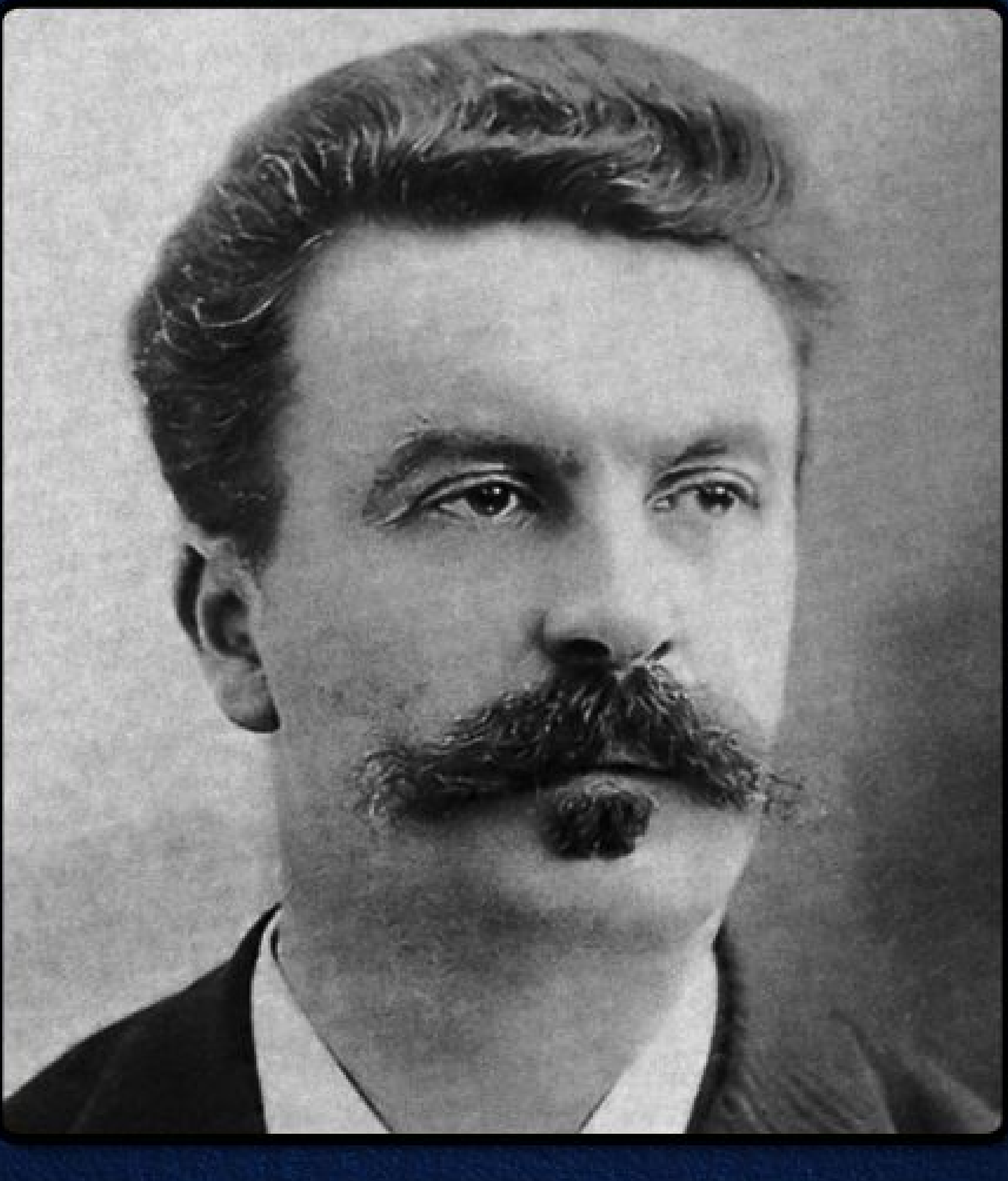
Complete Works of
GUY DE MAUPASSANT



DELPHI CLASSICS

The Complete Works of
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

(1850–1893)

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Guy de Maupassant

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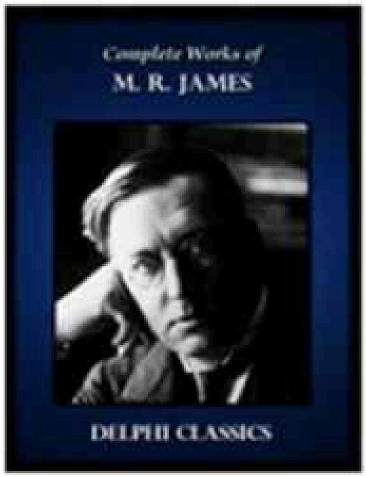
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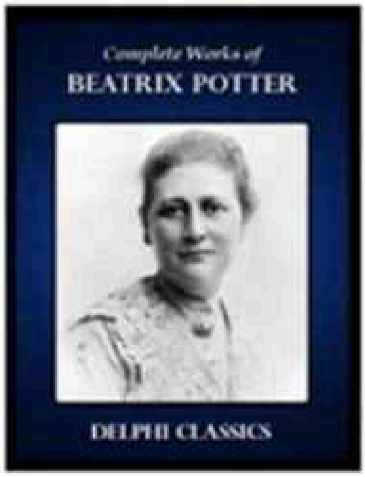
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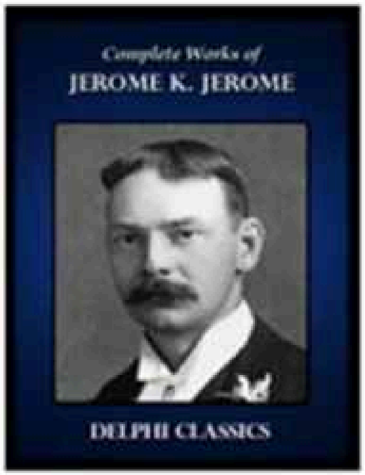
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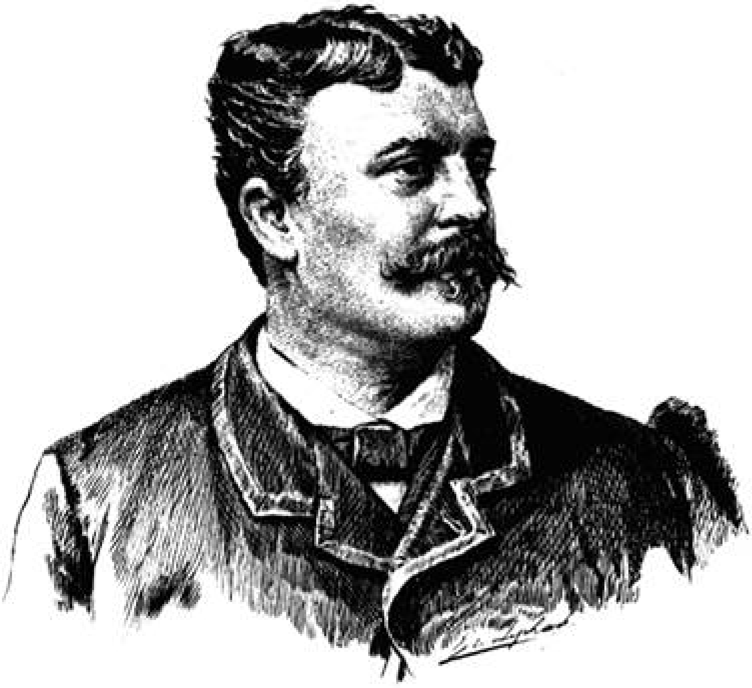

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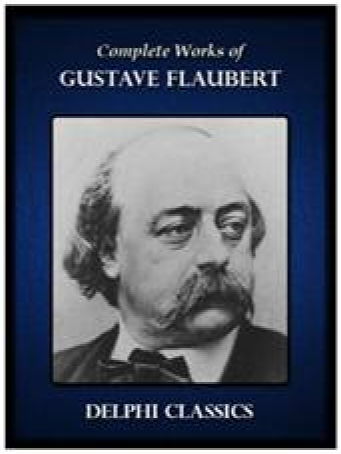
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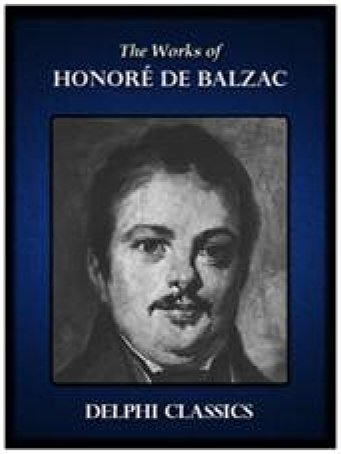
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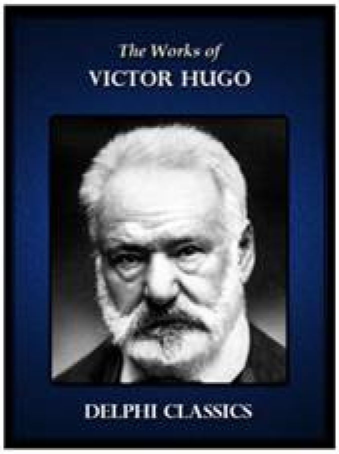
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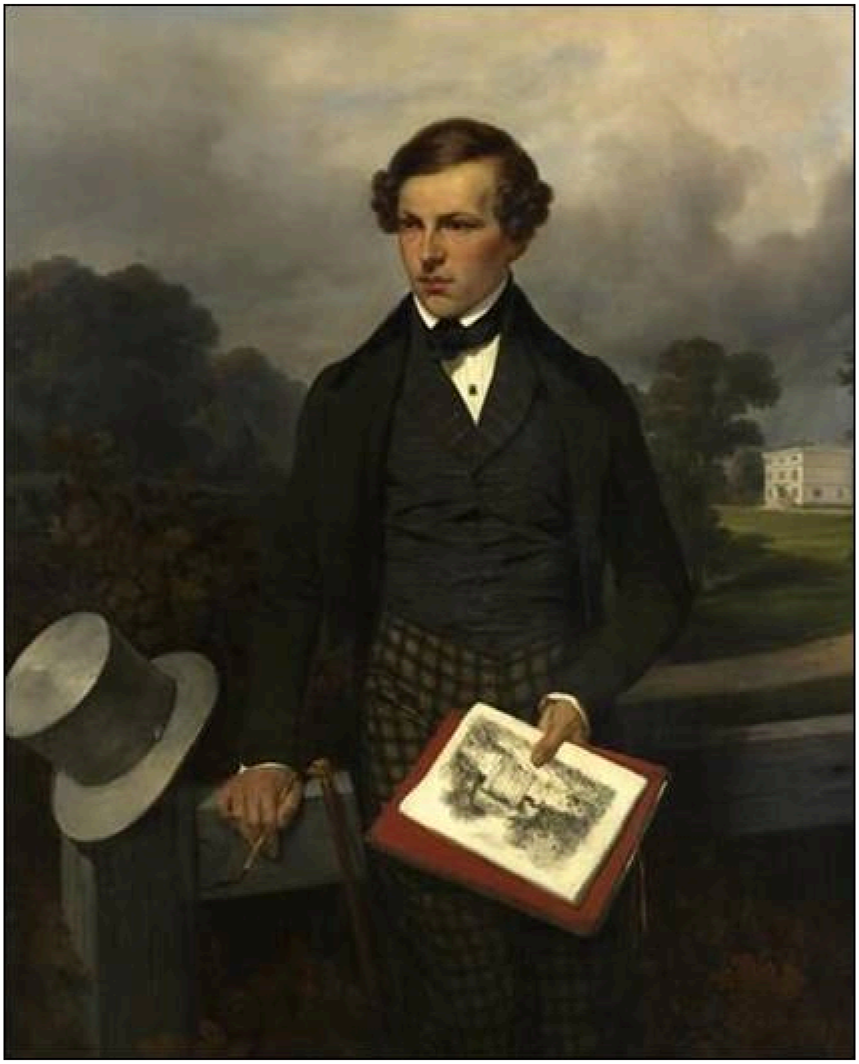
The Novels

Guy de Maupassant was born in 1850 at the château de Miromesnil, near Dieppe in the Seine-Inférieure department. He was the first son of Laure Le Poittevin and Gustave de Maupassant, both from prosperous bourgeois families.

A view of the birthplace from the gardens



Gustave de Maupassant, the author's father, was an unreliable father and unfaithful to his wife.

A good friend of Gustave Flaubert, the author's mother was greatly interested in culture and the classics, especially admiring the works of Shakespeare. Laure was an independent-minded woman, who risked social disgrace to obtain a legal separation from her husband.

Guy de Maupassant, seven years old

A LIFE

OR, THE HUMBLE TRUTH

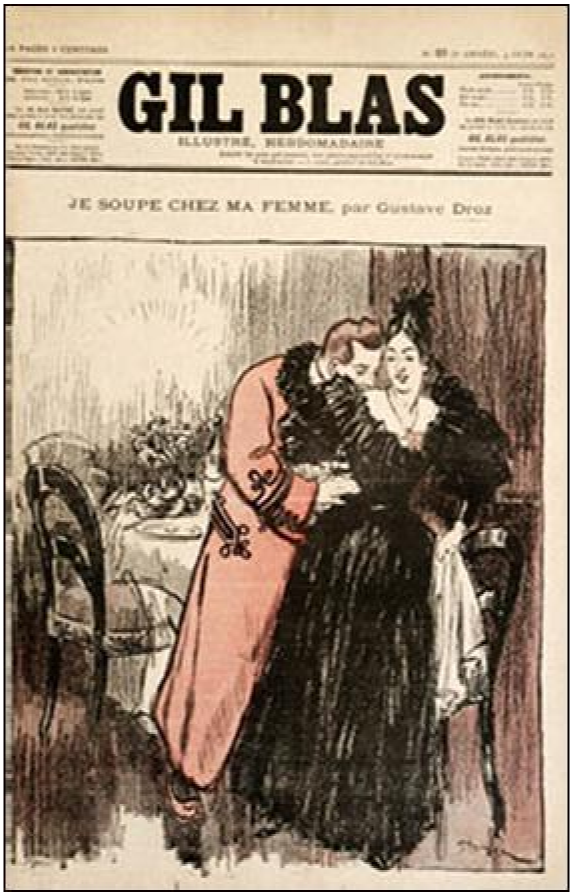
Translated by Albert M. C. McMaster

Maupassant’s first novel appeared in serial form in 1883 in *Gil Blas*, a leading Parisian magazine of the time, whilst appearing as a book later the same year under the title *The Humble Truth*. The novel concerns the life, as Maupassant explains, “of a woman from the time of awakening her heart ready its harvesting”. Written two years after the successful publication of *Boule de Suif*, his first masterpiece, Maupassant’s first venture in novel writing was immediately successful, with 25,000 copies selling in less than a year.

The narrative introduces Jeanne, the daughter of Simon Baron-Jacques and Baroness Adelaide, a young aristocrat of seventeen years, who is now leaving a convent to start living a real ‘life’ with her new and arranged husband, Julien de Lamare. However, arriving at the castle she discovers his greedy and selfish nature, and begins the struggles of her married life. The novel recounts Jeanne’s gradual lapse into a state of disillusionment with her marriage and the life she has been given.

With its intricate network of parallels and oppositions, the novel reflects the influence of Flaubert in its attention to form and coherent structure. The work also conveys Maupassant’s characteristic naturalistic vision in which the satire of bourgeois manners, the representation of the aristocracy in pathological decline, the undermining of human individuality and ideals, and the study of deterioration and disintegration, all play a vital role. But above all Maupassant brings to his first novel his genius for focused tension between *stasis* and change.

The author, aged ten


GIL BLAS
ILLUSTRÉ, HEBDOMADAIRE
JE SOUPE CHEZ MA FEMME, par Gustave Droz

The magazine in which Maupassant's first novel appeared in serial format

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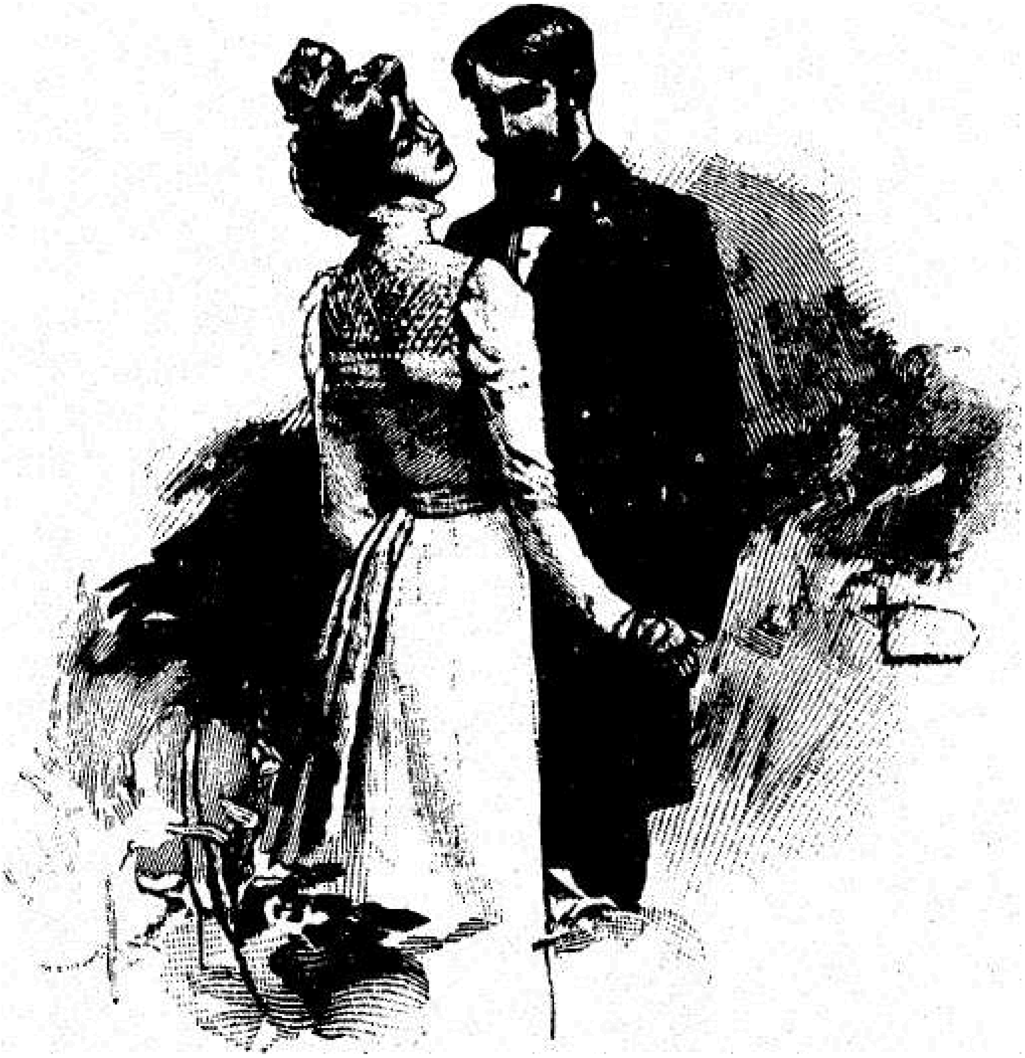
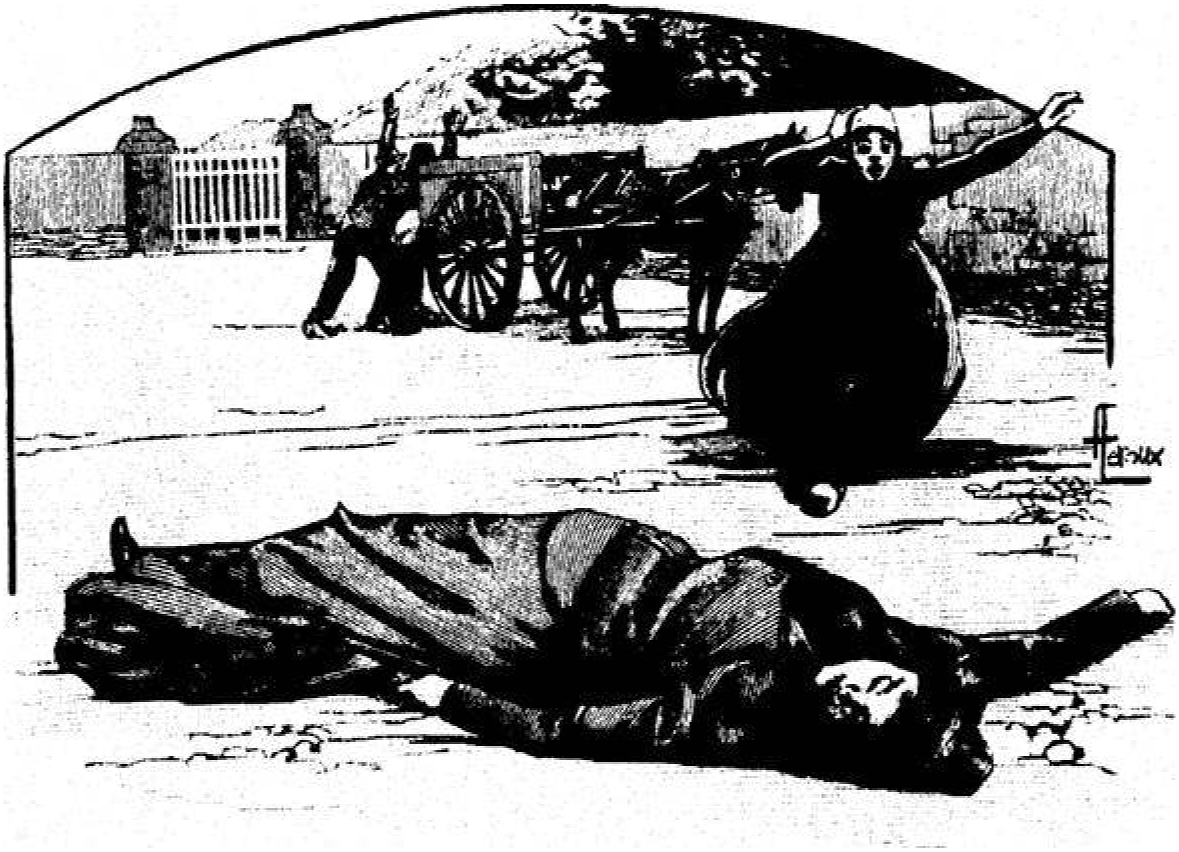


An original illustration for the novel



Another illustration originally appearing in the serialised publication

CHAPTER I. THE HOME BY THE SEA

The weather was most distressing. It had rained all night. The roaring of the overflowing gutters filled the deserted streets, in which the houses, like sponges, absorbed the humidity, which penetrating to the interior, made the walls sweat from cellar to garret. Jeanne had left the convent the day before, free for all time, ready to seize all the joys of life, of which she had dreamed so long. She was afraid her father would not set out for the new home in bad weather, and for the hundredth time since daybreak she examined the horizon. Then she noticed that she had omitted to put her calendar in her travelling bag. She took from the wall the little card which bore in golden figures the date of the current year, 1819. Then she marked with a pencil the first four columns, drawing a line through the name of each saint up to the 2d of May, the day that she left the convent. A voice outside the door called "Jeannette." Jeanne replied, "Come in, papa." And her father entered. Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a gentleman of the last century, eccentric and good. An enthusiastic disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, he had the tenderness of a lover for nature, in the fields, in the woods and in the animals. Of aristocratic birth, he hated instinctively the year 1793, but being a philosopher by temperament and liberal by education, he execrated tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred. His great strength and his great weakness was his kind-heartedness, which had not arms enough to caress, to give, to embrace; the benevolence of a god, that gave freely, without questioning; in a word, a kindness of inertia that became almost a vice. A man of theory, he thought out a plan of education for his daughter, to the end that she might become happy, good, upright and gentle. She had lived at home until the age of twelve, when, despite the tears of her mother, she was placed in the Convent of the Sacred Heart. He had kept her severely secluded, cloistered, in ignorance of the secrets of life. He wished the Sisters to restore her to him pure at seventeen years of age, so that he might imbue her mind with a sort of rational poetry, and by means of the fields, in the midst of the fruitful earth, unfold her soul, enlighten her ignorance through the aspect of love in nature, through the simple tenderness of the animals, through the placid laws of existence. She was leaving the convent radiant, full of the joy of life, ready for all the happiness, all the charming incidents which her mind had pictured in her idle hours and in the long, quiet nights. She was like a portrait by Veronese with her fair, glossy hair, which seemed to cast a radiance on her skin, a skin with the faintest tinge of pink, softened by a light velvety down which could be perceived when the sun kissed her cheek. Her eyes were an opaque blue, like those of Dutch porcelain figures. She had a tiny mole on her left nostril and another on the right of her chin. She was tall, well developed, with willowy figure. Her clear voice sounded at times a little too sharp, but her frank, sincere laugh spread joy around her. Often, with a familiar gesture, she would raise her hands to her temples as if to arrange her hair.

She ran to her father and embraced him warmly. “Well, are we going to start?” she said. He smiled, shook his head and said, pointing toward the window, “How can we travel in such weather?” But she implored in a cajoling and tender manner, “Oh, papa, do let us start. It will clear up in the afternoon.” “But your mother will never consent to it.” “Yes, I promise you that she will, I will arrange that.” “If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am perfectly willing.” In a few moments she returned from her mother’s room, shouting in a voice that could be heard all through the house, “Papa, papa, mamma is willing. Have the horses harnessed.” The rain was not abating; one might almost have said that it was raining harder when the carriage drove up to the door. Jeanne was ready to step in when the baroness came downstairs, supported on one side by her husband and on the other by a tall housemaid, strong and strapping as a boy. She was a Norman woman of the country of Caux, who looked at least twenty, although she was but eighteen at the most. She was treated by the family as a second daughter, for she was Jeanne’s foster sister. Her name was Rosalie, and her chief duty lay in guiding the steps of her mistress, who had grown enormous in the last few years and also had an affection of the heart, which kept her complaining continually. The baroness, gasping from over-exertion, finally reached the doorstep of the old residence, looked at the court where the water was streaming and remarked: “It really is not wise.” Her husband, always pleasant, replied: “It was you who desired it, Madame Adelaide.” He always preceded her pompous name of Adelaide with the title madame with an air of half respectful mockery. Madame mounted with difficulty into the carriage, causing all the springs to bend. The baron sat beside her, while Jeanne and Rosalie were seated opposite, with their backs to the horses. Ludivine, the cook, brought a heap of wraps to put over their knees and two baskets, which were placed under the seats; then she climbed on the box beside Father Simon, wrapping herself in a great rug which covered her completely. The porter and his wife came to bid them good-by as they closed the carriage door, taking the last orders about the trunks, which were to follow in a wagon. So they started. Father Simon, the coachman, with head bowed and back bent in the pouring rain, was completely covered by his box coat with its triple cape. The howling storm beat upon the carriage windows and inundated the highway.

They drove rapidly to the wharf and continued alongside the line of tall-masted vessels until they reached the boulevard of Mont Riboudet. Then they crossed the meadows, where from time to time a drowned willow, its branches drooping limply, could be faintly distinguished through the mist of rain. No one spoke. Their minds themselves seemed to be saturated with moisture like the earth.

The baroness leaned her head against the cushions and closed her eyes. The baron looked out with mournful eyes at the monotonous and drenched landscape. Rosalie, with a parcel on her knee, was dreaming in the dull reverie of a peasant. But Jeanne, under this downpour, felt herself revive like a plant that has been shut up and has just been restored to the air, and so great was her joy that, like foliage, it sheltered her heart from sadness. Although she did not speak, she longed to burst out singing, to reach out her hands to catch the rain that she might drink it. She enjoyed to the full being carried along rapidly by the horses, enjoyed gazing at the desolate landscape and feeling herself under shelter amid this general inundation. Beneath the pelting rain the gleaming backs of the two horses emitted a warm steam.

Little by little the baroness fell asleep, and presently began to snore sonorously. Her husband leaned over and placed in her hands a little leather pocketbook.

This awakened her, and she looked at the pocket-book with the stupid, sleepy look of one suddenly aroused. It fell off her lap and sprang open and gold and bank bills were scattered on the floor of the carriage. This roused her completely, and Jeanne gave vent to her mirth in a merry peal of girlish laughter.

The baron picked up the money and placed it on her knees. “This, my dear,” he said, “is all that is left of my farm at Eletot. I have sold it — so as to be able to repair the ‘Poplars,’ where we shall often live in the future.”

She counted six thousand four hundred francs and quietly put them in her pocket. This was the ninth of thirty-one farms that they had inherited which they had sold in this way. Nevertheless they still possessed about twenty thousand livres income annually in land rentals, which, with proper care, would have yielded about thirty thousand francs a year.

Living simply as they did, this income would have sufficed had there not been a bottomless hole always open in their house — kind-hearted generosity. It dried up the money in their hands as the sun dries the water in marshes. It flowed, fled, disappeared. How? No one knew. Frequently one would say to the other, “I don’t know how it happens, but I have spent one hundred francs to-day, and I have bought nothing of any consequence.” This faculty of giving was, however, one of the greatest pleasures of their life, and they all agreed on this point in a superb and touching manner.

Jeanne asked her father, “Is it beautiful now, my castle?” The baron replied, “You shall see, my little girl.”

The storm began to abate. The vault of clouds seemed to rise and heighten and suddenly, through a rift, a long ray of sunshine fell upon the fields, and presently the clouds separated, showing the blue firmament, and then, like the tearing of a veil, the opening grew larger and the beautiful azure sky, clear and fathomless, spread over the world. A fresh and gentle breeze passed over the earth like a happy sigh, and as they passed beside gardens or woods they heard occasionally the bright chirp of a bird as he dried his wings.

Evening was approaching. Everyone in the carriage was asleep except Jeanne. They stopped to rest and feed the horses. The sun had set. In the distance bells were heard. They passed a little village as the inhabitants were lighting their lamps, and the sky became also illuminated by myriads of stars. Suddenly they saw behind a hill, through the branches of the fir trees, the moon rising, red and full as if it were torpid with sleep.

The air was so soft that the windows were not closed. Jeanne, exhausted with dreams and happy visions, was now asleep. Finally they stopped. Some men and women were standing before the carriage door with lanterns in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, was the first to jump out. Her father and Rosalie had practically to carry the baroness, who was groaning and continually repeating in a weak little voice, “Oh, my

God, my poor children!” She refused all offers of refreshment, but went to bed and immediately fell asleep.

Jeanne and her father, the baron, took supper together. They were in perfect sympathy with each other. Later, seized with a childish joy, they started on a tour of inspection through the restored manor. It was one of those high and vast Norman residences that comprise both farmhouse and castle, built of white stone which had turned gray, large enough to contain a whole race of people.

An immense hall divided the house from front to rear and a staircase went up at either side of the entrance, meeting in a bridge on the first floor. The huge drawing-room was on the ground floor to the right and was hung with tapestries representing birds and foliage. All the furniture was covered with fine needlework tapestry illustrating La Fontaine’s fables, and Jeanne was delighted at finding a chair she had loved as a child, which pictured the story of “The Fox and the Stork.”

Beside the drawing-room were the library, full of old books, and two unused rooms; at the left was the dining-room, the laundry, the kitchen, etc.

A corridor divided the whole first floor, the doors of ten rooms opening into it. At the end, on the right, was Jeanne’s room. She and her father went in. He had had it all newly done over, using the furniture and draperies that had been in the storeroom.

There were some very old Flemish tapestries, with their peculiar looking figures. At sight of her bed, the young girl uttered a scream of joy. Four large birds carved in oak, black from age and highly polished, bore up the bed and seemed to be its protectors. On the sides were carved two wide garlands of flowers and fruit, and four finely fluted columns, terminating in Corinthian capitals, supported a cornice of cupids with roses intertwined. The tester and the coverlet were of antique blue silk, embroidered in gold fleur de lys. When Jeanne had sufficiently admired it, she lifted up the candle to examine the tapestries and the allegories they represented. They were mostly conventional subjects, but the last hanging represented a drama. Near a rabbit, which was still nibbling, a young man lay stretched out, apparently dead. A young girl, gazing at him, was plunging a sword into her bosom, and the fruit of the tree had turned black. Jeanne gave up trying to divine the meaning underlying this picture, when she saw in the corner a tiny little animal which the rabbit, had he lived, could have swallowed like a blade of grass; and yet it was a lion. Then she recognized the story of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” and though she smiled at the simplicity of the design, she felt happy to have in her room this love adventure which would continually speak to her of her cherished hopes, and every night this legendary love would hover about her dreams.

It struck eleven and the baron kissed Jeanne goodnight and retired to his room. Before retiring, Jeanne cast a last glance round her room and then regretfully extinguished the candle. Through her window she could see the bright moonlight bathing the trees and the wonderful landscape. Presently she arose, opened a window and looked out. The night was so clear that one could see as plainly as by daylight. She looked across the park with its two long avenues of very tall poplars that gave its name to the château and separated it from the two farms that belonged to it, one occupied by the Couillard family, the other by the Martins. Beyond the enclosure stretched a long, uncultivated plain, thickly overgrown with rushes, where the breeze whistled day and night. The land ended abruptly in a steep white cliff three hundred feet high, with its base in the ocean waves.

Jeanne looked out over the long, undulating surface that seemed to slumber beneath the heavens. All the fragrance of the earth was in the night air. The odor of jasmine rose from the lower windows, and light whiffs of briny air and of seaweed were wafted from the ocean.

Merely to breathe was enough for Jeanne, and the restful calm of the country was like a soothing bath. She felt as though her heart was expanding and she began dreaming of love. What was it? She did not know. She only knew that she would adore *him* with all her soul and that he would cherish her with all his strength. They would walk hand in hand on nights like this, hearing the beating of their hearts, mingling their love with the sweet simplicity of the summer nights in such close communion of thought that by the sole power of their tenderness they would easily penetrate each other’s most secret thoughts. This would continue forever in the calm of an enduring affection. It seemed to her that she felt *him* there beside her. And an unusual sensation came over her. She remained long musing thus, when suddenly she thought she heard a footstep behind the house. “If it were *he*.” But it passed on and she felt as if she had been deceived. The air became cooler. The day broke. Slowly bursting aside the gleaming clouds, touching with fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, all the horizon, the great flaming orb of the sun appeared.

Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness at the splendor of nature overcame her fluttering heart. It was *her* sun, *her* dawn! The beginning of *her* life! Thoroughly fatigued at last, she flung herself down and slept till her father called her at eight o'clock. He walked into the room and proposed to show her the improvements of the castle, of *her* castle. The road, called the parish road, connecting the farms, joined the high road between Havre and Fécamp, a mile and a half further on.

Jeanne and the baron inspected everything and returned home for breakfast. When the meal was over, as the baroness had decided that she would rest, the baron proposed to Jeanne that they should go down to Yport. They started, and passing through the hamlet of Etouvent, where the poplars were, and going through the wooded slope by a winding valley leading down to the sea, they presently perceived the village of Yport. Women sat in their doorways mending linen; brown fish-nets were hanging against the doors of the huts, where an entire family lived in one room. It was a typical little French fishing village, with all its concomitant odors. To Jeanne it was all like a scene in a play. On turning a corner they saw before them the limitless blue ocean. They bought a brill from a fisherman and another sailor offered to take them out sailing, repeating his name, "Lastique, Joséphin Lastique," several times, that they might not forget it, and the baron promised to remember. They walked home, chattering like two children, carrying the big fish between them, Jeanne having pushed her father's walking cane through its gills.

CHAPTER II. HAPPY DAYS

A delightful life commenced for Jeanne, a life in the open air. She wandered along the roads, or into the little winding valleys, their sides covered with a fleece of gorse blossoms, the strong sweet odor of which intoxicated her like the bouquet of wine, while the distant sound of the waves rolling on the beach seemed like a billow rocking her spirit.

A love of solitude came upon her in the sweet freshness of this landscape and in the calm of the rounded horizon, and she would remain sitting so long on the hill tops that the wild rabbits would bound by her feet.

She planted memories everywhere, as seeds are cast upon the earth, memories whose roots hold till death. It seemed to Jeanne that she was casting a little of her heart into every fold of these valleys. She became infatuated with sea bathing. When she was well out from shore, she would float on her back, her arms crossed, her eyes lost in the profound blue of the sky which was cleft by the flight of a swallow, or the white silhouette of a seabird.

After these excursions she invariably came back to the castle pale with hunger, but light, alert, a smile on her lips and her eyes sparkling with happiness.

The baron on his part was planning great agricultural enterprises. Occasionally, also, he went out to sea with the sailors of Yport. On several occasions he went fishing for mackerel and, again, by moonlight, he would haul in the nets laid the night before. He loved to hear the masts creak, to breathe in the fresh and whistling gusts of wind that arose during the night; and after having tacked a long time to find the buoys, guiding himself by a peak of rocks, the roof of a belfry or the Fécamp lighthouse, he delighted to remain motionless beneath the first gleams of the rising sun which made the slimy backs of the large fan-shaped rays and the fat bellies of the turbots glisten on the deck of the boat.

At each meal he gave an enthusiastic account of his expeditions, and the baroness in her turn told how many times she had walked down the main avenue of poplars.

As she had been advised to take exercise she made a business of walking, beginning as soon as the air grew warm. Leaning upon Rosalie's arm and dragging her left foot, which was rather heavier than the right, she wandered interminably up and down from the house to the edge of the wood, sitting down for five minutes at either end. The walking was resumed in the afternoon. A physician, consulted ten years before, had spoken of hypertrophy because she had suffered from suffocation. Ever since, this word had been used to describe the ailment of the baroness. The baron would say “my wife’s hypertrophy” and Jeanne “mamma’s hypertrophy” as they would have spoken of her hat, her dress, or her umbrella. She had been very pretty in her youth and slim as a reed. Now she had grown older, stouter, but she still remained poetical, having always retained the impression of “Corinne,” which she had read as a girl. She read all the sentimental love stories it was possible to collect, and her thoughts wandered among tender adventures in which she always figured as the heroine. Her new home was infinitely pleasing to her because it formed such a beautiful framework for the romance of her soul, the surrounding woods, the waste land, and the proximity of the ocean recalling to her mind the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which she had been devouring for some months. On rainy days she remained shut up in her room, sending Rosalie in a special manner for the drawer containing her “souvenirs,” which meant to the baroness all her old private and family letters.

Occasionally, Jeanne replaced Rosalie in the walks with her mother, and she listened eagerly to the tales of the latter’s childhood. The young girl saw herself in all these romantic stories, and was astonished at the similarity of ideas and desires; each heart imagines itself to have been the first to tremble at those very sensations that awakened the hearts of the first beings, and that will awaken the hearts of the last.

One afternoon as the baroness and Jeanne were resting on the beach at the end of the walk, a stout priest who was moving in their direction greeted them with a bow, while still at a distance. He bowed when within three feet and, assuming a smiling air, cried: “Well, Madame la Baronne, how are you?” It was the village priest. The baroness seldom went to church, though she liked priests, from a sort of religious instinct peculiar to women. She had, in fact, entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her priest, and blushed as she saw him. She made apologies for not having prepared for his visit, but the good man was not at all embarrassed. He looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her appearance and sat down, placing his three-cornered hat on his knees. He was very stout, very red, and perspired profusely. He drew from his pocket every moment an enormous checked handkerchief and passed it over his face and neck, but hardly was the task completed when necessity forced him to repeat the process. He was a typical country priest, talkative and kindly.

Presently the baron appeared. He was very friendly to the abbé and invited him to dinner. The priest was well versed in the art of being pleasant, thanks to the unconscious astuteness which the guiding of souls gives to the most mediocre of men who are called by the chance of events to exercise a power over their fellows. Toward dessert he became quite merry, with the gaiety that follows a pleasant meal, and as if struck by an idea he said: “I have a new parishioner whom I must present to you, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare.” The baroness, who was at home in heraldry, inquired if he was of the family of Lamares of Eure. The priest answered, “Yes, madame, he is the son of Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year.” After this, the baroness, who loved the nobility above all other things, inquired the history of the young vicomte. He had paid his father’s debts, sold the family castle, made his home on one of the three farms which he owned in the town of Etouvent. These estates brought him in an income of five or six thousand livres. The vicomte was economical and lived in this modest manner for two or three years, so that he might save enough to cut a figure in society, and to marry advantageously, without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms. The priest added, “He is a very charming young man, so steady and quiet, though there is very little to amuse him in the country.” The baron said, “Bring him in to see us, Monsieur l’Abbé, it will be a distraction for him occasionally.” After the coffee the baron and the priest took a turn about the grounds and then returned to say good-night to the ladies.

CHAPTER III. M. DE LAMARE

The following Sunday the baroness and Jeanne went to mass, prompted by a feeling of respect for their pastor, and after service waited to see the priest and invite him to luncheon the following Thursday. He came out of the sacristy leaning familiarly on the arm of a tall young man. As soon as he perceived the ladies, he exclaimed:

"How fortunate! Allow me, baroness and Mlle. Jeanne, to present to you your neighbor, M. le Vicomte de Lamare."

The vicomte said he had long desired to make their acquaintance, and began to converse in a well-bred manner. He had a face of which women dream and that men dislike. His black, wavy hair shaded a smooth, sunburnt forehead, and two large straight eyebrows, that looked almost artificial, cast a deep and tender shadow over his dark eyes, the whites of which had a bluish tinge.

His long, thick eyelashes accentuated the passionate eloquence of his expression which wrought havoc in the drawing-rooms of society, and made peasant girls carrying baskets turn round to look at him. The languorous fascination of his glance impressed one with the depth of his thoughts and lent weight to his slightest words. His beard, fine and glossy, concealed a somewhat heavy jaw.

Two days later, M. de Lamare made his first call, just as they were discussing the best place for a new rustic bench. The vicomte was consulted and agreed with the baroness, who differed from her husband.

M. de Lamare expatiated on the picturesqueness of the country and from time to time, as if by chance, his eyes met those of Jeanne, and she felt a strange sensation at the quickly averted glance which betrayed tender admiration and an awakened sympathy.

M. de Lamare's father, who had died the preceding year, had known an intimate friend of the baroness's father, M. Cultaux, and this fact led to an endless conversation about family, relations, dates, etc., and names heard in her childhood were recalled, and led to reminiscences.

The baron, whose nature was rather uncultivated, and whose beliefs and prejudices were not those of his class, knew little about the neighboring families, and inquired about them from the vicomte, who responded:

"Oh, there are very few of the nobility in the district," just as he might have said, "there are very few rabbits on the hills," and he began to particularize: There was the Marquis de Coutelier, a sort of leader of Norman aristocracy, Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, people of excellent stock, but living to themselves, and the Comte de Fourville, a kind of ogre, who was said to have made his wife die of sorrow, and who lived as a huntsman in his château of La Vrillette, built on a pond. There were a few parvenus among them who had bought properties here and there, but the vicomte did not know them.

As he left, his last glance was for Jeanne, as if it were a special tender and cordial farewell. The baroness was delighted with him, and the baron said: "Yes, indeed, he is a gentleman." And he was invited to dinner the following week, and from that time came regularly.

He generally arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon, went to join the baroness in "her avenue," and offered her his arm while she took her "exercise," as she called her daily walks. When Jeanne was at home she would walk on the other side of her mother, supporting her, and all three would walk slowly back and forth from one end of the avenue to the other. He seldom addressed Jeanne directly, but his eye frequently met hers.

He went to Yport several times with Jeanne and the baron. One evening, when they were on the beach, Père Lastique accosted him, and without removing his pipe, the absence of which would possibly have been more remarkable than the loss of his nose, he said:

"With this wind, m'sieu le baron, we could easily go to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands imploringly:

"Oh, papa, let us do it!"

The baron turned to M. de Lamare:

"Will you join us, vicomte? We can take breakfast down there."

And the matter was decided at once. From daybreak Jeanne was up and waiting for her father, who dressed more slowly. They walked in the dew across the level and then through the wood vibrant with the singing of birds. The vicomte and Père Lastique were seated on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped to shove off the boat from shore, which was not easy on the shingly beach. Once the boat was afloat, they all took their seats, and the two sailors who remained on shore shoved it off. A light, steady breeze was blowing from the ocean and they hoisted the sail, veered a little, and then sailed along smoothly with scarcely any motion. To landward the high cliff at the right cast a shadow on the water at its base, and patches of sunlit grass here and there varied its monotonous whiteness. Yonder, behind them, brown sails were coming out of the white harbor of Fécamp, and ahead of them they saw a rock of curious shape, rounded, with gaps in it looking something like an immense elephant with its trunk in the water; it was the little port of Étretat.

Jeanne, a little dizzy from the motion of the waves, held the side of the boat with one hand as she looked out into the distance. It seemed to her as if only three things in the world were really beautiful: light, space, water.

No one spoke. Père Lastique, who was at the tiller, took a pull every now and then from a bottle hidden under the seat; and he smoked a short pipe which seemed inextinguishable, although he never seemed to relight it or refill it.

The baron, seated in the bow looked after the sail. Jeanne and the vicomte seemed a little embarrassed at being seated side by side. Some unknown power seemed to make their glances meet whenever they raised their eyes; between them there existed already that subtle and vague sympathy which arises so rapidly between two young people when the young man is good looking and the girl is pretty. They were happy in each other's society, perhaps because they were thinking of each other. The rising sun was beginning to pierce through the slight mist, and as its beams grew stronger, they were reflected on the smooth surface of the sea as in a mirror.

"How beautiful!" murmured Jeanne, with emotion.

"Beautiful indeed!" answered the vicomte. The serene beauty of the morning awakened an echo in their hearts.

And all at once they saw the great arches of Étretat, like two supports of a cliff standing in the sea high enough for vessels to pass under them; while a sharp-pointed white rock rose in front of the first arch. They reached shore, and the baron got out first to make fast the boat, while the vicomte lifted Jeanne ashore so that she should not wet her feet. Then they walked up the shingly beach side by side, and they overheard Père Lastique say to the baron, "My! but they would make a pretty couple!"

They took breakfast in a little inn near the beach, and while the ocean had lulled their thoughts and made them silent, the breakfast table had the opposite effect, and they chattered like children on a vacation. The slightest thing gave rise to laughter.

Père Lastique, on taking his place at table, carefully hid his lighted pipe in his cap. That made them laugh. A fly, attracted no doubt by his red nose, persistently alighted on it, and each time it did so they burst into laughter. Finally the old man could stand it no longer, and murmured: “It is devilishly persistent!” whereupon Jeanne and the vicomte laughed till they cried.

After breakfast Jeanne suggested that they should take a walk. The vicomte rose, but the baron preferred to bask in the sun on the beach.

“Go on, my children, you will find me here in an hour.”

They walked straight ahead of them, passing by several cottages and finally by a small château resembling a large farm, and found themselves in an open valley that extended for some distance. They now had a wild longing to run at large in the fields. Jeanne seemed to have a humming in her ears from all the new and rapidly changing sensations she had experienced. The burning rays of the sun fell on them. On both sides of the road the crops were bending over from the heat. The grasshoppers, as numerous as the blades of grass, were uttering their thin, shrill cry.

Perceiving a wood a little further on to the right, they walked over to it. They saw a narrow path between two hedges shaded by tall trees which shut out the sun. A sort of moist freshness in the air was perceptible, giving them a sensation of chilliness. There was no grass, owing to the lack of sunlight, but the ground was covered with a carpet of moss.

“See, we can sit down there a little while,” she said.

They sat down and looked about them at the numerous forms of life that were in the air and on the ground at their feet, for a ray of sunlight penetrating the dense foliage brought them into its light.

“How beautiful it is here! How lovely it is in the country! There are moments when I should like to be a fly or a butterfly and hide in the flowers,” said Jeanne with emotion.

They spoke in low tones as one does in exchanging confidences, telling of their daily lives and of their tastes, and declaring that they were already disgusted with the world, tired of its useless monotony; it was always the same thing; there was no truth, no sincerity in it.

The world! She would gladly have made its acquaintance; but she felt convinced beforehand that it was not equal to a country life, and the more their hearts seemed to be in sympathy, the more ceremonious they became, the more frequently their glances met and blended smiling; and it seemed that a new feeling of benevolence was awakened in them, a wider affection, an interest in a thousand things of which they had never hitherto thought.

They wended their way back, but the baron had already set off on foot for the Chambre aux Demoiselles, a grotto in a cleft at the summit of one of the cliffs, and they waited for him at the inn. He did not return until five in the evening after a long walk along the cliffs.

They got into the boat, started off smoothly with the wind at their backs, scarcely seeming to make any headway. The breeze was irregular, at one moment filling the sail and then letting it flap idly along the mast. The sea seemed opaque and lifeless, and the sun was slowly approaching the horizon. The lulling motion of the sea had made them silent again. Presently Jeanne said, “How I should love to travel!”

“Yes, but it is tiresome to travel alone; there should be at least two, to exchange ideas,” answered the vicomte. She reflected a moment.

“That is true — I like to walk alone, however — how pleasant it is to dream all alone — — “

He gazed at her intently.

“Two can dream as well as one.”

She lowered her eyes. Was it a hint? Possibly. She looked out at the horizon as if to discover something beyond it, and then said slowly:

“I should like to go to Italy — and Greece — ah, yes, Greece — and to Corsica — it must be so wild and so beautiful!”

He preferred Switzerland on account of its chalets and its lakes.

“No,” said she, “I like new countries like Corsica, or very old countries full of souvenirs, like Greece. It must be delightful to find the traces of those peoples whose history we have known since childhood, to see places where great deeds were accomplished.”

The vicomte, less enthusiastic, exclaimed: “As for me, England attracts me very much; there is so much to be learned there.”

Then they talked about the world in general, discussing the attractions of each country from the poles to the equator, enthusing over imaginary scenes and the peculiar manners of certain peoples like the Chinese and the Lapps; but they arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, cool in summer, mild in winter, its rich soil, its green forests, its worship of the fine arts which existed nowhere else since the glorious centuries of Athens. Then they were silent. The setting sun left a wide dazzling train of light which extended from the horizon to the edge of their boat. The wind subsided, the ripples disappeared, and the motionless sail was red in the light of the dying day. A limitless calm seemed to settle down on space and make a silence amid this conjunction of elements; and by degrees the sun slowly sank into the ocean.

Then a fresh breeze seemed to arise, a little shiver went over the surface of the water, as if the engulfed orb cast a sigh of satisfaction across the world. The twilight was short, night fell with its myriad stars. Père Lastique took the oars, and they saw that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne and the vicomte, side by side, watched the fitful gleams in the wake of the boat. They were hardly thinking, but simply gazing vaguely, breathing in the beauty of the evening in a state of delicious contentment; Jeanne had one hand on the seat and her neighbor's finger touched it as if by accident; she did not move; she was surprised, happy, though embarrassed at this slight contact.

When she reached home that evening and went to her room, she felt strangely disturbed, and so affected that the slightest thing impelled her to weep. She looked at her clock, imagining that the little bee on the pendulum was beating like a heart, the heart of a friend; that it was aware of her whole life, that with its quick, regular tickings it would accompany her whole life; and she stopped the golden fly to press a kiss on its wings. She would have kissed anything, no matter what. She remembered having hidden one of her old dolls of former days at the bottom of a drawer; she looked for it, took it out, and was delighted to see it again, as people are to see loved friends; and pressing it to her heart, she covered its painted cheeks and curly wig with kisses. And as she held it in her arms, she thought:

Can *he* be the husband promised through a thousand secret voices, whom a superlatively good Providence had thus thrown across her path? Was he, indeed, the being created for her — the being to whom she would devote her existence? Were they the two predestined beings whose affection, blending in one, would beget love?

She did not as yet feel that tumultuous emotion, that mad enchantment, those deep stirrings which she thought were essential to the tender passion; but it seemed to her she was beginning to fall in love, for she sometimes felt a sudden faintness when she thought of him, and she thought of him incessantly. His presence stirred her heart; she blushed and grew pale when their eyes met, and trembled at the sound of his voice.

From day to day the longing for love increased. She consulted the marguerites, the clouds, and coins which she tossed in the air.

One day her father said to her:

“Make yourself look pretty to-morrow morning.”

“Why, papa?”

“That is a secret,” he replied.

And when she came downstairs the following morning, looking fresh and sweet in a pretty light dress, she found the drawing-room table covered with boxes of bonbons, and on a chair an immense bouquet.

A covered wagon drove into the courtyard bearing the inscription, “Lerat, Confectioner, Fécamp; Wedding Breakfasts,” and from the back of the wagon Ludivine and a kitchen helper were taking out large flat baskets which emitted an appetizing odor.

The Vicomte de Lamare appeared on the scene, his trousers were strapped down under his dainty boots of patent leather, which made his feet appear smaller. His long frock coat, tight at the waist line, was open at the bosom showing the lace of his ruffle, and a fine neckcloth wound several times round his neck obliged him to hold erect his handsome brown head, with its air of serious distinction. Jeanne, in astonishment, looked at him as though she had never seen him before. She thought he looked the grand seigneur from his head to his feet.

He bowed and said, smiling:

“Well, comrade, are you ready?”

“But what is it? What is going on?” she stammered.

“You will know presently,” said the baron.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Madame Adelaide, in festal array, descended the staircase, leaning on the arm of Rosalie, who was so much affected at the sight of M. de Lamare’s elegant appearance that the baron whispered:

“I say, vicomte, I think our maid admires you.”

The vicomte blushed up to his ears, pretended not to have heard and, taking up the enormous bouquet, handed it to Jeanne. She accepted it, more astonished than ever. They all four got into the carriage, and Ludivine, who brought a cup of bouillon to the baroness to sustain her strength, said: “Truly, madame, one would say it was a wedding!”

They alighted as soon as they entered Yport, and as they walked through the village the sailors, in their new clothes, still showing the creases, came out of their homes, and shaking hands with the baron, followed the party as if it were a procession. The vicomte, who had offered his arm to Jeanne, walked with her at the head.

When they reached the church they stopped, and an acolyte appeared holding upright the large silver crucifix, followed by another boy in red and white, who bore a chalice containing holy water.

Then came three old cantors, one of them limping; then the trumpet ("serpent"), and last, the curé with his gold embroidered stole. He smiled and nodded a greeting; then, with his eyes half closed, his lips moving in prayer, his beretta well over his forehead, he followed his surpliced bodyguard, walking in the direction of the sea.

On the beach a crowd was standing around a new boat wreathed with flowers. Its mast, sail and ropes were covered with long streamers of ribbon that floated in the breeze, and the name, "Jeanne," was painted in gold letters on the stern.

Père Lastique, the proprietor of this boat, built with the baron's money, advanced to meet the procession. All the men, simultaneously, took off their hats, and a row of pious persons wearing long black cloaks falling in large folds from their shoulders, knelt down in a circle at sight of the crucifix.

The curé walked, with an acolyte on either side of him, to one end of the boat, while at the other end, the three old cantors, in their white surplices, with a serious air and their eyes fixed on the psalter, sang at the top of their voices in the clear morning air. Each time they stopped to take breath, the "serpent" continued its bellowing alone, and as he puffed out his cheeks the musician's little gray eyes disappeared, and the skin of his forehead and neck seemed to distend.

The motionless, transparent sea seemed to be taking part meditatively in the baptism of this boat, rolling its tiny waves, no higher than a finger, with the faint sound of a rake on the shingle. And the big white gulls, with their wings unfurled, circled about in the blue heavens, flying off and then coming back in a curve above the heads of the kneeling crowd, as if to see what they were doing.

The singing ceased after an Amen that lasted five minutes; and the priest, in an unctuous voice, murmured some Latin words, of which one could hear only the sonorous endings. He then walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, and next began to murmur the "Oremus," standing alongside the boat opposite the sponsors, who remained motionless, hand in hand.

The vicomte had the usual grave expression on his handsome face, but Jeanne, choking with a sudden emotion, and on the verge of fainting, began to tremble so violently that her teeth chattered. The dream that had haunted her for some time was suddenly beginning, as if in a kind of hallucination, to take the appearance of reality. They had spoken of a wedding, a priest was present, blessing them; men in surplices were singing psalms; was it not she whom they were giving in marriage?

Did her fingers send out an electric shock, did the emotion of her heart follow the course of her veins until it reached the heart of her companion? Did he understand, did he guess, was he, like herself, pervaded by a sort of intoxication of love? Or else, did he know by experience, alone, that no woman could resist him? She suddenly noticed that he was squeezing her hand, gently at first, and then tighter, tighter, till he almost crushed it. And without moving a muscle of his face, without anyone perceiving it, he said — yes, he certainly said:

"Oh, Jeanne, if you would consent, this would be our betrothal."

She lowered her head very slowly, perhaps meaning it for "yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling the holy water, sprinkled some on their fingers.

The ceremony was over. The women rose. The return was unceremonious. The crucifix had lost its dignity in the hands of the acolyte, who walked rapidly, the crucifix swaying to right and left, or bending forward as though it would fall. The priest, who was not praying now, walked hurriedly behind them; the cantors and the musician with the "serpent" had disappeared by a narrow street, so as to get off their surplices without delay; and the sailors hurried along in groups. One thought prompted their haste, and made their mouths water.

A good breakfast was awaiting them at "The Poplars."

The large table was set in the courtyard, under the apple trees.

Sixty people sat down to table, sailors and peasants. The baroness in the middle, with a priest at either side of her, one from Yport, and the other belonging to "The Poplars." The baron seated opposite her on the other side of the table, the mayor on one side of him, and his wife, a thin peasant woman, already aging, who kept smiling and bowing to all around her, on the other.

Jeanne, seated beside her co-sponsor, was in a sea of happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and remained silent, her mind bewildered with joy. Presently she said:

"What is your Christian name?"

"Julien," he replied. "Did you not know?"

But she made no reply, thinking to herself:

"How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the feast was over, the courtyard was given up to the sailors, and the others went over to the other side of the château. The baroness began to take her exercise, leaning on the arm of the baron and accompanied by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went toward the wood and walked along one of the mossy paths. Suddenly seizing her hands, the vicomte said:

"Tell me, will you be my wife?"

She lowered her head, and as he stammered: "Answer me, I implore you!" she raised her eyes to his timidly, and he read his answer there.

CHAPTER IV. MARRIAGE AND DISILLUSION

The baron, one morning, entered Jeanne's room before she was up, and sitting down at the foot of her bed, said:

"M. le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand in marriage."

She wanted to hide her face under the sheets.

Her father continued:

"We have postponed our answer for the present."

She gasped, choking with emotion. At the end of a minute the baron, smiling, added:

"We did not wish to do anything without consulting you. Your mother and I are not opposed to this marriage, but we would not seek to influence you. You are much richer than he is; but, when it is a question of the happiness of a life, one should not think too much about money. He has no relations left. If you marry him, then, it would be as if a son should come into our family; if it were anyone else, it would be you, our daughter, who would go among strangers. The young fellow pleases us. Would he please you?"

She stammered, blushing up to the roots of her hair:

"I am willing, papa."

And the father, looking into her eyes and still smiling, murmured:

"I half suspected it, young lady."

She lived till evening in a condition of exhilaration, not knowing what she was doing, mechanically thinking of one thing by mistake for another, and with a feeling of weariness, although she had not walked at all.

Toward six o'clock, as she was sitting with her mother under the plane tree, the vicomte appeared.

Jeanne's heart began to throb wildly. The young man approached them apparently without any emotion. When he was close beside them, he took the baroness' hand and kissed her fingers, then raising to his lips the trembling hand of the young girl, he imprinted upon it a long, tender and grateful kiss.

And the radiant season of betrothal commenced. They would chat together alone in the corner of the parlor, or else seated on the moss at the end of the wood overlooking the plain. Sometimes they walked in Little

Mother’s Avenue; he, talking of the future, she, with her eyes cast down, looking at the dusty footprints of the baroness.

Once the matter was decided, they desired to waste no time in preliminaries. It was, therefore, decided that the ceremony should take place in six weeks, on the fifteenth of August; and that the bride and groom should set out immediately on their wedding journey. Jeanne, on being consulted as to which country she would like to visit, decided on Corsica where they could be more alone than in the cities of Italy.

They awaited the moment appointed for their marriage without too great impatience, but enfolded, lost in a delicious affection, expressed in the exquisite charm of insignificant caresses, pressure of hands, long passionate glances in which their souls seemed to blend; and, vaguely tortured by an uncertain longing for they knew not what.

They decided to invite no one to the wedding except Aunt Lison, the baron’s sister, who boarded in a convent at Versailles. After the death of their father, the baroness wished to keep her sister with her. But the old maid, possessed by the idea that she was in every one’s way, was useless, and a nuisance, retired into one of those religious houses that rent apartments to people that live a sad and lonely existence. She came from time to time to pass a month or two with her family.

She was a little woman of few words, who always kept in the background, appeared only at mealtimes, and then retired to her room where she remained shut in.

She looked like a kind old lady, though she was only forty-two, and had a sad, gentle expression. She was never made much of by her family as a child, being neither pretty nor boisterous, she was never petted, and she would stay quietly and gently in a corner. She had been neglected ever since. As a young girl nobody paid any attention to her. She was something like a shadow, or a familiar object, a living piece of furniture that one is accustomed to see every day, but about which one does not trouble oneself.

Her sister, from long habit, looked upon her as a failure, an altogether insignificant being. They treated her with careless familiarity which concealed a sort of contemptuous kindness. She called herself Lise, and seemed embarrassed at this frivolous youthful name. When they saw that she probably would not marry, they changed it from Lise to Lison, and since Jeanne’s birth, she had become “Aunt Lison,” a poor relation, very neat, frightfully timid, even with her sister and her brother-in-law, who loved her, but with an uncertain affection verging on indifference, with an unconscious compassion and a natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the baroness talked of far away things that happened in her youth, she would say, in order to fix a date: "It was the time that Lison had that attack."

They never said more than that; and this "attack" remained shrouded, as in a mist.

One evening, Lise, who was then twenty, had thrown herself into the water, no one knew why. Nothing in her life, her manner, gave any intimation of this seizure. They fished her out half dead, and her parents, raising their hands in horror, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of this action, had contented themselves with calling it "that attack," as if they were talking of the accident that happened to the horse "Coco," who had broken his leg a short time before in a ditch, and whom they had been obliged to kill.

From that time Lise, presently Lison, was considered feeble-minded. The gentle contempt which she inspired in her relations gradually made its way into the minds of all those who surrounded her. Little Jeanne herself, with the natural instinct of children, took no notice of her, never went up to kiss her good-night, never went into her room. Good Rosalie, alone, who gave the room all the necessary attention, seemed to know where it was situated.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for breakfast, the little one would go up to her from habit and hold up her forehead to be kissed; that was all.

If anyone wished to speak to her, they sent a servant to call her, and if she was not there, they did not bother about her, never thought of her, never thought of troubling themselves so much as to say: "Why, I have not seen Aunt Lison this morning!"

When they said "Aunt Lison," these two words awakened no feeling of affection in anyone's mind. It was as if one had said: "The coffee pot, or the sugar bowl."

She always walked with little, quick, silent steps, never made a noise, never knocking up against anything; and seemed to communicate to surrounding objects the faculty of not making any sound. Her hands seemed to be made of a kind of wadding, she handled everything so lightly and delicately.

She arrived about the middle of July, all upset at the idea of this marriage. She brought a quantity of presents which, as they came from her, remained almost unnoticed. On the following day they had forgotten she was there at all.

But an unusual emotion was seething in her mind, and she never took her eyes off the engaged couple. She interested herself in Jeanne's trousseau with a singular eagerness, a feverish activity, working like a simple seamstress in her room, where no one came to visit her.

She was continually presenting the baroness with handkerchiefs she had hemmed herself, towels on which she had embroidered a monogram, saying as she did so: "Is that all right, Adelaide?" And little mother, as she carelessly examined the objects, would reply: "Do not give yourself so much trouble, my poor Lison."

One evening, toward the end of the month, after an oppressively warm day, the moon rose on one of those clear, mild nights which seem to move, stir and affect one, apparently awakening all the secret poetry of one's soul. The gentle breath of the fields was wafted into the quiet drawing-room. The baroness and her husband were playing cards by the light of a lamp, and Aunt Lison was sitting beside them knitting; while the young people, leaning on the window sill, were gazing out at the moonlit garden.

The linden and the plane tree cast their shadows on the lawn which extended beyond it in the moonlight, as far as the dark wood. Attracted by the tender charm of the night, and by this misty illumination that lighted up the trees and the bushes, Jeanne turned toward her parents and said: "Little father, we are going to take a short stroll on the grass in front of the house."

The baron replied, without looking up: "Go, my children," and continued his game.

They went out and began to walk slowly along the moonlit lawn as far as the little wood at the end. The hour grew late and they did not think of going in. The baroness grew tired, and wishing to retire, she said:

"We must call the lovers in."

The baron cast a glance across the spacious garden where the two forms were wandering slowly.

"Let them alone," he said; "it is so delicious outside! Lison will wait for them, will you not, Lison?"

The old maid raised her troubled eyes and replied in her timid voice:

"Certainly, I will wait for them."

Little father gave his hand to the baroness, weary himself from the heat of the day.

"I am going to bed, too," he said, and went up with his wife.

Then Aunt Lison rose in her turn, and leaving on the arm of the chair her canvas with the wool and the knitting needles, she went over and leaned on the window sill and gazed out at the night.

The two lovers kept on walking back and forth between the house and the wood. They squeezed each other's fingers without speaking, as though they had left their bodies and formed part of this visible poetry that exhaled from the earth.

All at once Jeanne perceived, framed in the window, the silhouette of the aunt, outlined by the light of the lamp behind her.

"See," she said, "there is Aunt Lison looking at us."

The vicomte raised his head, and said in an indifferent tone without thinking:

"Yes, Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they continued to dream, to walk slowly, and to love each other. But the dew was falling fast, and the dampness made them shiver a little.

"Let us go in now," said Jeanne. And they went into the house.

When they entered the drawing-room, Aunt Lison had gone back to her work. Her head was bent over her work, and her fingers were trembling as if she were very tired.

"It is time to go to bed, aunt," said Jeanne, approaching her.

Her aunt turned her head, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. The young people did not notice it; but suddenly M. de Lamare perceived that Jeanne's thin shoes were covered with dew. He was worried, and asked tenderly:

"Are not your dear little feet cold?"

All at once the old lady's hands shook so violently that she let fall her knitting, and hiding her face in her hands, she began to sob convulsively.

The engaged couple looked at her in amazement, without moving. Suddenly Jeanne fell on her knees, and taking her aunt's hands away from her face, said in perplexity:

"Why, what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, her voice full of tears, and her whole body shaking with sorrow, replied:

“It was when he asked you — are not your — your — dear little feet cold? — no one ever said such things to me — to me — never — never — — “

Jeanne, surprised and compassionate, could still hardly help laughing at the idea of an admirer showing tender solicitude for Lison; and the vicomte had turned away to conceal his mirth.

But the aunt suddenly rose, laying her ball of wool on the floor and her knitting in the chair, and fled to her room, feeling her way up the dark staircase.

Left alone, the young people looked at one another, amused and saddened. Jeanne murmured:

“Poor aunt!” Julien replied. “She must be a little crazy this evening.”

They held each other’s hands and presently, gently, very gently, they exchanged their first kiss, and by the following day had forgotten all about Aunt Lison’s tears.

The two weeks preceding the wedding found Jeanne very calm, as though she were weary of tender emotions. She had no time for reflection on the morning of the eventful day. She was only conscious of a feeling as if her flesh, her bones and her blood had all melted beneath her skin, and on taking hold of anything, she noticed that her fingers trembled.

She did not regain her self-possession until she was in the chancel of the church during the marriage ceremony.

Married! So she was married! All that had occurred since daybreak seemed to her a dream, a waking dream. There are such moments, when all appears changed around us; even our motions seem to have a new meaning; even the hours of the day, which seem to be out of their usual time. She felt bewildered, above all else, bewildered. Last evening nothing had as yet been changed in her life; the constant hope of her life seemed only nearer, almost within reach. She had gone to rest a young girl; she was now a married woman. She had crossed that boundary that seems to conceal the future with all its joys, its dreams of happiness. She felt as though a door had opened in front of her; she was about to enter into the fulfillment of her expectations.

When they appeared on the threshold of the church after the ceremony, a terrific noise caused the bride to start in terror, and the baroness to scream; it was a rifle salute given by the peasants, and the firing did not cease until they reached “The Poplars.”

After a collation served for the family, the family chaplain, and the priest from Yport, the mayor and the witnesses, who were some of the large farmers of the district, they all walked in the garden. On the other side of the château one could hear the boisterous mirth of the peasants, who were drinking cider beneath the apple trees. The whole countryside, dressed in their best, filled the courtyard.

Jeanne and Julien walked through the copse and then up the slope and, without speaking, gazed out at the sea. The air was cool, although it was the middle of August; the wind was from the north, and the sun blazed down unpityingly from the blue sky. The young people sought a more sheltered spot, and crossing the plain, they turned to the right, toward the rolling and wooded valley that leads to Yport. As soon as they reached the trees the air was still, and they left the road and took a narrow path beneath the trees, where they could scarcely walk abreast.

Jeanne felt an arm passed gently round her waist. She said nothing, her breath came quick, her heart beat fast. Some low branches caressed their hair, as they bent to pass under them. She picked a leaf; two ladybirds were concealed beneath it, like two delicate red shells.

“Look, a little family,” she said innocently, and feeling a little more confidence.

Julien placed his mouth to her ear, and whispered: “This evening you will be my wife.”

Although she had learned many things during her sojourn in the country, she dreamed of nothing as yet but the poetry of love, and was surprised. His wife? Was she not that already?

Then he began to kiss her temples and neck, little light kisses. Startled each time afresh by these masculine kisses to which she was not accustomed, she instinctively turned away her head to avoid them, though they delighted her. But they had come to the edge of the wood. She stopped, embarrassed at being so far from home. What would they think?

“Let us go home,” she said.

He withdrew his arm from her waist, and as they turned round they stood face to face, so close that they could feel each other’s breath on their faces. They gazed deep into one another’s eyes with that gaze in which two souls seem to blend. They sought the impenetrable unknown of each other’s being. They sought to fathom one another, mutely and persistently. What would they be to one another? What would this life be that they were about to begin together? What joys, what happiness, or what disillusions were they preparing in this long, indissoluble tête-à-tête of marriage? And it seemed to them as if they had never yet seen each other.

Suddenly, Julien, placing his two hands on his wife's shoulders, kissed her full on the lips as she had never before been kissed. The kiss, penetrating as it did her very blood and marrow, gave her such a mysterious shock that she pushed Julien wildly away with her two arms, almost falling backward as she did so.

"Let us go away, let us go away," she faltered.

He did not reply, but took both her hands and held them in his. They walked home in silence, and the rest of the afternoon seemed long. The dinner was simple and did not last long, contrary to the usual Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment seemed to paralyze the guests. The two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers invited, alone betrayed a little of that broad mirth that is supposed to accompany weddings.

They had apparently forgotten how to laugh, when a remark of the mayor's woke them up. It was about nine o'clock; coffee was about to be served. Outside, under the apple-trees of the first court, the bal champêtre was beginning, and through the open window one could see all that was going on. Lanterns, hung from the branches, gave the leaves a grayish green tint. Rustics and their partners danced in a circle shouting a wild dance tune to the feeble accompaniment of two violins and a clarinet, the players seated on a large table as a platform. The boisterous singing of the peasants at times completely drowned the instruments, and the feeble strains torn to tatters by the unrestrained voices seemed to fall from the air in shreds, in little fragments of scattered notes.

Two large barrels surrounded by flaming torches were tapped, and two servant maids were kept busy rinsing glasses and bowls in order to refill them at the tap whence flowed the red wine, or at the tap of the cider barrel. On the table were bread, sausages and cheese. Every one swallowed a mouthful from time to time, and beneath the roof of illuminated foliage this wholesome and boisterous fête made the melancholy watchers in the dining-room long to dance also, and to drink from one of those large barrels, while they munched a slice of bread and butter and a raw onion.

The mayor, who was beating time with his knife, cried: "By Jove, that is all right; it is like the wedding of Ganache."

A suppressed giggle was heard, but Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority, cried: “You mean of Cana.” The other did not accept the correction. “No, monsieur le curé, I know what I am talking about; when I say Ganache, I mean Ganache.”

They rose from table and went into the drawing-room, and then outside to mix with the merrymakers. The guests soon left.

They went into the house. They were surprised to see Madame Adelaide sobbing on Julien’s shoulder. Her tears, noisy tears, as if blown out by a pair of bellows, seemed to come from her nose, her mouth and her eyes at the same time; and the young man, dumfounded, awkward, was supporting the heavy woman who had sunk into his arms to commend to his care her darling, her little one, her adored daughter.

The baron rushed toward them, saying: “Oh, no scenes, no tears, I beg of you,” and, taking his wife to a chair, he made her sit down, while she wiped away her tears. Then, turning to Jeanne: “Come, little one, kiss your mother and go to bed.”

What happened then? She could hardly have told, for she seemed to have lost her head, but she felt a shower of little grateful kisses on her lips.

Day dawned. Julien awoke, yawned, stretched, looked at his wife, smiled and asked: “Did you sleep well, darling?”

She noticed that he now said “thou,” and she replied, bewildered, “Why, yes. And you?” “Oh, very well,” he answered. And turning toward her, he kissed her and then began to chat quietly. He set before her plans of living, with the idea of economy, and this word occurring several times, astonished Jeanne. She listened without grasping the meaning of his words, looked at him, but was thinking of a thousand things that passed rapidly through her mind hardly leaving a trace.

The clock struck eight. “Come, we must get up,” he said. “It would look ridiculous for us to be late.” When he was dressed he assisted his wife with all the little details of her toilet, not allowing her to call Rosalie. As they left the room he stopped. “You know, when we are alone, we can now use ‘thou,’ but before your parents it is better to wait a while. It will be quite natural when we come back from our wedding journey.”

She did not go down till luncheon was ready. The day passed like any ordinary day, as if nothing new had occurred. There was one man more in the house, that was all.

CHAPTER V. CORSICA AND A NEW LIFE

Four days later the travelling carriage arrived that was to take them to Marseilles.

After the first night Jeanne had become accustomed to Julien's kisses and caresses, although her repugnance to a closer intimacy had not diminished. She thought him handsome, she loved him. She again felt happy and cheerful.

The farewells were short and without sadness. The baroness alone seemed tearful. As the carriage was just starting she placed a purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand, saying, "That is for your little expenses as a bride."

Jeanne thrust the purse in her pocket and the carriage started.

Toward evening Julien said: "How much money did your mother give you in that purse?"

She had not given it a thought, and she poured out the contents on her knees. A golden shower filled her lap: two thousand francs. She clapped her hands. "I shall commit all kinds of extravagance," she said as she replaced it in the purse.

After travelling eight days in terribly hot weather they reached Marseilles. The following day the *Roi-Louis*, a little mail steamer which went to Naples by way of Ajaccio, took them to Corsica.

Corsica! Its "maquis," its bandits, its mountains! The birthplace of Napoleon! It seemed to Jeanne that she was leaving real life to enter into a dream, although wide awake. Standing side by side on the bridge of the steamer, they looked at the cliffs of Provence as they passed swiftly by them. The calm sea of deep blue seemed petrified beneath the ardent rays of the sun.

"Do you remember our excursion in Père Lastique's boat?" said Jeanne.

Instead of replying, he gave her a hasty kiss on the ear.

The paddle-wheels struck the water, disturbing its torpor, and a long track of foam like the froth of champagne remained in the wake of the boat, reaching as far as the eye could see. Jeanne drank in with delight the odor of the salt mist that seemed to go to the very tips of her fingers. Everywhere the sea. But ahead of them there was something gray, not clearly defined in the early dawn; a sort of massing of strange-looking clouds, pointed, jagged, seemed to rest on the waters.

Presently it became clearer, its outline more distinct on the brightening sky; a large chain of mountains, peaked and weird, appeared. It was Corsica, covered with a light veil of mist. The sun rose behind it, outlining the jagged crests like black shadows. Then all the summits were bathed in light, while the rest of the island remained covered with mist.

The captain, a little sun-browned man, dried up, stunted, toughened and shrivelled by the harsh salt winds, appeared on the bridge and in a voice hoarse after twenty years of command and worn from shouting amid the storms, said to Jeanne:

“Do you perceive it, that odor?”

She certainly noticed a strong and peculiar odor of plants, a wild aromatic odor.

“That is Corsica that sends out that fragrance, madame,” said the captain. “It is her peculiar odor of a pretty woman. After being away for twenty years, I should recognize it five miles out at sea. I belong to it. He, down there, at Saint Helena, he speaks of it always, it seems, of the odor of his native country. He belongs to my family.”

And the captain, taking off his hat, saluted Corsica, saluted down yonder, across the ocean, the great captive emperor who belonged to his family.

Jeanne was so affected that she almost cried.

Then, pointing toward the horizon, the captain said: “Les Sanguinaires.”

Julien was standing beside his wife, with his arm round her waist, and they both looked out into the distance to see what he was alluding to. They at length perceived some pyramidal rocks which the vessel rounded presently to enter an immense peaceful gulf surrounded by lofty summits, the base of which was covered with what looked like moss.

Pointing to this verdant growth, the captain said: “Le maquis.”

As they proceeded on their course the circle of mountains appeared to close in behind the steamer, which moved along slowly in such a lake of transparent azure that one could sometimes see to the bottom.

The town suddenly appeared perfectly white at the end of the gulf, on the edge of the water, at the base of the mountains. Some little Italian boats were anchored in the dock. Four or five rowboats came up beside the *Roi-Louis* to get passengers.

Julien, who was collecting the baggage, asked his wife in a low tone: “Twenty sous is enough, is it not, to give to the porter?” For a week he had constantly asked the same question, which annoyed her each time. She replied somewhat impatiently: “When one is not sure of giving enough, one gives too much.”

He was always disputing with the hotel proprietors, with the servants, the drivers, the vendors of all kinds, and when, by dint of bargaining, he had obtained a reduction in price, he would say to Jeanne as he rubbed his hands: “I do not like to be cheated.”

She trembled whenever a bill came in, certain beforehand of the remarks that he would make about each item, humiliated at this bargaining, blushing up to the roots of her hair beneath the contemptuous glances of the servants as they looked after her husband, while they held in their hand the meagre tip.

He had a dispute with the boatmen who landed him.

The first tree Jeanne saw was a palm. They went to a great, empty hotel at the corner of an immense square and ordered breakfast.

After an hour’s rest they arranged an itinerary for their trip, and at the end of three days spent in this little town, hidden at the end of the blue gulf, and hot as a furnace enclosed in its curtain of mountains, which keep every breath of air from it, they decided to hire some saddle horses, so as to be able to cross any difficult pass, and selected two little Corsican stallions with fiery eyes, thin and unwearying, and set out one morning at daybreak. A guide, mounted on a mule, accompanied them and carried the provisions, for inns are unknown in this wild country.

The road ran along the gulf and soon turned into a kind of valley, and on toward the high mountains. They frequently crossed the dry beds of torrents with only a tiny stream of water trickling under the stones, gurgling faintly like a wild animal in hiding.

The uncultivated country seemed perfectly barren. The sides of the hills were covered with tall weeds, yellow from the blazing sun. Sometimes they met a mountaineer, either on foot or mounted on a little horse, or astride a donkey about as big as a dog. They all carried a loaded rifle slung across their backs, old rusty weapons, but redoubtable in their hands.

The pungent odor of the aromatic herbs with which the island is overgrown seemed to make the air heavy. The road ascended gradually amid the long curves of the mountains. The red or blue granite peaks gave an appearance of fairyland to the wild landscape, and on the foothills immense forests of chestnut trees looked like green brush, compared with the elevations above them.

Sometimes the guide, reaching out his hand toward some of these heights, would repeat a name. Jeanne and Julien would look where he pointed, but see nothing, until at last they discovered something gray, like a mass of stones fallen from the summit. It was a little village, a hamlet of granite hanging there, fastened on like a veritable bird's nest and almost invisible on the huge mountain.

Walking their horses like this made Jeanne nervous. "Let us go faster," she said. And she whipped up her horse. Then, as she did not hear her husband following her, she turned round and laughed heartily as she saw him coming along, pale, and holding on to his horse's mane as it bounced him up and down. His very appearance of a "beau cavalier" made his awkwardness and timidity all the more comical.

They trotted along quietly. The road now ran between two interminable forests of brush, which covered the whole side of the mountain like a garment. This was the "Maquis," composed of scrub oak, juniper, arbutus, mastic, privet, gorse, laurel, myrtle and boxwood, intertwined with clematis, huge ferns, honeysuckle, cytisus, rosemary, lavender and brambles, which covered the sides of the mountain with an impenetrable fleece.

They were hungry. The guide rejoined them and led them to one of those charming springs so frequent in rocky countries, a tiny thread of iced water issuing from a little hole in the rock and flowing into a chestnut leaf that some passerby had placed there to guide the water into one's mouth.

Jeanne felt so happy that she could hardly restrain herself from screaming for joy.

They continued their journey and began to descend the slope winding round the Bay of Sagone. Toward evening they passed through Cargese, the Greek village founded by a colony of refugees who were driven from their country. Tall, beautiful girls, with rounded hips, long hands and slender waists, and singularly graceful, were grouped beside a fountain. Julien called out, "Good evening," and they replied in musical tones in the harmonious language of their own land.

When they reached Piana they had to beg for hospitality, as in ancient times and in desert lands. Jeanne trembled with joy as they waited for the door to be opened after Julien knocked. Oh, this was a journey worth while, with all the unexpected of unexplored paths.

It happened to be the home of a young couple. They received the travellers as the patriarchs must have received the guest sent by God. They had to sleep on a corn husk mattress in an old moldy house. The woodwork, all eaten by worms, overrun with long boring-worms, seemed to emit sounds, to be alive and to sigh.

They set off again at daybreak, and presently stopped before a forest, a veritable forest of purple granite. There were peaks, pillars, bell-towers, wondrous forms molded by age, the ravaging wind and the sea mist. As much as three hundred metres in height, slender, round, twisted, hooked, deformed, unexpected and fantastic, these amazing rocks looked like trees, plants, animals, monuments, men, monks in their garb, horned devils, gigantic birds, a whole population of monsters, a menagerie of nightmares petrified by the will of some eccentric divinity.

Jeanne had ceased talking, her heart was full. She took Julien's hand and squeezed it, overcome with a longing for love in presence of the beauty of nature.

Suddenly, as they emerged from this chaos, they saw before them another gulf, encircled by a wall of blood-red granite. And these red rocks were reflected in the blue waters.

"Oh, Julien!" faltered Jeanne, unable to speak for wonder and choking with her emotion. Two tears fell from her eyes. Julien gazed at her in astonishment and said:

"What is the matter, my pet?"

She wiped away her tears, smiled and replied in a rather shaky voice:

"Nothing — I am nervous — I do not know — it just came over me. I am so happy that the least thing affects me."

He could not understand these feminine attacks of "nerves," the shocks of these vibrant beings, excited at nothing, whom enthusiasm stirs as might a catastrophe, whom an imperceptible sensation completely upsets, driving them wild with joy or despair.

These tears seemed absurd to him, and thinking only of the bad road, he said:

"You would do better to watch your horse."

They descended an almost impassable path to the shore of the gulf, then turned to the right to ascend the gloomy Val d'Ota.

But the road was so bad that Julien proposed that they should go on foot. Jeanne was delighted. She was enchanted at the idea of walking, of being alone with him after her late emotion.

The guide went ahead with the mule and the horses and they walked slowly.

The mountain, cleft from top to bottom, spreads apart. The path lies in this breach, between two gigantic walls. A roaring torrent flows through the gorge. The air is icy, the granite looks black, and high above one the glimpse of blue sky astonishes and bewilders one.

A sudden noise made Jeanne start. She raised her eyes. An immense bird flew away from a hollow; it was an eagle. His spread wings seemed to brush the two walls of the gorge and he soared into the blue and disappeared.

Farther on there was a double gorge and the path lay between the two in abrupt zigzags. Jeanne, careless and happy, took the lead, the pebbles rolling away beneath her feet, fearlessly leaning over the abysses. Julien followed her, somewhat out of breath, his eyes on the ground for fear of becoming dizzy.

All at once the sun shone down on them, and it seemed as if they were leaving the infernal regions. They were thirsty, and following a track of moisture, they crossed a wilderness of stones and found a little spring conducted into a channel made of a piece of hollowed-out wood for the benefit of the goatherds. A carpet of moss covered the ground all round it, and Jeanne and Julien knelt down to drink.

As they were enjoying the fresh cold water, Julien tried to draw Jeanne away to tease her. She resisted and their lips met and parted, and the stream of cold water splashed their faces, their necks, their clothes and their hands, and their kisses mingled in the stream.

They were a long time reaching the summit of the declivity, as the road was so winding and uneven, and they did not reach Evisa until evening and the house of Paoli Palabretti, a relative of their guide.

He was a tall man, somewhat bent, with the mournful air of a consumptive. He took them to their room, a cheerless room of bare stone, but handsome for this country, where all elegance is ignored. He expressed in his language — the Corsican patois, a jumble of French and Italian — his pleasure at welcoming them, when a shrill voice interrupted him. A little swarthy woman, with large black eyes, a skin warmed by the sun, a slender waist, teeth always showing in a perpetual smile, darted forward, kissed Jeanne, shook Julien's hand and said: "Good-day, madame; good-day, monsieur; I hope you are well."

She took their hats, shawls, carrying all on one arm, for the other was in a sling, and then she made them all go outside, saying to her husband: "Go and take them for a walk until dinner time."

M. Palabretti obeyed at once and walked between the two young people as he showed them the village. He dragged his feet and his words, coughing frequently, and repeating at each attack of coughing:

"It is the air of the Val, which is cool, and has struck my chest."

He led them on a by-path beneath enormous chestnut trees. Suddenly he stopped and said in his monotonous voice: "It is here that my cousin, Jean Rinaldi, was killed by Mathieu Lori. See, I was there, close to Jean, when Mathieu appeared at ten paces from us. 'Jean,' he cried, 'do not go to Albertacce; do not go, Jean, or I will kill you. I warn you!'

"I took Jean's arm: 'Do not go there, Jean; he will do it.'

"It was about a girl whom they were both after, Paulina Sinacoupi.

"But Jean cried out: 'I am going, Mathieu; you will not be the one to prevent me.'

"Then Mathieu unslung his gun, and before I could adjust mine, he fired.

"Jean leaped two feet in the air, like a child skipping, yes, monsieur, and he fell back full on me, so that my gun went off and rolled as far as the big chestnut tree over yonder.

"Jean's mouth was wide open, but he did not utter a word; he was dead."

The young people gazed in amazement at the calm witness of this crime. Jeanne asked:

"And what became of the assassin?"

Paoli Palabretti had a long fit of coughing and then said:

"He escaped to the mountain. It was my brother who killed him the following year. You know, my brother, Philippi Palabretti, the bandit."

Jeanne shuddered.

"Your brother a bandit?"

With a gleam of pride in his eye, the calm Corsican replied:

"Yes, madame. He was celebrated, that one. He laid low six gendarmes. He died at the same time as Nicolas Morali, when they were trapped in the Niolo, after six days of fighting, and were about to die of hunger.

"The country is worth it," he added with a resigned air in the same tone in which he said: "It is the air of the Val, which is cool."

Then they went home to dinner, and the little Corsican woman behaved as if she had known them for twenty years.

But Jeanne was worried. When Julien again held her in his arms, would she experience the same strange and intense sensation that she had felt on the moss beside the spring? And when they were alone together that evening she trembled lest she should still be insensible to his kisses. But she was reassured, and this was her first night of love.

The next day, as they were about to set out, she decided that she would not leave this humble cottage, where it seemed as though a fresh happiness had begun for her.

She called her host's little wife into her room and, while making clear that she did not mean it as a present, she insisted, even with some annoyance, on sending her from Paris, as soon as she arrived, a remembrance, a remembrance to which she attached an almost superstitious significance.

The little Corsican refused for some time, not wishing to accept it. But at last she consented, saying:

"Well, then, send me a little pistol, a very small one."

Jeanne opened her eyes in astonishment. The other added in her ear, as one confides a sweet and intimate secret: "It is to kill my brother-in-law." And smiling, she hastily unwound the bandages around the helpless arm, and showing her firm, white skin with the scratch of a stiletto across it, now almost healed, she said: "If I had not been almost as strong as he is, he would have killed me. My husband is not jealous, he knows me; and, besides, he is ill, you know, and that quiets your blood. And, besides, madame, I am an honest woman; but my brother-in-law believes all that he hears. He is jealous for my husband and he will surely try it again. Then I shall have my little pistol; I shall be easy, and sure of my revenge."

Jeanne promised to send the weapon, kissed her new friend tenderly and they set out on their journey.

The rest of the trip was nothing but a dream, a continual series of embraces, an intoxication of caresses. She saw nothing, neither the landscape, nor the people, nor the places where they stopped. She saw nothing but Julien.

On arriving at Bastia, they had to pay the guide. Julien fumbled in his pockets. Not finding what he wanted, he said to Jeanne: “As you are not using your mother’s two thousand francs, give them to me to carry. They will be safer in my belt, and it will avoid my having to make change.”

She handed him her purse.

They went to Leghorn, visited Florence, Genoa and all the Cornici. They reached Marseilles on a morning when the north wind was blowing. Two months had elapsed since they left the “Poplars.” It was now the 15th of October.

Jeanne, affected by the cold wind that seemed to come from yonder, from far-off Normandy, felt sad. Julien had, for some time, appeared changed, tired, indifferent, and she feared she knew not what.

They delayed their return home four days longer, not being able to make up their minds to leave this pleasant land of the sun. It seemed to her that she had come to an end of her happiness.

At length they left. They were to make all their purchases in Paris, prior to settling down for good at the “Poplars,” and Jeanne looked forward to bringing back some treasures, thanks to her mother’s present. But the first thing she thought of was the pistol promised to the little Corsican woman of Evisa.

The day after they arrived she said to Julien: “Dear, will you give me that money of mamma’s? I want to make my purchases.”

He turned toward her with a look of annoyance.

“How much do you want?”

“Why — whatever you please.”

“I will give you a hundred francs,” he replied, “but do not squander it.”

She did not know what to say, amazed and confused. At length she faltered: “But — I — handed you the money to — — “

He did not give her time to finish.

“Yes, of course. Whether it is in my pocket or yours makes no difference from the moment that we have the same purse. I do not refuse you, do I, since I am giving you a hundred francs?”

She took the five gold pieces without saying a word, but she did not venture to ask for any more, and she bought nothing but the pistol.

Eight days later they set out for the “Poplars.”

CHAPTER VI. DISENCHANTMENT

The family and servants were awaiting them outside the white gate with brick supports. The post-chaise drew up and there were long and affectionate greetings. Little mother wept; Jeanne, affected, wiped away some tears; father nervously walked up and down.

Then, as the baggage was being unloaded, they told of their travels beside the parlor fire. Jeanne's words flowed freely, and everything was told, everything, in a half hour, except, perhaps, a few little details forgotten in this rapid account.

The young wife then went to undo her parcels. Rosalie, also greatly affected, assisted her. When this was finished and everything had been put away, the little maid left her mistress, and Jeanne, somewhat fatigued, sat down.

She asked herself what she was now going to do, seeking some occupation for her mind, some work for her hands. She did not care to go down again into the drawing-room, where her mother was asleep, and she thought she would take a walk. But the country seemed so sad that she felt a weight at her heart on only looking out of the window.

Then it came to her that she had no longer anything to do, never again anything to do. All her young life at the convent had been preoccupied with the future, busied with dreams. The constant excitement of hope filled her hours at that time, so that she was not aware of their flight. Then hardly had she left those austere walls, where her illusions had unfolded, than her expectations of love were at once realized. The longed-for lover, met, loved and married within a few weeks, as one marries on these sudden resolves, had carried her off in his arms, without giving her time for reflection.

But now the sweet reality of the first days was to become the everyday reality, which closed the door on vague hopes, on the enchanting worries of the unknown. Yes, there was nothing more to look forward to. And there was nothing more to do, today, to-morrow, never. She felt all this vaguely as a certain disillusion, a certain crumbling of her dreams.

She rose and leaned her forehead against the cold window panes.

Then, after gazing for some time at the sky across which dark clouds were passing, she decided to go out.

Was this the same country, the same grass, the same trees as in May? What had become of the sunlit cheerfulness of the leaves and the poetry of the green grass, where dandelions, poppies and moon daisies bloomed and where yellow butterflies fluttered as though held by invisible wires? And this intoxication of the air teeming with life, with fragrance, with fertilizing pollen, existed no longer!

The avenues, soaked by the constant autumnal downpours, were covered with a thick carpet of fallen leaves which extended beneath the shivering bareness of the almost leafless poplars. She went as far as the shrubbery. It was as sad as the chamber of a dying person. A green hedge which separated the little winding walks was bare of leaves. Little birds flew from place to place with a little chilly cry, seeking a shelter.

The thick curtain of elm trees that formed a protection against the sea wind, the lime tree and the plane tree with their crimson and yellow tints seemed clothed, the one in red velvet and the other in yellow silk.

Jeanne walked slowly up and down petite mère's avenue, alongside the Couillards' farm. Something weighed on her spirit like a presentiment of the long boredom of the monotonous life about to begin.

She seated herself on the bank where Julien had first told her of his love and remained there, dreaming, scarcely thinking, depressed to the very soul, longing to lie down, to sleep, in order to escape the dreariness of the day.

All at once she perceived a gull crossing the sky, carried away in a gust of wind, and she recalled the eagle she had seen down there in Corsica, in the gloomy vale of Ota. She felt a spasm at her heart as at the remembrance of something pleasant that is gone by, and she had a sudden vision of the beautiful island with its wild perfume, its sun that ripens oranges and lemons, its mountains with their rosy summits, its azure gulfs and its ravines through which the torrents flowed.

And the moist, severe landscape that surrounded her, with the falling leaves and the gray clouds blown along by the wind, enfolded her in such a heavy mantle of misery that she went back to the house to keep from sobbing.

Her mother was dozing in a torpid condition in front of the fire, accustomed to the melancholy of the long days, and not noticing it any longer. Her father and Julien had gone for a walk to talk about business matters. Night was coming on, filling the large drawing-room with gloom lighted by reflections of light from the fire.

The baron presently appeared, followed by Julien. As soon as the vicomte entered the room he rang the bell, saying: “Quick, quick, let us have some light! It is gloomy in here.”

And he sat down before the fire. While his wet shoes were steaming in the warmth and the mud was drying on his soles, he rubbed his hands cheerfully as he said: “I think it is going to freeze; the sky is clearing in the north, and it is full moon to-night; we shall have a stinger to-night.”

Then turning to his daughter: “Well, little one, are you glad to be back again in your own country, in your own home, with the old folks?”

This simple question upset Jeanne. She threw herself into her father’s arms, her eyes full of tears, and kissed him nervously, as though asking pardon, for in spite of her honest attempt to be cheerful, she felt sad enough to give up altogether. She recalled the joy she had promised herself at seeing her parents again, and she was surprised at the coldness that seemed to numb her affection, just as if, after constantly thinking of those one loves, when at a distance and unable to see them at any moment, one should feel, on seeing them again, a sort of check of affection, until the bonds of their life in common had been renewed.

Dinner lasted a long time. No one spoke much. Julien appeared to have forgotten his wife.

In the drawing-room Jeanne sat before the fire in a drowsy condition, opposite little mother, who was sound asleep. Aroused by the voices of the men, Jeanne asked herself, as she tried to rouse herself, if she, too, was going to become a slave to this dreary lethargy of habit that nothing varies.

The baron approached the fire, and holding out his hands to the glowing flame, he said, smiling: “Ah, that burns finely this evening. It is freezing, children; it is freezing.” Then, placing his hand on Jeanne’s shoulder and pointing to the fire, he said: “See here, little daughter, that is the best thing in life, the hearth, the hearth, with one’s own around one. Nothing else counts. But supposing we retire. You children must be tired out.”

When she was in her room, Jeanne asked herself how she could feel so differently on returning a second time to the place that she thought she loved. Why did she feel as though she were wounded? Why did this house, this beloved country, all that hitherto had thrilled her with happiness, now appear so distressing?

Her eyes suddenly fell on her clock. The little bee was still swinging from left to right and from right to left with the same quick, continuous motion above the scarlet blossoms. All at once an impulse of tenderness moved her to tears at sight of this little piece of mechanism that seemed to be alive. She had not been so affected on kissing her father and mother. The heart has mysteries that no arguments can solve.

For the first time since her marriage she was alone, Julien, under pretext of fatigue, having taken another room.

She lay awake a long time, unaccustomed to being alone and disturbed by the bleak north wind which beat against the roof.

She was awakened the next morning by a bright light that flooded her room. She put on a dressing gown and ran to the window and opened it.

An icy breeze, sharp and bracing, streamed into the room, making her skin tingle and her eyes water. The sun appeared behind the trees on a crimson sky, and the earth, covered with frost and dry and hard, rang out beneath one's footsteps. In one night all the leaves had blown off the trees, and in the distance beyond the level ground was seen the long green line of water, covered with trails of white foam.

Jeanne dressed herself and went out, and for the sake of an object she went to call on the farmers.

The Martins held up their hands in surprise, and Mrs. Martin kissed her on both cheeks, and then they made her drink a glass of noyau. She then went to the other farm. The Couillards also were surprised. Mrs. Couillard pecked her on the ears and she had to drink a glass of cassis. Then she went home to breakfast.

The day went by like the previous day, cold instead of damp. And the other days of the week resembled these two days, and all the weeks of the month were like the first week.

Little by little, however, she ceased to regret far-off lands. The force of habit was covering her life with a layer of resignation similar to the limestone formation deposited on objects by certain springs. And a kind of interest for the thousand-and-one little insignificant things of daily life, a care for the simple, ordinary everyday occupations, awakened in her heart. A sort of pensive melancholy, a vague disenchantment with life was growing up in her mind. What did she lack? What did she want? She did not know. She had no worldly desires, no thirst for amusement, no longing for permissible pleasures. What then? Just as old furniture tarnishes in time, so everything was slowly becoming faded to her eyes, everything seemed to be fading, to be taking on pale, dreary shades.

Her relations with Julien had completely changed. He seemed to be quite different since they came back from their honeymoon, like an actor who has played his part and resumes his ordinary manner. He scarcely paid any attention to her or even spoke to her. All trace of love had suddenly disappeared, and he seldom came into her room at night.

He had taken charge of the money and of the house, changed the leases, worried the peasants, cut down expenses, and having adopted the costume of a gentleman farmer, he had lost his polish and elegance as a fiancé.

He always wore the same suit, although it was covered with spots. It was an old velveteen shooting jacket with brass buttons, that he had found among his former wardrobe, and with the carelessness that is frequent with those who no longer seek to please, he had given up shaving, and his long beard, badly cut, made an incredible change for the worse in his appearance. His hands were never cared for, and after each meal he drank four or five glasses of brandy.

Jeanne tried to remonstrate with him gently, but he had answered her so abruptly: “Won’t you let me alone!” that she never ventured to give him any more advice.

She had adapted herself to these changes in a manner that surprised herself. He had become a stranger to her, a stranger whose mind and heart were closed to her. She constantly thought about it, asking herself how it was that after having met, loved, married in an impulse of affection, they should all at once find themselves almost as much strangers as though they had never shared the same room.

And how was it that she did not feel this neglect more deeply? Was this life? Had they deceived themselves? Did the future hold nothing further for her?

If Julien had remained handsome, carefully dressed, elegant, she might possibly have suffered more deeply.

It had been agreed that after the new year the young couple should remain alone and that the father and mother should go back to spend a few months at their house in Rouen. The young people were not to leave the “Poplars” that winter, so as to get thoroughly settled and to become accustomed to each other and to the place where all their life would be passed. They had a few neighbors to whom Julien would introduce his wife. These were the Brisevilles, the Colteliers and the Fourvilles.

But the young people could not begin to pay calls because they had not as yet been able to get a painter to alter the armorial bearings on the carriage.

The old family coach had been given up to his son-in-law by the baron, and nothing would have induced him to show himself at the neighboring châteaux if the coat-of-arms of the De Lamares were not quartered with those of the Le Perthuis des Vauds.

There was only one man in the district who made a specialty of heraldic designs, a painter of Bolbec, called Bataille, who was in demand at all the Norman castles in turn to make these precious designs on the doors of carriages.

At length one morning in December, just as they were finishing breakfast, they saw an individual open the gate and walk toward the house. He was carrying a box on his back. This was Bataille.

They offered him some breakfast, and, while he was eating, the baron and Julien made sketches of quarterings. The baroness, all upset as soon as these things were discussed, gave her opinion. And even Jeanne took part in the discussion, as though some mysterious interest had suddenly awakened in her.

Bataille, while eating, gave his ideas, at times taking the pencil and tracing a design, citing examples, describing all the aristocratic carriages in the countryside, and seemed to have brought with him in his ideas, even in his voice, a sort of atmosphere of aristocracy.

As soon as he had finished his coffee, they all went to the coach house. They took off the cover of the carriage and Bataille examined it. He then gravely gave his views as to the size he considered suitable for the design, and after an exchange of ideas, he set to work.

Notwithstanding the cold, the baroness had her chair brought out so as to watch him working, and then her foot-stove, for her feet were freezing. She then began to chat with the painter, on all the recent births, deaths and marriages of which she had not heard, thus adding to the genealogical tree which she carried in her memory.

Julien sat beside her, astride on a chair. He was smoking, spitting on the ground, listening and following with his glances the emblazoning of his rank.

Presently old Simon, who was on his way to the vegetable garden, his spade on his shoulder, stopped to look at the work; and as Bataille's arrival had become known at the two farms, the farmers' wives soon put in an appearance. They went into raptures, standing one at either side of the baroness, exclaiming: “My! it requires some cleverness all the same to fix up those things.”

The two doors could not be finished before the next day about eleven o’clock. Every one was on hand; and they dragged the carriage outside so as to get a better view of it.

It was perfect. Bataille was complimented, and went off with his box on his back. They all agreed that the painter had great ability, and if circumstances had been favorable would doubtless have been a great artist.

Julien, by way of economy, had introduced great reforms which necessitated making some changes. The old coachman had been made gardener, Julien undertaking to drive himself, having sold the carriage horses to avoid buying feed for them. But as it was necessary to have some one to hold the horses when he and his wife got out of the carriage, he had made a little cow tender named Marius into a groom. Then in order to get some horses, he introduced a special clause into the Couillards’ and Martins’ leases, by which they were bound to supply a horse each, on a certain day every month, the date to be fixed by him; and this would exempt them from their tribute of poultry.

So the Couillards brought a big yellow horse, and the Martins a small white animal with long, unclipped coat, and the two were harnessed up together. Marius, buried in an old livery belonging to old Simon, led the carriage up to the front door.

Julien, looking clean and brushed up, looked a little like his former self; but his long beard gave him a common look in spite of all. He looked over the horses, the carriage, and the little groom, and seemed satisfied, the only really important thing to him being the newly painted escutcheon.

The baroness came down leaning on her husband’s arm and got into the carriage. Then Jeanne appeared. She began to laugh at the horses, saying that the white one was the son of the yellow horse; then, perceiving Marius, his face buried under his hat with its cockade, his nose alone preventing it from covering his face altogether, his hands hidden in his long sleeves, and the tail of his coat forming a skirt round his legs, his feet encased in immense shoes showing in a comical manner beneath it, and then when he threw his head back so as to see, and lifted up his leg to walk as if he were crossing a river, she burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

The baron turned round, glanced at the little bewildered groom and he, too, burst out laughing, calling to his wife: “Look at Ma-Ma-Marius! Is he not comical? Heavens, how funny he looks!”

The baroness, looking out of the carriage window, was also convulsed, so that the carriage shook on its springs.

But Julien, pale with anger, asked: “What makes you laugh like that? Are you crazy?”

Jeanne, quite convulsed and unable to stop laughing, sat down on the doorstep; the baron did the same, while, in the carriage, spasmodic sneezes, a sort of constant chuckling, told that the baroness was choking. Presently there was a motion beneath Marius’ livery. He had, doubtless, understood the joke, for he was shaking with laughter beneath his hat.

Julien darted forward in exasperation. With a box on the ear he sent the boy’s hat flying across the lawn; then, turning toward his father-in-law, he stammered in a voice trembling with rage: “It seems to me that you should be the last to laugh. We should not be where we are now if you had not wasted your money and ruined your property. Whose fault is it if you are ruined?”

The laughter ceased at once, and no one spoke. Jeanne, now ready to cry, got into the carriage and sat beside her mother. The baron, silent and astonished, took his place opposite the two ladies, and Julien sat on the box after lifting to the seat beside him the weeping boy, whose face was beginning to swell.

The road was dreary and appeared long. The occupants of the carriage were silent. All three sad and embarrassed, they would not acknowledge to one another what was occupying their thoughts. They felt that they could not talk on indifferent subjects while these thoughts had possession of them, and preferred to remain silent than to allude to this painful subject.

They drove past farmyards, the carriage jogging along unevenly with the ill-matched animals, putting to flight terrified black hens who plunged into the bushes and disappeared, occasionally followed by a barking wolf-hound.

At length they entered a wide avenue of pine trees, at the end of which was a white, closed gate. Marius ran to open it, and they drove in round an immense grass plot, and drew up before a high, spacious, sad-looking building with closed shutters.

The hall door opened abruptly, and an old, paralyzed servant wearing a black waistcoat with red stripes partially covered by his working apron slowly descended the slanting steps. He took the visitors' names and led them into an immense reception room, and opened with difficulty the Venetian blinds which were always kept closed. The furniture had covers on it, and the clock and candelabra were wrapped in white muslin. An atmosphere of mildew, an atmosphere of former days, damp and icy, seemed to permeate one's lungs, heart and skin with melancholy.

They all sat down and waited. They heard steps in the hall above them that betokened unaccustomed haste. The hosts were hurriedly dressing. The baroness, who was chilled, sneezed constantly. Julien paced up and down. Jeanne, despondent, sat beside her mother. The baron leaned against the marble mantelpiece with his head bent down.

Finally, one of the tall doors opened, and the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville appeared. They were both small, thin, vivacious, of no age in particular, ceremonious and embarrassed.

After the first greetings, there seemed to be nothing to say. So they began to congratulate each other for no special reason, and hoped that these friendly relations would be kept up. It was a treat to see people when one lived in the country the year round.

The icy atmosphere pierced to their bones and made their voices hoarse. The baroness was coughing now and had stopped sneezing. The baron thought it was time to leave. The Brisevilles said: "What, so soon? Stay a little longer." But Jeanne had risen in spite of Julien's signals, for he thought the visit too short.

They attempted to ring for the servant to order the carriage to the door, but the bell would not ring. The host started out himself to attend to it, but found that the horses had been put in the stable.

They had to wait. Every one tried to think of something to say. Jeanne, involuntarily shivering with cold, inquired what their hosts did to occupy themselves all the year round. The Brisevilles were much astonished; for they were always busy, either writing letters to their aristocratic relations, of whom they had a number scattered all over France, or attending to microscopic duties, as ceremonious to one another as though they were strangers, and talking grandiloquently of the most insignificant matters.

At last the carriage passed the windows with its ill-matched team. But Marius had disappeared. Thinking he was off duty until evening, he had doubtless gone for a walk.

Julien, perfectly furious, begged them to send him home on foot, and after a great many farewells on both sides, they set out for the “Poplars.”

As soon as they were inside the carriage, Jeanne and her father, in spite of Julien’s brutal behavior of the morning which still weighed on their minds, began to laugh at the gestures and intonations of the Brisevilles. The baron imitated the husband, and Jeanne the wife. But the baroness, a little touchy in these particulars, said: “You are wrong to ridicule them thus; they are people of excellent family.” They were silent out of respect for little mother, but nevertheless, from time to time, Jeanne and her father began again. The baroness could not forbear smiling in her turn, but she repeated: “It is not nice to laugh at people who belong to our class.”

Suddenly the carriage stopped, and Julien called out to someone behind it. Then Jeanne and the baron, leaning out, saw a singular creature that appeared to be rolling along toward them. His legs entangled in his flowing coattails, and blinded by his hat which kept falling over his face, shaking his sleeves like the sails of a windmill, and splashing into puddles of water, and stumbling against stones in the road, running and bounding, Marius was following the carriage as fast as his legs could carry him.

As soon as he caught up with it, Julien, leaning over, seized him by the collar of his coat, sat him down beside him, and letting go the reins, began to shower blows on the boy’s hat, which sank down to his shoulders with the reverberations of a drum. The boy screamed, tried to get away, to jump from the carriage, while his master, holding him with one hand, continued beating him with the other.

Jeanne, dumfounded, stammered: “Father — oh, father!” And the baroness, wild with indignation, squeezed her husband’s arm. “Stop him, Jack!” she exclaimed. The baron quickly lowered the front window, and seizing hold of his son-in-law’s sleeve, he sputtered out in a voice trembling with rage: “Have you almost finished beating that child?”

Julien turned round in astonishment: “Don’t you see what a condition his livery is in?”

But the baron, placing his head between them, said: “Well, what do I care? There is no need to be brutal like that!”

Julien got angry again: “Let me alone, please; this is not your affair!” And he was raising his hand again when his father-in-law caught hold of it and dragged it down so roughly that he knocked it against the wood of the seat, and he roared at him so loud: “If you do not stop, I shall get out, and I will see that you stop it, myself,” that Julien calmed down at once, and shrugging his shoulders without replying, he whipped up the horses, who set out at a quick trot.

The two women, pale as death, did not stir, and one could hear distinctly the thumping of the baroness’ heart.

At dinner Julien was more charming than usual, as though nothing had occurred. Jeanne, her father, and Madame Adelaide, pleased to see him so amiable, fell in with his mood, and when Jeanne mentioned the Brisevilles, he laughed at them himself, adding, however: “All the same, they have the grand air.”

They made no more visits, each one fearing to revive the Marius episode. They decided, to send New Year’s cards, and to wait until the first warm days of spring before paying any more calls.

At Christmas they invited the curé, the mayor and his wife to dinner, and again on New Year’s Day. These were the only events that varied the monotony of their life. The baron and his wife were to leave “The Poplars” on the ninth of January. Jeanne wanted to keep them, but Julien did not acquiesce, and the baron sent for a post-chaise from Rouen, seeing his son-in-law’s coolness.

The day before their departure, as it was a clear frost, Jeanne and her father decided to go to Yport, which they had not visited since her return from Corsica. They crossed the wood where she had strolled on her wedding-day, all wrapped up in the one whose lifelong companion she had become; the wood where she had received her first kiss, trembled at the first breath of love, had a presentiment of that sensual love of which she did not become aware until she was in the wild vale of Ota beside the spring where they mingled their kisses as they drank of its waters. The trees were now leafless, the climbing vines dead.

They entered the little village. The empty, silent streets smelled of the sea, of wrack, of fish. Huge brown nets were still hanging up to dry outside the houses, or stretched out on the shingle. The gray, cold sea, with its eternal roaring foam, was going out, uncovering the green rocks at the foot of the cliff toward Fécamp.

Jeanne and her father, motionless, watched the fishermen setting out in their boats in the dusk, as they did every night, risking their lives to keep from starving, and so poor, nevertheless, that they never tasted meat.

The baron, inspired at the sight of the ocean, murmured: “It is terrible, but it is beautiful. How magnificent this sea is on which the darkness is falling, and on which so many lives are in peril, is it not, Jeannette?”

She replied with a cold smile: “It is nothing to the Mediterranean.”

Her father, indignant, exclaimed: “The Mediterranean! It is oil, sugar water, bluing water in a washtub. Look at this sea, how terrible it is with its crests of foam! And think of all those men who have set out on it, and who are already out of sight.”

Jeanne assented with a sigh: “Yes, if you think so.” But this name, “Mediterranean,” had wrung her heart afresh, sending her thoughts back to those distant lands where her dreams lay buried.

Instead of returning home by the woods, they walked along the road, mounting the ascent slowly. They were silent, sad at the thought of the approaching separation. As they passed along beside the farmyards an odor of crushed apples, that smell of new cider which seems to pervade the atmosphere in this season all through Normandy, rose to their nostrils, or else a strong smell of the cow stables. A small lighted window at the end of the yard indicated the farmhouse.

It seemed to Jeanne that her mind was expanding, was beginning to understand the psychic meaning of things; and these little scattered gleams in the landscape gave her, all at once, a keen sense of the isolation of all human lives, a feeling that everything detaches, separates, draws one far away from the things they love.

She said, in a resigned tone: “Life is not always cheerful.”

The baron sighed: “How can it be helped, daughter? We can do nothing.”

The following day the baron and his wife went away, and Jeanne and Julien were left alone.

CHAPTER VII. JEANNE’S DISCOVERY

Cards now became a distraction in the life of the young people. Every morning after breakfast, Julien would play several games of bezique with his wife, smoking and sipping brandy as he played. She would then go up to her room and sit down beside the window, and as the rain beat against the panes, or the wind shook the windows, she would embroider away steadily. Occasionally she would raise her eyes and look out at the gray sea which had white-caps on it. Then, after gazing listlessly for some time, she would resume her work.

She had nothing else to do, Julien having taken the entire management of the house, to satisfy his craving for authority and his craze for economy. He was parsimonious in the extreme, never gave any tips, cut down the food to the merest necessaries; and as Jeanne since her return had ordered the baker to make her a little Norman “galette” for breakfast, he had cut down this extra expense, and condemned her to eat toast.

She said nothing in order to avoid recriminations, arguments and quarrels; but she suffered keenly at each fresh manifestation of avarice on the part of her husband. It appeared to her low and odious, brought up as she had been in a family where money was never considered. How often had she not heard her mother say: “Why, money is made to be spent.” Julien would now say: “Will you never become accustomed to not throwing money away?” And each time he deducted a few sous from some one’s salary or on a note, he would say with a smile, as he slipped the change into his pocket: “Little streams make big rivers.”

On certain days Jeanne would sit and dream. She would gradually cease sewing and, with her hands idle, and forgetting her surroundings, she would weave one of those romances of her girlhood and be lost in some enchanting adventure. But suddenly Julien’s voice giving some orders to old Simon would snatch her abruptly from her dreams, and she would take up her work again, saying: “That is all over,” and a tear would fall on her hands as she plied the needle.

Rosalie, formerly so cheerful and always singing, had changed. Her rounded cheeks had lost their color, and were now almost hollow, and sometimes had an earthy hue. Jeanne would frequently ask her: “Are you ill, my girl?” The little maid would reply: “No, madame,” while her cheeks would redden slightly and she would retire hastily.

At the end of January the snow came. In one night the whole plain was covered and the trees next morning were white with icy foam.

On one of these mornings, Jeanne was sitting warming her feet before the fire in her room, while Rosalie, who had changed from day to day, was making the bed. Suddenly hearing behind her a kind of moan, Jeanne asked, without turning her head: “What is the matter?”

The maid replied as usual: “Nothing, madame”; but her voice was weak and trembling.

Jeanne’s thoughts were on something else, when she noticed that the girl was not moving about the room. She called: “Rosalie!” Still no sound. Then, thinking she might have left the room, she cried in a louder tone: “Rosalie!” and she was reaching out her arm to ring the bell, when a deep moan close beside her made her start up with a shudder.

The little servant, her face livid, her eyes haggard, was seated on the floor, her legs stretched out, and her back leaning against the bed. Jeanne sprang toward her. “What is the matter with you — what is the matter?” she asked.

The girl did not reply, did not move. She stared vacantly at her mistress and gasped as though she were in terrible pain. Then, suddenly, she slid down on her back at full length, clenching her teeth to smother a cry of anguish.

Jeanne suddenly understood, and almost distracted, she ran to the head of the stairs, crying: “Julien, Julien!”

“What do you want?” he replied from below.

She hardly knew how to tell him. “It is Rosalie, who — — “

Julien rushed upstairs two steps at a time, and going abruptly into the room, he found the poor girl had just been delivered of a child. He looked round with a wicked look on his face, and pushing his terrified wife out of the room, exclaimed: “This is none of your affair. Go away. Send me Ludivine and old Simon.”

Jeanne, trembling, descended to the kitchen, and then, not daring to go upstairs again, she went into the drawing-room, in which there had been no fire since her parents left, and anxiously awaited news.

She presently saw the man-servant running out of the house. Five minutes later he returned with Widow Dentu, the nurse of the district.

Then there was a great commotion on the stairs as though they were carrying a wounded person, and Julien came in and told Jeanne that she might go back to her room.

She trembled as if she had witnessed some terrible accident. She sat down again before the fire, and asked: “How is she?”

Julien, preoccupied and nervous, was pacing up and down the room. He seemed to be getting angry, and did not reply at first. Then he stopped and said: “What do you intend to do with this girl?”

She did not understand, and looked at her husband. “Why, what do you mean? I do not know.”

Then suddenly flying into a rage, he exclaimed: “We cannot keep a bastard in the house.”

Jeanne was very much bewildered, and said at the end of a long silence: “But, my friend, perhaps we could put it out to nurse?”

He cut her short: “And who will pay the bill? You will, no doubt.”

She reflected for some time, trying to find some way out of the difficulty; at length she said: “Why, the father will take care of it, of the child; and if he marries Rosalie, there will be no more difficulty.”

Julien, as though his patience were exhausted, replied furiously: “The father! — the father! — do you know him — the father? No, is it not so? Well then —— ?”

Jeanne, much affected, became excited: “But you certainly would not let the girl go away like that. It would be cowardly! We will inquire the name of the man, and we will go and find him, and he will have to explain matters.”

Julien had calmed down and resumed his pacing up and down. “My dear,” he said, “she will not tell the name of the man; she will not tell you any more than she will tell me — and, if he does not want her? ... We cannot, however, keep a woman and her illegitimate child under our roof, don’t you understand?”

Jeanne, persistent, replied: “Then he must be a wretch, this man. But we must certainly find out who it is, and then he will have us to deal with.”

Julien colored, became annoyed again, and said: “But — meanwhile —— ?”

She did not know what course to take, and asked: “What do you propose?”

"Oh, I? That's very simple. I would give her some money and send her to the devil with her brat."

The young wife, indignant, was disgusted with him. "That shall never be," she said. "She is my foster-sister, that girl; we grew up together. She has made a mistake, so much the worse; but I will not cast her out of doors on that account; and, if it is necessary, I will bring up the child."

Then Julien's wrath exploded: "And we should earn a fine reputation, we, with our name and our position! And they would say of us everywhere that we were protecting vice, harboring beggars; and decent people would never set their foot inside our doors. What are you thinking of? You must be crazy!"

She had remained quite calm. "I shall never cast off Rosalie; and if you do not wish her to stay, my mother will take her; and we shall surely succeed in finding out the name of the father of the child."

He left the room in exasperation, banging the door after him and exclaiming: "What stupid ideas women have!"

In the afternoon Jeanne went up to see the patient. The little maid, watched over by Widow Dentu, was lying still in her bed, her eyes wide open, while the nurse held the new-born babe in her arms.

As soon as Rosalie perceived her mistress, she began to sob, hiding her face in the covers and shaking with her sorrow. Jeanne wanted to kiss her, but she avoided it by keeping her face covered. But the nurse interfered, and drawing away the sheet, uncovered her face, and she let Jeanne kiss her, weeping still, but more quietly.

A meagre fire was burning in the grate; the room was cold; the child was crying. Jeanne did not dare to speak of the little one, for fear of another attack, and she took her maid's hand as she said mechanically: "It will not matter, it will not matter." The poor girl glanced furtively at the nurse, and trembled as the infant cried, and the remembrance of her sorrow came to her mind occasionally in a convulsive sob, while suppressed tears choked her.

Jeanne kissed her again, and murmured softly in her ear: "We will take good care of it, never fear, my girl." Then as she was beginning to cry again, Jeanne made her escape.

She came to see her every day, and each time Rosalie burst into tears at the sight of her mistress.

The child was put out to nurse at a neighbor's.

Julien, however, hardly spoke to his wife, as though he had nourished anger against her ever since she refused to send away the maid. He referred to the subject one day, but Jeanne took from her pocket a letter from the baroness asking them to send the girl to them at once if they would not keep her at the "Poplars." Julien, furious, cried: "Your mother is as foolish as you are!" but he did not insist any more.

Two weeks later the patient was able to get up and take up her work again.

One morning, Jeanne made her sit down and, taking her hands and looking steadfastly at her, she said:

"See here, my girl, tell me everything."

Rosalie began to tremble, and faltered:

"What, madame?"

"Whose is it, this child?"

The little maid was overcome with confusion, and she sought wildly to withdraw her hands so as to hide her face. But Jeanne kissed her in spite of herself, and consoled her, saying: "It is a misfortune, but cannot be helped, my girl. You were weak, but that happens to many others. If the father marries you, no one will think of it again."

Rosalie sighed as if she were suffering, and from time to time made an effort to disengage herself and run away.

Jeanne resumed: "I understand perfectly that you are ashamed; but you see that I am not angry, that I speak kindly to you. If I ask you the name of the man it is for your own good, for I feel from your grief that he has deserted you, and because I wish to prevent that. Julien will go and look for him, you see, and we will oblige him to marry you; and as we will employ you both, we will oblige him also to make you happy."

This time Rosalie gave such a jerk that she snatched her hands away from her mistress and ran off as if she were mad.

That evening at dinner Jeanne said to Julien: "I tried to persuade Rosalie to tell me the name of her betrayer. I did not succeed. You try to find out so that we can compel this miserable man to marry her."

But Julien became angry: "Oh! you know I do not wish to hear anything about it. You wish to keep this girl. Keep her, but do not bother me about her."

Since the girl's illness he appeared to be more irritable than ever; and he had got into the way of never speaking to his wife without shouting as if he were in a rage, while she, on the contrary, would lower her voice, be gentle and conciliating, to avoid all argument; but she often wept at night after she went to bed.

In spite of his constant irritability, her husband had become more affectionate than customary since their return.

Rosalie was soon quite well and less sad, although she appeared terrified, pursued by some unknown fear, and she ran away twice when Jeanne tried to question her again.

Julien all at once became more amiable, and the young wife, clinging to vain hopes, also became more cheerful. The thaw had not yet set in and a hard, smooth, glittering covering of snow extended over the landscape. Neither men nor animals were to be seen; only the chimneys of the cottages gave evidence of life in the smoke that ascended from them into the icy air.

One evening the thermometer fell still lower, and Julien, shivering as he left the table — for the dining-room was never properly heated, he was so economical with the wood — rubbed his hands, murmuring: “It will be warmer to-night, won’t it, my dear?” He laughed with his jolly laugh of former days, and Jeanne threw her arms around his neck: “I do not feel well, dear; perhaps I shall be better to-morrow.”

“As you wish, my dear. If you are ill you must take care of yourself.” And they began to talk of other things.

She retired early. Julien, for a wonder, had a fire lighted in her room. As soon as he saw that it was burning brightly, he kissed his wife on the forehead and left the room.

The whole house seemed to be penetrated by the cold; the very walls seemed to be shivering, and Jeanne shivered in her bed. Twice she got up to put fresh logs on the fire and to look for dresses, skirts, and other garments which she piled on the bed. Nothing seemed to warm her; her feet were numbed and her lower limbs seemed to tingle, making her excessively nervous and restless.

Then her teeth began to chatter, her hands shook, there was a tightness in her chest, her heart began to beat with hard, dull pulsations, and at times seemed to stop beating, and she gasped for breath. A terrible apprehension seized her, while the cold seemed to penetrate to her marrow. She never had felt such a sensation, she had never seemed to lose her hold on life like this before, never been so near her last breath.

“I am going to die,” she thought, “I am dying — — “

And filled with terror, she jumped out of bed, rang for Rosalie, waited, rang again, waited again, shivering and frozen.

The little maid did not come. She was doubtless asleep, that first, sound sleep that nothing can disturb. Jeanne, in despair, darted toward the stairs in her bare feet, and groping her way, she ascended the staircase quietly, found the door, opened it, and called, “Rosalie!” She went forward, stumbled against the bed, felt all over it with her hands and found that it was empty. It was empty and cold, and as if no one had slept there. Much surprised, she said: “What! Has she gone out in weather like this?”

But as her heart began to beat tumultuously till she seemed to be suffocating, she went downstairs again with trembling limbs in order to wake Julien. She rushed into his room filled with the idea that she was going to die, and longing to see him before she lost consciousness.

By the light of the dying embers she perceived Rosalie’s head leaning on her husband’s shoulder.

At the cry she gave they both started to their feet; she stood motionless for a second, horrified at this discovery, and then fled to her room; and when Julien, at his wit’s end, called “Jeanne!” she was seized with an overmastering terror of seeing him, of hearing his voice, of listening to him explaining, lying, of meeting his gaze; and she darted toward the stairs again and went down.

She now ran along in the darkness, at the risk of falling downstairs, at the risk of breaking her neck on the stone floor of the hall. She rushed along, impelled by an imperious desire to flee, to know nothing about it, to see no one.

When she was at the bottom of the stairs she sat down on one of the steps, still in her nightdress, and in bare feet, and remained in a dazed condition. She heard Julien moving and walking about. She started to her feet in order to escape him. He was starting to come downstairs and called: “Listen, Jeanne!”

No, she would not listen nor let him touch her with the tips of his fingers; and she darted into the dining-room as if she were fleeing from an assassin. She looked for a door of escape, a hiding place, a dark corner, some way of avoiding him. She hid under the table. But he was already at the door, a candle in his hand, still calling: “Jeanne!” She started off again like a hare, darted into the kitchen, ran round it twice like a trapped animal, and as he came near her, she suddenly opened the door into the garden and darted out into the night.

The contact with the snow, into which she occasionally sank up to her knees, seemed to give her the energy of despair. She did not feel cold, although she had little on. She felt nothing, her body was so numbed from the emotion of her mind, and she ran along as white as the snow.

She followed the large avenue, crossed the wood, crossed the ditch, and started off across the plain.

There was no moon, the stars were shining like sparks of fire in the black sky; but the plain was light with a dull whiteness, and lay in infinite silence.

Jeanne walked quickly, hardly breathing, not knowing, not thinking of anything. She suddenly stopped on the edge of the cliff. She stopped short, instinctively, and crouched down, bereft of thought and of will power.

In the abyss before her the silent, invisible sea exhaled the salt odor of its wrack at low tide.

She remained thus some time, her mind as inert as her body; then, all at once, she began to tremble, to tremble violently, like a sail shaken by the wind. Her arms, her hands, her feet, impelled by an invisible force, throbbed, pulsated wildly, and her consciousness awakened abruptly, sharp and poignant.

Old memories passed before her mental vision: the sail with him in Père Lastique's boat, their conversation, his nascent love, the christening of the boat; then she went back, further back, to that night of dreams when she first came to the "Poplars." And now! *And now!* Oh, her life was shipwrecked, all joy was ended, all expectation at an end; and the frightful future full of torture, of deception, and of despair appeared before her. Better to die, it would all be over at once.

But a voice cried in the distance: "Here it is, here are her steps; quick, quick, this way!" It was Julien who was looking for her.

Oh! she did not wish to see him again. In the abyss down yonder before her she now heard a slight sound, the indistinct ripple of the waves over the rocks. She rose to her feet with the idea of throwing herself over the cliff and bidding life farewell. Like one in despair, she uttered the last word of the dying, the last word of the young soldier slain in battle: "Mother!"

All at once the thought of little mother came to her mind, she saw her sobbing, she saw her father on his knees before her mangled remains, and in a second she felt all the pain of their sorrow.

She sank down again into the snow; and when Julien and old Simon, followed by Marius, carrying a lantern, seized her arm to pull her back as she was so close to the brink, she made no attempt to escape.

She let them do as they would, for she could not stir. She felt that they were carrying her, and then that she was being put to bed and rubbed with hot cloths; then she became unconscious.

Then she had a nightmare, or was it a nightmare? She was in bed. It was broad daylight, but she could not get up. Why? She did not know. Then she heard a little noise on the floor, a sort of scratching, a rustling, and suddenly a mouse, a little gray mouse, ran quickly across the sheet. Another followed it, then a third, who ran toward her chest with his little, quick scamper. Jeanne was not afraid, and she reached out her hand to catch the animal, but could not catch it. Then other mice, ten, twenty, hundreds, thousands, rose up on all sides of her. They climbed the bedposts, ran up the tapestries, covered the bed completely. And soon they got beneath the covers; Jeanne felt them gliding over her skin, tickling her limbs, running up and down her body. She saw them running from the bottom of the bed to get into her neck under the sheets; and she tried to fight them off, throwing her hands out to try and catch them, but always finding them empty.

She was frantic, wanted to escape, screamed, and it seemed as if she were being held down, as if strong arms enfolded her and rendered her helpless; but she saw no one.

She had no idea of time. It must have been long, a very long time.

Then she awoke, weary, aching, but quiet. She felt weak, very weak. She opened her eyes and was not surprised to see little mother seated in her room with a man whom she did not know.

How old was she? She did not know, and thought she was a very little girl. She had no recollection of anything.

The big man said: “Why, she has regained consciousness.” Little mother began to weep. Then the big man resumed: “Come, be calm, baroness; I can ensure her recovery now. But do not talk to her at all. Let her sleep, let her sleep.”

Then it seemed to Jeanne that she remained in a state of exhaustion for a long time, overcome by a heavy sleep as soon as she tried to think; and she tried not to remember anything whatever, as though she had a vague fear that the reality might come back to her.

Once when she awoke she saw Julien, alone, standing beside her; and suddenly it all came back to her, as if the curtain which hid her past life had been raised.

She felt a horrible pain in her heart, and wanted to escape once more. She threw back the coverlets, jumped to the floor and fell down, her limbs being too weak to support her.

Julien sprang toward her, and she began to scream for him not to touch her. She writhed and rolled on the floor. The door opened. Aunt Lison came running in with Widow Dentu, then the baron, and finally little mother, puffing and distracted.

They put her back into bed, and she immediately closed her eyes, so as to escape talking and be able to think quietly.

Her mother and aunt watched over her anxiously, saying: “Do you hear us now, Jeanne, my little Jeanne?”

She pretended to be deaf, not to hear them, and did not answer. Night came on and the nurse took up her position beside the bed. She did not sleep; she kept trying to think of things that had escaped her memory as though there were holes in it, great white empty places where events had not been noted down.

Little by little she began to recall the facts, and she pondered over them steadily.

Little mother, Aunt Lison, the baron had come, so she must have been very ill. But Julien? What had he said? Did her parents know? And Rosalie, where was she? And what should she do? What should she do? An idea came to her — she would return to Rouen and live with father and little mother as in old days. She would be a widow; that’s all.

Then she waited, listening to what was being said around her, understanding everything without letting them see it, rejoiced at her returning reason, patient and crafty.

That evening, at last, she found herself alone with the baroness and called to her in a low tone: “Little Mother!” Her own voice astonished her, it seemed strange. The baroness seized her hands: “My daughter, my darling Jeanne! My child, do you recognize me?”

“Yes, little mother, but you must not weep; we have a great deal to talk about. Did Julien tell you why I ran away in the snow?”

“Yes, my darling, you had a very dangerous fever.”

“It was not that, mamma. I had the fever afterward; but did he tell you what gave me the fever and why I ran away?”

“No, my dearie.”

“It was because I found Rosalie in his room.”

Her mother thought she was delirious again and soothed her, saying: “Go to sleep, darling, calm yourself, try to sleep.”

But Jeanne, persistent, continued: “I am quite sensible now, little mother. I am not talking wildly as I must have done these last days. I felt ill one night and I went to look for Julien. Rosalie was with him in his room. I did not know what I was doing, for sorrow, and I ran out into the snow to throw myself off the cliff.”

But the baroness reiterated, “Yes, darling, you have been very ill, very ill.”

“It is not that, mamma. I found Rosalie in with Julien, and I will not live with him any longer. You will take me back with you to Rouen to live as we used to do.”

The baroness, whom the doctor had warned not to thwart Jeanne in any way, replied: “Yes, my darling.”

But the invalid grew impatient: “I see that you do not believe me. Go and fetch little father, he will soon understand.”

The baroness left the room and presently returned, leaning on her husband’s arm. They sat down beside the bed and Jeanne began to talk. She told them all, quietly, in a weak voice, but clearly; all about Julien’s peculiar character, his harshness, his avarice, and, finally, his infidelity.

When she had finished, the baron saw that she was not delirious, but he did not know what to think, what to determine, or what to answer. He took her hand, tenderly, as he used to do when he put her to sleep with stories, and said: “Listen, dearie, we must act with prudence. We must do nothing rash. Try to put up with your husband until we can come to some decision — promise me this?”

“I will try, but I will not stay here after I get well,” she replied.

Then she added in a lower tone: “Where is Rosalie now?”

“You will not see her any more,” replied the baron. But she persisted: “Where is she? I wish to know.” Then he confessed that she had not left the house, but declared that she was going to leave.

On leaving the room the baron, filled with indignation and wounded in his feelings as a father, went to look for Julien, and said to him abruptly:

"Sir, I have come to ask you for an explanation of your conduct toward my daughter. You have been unfaithful to her with your maid, which is a double insult."

Julien pretended to be innocent, denied everything positively, swore, took God as his witness. What proof had they? he asked. Was not Jeanne delirious? Had she not had brain fever? Had she not run out in the snow, in an attack of delirium, at the very beginning of her illness? And it was just at this time, when she was running about the house almost naked, that she pretends that she saw her maid in her husband's room!

And he grew angry, threatened a lawsuit, became furious. The baron, bewildered, made excuses, begged his pardon, and held out his loyal hand to Julien, who refused to take it.

When Jeanne heard what her husband had said, she did not show any annoyance, but replied: "He is lying, papa, but we shall end by convicting him."

For some days she remained taciturn and reserved, thinking over matters. The third morning she asked to see Rosalie. The baron refused to send her up, saying she had left. Jeanne persisted, saying: "Well, let some one go and fetch her."

She was beginning to get excited when the doctor came. They told him everything, so that he could form an opinion. But Jeanne suddenly burst into tears, her nerves all unstrung, and almost screamed: "I want Rosalie; I wish to see her!"

The doctor took hold of her hand and said in a low tone: "Calm yourself, madame; any emotion may lead to serious consequences, for you are enceinte."

She was dumfounded, as though she had received a blow; and it seemed to her that she felt the first stirrings of life within her. Then she was silent, not even listening to what was being said, absorbed in her own thoughts. She could not sleep that night for thinking of the new life that was developing in her, and was sad at the thought that it was Julien's child, and might resemble him. The following morning she sent for the baron. "Little father," she said, "my resolution is formed; I wish to know everything, and especially just now; you understand, I insist, and you know that you must not thwart me in my present condition. Listen! You must go and get M. le Curé. I need him here to keep Rosalie from telling a lie. Then, as soon as he comes, send him up to me, and you stay downstairs with little mother. And, above all things, see that Julien does not suspect anything.”

An hour later the priest came, looking fatter than ever, and puffing like the baroness. He sat down in an arm-chair and began to joke, wiping his forehead as usual with his plaid handkerchief. “Well, baroness, I do not think we grow any thinner; I think we make a good pair.” Then, turning toward the patient, he said: “Eh, what is this I hear, young lady, that we are soon to have a fresh baptism? Aha, it will not be a boat this time.” And in a graver tone he added: “It will be a defender of the country; unless” — after a moment’s reflection — it “should be the prospective mother of a family, like you, madame,” bowing to the baroness.

The door at the end of the room opened and Rosalie appeared, beside herself, weeping, refusing to enter the room, clinging to the door frame, and being pushed forward by the baron. Quite out of patience, he thrust her into the room. She covered her face with her hands and remained standing there, sobbing.

Jeanne, as soon as she saw her, rose to a sitting posture, whiter than the sheets, and with her heart beating wildly. She could not speak, could hardly breathe. At length she said, in a voice broken with emotion: “I — I — will not — need — to question you. It — it is enough for me to see you thus — to — to see your — your shame in my presence.”

After a pause, for she was out of breath, she continued: “I had M. le Curé come, so that it might be like a confession, you understand.”

Rosalie, motionless, uttered little cries that were almost screams behind her hands.

The baron, whose anger was gaining ground, seized her arms, and snatching her hands from her face, he threw her on her knees beside the bed, saying: “Speak! Answer!”

She remained on the ground, in the position assigned to Magdalens, her cap awry, her apron on the floor, and her face again covered by her hands.

Then the priest said: “Come, my girl, listen to what is said to you, and reply. We do not want to harm you, but we want to know what occurred.”

Jeanne, leaning over, looked at her and said: “Is it true that you were with Julien when I surprised you?”

Rosalie moaned through her fingers, “Yes, madame.”

Then the baroness suddenly began to cry in a choking fashion, and her convulsive sobs accompanied those of Rosalie.

Jeanne, with her eyes fixed on the maid, said: “How long had this been going on?”

“Ever since he came here,” faltered Rosalie.

Jeanne could not understand. “Ever since he came — then — ever since — ever since the spring?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Ever since he came into this house?”

“Yes, madame.”

And Jeanne, as if overflowing with questions, asked, speaking precipitately:

“But how did it happen? How did he approach you? How did he persuade you? What did he say? When, how did you ever yield to him? How could you ever have done it?”

Rosalie, removing her hands from her face, and overwhelmed also with a feverish desire to speak, said:

“How do I know, myself? It was the day he dined here for the first time, and he came up to my room. He had hidden himself in the loft. I did not dare to scream for fear of making a scandal. I no longer knew what I was doing. Then I said nothing because I liked him.”

Then Jeanne exclaimed with almost a scream:

“But — your — your child — is his child?”

Rosalie sobbed.

“Yes, madame.”

Then they were both silent. The only sound to be heard was the sobs of Rosalie and of the baroness.

Jeanne, quite overcome, felt her tears also beginning to flow; and they fell silently down her cheeks.

The maid’s child had the same father, as her child! Her anger was at an end; she now was filled with a dreary, slow, profound and infinite despair. She presently resumed in a changed, tearful voice, the voice of a woman who has been crying:

“When we returned from — from down there — from our journey — when did he begin again?”

The little maid, who had sunk down on the floor, faltered: “The first evening.”

Each word wrung Jeanne’s heart. So on the very first night of their return to the “Poplars” he left her for this girl. That was why he wanted to sleep alone!

She now knew all she wanted to know, and exclaimed: “Go away, go away!” And as Rosalie, perfectly crushed, did not stir, Jeanne called to her father: “Take her away, carry her away!” The priest, who had said nothing as yet, thought that the moment had arrived for him to preach a little sermon.

“What you have done is very wrong, my daughter, very wrong, and God will not pardon you so easily. Consider the hell that awaits you if you do not always act right. Now that you have a child you must behave yourself. No doubt madame la baronne will do something for you, and we will find you a husband.”

He would have continued speaking, but the baron, having again seized Rosalie by the shoulders, raised her from the floor and dragged her to the door, and threw her like a package into the corridor. As he turned back into the room, looking paler than his daughter, the priest resumed: “What can one do? They are all like that in the district. It is shocking, but cannot be helped, and then one must be a little indulgent toward the weaknesses of our nature. They never get married until they have become enceinte, never, madame.” He added, smiling: “One might call it a local custom. So, you see, monsieur, your maid did as all the rest do.”

But the baron, who was trembling with nervousness, interrupted him, saying, “She! what do I care about her! It is Julien with whom I am indignant. It is infamous, the way he has behaved, and I shall take my daughter away.”

He walked up and down excitedly, becoming more and more exasperated: “It is infamous to have betrayed my child, infamous! He is a wretch, this man, a cad, a wretch! and I will tell him so. I will slap his face. I will give him a horsewhipping!”

The priest, who was slowly taking a pinch of snuff, seated beside the baroness still in tears, and endeavoring to fulfill his office of a peacemaker, said: “Come, monsieur le baron, between ourselves, he has done what every one else does. Do you know many husbands who are faithful?” And he added with a sly good humor: “Come now, I wager that you have had your turn. Your hand on your heart, am I right?” The baron had stopped in astonishment before the priest, who continued: “Why, yes, you did just as others did. Who knows if you did not make love to a little sugar plum like that? I tell you that every one does. Your wife was none the less happy, or less loved; am I not right?"

The baron had not stirred, he was much disturbed. What the priest said was true, and he had sinned as much as any one and had not hesitated when his wife's maids were in question. Was he a wretch on that account? Why should he judge Julien's conduct so severely when his own had not been above blame?

The baroness, still struggling with her sobs, smiled faintly at the recollection of her husband's escapades, for she belonged to the sentimental class for whom love adventures are a part of existence.

Jeanne, exhausted, lay with wide-open eyes, absorbed in painful reflection. Something Rosalie had said had wounded her as though an arrow had pierced her heart: "As for me, I said nothing, because I liked him."

She had liked him also, and that was the only reason why she had given herself, bound herself for life to him, why she had renounced everything else, all her cherished plans, all the unknown future. She had fallen into this marriage, into this hole without any edges by which one could climb out, into this wretchedness, this sadness, this despair, because, like Rosalie, she had liked him!

The door was pushed violently open and Julien appeared, with a furious expression on his face. He had caught sight of Rosalie moaning on the stairs, and suspected that something was up, that the maid had probably told all. The sight of the priest riveted him to the spot.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked in a trembling but quiet tone.

The baron, so violent a short while ago, did not venture to speak, afraid of the priest's remarks, and of what his son-in-law might say in the same strain. Little mother was weeping more copiously than ever; but Jeanne had raised herself with her hands and looked, breathing quickly, at the one who had caused her such cruel sorrow. She stammered out: "The fact is, we know all, all your rascality since — since the day you first entered this house — we know that the child of this maid is your child, just as — as — mine is — they will be brothers." Overcome with sorrow at this thought, she buried herself in the sheets and wept bitterly.

Julien stood there gaping, not knowing what to say or do. The priest came to the rescue.

"Come, come, do not give way like that, my dear young lady, be sensible." He rose, approached the bed and placed his warm hand on the despairing girl’s forehead. This seemed to soothe her strangely. She felt quieted, as if this strong peasant’s hand, accustomed to the gesture of absolution, to kindly consolations, had conveyed by its touch some mysterious solace.

The good man, still standing, continued: “Madame, we must always forgive. A great sorrow has come to you; but God in His mercy has balanced it by a great happiness, since you will become a mother. This child will be your comfort. In his name I implore you, I adjure you to forgive M. Julien’s error. It will be a new bond between you, a pledge of his future fidelity. Can you remain apart in your heart from him whose child you bear?”

She did not reply, crushed, mortified, exhausted as she was, without even strength for anger or resentment. Her nerves seemed relaxed, almost severed, she seemed to be scarcely alive.

The baroness, who seemed incapable of resentment, and whose mind was unequal to prolonged effort, murmured: “Come, come, Jeanne.”

Then the priest took the hand of the young man and leading him up to the bed, he placed his hand in that of his wife, and gave it a little tap as though to unite them more closely. Then laying aside his professional tone and manner, he said with a satisfied air: “Well, now, that’s done. Believe me, that is the best thing to do.” The two hands, joined for a moment, separated immediately. Julien, not daring to kiss Jeanne, kissed his mother-in-law on the forehead, turned on his heel, took the arm of the baron, who acquiesced, happy at heart that the thing had been settled thus, and they went out together to smoke a cigar.

The patient, overcome, dozed off, while the priest and little mother talked in a low tone.

The priest explained and propounded his ideas, to which the baroness assented by nodding her head. He said in conclusion: “Well, then, that is understood; you will give this girl the Barville farm, and I will undertake to find her a husband, a good, steady fellow. Oh! with a property worth twenty thousand francs we shall have no lack of suitors. There will be more than enough to choose from.”

The baroness was smiling now, quite happy, with the remains of two tears that had dried on her cheeks.

She repeated: “That is settled. Barville is worth at least twenty thousand francs, but it will be settled on the child, the parents having the use of it during their lifetime."

The curé rose, shook little mother's hand, saying: "Do not disturb yourself, Madame la Baronne, do not disturb yourself; I know what an effort it is."

As he went out he met Aunt Lison coming to see her patient. She noticed nothing; they told her nothing; and she knew nothing, as usual.

CHAPTER VIII. MATERNITY

Rosalie had left the house. Jeanne felt no joy at the thought of being a mother, she had had so much sorrow. She awaited the advent of her child without curiosity, still filled with the apprehension of unknown misfortunes.

A big woman, big as a house, had taken Rosalie's place and supported the baroness in her monotonous walks along her avenue. The baron gave his arm to Jeanne, who was now always ailing, while Aunt Lison, uneasy, and busied about the approaching event, held her other hand, bewildered at this mystery which she would never know.

They all walked along like this almost in silence for hours at a time, while Julien was riding about the country on horseback, having suddenly acquired this taste. Nothing ever came to disturb their dreary life. The baron, his wife, and the vicomte paid a visit to the Fourvilles, whom Julien seemed to be already well acquainted with, without one knowing just how. Another ceremonious visit was exchanged with the Brisevilles, who were still hidden in their manor house.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, two persons, a lady and gentleman on horseback, rode up into the courtyard of the château. Julien, greatly excited, ran up to Jeanne's room. "Quick, quick, come downstairs; here are the Fourvilles. They have just come as neighbors, knowing your condition. Tell them that I have gone out, but that I will be back. I will just go and make myself presentable."

Jeanne, much surprised, went downstairs. A pale, pretty young woman with a sad face, dreamy eyes, and lustreless, fair hair, looking as though the sunlight had never kissed it, quietly introduced her husband, a kind of giant, or ogre with a large red mustache. She added: "We have several times had the pleasure of meeting M. de Lamare. We heard from him how you were suffering, and we would not put off coming to see you as neighbors, without any ceremony. You see that we came on horseback. I also had the pleasure the other day of a visit from madame, your mother, and the baron."

She spoke with perfect ease, familiar but refined. Jeanne was charmed, and fell in love with her at once. "This is a friend," she thought.

The Comte de Fourville, on the contrary, seemed like a bear in the drawing-room. As soon as he was seated, he placed his hat on the chair next him, did not know what to do with his hands, placed them on his knees, then on the arms of the chair, and finally crossed his fingers as if in prayer.

Suddenly Julien entered the room. Jeanne was amazed and did not recognize him. He was shaved. He looked handsome, elegant, and attractive as on the day of their betrothal. He shook the comte's hairy paw, kissed the hand of the comtesse, whose ivory cheeks colored up slightly while her eyelids quivered.

He began to speak; he was charming as in former days. His large eyes, the mirrors of love, had become tender again. And his hair, lately so dull and unkempt, had regained its soft, glossy wave, with the use of a hairbrush and perfumed oil.

At the moment that the Fourvilles were taking their leave the comtesse, turning toward him, said: "Would you like to take a ride on Thursday, dear vicomte?"

As he bowed and murmured, "Why, certainly, madame," she took Jeanne's hand and said in a sympathetic and affectionate tone, with a cordial smile: "Oh! when you are well, we will all three gallop about the country. It will be delightful. What do you say?"

With an easy gesture she held up her riding skirt and then jumped into the saddle with the lightness of a bird, while her husband, after bowing awkwardly, mounted his big Norman steed. As they disappeared outside the gate, Julien, who seemed charmed, exclaimed: "What delightful people! those are friends who may be useful to us."

Jeanne, pleased also without knowing why, replied: "The little comtesse is charming, I feel that I shall love her, but the husband looks like a brute. Where did you meet them?"

He rubbed his hands together good humoredly. "I met them by chance at the Brisevilles'. The husband seems a little rough. He cares for nothing but hunting, but he is a real noble for all that."

The dinner was almost cheerful, as though some secret happiness had come into the house.

Nothing new happened until the latter days of July, when Jeanne was taken ill. As she seemed to grow worse, the doctor was sent for and at the first glance recognized the symptoms of a premature confinement.

Her sufferings presently abated a little, but she was filled with a terrible anguish, a despairing sinking, something like a presentiment, the mysterious touch of death. It is in these moments when it comes so near to us that its breath chills our hearts.

The room was full of people. Little mother, buried in an armchair, was choking with grief. The baron, his hands trembling, ran hither and thither, carrying things, consulting the doctor and losing his head. Julien paced up and down, looking concerned, but perfectly calm, and Widow Dentu stood at the foot of the bed with an appropriate expression, the expression of a woman of experience whom nothing astonishes. The cook, Ludivine, and Aunt Lison remained discreetly concealed behind the door of the lobby.

Toward morning Jeanne became worse, and as her involuntary screams escaped from between her closed teeth, she thought incessantly of Rosalie, who had not suffered, who had hardly moaned, who had borne her child without suffering and without difficulty, and in her wretched and troubled mind she continually compared their conditions and cursed God, whom she had formerly thought to be just. She rebelled at the wicked partiality of fate and at the wicked lies of those who preach justice and goodness.

At times her sufferings were so great that her mind was a blank. She had neither strength, life nor knowledge for anything but suffering.

All at once her sufferings ceased. The nurse and the doctor leaned over her and gave her all attention. Presently she heard a little cry and, in spite of her weakness, she unconsciously held out her arms. She was suddenly filled with joy, with a glimpse of a new-found happiness which had just unfolded. Her child was born, she was soothed, happy, happy as she never yet had been. Her heart and her body revived; she was now a mother. She felt that she was saved, secure from all despair, for she had here something to love.

From now on she had but one thought — her child. She was a fanatical mother, all the more intense because she had been deceived in her love, deceived in her hopes. She would sit whole days beside the window, rocking the little cradle.

The baron and little mother smiled at this excess of tenderness, but Julien, whose habitual routine had been interfered with and his overweening importance diminished by the arrival of this noisy and all-powerful tyrant, unconsciously jealous of this mite of a man who had usurped his place in the house, kept on saying angrily and impatiently: “How wearisome she is with her brat!”

She became so obsessed by this affection that she would pass the entire night beside the cradle, watching the child asleep. As she was becoming exhausted by this morbid life, taking no rest, growing weaker and thinner and beginning to cough, the doctor ordered the child to be taken from her. She got angry, wept, implored, but they were deaf to her entreaties. His nurse took him every evening, and each night his mother would rise, and in her bare feet go to the door, listen at the keyhole to see if he was sleeping quietly, did not wake up and wanted nothing.

Julien found her here one night when he came home late, after dining with the Fourvilles. After that they locked her in her room to oblige her to stay in bed.

The baptism took place at the end of August. The baron was godfather and Aunt Lison godmother. The child was named Pierre-Simon-Paul and called Paul for short.

At the beginning of September Aunt Lison left without any commotion. Her absence was as little felt as her presence.

One evening after dinner the priest appeared. He seemed embarrassed as if he were burdened by some mystery, and after some idle remarks, he asked the baroness and her husband to grant him a short interview in private.

They all three walked slowly down the long avenue, talking with animation, while Julien, who was alone with Jeanne, was astonished, disturbed and annoyed at this secret.

He accompanied the priest when he took his leave, and they went off together toward the church where the Angelus was ringing.

As it was cool, almost cold, the others went into the drawing-room. They were all dozing when Julien came in abruptly, his face red, looking very indignant.

From the door he called out to his parents-in-law, without remembering that Jeanne was there: “Are you crazy, for God’s sake! to go and throw away twenty thousand francs on that girl?”

No one replied, they were so astonished. He continued, bellowing with rage: “How can one be so stupid as that? Do you wish to leave us without a sou?”

The baron, who had recovered his composure, attempted to stop him: “Keep still! Remember that you are speaking before your wife.”

But Julien was trembling with excitement: “As if I cared; she knows all about it, anyway. It is robbing her.”

Jeanne, bewildered, looked at him without understanding. She faltered: “What in the world is the matter?”

Julien then turned toward her, to try and get her on his side as a partner who has been cheated out of an unexpected fortune. He hurriedly told her about the conspiracy to marry off Rosalie and about the gift of the Barville property, which was worth at least twenty thousand francs. He said: “Your parents are crazy, my dear, crazy enough to be shut up! Twenty thousand francs! twenty thousand francs! Why, they have lost their heads! Twenty thousand francs for a bastard!”

Jeanne listened without emotion and without anger, astonished at her own calmness, indifferent now to everything but her own child.

The baron was raging, but could find nothing to say. He finally burst forth and, stamping his foot, exclaimed: “Think of what you are saying; it is disgusting. Whose fault was it if we had to give this girl-mother a dowry? Whose child is it? You would like to abandon it now!”

Julien, amazed at the baron’s violence, looked at him fixedly. He then resumed in a calmer tone: “But fifteen hundred francs would be quite enough. They all have children before they are legally married. It makes no difference whose child it is, in any case. Instead of giving one of your farms, to the value of twenty thousand francs, in addition to making the world aware of what has happened, you should, to say the least, have had some regard for our name and our position.”

He spoke in a severe tone like a man who stood on his rights and was convinced of the logic of his argument. The baron, disturbed at this unexpected discussion, stood there gaping at him. Julien then, seeing his advantage, concluded: “Happily, nothing has yet been settled. I know the young fellow who is going to marry her. He is an honest chap and we can make a satisfactory arrangement with him. I will take charge of the matter.”

And he went out immediately, fearing no doubt to continue the discussion, and pleased that he had had the last word, a proof, he thought, that they acquiesced in his views.

As soon as he had left the room, however, the baron exclaimed: “Oh, that is going too far, much too far!”

But Jeanne, happening to look up at her father’s bewildered face, began to laugh with her clear, ringing laugh of former days, when anything amused her. She said: “Father, father, did you hear the tone in which he said: ‘Twenty thousand francs?’”

Little mother, whose mirth was as ready as her tears, as she recalled her son-in-law's angry expression, his indignant exclamations and his refusal to allow the girl whom he had led astray to be given money that did not belong to him, delighted also at Jeanne's mirth, gave way to little bursts of laughter till the tears came to her eyes. The baron caught the contagion, and all three laughed to kill themselves as they used to do in the good old days.

As soon as they quieted down a little Jeanne said: "How strange it is that all this does not affect me. I look upon him now as a stranger. I cannot believe that I am his wife. You see how I can laugh at his — his — want of delicacy."

And without knowing why they all three embraced each other, smiling and happy.

Two days later, after breakfast, just as Julien had started away from the house on horseback, a strapping young fellow from twenty-one to twenty-five years old, clad in a brand-new blue blouse with wide sleeves buttoning at the wrist, slyly jumped over the gate, as though he had been there awaiting his opportunity all the morning, crept along the Couillards' ditch, came round the château, and cautiously approached the baron and his wife, who were still sitting under the plane-tree.

He took off his cap and advanced, bowing in an awkward manner. As soon as he was close to them he said: "Your servant, Monsieur le Baron, madame and the company." Then, as no one replied, he said: "It is I, I am Desiré Lecocq."

As the name conveyed nothing to them, the baron asked, "What do you want?"

Then, altogether upset at the necessity of explaining himself, the young fellow stuttered out as he gazed alternately at his cap, which he held in his hands, and at the roof of the château: "It was M'sieu le Curé who said something to me about this matter — — " And then he stopped, fearing he might say too much and compromise his own interests.

The other, lowering his voice, blurted out: "That matter of your maid — Rosalie — — "

Jeanne, who had guessed what was coming, had risen and moved away with her infant in her arms.

"Come nearer," said the baron, pointing to the chair his daughter had just left. The peasant sat down, murmuring: "You are very good." Then he waited as though he had no more to say. After a long silence, he screwed up courage, and looking up at the sky, remarked: “There’s fine weather for the time of year. But the earth will be none the better for it, as the seed is already sown.” And then he was silent again.

The baron was growing impatient. He plunged right into the subject and said drily: “Then it is you who are going to marry Rosalie?”

The man at once became uneasy, his Norman caution being on the alert. He replied with more animation, but with a tinge of defiance: “That depends; perhaps yes, perhaps no; it depends.”

The baron, annoyed at this hedging, exclaimed angrily: “Answer frankly, damn it! Was this what you came here for? Yes or no! Will you marry her? Yes or no!”

The bewildered man looked steadfastly at his feet: “If it is as M’sieu le Curé said, I will take her, but if it is as M’sieu Julien said, I will not take her.”

“What did M. Julien tell you?”

“M’sieu Julien told me fifteen hundred francs and M’sieu le Curé told me that I should have twenty thousand. I will do it for twenty thousand, but I will not do it for fifteen hundred.”

The baroness, who was buried in her easy chair, began to giggle at the anxious expression of the peasant, who, not understanding this frivolity, glanced at her angrily out of the corner of his eye and waited in silence.

The baron, who was embarrassed at this bargaining, cut it short by saying: “I told M. le Curé that you should have the Barville farm during your lifetime and that then it would revert to the child. It is worth twenty thousand francs. I do not go back on my word. Is it settled? Yes or no!”

The man smiled with a humble and satisfied expression, and suddenly becoming loquacious, said: “Oh, in that case, I will not say no. That was all that stood in my way. When M’sieu le Curé spoke to me, I was ready at once, by gosh! and I was very pleased to accommodate the baron who was giving me that. I said to myself, ‘Is it not true that when people are willing to do each other favors, they can always find a way and can make it worth while?’ But M’sieu Julien came to see me, and it was only fifteen hundred francs. I said to myself: ‘I must see about that,’ and so I came here. That is not to say that I did not trust you, but I wanted to know. Short accounts make long friends. Is not that true, M’sieu le Baron?”

The baron interrupted him by asking, “When do you wish to get married?”

The man became timid again, very much embarrassed, and finally said, hesitatingly: “I will not do it until I get a little paper.”

This time the baron got angry: “Doggone it! you will have the marriage contract. That is the best kind of paper.”

But the peasant was stubborn: “Meanwhile I might take a little turn; it will not be dark for a while.”

The baron rose to make an end of the matter: “Answer yes or no at once. If you do not wish her, say so; I have another suitor.”

The fear of a rival terrified the crafty Norman. He suddenly made up his mind and held out his hand, as after buying a cow, saying: “Put it there, M’sieu le Baron; it is a bargain. Whoever draws back is a skunk!”

The baron shook his hand, then called out: “Ludivine!” The cook appeared at the window. “Bring us a bottle of wine.” They clinked glasses to seal the matter and the young peasant went off with a light tread.

Nothing was said to Julien about this visit. The contract was drawn up with all secrecy and as soon as the banns were published the wedding took place one Monday morning.

A neighbor carried the child to church, walking behind the bride and groom, as a sure sign of good luck. And no one in all the district was surprised; they simply envied Desiré Lecocq. “He was born with a caul,” they said, with a sly smile into which there entered no resentment.

Julien was terribly angry and made such a scene that his parents-in-law cut short their visit to the “Poplars.” Jeanne was only moderately sad at their departure, for little Paul had become for her an inexhaustible source of happiness.

CHAPTER IX. DEATH OF LA BARONNE

As Jeanne's health was quite restored, they determined to go and return the Fourvilles' visit and also to call on the Marquis de Coutelier.

Julien had bought at a sale a new one-horse phaeton, so that they could go out twice a month. They set out one fine December morning, and after driving for two hours across the plains of Normandy, they began to descend a little slope into a little valley, the sides of which were wooded, while the valley itself was cultivated. After an abrupt turn in the valley they saw the Château of Vrillette, a wooded slope on one side of it and a large pond on the other, out of which rose one of its walls and which was bounded by a wood of tall pine trees that formed the other side of the valley.

Julien explained all the portions of the building to Jeanne, like one who knows his subject thoroughly, and went into raptures over its beauty, adding; "It is full of game, this country. The comte loves to hunt here. This is a true seignorial residence."

The hall door was opened and the pale comtesse appeared, coming forward to meet the visitors, all smiles, and wearing a long-trained dress, like a chatelaine of olden times. She looked a fitting lady of the lake, born to inhabit this fairy castle.

The comtesse took both Jeanne's hands, as if she had known her all her life, and made her sit down beside her in a low chair, while Julien, all of whose forgotten elegance seemed to have revived within the past five months, chatted and smiled quietly and familiarly.

The comtesse and he talked of their horseback rides. She was laughing at his manner of mounting a horse and called him "Le Chevalier Trébuche," and he smiled also, having nicknamed her "The Amazon Queen." A gun fired beneath the windows caused Jeanne to give a little scream. It was the comte, who had killed a teal.

His wife called to him. A sound of oars was heard, a boat grinding against the stones, and he appeared, enormous, booted, followed by two drenched dogs of a ruddy color like himself, who lay down on the mat outside the door.

He seemed more at his ease in his own home, and was delighted to see his visitors. He put some wood on the fire, sent for madeira and biscuits and then exclaimed suddenly: “Why, you will take dinner with us, of course.”

Jeanne, whose child was never out of her thoughts, declined. He insisted, and as she could not be persuaded, Julien made a gesture of annoyance. She feared to arouse his ugly, quarrelsome temper, and although she was very unhappy at the thought that she should not see Paul until the next day, she consented to stay.

The afternoon was delightful. They first visited the springs which bubbled up at the foot of a mossy rock and then took a row on the pond. At one end of the boat Julien and the comtesse, wrapped in shawls, were smiling happily like those who have nothing left to wish for.

A huge fire was blazing in the spacious reception room, which imparted a sense of warmth and contentment. The comte seized his wife in his arms and lifted her from the floor as though she had been a child and gave her a hearty kiss on each cheek, like a man satisfied with the world.

Jeanne, smiling, looked at this good giant whom one would have thought was an ogre at the very sight of his mustaches, and she thought: “How one may be deceived each day about everybody.” Then, almost involuntarily, she glanced at Julien standing in the doorway, looking horribly pale and with his eyes fixed on the comte. She approached him and said in a low tone: “Are you ill? What is the matter with you?” He answered her angrily: “Nothing. Let me alone! I was cold.”

When they went into the dining-room the count asked if he might let his dogs come in, and they settled themselves one on either side of their master.

After dinner, as Jeanne and Julien were preparing to leave, M. de Fourville kept them a little longer to look at some fishing by torchlight. When they finally set out, wrapped up in their cloaks and some rugs they had borrowed, Jeanne said almost involuntarily: “What a fine man that giant is!” Julien, who was driving, replied: “Yes, but he does not always restrain himself before company.”

A week later they called on the Couteliers, who were supposed to be the chief noble family in the province. Their property of Remenil adjoined the large town of Cany. The new château built in the reign of Louis XIV. was hidden in a magnificent park enclosed by walls. The ruins of the old château could be seen on an eminence. They were ushered into a stately reception room by men servants in livery. In the middle of the room a sort of column held an immense bowl of Sèvres ware and on the pedestal of the column an autograph letter from the king, under glass, requested the Marquis Leopold-

Hervé-Joseph-Germer de Varneville de Rollebosc de Coutelier to receive this present from his sovereign.

Jeanne and Julien were looking at this royal gift when the marquis and marquise entered the room.

They were very ceremonious people whose minds, sentiments and words seemed always to be on stilts. They spoke without waiting for an answer, smiling complacently, appearing always to be fulfilling the duty imposed on them by their position, of showing civilities to the inferior nobility of the region.

Jeanne and Julien, somewhat taken aback, endeavored to be agreeable, but although they felt too embarrassed to remain any longer, they did not know exactly how to take their leave. The marquise herself put an end to the visit naturally and simply by bringing the conversation to a close like a queen giving a dismissal.

On the way home Julien said: “If you like, we will make this our first and last call; the Fourvilles are good enough for me.” Jeanne was of the same opinion. December passed slowly and the shut-in life began again as in the previous year. But Jeanne did not find it wearisome, as she was always taken up with Paul, whom Julien looked at askance, uneasy and annoyed. Often when the mother held the child in her arms, kissing it frantically as women do their children, she would hold it up to its father, saying: “Give him a kiss; one would suppose you did not love him.” He would hardly touch with his lips the child’s smooth forehead, walking all round it, as though he did not wish to touch the restless little fists. Then he would walk away abruptly as though from something distasteful.

The mayor, the doctor and the curé came to dinner occasionally, and sometimes it was the Fourvilles, with whom they were becoming more and more intimate. The comte appeared to worship Paul. He held him on his knees during the whole visit and sometimes during the whole afternoon, playing with him and amusing him and then kissing him tenderly as mothers do. He always lamented that he had no children of his own.

Comtesse Gilberte again mentioned the rides they all four were going to take together. Jeanne, a little weary of the monotonous days and nights, was quite happy in anticipation of these plans, and for a week amused herself making a riding habit.

They always set out two and two, the comtesse and Julien ahead, the count and Jeanne a hundred feet behind them, talking quietly, like good friends, for such they had become through the sympathy of their straightforward minds and simple hearts. The others often spoke in a low tone, sometimes bursting into laughter and looking quickly at each other, as though their eyes were expressing what they dared not utter. And they would suddenly set off at a gallop, impelled by a desire to flee, to get away, far away.

Then Gilberte would seem to be growing irritable. Her sharp voice, borne on the breeze, occasionally reached the ears of the loitering couple. The comte would smile and say to Jeanne: “She does not always get out of bed the right side, that wife of mine.”

One evening as they were coming home the comtesse was teasing her mount, spurring it and then checking it abruptly. They heard Julien say several time: “Take care, take care; you will be thrown.” “So much the worse,” she replied; “it is none of your business,” in a hard clear tone that resounded across the fields as though the words hung in the air.

The animal reared, plunged and champed the bit. The comte, uneasy, shouted: “Be careful, Gilberte!” Then, as if in defiance, with one of those impulses of a woman whom nothing can stop, she struck her horse brutally between the ears. The animal reared in anger, pawed the air with his front feet and, landing again on his feet, gave a bound and darted across the plain at full speed.

First it crossed the meadow, then plunging into a ploughed field kicked up the damp rich earth behind it, going so fast that one could hardly distinguish its rider. Julien remained transfixed with astonishment, calling out in despair: “Madame, madame!” but the comte was rather annoyed, and, bending forward on his heavy mount, he urged it forward and started out at such a pace, spurring it on with his voice, his gestures and the spur, that the huge horseman seemed to be carrying the heavy beast between his legs and to be lifting it up as if to fly. They went at incredible speed, straight ahead, and Jeanne saw the outline of the wife and of the husband fleeing getting smaller and disappearing in the distance, as if they were two birds pursuing each other to the verge of the horizon.

Julien, approaching Jeanne slowly, murmured angrily: “I think she is crazy to-day.” And they set out together to follow their friends, who were now hidden by the rising ground.

At the end of about a quarter of an hour they saw them returning and presently joined them. The comte, perspiring, his face red, but smiling, happy and triumphant, was holding his wife’s trembling horse in his iron grasp. Gilberte was pale, her face sad and drawn, and she was leaning one hand on her husband’s shoulder as if she were going to faint. Jeanne understood now that the comte loved her madly.

After this the comtesse for some months seemed happier than she had ever been. She came to the “Poplars” more frequently, laughed continually and kissed Jeanne impulsively. One might have said that some mysterious charm had come into her life. Her husband was also quite happy and never took his eyes off her. He said to Jeanne one evening: “We are very happy just now. Gilberte has never been so nice as this. She never is out of humor, never gets angry. I feel that she loves me; until now I was not sure of it.”

Julien also seemed changed, no longer impatient, as though the friendship between the two families had brought peace and happiness to both. The spring was singularly early and mild. Everything seemed to be coming to life beneath the quickening rays of the sun. Jeanne was vaguely troubled at this awakening of nature. Memories came to her of the early days of her love. Not that her love for Julien was renewed; that was over, over forever. But all her being, caressed by the breeze, filled with the fragrance of spring, was disturbed as though in response to some invisible and tender appeal. She loved to be alone, to give herself up in the sunlight to all kinds of vague and calm enjoyment which did not necessitate thinking.

One morning as she was in a reverie a vision came to her, a swift vision of the sunlit nook amid the dark foliage in the little wood near Étretat. It was there that she had for the first time trembled, when beside the young man who loved her then. It was there that he had uttered for the first time the timid desire of his heart. It was there that she thought that she had all at once reached the radiant future of her hopes. She wished to see this wood again, to make a sort of sentimental and superstitious pilgrimage, as though a return to this spot might somehow change the current of her life. Julien had been gone since daybreak, she knew not whither. She had the little white horse, which she sometimes rode, saddled, and she set out. It was one of those days when nothing seemed stirring, not a blade of grass, not a leaf. All seemed wrapped in a golden mist beneath the blazing sun. Jeanne walked her horse, soothed and happy.

She descended into the valley which leads to the sea, between the great arches in the cliff that are called the “Gates” of Étretat, and slowly reached the wood. The sunlight was streaming through the still scanty foliage. She wandered about the little paths, looking for the spot.

All at once, as she was going along one of the lower paths, she perceived at the farther end of it two horses tied to a tree and recognized them at once; they belonged to Gilberte and Julien. The loneliness of the place was beginning to be irksome to her, and she was pleased at this chance meeting, and whipped up her horse.

When she reached the two patient animals, who were probably accustomed to these long halts, she called. There was no reply. A woman's glove and two riding whips lay on the beaten-down grass. So they had no doubt sat down there awhile and then walked away leaving their horses tied.

She waited a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, surprised, not understanding what could be keeping them. She had dismounted. She sat there, leaning against a tree trunk. Suddenly a thought came to her as she glanced again at the glove, the whips and the two horses left tied there, and she sprang to her saddle with an irresistible desire to make her escape.

She started off at a gallop for the "Poplars." She was turning things over in her mind, trying to reason, to put two and two together, to compare facts. How was it that she had not suspected this sooner? How was it that she had not noticed anything? How was it she had not guessed the reason of Julien's frequent absences, the renewal of his former attention to his appearance and the improvement in his temper? She now recalled Gilberte's nervous abruptness, her exaggerated affection and the kind of beaming happiness in which she seemed to exist latterly and that so pleased the comte.

She reined in her horse, as she wanted to think, and the quick pace disturbed her ideas.

As soon as the first emotion was over she became almost calm, without jealousy or hatred, but filled with contempt. She hardly gave Julien a thought; nothing he might do could astonish her. But the double treachery of the comtesse, her friend, disgusted her. Everyone, then, was treacherous, untruthful and false. And tears came to her eyes. One sometimes mourns lost illusions as deeply as one does the death of a friend.

She resolved, however, to act as though she knew nothing, to close the doors of her heart to all ordinary affection and to love no one but Paul and her parents and to endure other people with an undisturbed countenance.

As soon as she got home she ran to her son, carried him up to her room and kissed him passionately for an hour.

Julien came home to dinner, smiling and attentive, and appeared interested as he asked: “Are not father and little mother coming this year?”

She was so grateful to him for this little attention that she almost forgave him for the discovery she had made in the wood, and she was filled all of a sudden with an intense desire to see without delay the two beings in the world whom she loved next to Paul, and passed the whole evening writing to them to hasten their journey.

They promised to be there on the 20th of May and it was now the 7th.

She awaited their arrival with a growing impatience, as though she felt, in addition to her filial affection, the need of opening her heart to honest hearts, to talk with frankness to pure-minded people, devoid of all infamy, all of whose life, actions and thoughts had been upright at all times.

What she now felt was a sort of moral isolation, amid all this immorality, and, although she had learned suddenly to disseminate, although she received the comtesse with outstretched hand and smiling lips, she felt this consciousness of hollowness, this contempt for humanity increasing and enveloping her, and the petty gossip of the district gave her a still greater disgust, a still lower opinion of her fellow creatures.

The immorality of the peasants shocked her, and this warm spring seemed to stir the sap in human beings as well as in plants. Jeanne did not belong to the race of peasants who are dominated by their lower instincts. Julien one day awakened her aversion anew by telling her a coarse story that had been told to him and that he considered very amusing.

When the travelling carriage stopped at the door and the happy face of the baron appeared at the window Jeanne was stirred with so deep an emotion, such a tumultuous feeling of affection as she had never before experienced. But when she saw her mother she was shocked and almost fainted. The baroness, in six months, had aged ten years. Her heavy cheeks had grown flabby and purple, as though the blood were congested; her eyes were dim and she could no longer move about unless supported under each arm. Her breathing was difficult and wheezing and affected those near her with a painful sensation.

When Jeanne had taken them to their room, she retired to her own in order to have a good cry, as she was so upset. Then she went to look for her father, and throwing herself into his arms, she exclaimed, her eyes still full of tears: “Oh, how mother is changed! What is the matter with her? Tell me, what is the matter?” He was much surprised and replied: “Do you think so?

What an idea! Why, no. I have never been away from her. I assure you that I do not think she looks ill. She always looks like that.”

That evening Julien said to his wife: “Your mother is in a pretty bad way. I think she will not last long.” And as Jeanne burst out sobbing, he became annoyed. “Come, I did not say there was no hope for her. You always exaggerate everything. She is changed, that’s all. She is no longer young.”

The baroness was not able to walk any distance and only went out for half an hour each day to take one turn in her avenue and then she would sit on the bench. And when she felt unequal to walking to the end of her avenue, she would say: “Let us stop; my hypertrophy is breaking my legs today.” She hardly ever laughed now as she did the previous year at anything that amused her, but only smiled. As she could see to read excellently, she passed hours reading “Corinne” or Lamartine’s “Meditations.” Then she would ask for her drawer of “souvenirs,” and emptying her cherished letters on her lap, she would place the drawer on a chair beside her and put back, one by one, her “relics,” after she had slowly gone over them. And when she was alone, quite alone, she would kiss some of them, as one kisses in secret a lock of hair of a loved one passed away.

Sometimes Jeanne, coming in abruptly, would find her weeping and would exclaim: “What is the matter, little mother?” And the baroness, sighing deeply, would reply: “It is my ‘relics’ that make me cry. They stir remembrances that were so delightful and that are now past forever, and one is reminded of persons whom one had forgotten and recalls once more. You seem to see them, to hear them and it affects you strangely. You will feel this later.”

When the baron happened to come in at such times he would say gently: “Jeanne, dearie, take my advice and burn your letters, all of them — your mother’s, mine, everyone’s. There is nothing more dreadful, when one is growing old, than to look back to one’s youth.” But Jeanne also kept her letters, was preparing a chest of “relics” in obedience to a sort of hereditary instinct of dreamy sentimentality, although she differed from her mother in every other way.

The baron was obliged to leave them some days later, as he had some business that called him away.

One afternoon Jeanne took Paul in her arms and went out for a walk. She was sitting on a bank, gazing at the infant, whom she seemed to be looking at for the first time. She could hardly imagine him grown up, walking with a steady step, with a beard on his face and talking in a big voice. She heard someone calling and raised her head. Marius came running toward her.

"Madame, Madame la Baronne is very bad!"

A cold chill seemed to run down her back as she started up and walked hurriedly toward the house.

As she approached she saw a number of persons grouped around the plane tree. She darted forward and saw her mother lying on the ground with two pillows under her head. Her face was black, her eyes closed and her breathing, which had been difficult for twenty years, now quite hushed. The nurse took the child out of Jeanne's arms and carried it off.

Jeanne, with drawn, anxious face, asked: "What happened? How did she come to fall? Go for the doctor, somebody." Turning round, she saw the old curé, who had heard of it in some way. He offered his services and began rolling up the sleeves of his cassock. But vinegar, eau de cologne and rubbing the invalid proved ineffectual.

"She should be undressed and put to bed," said the priest.

Joseph Couillard, the farmer, was there and old Simon and Ludivine. With the assistance of Abbé Picot, they tried to lift the baroness, but after an attempt were obliged to bring a large easy chair from the drawing-room and place her in it. In this way they managed to get her into the house and then upstairs, where they laid her on her bed.

Joseph Couillard set out in hot haste for the doctor. As the priest was going to get the holy oil, the nurse, who had "scented a death," as the servants say, and was on the spot, whispered to him: "Do not put yourself out, monsieur; she is dead. I know all about these things."

Jeanne, beside herself, entreated them to do something. The priest thought it best to pronounce the absolution.

They watched for two hours beside this lifeless, discolored body. Jeanne, on her knees, was sobbing in an agony of grief.

When the door opened and the doctor appeared, Jeanne darted toward him, stammering out what she knew of the accident, but seeing the nurse exchange a meaning glance with the doctor, she stopped to ask him: "Is it serious? Do you think it is serious?"

He said presently: "I am afraid — I am afraid — it is all over. Be brave, be brave."

Jeanne, extending her arms, threw herself on her mother's body. Julien just then came in. He stood there amazed, visibly annoyed, without any exclamation of sorrow, any appearance of grief, taken so unawares that he had not time to prepare a suitable expression of countenance. He muttered: “I was expecting it, I felt that the end was near.” Then he took out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, knelt down, crossed himself, and then rising to his feet, attempted to raise his wife. But she was clasping the dead body and kissing it, and it became necessary to carry her away. She appeared to be out of her mind.

At the end of an hour she was allowed to come back. There was no longer any hope. The room was arranged as a death chamber. Julien and the priest were talking in a low tone near the window. It was growing dark. The priest came over to Jeanne and took her hands, trying to console her. He spoke of the defunct, praised her in pious phrases and offered to pass the night in prayer beside the body.

But Jeanne refused, amid convulsive sobs. She wished to be alone, quite alone on this last night of farewell. Julien came forward: “But you must not do it; we will stay together.” She shook her head, unable to speak. At last she said: “It is my mother, my mother. I wish to watch beside her alone.” The doctor murmured: “Let her do as she pleases; the nurse can stay in the adjoining room.”

The priest and Julien consented, more interested in their own rest. Then Abbé Picot knelt down in his turn, and as he rose and left the room, he said: “She was a saint” in the same tone as he said “Dominus vobiscum.”

The vicomte in his ordinary tone then asked: “Are you not going to eat something?” Jeanne did not reply, not knowing he was speaking to her, and he repeated: “You had better eat something to keep up your stomach.” She replied in a bewildered manner: “Send at once for papa.” And he went out of the room to send someone on horseback to Rouen.

She remained plunged in a sort of motionless grief, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, understanding nothing. She only wanted to be alone. Julien came back. He had dined and he asked her again: “Won’t you take something?” She shook her head. He sat down with an air of resignation rather than sadness, without speaking, and they both sat there silent, till at length Julien arose, and approaching Jeanne, said: “Would you like to stay alone now?” She took his hand impulsively and replied: “Oh, yes! leave me!”

He kissed her forehead, murmuring: “I will come in and see you from time to time.” He went out with Widow Dentu, who rolled her easy chair into the next room.

Jeanne shut the door and opened the windows wide. She felt the soft breath from the mown hay that lay in the moonlight on the lawn. It seemed to harrow her feelings like an ironical remark.

She went back to the bed, took one of the cold, inert hands and looked at her mother earnestly. She seemed to be sleeping more peacefully than she had ever done, and the pale flame of the tapers which flickered at every breath made her face appear to be alive, as if she had stirred. Jeanne remembered all the little incidents of her childhood, the visits of little mother to the "parloir" of the convent, the manner in which she handed her a little paper bag of cakes, a multitude of little details, little acts, little caresses, words, intonations, familiar gestures, the creases at the corner of her eyes when she laughed, the big sigh she gave when she sat down.

And she stood there looking at her, repeating half mechanically: "She is dead," and all the horror of the word became real to her. It was mamma lying there — little mother — Mamma Adelaide who was dead. She would never move about again, nor speak, nor laugh, nor sit at dinner opposite little father. She would never again say: "Good-morning, Jeannette." She was dead!

And she fell on her knees in a paroxysm of despair, her hands clutching the sheet, her face buried in the covers as she cried in a heartrending tone: "Oh, mamma, my poor mamma!" Then feeling that she was losing her reason as she had done on the night when she fled across the snow, she rose and ran to the window to drink in the fresh air. The soothing calmness of the night entered her soul and she began to weep quietly.

Presently she turned back into the room and sat down again beside her mother. Other remembrances came to her: those of her own life — Rosalie, Gilberte, the bitter disillusions of her heart. Everything, then, was only misery, grief, unhappiness and death. Everyone tried to deceive, everyone lied, everyone made you suffer and weep. Where could one find a little rest and happiness? In another existence no doubt, when the soul is freed from the trials of earth. And she began to ponder on this insoluble mystery.

A tender and curious thought came to her mind. It was to read over in this last watch, as though they were a litany, the old letters that her mother loved. It seemed to her that she was about to perform a delicate and sacred duty which would give pleasure to little mother in the other world.

She rose, opened the writing desk and took from the lower drawer ten little packages of yellow letters, tied and arranged in order, side by side. She placed them all on the bed over her mother's heart from a sort of sentiment and began to read them. They were old letters that savored of a former century. The first began, "My dear little granddaughter," then again "My dear little girl," "My darling," "My dearest daughter," then "My dear child," "My dear Adelaide," "My dear daughter," according to the periods — childhood, youth or young womanhood. They were all full of little insignificant details and tender words, about a thousand little matters, those simple but important events of home life, so petty to outsiders: "Father has the grip; poor Hortense burnt her finger; the cat, 'Croquerat,' is dead; they have cut down the pine tree to the right of the gate; mother lost her prayerbook on the way home from church, she thinks it was stolen."

All these details affected her. They seemed like revelations, as though she had suddenly entered the past secret heart life of little mother. She looked at her lying there and suddenly began to read aloud, to read to the dead, as though to distract, to console her.

And the dead woman appeared to be pleased.

Jeanne tossed the letters as she read them to the foot of the bed. She untied another package. It was a new handwriting. She read: "I cannot do without your caresses. I love you so that I am almost crazy."

That was all; no signature.

She put back the letter without understanding its meaning. The address was certainly "Madame la Baronne Le Perthuis des Vauds."

Then she opened another: "Come this evening as soon as he goes out; we shall have an hour together. I worship you." In another: "I passed the night longing in vain for you, longing to look into your eyes, to press my lips to yours, and I am insane enough to throw myself from the window at the thought that you are another's...."

Jeanne was perfectly bewildered. What did that mean? To whom, for whom, from whom were these words of love?

She went on reading, coming across fresh impassioned declarations, appointments with warnings as to prudence, and always at the end the six words: "Be sure to burn this letter!"

At last she opened an ordinary note, accepting an invitation to dinner, but in the same handwriting and signed: "Paul d'Ennemare," whom the baron called, whenever he spoke of him, “My poor old Paul,” and whose wife had been the baroness’ dearest friend.

Then a suspicion, which immediately became a certainty, flashed across Jeanne’s mind: He had been her mother’s lover.

And, almost beside herself, she suddenly threw aside these infamous letters as she would have thrown off some venomous reptile and ran to the window and began to cry piteously. Then, collapsing, she sank down beside the wall, and hiding her face in the curtain so that no one should hear her, she sobbed bitterly as if in hopeless despair.

She would have remained thus probably all night, if she had not heard a noise in the adjoining room that made her start to her feet. It might be her father. And all the letters were lying on the floor! He would have to open only one of them to know all! Her father!

She darted into the other room and seizing the letters in handfuls, she threw them all into the fireplace, those of her grandparents as well as those of the lover; some that she had not looked at and some that had remained tied up in the drawers of the desk. She then took one of the tapers that burned beside the bed and set fire to this pile of letters. When they were reduced to ashes she went back to the open window, as though she no longer dared to sit beside the dead, and began to cry again with her face in her hands: “Oh, my poor mamma! oh, my poor mamma!”

The stars were paling. It was the cool hour that precedes the dawn. The moon was sinking on the horizon and turning the sea to mother of pearl. The recollection of the night she passed at the window when she first came to the “Poplars” came to Jeanne’s mind. How far away it seemed, how everything was changed, how different the future now seemed!

The sky was becoming pink, a joyous, love-inspiring, enchanting pink. She looked at it in surprise, as at some phenomenon, this radiant break of day, and asked herself if it were possible that, on a planet where such dawns were found, there should be neither joy nor happiness.

A noise at the door made her start. It was Julien. “Well,” he said, “are you not very tired?”

She murmured, “No,” happy at being no longer alone. “Go and rest now,” he said. She kissed her mother a long, sad kiss; then she went to her room.

The next day passed in the usual attentions to the dead. The baron arrived toward evening. He wept for some time.

The funeral took place the following day. After pressing a last kiss on her mother's icy forehead and seeing the coffin nailed down, Jeanne left the room. The invited guests would soon arrive.

Gilberte was the first to come, and she threw herself sobbing on her friend's shoulder. Women in black presently entered the room one after another, people whom Jeanne did not know. The Marquise de Coutelier and the Vicomtesse de Briseville embraced her. She suddenly saw Aunt Lison gliding in behind her. She turned round and kissed her tenderly.

Julien came in, dressed all in black, elegant, very important, pleased at seeing so many people. He asked his wife some question in a low tone and added confidentially: "All the nobility are here; it will be a fine affair." And he walked away, gravely bowing to the ladies. Aunt Lison and Comtesse Gilberte alone remained with Jeanne during the service for the dead. The comtesse kissed her repeatedly, exclaiming: "My poor dear, my poor dear!"

When Comte de Fourville came to fetch his wife he was also crying as though it were for his own mother.

CHAPTER X. RETRIBUTION

The following days were very sad and dreary, as they always are when there has been a death in the house. And, in addition, Jeanne was crushed at the thought of what she had discovered; her last shred of confidence had been destroyed with the destruction of her faith. Little father, after a short stay, went away to try and distract his thoughts from his grief, and the large house, whose former masters were leaving it from time to time, resumed its usual calm and monotonous course.

Then Paul fell ill, and Jeanne was almost beside herself, not sleeping for ten days, and scarcely tasting food. He recovered, but she was haunted by the idea that he might die. Then what should she do? What would become of her? And there gradually stole into her heart the hope that she might have another child. She dreamed of it, became obsessed with the idea. She longed to realize her old dream of seeing two little children around her; a boy and a girl.

But since the affair of Rosalie she and Julien had lived apart. A reconciliation seemed impossible in their present situation. Julien loved some one else, she knew it; and the very thought of suffering his approach filled her with repugnance. She had no one left whom she could consult. She resolved to go and see Abbé Picot and tell him, under the seal of confession, all that weighed upon her mind in this matter.

He was reading from his breviary in his little garden planted with fruit trees when she arrived.

After a few minutes' conversation on indifferent matters, she faltered, her color rising: "I want to confess, Monsieur l'Abbé."

He looked at her in astonishment, as he pushed his spectacles back on his forehead; then he began to laugh. "You surely have no great sins on your conscience." This embarrassed her greatly, and she replied: "No, but I want to ask your advice on a subject that is so — so — so painful that I dare not mention it casually."

He at once laid aside his jovial manner and assumed his priestly attitude. "Well, my child, I will listen to you in the confessional; come along."

But she held back, undecided, restrained by a kind of scruple at speaking of these matters, of which she was half ashamed, in the seclusion of an empty church.

“Or else, no — Monsieur le Curé — I might — I might — if you wish, tell you now what brings me here. Let us go and sit over there, in your little arbor.”

They walked toward it, and Jeanne tried to think how she could begin. They sat down in the arbor, and then, as if she were confessing herself, she said: “Father — — “ then hesitated, and repeated: “Father — — “ and was silent from emotion.

He waited, his hands crossed over his paunch. Seeing her embarrassment, he sought to encourage her: “Why, my daughter, one would suppose you were afraid; come, take courage.”

She plucked up courage, like a coward who plunges headlong into danger. “Father, I should like to have another child.” He did not reply, as he did not understand her. Then she explained, timid and unable to express herself clearly:

“I am all alone in life now; my father and my husband do not get along together; my mother is dead; and — and — — “ she added with a shudder, “the other day I nearly lost my son! What would have become of me then?”

She was silent. The priest, bewildered, was gazing at her. “Come, get to the point of your subject.”

“I want to have another child,” she said. Then he smiled, accustomed to the coarse jokes of the peasants, who were not embarrassed in his presence, and he replied, with a sly motion of his head:

“Well, it seems to me that it depends only on yourself.”

She raised her candid eyes to his face, and said, hesitating with confusion: “But — but — you understand that since — since — what you know about — about that maid — my husband and I have lived — have lived quite apart.”

Accustomed to the promiscuity and undignified relations of the peasants, he was astonished at the revelation. All at once he thought he guessed at the young woman’s real desire, and looking at her out of the corner of his eye, with a heart full of benevolence and of sympathy for her distress, he said: “Oh, I understand perfectly. I know that your widowhood must be irksome to you. You are young and in good health. It is natural, quite natural.”

He smiled, bearing out his easy-going character of a country priest, and tapping Jeanne lightly on the hand, he said: “That is permissible, very permissible indeed, according to the commandments. You are married, are you not? Well, then, what is the harm?"

She, in her turn, had not understood his hidden meaning; but as soon as she saw through it, she blushed scarlet, shocked, and with tears in her eyes exclaimed: "Oh, Monsieur le Curé, what are you saying? What are you thinking of? I swear to you — I swear to you — — " And sobs choked her words.

He was surprised and sought to console her: "Come, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I was only joking a little; there is no harm in that when one is decent. But you may rely on me, you may rely on me. I will see M. Julien."

She did not know what to say. She now wished to decline this intervention, which she thought clumsy and dangerous, but she did not dare to do so, and she went away hurriedly, faltering: "I am grateful to you, Monsieur le Curé."

A week passed. One day at dinner Julien looked at her with a peculiar expression, a certain smiling curve of the lips that she had noticed when he was teasing her. He was even almost ironically gallant toward her, and as they were walking after dinner in little mother's avenue, he said in a low tone: "We seem to have made up again."

She did not reply, but continued to look on the ground at a sort of track that was almost effaced now that the grass was sprouting anew. They were the footprints of the baroness, which were vanishing as does a memory. And Jeanne was plunged in sadness; she felt herself lost in life, far away from everyone.

"As for me, I ask nothing better. I was afraid of displeasing you," continued Julien.

The sun was going down, the air was mild. A longing to weep came over Jeanne, one of those needs of unbosoming oneself to a kindred spirit, of unbending and telling one's griefs. A sob rose in her throat; she opened her arms and fell on Julien's breast, and wept. He glanced down in surprise at her head, for he could not see her face which was hidden on his shoulder. He supposed that she still loved him, and placed a condescending kiss on the back of her head.

They entered the house and he followed her to her room. And thus they resumed their former relations, he, as a not unpleasant duty, and she, merely tolerating him.

She soon noticed, however, that his manner had changed, and one day with her lips to his, she murmured: “Why are you not the same as you used to be?”

“Because I do not want any more children,” he said jokingly.

She started. “Why not?”

He appeared greatly surprised. “Eh, what’s that you say? Are you crazy? No, indeed! One is enough, always crying and bothering everyone. Another baby! No, thank you!”

At the end of a month she told the news to everyone, far and wide, with the exception of Comtesse Gilberte, from reasons of modesty and delicacy.

What the priest had foreseen finally came to pass. She became enceinte. Then, filled with an unspeakable happiness, she locked her door every night when she retired, vowing herself from henceforth to eternal chastity, in gratitude to the vague divinity she adored.

She was now almost quite happy again. Her children would grow up and love her; she would grow old quietly, happy and contented, without troubling herself about her husband.

Toward the end of September, Abbé Picot called on a visit of ceremony to introduce his successor, a young priest, very thin, very short, with an emphatic way of talking, and with dark circles round his sunken eyes.

The old abbé had been appointed Dean of Goderville.

Jeanne was really sorry to lose the old man, who had been associated with all her recollections as a young woman. He had married her, baptized Paul, and buried the baroness. She could not imagine Étouvent without Abbé Picot and his paunch passing along by the farms, and she loved him because he was cheerful and natural.

But he did not seem very cheerful at the thought of his promotion. “It is a wrench, it is a wrench, madame la comtesse. I have been here for eighteen years. Oh, the place does not bring in much, and is not wealthy. The men have no more religion than they need, and the women, look you, the women have no morals. But nevertheless, I loved it.”

The new curé appeared impatient, and said abruptly: “When I am here all that will have to be changed.” He looked like an angry boy, thin and frail in his somewhat worn, though clean cassock.

Abbé Picot looked at him sideways, as he did when he was in a joking mood, and said: “You see, abbé, in order to prevent those happenings, you will have to chain up your parishioners; and even that would not be of much use.” The little priest replied sharply: “We shall see.” And the older man smiled as he took a pinch of snuff, and said: “Age will calm you down, abbé, and experience also. You will drive away from the church the remaining faithful ones, and that is all the good it will do. In this district they are religious, but pig-headed; be careful. Faith, when I see a girl come to confess who looks rather stout, I say to myself: ‘She is bringing me a new parishioner,’ and I try to get her married. You cannot prevent them from making mistakes; but you can go and look for the man, and prevent him from deserting the mother. Get them married, abbé, get them married, and do not trouble yourself about anything else.”

“We think differently,” said the young priest rudely; “it is useless to insist.” And Abbé Picot once more began to regret his village, the sea which he saw from his parsonage, the little valleys where he walked while repeating his breviary, glancing up at the boats as they passed.

As the two priests took their leave, the old man kissed Jeanne, who was on the verge of tears.

A week later Abbé Tolbiac called again. He spoke of reforms which he intended to accomplish, as a prince might have done on taking possession of a kingdom. Then he requested the vicomtesse not to miss the service on Sunday, and to communicate a all the festivals. “You and I,” he said, “we are at the head of the district; we must rule it and always set them an example to follow. We must be of one accord so that we may be powerful and respected. The church and the château in joining forces will make the peasants obey and fear us.”

Jeanne’s religion was all sentiment; she had all a woman’s dream faith, and if she attended at all to her religious duties, it was from a habit acquired at the convent, the baron’s advanced ideas having long since overthrown her convictions. Abbé Picot contented himself with what observances she gave him, and never blamed her. But his successor, not seeing her at mass the preceding Sunday, had come to call, uneasy and stern.

She did not wish to break with the parsonage, and promised, making up her mind to be assiduous in attendance the first few weeks, out of politeness.

Little by little, however, she got into the habit of going to church, and came under the influence of this delicate, upright and dictatorial abbé. A mystic, he appealed to her in his enthusiasm and zeal. He set in vibration in her soul the chord of religious poetry that all women possess. His unyielding austerity, his disgust for ordinary human interests, his love of God, his youthful and untutored inexperience, his harsh words, and his inflexible will, gave Jeanne an idea of the stuff martyrs were made of; and she let herself be carried away, all disillusioned as she was, by the fanaticism of this child, the minister of God.

He led her to Christ, the consoler, showing her how the joy of religion will calm all sorrow; and she knelt at the confessional, humbling herself, feeling herself small and weak in presence of this priest, who appeared to be about fifteen.

He was, however, very soon detested in all the countryside. Inflexibly severe toward himself, he was implacably intolerant toward others, and the one thing that especially roused his wrath and indignation was love. The young men and girls looked at each other slyly across the church, and the old peasants who liked to joke about such things disapproved his severity. All the parish was in a ferment. Soon the young men all stopped going to church.

The curé dined at the château every Thursday, and often came during the week to chat with his penitent. She became enthusiastic like himself, talked about spiritual matters, handling all the antique and complicated arsenal of religious controversy.

They walked together along the baroness' avenue, talking of Christ and the apostles, the Virgin Mary and the Fathers of the Church as though they were personally acquainted with them.

Julien treated the new priest with great respect, saying constantly: "That priest suits me, he does not back down." And he went to confession and communion, setting a fine example. He now went to the Fourvilles' nearly every day, gunning with the husband, who was never happy without him, and riding with the comtesse, in spite of rain and storm. The comte said: "They are crazy about riding, but it does my wife good."

The baron returned to the château about the middle of November. He was changed, aged, faded, filled with a deep sadness. And his love for his daughter seemed to have gained in strength, as if these few months of dreary solitude had aggravated his need of affection, confidence and tenderness. Jeanne did not tell him about her new ideas, and her friendship for the Abbé Tolbiac. The first time he saw the priest he conceived a great aversion to him. And when Jeanne asked him that evening how he liked him, he replied: "That man is an inquisitor! He must be very dangerous."

When he learned from the peasants, whose friend he was, of the harshness and violence of the young priest, of the kind of persecution which he carried on against all human and natural instincts, he developed a hatred toward him. He, himself, was one of the old race of natural philosophers who bowed the knee to a sort of pantheistic Divinity, and shrank from the catholic conception of a God with bourgeois instincts, Jesuitical wrath, and tyrannical revenge. To him reproduction was the great law of nature, and he began from farm to farm an ardent campaign against this intolerant priest, the persecutor of life.

Jeanne, very much worried, prayed to the Lord, entreated her father; but he always replied: "We must fight such men as that, it is our duty and our right. They are not human."

And he repeated, shaking his long white locks: "They are not human; they understand nothing, nothing, nothing. They are moving in a morbid dream; they are anti-physical." And he pronounced the word "anti-physical" as though it were a malediction.

The priest knew who his enemy was, but as he wished to remain ruler of the château and of Jeanne, he temporized, sure of final victory. He was also haunted by a fixed idea. He had discovered by chance the amours of Julien and Gilberte, and he desired to put a stop to them at all costs.

He came to see Jeanne one day and, after a long conversation on spiritual matters, he asked her to give her aid in helping him to fight, to put an end to the evil in her own family, in order to save two souls that were in danger.

She did not understand, and did not wish to know. He replied: "The hour has not arrived. I shall see you some other time." And he left abruptly.

The winter was coming to a close, a rotten winter, as they say in the country, damp and mild. The abbé called again some days later and hinted mysteriously at one of those shameless intrigues between persons whose conduct should be irreproachable. It was the duty, he said, of those who were aware of the facts to use every means to bring it to an end. He took Jeanne's hand and adjured her to open her eyes and understand and lend him her aid.

This time she understood, but she was silent, terrified at the thought of all that might result in the house that was now peaceful, and she pretended not to understand. Then he spoke out clearly.

She faltered: "What do you wish me to do, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Anything, rather than permit this infamy. Anything, I say. Leave him. Flee from this impure house!"

"But I have no money; and then I have no longer any courage; and, besides, how can I go without any proof? I have not the right to do so."

The priest arose trembling: "That is cowardice, madame; I am mistaken in you. You are unworthy of God's mercy!"

She fell on her knees: "Oh, I pray you not to leave me, tell me what to do!"

"Open M. de Fourville's eyes," he said abruptly. "It is his place to break up this intrigue."

This idea filled her with terror. "Why, he would kill them, Monsieur l'Abbé! And I should be guilty of denouncing them! Oh, never that, never!"

He raised his hand as if to curse her in his fury: "Remain in your shame and your crime; for you are more guilty than they are. You are the complaisant wife! There is nothing more for me to do here." And he went off so furious that he trembled all over.

She followed him, distracted and ready to do as he suggested. But he strode along rapidly, shaking his large blue umbrella in his rage. He perceived Julien standing outside the gate superintending the lopping of the trees, so he turned to the left to go across the Couillard farm, and he said: "Leave me alone, madame, I have nothing further to say to you."

Jeanne was entreating him to give her a few days for reflection, and then if he came back to the château she would tell him what she had done, and they could take counsel together.

Right in his road, in the middle of the farmyard, a group of children, those of the house and some neighbor's children, were standing around the kennel of Mirza, the dog, looking curiously at something with silent and concentrated attention. In the midst of them stood the baron, his hands behind his back, also looking on with curiosity. One would have taken him for a schoolmaster. When he saw the priest approaching, he moved away so as not to have to meet him and speak to him.

The priest did not call again; but the following Sunday from the pulpit he hurled imprecations, curses and threats against the château, anathematizing the baron, and making veiled allusions, but timidly, to Julien's latest intrigue. The vicomte was furious, but the dread of a shocking scandal kept him silent. At each service thereafter the priest declared his indignation, predicting the approach of the hour when God would smite all his enemies.

Julien wrote a firm, but respectful letter to the archbishop; the abbé was threatened with suspension. He was silent thereafter.

Gilberte and Julien now frequently met him during their rides reading his breviary, but they turned aside so as not to pass him by. Spring had come and reawakened their love. As the foliage was still sparse and the grass damp, they used to meet in a shepherd's movable hut that had been deserted since autumn. But one day when they were leaving it, they saw the Abbé Tolbiac, almost hidden in the sea rushes on the slope.

"We must leave our horses in the ravine," said Julien, "as they can be seen from a distance and would betray us." One evening as they were coming home together to La Vrillette, where they were to dine with the comte, they met the curé of Étouvent coming out of the château. He stepped to the side of the road to let them pass, and bowed without their eyes meeting. They were uneasy for a few moments, but soon forgot it.

One afternoon, Jeanne was reading beside the fire while a storm of wind was raging outside, when she suddenly perceived Comte Fourville coming on foot at such a pace that she thought some misfortune had happened.

She ran downstairs to meet him, and when she saw him she thought he must be crazy. He wore a large quilted cap that he wore only at home, his hunting jacket, and looked so pale that his red mustache, usually the color of his skin, now seemed like a flame. His eyes were haggard, rolling as though his mind were vacant.

He stammered: "My wife is here, is she not?" Jeanne, losing her presence of mind, replied: "Why, no, I have not seen her to-day."

He sat down as if his legs had given way. He then took off his cap and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief mechanically several times. Then starting up suddenly, he approached Jeanne, his hands stretched out, his mouth open, as if to speak, to confide some great sorrow to her. Then he stopped, looked at her fixedly and said as though he were wandering: "But it is your husband — you also — — " And he fled, going toward the sea.

Jeanne ran after him, calling him, imploring him to stop, her heart beating with apprehension as she thought: "He knows all! What will he do? Oh, if he only does not find them!"

But she could not come up to him, and he disregarded her appeals. He went straight ahead without hesitation, straight to his goal. He crossed the ditch, then, stalking through the sea rushes like a giant, he reached the cliff.

Jeanne, standing on the mound covered with trees, followed him with her eyes until he was out of sight. Then she went into the house, distracted with grief.

He had turned to the right and started to run. Threatening waves overspread the sea, big black clouds were scudding along madly, passing on and followed by others, each of them coming down in a furious downpour. The wind whistled, moaned, laid the grass and the young crops low and carried away big white birds that looked like specks of foam and bore them far into the land.

The hail which followed beat in the comte's face, filling his ears with noise and his heart with tumult.

Down yonder before him was the deep gorge of the Val de Vaucotte. There was nothing before him but a shepherd's hut beside a deserted sheep pasture. Two horses were tied to the shafts of the hut on wheels. What might not happen to one in such a tempest as this?

As soon as he saw them the comte crouched on the ground and crawled along on his hands and knees as far as the lonely hut and hid himself beneath the hut that he might not be seen through the cracks. The horses on seeing him became restive. He slowly cut their reins with the knife which he held open in his hand, and a sudden squall coming up, the animals fled, frightened at the hail which rattled on the sloping roof of the wooden hut and made it shake on its wheels.

The comte then kneeling upright, put his eye to the bottom of the door and looked inside. He did not stir; he seemed to be waiting.

A little time elapsed and then he suddenly rose to his feet, covered with mud from head to foot. He frantically pushed back the bolt which closed the hut on the outside, and seizing the shafts, he began to shake the hut as though he would break it to pieces. Then all at once he got between the shafts, bending his huge frame, and with a desperate effort dragged it along like an ox, panting as he went. He dragged it, with whoever was in it, toward the steep incline.

Those inside screamed and banged with their fists on the door, not understanding what was going on.

When he reached the top of the cliff he let go the fragile dwelling, which began to roll down the incline, going ever faster and faster, plunging, stumbling like an animal and striking the ground with its shafts.

An old beggar hidden in a ditch saw it flying over his head and heard frightful screams coming from the wooden box.

All at once a wheel was wrenched off and it fell on its side and began to roll like a ball, as a house torn from its foundations might roll from the summit of a mountain. Then, reaching the ledge of the last ravine, it described a circle, and, falling to the bottom, burst open as an egg might do. It was no sooner smashed on the stones than the old beggar, who had seen it going past, went down toward it slowly amid the rushes, and with the customary caution of a peasant, not daring to go directly to the shattered hut, he went to the nearest farm to tell of the accident.

They all ran to look at it and raised the wreck of the hut. They found two bodies, bruised, crushed and bleeding. The man's forehead was split open and his whole face crushed; the woman's jaw was hanging, dislocated in one of the jolts, and their shattered limbs were soft as pulp.

"What were they doing in that shanty?" said a woman.

The old beggar then said that they had apparently taken refuge in it to get out of the storm and that a furious squall must have blown the hut over the cliff. He said he had intended to take shelter there himself, when he saw the horses tied to it, and understood that some one else must be inside. "But for that," he added in a satisfied tone, "I might have rolled down in it." Some one remarked: "Would not that have been a good thing?"

The old man, in a furious rage, said: "Why would it have been a good thing? Because I am poor and they are rich! Look at them now." And trembling, ragged and dripping with rain, he pointed to the two dead bodies with his hooked stick and exclaimed: "We are all alike when we get to this."

The comte, as soon as he saw the hut rolling down the steep slope, ran off at full speed through the blinding storm. He ran in this way for several hours, taking short cuts, leaping across ditches, breaking through the hedges, and thus got back home at dusk, not knowing how himself.

The frightened servants were awaiting his return and told him that the two horses had returned riderless some little time before, that of Julien following the other one.

Then M. de Fourville reeled and in a choked voice said: "Something must have happened to them in this dreadful weather. Let every one help to look for them."

He started off himself, but he was no sooner out of sight than he concealed himself in a clump of bushes, watching the road along which she whom he even still loved with an almost savage passion was to return dead, dying or maybe crippled and disfigured forever.

And soon a carriole passed by carrying a strange burden.

It stopped at the château and passed through the gate. It was that, it was she. But a fearful anguish nailed him to the spot, a fear to know the worst, a dread of the truth, and he did not stir, hiding as a hare, starting at the least sound.

He waited thus an hour, two hours perhaps. The buggy did not come out. He concluded that his wife was expiring, and the thought of seeing her, of meeting her gaze filled him with so much horror that he suddenly feared to be discovered in his hiding place and of being compelled to return and be present at this agony, and he then fled into the thick of the wood. Then all of a sudden it occurred to him that she perhaps might be needing his care, that no one probably could properly attend to her. Then he returned on his tracks, running breathlessly.

On entering the château he met the gardener and called out to him, "Well?" The man did not dare answer him. Then M. de Fourville almost roared at him: "Is she dead?" and the servant stammered: "Yes, M. le Comte."

He experienced a feeling of immense relief. His blood seemed to cool and his nerves relax somewhat of their extreme tension, and he walked firmly up the steps of his great hallway.

The other wagon had reached "The Poplars." Jeanne saw it from afar. She descried the mattress; she guessed that a human form was lying upon it, and understood all. Her emotion was so vivid that she swooned and fell prostrate.

When she regained consciousness her father was holding her head and bathing her temples with vinegar. He said hesitatingly: "Do you know?" She murmured: "Yes, father." But when she attempted to rise she found herself unable to do so, so intense was her agony.

That very night she gave birth to a stillborn infant, a girl.

Jeanne saw nothing of the funeral of Julien; she knew nothing of it. She merely noticed at the end of a day or two that Aunt Lison was back, and in her feverish dreams which haunted her she persistently sought to recall when the old maiden lady had left "The Poplars," at what period and under what circumstances. She could not make this out, even in her lucid moments, but she was certain of having seen her subsequent to the death of "little mother."

CHAPTER XI. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL

Jeanne did not leave her room for three months and was so wan and pale that no one thought she would recover. But she picked up by degrees. Little father and Aunt Lison never left her; they had both taken up their abode at "The Poplars." The shock of Julien's death had left her with a nervous malady. The slightest sound made her faint and she had long swoons from the most insignificant causes.

She had never asked the details of Julien's death. What did it matter to her? Did she not know enough already? Every one thought it was an accident, but she knew better, and she kept to herself this secret which tortured her: the knowledge of his infidelity and the remembrance of the abrupt and terrible visit of the comte on the day of the catastrophe.

And now she was filled with tender, sweet and melancholy recollections of the brief evidences of love shown her by her husband. She constantly thrilled at unexpected memories of him, and she seemed to see him as he was when they were betrothed and as she had known him in the hours passed beneath the sunlight in Corsica. All his faults diminished, all his harshness vanished, his very infidelities appeared less glaring in the widening separation of the closed tomb. And Jeanne, pervaded by a sort of posthumous gratitude for this man who had held her in his arms, forgave all the suffering he had caused her, to remember only moments of happiness they had passed together. Then, as time went on and month followed month, covering all her grief and reminiscences with forgetfulness, she devoted herself entirely to her son.

He became the idol, the one thought of the three beings who surrounded him, and he ruled as a despot. A kind of jealousy even arose among his slaves. Jeanne watched with anxiety the great kisses he gave his grandfather after a ride on his knee, and Aunt Lison, neglected by him as she had been by every one else and treated often like a servant by this little tyrant who could scarcely speak as yet, would go to her room and weep as she compared the slight affection he showed her with the kisses he gave his mother and the baron.

Two years passed quietly, and at the beginning of the third winter it was decided that they should go to Rouen to live until spring, and the whole family set out. But on their arrival in the old damp house, that had been shut up for some time, Paul had such a severe attack of bronchitis that his three relatives in despair declared that he could not do without the air of “The Poplars.” They took him back there and he got well.

Then began a series of quiet, monotonous years. Always around the little one, they went into raptures at everything he did. His mother called him Poulet, and as he could not pronounce the word, he said “Pol,” which amused them immensely, and the nickname of “Poulet” stuck to him.

The favorite occupation of his “three mothers,” as the baron called his relatives, was to see how much he had grown, and for this purpose they made little notches in the casing of the drawing-room door, showing his progress from month to month. This ladder was called “Poulet’s ladder,” and was an important affair.

A new individual began to play a part in the affairs of the household — the dog “Massacre,” who became Paul’s inseparable companion.

Rare visits were exchanged with the Brisevilles and the Couteliers. The mayor and the doctor alone were regular visitors. Since the episode of the mother dog and the suspicion Jeanne had entertained of the priest on the occasion of the terrible death of the comtesse and Julien, Jeanne had not entered the church, angry with a divinity that could tolerate such ministers.

The church was deserted and the priest came to be looked on as a sorcerer because he had, so they said, driven out an evil spirit from a woman who was possessed, and although fearing him the peasants came to respect him for this occult power as well as for the unimpeachable austerity of his life.

When he met Jeanne he never spoke. This condition of affairs distressed Aunt Lison, and when she was alone, quite alone with Paul, she talked to him about God, telling him the wonderful stories of the early history of the world. But when she told him that he must love Him very much, the child would say: “Where is He, auntie?” “Up there,” she would say, pointing to the sky; “up there, Poulet, but do not say so.” She was afraid of the baron.

One day, however, Poulet said to her: “God is everywhere, but He is not in church.” He had told his grandfather of his aunt’s wonderful revelations.

When Paul was twelve years old a great difficulty arose on the subject of his first communion.

Lison came to Jeanne one morning and told her that the little fellow should no longer be kept without religious instruction and from his religious duties. His mother, troubled and undecided, hesitated, saying that there was time enough. But a month later, as she was returning a call at the Brisevilles', the comtesse asked her casually if Paul was going to make his first communion that year. Jeanne, unprepared for this, answered, "Yes," and this simple word decided her, and without saying a word to her father, she asked Aunt Lison to take the boy to the catechism class.

All went well for a month, but one day Paul came home with a hoarseness and the following day he coughed. On inquiry his mother learned that the priest had sent him to wait till the lesson was over at the door of the church, where there was a draught, because he had misbehaved. So she kept him at home and taught him herself. But the Abbé Tobiac, despite Aunt Lison's entreaties, refused to admit him as a communicant on the ground that he was not thoroughly taught.

The same thing occurred the following year, and the baron angrily swore that the child did not need to believe all that tomfoolery, so it was decided that he should be brought up as a Christian, but not as an active Catholic, and when he came of age he could believe as he pleased.

The Brisevilles ceased to call on her and Jeanne was surprised, knowing the punctiliousness of these neighbors in returning calls, but the Marquise de Coutelier haughtily told her the reason. Considering herself, in virtue of her husband's rank and fortune, a sort of queen of the Norman nobility, the marquise ruled as a queen, said what she thought, was gracious or the reverse as occasion demanded, admonishing, restoring to favor, congratulating whenever she saw fit. So when Jeanne came to see her, this lady, after a few chilling remarks, said drily: "Society is divided into two classes: those who believe in God and those who do not believe in Him. The former, even the humblest, are our friends, our equals; the latter are nothing to us."

Jeanne, perceiving the insinuation, replied: "But may one not believe in God without going to church?"

"No, madame," answered the marquise. "The faithful go to worship God in His church, just as one goes to see people in their homes."

Jeanne, hurt, replied: "God is everywhere, madame. As for me, who believes from the bottom of my heart in His goodness, I no longer feel His presence when certain priests come between Him and me."

The marquise rose. "The priest is the standard bearer of the Church, madame. Whoever does not follow the standard is opposed to Him and opposed to us."

Jeanne had risen in her turn and said, trembling: "You believe, madame, in a partisan God. I believe in the God of upright people." She bowed and took her leave.

The peasants also blamed her among themselves for not having let Poulet make his first communion. They themselves never attended service or took the sacrament unless it might be at Easter, according to the rule ordained by the Church; but for boys it was quite another thing, and they would have all shrunk in horror at the audacity of bringing up a child outside this recognized law, for religion is religion.

She saw how they felt and was indignant at heart at all these discriminations, all these compromises with conscience, this general fear of everything, the real cowardice of all hearts and the mask of respectability assumed in public.

The baron took charge of Paul's studies and made him study Latin, his mother merely saying: "Above all things, do not get over tired."

As soon as the boy was at liberty he went down to work in the garden with his mother and his aunt.

He now loved to dig in the ground, and all three planted young trees in the spring, sowed seed and watched it growing with the deepest interest, pruned branches and cut flowers for bouquets.

Poulet was almost fifteen, but was a mere child in intelligence, ignorant, silly, suppressed between petticoat government and this kind old man who belonged to another century.

One evening the baron spoke of college, and Jeanne at once began to sob. Aunt Lison timidly remained in a dark corner.

"Why does he need to know so much?" asked his mother. "We will make a gentleman farmer of him. He can cultivate his land, as many of the nobility do. He will live and grow old happily in this house, where we have lived before him and where we shall die. What more can one do?"

But the baron shook his head. "What would you say to him if he should say to you when he is twenty-five: 'I amount to nothing, I know nothing, all through your fault, the fault of your maternal selfishness. I feel that I am incapable of working, of making something of myself, and yet I was not intended for a secluded, simple life, lonely enough to kill one, to which I have been condemned by your shortsighted affection.'"

She was weeping and said entreatingly: “Tell me, Poulet, you will not reproach me for having loved you too well?” And the big boy, in surprise, promised that he never would. “Swear it,” she said. “Yes, mamma.” “You want to stay here, don’t you?” “Yes, mamma.”

Then the baron spoke up loud and decidedly: “Jeanne, you have no right to make disposition of this life. What you are doing is cowardly and almost criminal; you are sacrificing your child to your own private happiness.”

She hid her face in her hands, sobbing convulsively, and stammered out amid her tears: “I have been so unhappy — so unhappy! Now, just as I am living peacefully with him, they want to take him away from me. What will become of me now — all by myself?” Her father rose and, sitting down beside her, put his arms round her. “And how about me, Jeanne?”

She put her arms suddenly round his neck, gave him a hearty kiss and with her voice full of tears, she said: “Yes, you are right perhaps, little father. I was foolish, but I have suffered so much. I am quite willing he should go to college.”

And without knowing exactly what they were going to do with him, Poulet in his turn began to weep.

Then the three mothers began to kiss him and pet him and encourage him. When they retired to their rooms it was with a weight at their hearts, and they all wept, even the baron, who had restrained himself up to that.

It was decided that when the term began to put the young boy to school at Havre, and during the summer he was petted more than ever; his mother sighed often as she thought of the separation. She prepared his wardrobe as if he were going to undertake a ten years’ voyage. One October morning, after a sleepless night, the two women and the baron got into the carriage with him and set out on their journey.

They had previously selected his place in the dormitory and his desk in the school room. Jeanne, aided by Aunt Lison, spent the whole day in arranging his clothes in his little wardrobe. As it did not hold a quarter of what they had brought, she went to look for the superintendent to ask for another. The treasurer was called, but he pointed out that all that amount of clothing would only be in the way and would never be needed, and he refused, on behalf of the directors, to let her have another chest of drawers. Jeanne, much annoyed, decided to hire a room in a small neighboring hotel, begging the proprietor to go himself and take Poulet whatever he required as soon as the boy asked for it.

They then took a walk on the pier to look at the ships coming and going. They went into a restaurant to dine, but they were none of them able to eat, and looked at one another with moistened eyes as the dishes were brought on and taken away almost untouched.

They now returned slowly toward the school. Boys of all ages were arriving from all quarters, accompanied by their families or by servants. Many of them were crying.

Jeanne held Poulet in a long embrace, while Aunt Lison remained in the background, her face hidden in her handkerchief. The baron, however, who was becoming affected, cut short the adieus by dragging his daughter away. They got into the carriage and went back through the darkness to “The Poplars,” the silence being broken by an occasional sob.

Jeanne wept all the following day and on the day after drove to Havre in the phaeton. Poulet seemed to have become reconciled to the separation. For the first time in his life he now had playmates, and in his anxiety to join them he could scarcely sit still on his chair when his mother called. She continued her visits to him every other day and called to take him home on Sundays. Not knowing what to do with herself while school was in session until recreation time, she would remain sitting in the reception room, not having the strength or the courage to go very far from the school. The superintendent sent to ask her to come to his office and begged her not to come so frequently. She paid no attention to his request. He therefore informed her that if she continued to prevent her son from taking his recreation at the usual hours, obliging him to work without a change of occupation, they would be forced to send him back home again, and the baron was also notified to the same effect. She was consequently watched like a prisoner at “The Poplars.”

She became restless and worried and would ramble about for whole days in the country, accompanied only by Massacre, dreaming as she walked along. Sometimes she would remain seated for a whole afternoon, looking out at the sea from the top of the cliff; at other times she would go down to Yport through the wood, going over the ground of her former walks, the memory of which haunted her. How long ago — how long ago it was — the time when she had gone over these same paths as a young girl, carried away by her dreams.

Poulet was not very industrious at school; he was kept two years in the fourth form. The third year’s work was only tolerable and he had to begin the second over again, so that he was in rhetoric when he was twenty.

He was now a big, fair young man, with downy whiskers and a faint sign of a mustache. He now came home to “The Poplars” every Sunday, riding over in a couple of hours, his mother, Aunt Lison and the baron starting out early to go and meet him.

Although he was a head taller than his mother, she always treated him as though he were a child, and when he returned to school in the evening she would charge him anxiously not to go too fast and to think of his poor mother, who would break her heart if anything happened to him.

One Saturday morning she received a letter from Paul, saying that he would not be home on the following day because some friends had arranged an excursion and had invited him. She was tormented with anxiety all day Sunday, as though she dreaded some misfortune, and on Thursday, as she could endure it no longer, she set out for Havre.

He seemed to be changed, though she could not have told in what manner. He appeared excited and his voice seemed deeper. And suddenly, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, he said: “I say, mother, as long as you have come to-day, I want to tell you that I will not be at ‘The Poplars’ next Sunday, for we are going to have another excursion.”

She was amazed, smothering, as if he had announced his departure for America. At last, recovering herself, she said: “Oh, Poulet, what is the matter with you? Tell me what is going on.”

He began to laugh, and kissing her, replied: “Why, nothing, nothing, mamma. I am going to have a good time with my friends; I am just at that age.”

She had nothing to say, but when she was alone in the carriage all manner of ideas came into her mind. She no longer recognized him, her Poulet, her little Poulet of former days. She felt for the first time that he was grown up, that he no longer belonged to her, that he was going to live his life without troubling himself about the old people. It seemed to her that one day had wrought this change in him. Was it possible that this was her son, her poor little boy who had helped her to replant the lettuce, this great big bearded youth who had a will of his own!

For three months Paul came home only occasionally, and always seemed impatient to get away again, trying to steal off an hour earlier each evening. Jeanne was alarmed, but the baron consoled her, saying: “Let him alone; the boy is twenty years old.”

One morning, however, an old man, poorly dressed, inquired in German-French for “Madame la Vicomtesse,” and after many ceremonious bows, he drew from his pocket a dilapidated pocketbook, saying: “Che un betit bapier bour fous,” and unfolding as he handed it to her a piece of greasy paper. She read and reread it, looked at the Jew, read it over again and asked: “What does it mean?”

He obsequiously explained: “I will tell you. Your son needed a little money, and as I knew that you are a good mother, I lent him a trifle to help him out.”

Jeanne was trembling. “But why did he not ask me?” The Jew explained at length that it was a question of a debt that must be paid before noon the following day; that Paul not being of age, no one would have lent him anything, and that his “honor would have been compromised” without this little service that he had rendered the young man.

Jeanne tried to call the baron, but had not the strength to rise, she was so overcome by emotion. At length she said to the usurer: “Would you have the kindness to ring the bell?”

He hesitated, fearing some trap, and then stammered out: “If I am intruding, I will call again.” She shook her head in the negative. He then rang, and they waited in silence, sitting opposite each other.

When the baron came in he understood the situation at once. The note was for fifteen hundred francs. He paid one thousand, saying close to the man’s face: “And on no account come back.” The other thanked him and went his way.

The baron and Jeanne set out at once for Havre. On reaching the college they learned that Paul had not been there for a month. The principal had received four letters signed by Jeanne saying that his pupil was not well and then to tell how he was getting along. Each letter was accompanied by a doctor’s certificate. They were, of course, all forged. They were all dumbfounded, and stood there looking at each other.

The principal, very much worried, took them to the commissary of police. Jeanne and her father stayed at a hotel that night. The following day the young man was found in the apartment of a courtesan of the town. His grandfather and mother took him back to “The Poplars” and not a word was exchanged between them during the whole journey.

A week later they discovered that he had contracted fifteen thousand francs’ worth of debts within the last three months. His creditors had not come forward at first, knowing that he would soon be of age.

They entered into no discussion about it, hoping to win him back by gentleness. They gave him dainty food, petted him, spoiled him. It was spring and they hired a boat for him at Yport, in spite of Jeanne's fears, so that he might amuse himself on the water.

They would not let him have a horse, for fear he should ride to Havre.

He was there with nothing to do and became irritable and occasionally brutally so. The baron was worried at the discontinuance of his studies. Jeanne, distracted at the idea of a separation, asked herself what they could do with him.

One evening he did not come home. They learned that he had gone out in a boat with two sailors. His mother, beside herself with anxiety, went down to Yport without a hat in the dark. Some men were on the beach, waiting for the boat to come in. There was a light on board an incoming boat, but Paul was not on board. He had made them take him to Havre.

The police sought him in vain; he could not be found. The woman with whom he had been found the first time had also disappeared without leaving any trace; her furniture was sold and her rent paid. In Paul's room at "The Poplars" were found two letters from this person, who seemed to be madly in love with him. She spoke of a voyage to England, having, she said, obtained the necessary funds.

The three dwellers in the château lived silently and drearily, their minds tortured by all kinds of suppositions. Jeanne's hair, which had become gray, now turned perfectly white. She asked in her innocence why fate had thus afflicted her.

She received a letter from the Abbé Tolbiac: "Madame, the hand of God is weighing heavily on you. You refused Him your child; He took him from you in His turn to cast him into the hands of a prostitute. Will not you open your eyes at this lesson from Heaven? God's mercy is infinite. Perhaps He may pardon you if you return and fall on your knees before Him. I am His humble servant. I will open to you the door of His dwelling when you come and knock at it."

She sat a long time with this letter on her lap. Perhaps it was true what the priest said. And all her religious doubts began to torment her conscience. And in her cowardly hesitation, which drives to church the doubting, the sorrowful, she went furtively one evening at twilight to the parsonage, and kneeling at the feet of the thin abbé, begged for absolution.

He promised her a conditional pardon, as God could not pour down all His favors on a roof that sheltered a man like the baron. “You will soon feel the effects of the divine mercy,” he declared.

Two days later she did, indeed, receive a letter from her son, and in her discouragement and grief she looked upon this as the commencement of the consolation promised her by the abbé. The letter ran:

“My Dear Mamma: Do not be uneasy. I am in London, in good health, in very great need of money. We have not a sou left, and we do not have anything to eat some days. The one who is with me, and whom I love with all my heart, has spent all that she had so as not to leave me — five thousand francs — and you see that I am bound in honor to return her this sum in the first place. So I wish you would be kind enough to advance me fifteen thousand francs of papa’s fortune, for I shall soon be of age. This will help me out of very serious difficulties.

“Good-by, my dear mamma. I embrace you with all my heart, and also grandfather and Aunt Lison. I hope to see you soon.

“Your son,

“Vicomte Paul de Lamare.”

He had written to her! He had not forgotten her then. She did not care anything about his asking for money! She would send him some as long as he had none. What did money matter? He had written to her! And she ran, weeping for joy, to show this letter to the baron. Aunt Lison was called and read over word by word this paper that told of him. They discussed each sentence.

Jeanne, jumping from the most complete despair to a kind of intoxication of hope, took Paul’s part. “He will come back, he will come back as he has written.”

The baron, more calm, said: “All the same he left us for that creature, so he must love her better than us, as he did not hesitate about it.”

A sudden and frightful pang struck Jeanne’s heart, and immediately she was filled with hatred of this woman who had stolen her son from her, an unappeasable, savage hate, the hatred of a jealous mother. Until now all her thoughts had been given to Paul. She scarcely took into consideration that a girl had been the cause of his vagaries. But the baron’s words had suddenly brought before her this rival, had revealed her fatal power, and she felt that between herself and this woman a struggle was about to begin, and she also felt that she would rather lose her son than share his affection with another. And all her joy was at an end.

They sent him the fifteen thousand francs and heard nothing more from him for five months.

Then a business man came to settle the details of Julien’s inheritance. Jeanne and the baron handed over the accounts without any discussion, even giving up the interest that should come to his mother. When Paul came back to Paris he had a hundred and twenty thousand francs. He then wrote four letters in six months, giving his news in concise terms and ending the letters with coldly affectionate expressions. “I am working,” he said; “I have obtained a position on the stock exchange. I hope to go and embrace you at ‘The Poplars’ some day, my dear parents.”

He did not mention his companion, and this silence implied more than if he had filled four pages with news of her. Jeanne, in these cold letters, felt this woman in ambush, the implacable, eternal enemy of mothers, the courtesan.

The three lonely beings discussed the best plan to follow in order to rescue Paul, but could decide on nothing. A voyage to Paris? What good would it do?

“Let his passion exhaust itself. He will come back then of his own accord,” said the baron.

Some time passed without any further news. But one morning they were terrified at the receipt of a despairing letter:

“My Poor Mamma: I am lost. There is nothing left for me to do but to blow out my brains unless you come to my aid. A speculation that gave every prospect of success has fallen through, and I am eighty-five thousand dollars in debt. I shall be dishonored if I do not pay up — ruined — and it will henceforth be impossible for me to do anything. I am lost. I repeat that I would rather blow out my brains than undergo this disgrace. I should have done so already, probably, but for the encouragement of a woman of whom I never speak to you, and who is my providence.

“I embrace you from the bottom of my heart, my dear mamma — perhaps for the last time. Good-by.

“Paul.”

A package of business papers accompanying the letter gave the details of the failure.

The baron answered by return mail that they would see what could be done. Then he set out for Havre to get advice and he mortgaged some property to raise the money which was sent to Paul.

The young man wrote three letters full of the most heartfelt thanks and passionate affection, saying he was coming home at once to see his dear parents.

But he did not come.

A whole year passed. Jeanne and the baron were about to set out for Paris to try and make a last effort, when they received a line to say that he was in London again, setting an enterprise on foot in connection with steamboats under the name of "Paul de Lamare & Co." He wrote: "This will give me an assured fortune, and perhaps great wealth, and I am risking nothing. You can see at once what a splendid thing it is. When I see you again I shall have a fine position in society. There is nothing but business these days to help you out of difficulties."

Three months later the steamboat company failed and the manager was being sought for on account of certain irregularities in business methods. Jeanne had a nervous attack that lasted several hours and then she took to her bed.

The baron again went to Havre to make inquiries, saw some lawyers, some business men, some solicitors and bailiffs and found that the liabilities of the De Lamare concern were two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, and he once more mortgaged some property. The château of "The Poplars" and the two farms and all that went with them were mortgaged for a large sum.

One evening as he was arranging the final details in the office of a business man, he fell over on the floor with a stroke of apoplexy.

A man was sent on horseback to notify Jeanne, but when she arrived he was dead.

She took his body back to "The Poplars," so overcome that her grief was numbness rather than despair.

Abbé Tolbiac refused to permit the body to be brought to the church, despite the distracted entreaties of the two women. The baron was interred at twilight without any religious ceremony.

Paul learned of the event through one of the men who was settling up his affairs. He was still in hiding in England. He wrote to make excuses for not having come home, saying that he had learned of his grandfather's death too late. “However, now that you have helped me out of my difficulties, my dear mamma, I shall go back to France and hope to embrace you soon.”

Jeanne was so crushed in spirit that she appeared not to understand anything. Toward the end of the winter Aunt Lison, who was now sixty-eight, had an attack of bronchitis that developed into pneumonia, and she died quietly, murmuring with her last breath: “My poor little Jeanne, I will ask God to take pity on you.”

Jeanne followed her to the grave, and as the earth fell on her coffin she sank to the ground, wishing that she might die also, so as not to suffer, to think. A strong peasant woman lifted her up and carried her away as if she had been a child.

When she reached the château Jeanne, who had spent the last five nights at Aunt Lison’s bedside, allowed herself to be put to bed without resistance by this unknown peasant woman, who handled her with gentleness and firmness, and she fell asleep from exhaustion, overcome with weariness and suffering.

She awoke about the middle of the night. A night light was burning on the mantelpiece. A woman was asleep in her easy chair. Who was this woman? She did not recognize her, and leaning over the edge of her bed, she sought to examine her features by the dim light of the wick floating in oil in a tumbler of water.

It seemed to her that she had seen this face. But when, but where? The woman was sleeping peacefully, her head to one side and her cap on the floor. She might be about forty or forty-five. She was stout, with a high color, squarely built and powerful. Her large hands hung down at either side of the chair. Her hair was turning gray. Jeanne looked at her fixedly, her mind in the disturbed condition of one awaking from a feverish sleep after a great sorrow.

She had certainly seen this face! Was it in former days? Was it of late years? She could not tell, and the idea distressed her, upset her nerves. She rose noiselessly to take another look at the sleeping woman, walking over on tiptoe. It was the woman who had lifted her up in the cemetery and then put her to bed. She remembered this confusedly.

But had she met her elsewhere at some other time of her life or did she only imagine she recognized her amid the confused recollections of the day before? And how did she come to be there in her room and why?

The woman opened her eyes and, seeing Jeanne, she rose to her feet suddenly. They stood face to face, so close that they touched one another. The stranger said crossly: “What! are you up? You will be ill, getting up at this time of night. Go back to bed!”

“Who are you?” asked Jeanne.

But the woman, opening her arms, picked her up and carried her back to her bed with the strength of a man. And as she laid her down gently and drew the covers over her, she leaned over close to Jeanne and, weeping as she did so, she kissed her passionately on the cheeks, her hair, her eyes, the tears falling on her face as she stammered out: “My poor mistress, Mam’zelle Jeanne, my poor mistress, don’t you recognize me?”

“Rosalie, my girl!” cried Jeanne, throwing her arms round her neck and hugging her as she kissed her, and they sobbed together, clasped in each other’s arms.

Rosalie was the first to regain her calmness. “Come,” she said, “you must be sensible and not catch cold.” And she covered her up warm and straightened the pillow under her former mistress’ head. The latter continued to sob, trembling all over at the recollections that were awakened in her mind. She finally inquired: “How did you come back, my poor girl?”

“Pardi! do you suppose I was going to leave you all alone like that, now?” replied Rosalie.

“Light a candle, so I may see you,” said Jeanne. And when the candle was brought to the bedside they looked at each other for some time without speaking a word. Then Jeanne, holding out her hand to her former maid, murmured: “I should not have recognized you, my girl, you have changed greatly; did you know it? But not as much as I have.” And Rosalie, looking at this white-haired woman, thin and faded, whom she had left a beautiful and fresh young woman, said: “That is true, you have changed, Madame Jeanne, and more than you should. But remember, however, that we have not seen each other for twenty-five years.”

They were silent, thinking over the past. At length Jeanne said hesitatingly: “Have you been happy?”

Rosalie, fearful of awakening certain painful souvenirs, stammered out: “Why — yes — yes — madame. I have nothing much to complain of. I have been happier than you have — that is sure. There was only one thing that always weighed on my heart, and that was that I did not stay here— “ And she stopped suddenly, sorry she had referred to that unintentionally.

But Jeanne replied gently: “How could you help it, my girl? One cannot always do as they wish. You are a widow now, also, are you not?” Then her voice trembled with emotion as she said: “Have you other — other children?”

“No, madame.”

“And he — your — your boy — what has become of him? Has he turned out well?”

“Yes, madame, he is a good boy and works industriously. He has been married for six months, and he can take my farm now, since I have come back to you.”

Jeanne murmured in a trembling voice: “Then you will never leave me again, my girl?”

“No, indeed, madame, I have arranged all that.”

Jeanne, in spite of herself, began to compare their lives, but without any bitterness, for she was now resigned to the unjust cruelty of fate. She said: “And your husband, how did he treat you?”

“Oh, he was a good man, madame, and not lazy; he knew how to make money. He died of consumption.”

Then Jeanne, sitting up in bed, filled with a longing to know more, said: “Come, tell me everything, my girl, all about your life. It will do me good just now.”

Rosalie, drawing up her chair, began to tell about herself, her home, her people, entering into those minute details dear to country people, describing her yard, laughing at some old recollection that reminded her of good times she had had, and raising her voice by degrees like a farmer’s wife accustomed to command. She ended by saying: “Oh, I am well off now. I don’t have to worry.” Then she became confused again, and said in a lower tone: “It is to you that I owe it, anyhow; and you know I do not want any wages. No, indeed! No, indeed! And if you will not have it so, I will go.”

Jeanne replied: “You do not mean that you are going to serve me for nothing?”

“Oh, yes, indeed, madame. Money! You give me money! Why, I have almost as much as you. Do you know what is left to you will all your jumble of mortgages and borrowing, and interests unpaid which are mounting up every year? Do you know? No, is it not so? Well, then, I can promise you that you have not even ten thousand francs income. Not ten thousand, do you understand? But I will settle all that for you, and very quickly."

She had begun talking loud again, carried away in her indignation at these interests left unpaid, at this threatening ruin. And as a faint, tender smile passed over the face of her mistress, she cried in a tone of annoyance: "You must not laugh, madame, for without money we are nothing but laborers."

Jeanne took hold of her hands and kept them in her own; then she said slowly, still full of the idea that haunted her: "Oh, I have had no luck. Everything has gone against me. Fate has a grudge against my life."

But Rosalie shook her head: "You must not say that, madame. You married badly, that's all. One should not marry like that, anyway, without knowing anything about one's intended."

And they went on talking about themselves just as two old friends might have done.

The sun rose while they were still talking.

CHAPTER XII. A NEW HOME

In a week's time Rosalie had taken absolute control of everything and everyone in the château. Jeanne was quite resigned and obeyed passively. Weak and dragging her feet as she walked, as little mother had formerly done, she went out walking leaning on Rosalie's arm, the latter lecturing her and consoling her with abrupt and tender words as they walked slowly along, treating her mistress as though she were a sick child.

They always talked of bygone days, Jeanne with tears in her throat, and Rosalie in the quiet tone of a phlegmatic peasant. The servant kept referring to the subject of unpaid interests; and at last requested Jeanne to give her up all the business papers that Jeanne, in her ignorance of money matters, was hiding from her, out of consideration for her son.

After that, for a week, Rosalie went to Fécamp every day to have matters explained to her by a lawyer whom she knew.

One evening, after having put her mistress to bed, she sat down by the bedside and said abruptly: "Now that you are settled quietly, madame, we will have a chat." And she told her exactly how matters stood.

When everything was settled, there would be about seven thousand francs of income left, no more.

"We cannot help it, my girl," said Jeanne. "I feel that I shall not make old bones, and there will be quite enough for me."

But Rosalie was annoyed: "For you, madame, it might be; but M. Paul — will you leave nothing for him?"

Jeanne shuddered. "I beg you not to mention him again. It hurts me too much to think about him."

"But I wish to speak about him, because you see you are not brave, Madame Jeanne. He does foolish things. Well! what of it? He will not do so always; and then he will marry and have children. He will need money to bring them up. Pay attention to me: you must sell 'The Poplars.'"

Jeanne sprang up in a sitting posture. "Sell 'The Poplars'! Do you mean it? Oh, never, never!"

But Rosalie was not disturbed. "I tell you that you will sell the place, madame, because it must be done." And then she explained her calculations, her plans, her reasons.

Once they had sold “The Poplars” and the two farms belonging to it to a buyer whom she had found, they would keep four farms situated at St. Leonard, which, free of all mortgage, would bring in an income of eight thousand three hundred francs. They would set aside thirteen hundred francs a year for repairs and for the upkeep of the property; there would then remain seven thousand francs, five thousand of which would cover the annual expenditures and the other two thousand would be put away for a rainy day.

She added: “All the rest has been squandered; there is an end of it. And then I am to keep the key, you understand. As for M. Paul, he will have nothing left, nothing; he would take your last sou from you.”

Jeanne, who was weeping silently, murmured:

“But if he has nothing to eat?”

“He can come and eat with us if he is hungry. There will always be a bed and some stew for him. Do you believe he would have acted as he has done if you had not given him a sou in the first place?”

“But he was in debt, he would have been disgraced.”

“When you have nothing left, will that prevent him from making fresh debts? You have paid his debts, that is all right; but you will not pay any more; it is I who am telling you this. Now goodnight, madame.”

And she left the room.

Jeanne did not sleep, she was so upset at the idea of selling “The Poplars,” of going away, of leaving this house to which all her life was linked.

When Rosalie came into the room next morning she said to her: “My poor girl, I never could make up my mind to go away from here.”

But the servant grew angry: “It will have to be, however, madame; the lawyer will soon be here with the man who wants to buy the château. Otherwise, in four years you will not have a rap left.”

Jeanne was crushed, and repeated: “I could not do it; I never could.”

An hour later the postman brought her a letter from Paul asking for ten thousand francs. What should she do? At her wit’s end, she consulted Rosalie, who threw up her hands, exclaiming: “What was I telling you, madame? Ah! You would have been in a nice fix, both of you, if I had not come back.” And Jeanne, bending to her servant’s will, wrote as follows to the young man:

"My Dear Son: I can do nothing more for you. You have ruined me; I am even obliged to sell 'The Poplars.' But never forget that I shall always have a home whenever you want to seek shelter with your old mother, to whom you have caused much suffering. Jeanne."

When the notary arrived with M. Jeoffrin, a retired sugar refiner, she received them herself, and invited them to look over the château.

A month later, she signed a deed of sale, and also bought herself a little cottage in the neighborhood of Goderville, on the high road to Montiviliers, in the hamlet of Batteville.

Then she walked up and down all alone until evening, in little mother's avenue, with a sore heart and troubled mind, bidding distracted and sobbing farewells to the landscape, the trees, the rustic bench under the plane tree, to all those things she knew so well and that seemed to have become part of her vision and her soul, the grove, the mound overlooking the plain, where she had so often sat, and from where she had seen the Comte de Fourville running toward the sea on that terrible day of Julian's death, to an old elm whose upper branches were missing, against which she had often leaned, and to all this familiar garden spot.

Rosalie came out and took her by the arm to make her come into the house.

A tall young peasant of twenty-five was waiting outside the door. He greeted her in a friendly manner as if he had known her for some time: "Good-morning, Madame Jeanne. I hope you are well. Mother told me to come and help you move. I would like to know what you are going to take away, seeing that I shall do it from time to time so as not to interfere with my farm work."

It was her maid's son, Julien's son, Paul's brother.

She felt as if her heart stopped beating; and yet she would have liked to embrace this young fellow.

She looked at him, trying to find some resemblance to her husband or to her son. He was ruddy, vigorous, with fair hair and his mother's blue eyes. And yet he looked like Julien. In what way? How? She could not have told, but there was something like him in the whole makeup of his face.

The young man resumed: "If you could show me at once, I should be much obliged."

But she had not yet decided what she was going to take with her, as her new home was very small; and she begged him to come back again at the end of the week.

She was now entirely occupied with getting ready to move, which brought a little variety into her very dreary and hopeless life. She went from room to room, picking out the furniture which recalled episodes in her life, old friends, as it were, who have a share in our life and almost of our being, whom we have known since childhood, and to which are linked our happy or sad recollections, dates in our history; silent companions of our sad or sombre hours, who have grown old and become worn at our side, their covers torn in places, their joints shaky, their color faded.

She selected them, one by one, sometimes hesitating and troubled, as if she were taking some important step, changing her mind every instant, weighing the merits of two easy chairs or of some old writing-desk and an old work table.

She opened the drawers, sought to recall things; then, when she had said to herself, "Yes, I will take this," the article was taken down into the dining-room.

She wished to keep all the furniture of her room, her bed, her tapestries, her clock, everything.

She took away some of the parlor chairs, those that she had loved as a little child; the fox and the stork, the fox and the crow, the ant and the grasshopper, and the melancholy heron.

Then, while wandering about in all the corners of this dwelling she was going to forsake, she went one day up into the loft, where she was filled with amazement; it was a chaos of articles of every kind, some broken, others tarnished only, others taken up there for no special reason probably, except that they were tired of them or that they had been replaced by others. She saw numberless knick-knacks that she remembered, and that had disappeared suddenly, trifles that she had handled, those old little insignificant articles that she had seen every day without noticing, but which now, discovered in this loft, assumed an importance as of forgotten relics, of friends that she had found again.

She went from one to the other of them with a little pang, saying: "Why, it was I who broke that china cup a few evenings before my wedding. Ah! there is mother's little lantern and a cane that little father broke in trying to open the gate when the wood was swollen with the rain."

There were also a number of things that she did not remember that had belonged to her grandparents or to their parents, dusty things that appeared to be exiled in a period that is not their own, and that looked sad at their abandonment, and whose history, whose experiences no one knows, for they never saw those who chose them, bought them, owned them, and loved them; never knew the hands that had touched them familiarly, and the eyes that looked at them with delight.

Jeanne examined carefully three-legged chairs to see if they recalled any memories, a copper warming pan, a damaged foot stove that she thought she remembered, and a number of housekeeping utensils unfit for use.

She then put together all the things she wished to take, and going downstairs, sent Rosalie up to get them. The servant indignantly refused to bring down "that rubbish." But Jeanne, who had not much will left, held her own this time, and had to be obeyed.

One morning the young farmer, Julien's son, Denis Lecoq, came with his wagon for the first load. Rosalie went back with him in order to superintend the unloading and placing of furniture where it was to stand.

Rosalie had come back and was waiting for Jeanne, who had been out on the cliff. She was enchanted with the new house, declaring it was much more cheerful than this old box of a building, which was not even on the side of the road.

Jeanne wept all the evening.

Ever since they heard that the château was sold, the farmers were not more civil to her than necessary, calling her among themselves "the crazy woman," without knowing exactly why, but doubtless because they guessed with their animal instinct at her morbid and increasing sentimentality, at all the disturbance of her poor mind that had undergone so much sorrow.

The night before they left she chanced to go into the stable. A growl made her start. It was Massacre, whom she had hardly thought of for months. Blind and paralyzed, having reached a great age for an animal, he existed in a straw bed, taken care of by Ludivine, who never forgot him. She took him in her arms, kissed him, and carried him into the house. As big as a barrel, he could scarcely carry himself along on his stiff legs, and he barked like the wooden dogs that one gives to children.

The day of departure finally came. Jeanne had slept in Julien's old room, as hers was dismantled. She got up exhausted and short of breath as if she had been running. The carriage containing the trunks and the rest of the furniture was in the yard ready to start. Another two-wheeled vehicle was to take Jeanne and the servant. Old Simon and Ludivine were to stay until the arrival of a new proprietor, and then to go to some of their relations, Jeanne having provided a little income for them. They had also saved up some money, and being now very old and garrulous, they were not of much use in the house. Marius had long since married and left.

About eight o'clock it began to rain, a fine icy rain, driven by a light breeze. On the kitchen table, some cups of café au lait were steaming. Jeanne sat down and sipped hers, then rising, she said, "Come along."

She put on her hat and shawl, and while Rosalie was putting on her overshoes, she said in a choking voice: "Do you remember, my girl, how it rained when we left Rouen to come here?"

As she said this, she put her two hands to her breast and fell over on her back, unconscious. She remained thus over an hour, apparently dead. Then she opened her eyes and was seized with convulsions accompanied by floods of tears.

When she was a little calmer she was so weak that she could not stand up, and Rosalie, fearing another attack if they delayed their departure, went to look for her son. They took her up and carried her to the carriage, placed her on the wooden bench covered with leather; and the old servant got in beside her, wrapped her up with a big cloak, and holding an umbrella over her head, cried: "Quick, Denis, let us be off." The young man climbed up beside his mother and whipped up the horse, whose jerky pace made the two women bounce about vigorously.

As they turned the corner to enter the village, they saw some one stalking along the road; it was Abbé Tolbiac, who seemed to be watching for them to go by. He stopped to let the carriage pass. He was holding up his cassock with one hand, to keep it out of the mud, and his thin legs, encased in black stockings, ended in a pair of enormous muddy shoes.

Jeanne lowered her eyes so as not to meet his glance, and Rosalie, who had heard all about him, flew into a rage. "Peasant! Peasant!" she murmured; and then seizing her son's hand: "Give him a good slash with the whip."

But the young man, just as they were passing the priest, made the wheel of the wagon, which was going at full speed, sink into a rut, splashing the abbé with mud from head to foot.

Rosalie was delighted and turned round to shake her fist at him, while the priest was wiping off the mud with his big handkerchief.

All at once Jeanne exclaimed: “We have forgotten Massacre!” They stopped, and, getting down, Denis ran to fetch the dog, while Rosalie held the reins. He presently reappeared, carrying in his arms the shapeless and crippled animal, which he placed at the feet of the two women.

CHAPTER XIII. JEANNE IN PARIS

Two hours later the carriage stopped at a little brick house built in the middle of a lot planted with pear trees at the side of the high road.

Four trellised arbors covered with honeysuckle and clematis formed the four corners of the garden, which was divided into little beds of vegetables separated by narrow paths bordered with fruit trees.

A very high box hedge enclosed the whole property, which was separated by a field from the neighboring farm. There was a blacksmith's shop about a hundred feet further along the road. There were no other houses within three-quarters of a mile.

The house commanded a view of the level district of Caux, covered with farms surrounded by their four double rows of tall trees which enclosed the courtyard planted with apple trees.

As soon as they reached the house, Jeanne wanted to rest; but Rosalie would not allow her to do so for fear she would begin to think of the past.

The carpenter from Goderville was there, and they began at once to place the furniture that had already arrived while waiting for the last load. This required a good deal of thought and planning.

At the end of an hour the wagon appeared at the gate and had to be unloaded in the rain. When night fell the house was in utter disorder, with things piled up anyhow. Jeanne, tired out, fell asleep as soon as she got into bed.

She had no time to mourn for some days, as there was so much to be done. She even took a certain pleasure in making her new house look pretty, the thought that her son would come back there haunting her continually. The tapestries from her old room were hung in the dining-room, which also had to serve as a parlor; and she took special pains with one of the two rooms on the first floor, which she thought of as "Poulet's room."

She kept the other room herself, Rosalie sleeping above, next to the loft. The little house, furnished with care, was very pretty, and Jeanne was happy there at first, although she seemed to lack something, but she did not know what.

One morning the lawyer's clerk from Fécamp brought her three thousand six hundred francs, the price of the furniture left at "The Poplars," and valued by an upholsterer. She had a little thrill of pleasure at receiving this money, and as soon as the man had gone, she ran to put on her hat, so as to get to Goderville as quickly as possible to send Paul this unexpected sum.

But as she was hurrying along the high road she met Rosalie coming from market. The servant suspected something, without at once guessing the facts; and when she discovered them, for Jeanne could hide nothing from her, she placed her basket on the ground that she might get angry with more comfort.

She began to scold with her fists on her hips; then taking hold of her mistress with her right arm and taking her basket in her left, and still fuming, she continued on her way to the house.

As soon as they were in the house the servant asked to have the money handed over to her. Jeanne gave all but six hundred francs, which she held back; but Rosalie soon saw through her tricks, and she was obliged to hand it all over. However, she consented to her sending this amount to the young man.

A few days later he wrote: “You have rendered me a great service, my dear mother, for we were in the greatest distress.”

Jeanne, however, could not get accustomed to Batteville. It seemed to her as if she could not breathe as she did formerly, that she was more lonely, more deserted, more lost than ever. She went out for a walk, got as far as the hamlet of Verneuil, came back by the Trois-Mares, came home, then suddenly wanted to start out again, as if she had forgotten to go to the very place she intended.

And every day she did the same thing without knowing why. But one evening a thought came to her unconsciously which revealed to her the secret of her restlessness. She said as she was sitting down to dinner: “Oh, how I long to see the sea!”

That was what she had missed so greatly, the sea, her big neighbor for twenty-five years, the sea with its salt air, its rages, its scolding voice, its strong breezes, the sea which she sought from her window at “The Poplars” every morning, whose air she breathed day and night, the sea which she felt close to her, which she had taken to loving unconsciously as she would a person.

Winter was approaching, and Jeanne felt herself overcome by an unconquerable discouragement. It was not one of those acute griefs which seemed to wring the heart, but a dreary, mournful sadness.

Nothing roused her. No one paid any attention to her. The high road before her door stretched to right and left with hardly any passersby. Occasionally a dogcart passed rapidly, driven by a red-faced man, with his blouse puffed out by the wind, making a sort of blue balloon; sometimes a slow-moving wagon, or else two peasants, a man and a woman, who came near, passed by, and disappeared in the distance.

As soon as the grass began to grow again, a young girl in a short skirt passed by the gate every morning with two thin cows who browsed along the side of the road. She came back every evening with the same sleepy face, making a step every ten minutes as she walked behind the animals.

Jeanne dreamed every night that she was still at "The Poplars." She seemed to be there with father and little mother, and sometimes even with Aunt Lison. She did over again things forgotten and done with, thought she was supporting Madame Adelaide in her walk along the avenue. And each awakening was attended with tears.

She thought continually of Paul, wondering what he was doing — how he was — whether he sometimes thought of her. As she walked slowly in the by-roads between the farms, she thought over all these things which tormented her, but above all else, she cherished an intense jealousy of the woman who had stolen her son from her. It was this hatred alone which prevented her from taking any steps, from going to look for him, to see him. It seemed to her that she saw that woman standing on the doorsill asking: "What do you want here, madame?" Her mother's pride revolted at the possibility of such a meeting. And her haughty pride of a good woman whose character is blameless made her all the more indignant at the cowardice of a man subjugated by an unworthy passion.

When autumn returned with its long rains, its gray sky, its dark clouds, such a weariness of this kind of life came over her that she determined to make a great effort to get her Poulet back; he must have got over his infatuation by this time.

She wrote him an imploring letter:

"My Dear Child: I am going to entreat you to come back to me. Remember that I am old and delicate, all alone the whole year round except for a servant maid. I am now living in a little house on the main road. It is very lonely, but if you were here all would be different for me. I have only you in the world, and I have not seen you for seven years! You were my life, my dream, my only hope, my one love, and you failed me, you deserted me!

“Oh, come back, my little Poulet — come and embrace me. Come back to your old mother, who holds out her despairing arms towards you.

“Jeanne.”

He replied a few days later:

“My Dear Mother: I would ask nothing better than to go and see you, but I have not a penny. Send me some money and I will come. I wanted, in any case, to see you to talk to you about a plan that would make it possible for me to do as you ask.

“The disinterestedness and love of the one who has been my companion in the dark days through which I have passed can never be forgotten by me. It is not possible for me to remain any longer without publicly recognizing her love and her faithful devotion. She has very pleasing manners, which you would appreciate. She is also educated and reads a good deal. In fact, you cannot understand what she has been to me. I should be a brute if I did not show her my gratitude. I am going, therefore, to ask you to give me your permission to marry her. You will forgive all my follies and we will all live together in your new house.

“If you knew her you would at once give your consent. I can assure you that she is perfect and very distingué. You will love her, I am sure. As for me, I could not live without her.

“I shall expect your reply with impatience, my dear mother, and we both embrace you with all our heart.

“Your son,

“Vicomte Paul de Lamare.”

Jeanne was crushed. She remained motionless, the letter on her lap, seeing through the cunning of this girl who had had such a hold on her son for so long, and had not let him come to see her once, biding her time until the despairing old mother could no longer resist the desire to clasp her son in her arms, and would weaken and grant all they asked.

And grief at Paul’s persistent preference for this creature wrung her heart. She said: “He does not love me. He does not love me.”

Rosalie just then entered the room. Jeanne faltered: “He wants to marry her now.”

The maid was startled. “Oh, madame, you will not allow that. M. Paul must not pick up that rubbish.”

And Jeanne, overcome with emotion, but indignant, replied: “Never that, my girl. And as he will not come here, I am going to see him, myself, and we shall see which of us will carry the day.”

She wrote at once to Paul to prepare him for her visit, and to arrange to meet him elsewhere than in the house inhabited by that baggage.

While awaiting a reply she made her preparations for departure. Rosalie began to pack her mistress’ clothes in an old trunk, but as she was folding a dress, one of those she had worn in the country, she exclaimed: “Why, you have nothing to put on your back. I will not allow you to go like that. You would be a disgrace to everyone; and the Parisian ladies would take you for a servant.”

Jeanne let her have her own way, and the two women went together to Goderville to choose some material, which was given a dressmaker in the village. Then they went to the lawyer, M. Roussel, who spent a fortnight in the capital every year, in order to get some information; for Jeanne had not been in Paris for twenty-eight years.

He gave them lots of advice on how to avoid being run over, on methods of protecting yourself from thieves, advising her to sew her money up inside the lining of her coat, and to keep in her pocket only what she absolutely needed. He spoke at length about moderate priced restaurants, and mentioned two or three patronized by women, and told them that they might mention his name at the Hotel Normandie.

Jeanne had never yet seen the railroad, though trains had been running between Paris and Havre for six years, and were revolutionizing the whole country.

She received no answer from Paul, although she waited a week, then two weeks, going every morning to meet the postman, asking him hesitatingly: “Is there anything for me, Père Malandain?” And the man always replied in his hoarse voice: “Nothing again, my good lady.”

It certainly must be this woman who was keeping Paul from writing.

Jeanne, therefore, determined to set out at once. She wanted to take Rosalie with her, but the maid refused for fear of increasing the expense of the journey. She did not allow her mistress to take more than three hundred francs, saying: “If you need more you can write to me and I will go to the lawyer and ask him to send it to you. If I give you any more, M. Paul will put it in his pocket.”

One December morning Denis Lecoq came for them in his light wagon and took them to the station. Jeanne wept as she kissed Rosalie good-by, and got into the train. Rosalie was also affected and said: “Good-by, madame, bon voyage, and come back soon!”

“Good-by, my girl.”

A whistle and the train was off, beginning slowly and gradually going with a speed that terrified Jeanne. In her compartment there were two gentlemen leaning back in the two corners of the carriage.

She looked at the country as they swept past, the trees, the farms, the villages, feeling herself carried into a new life, into a new world that was no longer the life of her tranquil youth and of her present monotonous existence.

She reached Paris that evening. A commissionaire took her trunk and she followed him in great fear, jostled by the crowd and not knowing how to make her way amid this mass of moving humanity, almost running to keep up with the man for fear of losing sight of him.

On reaching the hotel she said at the desk: “I was recommended here by M. Roussel.”

The proprietress, an immense woman with a serious face, who was seated at the desk, inquired:

“Who is he — M. Roussel?”

Jeanne replied in amazement: “Why, he is the lawyer at Goderville, who stops here every year.”

“That’s very possible,” said the big woman, “but I do not know him. Do you wish a room?”

“Yes, madame.”

A boy took her satchel and led the way upstairs. She felt a pang at her heart. Sitting down at a little table she sent for some luncheon, as she had eaten nothing since daybreak. As she ate, she was thinking sadly of a thousand things, recalling her stay here on the return from her wedding journey, and the first indication of Julien’s character betrayed while they were in Paris. But she was young then, and confident and brave. Now she felt old, embarrassed, even timid, weak and disturbed at trifles. When she had finished her luncheon she went over to the window and looked down on the street filled with people. She wished to go out, but was afraid to do so. She would surely get lost. She went to bed, but the noise, the feeling of being in a strange city, kept her awake. About two o’clock in the morning, just as she was dozing off, she heard a woman scream in an adjoining room; she sat up in bed and then she thought she heard a man laugh. As daylight dawned the thought of Paul came to her, and she dressed herself before it was light.

Paul lived in the Rue du Sauvage, in the old town. She wanted to go there on foot so as to carry out Rosalie's economical advice. The weather was delightful, the air cold enough to make her skin tingle. People were hurrying along the sidewalks. She walked as fast as she could, according to directions given her, along a street, at the end of which she was to turn to the right and then to the left, when she would come to a square where she must make fresh inquiries. She did not find the square, and went into a baker's to ask her way, and he directed her differently. She started off again, went astray, inquired her way again, and finally got lost completely.

Half crazy, she now walked at random. She had made up her mind to call a cab, when she caught sight of the Seine. She then walked along the quays.

After about an hour she found the Rue Sauvage, a sort of dark alley. She stopped at a door, so overcome that she could not move.

He was there, in that house — Poulet.

She felt her knees and hands trembling; but at last she entered the door, and walking along a passage, saw the janitor's quarters. She said, as she held out a piece of money: "Would you go up and tell M. Paul de Lamare that an old lady, a friend of his mother's, is downstairs, and wishes to see him?"

"He does not live here any longer, madame," replied the janitor.

A shudder went over her. She faltered:

"Oh! Where — where is he living now?"

"I do not know."

She grew dizzy as though she were about to fall over, and stood there for some moments without being able to speak. At length, with a great effort, she collected her senses and murmured:

"How long is it since he left?"

"About two weeks ago. They went off like that, one evening, and never came back. They were in debt everywhere in the neighborhood, so you can understand that they did not care to leave their address."

Jeanne saw lights before her eyes, flashes of flame, as though a gun had been fired off in front of her eyes. But she had one fixed idea in her mind, and that sustained her, and kept her outwardly calm and rational. She wished to find Poulet and know all about him.

“Then he said nothing when he was going away?”

“Nothing at all; they ran off to escape their debts, that’s all.”

“But he surely sends someone to get his mail.”

“More frequently than I send it. He never got more than ten letters a year. I took one up to them, however, two days before they left.”

That was probably her letter. She said abruptly: “Listen! I am his mother, his own mother, and I have come to look for him. Here are ten francs for you. If you can get any news or any particulars about him, come and see me at the Hotel Normandie, Rue du Havre, and I will pay you well.”

“You may count on me, madame,” he replied.

She left him and began to walk away without caring whither she went. She hurried along as though she were on some important business, knocking up against people with packages, crossing the streets without paying attention to the approaching vehicles, and being sworn at by the drivers, stumbling on the curb of the sidewalk, and tearing along straight ahead in utter despair.

All at once she found herself in a garden, and was so tired that she sat down on a bench to rest. She stayed there some time apparently, weeping without being conscious of it, for passersby stopped to look at her. Then she felt very cold, and rose to go on her way; but her legs would scarcely carry her, she was so weak and distressed.

She wanted to go into a restaurant and get a cup of bouillon, but a sort of shame, of fear, of modesty at her grief being observed held her back. She would pause at the door, look in, see all the people sitting at table eating, and would turn away, saying: “I will go into the next one.” But she had not the courage.

Finally she went into a bakery and bought a crescent and ate it as she walked along. She was very thirsty, but did not know where to go to get something to drink, so did without it.

Presently she found herself in another garden surrounded by arcades. She recognized the Palais Royal. Being tired and warm, she sat down here for an hour or two.

A crowd of people came in, a well-dressed crowd, chatting, smiling, bowing to each other, that happy crowd of beautiful women and wealthy men who live only for dress and amusement. Jeanne felt bewildered in the midst of this brilliant assemblage, and got up to make her escape. But suddenly the thought came to her that she might meet Paul in this place; and she began to wander about, looking into the faces, going and coming incessantly with her quick step from one end of the garden to the other.

People turned round to look at her, others laughed as they pointed her out. She noticed it and fled, thinking that they were doubtless amused at her appearance and at her dress of green plaid, selected by Rosalie, and made according to her ideas by the dressmaker at Goderville.

She no longer dared even to ask her way of passersby, but at last she ventured to do so and found her way back to the hotel.

The following day she went to the police department to ask them to look for her child. They could promise her nothing, but said they would do all they could. She wandered about the streets hoping that she might come across him. And she felt more alone in this bustling crowd, more lost, more wretched than in the lonely country.

That evening when she came back to the hotel she was informed that a man had come to see her from M. Paul, and that he would come back again the following day. Her heart began to beat violently and she never closed her eyes that night. If it should be he! Yes, it assuredly was, although she would not have recognized him from the description they gave her.

About nine o’clock the following morning there was a knock at the door. She cried: “Come in!” ready to throw herself into certain outstretched arms. But an unknown person appeared; and while he excused himself for disturbing her, and explained his business, which was to collect a debt of Paul’s, she felt the tears beginning to overflow, and wiped them away with her finger before they fell on her cheeks.

He had learned of her arrival through the janitor of the Rue Sauvage, and as he could not find the young man, he had come to see his mother. He handed her a paper, which she took without knowing what she was doing and read the figures — ninety francs — which she paid without a word.

She did not go out that day.

The next day other creditors came. She gave them all that she had left except twenty francs and then wrote to Rosalie to explain matters to her.

She passed her days wandering about, waiting for Rosalie’s answer, not knowing what to do, how to kill the melancholy, interminable hours, having no one to whom she could say an affectionate word, no one who knew her sorrow. She now longed to return home to her little house at the side of the lonely high road. A few days before she thought she could not live there, she was so overcome with grief, and now she felt that she could never live anywhere else but there where her serious character had been formed.

One evening the letter at last came, enclosing two hundred francs. Rosalie wrote:

"Madame Jeanne: Come back at once, for I shall not send you any more. As for M. Paul, it is I who will go and get him when we know where he is.

"With respect, your servant,

"Rosalie."

Jeanne set out for Batteville one very cold, snowy morning.

CHAPTER XIV. LIGHT AT EVENTIDE

Jeanne never went out now, never stirred about. She rose at the same hour every day, looked out at the weather and then went downstairs and sat before the parlor fire.

She would remain for days motionless, gazing into the fire, thinking of nothing in particular. It would grow dark before she stirred, except to put a fresh log on the fire. Rosalie would then bring in the lamp and exclaim: "Come, Madame Jeanne, you must stir about or you will have no appetite again this evening."

She lived over the past, haunted by memories of her early life and her wedding journey down yonder in Corsica. Forgotten landscapes in that isle now rose before her in the blaze of the fire, and she recalled all the little details, all the little incidents, the faces she had seen down there. The head of the guide, Jean Ravoli, haunted her, and she sometimes seemed to hear his voice.

Then she remembered the sweet years of Paul's childhood, when they planted salad together and when she knelt in the thick grass beside Aunt Lison, each trying what they could do to please the child, and her lips murmured: "Poulet, my little Poulet," as though she were talking to him. Stopping at this word, she would try to trace it, letter by letter, in space, sometimes for hours at a time, until she became confused and mixed up the letters and formed other words, and she became so nervous that she was almost crazy.

She had all the peculiarities of those who live a solitary life. The least thing out of its usual place irritated her.

Rosalie often obliged her to walk and took her on the high road, but at the end of twenty minutes she declared she could not take another step and sat down on the side of the road.

She soon became averse to all movement and stayed in bed as late as possible. Since her childhood she had retained one custom, that of rising the instant she had drunk her café au lait in the morning. But now she would lie down again and begin to dream, and as she was daily growing more lazy, Rosalie would come and oblige her to get up and almost force her to get dressed.

She seemed no longer to have any will power, and each time the maid asked her a question or wanted her advice or opinion she would say: “Do as you think best, my girl.”

She imagined herself pursued by some persistent ill luck and was like an oriental fatalist, and having seen her dreams all fade away and her hopes crushed, she would sometimes hesitate a whole day or longer before undertaking the simplest thing, for fear she might be on the wrong road and it would turn out badly. She kept repeating: “Talk of bad luck — I have never had any luck in life.”

Then Rosalie would say: “What would you do if you had to work for your living, if you were obliged to get up every morning at six o’clock to go out to your work? Many people have to do that, nevertheless, and when they grow too old they die of want.”

Jeanne replied: “Remember that I am all alone; that my son has deserted me.” And Rosalie would get very angry: “That’s another thing! Well, how about the sons who are drafted into the army and those who go to America?”

America to her was an undefined country, where one went to make a fortune and whence one never returned. She continued: “There always comes a time when people have to part, for old people and young people are not made to live together.” And she added fiercely: “Well, what would you say if he were dead?”

Jeanne had nothing more to say.

One day in spring she had gone up to the loft to look for something and by chance opened a box containing old calendars which had been preserved after the manner of some country folks.

She took them up and carried them downstairs. They were of all sizes, and she laid them out on the table in the parlor in regular order. Suddenly she spied the earliest, the one she had brought with her to “The Poplars.” She gazed at it for some time, at the days crossed off by her the morning she left Rouen, the day after she left the convent, and she wept slow, sorrowful tears, the tears of an old woman at sight of her wretched life spread out before her on this table.

One morning the maid came into her room earlier than usual, and placing the bowl of café au lait on the little stand beside her bed, she said: “Come, drink it quickly. Denis is waiting for us at the door. We are going to ‘The Poplars,’ for I have something to attend to down there.”

Jeanne dressed herself with trembling hands, almost fainting at the thought of seeing her dear home once more.

The sky was cloudless and the nag, who was inclined to be frisky, would suddenly start off at a gallop every now and then. As they entered the commune of Étouvent Jeanne's heart beat so that she could hardly breathe.

They unharnessed the horse at the Couillard place, and while Rosalie and her son were attending to their own affairs, the farmer and his wife offered to let Jeanne go over the chateau, as the proprietor was away and they had the keys.

She went off alone, and when she reached the side of the chateau from which there was a view of the sea she turned round to look. Nothing had changed on the outside. When she turned the heavy lock and went inside the first thing she did was to go up to her old room, which she did not recognize, as it had been newly papered and furnished. But the view from the window was the same, and she stood and gazed out at the landscape she had so loved.

She then wandered all over the house, walking quietly all alone in this silent abode as though it were a cemetery. All her life was buried here. She went down to the drawing-room, which was dark with its closed shutters. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light she recognized some of the old hangings. Two easy chairs were drawn up before the fire, as if some one had just left them, and as Jeanne stood there, full of old memories, she suddenly seemed to see her father and mother sitting there, warming their feet at the fire.

She started back in terror and knocked up against the edge of the door, against which she leaned to support herself, still staring at the armchairs.

The vision had vanished.

She remained bewildered for some minutes. Then she slowly recovered her composure and started to run away, for fear she might become insane. She chanced to look at the door against which she had been leaning and saw there "Poulet's ladder."

All the little notches were there showing the age and growth of her child. Here was the baron's writing, then hers, a little smaller, and then Aunt Lison's rather shaky characters. And she seemed to see her boy of long ago with his fair hair standing before her, leaning his little forehead against the door while they measured his height.

And she kissed the edge of the door in a frenzy of affection.

But some one was calling her outside. It was Rosalie's voice: "Madame Jeanne, Madame Jeanne, they are waiting breakfast for you." She went out in a dream and understood nothing of what they were saying to her. She ate what they gave her, heard them talking, but about what she knew not, let them kiss her on the cheeks and kissed them in return and then got into the carriage.

When they lost sight of the château behind the tall trees she felt a wrench at her heart, convinced that she had bid a last farewell to her old home.

When they reached Batteville and just as she was going into her new house, she saw something white under the door. It was a letter that the postman had slipped under the door while she was out. She recognized Paul's writing and opened it, trembling with anxiety. He wrote:

"My Dear Mother: I have not written sooner because I did not wish you to make a useless journey to Paris when it was my place to go and see you. I am just now in great sorrow and in great straits. My wife is dying after giving birth to a little girl three days ago, and I have not one sou. I do not know what to do with the child, whom my janitor's wife is bringing up on the bottle as well as she can, but I fear I shall lose her. Could you not take charge of it? I absolutely do not know what to do, and I have no money to put her out to nurse. Answer by return mail.

"Your son, who loves you,

"Paul."

Jeanne sank into a chair and had scarcely strength to call Rosalie. When the maid came into the room they read the letter over together and then remained silent for some time, face to face.

At last Rosalie said: "I am going to fetch the little one, madame. We cannot leave it like that."

"Go, my girl," replied Jeanne.

Then they were silent until the maid said: "Put on your hat, madame, and we will go to Goderville to see the lawyer. If she is going to die, the other one, M. Paul must marry her for the little one's sake later on."

Jeanne, without replying, put on her hat. A deep, inexpressible joy filled her heart, a treacherous joy that she sought to hide at any cost, one of those things of which one is ashamed, although cherishing it in one's soul — her son's sweetheart was going to die.

The lawyer gave the servant minute instructions, making her repeat them several times. Then, sure that she could make no mistake, she said: "Do not be afraid. I will see to it now."

She set out for Paris that very night.

Jeanne passed two days in such a troubled condition that she could not think. The third morning she received merely a line from Rosalie saying she would be back on the evening train. That was all.

About three o'clock she drove in a neighbor's light wagon to the station at Beuzeville to meet Rosalie.

She stood on the platform, looking at the railroad track as it disappeared on the horizon. She looked at the clock. Ten minutes still — five minutes still — two minutes more. Then the hour of the train's arrival, but it was not in sight. Presently, however, she saw a cloud of white smoke and gradually it drew up in the station. She looked anxiously and at last perceived Rosalie carrying a sort of white bundle in her arms.

She wanted to go over toward her, but her knees seemed to grow weak and she was afraid of falling.

But the maid had seen her and came forward with her usual calm manner and said: "How do you do, madame? Here I am back again, but not without some difficulty."

"Well?" faltered Jeanne.

"Well," answered Rosalie, "she died last night. They were married and here is the little girl." And she held out the child, who could not be seen under her wraps.

Jeanne took it mechanically and they left the station and got into the carriage.

"M. Paul will come as soon as the funeral is over — to-morrow about this time, I believe," resumed Rosalie.

Jeanne murmured "Paul" and then was silent.

The wagon drove along rapidly, the peasant clacking his tongue to urge on the horse. Jeanne looked straight ahead of her into the clear sky through which the swallows darted in curves. Suddenly she felt a gentle warmth striking through to her skin; it was the warmth of the little being who was asleep on her lap.

Then she was overcome with an intense emotion, and uncovering gently the face of the sleeping infant, she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

But Rosalie, happy though grumpy, stopped her; "Come, come, Madame Jeanne, stop that; you will make it cry."

And then she added, probably in answer to her own thoughts: “Life, after all, is not as good or as bad as we believe it to be.”

BEL-AMI

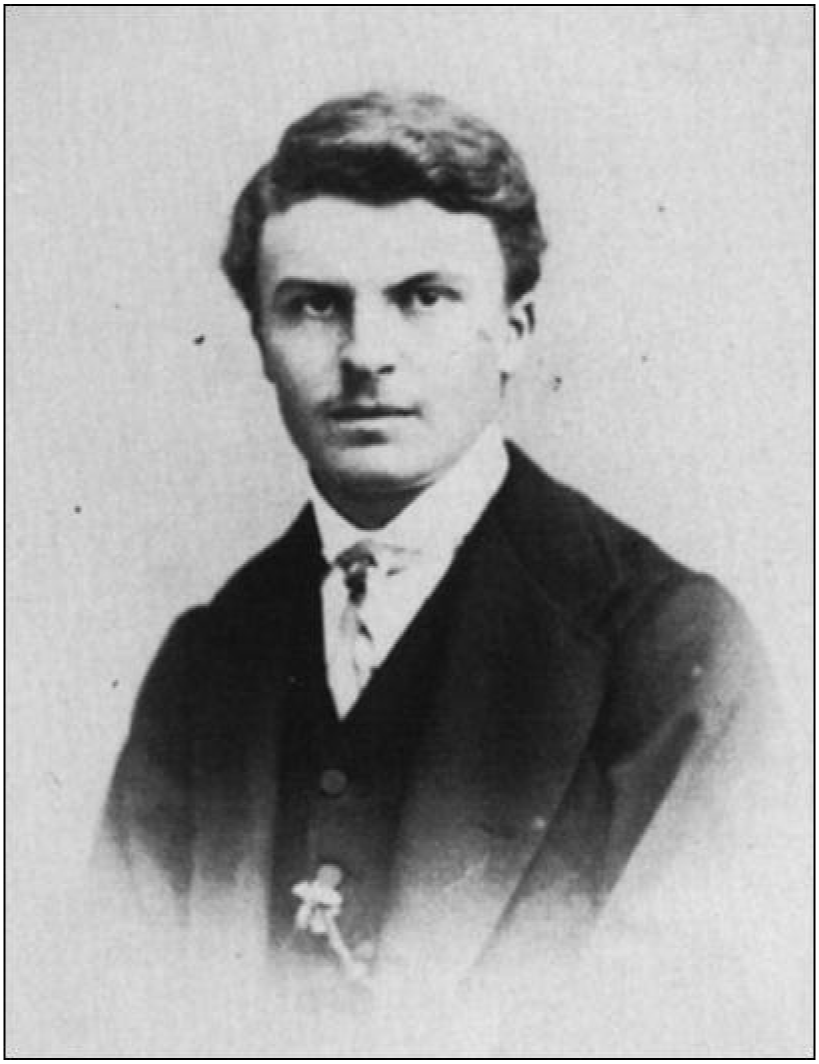
OR, THE HISTORY OF A SCOUNDREL

Translated by A. E. Henderson

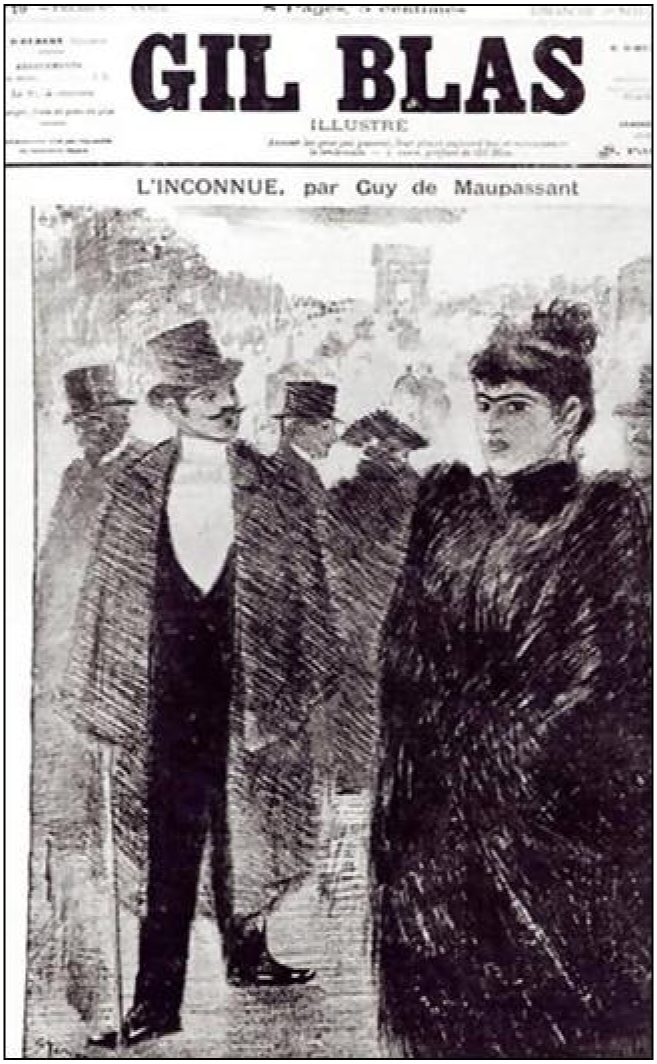
Published in 1885 in serial form in *Gil Blas*, Maupassant's second novel chronicles journalist Georges Duroy's corrupt rise to power from a poor ex-NCO to becoming one of the most successful men in Paris, which he achieves through manipulating a series of wealthy mistresses.

The novel is set in Paris in the upper-middle class environment of the leading journalists of the newspaper *La Vie française* and their friends. Georges Duroy, who has spent three years in military service in Algeria, encounters his former comrade Forestier, which enables him to start a career as a journalist. From a reporter of minor events and soft news, he gradually climbs his way up to chief editor. Duroy initially owes his success to Forestier's wife, Madeleine, who helps him write his first articles and when he later starts writing lead articles, she adds an edge and poignancy to them. At the same time, she uses her connections among leading politicians to provide him with behind the scenes information which allows him to become actively involved in politics. In time, Duroy finds himself climbing the upper echelons of French society, exposing scandals, while becoming immersed in his own nefarious intrigues in the process.

It is the story of a ruthlessly ambitious young man's rise to the top in *fin-de-siecle* Paris, set against the background of the politics of the French colonisation of North Africa. The novel explores the dynamics of an urban society unnervingly close to our own, providing a cutting satire of the corruptness of contemporary journalism. *Bel-Ami* remains one of the finest French novels of its time, applauded for its unflinching realistic portrayal of contemporary Parisian life, and the novel is now recognised as being Maupassant's greatest achievement as a novelist.



Maupassant, as a young man

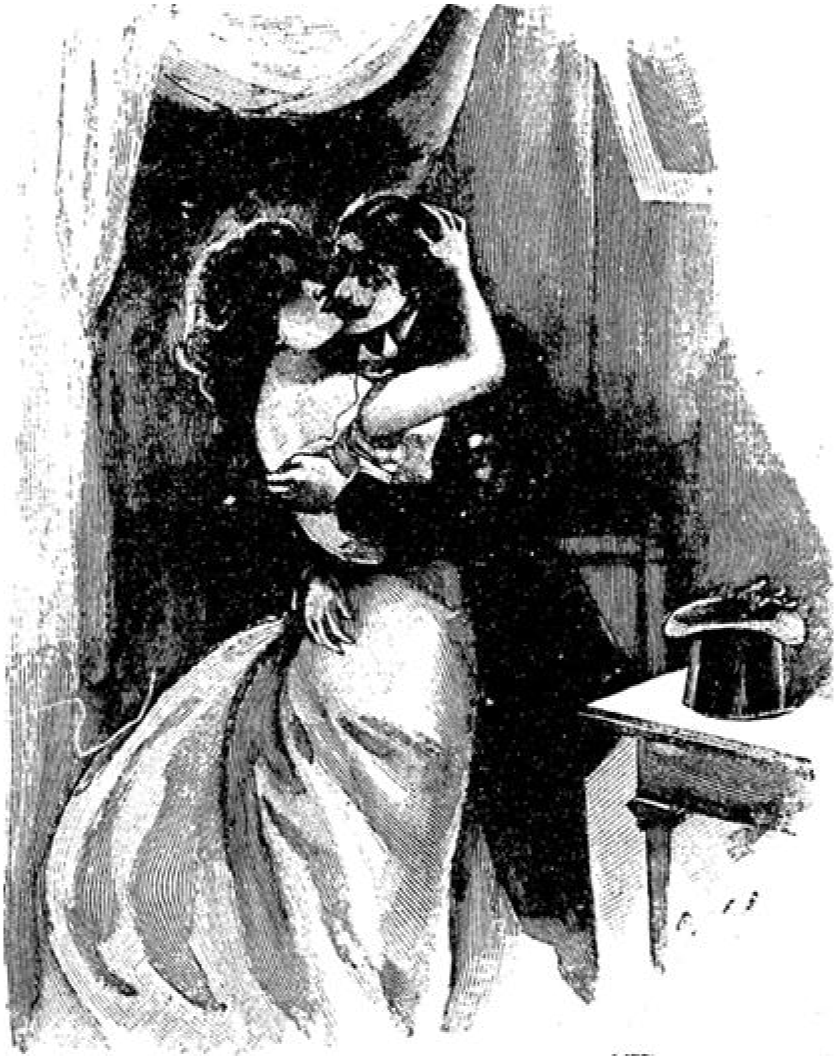


GIL BLAS

ILLUSTRÉ

L'INCONNUE, par Guy de Maupassant

How the novel first appeared in serial format



An original illustration for the novel

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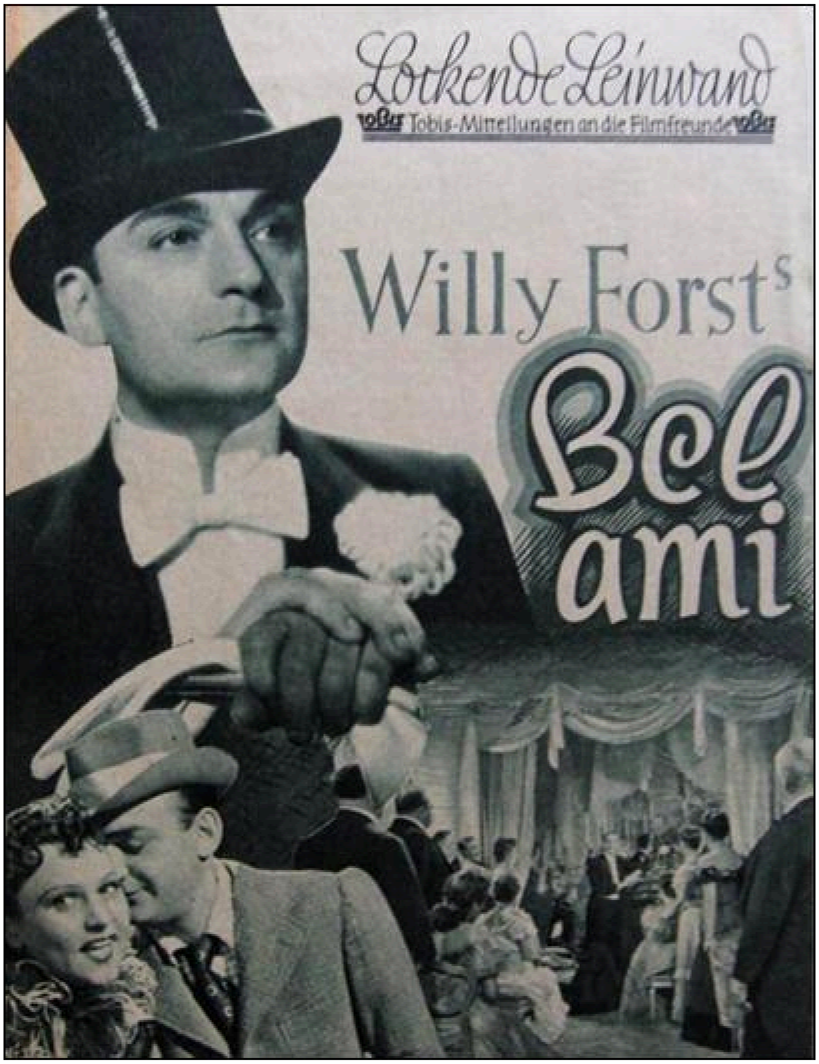
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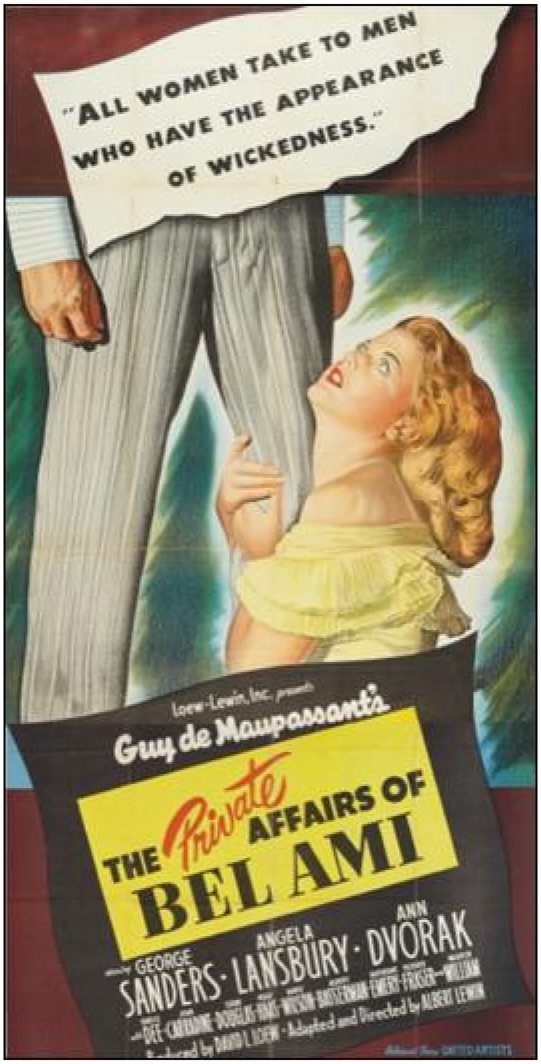
Tobis-Mitteilungen an die Filmfreunde
Willy Forsts
Bel ami

The 1939 German film adaptation of the novel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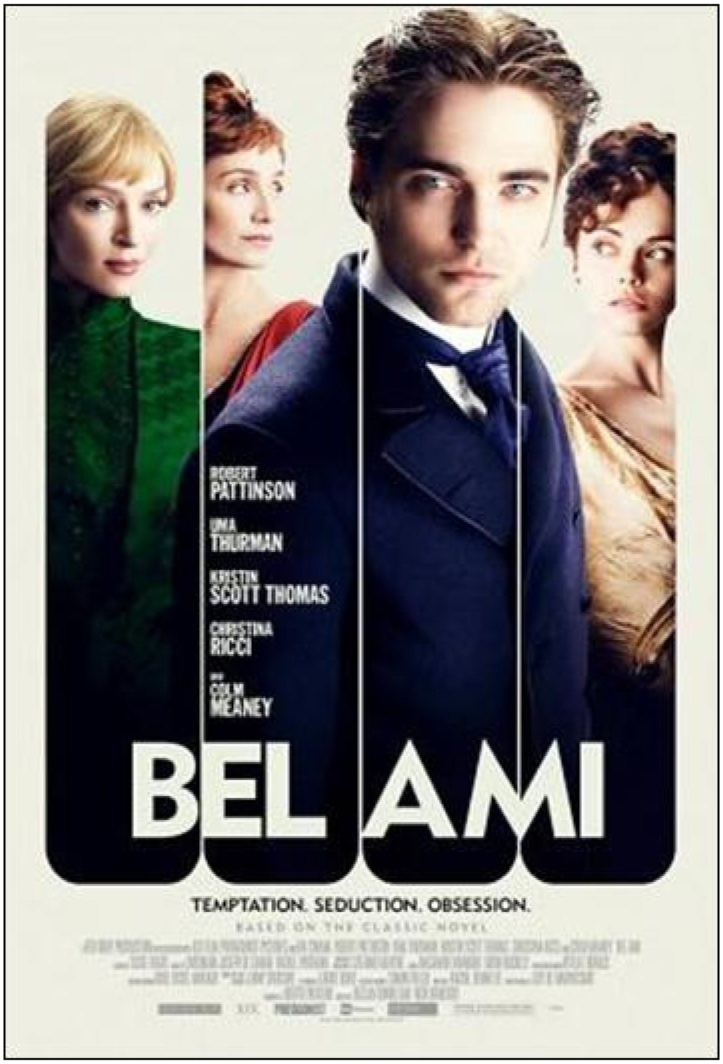
Produced by DAVID L. LOEW · Adapted and Directed by ALBERT LEWIN
UNITED ARTISTS

The Private Affairs of Bel Ami (1947), starring George Sanders, was the first film adaptation in English.

A scene from the 1947 film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COLM MEANEY
BEL AMI
TEMPTATION. SEDUCTION. OBSESSION.
BASED ON THE CLASSIC NOVEL

The 2012 film adaptation

I

When the cashier had given him the change out of his five francpiece, George Duroy left the restaurant.

As he had a good carriage, both naturally and from his military training, he drew himself up, twirled his moustache, and threw upon the lingering customers a rapid and sweeping glance — one of those glances which take in everything within their range like a casting net.

The women looked up at him in turn — three little work-girls, a middle-aged music mistress, disheveled, untidy, and wearing a bonnet always dusty and a dress always awry; and two shopkeepers' wives dining with their husbands — all regular customers at this slap-bang establishment.

When he was on the pavement outside, he stood still for a moment, asking himself what he should do. It was the 28th of June, and he had just three francs forty centimes in his pocket to carry him to the end of the month. This meant the option of two dinners without lunch or two lunches without dinner. He reflected that as the earlier repasts cost twenty sous apiece, and the latter thirty, he would, if he were content with the lunches, be one franc twenty centimes to the good, which would further represent two snacks of bread and sausage and two bocks of beer on the boulevards. This latter item was his greatest extravagance and his chief pleasure of a night; and he began to descend the Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette.

He walked as in the days when he had worn a hussar uniform, his chest thrown out and his legs slightly apart, as if he had just left the saddle, pushing his way through the crowded street, and shouldering folk to avoid having to step aside. He wore his somewhat shabby hat on one side, and brought his heels smartly down on the pavement. He seemed ever ready to defy somebody or something, the passers-by, the houses, the whole city, retaining all the swagger of a dashing cavalry-man in civil life.

Although wearing a sixty-franc suit, he was not devoid of a certain somewhat loud elegance. Tall, well-built, fair, with a curly moustache twisted up at the ends, bright blue eyes with small pupils, and reddish-brown hair curling naturally and parted in the middle, he bore a strong resemblance to the dare-devil of popular romances.

It was one of those summer evenings on which air seems to be lacking in Paris. The city, hot as an oven, seemed to swelter in the stifling night. The sewers breathed out their poisonous breath through their granite mouths, and the underground kitchens gave forth to the street through their windows the stench of dishwater and stale sauces.

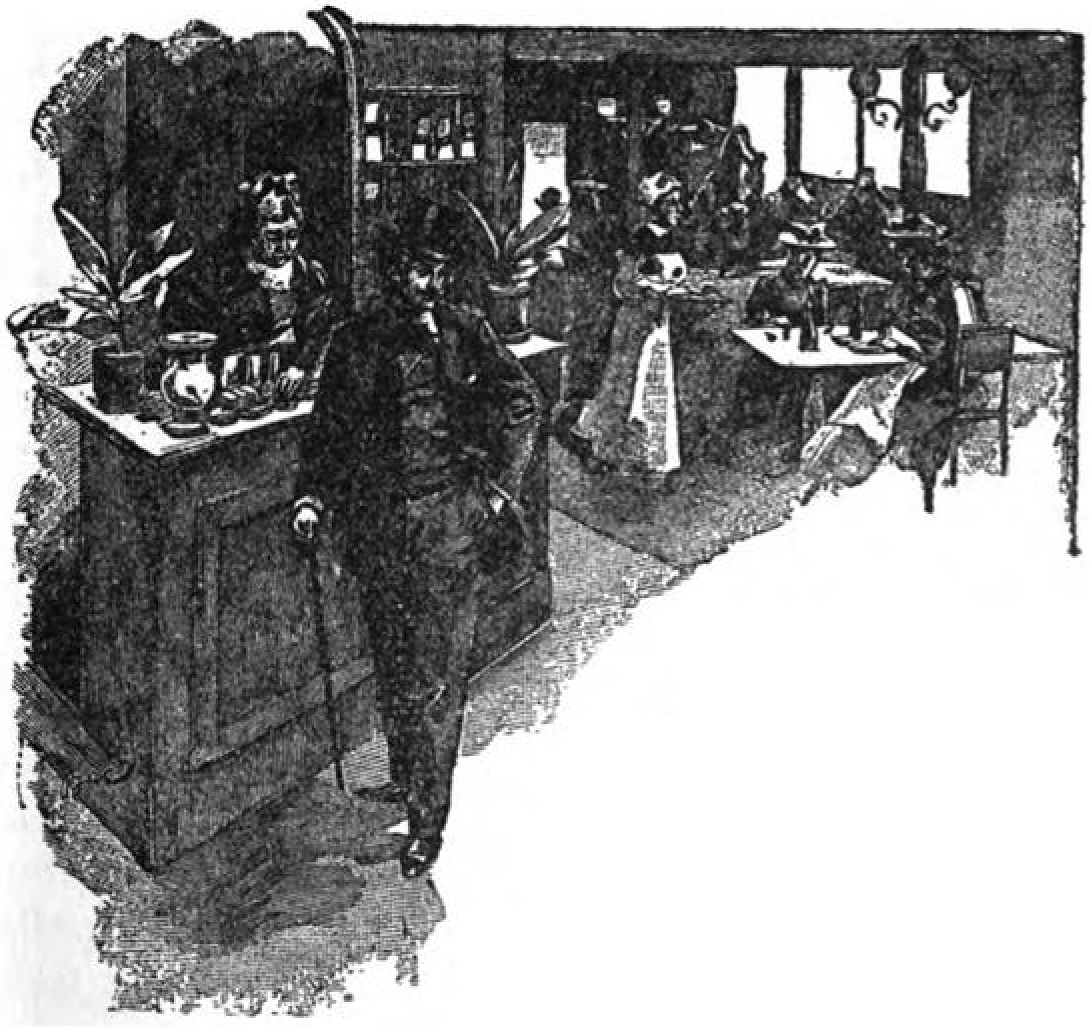
The doorkeepers in their shirtsleeves sat astride straw-bottomed chairs within the carriage entrances to the houses, smoking their pipes, and the pedestrians walked with flagging steps, head bare, and hat in hand.

When George Duroy reached the boulevards he paused again, undecided as to what he should do. He now thought of going on to the Champs Elysées and the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne to seek a little fresh air under the trees, but another wish also assailed him, a desire for a love affair.

What shape would it take? He did not know, but he had been awaiting it for three months, night and day. Occasionally, thanks to his good looks and gallant bearing, he gleaned a few crumbs of love here and there, but he was always hoping for something further and better.

With empty pockets and hot blood, he kindled at the contact of the prowlers who murmur at street corners: “Will you come home with me, dear?” but he dared not follow them, not being able to pay them, and, besides, he was awaiting something else, less venally vulgar kisses.

He liked, however, the localities in which women of the town swarm — their balls, their cafés, and their streets. He liked to rub shoulders with them, speak to them, chaff them, inhale their strong perfumes, feel himself near them. They were women at any rate, women made for love. He did not despise them with the innate contempt of a well-born man.



He turned towards the Madeleine, following the flux of the crowd which flowed along overcome by the heat. The chief cafés, filled with customers, were overflowing on to the pavement, and displayed their drinking public under the dazzling glare of their lit-up facias. In front of them, on little tables, square or round, were glasses holding fluids of every shade, red, yellow, green, brown, and inside the decanters glittered the large transparent cylinders of ice, serving to cool the bright, clear water. Duroy had slackened his pace, a longing to drink parched his throat.

A hot thirst, a summer evening's thirst assailed him, and he fancied the delightful sensation of cool drinks flowing across his palate. But if he only drank two bocks of beer in the evening, farewell to the slender supper of the morrow, and he was only too well acquainted with the hours of short commons at the end of the month.

He said to himself: “I must hold out till ten o’clock, and then I’ll have my bock at the American café. Confound it, how thirsty I am though.” And he scanned the men seated at the tables drinking, all the people who could quench their thirst as much as they pleased. He went on, passing in front of the cafés with a sprightly swaggering air, and guessing at a glance from their dress and bearing how much money each customer ought to have about him. Wrath against these men quietly sitting there rose up within him. If their pockets were rummaged, gold, silver, and coppers would be found in them. On an average each one must have at least two louis. There were certainly a hundred to a café, a hundred times two louis is four thousand francs. He murmured “the swine,” as he walked gracefully past them. If he could have had hold of one of them at a nice dark corner he would have twisted his neck without scruple, as he used to do the country-folk’s fowls on field-days.

And he recalled his two years in Africa and the way in which he used to pillage the Arabs when stationed at little out-posts in the south. A bright and cruel smile flitted across his lips at the recollection of an escapade which had cost the lives of three men of the Ouled-Alane tribe, and had furnished him and his comrades with a score of fowls, a couple of sheep, some gold, and food for laughter for six months.

The culprits had never been found, and, what is more, they had hardly been looked for, the Arab being looked upon as somewhat in the light of the natural prey of the soldier.

In Paris it was another thing. One could not plunder prettily, sword by side and revolver in hand, far from civil authority. He felt in his heart all the instincts of a sub-officer let loose in a conquered country. He certainly regretted his two years in the desert. What a pity he had not stopped there. But, then, he had hoped something better in returning home. And now — ah! yes, it was very nice now, was it not?

He clicked his tongue as if to verify the parched state of his palate.

The crowd swept past him slowly, and he kept thinking. “Set of hogs — all these idiots have money in their waistcoat pockets.” He pushed against people and softly whistled a lively tune. Gentlemen whom he thus elbowed turned grumbling, and women murmured: “What a brute!”

He passed the Vaudeville Theater and stopped before the American café, asking himself whether he should not take his bock, so greatly did thirst torture him. Before making up his mind, he glanced at the illuminated clock. It was a quarter past nine. He knew himself that as soon as the glassful of beer was before him he would gulp it down. What would he do then up to eleven o'clock?

He passed on. "I will go as far as the Madeleine," he said, "and walk back slowly."

As he reached the corner of the Palace de l'Opera, he passed a stout young fellow, whose face he vaguely recollected having seen somewhere. He began to follow him, turning over his recollections and repeating to himself half-aloud: "Where the deuce did I know that joker?"

He searched without being able to recollect, and then all at once, by a strange phenomenon of memory, the same man appeared to him thinner, younger, and clad in a hussar uniform. He exclaimed aloud: "What, Forestier!" and stepping out he tapped the other on the shoulder. The promenader turned round and looked at him, and then said: "What is it, sir?"

Duroy broke into a laugh. "Don't you know me?" said he.

"No."

"George Duroy, of the 6th Hussars."

Forestier held out his hands, exclaiming: "What, old fellow! How are you?"

"Very well, and you?"

"Oh, not very brilliant! Just fancy, I have a chest in brown paper now. I cough six months out of twelve, through a cold I caught at Bougival the year of my return to Paris, four years ago."

And Forestier, taking his old comrade's arm, spoke to him of his illness, related the consultations, opinions, and advice of the doctors, and the difficulty of following this advice in his position. He was told to spend the winter in the South, but how could he? He was married, and a journalist in a good position.

"I am political editor of the *Vie Francaise*. I write the proceedings in the Senate for the *Salut*, and from time to time literary criticisms for the *Planète*. That is so. I have made my way."

Duroy looked at him with surprise. He was greatly changed, matured. He had now the manner, bearing, and dress of a man in a good position and sure of himself, and the stomach of a man who dines well. Formerly he had been thin, slight, supple, heedless, brawling, noisy, and always ready for a spree. In three years Paris had turned him into someone quite different, stout and serious, and with some white hairs about his temples, though he was not more than twenty-seven.

Forestier asked: “Where are you going?”

Duroy answered: “Nowhere; I am just taking a stroll before turning in.”

“Well, will you come with me to the *Vie Francaise*, where I have some proofs to correct, and then we will take a bock together?”

“All right.”

They began to walk on, arm-in-arm, with that easy familiarity existing between school-fellows and men in the same regiment.

“What are you doing in Paris?” asked Forestier.

Duroy shrugged his shoulders. “Simply starving. As soon as I finished my term of service I came here — to make a fortune, or rather for the sake of living in Paris; and for six months I have been a clerk in the offices of the Northern Railway at fifteen hundred francs a year, nothing more.”

Forestier murmured: “Hang it, that’s not much!”

“I should think not. But how can I get out of it? I am alone; I don’t know anyone; I can get no one to recommend me. It is not goodwill that is lacking, but means.”

His comrade scanned him from head to foot, like a practical man examining a subject, and then said, in a tone of conviction: “You see, my boy, everything depends upon assurance here. A clever fellow can more easily become a minister than an under-secretary. One must obtrude one’s self on people; not ask things of them. But how the deuce is it that you could not get hold of anything better than a clerk’s berth on the Northern Railway?”

Duroy replied: “I looked about everywhere, but could not find anything. But I have something in view just now; I have been offered a riding-master’s place at Pellerin’s. There I shall get three thousand francs at the lowest.”

Forestier stopped short. “Don’t do that; it is stupid, when you ought to be earning ten thousand francs. You would nip your future in the bud. In your office, at any rate, you are hidden; no one knows you; you can emerge from it if you are strong enough to make your way. But once a riding-master, and it is all over. It is as if you were head-waiter at a place where all Paris goes to dine. When once you have given riding lessons to people in society or to their children, they will never be able to look upon you as an equal.”

He remained silent for a few moments, evidently reflecting, and then asked:

"Have you a bachelor's degree?"

"No; I failed to pass twice."

"That is no matter, as long as you studied for it. If anyone mentions Cicero or Tiberius, you know pretty well what they are talking about?"

"Yes; pretty well."

"Good; no one knows any more, with the exception of a score of idiots who have taken the trouble. It is not difficult to pass for being well informed; the great thing is not to be caught in some blunder. You can maneuver, avoid the difficulty, turn the obstacle, and floor others by means of a dictionary. Men are all as stupid as geese and ignorant as donkeys."

He spoke like a self-possessed blade who knows what life is, and smiled as he watched the crowd go by. But all at once he began to cough, and stopped again until the fit was over, adding, in a tone of discouragement: "Isn't it aggravating not to be able to get rid of this cough? And we are in the middle of summer. Oh! this winter I shall go and get cured at Mentone. Health before everything."

They halted on the Boulevard Poissonière before a large glass door, on the inner side of which an open newspaper was pasted. Three passers-by had stopped and were reading it.

Above the door, stretched in large letters of flame, outlined by gas jets, the inscription *La Vie Francaise*. The pedestrians passing into the light shed by these three dazzling words suddenly appeared as visible as in broad daylight, then disappeared again into darkness.

Forestier pushed the door open, saying, "Come in." Duroy entered, ascended an ornate yet dirty staircase, visible from the street, passed through an ante-room where two messengers bowed to his companion, and reached a kind of waiting-room, shabby and dusty, upholstered in dirty green Utrecht velvet, covered with spots and stains, and worn in places as if mice had been gnawing it.

"Sit down," said Forestier. "I will be back in five minutes."

And he disappeared through one of the three doors opening into the room.

A strange, special, indescribable odor, the odor of a newspaper office, floated in the air of the room. Duroy remained motionless, slightly intimidated, above all surprised. From time to time folk passed hurriedly before him, coming in at one door and going out at another before he had time to look at them.

They were now young lads, with an appearance of haste, holding in their hand a sheet of paper which fluttered from the hurry of their progress; now compositors, whose white blouses, spotted with ink, revealed a clean shirt collar and cloth trousers like those of men of fashion, and who carefully carried strips of printed paper, fresh proofs damp from the press. Sometimes a gentleman entered rather too elegantly attired, his waist too tightly pinched by his frock-coat, his leg too well set off by the cut of his trousers, his foot squeezed into a shoe too pointed at the toe, some fashionable reporter bringing in the echoes of the evening.

Others, too, arrived, serious, important-looking men, wearing tall hats with flat brims, as if this shape distinguished them from the rest of mankind.

Forestier reappeared holding the arm of a tall, thin fellow, between thirty and forty years of age, in evening dress, very dark, with his moustache ends stiffened in sharp points, and an insolent and self-satisfied bearing.

Forestier said to him: “Good night, dear master.”

The other shook hands with him, saying: “Good night, my dear fellow,” and went downstairs whistling, with his cane under his arm.

Duroy asked: “Who is that?”

“Jacques Rival, you know, the celebrated descriptive writer, the duellist. He has just been correcting his proofs. Garin, Montel, and he are the three best descriptive writers, for facts and points, we have in Paris. He gets thirty thousand francs a year here for two articles a week.”

As they were leaving they met a short, stout man, with long hair and untidy appearance, who was puffing as he came up the stairs.

Forestier bowed low to him. “Norbert de Varenne,” said he, “the poet; the author of ‘*Les Soleils Morts*’; another who gets long prices. Every tale he writes for us costs three hundred francs, and the longest do not run to two hundred lines. But let us turn into the Neapolitan *café*, I am beginning to choke with thirst.”

As soon as they were seated at a table in the *café*, Forestier called for two bocks, and drank off his own at a single draught, while Duroy sipped his beer in slow mouthfuls, tasting it and relishing it like something rare and precious.

His companion was silent, and seemed to be reflecting. Suddenly he exclaimed: “Why don’t you try journalism?”

The other looked at him in surprise, and then said: “But, you know, I have never written anything.”

“Bah! everyone must begin. I could give you a job to hunt up information for me — to make calls and inquiries. You would have to start with two hundred and fifty francs a month and your cab hire. Shall I speak to the manager about it?”

“Certainly!”

“Very well, then, come and dine with me to-morrow. I shall only have five or six people — the governor, Monsieur Walter and his wife, Jacques Rival, and Norbert de Varenne, whom you have just seen, and a lady, a friend of my wife. Is it settled?”

Duroy hesitated, blushing and perplexed. At length he murmured: “You see, I have no clothes.”

Forestier was astounded. “You have no dress clothes? Hang it all, they are indispensable, though. In Paris one would be better off without a bed than without a dress suit.”

Then, suddenly feeling in his waistcoat pocket, he drew out some gold, took two louis, placed them in front of his old comrade, and said in a cordial and familiar tone: “You will pay me back when you can. Hire or arrange to pay by installments for the clothes you want, whichever you like, but come and dine with me to-morrow, half-past seven, number seventeen Rue Fontaine.”

Duroy, confused, picked up the money, stammering: “You are too good; I am very much obliged to you; you may be sure I shall not forget.”

The other interrupted him. “All right. Another bock, eh? Waiter, two bocks.”

Then, when they had drunk them, the journalist said: “Will you stroll about a bit for an hour?”

“Certainly.”

And they set out again in the direction of the Madeleine.

“What shall we, do?” said Forestier. “They say that in Paris a lounger can always find something to amuse him, but it is not true. I, when I want to lounge about of an evening, never know where to go. A drive round the Bois de Boulogne is only amusing with a woman, and one has not always one to hand; the *café* concerts may please my chemist and his wife, but not me. Then what is there to do? Nothing. There ought to be a summer garden like the Parc Monceau, open at night, where one would hear very good music while sipping cool drinks under the trees. It should not be a pleasure resort, but a lounging place, with a high price for entrance in order to attract the fine ladies. One ought to be able to stroll along well-graveled walks lit up by electric light, and to sit down when one wished to hear the music near or at a distance. We had about the sort of thing formerly at Musard's, but with a smack of the low-class dancing-room, and too much dance music, not enough space, not enough shade, not enough gloom. It would want a very fine garden and a very extensive one. It would be delightful. Where shall we go?"

Duroy, rather perplexed, did not know what to say; at length he made up his mind. "I have never been in the Folies Bergère. I should not mind taking a look round there," he said.

"The Folies Bergère," exclaimed his companion, "the deuce; we shall roast there as in an oven. But, very well, then, it is always funny there."

And they turned on their heels to make their way to the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

The lit-up front of the establishment threw a bright light into the four streets which met in front of it. A string of cabs were waiting for the close of the performance.

Forestier was walking in when Duroy checked him.

"You are passing the pay-box," said he.

"I never pay," was the reply, in a tone of importance.

When he approached the check-takers they bowed, and one of them held out his hand. The journalist asked: "Have you a good box?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Forestier."

He took the ticket held out to him, pushed the padded door with its leather borders, and they found themselves in the auditorium.

Tobacco smoke slightly veiled like a faint mist the stage and the further side of the theater. Rising incessantly in thin white spirals from the cigars and pipes, this light fog ascended to the ceiling, and there, accumulating, formed under the dome above the crowded gallery a cloudy sky.

In the broad corridor leading to the circular promenade a group of women were awaiting new-comers in front of one of the bars, at which sat enthroned three painted and faded vendors of love and liquor.

The tall mirrors behind them reflected their backs and the faces of passers-by.

Forestier pushed his way through the groups, advancing quickly with the air of a man entitled to consideration.

He went up to a box-keeper. “Box seventeen,” said he.

“This way, sir.”

And they were shut up in a little open box draped with red, and holding four chairs of the same color, so near to one another that one could scarcely slip between them. The two friends sat down. To the right, as to the left, following a long curved line, the two ends of which joined the proscenium, a row of similar cribs held people seated in like fashion, with only their heads and chests visible.

On the stage, three young fellows in fleshings, one tall, one of middle size, and one small, were executing feats in turn upon a trapeze.

The tall one first advanced with short, quick steps, smiling and waving his hand as though wafting a kiss.

The muscles of his arms and legs stood out under his tights. He expanded his chest to take off the effect of his too prominent stomach, and his face resembled that of a barber’s block, for a careful parting divided his locks equally on the center of the skull. He gained the trapeze by a graceful bound, and, hanging by the hands, whirled round it like a wheel at full speed, or, with stiff arms and straightened body, held himself out horizontally in space.

Then he jumped down, saluted the audience again with a smile amidst the applause of the stalls, and went and leaned against the scenery, showing off the muscles of his legs at every step.

The second, shorter and more squarely built, advanced in turn, and went through the same performance, which the third also recommenced amidst most marked expressions of approval from the public.

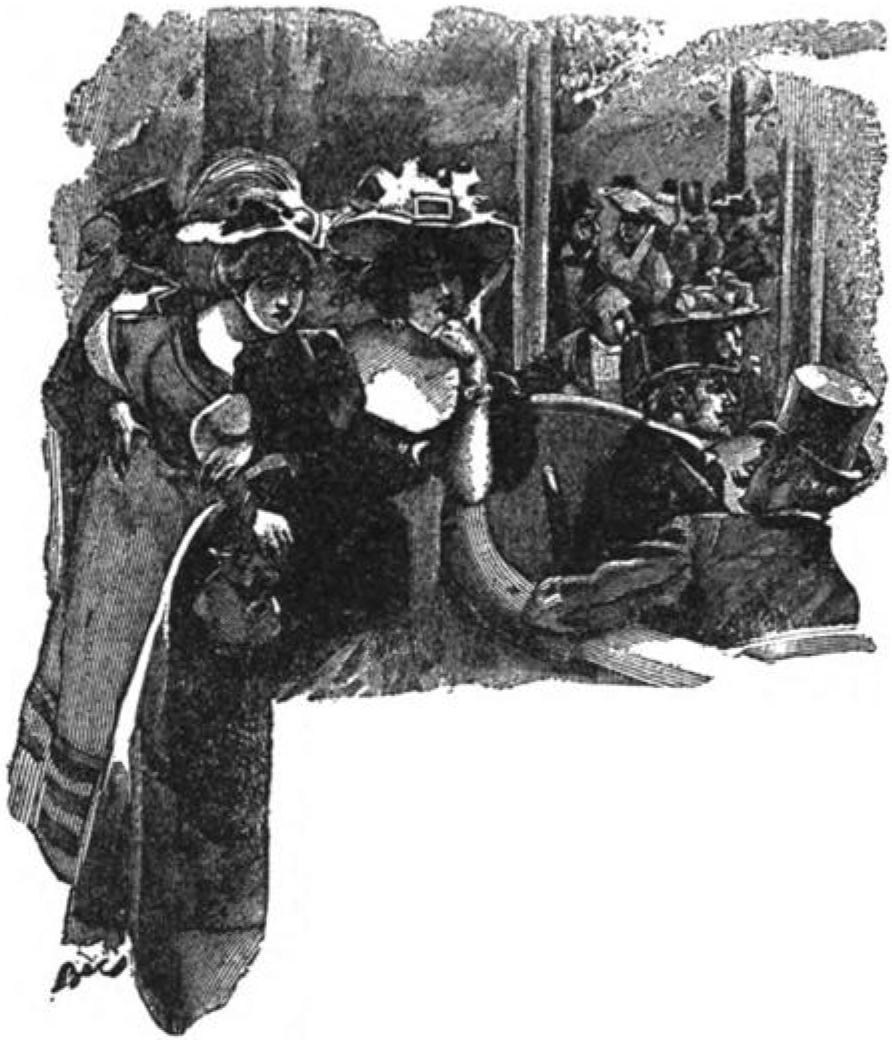
But Duroy scarcely noticed the performance, and, with head averted, kept his eyes on the promenade behind him, full of men and prostitutes.

Said Forestier to him: “Look at the stalls; nothing but middle-class folk with their wives and children, good noodlepates who come to see the show. In the boxes, men about town, some artistes, some girls, good second-raters; and behind us, the strangest mixture in Paris. Who are these men? Watch them. There is something of everything, of every profession, and every caste; but blackguardism predominates. There are clerks of all kinds —

bankers' clerks, government clerks, shopmen, reporters, ponces, officers in plain clothes, swells in evening dress, who have dined out, and have dropped in here on their way from the Opera to the Théatre des Italiens; and then again, too, quite a crowd of suspicious folk who defy analysis. As to the women, only one type, the girl who sups at the American *café*, the girl at one or two louis who looks out for foreigners at five louis, and lets her regular customers know when she is disengaged. We have known them for the last ten years; we see them every evening all the year round in the same places, except when they are making a hygienic sojourn at Saint Lazare or at Lourcine."

Duroy no longer heard him. One of these women was leaning against their box and looking at him. She was a stout brunette, her skin whitened with paint, her black eyes lengthened at the corners with pencil and shaded by enormous and artificial eyebrows. Her too exuberant bosom stretched the dark silk of her dress almost to bursting; and her painted lips, red as a fresh wound, gave her an aspect bestial, ardent, unnatural, but which, nevertheless, aroused desire.

She beckoned with her head one of the friends who was passing, a blonde with red hair, and stout, like herself, and said to her, in a voice loud enough to be heard: "There is a pretty fellow; if he would like to have me for ten louis I should not say no."



Forestier turned and tapped Duroy on the knee, with a smile. "That is meant for you; you are a success, my dear fellow. I congratulate you."

The ex-sub-officer blushed, and mechanically fingered the two pieces of gold in his waistcoat pocket.

The curtain had dropped, and the orchestra was now playing a waltz.

Duroy said: "Suppose we take a turn round the promenade."

"Just as you like."

They left their box, and were at once swept away by the throng of promenaders. Pushed, pressed, squeezed, shaken, they went on, having before their eyes a crowd of hats. The girls, in pairs, passed amidst this crowd of men, traversing it with facility, gliding between elbows, chests, and backs as if quite at home, perfectly at their ease, like fish in water, amidst this masculine flood.

Duroy, charmed, let himself be swept along, drinking in with intoxication the air vitiated by tobacco, the odor of humanity, and the perfumes of the hussies. But Forestier sweated, puffed, and coughed.

"Let us go into the garden," said he.

And turning to the left, they entered a kind of covered garden, cooled by two large and ugly fountains. Men and women were drinking at zinc tables placed beneath evergreen trees growing in boxes.

"Another bock, eh?" said Forestier.

"Willingly."

They sat down and watched the passing throng.

From time to time a woman would stop and ask, with stereotyped smile: "Are you going to stand me anything?"

And as Forestier answered: "A glass of water from the fountain," she would turn away, muttering: "Go on, you duffer."

But the stout brunette, who had been leaning, just before, against the box occupied by the two comrades, reappeared, walking proudly arm-in-arm with the stout blonde. They were really a fine pair of women, well matched.

She smiled on perceiving Duroy, as though their eyes had already told secrets, and, taking a chair, sat down quietly in face of him, and making her friend sit down, too, gave the order in a clear voice: "Waiter, two grenadines!"

Forestier, rather surprised, said: "You make yourself at home."

She replied: "It is your friend that captivates me. He is really a pretty fellow. I believe that I could make a fool of myself for his sake."

Duroy, intimidated, could find nothing to say. He twisted his curly moustache, smiling in a silly fashion. The waiter brought the drinks, which the women drank off at a draught; then they rose, and the brunette, with a friendly nod of the head, and a tap on the arm with her fan, said to Duroy: "Thanks, dear, you are not very talkative."

And they went off swaying their trains.

Forestier laughed. "I say, old fellow, you are very successful with the women. You must look after it. It may lead to something." He was silent for a moment, and then continued in the dreamy tone of men who think aloud: "It is through them, too, that one gets on quickest."

And as Duroy still smiled without replying, he asked: "Are you going to stop any longer? I have had enough of it. I am going home."

The other murmured: "Yes, I shall stay a little longer. It is not late."

Forestier rose. “Well, good-night, then. Till to-morrow. Don’t forget. Seventeen Rue Fontaine, at half-past seven.”

“That is settled. Till to-morrow. Thanks.”

They shook hands, and the journalist walked away.

As soon as he had disappeared Duroy felt himself free, and again he joyfully felt the two pieces of gold in his pocket; then rising, he began to traverse the crowd, which he followed with his eyes.

He soon caught sight of the two women, the blonde and the brunette, who were still making their way, with their proud bearing of beggars, through the throng of men.

He went straight up to them, and when he was quite close he no longer dared to do anything.

The brunette said: “Have you found your tongue again?”

He stammered “By Jove!” without being able to say anything else.

The three stood together, checking the movement, the current of which swept round them.

All at once she asked: “Will you come home with me?”

And he, quivering with desire, answered roughly: “Yes, but I have only a louis in my pocket.”

She smiled indifferently. “It is all the same to me,”’ and took his arm in token of possession.

As they went out he thought that with the other louis he could easily hire a suit of dress clothes for the next evening.

II

"Monsieur Forestier, if you please?"

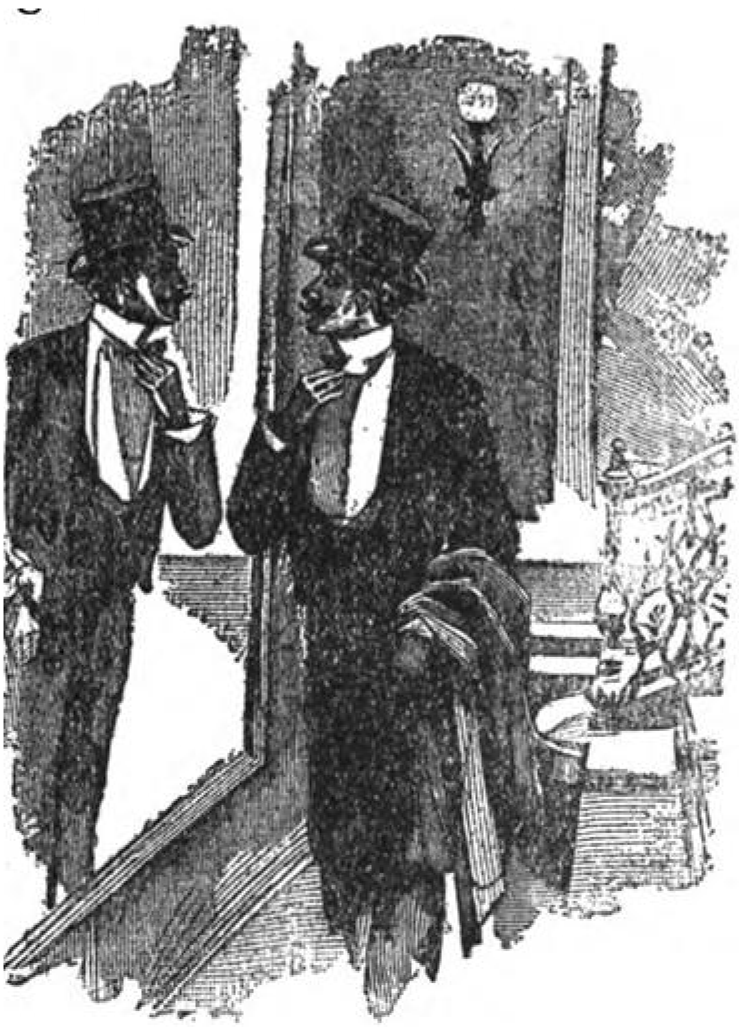
"Third floor, the door on the left," the concierge had replied, in a voice the amiable tone of which betokened a certain consideration for the tenant, and George Duroy ascended the stairs.

He felt somewhat abashed, awkward, and ill at ease. He was wearing a dress suit for the first time in his life, and was uneasy about the general effect of his toilet. He felt it was altogether defective, from his boots, which were not of patent leather, though neat, for he was naturally smart about his foot-gear, to his shirt, which he had bought that very morning for four franc fifty centimes at the Masgasin du Louvre, and the limp front of which was already rumpled. His everyday shirts were all more or less damaged, so that he had not been able to make use of even the least worn of them.

His trousers, rather too loose, set off his leg badly, seeming to flap about the calf with that creased appearance which second-hand clothes present. The coat alone did not look bad, being by chance almost a perfect fit.

He was slowly ascending the stairs with beating heart and anxious mind, tortured above all by the fear of appearing ridiculous, when suddenly he saw in front of him a gentleman in full dress looking at him. They were so close to one another that Duroy took a step back and then remained stupefied; it was himself, reflected by a tall mirror on the first-floor landing. A thrill of pleasure shot through him to find himself so much more presentable than he had imagined.

Only having a small shaving-glass in his room, he had not been able to see himself all at once, and as he had only an imperfect glimpse of the various items of his improvised toilet, he had mentally exaggerated its imperfections, and harped to himself on the idea of appearing grotesque.



But on suddenly coming upon his reflection in the mirror, he had not even recognized himself; he had taken himself for someone else, for a gentleman whom at the first glance he had thought very well dressed and fashionable looking. And now, looking at himself carefully, he recognized that really the general effect was satisfactory.

He studied himself as actors do when learning their parts. He smiled, held out his hand, made gestures, expressed sentiments of astonishment, pleasure, and approbation, and essayed smiles and glances, with a view of displaying his gallantry towards the ladies, and making them understand that they were admired and desired.

A door opened somewhere. He was afraid of being caught, and hurried upstairs, filled with the fear of having been seen grimacing thus by one of his friend's guests.

On reaching the second story he noticed another mirror, and slackened his pace to view himself in it as he went by. His bearing seemed to him really graceful. He walked well. And now he was filled with an unbounded confidence in himself. Certainly he must be successful with such an appearance, his wish to succeed, his native resolution, and his independence of mind. He wanted to run, to jump, as he ascended the last flight of stairs. He stopped in front of the third mirror, twirled his moustache as he had a trick of doing, took off his hat to run his fingers through his hair, and muttered half-aloud as he often did: “What a capital notion.” Then raising his hand to the bell handle, he rang.

The door opened almost at once, and he found himself face to face with a man-servant out of livery, serious, clean-shaven, and so perfect in his get-up that Duroy became uneasy again without understanding the reason of his vague emotion, due, perhaps, to an unwitting comparison of the cut of their respective garments. The man-servant, who had patent-leather shoes, asked, as he took the overcoat which Duroy had carried on his arm, to avoid exposing the stains on it: “Whom shall I announce?”

And he announced the name through a door with a looped-back draping leading into a drawing-room.

But Duroy, suddenly losing his assurance, felt himself breathless and paralyzed by terror. He was about to take his first step in the world he had looked forward to and longed for. He advanced, nevertheless. A fair young woman, quite alone, was standing awaiting him in a large room, well lit up and full of plants as a greenhouse.

He stopped short, quite disconcerted. Who was this lady who was smiling at him? Then he remembered that Forestier was married, and the thought that this pretty and elegant blonde must be his friend’s wife completed his alarm.

He stammered: “Madame, I am— “

She held out her hand, saying: “I know, sir; Charles has told me of your meeting last evening, and I am very pleased that he had the idea of asking you to dine with us to-day.”

He blushed up to his ears, not knowing what to say, and felt himself examined from head to foot, reckoned up, and judged.

He longed to excuse himself, to invent some pretext for explaining the deficiencies of his toilet, but he could not think of one, and did not dare touch on this difficult subject.

He sat down on an armchair she pointed out to him, and as he felt the soft and springy velvet-covered seat yield beneath his weight, as he felt himself, as it were, supported and clasped by the padded back and arms, it seemed to him that he was entering upon a new and enchanting life, that he was taking possession of something delightful, that he was becoming somebody, that he was saved, and he looked at Madame Forestier, whose eyes had not quitted him.

She was attired in a dress of pale blue cashmere, which set off the outline of her slender waist and full bust. Her arms and neck issued from a cloud of white lace, with which the bodice and short sleeves were trimmed, and her fair hair, dressed high, left a fringe of tiny curls at the nape of her neck.

Duroy recovered his assurance beneath her glance, which reminded him, without his knowing why, of that of the girl met overnight at the Folies Bergére. She had gray eyes, of a bluish gray, which imparted to them a strange expression; a thin nose, full lips, a rather fleshy chin, and irregular but inviting features, full of archness and charm. It was one of those faces, every trait of which reveals a special grace, and seems to have its meaning — every movement to say or to hide something. After a brief silence she asked: “Have you been long in Paris?”

He replied slowly, recovering his self-possession: “A few months only, Madame. I have a berth in one of the railway companies, but Forestier holds out the hope that I may, thanks to him, enter journalism.”

She smiled more plainly and kindly, and murmured, lowering her voice: “Yes, I know.”

The bell had rung again. The servant announced “Madame de Marelle.”

This was a little brunette, who entered briskly, and seemed to be outlined — modeled, as it were — from head to foot in a dark dress made quite plainly. A red rose placed in her black hair caught the eye at once, and seemed to stamp her physiognomy, accentuate her character, and strike the sharp and lively note needed.

A little girl in short frocks followed her.

Madame Forestier darted forward, exclaiming: “Good evening, Clotilde.”

“Good evening, Madeleine.” They kissed one another, and then the child offered her forehead, with the assurance of a grown-up person, saying: “Good evening, cousin.”

Madame Forestier kissed her, and then introduced them, saying: “Monsieur George Duroy, an old friend of Charles; Madame de Marelle, my friend, and in some degree my relation.” She added: “You know we have no ceremonious affectation here. You quite understand, eh?”

The young man bowed.

The door opened again, and a short, stout gentleman appeared, having on his arm a tall, handsome woman, much younger than himself, and of distinguished appearance and grave bearing. They were Monsieur Walter, a Jew from the South of France, deputy, financier, capitalist, and manager of the *Vie Francaise*, and his wife, the daughter of Monsieur Basile-Ravalau, the banker.

Then came, one immediately after the other, Jacques Rival, very elegantly got up, and Norbert de Varenne, whose coat collar shone somewhat from the friction of the long locks falling on his shoulders and scattering over them a few specks of white scurf. His badly-tied cravat looked as if it had already done duty. He advanced with the air and graces of an old beau, and taking Madame Forestier's hand, printed a kiss on her wrist. As he bent forward his long hair spread like water over her bare arm.

Forestier entered in his turn, offering excuses for being late. He had been detained at the office of the paper by the Morel affair. Monsieur Morel, a Radical deputy, had just addressed a question to the Ministry respecting a vote of credit for the colonization of Algeria.

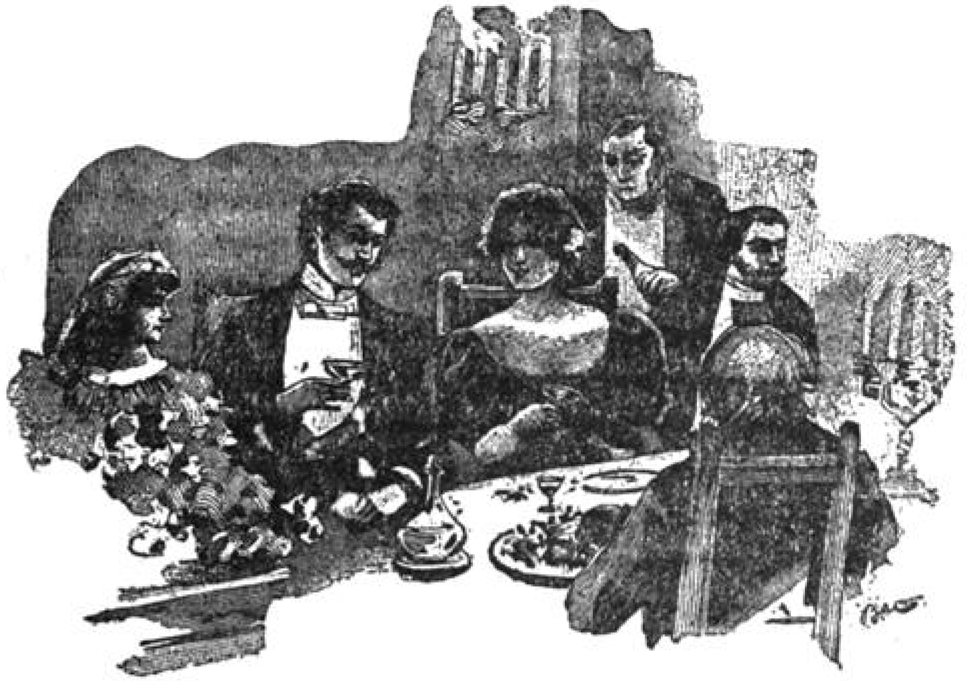
The servant announced: "Dinner is served, Madame," and they passed into the dining-room.

Duroy found himself seated between Madame de Marelle and her daughter. He again felt ill at ease, being afraid of making some mistake in the conventional handling of forks, spoons, and glasses. There were four of these, one of a faint blue tint. What could be meant to be drunk out of that?

Nothing was said while the soup was being consumed, and then Norbert de Varenne asked: "Have you read the Gauthier case? What a funny business it is."

After a discussion on this case of adultery, complicated with blackmailing, followed. They did not speak of it as the events recorded in newspapers are spoken of in private families, but as a disease is spoken of among doctors, or vegetables among market gardeners. They were neither shocked nor astonished at the facts, but sought out their hidden and secret motives with professional curiosity, and an utter indifference for the crime itself. They sought to clearly explain the origin of certain acts, to determine all the cerebral phenomena which had given birth to the drama, the scientific result due to an especial condition of mind. The women, too, were interested in this investigation. And other recent events were examined, commented upon, turned so as to show every side of them, and weighed correctly, with the practical glance, and from the especial standpoint of dealers in news, and vendors of the drama of life at so much a line, just as articles destined for sale are examined, turned over, and weighed by tradesmen.

Then it was a question of a duel, and Jacques Rival spoke. This was his business; no one else could handle it.



Duroy dared not put in a word. He glanced from time to time at his neighbor, whose full bosom captivated him. A diamond, suspended by a thread of gold, dangled from her ear like a drop of water that had rolled down it. From time to time she made an observation which always brought a smile to her hearers' lips. She had a quaint, pleasant wit, that of an experienced tomboy who views things with indifference and judges them with frivolous and benevolent skepticism.

Duroy sought in vain for some compliment to pay her, and, not finding one, occupied himself with her daughter, filling her glass, holding her plate, and helping her. The child, graver than her mother, thanked him in a serious tone and with a slight bow, saying: “You are very good, sir,” and listened to her elders with an air of reflection.

The dinner was very good, and everyone was enraptured. Monsieur Walter ate like an ogre, hardly spoke, and glanced obliquely under his glasses at the dishes offered to him. Norbert de Varenne kept him company, and from time to time let drops of gravy fall on his shirt front. Forestier, silent and serious, watched everything, exchanging glances of intelligence with his wife, like confederates engaged together on a difficult task which is going on swimmingly.

Faces grew red, and voices rose, as from time to time the man-servant murmured in the guests' ears: "Corton or Chateau-Laroze."

Duroy had found the Corton to his liking, and let his glass be filled every time. A delicious liveliness stole over him, a warm cheerfulness, that mounted from the stomach to the head, flowed through his limbs and penetrated him throughout. He felt himself wrapped in perfect comfort of life and thought, body and soul.

A longing to speak assailed him, to bring himself into notice, to be appreciated like these men, whose slightest words were relished.

But the conversation, which had been going on unchecked, linking ideas one to another, jumping from one topic to another at a chance word, a mere trifle, and skimming over a thousand matters, turned again on the great question put by Monsieur Morel in the Chamber respecting the colonization of Algeria.

Monsieur Walter, between two courses, made a few jests, for his wit was skeptical and broad. Forestier recited his next day's leader. Jacques Rival insisted on a military government with land grants to all officers after thirty years of colonial service.

"By this plan," he said, "you will create an energetic class of colonists, who will have already learned to love and understand the country, and will be acquainted with its language, and with all those grave local questions against which new-comers invariably run their heads."

Norbert de Varenne interrupted him with: "Yes; they will be acquainted with everything except agriculture. They will speak Arabic, but they will be ignorant how beet-root is planted out and wheat sown. They will be good at fencing, but very shaky as regards manures. On the contrary, this new land should be thrown entirely open to everyone. Intelligent men will achieve a position there; the others will go under. It is the social law."

A brief silence followed, and the listeners smiled at one another.

George Duroy opened his mouth, and said, feeling as much surprised at the sound of his own voice as if he had never heard himself speak: "What is most lacking there is good land. The really fertile estates cost as much as in

France, and are bought up as investments by rich Parisians. The real colonists, the poor fellows who leave home for lack of bread, are forced into the desert, where nothing will grow for want of water."

Everyone looked at him, and he felt himself blushing.

Monsieur Walter asked: "Do you know Algeria, sir?"

George replied: "Yes, sir; I was there nearly two years and a half, and I was quartered in all three provinces."

Suddenly unmindful of the Morel question, Norbert de Varenne interrogated him respecting a detail of manners and customs of which he had been informed by an officer. It was with respect to the Mzab, that strange little Arab republic sprung up in the midst of the Sahara, in the driest part of that burning region.

Duroy had twice visited the Mzab, and he narrated some of the customs of this singular country, where drops of water are valued as gold; where every inhabitant is bound to discharge all public duties; and where commercial honesty is carried further than among civilized nations.

He spoke with a certain raciness excited by the wine and the desire to please, and told regimental yarns, incidents of Arab life and military adventure. He even hit on some telling phrases to depict these bare and yellow lands, eternally laid waste by the devouring fire of the sun.

All the women had their eyes turned upon him, and Madame Walter said, in her deliberate tones: "You could make a charming series of articles out of your recollections."

Then Walter looked at the young fellow over the glasses of his spectacles, as was his custom when he wanted to see anyone's face distinctly. He looked at the dishes underneath them.

Forestier seized the opportunity. "My dear sir, I had already spoken to you about Monsieur George Duroy, asking you to let me have him for my assistant in gleaning political topics. Since Marambot left us, I have no one to send in quest of urgent and confidential information, and the paper suffers from it."

Daddy Walter became serious, and pushed his spectacles upon his forehead, in order to look Duroy well in the face. Then he said: "It is true that Monsieur Duroy has evidently an original turn of thought. If he will come and have a chat with us to-morrow at three o'clock, we will settle the matter." Then, after a short silence, turning right round towards George, he added: "But write us a little fancy series of articles on Algeria at once.

Relate your experiences, and mix up the colonization question with them as you did just now. They are facts, genuine facts, and I am sure they will greatly please our readers. But be quick. I must have the first article to-morrow or the day after, while the subject is being discussed in the Chamber, in order to catch the public."

Madame Walter added, with that serious grace which characterized everything she did, and which lent an air of favor to her words: "And you have a charming title, 'Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique.' Is it not so, Monsieur Norbert?"

The old poet, who had worn renown late in life, feared and hated new-comers. He replied dryly: "Yes, excellent, provided that the keynote be followed, for that is the great difficulty; the exact note, what in music is called the pitch."

Madame Forestier cast on Duroy a smiling and protective glance, the glance of a connoisseur, which seemed to say: "Yes, you will get on." Madame de Marelle had turned towards him several times, and the diamond in her ear quivered incessantly as though the drop of water was about to fall.

The little girl remained quiet and serious, her head bent over her plate.

But the servant passed round the table, filling the blue glasses with Johannisberg, and Forestier proposed a toast, drinking with a bow to Monsieur Walter: "Prosperity to the *Vie Francaise*."

Everyone bowed towards the proprietor, who smiled, and Duroy, intoxicated with success, emptied his glass at a draught. He would have emptied a whole barrel after the same fashion; it seemed to him that he could have eaten a bullock or strangled a lion. He felt a superhuman strength in his limbs, unconquerable resolution and unbounded hope in his mind. He was now at home among these people; he had just taken his position, won his place. His glance rested on their faces with a new-born assurance, and he ventured for the first time to address his neighbor. "You have the prettiest earrings I have ever seen, Madame."

She turned towards him with a smile. "It was an idea of my own to have the diamonds hung like that, just at the end of a thread. They really look like dew-drops, do they not?"

He murmured, ashamed of his own daring, and afraid of making a fool of himself:

"It is charming; but the ear, too, helps to set it off."

She thanked him with a look, one of those woman's looks that go straight to the heart. And as he turned his head he again met Madame Forestier's eye, always kindly, but now he thought sparkling with a livelier mirth, an archness, an encouragement.

All the men were now talking at once with gesticulations and raised voices. They were discussing the great project of the metropolitan railway. The subject was not exhausted till dessert was finished, everyone having a deal to say about the slowness of the methods of communication in Paris, the inconvenience of the tramway, the delays of omnibus traveling, and the rudeness of cabmen.

Then they left the dining-room to take coffee. Duroy, in jest, offered his arm to the little girl. She gravely thanked him, and rose on tiptoe in order to rest her hand on it.

On returning to the drawing-room he again experienced the sensation of entering a greenhouse. In each of the four corners of the room tall palms unfolded their elegantly shaped leaves, rising to the ceiling, and there spreading fountain-wise.

On each side of the fireplace were india-rubber plants like round columns, with their dark green leaves tapering one above the other; and on the piano two unknown shrubs covered with flowers, those of one all crimson and those of the other all white, had the appearance of artificial plants, looking too beautiful to be real.

The air was cool, and laden with a soft, vague perfume that could scarcely be defined. The young fellow, now more himself, considered the room more attentively. It was not large; nothing attracted attention with the exception of the shrubs, no bright color struck one, but one felt at one's ease in it; one felt soothed and refreshed, and, as it were, caressed by one's surroundings. The walls were covered with an old-fashioned stuff of faded violet, spotted with little flowers in yellow silk about the size of flies. Hangings of grayish-blue cloth, embroidered here and there with crimson poppies, draped the doorways, and the chairs of all shapes and sizes, scattered about the room, lounging chairs, easy chairs, ottomans, and stools, were upholstered in Louise Seize silk or Utrecht velvet, with a crimson pattern on a cream-colored ground.

"Do you take coffee, Monsieur Duroy?" and Madame Forestier held out a cup towards him with that smile which never left her lips.

"Thank you, Madame." He took the cup, and as he bent forward to take a lump of sugar from the sugar-basin carried by the little girl, Madame Forestier said to him in a low voice: "Pay attention to Madame Walter."

Then she drew back before he had time to answer a word.

He first drank off his coffee, which he was afraid of dropping onto the carpet; then, his mind more at ease, he sought for some excuse to approach the wife of his new governor, and begin a conversation. All at once he noticed that she was holding an empty cup in her hand, and as she was at some distance from a table, did not know where to put it. He darted forward with, "Allow me, Madame?"

"Thank you, sir."

He took away the cup and then returned.

"If you knew, Madame," he began, "the happy hours the *Vie Francaise* helped me to pass when I was away in the desert. It is really the only paper that is readable out of France, for it is more literary, wittier, and less monotonous than the others. There is something of everything in it."

She smiled with amiable indifference, and answered, seriously:

"Monsieur Walter has had a great deal of trouble to create a type of newspaper supplying the want of the day."

And they began to chat. He had an easy flow of commonplace conversation, a charm in his voice and look, and an irresistible seductiveness about his moustache. It curled coquettishly about his lips, reddish brown, with a paler tint about the ends. They chatted about Paris, its suburbs, the banks of the Seine, watering places, summer amusements, all the current topics on which one can prate to infinity without wearying oneself.

Then as Monsieur Norbert de Varenne approached with a liqueur glass in his hand, Duroy discreetly withdrew.

Madame de Marelle, who had been speaking with Madame Forestier, summoned him.

"Well, sir," she said, abruptly, "so you want to try your hand at journalism?"

He spoke vaguely of his prospects, and there recommenced with her the conversation he had just had with Madame Walter, but as he was now a better master of his subject, he showed his superiority in it, repeating as his own the things he had just heard. And he continually looked his companion in the eyes, as though to give deep meaning to what he was saying.

She, in her turn, related anecdotes with the easy flow of spirits of a woman who knows she is witty, and is always seeking to appear so, and becoming familiar, she laid her hand from time to time on his arm, and lowered her voice to make trifling remarks which thus assumed a character of intimacy. He was inwardly excited by her contact. He would have liked to have shown his devotion for her on the spot, to have defended her, shown her what he was worth, and his delay in his replies to her showed the preoccupation of his mind.

But suddenly, without any reason, Madame de Marelle called, “Laurine!” and the little girl came.

“Sit down here, child; you will catch cold near the window.”

Duroy was seized with a wild longing to kiss the child. It was as though some part of the kiss would reach the mother.

He asked in a gallant, and at the same time fatherly, tone: “Will you allow me to kiss you, Mademoiselle?”

The child looked up at him in surprise.

“Answer, my dear,” said Madame de Marelle, laughingly.

“Yes, sir, this time; but it will not do always.”

Duroy, sitting down, lifted Laurine onto his knees and brushed the fine curly hair above her forehead with his lips.

Her mother was surprised. “What! she has not run away; it is astounding. Usually she will only let ladies kiss her. You are irresistible, Monsieur Duroy.”

He blushed without answering, and gently jogged the little girl on his knee.

Madame Forestier drew near, and exclaimed, with astonishment: “What, Laurine tamed! What a miracle!”

Jacques Rival also came up, cigar in mouth, and Duroy rose to take leave, afraid of spoiling, by some unlucky remark, the work done, his task of conquest begun.

He bowed, softly pressed the little outstretched hands of the women, and then heartily shook those of the men. He noted that the hand of Jacques Rival, warm and dry, answered cordially to his grip; that of Norbert de Varenne, damp and cold, slipped through his fingers; that of Daddy Walter, cold and flabby, was without expression or energy; and that of Forestier was plump and moist. His friend said to him in a low tone, “To-morrow, at three o’clock; do not forget.”

"Oh! no; don't be afraid of that."

When he found himself once more on the stairs he felt a longing to run down them, so great was his joy, and he darted forward, going down two steps at a time, but suddenly he caught sight in a large mirror on the second-floor landing of a gentleman in a hurry, who was advancing briskly to meet him, and he stopped short, ashamed, as if he had been caught tripping. Then he looked at himself in the glass for some time, astonished at being really such a handsome fellow, smiled complacently, and taking leave of his reflection, bowed low to it as one bows to a personage of importance.

III

When George Duroy found himself in the street he hesitated as to what he should do. He wanted to run, to dream, to walk about thinking of the future as he breathed the soft night air, but the thought of the series of articles asked for by Daddy Walter haunted him, and he decided to go home at once and set to work.

He walked along quickly, reached the outer boulevards, and followed their line as far as the Rue Boursault, where he dwelt. The house, six stories high, was inhabited by a score of small households, trades-people or workmen, and he experienced a sickening sensation of disgust, a longing to leave the place and live like well-to-do people in a clean dwelling, as he ascended the stairs, lighting himself with wax matches on his way up the dirty steps, littered with bits of paper, cigarette ends, and scraps of kitchen refuse. A stagnant stench of cooking, cesspools and humanity, a close smell of dirt and old walls, which no rush of air could have driven out of the building, filled it from top to bottom.

The young fellow's room, on the fifth floor, looked into a kind of abyss, the huge cutting of the Western Railway just above the outlet by the tunnel of the Batignolles station. Duroy opened his window and leaned against the rusty iron cross-bar.

Below him, at the bottom of the dark hole, three motionless red lights resembled the eyes of huge wild animals, and further on a glimpse could be caught of others, and others again still further. Every moment whistles, prolonged or brief, pierced the silence of the night, some near at hand, others scarcely discernible, coming from a distance from the direction of Asnières. Their modulations were akin to those of the human voice. One of them came nearer and nearer, with its plaintive appeal growing louder and louder every moment, and soon a big yellow light appeared advancing with a loud noise, and Duroy watched the string of railway carriages swallowed up by the tunnel.

Then he said to himself: “Come, let's go to work.”

He placed his light upon the table, but at the moment of commencing he found that he had only a quire of letter paper in the place. More the pity, but he would make use of it by opening out each sheet to its full extent. He dipped his pen in ink, and wrote at the head of the page, in his best hand, “Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique.”

Then he tried to frame the opening sentence. He remained with his head on his hands and his eyes fixed on the white sheet spread out before him. What should he say? He could no longer recall anything of what he had been relating a little while back; not an anecdote, not a fact, nothing.

All at once the thought struck him: “I must begin with my departure.”

And he wrote: “It was in 1874, about the middle of May, when France, in her exhaustion, was reposing after the catastrophe of the terrible year.”

He stopped short, not knowing how to lead up to what should follow — his embarkation, his voyage, his first impressions.

After ten minutes’ reflection, he resolved to put off the introductory slip till to-morrow, and to set to work at once to describe Algiers.

And he traced on his paper the words: “Algiers is a white city,” without being able to state anything further. He recalled in his mind the pretty white city flowing down in a cascade of flat-roofed dwellings from the summit of its hills to the sea, but he could no longer find a word to express what he had seen and felt.

After a violent effort, he added: “It is partly inhabited by Arabs.”

Then he threw down his pen and rose from his chair.

On his little iron bedstead, hollowed in the center by the pressure of his body, he saw his everyday garments cast down there, empty, worn, limp, ugly as the clothing at the morgue. On a straw-bottomed chair his tall hat, his only one, brim uppermost, seemed to be awaiting an alms.

The wall paper, gray with blue bouquets, showed as many stains as flowers, old suspicious-looking stains, the origin of which could not be defined; crushed insects or drops of oil; finger tips smeared with pomatum or soapy water scattered while washing. It smacked of shabby, genteel poverty, the poverty of a Paris lodging-house. Anger rose within him at the wretchedness of his mode of living. He said to himself that he must get out of it at once; that he must finish with this irksome existence the very next day.

A frantic desire of working having suddenly seized on him again, he sat down once more at the table, and began anew to seek for phrases to describe the strange and charming physiognomy of Algiers, that ante-room of vast and mysterious Africa; the Africa of wandering Arabs and unknown tribes of negroes; that unexplored Africa of which we are sometimes shown in public gardens the improbable-looking animals seemingly made to figure in fairy tales; the ostriches, those exaggerated fowls; the gazelles, those divine goats; the surprising and grotesque giraffes; the grave-looking camels, the monstrous hippopotomi, the shapeless rhinosceri, and the gorillas, those frightful-looking brothers of mankind.

He vaguely felt ideas occurring to him; he might perhaps have uttered them, but he could not put them into writing. And his impotence exasperated him, he got up again, his hands damp with perspiration, and his temples throbbing.

His eyes falling on his washing bill, brought up that evening by the concierge, he was suddenly seized with wild despair. All his joy vanishing in a twinkling, with his confidence in himself and his faith in the future. It was all up; he could not do anything, he would never be anybody; he felt played out, incapable, good for nothing, damned.

And he went and leaned out of the window again, just as a train issued from the tunnel with a loud and violent noise. It was going away, afar off, across the fields and plains towards the sea. And the recollection of his parents stirred in Duroy's breast. It would pass near them, that train, within a few leagues of their house. He saw it again, the little house at the entrance to the village of Canteleu, on the summit of the slope overlooking Rouen and the immense valley of the Seine.

His father and mother kept a little inn, a place where the tradesfolk of the suburbs of Rouen came out to lunch on Sunday at the sign of the Belle Vue. They had wanted to make a gentleman of their son, and had sent him to college. Having finished his studies, and been plowed for his bachelor's degree, he had entered on his military service with the intention of becoming an officer, a colonel, a general. But, disgusted with military life long before the completion of his five years' term of service, he had dreamed of making a fortune at Paris.

He came there at the expiration of his term of service, despite the entreaties of his father and mother, whose visions having evaporated, wanted now to have him at home with them. In his turn he hoped to achieve a future; he foresaw a triumph by means as yet vaguely defined in his mind, but which he felt sure he could scheme out and further.

He had had some successful love affairs in the regiment, some easy conquests, and even some adventures in a better class of society, having seduced a tax collector's daughter, who wanted to leave her home for his sake, and a lawyer's wife, who had tried to drown herself in despair at being abandoned.

His comrades used to say of him: "He is a sharp fellow, a deep one to get out of a scrape, a chap who knows which side his bread is buttered," and he had promised himself to act up to this character.

His conscience, Norman by birth, worn by the daily dealings of garrison life, rendered elastic by the examples of pillaging in Africa, illicit commissions, shaky dodges; spurred, too, by the notions of honor current in the army, military bravadoes, patriotic sentiments, the fine-sounding tales current among sub-officers, and the vain glory of the profession of arms, had become a kind of box of tricks in which something of everything was to be found.

But the wish to succeed reigned sovereign in it.

He had, without noticing it, began to dream again as he did every evening. He pictured to himself some splendid love adventure which should bring about all at once the realization of his hopes. He married the daughter of some banker or nobleman met with in the street, and captivated at the first glance.

The shrill whistle of a locomotive which, issuing from the tunnel like a big rabbit bolting out of its hole, and tearing at full speed along the rails towards the machine shed where it was to take its rest, awoke him from his dream.

Then, repossessed by the vague and joyful hope which ever haunted his mind, he wafted a kiss into the night, a kiss of love addressed to the vision of the woman he was awaiting, a kiss of desire addressed to the fortune he coveted. Then he closed his window and began to undress, murmuring:

"I shall feel in a better mood for it to-morrow. My thoughts are not clear to-night. Perhaps, too, I have had just a little too much to drink. One can't work well under those circumstances."

He got into bed, blew out his light, and went off to sleep almost immediately.

He awoke early, as one awakes on mornings of hope and trouble, and jumping out of bed, opened his window to drink a cup of fresh air, as he phrased it.

The houses of the Rue de Rome opposite, on the other side of the broad railway cutting, glittering in the rays of the rising sun, seemed to be painted with white light. Afar off on the right a glimpse was caught of the slopes of

Argenteuil, the hills of Sannois, and the windmills of Orgemont through a light bluish mist; like a floating and transparent veil cast onto the horizon.

Duroy remained for some minutes gazing at the distant country side, and he murmured: “It would be devilish nice out there a day like this.” Then he bethought himself that he must set to work, and that at once, and also send his concierge’s lad, at a cost of ten sous, to the office to say that he was ill.

He sat down at his table, dipped his pen in the ink, leaned his forehead on his hand, and sought for ideas. All in vain, nothing came.

He was not discouraged, however. He thought, “Bah! I am not accustomed to it. It is a trade to be learned like all other trades. I must have some help the first time. I will go and find Forestier, who will give me a start for my article in ten minutes.”

And he dressed himself.

When he got into the street he came to the conclusion that it was still too early to present himself at the residence of his friend, who must be a late sleeper. He therefore walked slowly along beneath the trees of the outer boulevards. It was not yet nine o’clock when he reached the Parc Monceau, fresh from its morning watering. Sitting down upon a bench he began to dream again. A well-dressed young man was walking up and down at a short distance, awaiting a woman, no doubt. Yes, she appeared, close veiled and quick stepping, and taking his arm, after a brief clasp of the hand, they walked away together.

A riotous need of love broke out in Duroy’s heart, a need of amours at once distinguished and delicate. He rose and resumed his journey, thinking of Forestier. What luck the fellow had!

He reached the door at the moment his friend was coming out of it. “You here at this time of day. What do you want of me?”

Duroy, taken aback at meeting him thus, just as he was starting off, stammered: “You see, you see, I can’t manage to write my article; you know the article Monsieur Walter asked me to write on Algeria. It is not very surprising, considering that I have never written anything. Practice is needed for that, as for everything else. I shall get used to it very quickly, I am sure, but I do not know how to set about beginning. I have plenty of ideas, but I cannot manage to express them.”

He stopped, hesitatingly, and Forestier smiled somewhat slyly, saying: “I know what it is.”

Duroy went on: “Yes, it must happen to everyone at the beginning. Well, I came, I came to ask you for a lift. In ten minutes you can give me a start, you can show me how to shape it. It will be a good lesson in style you will give me, and really without you I do not see how I can get on with it.”

Forestier still smiled, and tapping his old comrade on the arm, said: “Go in and see my wife; she will settle your business quite as well as I could. I have trained her for that kind of work. I, myself, have not time this morning, or I would willingly have done it for you.”

Duroy suddenly abashed, hesitated, feeling afraid.

“But I cannot call on her at this time of the day.”

“Oh, yes; she is up. You will find her in my study arranging some notes for me.”

Duroy refused to go upstairs, saying: “No, I can’t think of such a thing.”

Forestier took him by the shoulders, twisted him round on his heels, and pushing him towards the staircase, said: “Go along, you great donkey, when I tell you to. You are not going to oblige me to go up these flights of stairs again to introduce you and explain the fix you are in.”

Then Duroy made up his mind. “Thanks, then, I will go up,” he said. “I shall tell her that you forced me, positively forced me to come and see her.”

“All right. She won’t scratch your eyes out. Above all, do not forget our appointment for three o’clock.”

“Oh! don’t be afraid about that.”

Forestier hastened off, and Duroy began to ascend the stairs slowly, step by step, thinking over what he should say, and feeling uneasy as to his probable reception.

The man servant, wearing a blue apron, and holding a broom in his hand, opened the door to him.

“Master is not at home,” he said, without waiting to be spoken to.

Duroy persisted.

“Ask Madame Forestier,” said he, “whether she will receive me, and tell her that I have come from her husband, whom I met in the street.”

Then he waited while the man went away, returned, and opening the door on the right, said: “Madame will see you, sir.”

She was seated in an office armchair in a small room, the walls of which were wholly hidden by books carefully ranged on shelves of black wood. The bindings, of various tints, red, yellow, green, violet, and blue, gave some color and liveliness to those monotonous lines of volumes.

She turned round, still smiling. She was wrapped in a white dressing gown, trimmed with lace, and as she held out her hand, displayed her bare arm in its wide sleeve.

“Already?” said she, and then added: “That is not meant for a reproach, but a simple question.”

“Oh, madame, I did not want to come up, but your husband, whom I met at the bottom of the house, obliged me to. I am so confused that I dare not tell you what brings me.”

She pointed to a chair, saying: “Sit down and tell me about it.”

She was twirling a goose-quill between her fingers, and in front of her was a half-written page, interrupted by the young fellow’s arrival. She seemed quite at home at this work table, as much at her ease as if in her drawing-room, engaged on everyday tasks. A faint perfume emanated from her dressing gown, the fresh perfume of a recent toilet. Duroy sought to divine, fancied he could trace, the outline of her plump, youthful figure through the soft material enveloping it.

She went on, as he did not reply: “Well, come tell me what is it.”

He murmured, hesitatingly: “Well, you see — but I really dare not — I was working last night very late and quite early this morning on the article upon Algeria, upon which Monsieur Walter asked me to write, and I could not get on with it — I tore up all my attempts. I am not accustomed to this kind of work, and I came to ask Forestier to help me this once— “

She interrupted him, laughing heartily. “And he told you to come and see me? That is a nice thing.”

“Yes, madame. He said that you will get me out of my difficulty better than himself, but I did not dare, I did not wish to — you understand.”

She rose, saying: “It will be delightful to work in collaboration with you like that. I am charmed at the notion. Come, sit down in my place, for they know my hand-writing at the office. And we will knock you off an article; oh, but a good one.”

He sat down, took a pen, spread a sheet of paper before him, and waited.

Madame Forestier, standing by, watched him make these preparations, then took a cigarette from the mantel-shelf, and lit it.

“I cannot work without smoking,” said she. “Come, what are you going to say?”

He lifted his head towards her with astonishment.

“But that is just what I don’t know, since it is that I came to see you about.”

She replied: “Oh, I will put it in order for you. I will make the sauce, but then I want the materials of the dish.”

He remained embarrassed before her. At length he said, hesitatingly: “I should like to relate my journey, then, from the beginning.”

Then she sat down before him on the other side of the table, and looking him in the eyes:

“Well, tell it me first; for myself alone, you understand, slowly and without forgetting anything, and I will select what is to be used of it.”

But as he did not know where to commence, she began to question him as a priest would have done in the confessional, putting precise questions which recalled to him forgotten details, people encountered and faces merely caught sight of.

When she had made him speak thus for about a quarter of an hour, she suddenly interrupted him with: “Now we will begin. In the first place, we will imagine that you are narrating your impressions to a friend, which will allow you to write a lot of tom-foolery, to make remarks of all kinds, to be natural and funny if we can. Begin:

“‘My Dear Henry, — You want to know what Algeria is like, and you shall. I will send you, having nothing else to do in a little cabin of dried mud which serves me as a habitation, a kind of journal of my life, day by day, and hour by hour. It will be a little lively at times, more is the pity, but you are not obliged to show it to your lady friends.’”

She paused to re-light her cigarette, which had gone out, and the faint creaking of the quill on the paper stopped, too.

“Let us continue,” said she.

“Algeria is a great French country on the frontiers of the great unknown countries called the Desert, the Sahara, central Africa, etc., etc.

“Algiers is the door, the pretty white door of this strange continent.

“But it is first necessary to get to it, which is not a rosy job for everyone. I am, you know, an excellent horseman, since I break in the colonel’s horses; but a man may be a very good rider and a very bad sailor. That is my case.

“You remember Surgeon-Major Simbretras, whom we used to call Old Ipecacuanha, and how, when we thought ourselves ripe for a twenty-four hours’ stay in the infirmary, that blessed sojourning place, we used to go up before him.

“How he used to sit in his chair, with his fat legs in his red trousers, wide apart, his hands on his knees, and his elbows stuck, rolling his great eyes and gnawing his white moustache.

“You remember his favorite mode of treatment: ‘This man’s stomach is out of order. Give him a dose of emetic number three, according to my prescription, and then twelve hours off duty, and he will be all right.’

“It was a sovereign remedy that emetic — sovereign and irresistible. One swallowed it because one had to. Then when one had undergone the effects of Old Ipecacuanha’s prescription, one enjoyed twelve well-earned hours’ rest.

“Well, my dear fellow, to reach Africa, it is necessary to undergo for forty hours the effects of another kind of irresistible emetic, according to the prescription of the Compagnie Transatlantique.”

She rubbed her hands, delighted with the idea.

She got up and walked about, after having lit another cigarette, and dictated as she puffed out little whiffs of smoke, which, issuing at first through a little round hole in the midst of her compressed lips, slowly evaporated, leaving in the air faint gray lines, a kind of transparent mist, like a spider’s web. Sometimes with her open hand she would brush these light traces aside; at others she would cut them asunder with her forefinger, and then watch with serious attention the two halves of the almost impenetrable vapor slowly disappear.

Duroy, with his eyes, followed all her gestures, her attitudes, the movements of her form and features — busied with this vague pastime which did not preoccupy her thoughts.

She now imagined the incidents of the journey, sketched traveling companions invented by herself, and a love affair with the wife of a captain of infantry on her way to join her husband.

Then, sitting down again, she questioned Duroy on the topography of Algeria, of which she was absolutely ignorant. In ten minutes she knew as much about it as he did, and she dictated a little chapter of political and colonial geography to coach the reader up in such matters and prepare him to understand the serious questions which were to be brought forward in the following articles. She continued by a trip into the provinces of Oran, a fantastic trip, in which it was, above all, a question of women, Moorish, Jewish, and Spanish.

"That is what interests most," she said.

She wound up by a sojourn at Saïda, at the foot of the great tablelands; and by a pretty little intrigue between the sub-officer, George Duroy, and a Spanish work-girl employed at the *alfa* factory at Ain el Hadjar. She described their rendezvous at night amidst the bare, stony hills, with jackals, hyenas, and Arab dogs yelling, barking and howling among the rocks.

And she gleefully uttered the words: "To be continued." Then rising, she added: "That is how one writes an article, my dear sir. Sign it, if you please."

He hesitated.

"But sign it, I tell you."

Then he began to laugh, and wrote at the bottom of the page, "George Duroy."

She went on smoking as she walked up and down; and he still kept looking at her, unable to find anything to say to thank her, happy to be with her, filled with gratitude, and with the sensual pleasure of this new-born intimacy. It seemed to him that everything surrounding him was part of her, everything down to the walls covered with books. The chairs, the furniture, the air in which the perfume of tobacco was floating, had something special, nice, sweet, and charming, which emanated from her.

Suddenly she asked: "What do you think of my friend, Madame de Marelle?"

He was surprised, and answered: "I think — I think — her very charming."

"Is it not so?"

"Yes, certainly."

He longed to add: "But not so much as yourself," but dared not.

She resumed: "And if you only knew how funny, original, and intelligent she is. She is a Bohemian — a true Bohemian. That is why her husband scarcely cares for her. He only sees her defects, and does not appreciate her good qualities."

Duroy felt stupefied at learning that Madame de Marelle was married, and yet it was only natural that she should be.

He said: "Oh, she is married, then! And what is her husband?"

Madame Forestier gently shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows, with a gesture of incomprehensible meaning.

“Oh! he is an inspector on the Northern Railway. He spends eight days out of the month in Paris. What his wife calls ‘obligatory service,’ or ‘weekly duty,’ or ‘holy week.’ When you know her better you will see how nice and bright she is. Go and call on her one of these days.”

Duroy no longer thought of leaving. It seemed to him that he was going to stop for ever; that he was at home.

But the door opened noiselessly, and a tall gentleman entered without being announced. He stopped short on seeing a stranger. Madame Forestier seemed troubled for a moment; then she said in natural tones, though a slight rosy flush had risen to her cheeks:

“Come in, my dear sir. I must introduce one of Charles’ old friends, Monsieur George Duroy, a future journalist.” Then in another tone, she added: “Our best and most intimate friend, the Count de Vaudrec.”

The two men bowed, looking each other in the eyes, and Duroy at once took his leave.

There was no attempt to detain him. He stammered a few thanks, grasped the outstretched hand of Madame Forestier, bowed again to the new-comer, who preserved the cold, grave air of a man of position, and went out quite disturbed, as if he had made a fool of himself.

On finding himself once more in the street, he felt sad and uneasy, haunted by the vague idea of some hidden vexation. He walked on, asking himself whence came this sudden melancholy. He could not tell, but the stern face of the Count de Vaudrec, already somewhat aged, with gray hair, and the calmly insolent look of a very wealthy man, constantly recurred to his recollection. He noted that the arrival of this unknown, breaking off a charming *tête-à-tête*, had produced in him that chilly, despairing sensation that a word overheard, a trifle noticed, the least thing suffices sometimes to bring about. It seemed to him, too, that this man, without his being able to guess why, had been displeased at finding him there.

He had nothing more to do till three o’clock, and it was not yet noon. He had still six francs fifty centimes in his pocket, and he went and lunched at a Bouillon Duval. Then he prowled about the boulevard, and as three o’clock struck, ascended the staircase, in itself an advertisement, of the *Vie Francaise*.

The messengers-in-waiting were seated with folded arms on a bench, while at a kind of desk a doorkeeper was sorting the correspondence that had just arrived. The entire get-up of the place, intended to impress visitors, was perfect. Everyone had the appearance, bearing, dignity, and smartness suitable to the ante-room of a large newspaper.

"Monsieur Walter, if you please?" inquired Duroy.

"The manager is engaged, sir," replied the doorkeeper. "Will you take a seat, sir?" and he indicated the waiting-room, already full of people.

There were men grave, important-looking, and decorated; and men without visible linen, whose frock-coats, buttoned up to the chin, bore upon the breast stains recalling the outlines of continents and seas on geographical maps. There were three women among them. One of them was pretty, smiling, and decked out, and had the air of a gay woman; her neighbor, with a wrinkled, tragic countenance, decked out also, but in more severe fashion, had about her something worn and artificial which old actresses generally have; a kind of false youth, like a scent of stale love. The third woman, in mourning, sat in a corner, with the air of a desolate widow. Duroy thought that she had come to ask for charity.

However, no one was ushered into the room beyond, and more than twenty minutes had elapsed.

Duroy was seized with an idea, and going back to the doorkeeper, said: "Monsieur Walter made an appointment for me to call on him here at three o'clock. At all events, see whether my friend, Monsieur Forestier, is here."

He was at once ushered along a lengthy passage, which brought him to a large room where four gentlemen were writing at a large green-covered table.

Forestier standing before the fireplace was smoking a cigarette and playing at cup and ball. He was very clever at this, and kept spiking the huge ball of yellow boxwood on the wooden point. He was counting "Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five."

"Twenty-six," said Duroy.

His friend raised his eyes without interrupting the regular movement of his arm, saying: "Oh! here you are, then. Yesterday I landed the ball fifty-seven times right off. There is only Saint-Potin who can beat me at it among those here. Have you seen the governor? There is nothing funnier than to see that old tubby Norbert playing at cup and ball. He opens his mouth as if he was going to swallow the ball every time."

One of the others turned round towards him, saying: “I say, Forestier, I know of one for sale, a beauty in West Indian wood; it is said to have belonged to the Queen of Spain. They want sixty francs for it. Not dear.”

Forestier asked: “Where does it hang out?”

And as he had missed his thirty-seventh shot, he opened a cupboard in which Duroy saw a score of magnificent cups and balls, arranged and numbered like a collection of art objects. Then having put back the one he had been using in its usual place, he repeated: “Where does this gem hang out?”

The journalist replied: “At a box-office keeper’s of the Vaudeville. I will bring it you to-morrow, if you like.”

“All right. If it is really a good one I will take it; one can never have too many.” Then turning to Duroy he added: “Come with me. I will take you in to see the governor; otherwise you might be getting mouldy here till seven in the evening.”

They re-crossed the waiting-room, in which the same people were waiting in the same order. As soon as Forestier appeared the young woman and the old actress, rising quickly, came up to him. He took them aside one after the other into the bay of the window, and although they took care to talk in low tones, Duroy noticed that they were on familiar terms.

Then, having passed through two padded doors, they entered the manager’s room. The conference which had been going on for an hour or so was nothing more than a game at ecarté with some of the gentlemen with the flat brimmed hats whom Duroy had noticed the night before.

Monsieur Walter dealt and played with concentrated attention and crafty movements, while his adversary threw down, picked up, and handled the light bits of colored pasteboard with the swiftness, skill, and grace of a practiced player. Norbert de Varenne, seated in the managerial armchair, was writing an article. Jacques Rival, stretched at full length on a couch, was smoking a cigar with his eyes closed.

The room smelled close, with that blended odor of leather-covered furniture, stale tobacco, and printing-ink peculiar to editors’ rooms and familiar to all journalists. Upon the black wood table, inlaid with brass, lay an incredible pile of papers, letters, cards, newspapers, magazines, bills, and printed matter of every description.

Forestier shook hands with the punters standing behind the card players, and without saying a word watched the progress of the game; then, as soon as Daddy Walter had won, he said: “Here is my friend, Duroy.”

The manager glanced sharply at the young fellow over the glasses of his spectacles, and said:

“Have you brought my article? It would go very well to-day with the Morel debate.”

Duroy took the sheets of paper folded in four from his pocket, saying: “Here it is sir.”

The manager seemed pleased, and remarked, with a smile: “Very good, very good. You are a man of your word. You must look through this for me, Forestier.”

But Forestier hastened to reply: “It is not worth while, Monsieur Walter. I did it with him to give him a lesson in the tricks of the trade. It is very well done.”

And the manager, who was gathering up the cards dealt by a tall, thin gentleman, a deputy belonging to the Left Center, remarked with indifference: “All right, then.”

Forestier, however, did not let him begin the new game, but stooping, murmured in his ear: “You know you promised me to take on Duroy to replace Marambot. Shall I engage him on the same terms?”

“Yes, certainly.”

Taking his friend’s arm, the journalist led him away, while Monsieur Walter resumed the game.

Norbert de Varenne had not lifted his head; he did not appear to have seen or recognized Duroy. Jacques Rival, on the contrary, had taken his hand with the marked and demonstrative energy of a comrade who may be reckoned upon in the case of any little difficulty.

They passed through the waiting-room again, and as everyone looked at them, Forestier said to the youngest of the women, in a tone loud enough to be heard by the rest: “The manager will see you directly. He is just now engaged with two members of the Budget Committee.”

Then he passed swiftly on, with an air of hurry and importance, as though about to draft at once an article of the utmost weight.

As soon as they were back in the reporters’ room Forestier at once took up his cup and ball, and as he began to play with it again, said to Duroy, breaking his sentences in order to count: “You will come here every day at three o’clock, and I will tell you the places you are to go to, either during the day or in the evening, or the next morning — one — I will give you, first of all, a letter of introduction to the head of the First Department of the Préfecture of Police — two — who will put you in communication with one of his clerks. You will settle with him about all the important information — three — from the Préfecture, official and quasi-official information, you know. In all matters of detail you will apply to Saint-Potin, who is up in the work — four — You can see him by-and-by, or to-morrow. You must, above all, cultivate the knack of dragging information out of men I send you to see — five — and to get in everywhere, in spite of closed doors — six — You will have for this a salary of two hundred francs a month, with two sous a line for the paragraphs you glean — seven — and two sous a line for all articles written by you to order on different subjects — eight.”

Then he gave himself up entirely to his occupation, and went on slowly counting: “Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen.” He missed the fourteenth, and swore, “Damn that thirteen, it always brings me bad luck. I shall die on the thirteenth of some month, I am certain.”

One of his colleagues who had finished his work also took a cup and ball from the cupboard. He was a little man, who looked like a boy, although he was really five-and-thirty. Several other journalists having come in, went one after the other and got out the toy belonging to each of them. Soon there were six standing side by side, with their backs to the wall, swinging into the air, with even and regular motion, the balls of red, yellow, and black, according to the wood they were made of. And a match having begun, the two who were still working got up to act as umpires. Forestier won by eleven points. Then the little man, with the juvenile aspect, who had lost, rang for the messenger, and gave the order, “Nine bocks.” And they began to play again pending the arrival of these refreshments.

Duroy drank a glass of beer with his new comrades, and then said to his friend: “What am I to do now?”

“I have nothing for you to-day. You can go if you want to.”

“And our — our — article, will it go in to-night?”

“Yes, but do not bother yourself about it; I will correct the proofs. Write the continuation for to-morrow, and come here at three o’clock, the same as to-day.”

Duroy having shaken hands with everyone, without even knowing their names, went down the magnificent staircase with a light heart and high spirits.

IV

George Duroy slept badly, so excited was he by the wish to see his article in print. He was up as soon as it was daylight, and was prowling about the streets long before the hour at which the porters from the newspaper offices run with their papers from kiosque to kiosque. He went on to the Saint Lazare terminus, knowing that the *Vie Francaise* would be delivered there before it reached his own district. As he was still too early, he wandered up and down on the footpath.

He witnessed the arrival of the newspaper vendor who opened her glass shop, and then saw a man bearing on his head a pile of papers. He rushed forward. There were the *Figaro*, the *Gil Blas*, the *Gaulois*, the *Evenement*, and two or three morning journals, but the *Vie Francaise* was not among them. Fear seized him. Suppose the “Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique” had been kept over for the next day, or that by chance they had not at the last moment seemed suitable to Daddy Walter.

Turning back to the kiosque, he saw that the paper was on sale without his having seen it brought there. He darted forward, unfolded it, after having thrown down the three sous, and ran through the headings of the articles on the first page. Nothing. His heart began to beat, and he experienced strong emotion on reading at the foot of a column in large letters, “George Duroy.” It was in; what happiness!

He began to walk along unconsciously, the paper in his hand and his hat on one side of his head, with a longing to stop the passers-by in order to say to them: “Buy this, buy this, there is an article by me in it.” He would have liked to have bellowed with all the power of his lungs, like some vendors of papers at night on the boulevards, “Read the *Vie Francaise*; read George Duroy’s article, ‘Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique.’” And suddenly he felt a wish to read this article himself, read it in a public place, a *café*, in sight of all. He looked about for some establishment already filled with customers. He had to walk in search of one for some time. He sat down at last in front of a kind of wine shop, where several customers were already installed, and asked for a glass of rum, as he would have asked for one of absinthe, without thinking of the time. Then he cried: “Waiter, bring me the *Vie Francaise*.”

A man in a white apron stepped up, saying: “We have not got it, sir; we only take in the *Rappel*, the *Siecle*, the *Lanierne*, and the *Petit Parisien*.”

“What a den!” exclaimed Duroy, in a tone of anger and disgust. “Here, go and buy it for me.”

The waiter hastened to do so, and brought back the paper. Duroy began to read his article, and several times said aloud: “Very good, very well put,” to attract the attention of his neighbors, and inspire them with the wish to know what there was in this sheet. Then, on going away, he left it on the table. The master of the place, noticing this, called him back, saying: “Sir, sir, you are forgetting your paper.”

And Duroy replied: “I will leave it to you. I have finished with it. There is a very interesting article in it this morning.”

He did not indicate the article, but he noticed as he went away one of his neighbors take the *Vie Francaise* up from the table on which he had left it.

He thought: “What shall I do now?” And he decided to go to his office, take his month’s salary, and tender his resignation. He felt a thrill of anticipatory pleasure at the thought of the faces that would be pulled up by the chief of his room and his colleagues. The notion of the bewilderment of the chief above all charmed him.

He walked slowly, so as not to get there too early, the cashier’s office not opening before ten o’clock.

His office was a large, gloomy room, in which gas had to be kept burning almost all day long in winter. It looked into a narrow court-yard, with other offices on the further side of it. There were eight clerks there, besides a sub-chief hidden behind a screen in one corner.

Duroy first went to get the hundred and eighteen francs twenty-five centimes enclosed in a yellow envelope, and placed in the drawer of the clerk entrusted with such payments, and then, with a conquering air, entered the large room in which he had already spent so many days.

As soon as he came in the sub-chief, Monsieur Potel, called out to him: “Ah! it is you, Monsieur Duroy? The chief has already asked for you several times. You know that he will not allow anyone to plead illness two days running without a doctor’s certificate.”

Duroy, who was standing in the middle of the room preparing his sensational effect, replied in a loud voice:

“I don’t care a damn whether he does or not.”

There was a movement of stupefaction among the clerks, and Monsieur Potel’s features showed affrightedly over the screen which shut him up as in a box. He barricaded himself behind it for fear of draughts, for he was rheumatic, but had pierced a couple of holes through the paper to keep an eye on his staff. A pin might have been heard to fall. At length the sub-chief said, hesitatingly: “You said?”

“I said that I don’t care a damn about it. I have only called to-day to tender my resignation. I am engaged on the staff of the *Vie Francaise* at five hundred francs a month, and extra pay for all I write. Indeed, I made my *début* this morning.”

He had promised himself to spin out his enjoyment, but had not been able to resist the temptation of letting it all out at once.

The effect, too, was overwhelming. No one stirred.

Duroy went on: “I will go and inform Monsieur Perthuis, and then come and wish you good-bye.”

And he went out in search of the chief, who exclaimed, on seeing him: “Ah, here you are. You know that I won’t have— “

His late subordinate cut him short with: “It’s not worth while yelling like that.”

Monsieur Perthuis, a stout man, as red as a turkey cock, was choked with bewilderment.

Duroy continued: “I have had enough of this crib. I made my *début* this morning in journalism, where I am assured of a very good position. I have the honor to bid you good-day.” And he went out. He was avenged.

As he promised, he went and shook hands with his old colleagues, who scarcely dared to speak to him, for fear of compromising themselves, for they had overheard his conversation with the chief, the door having remained open.

He found himself in the street again, with his salary in his pocket. He stood himself a substantial breakfast at a good but cheap restaurant he was acquainted with, and having again purchased the *Vie Francaise*, and left it on the table, went into several shops, where he bought some trifles, solely for the sake of ordering them to be sent home, and giving his name: “George Duroy,” with the addition, “I am the editor of the *Vie Francaise*.”

Then he gave the name of the street and the number, taking care to add: “Leave it with the doorkeeper.”

As he had still some time to spare he went into the shop of a lithographer, who executed visiting cards at a moment's notice before the eyes of passers-by, and had a hundred, bearing his new occupation under his name, printed off while he waited.

Then he went to the office of the paper.

Forestier received him loftily, as one receives a subordinate. "Ah! here you are. Good. I have several things for you to attend to. Just wait ten minutes. I will just finish what I am about."

And he went on with a letter he was writing.

At the other end of the large table a fat, bald little man, with a very pale, puffy face, and a white and shining head, was writing, with his nose on the paper owing to extreme shortsightedness. Forestier said to him: "I say, Saint-Potin, when are you going to interview those people?"

"At four o'clock."

"Will you take young Duroy here with you, and let him into the way of doing it?"

"All right."

Then turning to his friend, Forestier added: "Have you brought the continuation of the Algerian article? The opening this morning was very successful."

Duroy, taken aback, stammered: "No. I thought I should have time this afternoon. I had heaps of things to do. I was not able."

The other shrugged his shoulders with a dissatisfied air. "If you are not more exact than that you will spoil your future. Daddy Walter was reckoning on your copy. I will tell him it will be ready to-morrow. If you think you are to be paid for doing nothing you are mistaken."

Then, after a short silence, he added: "One must strike the iron while it is hot, or the deuce is in it."

Saint-Potin rose, saying: "I am ready."

Then Forestier, leaning back in his chair, assumed a serious attitude in order to give his instructions, and turning to Duroy, said: "This is what it is. Within the last two days the Chinese General, Li Theng Fao, has arrived at the Hotel Continental, and the Rajah Taposahib Ramaderao Pali at the Hotel Bristol. You will go and interview them." Turning to Saint-Potin, he continued: "Don't forget the main points I told you of. Ask the General and the Rajah their opinion upon the action of England in the East, their ideas upon her system of colonization and domination, and their hopes respecting the intervention of Europe, and especially of France.” He was silent for a moment, and then added in a theatrical aside: “It will be most interesting to our readers to learn at the same time what is thought in China and India upon these matters which so forcibly occupy public attention at this moment.” He continued, for the benefit of Duroy: “Watch how Saint-Potin sets to work; he is a capital reporter; and try to learn the trick of pumping a man in five minutes.”

Then he gravely resumed his writing, with the evident intention of defining their relative positions, and putting his old comrade and present colleague in his proper place.

As soon as they had crossed the threshold Saint-Potin began to laugh, and said to Duroy: “There’s a fluffer for you. He tried to fluff even us. One would really think he took us for his readers.”

They reached the boulevard, and the reporter observed: “Will you have a drink?”

“Certainly. It is awfully hot.”

They turned into a *café* and ordered cooling drinks. Saint-Potin began to talk. He talked about the paper and everyone connected with it with an abundance of astonishing details.

“The governor? A regular Jew? And you know, nothing can alter a Jew. What a breed!” And he instanced some astounding traits of avariciousness peculiar to the children of Israel, economies of ten centimes, petty bargaining, shameful reductions asked for and obtained, all the ways of a usurer and pawnbroker.

“And yet with all this, a good fellow who believes in nothing and does everyone. His paper, which is Governmental, Catholic, Liberal, Republican, Orleanist, pay your money and take your choice, was only started to help him in his speculations on the Bourse, and bolster up his other schemes. At that game he is very clever, and nets millions through companies without four sous of genuine capital.”

He went on, addressing Duroy as “My dear fellow.”

“And he says things worthy of Balzac, the old shark. Fancy, the other day I was in his room with that old tub Norbert, and that Don Quixote Rival, when Montelin, our business manager, came in with his morocco bill-case, that bill-case that everyone in Paris knows, under his arm. Walter raised his head and asked: ‘What news?’ Montelin answered simply: ‘I have just paid the sixteen thousand francs we owed the paper maker.’ The governor gave a jump, an astonishing jump. ‘What do you mean?’ said he. ‘I have just paid Monsieur Privas,’ replied Montelin. ‘But you are mad.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Why — why — why— ‘ he took off his spectacles and wiped them. Then he smiled with that queer smile that flits across his fat cheeks whenever he is going to say something deep or smart, and went on in a mocking and derisive tone, ‘Why? Because we could have obtained a reduction of from four to five thousand francs.’ Montelin replied, in astonishment: ‘But, sir, all the accounts were correct, checked by me and passed by yourself.’ Then the governor, quite serious again, observed: ‘What a fool you are. Don’t you know, Monsieur Montelin, that one should always let one’s debts mount up, in order to offer a composition?’”

And Saint-Potin added, with a knowing shake of his head, “Eh! isn’t that worthy of Balzac?”

Duroy had not read Balzac, but he replied, “By Jove! yes.”

Then the reporter spoke of Madame Walter, an old goose; of Norbert de Varenne, an old failure; of Rival, a copy of Fervacques. Next he came to Forestier. “As to him, he has been lucky in marrying his wife, that is all.”

Duroy asked: “What is his wife, really?”

Saint-Potin rubbed his hands. “Oh! a deep one, a smart woman. She was the mistress of an old rake named Vaudrec, the Count de Vaudrec, who gave her a dowry and married her off.”

Duroy suddenly felt a cold shiver run through him, a tingling of the nerves, a longing to smack this gabbler on the face. But he merely interrupted him by asking:

“And your name is Saint-Potin?”

The other replied, simply enough:

“No, my name is Thomas. It is in the office that they have nicknamed me Saint-Potin.”

Duroy, as he paid for the drinks, observed: “But it seems to me that time is getting on, and that we have two noble foreigners to call on.”

Saint-Potin began to laugh. “You are still green. So you fancy I am going to ask the Chinese and the Hindoo what they think of England? As if I did not know better than themselves what they ought to think in order to please the readers of the *Vie Francaise*. I have already interviewed five hundred of these Chinese, Persians, Hindoos, Chilians, Japanese, and others. They all reply the same, according to me. I have only to take my article on the last comer and copy it word for word. What has to be changed, though, is their appearance, their name, their title, their age, and their suite. Oh! on that point it does not do to make a mistake, for I should be snapped up sharp by the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*. But on these matters the hall porters at the Hotel Bristol and the Hotel Continental will put me right in five minutes. We will smoke a cigar as we walk there. Five francs cab hire to charge to the paper. That is how one sets about it, my dear fellow, when one is practically inclined."

"It must be worth something decent to be a reporter under these circumstances," said Duroy.

The journalist replied mysteriously: "Yes, but nothing pays so well as paragraphs, on account of the veiled advertisements."

They had got up and were passing down the boulevards towards the Madeleine. Saint-Potin suddenly observed to his companion: "You know if you have anything else to do, I shall not need you in any way."

Duroy shook hands and left him. The notion of the article to be written that evening worried him, and he began to think. He stored his mind with ideas, reflections, opinions, and anecdotes as he walked along, and went as far as the end of the Avenue des Champs Elysées, where only a few strollers were to be seen, the heat having caused Paris to be evacuated.

Having dined at a wine shop near the Arc de Triomphe, he walked slowly home along the outer boulevards and sat down at his table to work. But as soon as he had the sheet of blank paper before his eyes, all the materials that he had accumulated fled from his mind as though his brain had evaporated. He tried to seize on fragments of his recollections and to retain them, but they escaped him as fast as he laid hold of them, or else they rushed on him altogether pell-mell, and he did not know how to clothe and present them, nor which one to begin with.

After an hour of attempts and five sheets of paper blackened by opening phrases that had no continuation, he said to himself: "I am not yet well enough up in the business. I must have another lesson." And all at once the prospect of another morning's work with Madame Forestier, the hope of another long and intimate *tête-à-tête* so cordial and so pleasant, made him quiver with desire. He went to bed in a hurry, almost afraid now of setting to work again and succeeding all at once.

He did not get up the next day till somewhat late, putting off and tasting in advance the pleasure of this visit.

It was past ten when he rang his friend's bell.

The man-servant replied: “Master is engaged at his work.”

Duroy had not thought that the husband might be at home. He insisted, however, saying: “Tell him that I have called on a matter requiring immediate attention.”

After waiting five minutes he was shown into the study in which he had passed such a pleasant morning. In the chair he had occupied Forestier was now seated writing, in a dressing-gown and slippers and with a little Scotch bonnet on his head, while his wife in the same white gown leant against the mantelpiece and dictated, cigarette in mouth.

Duroy, halting on the threshold, murmured: “I really beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you.”

His friend, turning his face towards him — an angry face, too — growled: “What is it you want now? Be quick; we are pressed for time.”

The intruder, taken back, stammered: “It is nothing; I beg your pardon.”

But Forestier, growing angry, exclaimed: “Come, hang it all, don’t waste time about it; you have not forced your way in just for the sake of wishing us good-morning, I suppose?”

Then Duroy, greatly perturbed, made up his mind. “No — you see — the fact is — I can’t quite manage my article — and you were — so — so kind last time — that I hoped — that I ventured to come— “

Forestier cut him short. “You have a pretty cheek. So you think I am going to do your work, and that all you have to do is to call on the cashier at the end of the month to draw your screw? No, that is too good.”

The young woman went on smoking without saying a word, smiling with a vague smile, which seemed like an amiable mask, concealing the irony of her thoughts.

Duroy, colored up, stammered: “Excuse me — I fancied — I thought— “ then suddenly, and in a clear voice, he went on: “I beg your pardon a thousand times, Madame, while again thanking you most sincerely for the charming article you produced for me yesterday.” He bowed, remarked to Charles: “I shall be at the office at three,” and went out.

He walked home rapidly, grumbling: “Well, I will do it all alone, and they shall see— “

Scarcely had he got in than, excited by anger, he began to write. He continued the adventure began by Madame Forestier, heaping up details of catch-penny romance, surprising incidents, and inflated descriptions, with the style of a schoolboy and the phraseology of the barrack-room. Within an hour he had finished an article which was a chaos of nonsense, and took it with every assurance to the *Vie Francaise*.

The first person he met was Saint-Potin, who, grasping his hand with the energy of an accomplice, said: “You have read my interview with the Chinese and the Hindoo? Isn’t it funny? It has amused everyone. And I did not even get a glimpse of them.”

Duroy, who had not read anything, at once took up the paper and ran his eye over a long article headed: “India and China,” while the reporter pointed out the most interesting passages.

Forestier came in puffing, in a hurry, with a busy air, saying:

“Good; I want both of you.”

And he mentioned a number of items of political information that would have to be obtained that very afternoon.

Duroy held out his article.

“Here is the continuation about Algeria.”

“Very good; hand it over; and I will give it to the governor.”

That was all.

Saint-Potin led away his new colleague, and when they were in the passage, he said to him: “Have you seen the cashier?”

“No; why?”

“Why? To draw your money. You see you should always draw a month in advance. One never knows what may happen.”

“But — I ask for nothing better.”

“I will introduce you to the cashier. He will make no difficulty about it. They pay up well here.”

Duroy went and drew his two hundred francs, with twenty-eight more for his article of the day before, which, added to what remained of his salary from the railway company, gave him three hundred and forty francs in his pocket. He had never owned such a sum, and thought himself possessed of wealth for an indefinite period.

Saint-Potin then took him to have a gossip in the offices of four or five rival papers, hoping that the news he was entrusted to obtain had already been gleaned by others, and that he should be able to draw it out of them — thanks to the flow and artfulness of his conversation.

When evening had come, Duroy, who had nothing more to do, thought of going again to the Folies Bergères, and putting a bold face on, he went up to the box office.

"I am George Duroy, on the staff of the *Vie Francaise*. I came here the other day with Monsieur Forestier, who promised me to see about my being put on the free list; I do not know whether he has thought of it."

The list was referred to. His name was not entered.

However, the box office-keeper, a very affable man, at once said: "Pray, go in all the same, sir, and write yourself to the manager, who, I am sure, will pay attention to your letter."

He went in and almost immediately met Rachel, the woman he had gone off with the first evening. She came up to him, saying: "Good evening, ducky. Are you quite well?"

"Very well, thanks — and you?"

"I am all right. Do you know, I have dreamed of you twice since last time?"

Duroy smiled, feeling flattered. "Ah! and what does that mean?"

"It means that you pleased me, you old dear, and that we will begin again whenever you please."

"To-day, if you like."

"Yes, I am quite willing."

"Good, but— " He hesitated, a little ashamed of what he was going to do. "The fact is that this time I have not a penny; I have just come from the club, where I have dropped everything."

She looked him full in the eyes, scenting a lie with the instinct and habit of a girl accustomed to the tricks and bargainings of men, and remarked: "Bosh! That is not a nice sort of thing to try on me."

He smiled in an embarrassed way. "If you will take ten francs, it is all I have left."

She murmured, with the disinterestedness of a courtesan gratifying a fancy: "What you please, my lady; I only want you."

And lifting her charming eyes towards the young man's moustache, she took his arm and leant lovingly upon it.

"Let us go and have a grenadine first of all," she remarked. "And then we will take a stroll together. I should like to go to the opera like this, with you, to show you off. And we will go home early, eh?"

He lay late at this girl's place. It was broad day when he left, and the notion occurred to him to buy the *Vie Francaise*. He opened the paper with feverish hand. His article was not there, and he stood on the footpath, anxiously running his eye down the printed columns with the hope of at length finding what he was in search of. A weight suddenly oppressed his heart, for after the fatigue of a night of love, this vexation came upon him with the weight of a disaster.

He reached home and went to sleep in his clothes on the bed.

Entering the office some hours later, he went on to see Monsieur Walter.

“I was surprised at not seeing my second article on Algeria in the paper this morning, sir,” said he.

The manager raised his head, and replied in a dry tone: “I gave it to your friend Forestier, and asked him to read it through. He did not think it up to the mark; you must rewrite it.”

Duroy, in a rage, went out without saying a word, and abruptly entering his old comrade’s room, said:

“Why didn’t you let my article go in this morning?”

The journalist was smoking a cigarette with his back almost on the seat of his armchair and his feet on the table, his heels soiling an article already commenced. He said slowly, in a bored and distant voice, as though speaking from the depths of a hole: “The governor thought it poor, and told me to give it back to you to do over again. There it is.” And he pointed out the slips flattened out under a paperweight.

Duroy, abashed, could find nothing to say in reply, and as he was putting his prose into his pocket, Forestier went on: “To-day you must first of all go to the Préfecture.” And he proceeded to give a list of business errands and items of news to be attended to.

Duroy went off without having been able to find the cutting remark he wanted to. He brought back his article the next day. It was returned to him again. Having rewritten it a third time, and finding it still refused, he understood that he was trying to go ahead too fast, and that Forestier’s hand alone could help him on his way. He did not therefore say anything more about the “Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique,” promising himself to be supple and cunning since it was needful, and while awaiting something better to zealously discharge his duties as a reporter.

He learned to know the way behind the scenes in theatrical and political life; the waiting-rooms of statesmen and the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies; the important countenances of permanent secretaries, and the grim looks of sleepy ushers. He had continual relations with ministers, doorkeepers, generals, police agents, princes, bullies, courtesans, ambassadors, bishops, panders, adventurers, men of fashion, card-sharpers, cab drivers, waiters, and many others, having become the interested yet indifferent friend of all these; confounding them together in his estimation, measuring them with the same measure, judging them with the same eye, though having to see them every day at every hour, without any transition, and to speak with them all on the same business of his own. He compared himself to a man who had to drink off samples of every kind of wine one after the other, and who would soon be unable to tell Château Margaux from Argenteuil.

He became in a short time a remarkable reporter, certain of his information, artful, swift, subtle, a real find for the paper, as was observed by Daddy Walter, who knew what newspaper men were. However, as he got only centimes a line in addition to his monthly screw of two hundred francs, and as life on the boulevards and in *cafés* and restaurants is costly, he never had a halfpenny, and was disgusted with his poverty. There is some knack to be got hold of, he thought, seeing some of his fellows with their pockets full of money without ever being able to understand what secret methods they could make use of to procure this abundance. He enviously suspected unknown and suspicious transactions, services rendered, a whole system of contraband accepted and agreed to. But it was necessary that he should penetrate the mystery, enter into the tacit partnership, make himself one with the comrades who were sharing without him.

And he often thought of an evening, as he watched the trains go by from his window, of the steps he ought to take.

V

Two months had gone by, September was at hand, and the rapid fortune which Duroy had hoped for seemed to him slow in coming. He was, above all, uneasy at the mediocrity of his position, and did not see by what path he could scale the heights on the summit of which one finds respect, power, and money. He felt shut up in the mediocre calling of a reporter, so walled in as to be unable to get out of it. He was appreciated, but estimated in accordance with his position. Even Forestier, to whom he rendered a thousand services, no longer invited him to dinner, and treated him in every way as an inferior, though still accosting him as a friend.

From time to time, it is true, Duroy, seizing an opportunity, got in a short article, and having acquired through his paragraphs a mastery over his pen, and a tact which was lacking to him when he wrote his second article on Algeria, no longer ran any risk of having his descriptive efforts refused. But from this to writing leaders according to his fancy, or dealing with political questions with authority, there was as great a difference as driving in the Bois de Boulogne as a coachman, and as the owner of an equipage. That which humiliated him above everything was to see the door of society closed to him, to have no equal relations with it, not to be able to penetrate into the intimacy of its women, although several well-known actresses had occasionally received him with an interested familiarity.

He knew, moreover, from experience that all the sex, ladies or actresses, felt a singular attraction towards him, an instantaneous sympathy, and he experienced the impatience of a hobbled horse at not knowing those whom his future may depend on.

He had often thought of calling on Madame Forestier, but the recollection of their last meeting checked and humiliated him; and besides, he was awaiting an invitation to do so from her husband. Then the recollection of Madame de Marelle occurred to him, and recalling that she had asked him to come and see her, he called one afternoon when he had nothing to do.

“I am always at home till three o’clock,” she had said.

He rang at the bell of her residence, a fourth floor in the Rue de Verneuil, at half-past two.

At the sound of the bell a servant opened the door, an untidy girl, who tied her cap strings as she replied: “Yes, Madame is at home, but I don’t know whether she is up.”

And she pushed open the drawing-room door, which was ajar. Duroy went in. The room was fairly large, scantily furnished and neglected looking. The chairs, worn and old, were arranged along the walls, as placed by the servant, for there was nothing to reveal the tasty care of the woman who loves her home. Four indifferent pictures, representing a boat on a stream, a ship at sea, a mill on a plain, and a wood-cutter in a wood, hung in the center of the four walls by cords of unequal length, and all four on one side. It could be divined that they had been dangling thus askew ever so long before indifferent eyes.

Duroy sat down immediately. He waited a long time. Then a door opened, and Madame de Marelle hastened in, wearing a Japanese morning gown of rose-colored silk embroidered with yellow landscapes, blue flowers, and white birds.

“Fancy! I was still in bed!” she exclaimed. “How good of you to come and see me! I had made up my mind that you had forgotten me.”

She held out both her hands with a delighted air, and Duroy, whom the commonplace appearance of the room had put at his ease, kissed one, as he had seen Norbert de Varenne do.

She begged him to sit down, and then scanning him from head to foot, said: “How you have altered! You have improved in looks. Paris has done you good. Come, tell me the news.”

And they began to gossip at once, as if they had been old acquaintances, feeling an instantaneous familiarity spring up between them; feeling one of those mutual currents of confidence, intimacy, and affection, which, in five minutes, make two beings of the same breed and character good friends.

Suddenly, Madame de Marelle exclaimed in astonishment: “It is funny how I get on with you. It seems to me as though I had known you for ten years. We shall become good friends, no doubt. Would you like it?”

He answered: “Certainly,” with a smile which said still more.

He thought her very tempting in her soft and bright-hued gown, less refined and delicate than the other in her white one, but more exciting and spicy. When he was beside Madame Forestier, with her continual and gracious smile which attracted and checked at the same time; which seemed to say: “You please me,” and also “Take care,” and of which the real meaning was never clear, he felt above all the wish to lie down at her feet, or to kiss the lace bordering of her bodice, and slowly inhale the warm and perfumed atmosphere that must issue from it. With Madame de Marelle he felt within him a more definite, a more brutal desire — a desire that made his fingers quiver in presence of the rounded outlines of the light silk.

She went on talking, scattering in each phrase that ready wit of which she had acquired the habit just as a workman acquires the knack needed to accomplish a task reputed difficult, and at which other folk are astonished. He listened, thinking: “All this is worth remembering. A man could write charming articles of Paris gossip by getting her to chat over the events of the day.”

Some one tapped softly, very softly, at the door by which she had entered, and she called out: “You can come in, pet.”

Her little girl made her appearance, walked straight up to Duroy, and held out her hand to him. The astonished mother murmured: “But this is a complete conquest. I no longer recognize her.”

The young fellow, having kissed the child, made her sit down beside him, and with a serious manner asked her pleasant questions as to what she had been doing since they last met. She replied, in her little flute-like voice, with her grave and grown-up air.

The clock struck three, and the journalist arose.

“Come often,” said Madame de Marelle, “and we will chat as we have done to-day; it will always give me pleasure. But how is it one no longer sees you at the Forestiers?” He replied: “Oh! for no reason. I have been very busy. I hope to meet you there again one of these days.”

He went out, his heart full of hope, though without knowing why.

He did not speak to Forestier of this visit. But he retained the recollection of it the following days, and more than the recollection — a sensation of the unreal yet persistent presence of this woman. It seemed to him that he had carried away something of her, the reflection of her form in his eyes, and the smack of her moral self in his heart. He remained under the haunted influence of her image, as it happens sometimes when we have passed pleasant hours with some one.

He paid a second visit a few days later.

The maid ushered him into the drawing-room, and Laurine at once appeared. She held out no longer her hand, but her forehead, and said:

“Mamma has told me to request you to wait for her. She will be a quarter-of-an-hour, because she is not dressed yet. I will keep you company.”

Duroy, who was amused by the ceremonious manners of the little girl, replied: “Certainly, Mademoiselle. I shall be delighted to pass a quarter-of-an-hour with you, but I warn you that for my part I am not at all serious, and that I play all day long, so I suggest a game at touch.”

The girl was astonished; then she smiled as a woman would have done at this idea, which shocked her a little as well as astonished her, and murmured: “Rooms are not meant to be played in.”

He said: “It is all the same to me. I play everywhere. Come, catch me.”

And he began to go round the table, exciting her to pursue him, while she came after him, smiling with a species of polite condescension, and sometimes extending her hand to touch him, but without ever giving way so far as to run. He stopped, stooped down, and when she drew near with her little hesitating steps, sprung up in the air like a jack-in-the-box, and then bounded with a single stride to the other end of the dining-room. She thought it funny, ended by laughing, and becoming aroused, began to trot after him, giving little gleeful yet timid cries when she thought she had him. He shifted the chairs and used them as obstacles, forcing her to go round and round one of them for a minute at a time, and then leaving that one to seize upon another. Laurine ran now, giving herself wholly up to the charm of this new game, and with flushed face, rushed forward with the bound of a delighted child at each of the flights, the tricks, the feints of her companion. Suddenly, just as she thought she had got him, he seized her in his arms, and lifting her to the ceiling, exclaimed: “Touch.”

The delighted girl wriggled her legs to escape, and laughed with all her heart.

Madame de Marelle came in at that moment, and was amazed. “What, Laurine, Laurine, playing! You are a sorcerer, sir.”

He put down the little girl, kissed her mother’s hand, and they sat down with the child between them. They began to chat, but Laurine, usually so silent, kept talking all the while, and had to be sent to her room. She obeyed without a word, but with tears in her eyes.

As soon as they were alone, Madame de Marelle lowered her voice. “You do not know, but I have a grand scheme, and I have thought of you. This is it. As I dine every week at the Forestiers, I return their hospitality from time to time at some restaurant. I do not like to entertain company at home, my household is not arranged for that, and besides, I do not understand anything about domestic affairs, anything about the kitchen, anything at all. I like to live anyhow. So I entertain them now and then at a restaurant, but it is not very lively when there are only three, and my own acquaintances scarcely go well with them. I tell you all this in order to explain a somewhat irregular invitation. You understand, do you not, that I want you to make one of us on Saturday at the Café Riche, at half-past seven. You know the place?”

He accepted with pleasure, and she went on: “There will be only us four. These little outings are very amusing to us women who are not accustomed to them.”

She was wearing a dark brown dress, which showed off the lines of her waist, her hips, her bosom, and her arm in a coquettishly provocative way. Duroy felt confusedly astonished at the lack of harmony between this carefully refined elegance and her evident carelessness as regarded her dwelling. All that clothed her body, all that closely and directly touched her flesh was fine and delicate, but that which surrounded her did not matter to her.

He left her, retaining, as before, the sense of her continued presence in species of hallucination of the senses. And he awaited the day of the dinner with growing impatience.

Having hired, for the second time, a dress suit — his funds not yet allowing him to buy one — he arrived first at the rendezvous, a few minutes before the time. He was ushered up to the second story, and into a small private dining-room hung with red and white, its single window opening into the boulevard. A square table, laid for four, displaying its white cloth, so shining that it seemed to be varnished, and the glasses and the silver glittered brightly in the light of the twelve candles of two tall candelabra. Without was a broad patch of light green, due to the leaves of a tree lit up by the bright light from the dining-rooms.

Duroy sat down in a low armchair, upholstered in red to match the hangings on the walls. The worn springs yielding beneath him caused him to feel as though sinking into a hole. He heard throughout the huge house a confused murmur, the murmur of a large restaurant, made up of the clattering of glass and silver, the hurried steps of the waiters, deadened by the carpets in the passages, and the opening of doors letting out the sound of voices from the numerous private rooms in which people were dining.

Forestier came in and shook hands with him, with a cordial familiarity which he never displayed at the offices of the *Vie Francaise*.

“The ladies are coming together,” said he; “these little dinners are very pleasant.”

Then he glanced at the table, turned a gas jet that was feebly burning completely off, closed one sash of the window on account of the draught, and chose a sheltered place for himself, with a remark: “I must be careful; I have been better for a month, and now I am queer again these last few days. I must have caught cold on Tuesday, coming out of the theater.”

The door was opened, and, followed by a waiter, the two ladies appeared, veiled, muffled, reserved, with that charmingly mysterious bearing they assume in such places, where the surroundings are suspicious.

As Duroy bowed to Madame Forestier she scolded him for not having come to see her again; then she added with a smile, in the direction of her friend: “I know what it is; you prefer Madame de Marelle, you can find time to visit her.”

They sat down to table, and the waiter having handed the wine card to Forestier, Madame de Marelle exclaimed: “Give these gentlemen whatever they like, but for us iced champagne, the best, sweet champagne, mind — nothing else.” And the man having withdrawn, she added with an excited laugh: “I am going to get tipsy this evening; we will have a spree — a regular spree.”

Forestier, who did not seem to have heard, said: “Would you mind the window being closed? My chest has been rather queer the last few days.”

“No, not at all.”

He pushed too the sash left open, and returned to his place with a reassured and tranquil countenance. His wife said nothing. Seemingly lost in thought, and with her eyes lowered towards the table, she smiled at the glasses with that vague smile which seemed always to promise and never to grant.

The Ostend oysters were brought in, tiny and plump like little ears enclosed in shells, and melting between the tongue and the palate like salt bon-bons. Then, after the soup, was served a trout as rose-tinted as a young girl, and the guests began to talk.

They spoke at first of a current scandal; the story of a lady of position, surprised by one of her husband’s friends supping in a private room with a foreign prince. Forestier laughed a great deal at the adventure; the two ladies declared that the indiscreet gossip was nothing less than a blackguard and a coward. Duroy was of their opinion, and loudly proclaimed that it is the duty of a man in these matters, whether he be actor, confidant, or simple spectator, to be silent as the grave. He added: “How full life would be of pleasant things if we could reckon upon the absolute discretion of one another. That which often, almost always, checks women is the fear of the secret being revealed. Come, is it not true?” he continued. “How many are there who would yield to a sudden desire, the caprice of an hour, a passing fancy, did they not fear to pay for a short-lived and fleeting pleasure by an irremediable scandal and painful tears?”

He spoke with catching conviction, as though pleading a cause, his own cause, as though he had said: “It is not with me that one would have to dread such dangers. Try me and see.”

They both looked at him approvingly, holding that he spoke rightly and justly, confessing by their friendly silence that their flexible morality as Parisians would not have held out long before the certainty of secrecy. And Forestier, leaning back in his place on the divan, one leg bent under him, and his napkin thrust into his waistcoat, suddenly said with the satisfied laugh of a skeptic: “The deuce! yes, they would all go in for it if they were certain of silence. Poor husbands!”

And they began to talk of love. Without admitting it to be eternal, Duroy understood it as lasting, creating a bond, a tender friendship, a confidence. The union of the senses was only a seal to the union of hearts. But he was angry at the outrageous jealousies, melodramatic scenes, and unpleasantness which almost always accompany ruptures.

When he ceased speaking, Madame de Marelle replied: “Yes, it is the only pleasant thing in life, and we often spoil it by preposterous unreasonableness.”

Madame Forestier, who was toying with her knife, added: “Yes — yes — it is pleasant to be loved.”

And she seemed to be carrying her dream further, to be thinking things that she dared not give words to.

As the first *entreé* was slow in coming, they sipped from time to time a mouthful of champagne, and nibbled bits of crust. And the idea of love, entering into them, slowly intoxicated their souls, as the bright wine, rolling drop by drop down their throats, fired their blood and perturbed their minds.

The waiter brought in some lamb cutlets, delicate and tender, upon a thick bed of asparagus tips.

"Ah! this is good," exclaimed Forestier; and they ate slowly, savoring the delicate meat and vegetables as smooth as cream.

Duroy resumed: "For my part, when I love a woman everything else in the world disappears." He said this in a tone of conviction.

Madame Forestier murmured, with her let-me-alone air:

"There is no happiness comparable to that of the first hand-clasp, when the one asks, 'Do you love me?' and the other replies, 'Yes.'"

Madame de Marelle, who had just tossed a fresh glass of champagne off at a draught, said gayly, as she put down her glass: "For my part, I am not so Platonic."

And all began to smile with kindling eyes at these words.

Forestier, stretched out in his seat on the divan, opened his arms, rested them on the cushions, and said in a serious tone: "This frankness does you honor, and proves that you are a practical woman. But may one ask you what is the opinion of Monsieur de Marelle?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, with infinite and prolonged disdain; and then in a decided tone remarked: "Monsieur de Marelle has no opinions on this point. He only has — abstentions."

And the conversation, descending from the elevated theories, concerning love, strayed into the flowery garden of polished blackguardism. It was the moment of clever double meanings; veils raised by words, as petticoats are lifted by the wind; tricks of language; clever disguised audacities; sentences which reveal nude images in covered phrases; which cause the vision of all that may not be said to flit rapidly before the eye and the mind, and allow the well-bred people the enjoyment of a kind of subtle and mysterious love, a species of impure mental contact, due to the simultaneous evocation of secret, shameful, and longed-for pleasures. The roast, consisting of partridges flanked by quails, had been served; then a dish of green peas, and then a terrine of foie gras, accompanied by a curly-leaved salad, filling a salad bowl as though with green foam. They had partaken of all these things without tasting them, without knowing, solely taken up by what they were talking of, plunged as it were in a bath of love.

The two ladies were now going it strongly in their remarks. Madame de Marelle, with a native audacity which resembled a direct provocation, and Madame Forestier with a charming reserve, a modesty in her tone, voice, smile, and bearing that underlined while seeming to soften the bold remarks falling from her lips. Forestier, leaning quite back on the cushions, laughed, drank and ate without leaving off, and sometimes threw in a word so risque or so crude that the ladies, somewhat shocked by its appearance, and for appearance sake, put on a little air of embarrassment that lasted two or three seconds. When he had given vent to something a little too coarse, he added: “You are going ahead nicely, my children. If you go on like that you will end by making fools of yourselves.”

Dessert came, and then coffee; and the liquors poured a yet warmer dose of commotion into the excited minds.

As she had announced on sitting down to table, Madame de Marelle was intoxicated, and acknowledged it in the lively and graceful rabble of a woman emphasizing, in order to amuse her guests, a very real commencement of drunkenness.

Madame Forestier was silent now, perhaps out of prudence, and Duroy, feeling himself too much excited not to be in danger of compromising himself, maintained a prudent reserve.

Cigarettes were lit, and all at once Forestier began to cough. It was a terrible fit, that seemed to tear his chest, and with red face and forehead damp with perspiration, he choked behind his napkin. When the fit was over he growled angrily: “These feeds are very bad for me; they are ridiculous.” All his good humor had vanished before his terror of the illness that haunted his thoughts. “Let us go home,” said he.

Madame de Marelle rang for the waiter, and asked for the bill. It was brought almost immediately. She tried to read it, but the figures danced before her eyes, and she passed it to Duroy, saying: “Here, pay for me; I can’t see, I am too tipsy.”

And at the same time she threw him her purse. The bill amounted to one hundred and thirty francs. Duroy checked it, and then handed over two notes and received back the change, saying in a low tone: “What shall I give the waiter?”

“What you like; I do not know.”

He put five francs on the salver, and handed back the purse, saying: “Shall I see you to your door?”

“Certainly. I am incapable of finding my way home.”

They shook hands with the Forestiers, and Duroy found himself alone with Madame de Marelle in a cab. He felt her close to him, so close, in this dark box, suddenly lit up for a moment by the lamps on the sidewalk. He felt through his sleeve the warmth of her shoulder, and he could find nothing to say to her, absolutely nothing, his mind being paralyzed by the imperative desire to seize her in his arms.

"If I dared to, what would she do?" he thought. The recollection of all the things uttered during dinner emboldened him, but the fear of scandal restrained him at the same time.

Nor did she say anything either, but remained motionless in her corner. He would have thought that she was asleep if he had not seen her eyes glitter every time that a ray of light entered the carriage.

"What was she thinking?" He felt that he must not speak, that a word, a single word, breaking this silence would destroy his chance; yet courage failed him, the courage needed for abrupt and brutal action. All at once he felt her foot move. She had made a movement, a quick, nervous movement of impatience, perhaps of appeal. This almost imperceptible gesture caused a thrill to run through him from head to foot, and he threw himself upon her, seeking her mouth with his lips, her form with his hands.

But the cab having shortly stopped before the house in which she resided, Duroy, surprised, had no time to seek passionate phrases to thank her, and express his grateful love. However, stunned by what had taken place, she did not rise, she did not stir. Then he was afraid that the driver might suspect something, and got out first to help her to alight.

At length she got out of the cab, staggering and without saying a word. He rang the bell, and as the door opened, said, tremblingly: "When shall I see you again?"

She murmured so softly that he scarcely heard it: "Come and lunch with me to-morrow." And she disappeared in the entry, pushed to the heavy door, which closed with a noise like that of a cannon. He gave the driver five francs, and began to walk along with rapid and triumphant steps, and heart overflowing with joy.

He had won at last — a married woman, a lady. How easy and unexpected it had all been. He had fancied up till then that to assail and conquer one of these so greatly longed-for beings, infinite pains, interminable expectations, a skillful siege carried on by means of gallant attentions, words of love, sighs, and gifts were needed. And, lo! suddenly, at the faintest attack, the first whom he had encountered had yielded to him so quickly that he was stupefied at it.

“She was tipsy,” he thought; “to-morrow it will be another story. She will meet me with tears.” This notion disturbed him, but he added: “Well, so much the worse. Now I have her, I mean to keep her.”

He was somewhat agitated the next day as he ascended Madame de Marelle’s staircase. How would she receive him? And suppose she would not receive him at all? Suppose she had forbidden them to admit him? Suppose she had said — but, no, she could not have said anything without letting the whole truth be guessed. So he was master of the situation.

The little servant opened the door. She wore her usual expression. He felt reassured, as if he had anticipated her displaying a troubled countenance, and asked: “Is your mistress quite well?”

She replied: “Oh! yes, sir, the same as usual,” and showed him into the drawing-room.

He went straight to the chimney-glass to ascertain the state of his hair and his toilet, and was arranging his necktie before it, when he saw in it the young woman watching him as she stood at the door leading from her room. He pretended not to have noticed her, and the pair looked at one another for a few moments in the glass, observing and watching before finding themselves face to face. He turned round. She had not moved, and seemed to be waiting. He darted forward, stammering: “My darling! my darling!”

She opened her arms and fell upon his breast; then having lifted her head towards him, their lips met in a long kiss.

He thought: “It is easier than I should have imagined. It is all going on very well.”

And their lips separating, he smiled without saying a word, while striving to throw a world of love into his looks. She, too, smiled, with that smile by which women show their desire, their consent, their wish to yield themselves, and murmured: “We are alone. I have sent Laurine to lunch with one of her young friends.”

He sighed as he kissed her. “Thanks, I will worship you.”

Then she took his arm, as if he had been her husband, to go to the sofa, on which they sat down side by side. He wanted to start a clever and attractive chat, but not being able to do so to his liking, stammered: “Then you are not too angry with me?”

She put her hand on his mouth, saying “Be quiet.”

They sat in silence, looking into one another's eyes, with burning fingers interlaced.

"How I did long for you!" said he.

She repeated: "Be quiet."

They heard the servant arranging the table in the adjoining dining-room, and he rose, saying: "I must not remain so close to you. I shall lose my head."

The door opened, and the servant announced that lunch was ready. Duroy gravely offered his arm.

They lunched face to face, looking at one another and constantly smiling, solely taken up by themselves, and enveloped in the sweet enchantment of a growing love. They ate, without knowing what. He felt a foot, a little foot, straying under the table. He took it between his own and kept it there, squeezing it with all his might. The servant came and went, bringing and taking away the dishes with a careless air, without seeming to notice anything.

When they had finished they returned to the drawing-room, and resumed their place on the sofa, side by side. Little by little he pressed up against her, striving to take her in his arms. But she calmly repulsed him, saying: "Take care; someone may come in."

He murmured: "When can I see you quite alone, to tell you how I love you?"

She leant over towards him and whispered: "I will come and pay you a visit one of these days."

He felt himself redden. "You know — you know — my place is very small."

She smiled: "That does not matter. It is you I shall call to see, and not your rooms."

Then he pressed her to know when she would come. She named a day in the latter half of the week. He begged of her to advance the date in broken sentences, playing with and squeezing her hands, with glittering eyes, and flushed face, heated and torn by desire, that imperious desire which follows *tête-à-tête* repasts. She was amazed to see him implore her with such ardor, and yielded a day from time to time. But he kept repeating: "To-morrow, only say to-morrow."

She consented at length. "Yes, to-morrow; at five o'clock."

He gave a long sigh of joy, and they then chatted almost quietly with an air of intimacy, as though they had known one another twenty years. The sound of the door bell made them start, and with a bound they separated to a distance. She murmured: “It must be Laurine.”

The child made her appearance, stopped short in amazement, and then ran to Duroy, clapping her hands with pleasure at seeing him, and exclaiming: “Ah! pretty boy.”

Madame de Marelle began to laugh. “What! Pretty boy! Laurine has baptized you. It’s a nice little nickname for you, and I will call you Pretty-boy, too.”

He had taken the little girl on his knee, and he had to play with her at all the games he had taught her. He rose to take his leave at twenty minutes to three to go to the office of the paper, and on the staircase, through the half-closed door, he still whispered: “To-morrow, at five.”

She answered “Yes,” with a smile, and disappeared.

As soon as he had got through his day’s work, he speculated how he should arrange his room to receive his mistress, and hide as far as possible the poverty of the place. He was struck by the idea of pinning a lot of Japanese trifles on the walls, and he bought for five francs quite a collection of little fans and screens, with which he hid the most obvious of the marks on the wall paper. He pasted on the window panes transparent pictures representing boats floating down rivers, flocks of birds flying across rosy skies, multi-colored ladies on balconies, and processions of little black men over plains covered with snow. His room, just big enough to sleep and sit down in, soon looked like the inside of a Chinese lantern. He thought the effect satisfactory, and passed the evening in pasting on the ceiling birds that he had cut from the colored sheets remaining over. Then he went to bed, lulled by the whistle of the trains.

He went home early the next day, carrying a paper bag of cakes and a bottle of Madeira, purchased at the grocer’s. He had to go out again to buy two plates and two glasses, and arranged this collation on his dressing-table, the dirty wood of which was covered by a napkin, the jug and basin being hidden away beneath it.

Then he waited.

She came at about a quarter-past five; and, attracted by the bright colors of the pictures, exclaimed: “Dear me, yours is a nice place. But there are a lot of people about on the staircase.”

He had clasped her in his arms, and was eagerly kissing the hair between her forehead and her bonnet through her veil.

An hour and a half later he escorted her back to the cab-stand in the Rue de Rome. When she was in the carriage he murmured: “Tuesday at the same time?”

She replied: “Tuesday at the same time.” And as it had grown dark, she drew his head into the carriage and kissed him on the lips. Then the driver, having whipped up his beast, she exclaimed: “Good-bye, Pretty-boy,” and the old vehicle started at the weary trot of its old white horse.

For three weeks Duroy received Madame de Marelle in this way every two or three days, now in the evening and now in the morning. While he was expecting her one afternoon, a loud uproar on the stairs drew him to the door. A child was crying. A man’s angry voice shouted: “What is that little devil howling about now?” The yelling and exasperated voice of a woman replied: “It is that dirty hussy who comes to see the penny-a-liner upstairs; she has upset Nicholas on the landing. As if dabs like that, who pay no attention to children on the staircase, should be allowed here.”

Duroy drew back, distracted, for he could hear the rapid rustling of skirts and a hurried step ascending from the story just beneath him. There was soon a knock at the door, which he had reclosed. He opened it, and Madame de Marelle rushed into the room, terrified and breathless, stammering: “Did you hear?”

He pretended to know nothing. “No; what?”

“How they have insulted me.”

“Who? Who?”

“The blackguards who live down below.”

“But, surely not; what does it all mean, tell me?”

She began to sob, without being able to utter a word. He had to take off her bonnet, undo her dress, lay her on the bed, moisten her forehead with a wet towel. She was choking, and then when her emotion was somewhat abated, all her wrathful indignation broke out. She wanted him to go down at once, to thrash them, to kill them.

He repeated: “But they are only work-people, low creatures. Just remember that it would lead to a police court, that you might be recognized, arrested, ruined. One cannot lower one’s self to have anything to do with such people.”

She passed on to another idea. “What shall we do now? For my part, I cannot come here again.”

He replied: “It is very simple; I will move.”

She murmured: “Yes, but that will take some time.” Then all at once she framed a plan, and reassured, added softly: “No, listen, I know what to do; let me act, do not trouble yourself about anything. I will send you a telegram to-morrow morning.”

She smiled now, delighted with her plan, which she would not reveal, and indulged in a thousand follies. She was very agitated, however, as she went downstairs, leaning with all her weight on her lover’s arm, her legs trembled so beneath her. They did not meet anyone, though.

As he usually got up late, he was still in bed the next day, when, about eleven o’clock, the telegraph messenger brought him the promised telegram. He opened it and read:

“Meet me at five; 127, Rue de Constantinople. Rooms hired by Madame Duroy. — Clo.”

At five o’clock to the minute he entered the doorkeeper’s lodge of a large furnished house, and asked: “It is here that Madame Duroy has taken rooms, is it not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Will you show me to them, if you please.”

The man, doubtless used to delicate situations in which prudence is necessary, looked him straight in the eyes, and then, selecting one of the long range of keys, said: “You are Monsieur Duroy?”

“Yes, certainly.”

The man opened the door of a small suite of rooms on the ground floor in front of the lodge. The sitting-room, with a tolerably fresh wall-paper of floral design, and a carpet so thin that the boards of the floor could be felt through it, had mahogany furniture, upholstered in green rep with a yellow pattern. The bedroom was so small that the bed three-parts filled it. It occupied the further end, stretching from one wall to the other — the large bed of a furnished lodging-house, shrouded in heavy blue curtains also of rep, and covered with an eider-down quilt of red silk stained with suspicious-looking spots.

Duroy, uneasy and displeased, thought: “This place will cost, Lord knows how much. I shall have to borrow again. It is idiotic what she has done.”

The door opened, and Clotilde came in like a whirlwind, with outstretched arms and rustling skirts. She was delighted. “Isn’t it nice, eh, isn’t it nice? And on the ground floor, too; no stairs to go up. One could get in and out of the windows without the doorkeeper seeing one. How we will love one another here!”

He kissed her coldly, not daring to put the question that rose to his lips. She had placed a large parcel on the little round table in the middle of the room. She opened it, and took out a cake of soap, a bottle of scent, a sponge, a box of hairpins, a buttonhook, and a small pair of curling tongs to set right her fringe, which she got out of curl every time. And she played at moving in, seeking a place for everything, and derived great amusement from it.

She kept on chattering as she opened the drawers. “I must bring a little linen, so as to be able to make a change if necessary. It will be very convenient. If I get wet, for instance, while I am out, I can run in here to dry myself. We shall each have one key, beside the one left with the doorkeeper in case we forget it. I have taken the place for three months, in your name, of course, since I could not give my own.”

Then he said: “You will let me know when the rent is to be paid.”

She replied, simply: “But it is paid, dear.”

“Then I owe it to you.”

“No, no, my dear; it does not concern you at all; this is a little fancy of my own.”

He seemed annoyed: “Oh, no, indeed; I can’t allow that.”

She came to him in a supplicating way, and placing her hands on his shoulders, said: “I beg of you, George; it will give me so much pleasure to feel that our little nest here is mine — all my own. You cannot be annoyed at that. How can you? I wanted to contribute that much towards our loves. Say you agree, Georgy; say you agree.”

She implored him with looks, lips, the whole of her being. He held out, refusing with an irritated air, and then he yielded, thinking that, after all, it was fair. And when she had gone, he murmured, rubbing his hands, and without seeking in the depths of his heart whence the opinion came on that occasion: “She is very nice.”

He received, a few days later, another telegram running thus: “My husband returns to-night, after six weeks’ inspection, so we shall have a week off. What a bore, darling. — Clo.”

Duroy felt astounded. He had really lost all idea of her being married. But here was a man whose face he would have liked to see just once, in order to know him. He patiently awaited the husband’s departure, but he passed two evenings at the Folies Bergère, which wound up with Rachel.

Then one morning came a fresh telegram: “To-day at five. — Clo.”

They both arrived at the meeting-place before the time. She threw herself into his arms with an outburst of passion, and kissed him all over the face, and then said: “If you like, when we have loved one another a great deal, you shall take me to dinner somewhere. I have kept myself disengaged.”

It was at the beginning of the month, and although his salary was long since drawn in advance, and he lived from day to day upon money gleaned on every side, Duroy happened to be in funds, and was pleased at the opportunity of spending something upon her, so he replied: “Yes, darling, wherever you like.”

They started off, therefore, at about seven, and gained the outer boulevards. She leaned closely against him, and whispered in his ear: “If you only knew how pleased I am to walk out on your arm; how I love to feel you beside me.”

He said: “Would you like to go to Père Lathuile’s?”

“Oh, no, it is too swell. I should like something funny, out of the way! a restaurant that shopmen and work-girls go to. I adore dining at a country inn. Oh! if we only had been able to go into the country.”

As he knew nothing of the kind in the neighborhood, they wandered along the boulevard, and ended by going into a wine-shop where there was a dining-room. She had seen through the window two bareheaded girls seated at tables with two soldiers. Three cab-drivers were dining at the further end of the long and narrow room, and an individual impossible to classify under any calling was smoking, stretched on a chair, with his legs stuck out in front of him, his hands in the waist-band of his trousers, and his head thrown back over the top bar. His jacket was a museum of stains, and in his swollen pockets could be noted the neck of a bottle, a piece of bread, a parcel wrapped up in a newspaper, and a dangling piece of string. He had thick, tangled, curly hair, gray with scurf, and his cap was on the floor under his chair.

The entrance of Clotilde created a sensation, due to the elegance of her toilet. The couples ceased whispering together, the three cab-drivers left off arguing, and the man who was smoking, having taken his pipe from his mouth and spat in front of him, turned his head slightly to look.

Madame de Marelle murmured: “It is very nice; we shall be very comfortable here. Another time I will dress like a work-girl.” And she sat down, without embarrassment or disgust, before the wooden table, polished by the fat of dishes, washed by spilt liquors, and cleaned by a wisp of the waiter’s napkin. Duroy, somewhat ill at ease, and slightly ashamed, sought a peg to hang his tall hat on. Not finding one, he put it on a chair.

They had a ragout, a slice of melon, and a salad. Clotilde repeated: “I delight in this. I have low tastes. I like this better than the Café Anglais.” Then she added: “If you want to give me complete enjoyment, you will take me to a dancing place. I know a very funny one close by called the Reine Blanche.”

Duroy, surprised at this, asked: “Whoever took you there?”

He looked at her and saw her blush, somewhat disturbed, as though this sudden question had aroused within her some delicate recollections. After one of these feminine hesitations, so short that they can scarcely be guessed, she replied: “A friend of mine,” and then, after a brief silence, added, “who is dead.” And she cast down her eyes with a very natural sadness.

Duroy, for the first time, thought of all that he did not know as regarded the past life of this woman. Certainly she already had lovers, but of what kind, in what class of society? A vague jealousy, a species of enmity awoke within him; an enmity against all that he did not know, all that had not belonged to him. He looked at her, irritated at the mystery wrapped up within that pretty, silent head, which was thinking, perhaps, at that very moment, of the other, the others, regretfully. How he would have liked to have looked into her recollections — to have known all.

She repeated: “Will you take me to the Reine Blanche? That will be a perfect treat.”

He thought: “What matters the past? I am very foolish to bother about it,” and smilingly replied: “Certainly, darling.”

When they were in the street she resumed, in that low and mysterious tone in which confidences are made: “I dared not ask you this until now, but you cannot imagine how I love these escapades in places ladies do not go to. During the carnival I will dress up as a schoolboy. I make such a capital boy.”

When they entered the ball-room she clung close to him, gazing with delighted eyes on the girls and the bullies, and from time to time, as though to reassure herself as regards any possible danger, saying, as she noticed some serious and motionless municipal guard: “That is a strong-looking fellow.” In a quarter of an hour she had had enough of it and he escorted her home.

Then began quite a series of excursions in all the queer places where the common people amuse themselves, and Duroy discovered in his mistress quite a liking for this vagabondage of students bent on a spree. She came to their meeting-place in a cotton frock and with a servant’s cap — a theatrical servant’s cap — on her head; and despite the elegant and studied simplicity of her toilet, retained her rings, her bracelets, and her diamond earrings, saying, when he begged her to remove them: “Bah! they will think they are paste.”

She thought she was admirably disguised, and although she was really only concealed after the fashion of an ostrich, she went into the most ill-famed drinking places. She wanted Duroy to dress himself like a workman, but he resisted, and retained his correct attire, without even consenting to exchange his tall hat for one of soft felt. She was consoled for this obstinacy on his part by the reflection that she would be taken for a chambermaid engaged in a love affair with a gentleman, and thought this delightful. In this guise they went into popular wine-shops, and sat down on rickety chairs at old wooden tables in smoke-filled rooms. A cloud of strong tobacco smoke, with which still blended the smell of fish fried at dinner time, filled the room; men in blouses shouted at one another as they tossed off nips of spirits; and the astonished waiter would stare at this strange couple as he placed before them two cherry brandies. She — trembling, fearsome, yet charmed — began to sip the red liquid, looking round her with uneasy and kindling eye. Each cherry swallowed gave her the sensation of a sin committed, each drop of burning liquor flowing down her throat gave her the pleasure of a naughty and forbidden joy.

Then she would say, “Let us go,” and they would leave. She would pass rapidly, with bent head and the short steps of an actress leaving the stage, among the drinkers, who, with their elbows on the tables, watched her go by with suspicious and dissatisfied glances; and when she had crossed the threshold would give a deep sigh, as if she had just escaped some terrible danger.

Sometimes she asked Duroy, with a shudder: “If I were insulted in these places, what would you do?”

He would answer, with a swaggering air: “Take your part, by Jove!”

And she would clasp his arm with happiness, with, perhaps, a vague wish to be insulted and defended, to see men fight on her account, even such men as those, with her lover.

But these excursions taking place two or three times a week began to weary Duroy, who had great difficulty, besides, for some time past, in procuring the ten francs necessary for the cake and the drinks. He now lived very hardly and with more difficulty than when he was a clerk in the Northern Railway; for having spent lavishly during his first month of journalism, in the constant hope of gaining large sums of money in a day or two, he had exhausted all his resources and all means of procuring money. A very simple method, that of borrowing from the cashier, was very soon exhausted; and he already owed the paper four months’ salary, besides six hundred francs advanced on his lineage account. He owed, besides, a hundred francs to Forestier, three hundred to Jacques Rival, who was free-handed with his money; and he was also eaten up by a number of small debts of from five francs to twenty. Saint-Potin, consulted as to the means of raising another hundred francs, had discovered no expedient, although a man of inventive mind, and Duroy was exasperated at this poverty, of which he was more sensible now than formerly, since he had more wants. A sullen rage against everyone smouldered within him, with an ever-increasing irritation, which manifested itself at every moment on the most futile pretexts. He sometimes asked himself how he could have spent an average of a thousand francs a month, without any excess and the gratification of any extravagant fancy, and he found that, by adding a lunch at eight francs to a dinner at twelve, partaken of in some large café on the boulevards, he at once came to a louis, which, added to ten francs pocket-money — that pocket-money that melts away, one does not know how — makes a total of thirty francs. But thirty francs a day is nine hundred francs at the end of the month. And he did not reckon in the cost of clothes, boots, linen, washing, etc.

So on the 14th December he found himself without a sou in his pocket, and without a notion in his mind how to get any money. He went, as he had often done of old, without lunch, and passed the afternoon working at the newspaper office, angry and preoccupied. About four o’clock he received a telegram from his mistress, running: “Shall we dine together, and have a lark afterwards?”

He at once replied: “Cannot dine.” Then he reflected that he would be very stupid to deprive himself of the pleasant moments she might afford him, and added: “But will wait at nine at our place.” And having sent one of the messengers with this, to save the cost of a telegram, he began to reflect what he should do to procure himself a dinner.

At seven o’clock he had not yet hit upon anything and a terrible hunger assailed him. Then he had recourse to the stratagem of a despairing man. He let all his colleagues depart, one after the other, and when he was alone rang sharply. Monsieur Walter’s messenger, left in charge of the offices, came in. Duroy was standing feeling in his pockets, and said in an abrupt voice: “Foucart, I have left my purse at home, and I have to go and dine at the Luxembourg. Lend me fifty sous for my cab.”

The man took three francs from his waistcoat pocket and said: “Do you want any more, sir?”

“No, no, that will be enough. Thanks.”

And having seized on the coins, Duroy ran downstairs and dined at a slap-bank, to which he drifted on his days of poverty.

At nine o’clock he was awaiting his mistress, with his feet on the fender, in the little sitting-room. She came in, lively and animated, brisked up by the keen air of the street. “If you like,” said she, “we will first go for a stroll, and then come home here at eleven. The weather is splendid for walking.”

He replied, in a grumbling tone: “Why go out? We are very comfortable here.”

She said, without taking off her bonnet: “If you knew, the moonlight is beautiful. It is splendid walking about to-night.”

“Perhaps so, but I do not care for walking about!”

He had said this in an angry fashion. She was struck and hurt by it, and asked: “What is the matter with you? Why do you go on in this way? I should like to go for a stroll, and I don’t see how that can vex you.”

He got up in a rage. “It does not vex me. It is a bother, that is all.”

She was one of those sort of women whom resistance irritates and impoliteness exasperates, and she said disdainfully and with angry calm: “I am not accustomed to be spoken to like that. I will go alone, then. Good-bye.”

He understood that it was serious, and darting towards her, seized her hands and kissed them, saying: “Forgive me, darling, forgive me. I am very nervous this evening, very irritable. I have had vexations and annoyances, you know — matters of business.”

She replied, somewhat softened, but not calmed down: “That does not concern me, and I will not bear the consequences of your ill-temper.”

He took her in his arms, and drew her towards the couch.

“Listen, darling, I did not want to hurt you; I was not thinking of what I was saying.”

He had forced her to sit down, and, kneeling before her, went on: “Have you forgiven me? Tell me you have forgiven me?”

She murmured, coldly: “Very well, but do not do so again;” and rising, she added: “Now let us go for a stroll.”

He had remained at her feet, with his arms clasped about her hips, and stammered: “Stay here, I beg of you. Grant me this much. I should so like to keep you here this evening all to myself, here by the fire. Say yes, I beg of you, say yes.”

She answered plainly and firmly: “No, I want to go out, and I am not going to give way to your fancies.”

He persisted. “I beg of you, I have a reason, a very serious reason.”

She said again: “No; and if you won’t go out with me, I shall go. Good-bye.”

She had freed herself with a jerk, and gained the door. He ran towards her, and clasped her in his arms, crying:

“Listen, Clo, my little Clo; listen, grant me this much.”

She shook her head without replying, avoiding his kisses, and striving to escape from his grasp and go.

He stammered: “Clo, my little Clo, I have a reason.”

She stopped, and looking him full in the face, said: “You are lying. What is it?”

He blushed not knowing what to say, and she went on in an indignant tone: “You see very well that you are lying, you low brute.” And with an angry gesture and tears in her eyes, she escaped him.

He again caught her by the shoulders, and, in despair, ready to acknowledge anything in order to avoid a rupture, he said, in a despairing tone: “I have not a son. That’s what it all means.” She stopped short, and looking into his eyes to read the truth in them, said: “You say?”

He had flushed to the roots of his hair. “I say that I have not a sou. Do you understand? Not twenty sous, not ten, not enough to pay for a glass of cassis in the café we may go into. You force me to confess what I am ashamed of. It was, however, impossible for me to go out with you, and when we were seated with refreshments in front of us to tell you quietly that I could not pay for them.”

She was still looking him in the face. “It is true, then?”

In a moment he had turned out all his pockets, those of his trousers, coat, and waistcoat, and murmured: “There, are you satisfied now?”

Suddenly opening her arms, in an outburst of passion, she threw them around his neck, crying: “Oh, my poor darling, my poor darling, if I had only known. How did it happen?”

She made him sit down, and sat down herself on his knees; then, with her arm round his neck, kissing him every moment on his moustache, his mouth, his eyes, she obliged him to tell her how this misfortune had come about.

He invented a touching story. He had been obliged to come to the assistance of his father, who found himself in difficulties. He had not only handed over to him all his savings, but had even incurred heavy debts on his behalf. He added: “I shall be pinched to the last degree for at least six months, for I have exhausted all my resources. So much the worse; there are crises in every life. Money, after all, is not worth troubling about.”

She whispered: “I will lend you some; will you let me?”

He answered, with dignity: “You are very kind, pet; but do not think of that, I beg of you. You would hurt my feelings.”

She was silent, and then clasping him in her arms, murmured: “You will never know how much I love you.”

It was one of their most pleasant evenings.

As she was leaving, she remarked, smilingly: “How nice it is when one is in your position to find money you had forgotten in your pocket — a coin that had worked its way between the stuff and the lining.”

He replied, in a tone of conviction: “Ah, yes, that it is.”

She insisted on walking home, under the pretense that the moon was beautiful and went into ecstasies over it. It was a cold, still night at the beginning of winter. Pedestrians and horses went by quickly, spurred by a sharp frost. Heels rang on the pavement. As she left him she said: “Shall we meet again the day after to-morrow?”

"Certainly."

"At the same time?"

"The same time."

"Good-bye, dearest." And they kissed lovingly.

Then he walked home swiftly, asking himself what plan he could hit on the morrow to get out of his difficulty. But as he opened the door of his room, and fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a match, he was stupefied to find a coin under his fingers. As soon as he had a light he hastened to examine it. It was a louis. He thought he must be mad. He turned it over and over, seeking by what miracle it could have found its way there. It could not, however, have fallen from heaven into his pocket.

Then all at once he guessed, and an angry indignation awoke within him. His mistress had spoken of money slipping into the lining, and being found in times of poverty. It was she who had tendered him this alms. How shameful! He swore: "Ah! I'll talk to her the day after to-morrow. She shall have a nice time over it."

And he went to bed, his heart filled with anger and humiliation.

He woke late. He was hungry. He tried to go to sleep again, in order not to get up till two o'clock, and then said to himself: "That will not forward matters. I must end by finding some money." Then he went out, hoping that an idea might occur to him in the street. It did not; but at every restaurant he passed a longing to eat made his mouth water. As by noon he had failed to hit on any plan, he suddenly made up his mind: "I will lunch out of Clotilde's twenty francs. That won't hinder me from paying them back to-morrow."

He, therefore, lunched for two francs fifty centimes. On reaching the office he also gave three francs to the messenger, saying: "Here, Foucart, here is the money you lent me last night for my cab."

He worked till seven o'clock. Then he went and dined taking another three francs. The two evening bocks brought the expenditure of the day up to nine francs thirty centimes. But as he could not re-establish a credit or create fresh resources in twenty-four hours, he borrowed another six francs fifty centimes the next day from the twenty he was going to return that very evening, so that he came to keep his appointment with just four francs twenty centimes in his pocket.

He was in a deuce of a temper, and promised himself that he would pretty soon explain things. He would say to his mistress: "You know, I found the twenty francs you slipped into my pocket the other day. I cannot give them back to you now, because my situation is unaltered, and I have not had time to occupy myself with money matters. But I will give them to you the next time we meet."

She arrived, loving, eager, full of alarm. How would he receive her? She kissed him persistently to avoid an explanation at the outset.

He said to himself: "It will be time enough to enter on the matter by-and-by. I will find an opportunity of doing so."

He did not find the opportunity, and said nothing, shirking before the difficulty of opening this delicate subject. She did not speak of going out, and was in every way charming. They separated about midnight, after making an appointment for the Wednesday of the following week, for Madame de Marelle was engaged to dine out several days in succession.

The next day, as Duroy, on paying for his breakfast, felt for the four coins that ought to be remaining to him, he perceived that they were five, and one of them a gold one. At the outset he thought that he had received it by mistake in his change the day before, then he understood it, and his heart throbbed with humiliation at this persistent charity. How he now regretted not having said anything! If he had spoken energetically this would not have happened.

For four days he made efforts, as numerous as they were fruitless, to raise five louis, and spent Clotilde's second one. She managed, although he had said to her savagely, "Don't play that joke of the other evening's again, or I shall get angry," to slip another twenty francs into his trouser pockets the first time they met. When he found them he swore bitterly, and transferred them to his waistcoat to have them under his hand, for he had not a rap. He appeased his conscience by this argument: "I will give it all back to her in a lump. After all, it is only borrowed money."

At length the cashier of the paper agreed, on his desperate appeals, to let him have five francs daily. It was just enough to live upon, but not enough to repay sixty francs with. But as Clotilde was again seized by her passion for nocturnal excursions in all the suspicious localities in Paris, he ended by not being unbearably annoyed to find a yellow boy in one of his pockets, once even in his boot, and another time in his watch-case, after their adventurous excursions. Since she had wishes which he could not for the moment gratify himself, was it not natural that she should pay for them rather than go without them? He kept an account, too, of all he received in this way, in order to return it to her some day.

One evening she said to him: “Would you believe that I have never been to the Folies-Bergère? Will you take me there?”

He hesitated a moment, afraid of meeting Rachel. Then he thought: “Bah! I am not married, after all. If that girl sees me she will understand the state of things, and will not speak to me. Besides, we will have a box.”

Another reason helped his decision. He was well pleased of this opportunity of offering Madame de Marelle a box at the theater without its costing anything. It was a kind of compensation.

He left her in the cab while he got the order for the box, in order that she might not see it offered him, and then came to fetch her. They went in, and were received with bows by the acting manager. An immense crowd filled the lounge, and they had great difficulty in making their way through the swarm of men and women. At length they reached the box and settled themselves in it, shut in between the motionless orchestra and the eddy of the gallery. But Madame de Marelle rarely glanced at the stage. Wholly taken up with the women promenading behind her back, she constantly turned round to look at them, with a longing to touch them, to feel their bodices, their skirts, their hair, to know what these creatures were made of.

Suddenly she said: “There is a stout, dark girl who keeps watching us all the time. I thought just now that she was going to speak to us. Did you notice her?”

He answered: “No, you must be mistaken.” But he had already noticed her for some time back. It was Rachel who was prowling about in their neighborhood, with anger in her eyes and hard words upon her lips.

Duroy had brushed against her in making his way through the crowd, and she had whispered, “Good evening,” with a wink which signified, “I understand.” But he had not replied to this mark of attention for fear of being seen by his mistress, and he had passed on coldly, with haughty look and disdainful lip. The woman, whom unconscious jealousy already assailed, turned back, brushed against him again, and said in louder tones: “Good evening, George.” He had not answered even then. Then she made up her mind to be recognized and bowed to, and she kept continually passing in the rear of the box, awaiting a favorable moment.

As soon as she saw that Madame de Marelle was looking at her she touched Duroy’s shoulder, saying: “Good evening, are you quite well?”

He did not turn round, and she went on: “What, have you grown deaf since Thursday?” He did not reply, affecting a contempt which would not allow him to compromise himself even by a word with this slut.

She began to laugh an angry laugh, and said: “So you are dumb, then? Perhaps the lady has bitten your tongue off?”

He made an angry movement, and exclaimed, in an exasperated tone: “What do you mean by speaking to me? Be off, or I will have you locked up.”

Then, with fiery eye and swelling bosom, she screeched out: “So that’s it, is it? Ah! you lout. When a man sleeps with a woman the least he can do is to nod to her. It is no reason because you are with someone else that you should cut me to-day. If you had only nodded to me when I passed you just now, I should have left you alone. But you wanted to do the grand. I’ll pay you out! Ah, so you won’t say good evening when you meet me!”

She would have gone on for a long time, but Madame de Marelle had opened the door of the box and fled through the crowd, blindly seeking the way out. Duroy started off in her rear and strove to catch her up, while Rachel, seeing them flee, yelled triumphantly: “Stop her, she has stolen my sweetheart.”

People began to laugh. Two gentlemen for fun seized the fugitive by the shoulders and sought to bring her back, trying, too, to kiss her. But Duroy, having caught her up, freed her forcibly and led her away into the street. She jumped into an empty cab standing at the door. He jumped in after her, and when the driver asked, “Where to, sir?” replied, “Wherever you like.”

The cab slowly moved off, jolting over the paving stones. Clotilde, seized by a kind of hysterical attack, sat choking and gasping with her hands covering her face, and Duroy neither knew what to do nor what to say. At last, as he heard her sobbing, he stammered out: “Clo, my dear little Clo, just listen, let me explain. It is not my fault. I used to know that woman, some time ago, you know— “

She suddenly took her hands from her face, and overcome by the wrath of a loving and deceitful woman, a furious wrath that enabled her to recover her speech, she pantingly jerked out, in rapid and broken sentences: “Oh! — you wretch — you wretch — what a scoundrel you are — can it be possible? How shameful — O Lord — how shameful!” Then, getting angrier and angrier as her ideas grew clearer and arguments suggested themselves to her, she went on: “It was with my money you paid her, wasn’t it? And I was giving him money — for that creature. Oh, the scoundrel!" She seemed for a few minutes to be seeking some stronger expression that would not come, and then all at once she spat out, as it were, the words: "Oh! you swine — you swine — you swine — you paid her with my money — you swine — you swine!" She could not think of anything else, and kept repeating, "You swine, you swine!"

Suddenly she leant out of the window, and catching the driver by the sleeve, cried, "Stop," and opening the door, sprang out.

George wanted to follow, but she cried, "I won't have you get out," in such loud tones that the passers-by began to gather about her, and Duroy did not move for fear of a scandal. She took her purse from her pocket and looked for some change by the light of the cab lantern, then taking two francs fifty centimes she put them in the driver's hand, saying, in ringing tones: "There is your fare — I pay you, now take this blackguard to the Rue Boursault, Batignolles."

Mirth was aroused in the group surrounding her. A gentleman said: "Well done, little woman," and a young rapscallion standing close to the cab thrust his head into the open door and sang out, in shrill tones, "Good-night, lovey!" Then the cab started off again, followed by a burst of laughter.

VI

George Duroy woke up chapfallen the next morning.

He dressed himself slowly, and then sat down at his window and began to reflect. He felt a kind of aching sensation all over, just as though he had received a drubbing over night. At last the necessity of finding some money spurred him up, and he went first to Forestier.

His friend received him in his study with his feet on the fender.

“What has brought you out so early?” said he.

“A very serious matter, a debt of honor.”

“At play?”

He hesitated a moment, and then said: “At play.”

“Heavy?”

“Five hundred francs.”

He only owed two hundred and eighty.

Forestier, skeptical on the point, inquired: “Whom do you owe it to?”

Duroy could not answer right off. “To — to — a Monsieur de Carleville.”

“Ah! and where does he live?”

“At — at— “

Forestier began to laugh. “Number ought, Nowhere Street, eh? I know that gentleman, my dear fellow. If you want twenty francs, I have still that much at your service, but no more.”

Duroy took the offered louis. Then he went from door to door among the people he knew, and wound up by having collected at about five o’clock the sum of eighty francs. And he still needed two hundred more; he made up his mind, and keeping for himself what he had thus gleaned, murmured: “Bah! I am not going to put myself out for that cat. I will pay her when I can.”

For a fortnight he lived regularly, economically, and chastely, his mind filled with energetic resolves. Then he was seized with a strong longing for love. It seemed to him that several years had passed since he last clasped a woman in his arms, and like the sailor who goes wild on seeing land, every passing petticoat made him quiver. So he went one evening to the Folies Bergère in the hope of finding Rachel. He caught sight of her indeed, directly he entered, for she scarcely went elsewhere, and went up to her smiling with outstretched hand. But she merely looked him down from head to foot, saying: “What do you want with me?”

He tried to laugh it off with, “Come, don’t be stuck-up.”

She turned on her heels, saying: “I don’t associate with ponces.”

She had picked out the bitterest insult. He felt the blood rush to his face, and went home alone.

Forestier, ill, weak, always coughing, led him a hard life at the paper, and seemed to rack his brain to find him tiresome jobs. One day, even, in a moment of nervous irritation, and after a long fit of coughing, as Duroy had not brought him a piece of information he wanted, he growled out: “Confound it! you are a bigger fool than I thought.”

The other almost struck him, but restrained himself, and went away muttering: “I’ll manage to pay you out some day.” An idea shot through his mind, and he added: “I will make a cuckold of you, old fellow!” And he took himself off, rubbing his hands, delighted at this project.

He resolved to set about it the very next day. He paid Madame Forestier a visit as a reconnaissance. He found her lying at full length on a couch, reading a book. She held out her hand without rising, merely turning her head, and said: “Good-day, Pretty-boy!”

He felt as though he had received a blow. “Why do you call me that?” he said.

She replied, with a smile: “I saw Madame de Marelle the other day, and learned how you had been baptized at her place.”

He felt reassured by her amiable air. Besides, what was there for him to be afraid of?

She resumed: “You spoil her. As to me, people come to see me when they think of it — the thirty-second of the month, or something like it.”

He sat down near her, and regarded her with a new species of curiosity, the curiosity of the amateur who is bargain-hunting. She was charming, a soft and tender blonde, made for caresses, and he thought: “She is better than the other, certainly.” He did not doubt his success, it seemed to him that he had only to stretch out his hand and take her, as one gathers a fruit.

He said, resolutely: “I did not come to see you, because it was better so.”

She asked, without understanding: “What? Why?”

“No, not at all.”

“Because I am in love with you; oh! only a little, and I do not want to be head over ears.”

She seemed neither astonished, nor shocked, nor flattered; she went on smiling the same indifferent smile, and replied with the same tranquillity: “Oh! you can come all the same. No one is in love with me long.”

He was surprised, more by the tone than by the words, and asked: “Why not?”

“Because it is useless. I let this be understood at once. If you had told me of your fear before, I should have reassured you, and invited you, on the contrary, to come as often as possible.”

He exclaimed, in a pathetic tone: “Can we command our feelings?”

She turned towards him: “My dear friend, for me a man in love is struck off the list of the living. He becomes idiotic, and not only idiotic, but dangerous. I cease all intimate relations with people who are in love with me, or who pretend to be so — because they bore me, in the first place; and, secondly, because they are as much objects of suspicion to me as a mad dog, which may have a fit of biting. I therefore put them into a kind of moral quarantine until their illness is over. Do not forget this. I know very well that in your case love is only a species of appetite, while with me it would be, on the contrary, a kind of — of — of communion of souls, which does not enter into a man’s religion. You understand its letter, and its spirit. But look me well in the face.” She no longer smiled. Her face was calm and cold, and she continued, emphatically: “I will never, never be your mistress; you understand. It is therefore absolutely useless, it would even be hurtful, for you to persist in this desire. And now that the operation is over, will you agree to be friends — good friends — real friends, I mean, without any mental reservation.”

He had understood that any attempt would be useless in face of this irrevocable sentence. He made up his mind at once, frankly, and, delighted at being able to secure this ally in the battle of life, held out both hands, saying: “I am yours, madame, as you will.”

She read the sincerity of his intention in his voice, and gave him her hands. He kissed them both, one after the other, and then said simply, as he raised his head: “Ah, if I had found a woman like you, how gladly I would have married her.”

She was touched this time — soothed by this phrase, as women are by the compliments which reach their hearts, and she gave him one of those rapid and grateful looks which make us their slaves. Then, as he could find no change of subject to renew the conversation, she said softly, laying her finger on his arm: “And I am going to play my part of a friend at once. You are clumsy.” She hesitated a moment, and then asked: “May I speak plainly?”

“Yes.”

“Quite plainly?”

“Quite.”

“Well, go and see Madame Walter, who greatly appreciates you, and do your best to please her. You will find a place there for your compliments, although she is virtuous, you understand me, perfectly virtuous. Oh! there is no hope of — of poaching there, either. You may find something better, though, by showing yourself. I know that you still hold an inferior position on the paper. But do not be afraid, they receive all their staff with the same kindness. Go there — believe me.”

He said, with a smile: “Thanks, you are an angel, a guardian angel.”

They spoke of one thing and another. He stayed for some time, wishing to prove that he took pleasure in being with her, and on leaving, remarked: “It is understood, then, that we are friends?”

“It is.”

As he had noted the effect of the compliment he had paid her shortly before, he seconded it by adding: “And if ever you become a widow, I enter the lists.”

Then he hurried away, so as not to give her time to get angry.

A visit to Madame Walter was rather awkward for Duroy, for he had not been authorized to call, and he did not want to commit a blunder. The governor displayed some good will towards him, appreciated his services, and employed him by preference on difficult jobs, so why should he not profit by this favor to enter the house? One day, then, having risen early, he went to the market while the morning sales were in progress, and for ten francs obtained a score of splendid pears. Having carefully packed them in a hamper to make it appear that they had come from a distance, he left them with the doorkeeper at Madame Walter’s with his card, on which he had written: “George Duroy begs Madame Walter to accept a little fruit which he received this morning from Normandy.”

He found the next morning, among his letters at the office, an envelope in reply, containing the card of Madame Walter, who “thanked Monsieur George Duroy, and was at home every Saturday.”

On the following Saturday he called. Monsieur Walter occupied, on the Boulevard Malesherbes, a double house, which belonged to him, and of which a part was let off, in the economical way of practical people. A single doorkeeper, quartered between the two carriage entrances, opened the door for both landlord and tenant, and imparted to each of the entrances an air of wealth by his get-up like a beadle, his big calves in white stockings, and his coat with gilt buttons and scarlet facings. The reception-rooms were on the first floor, preceded by an ante-room hung with tapestry, and shut in by curtains over the doorways. Two footmen were dozing on benches. One of them took Duroy's overcoat and the other relieved him of his cane, opened the door, advanced a few steps in front of the visitor, and then drawing aside, let him pass, calling out his name, into an empty room.

The young fellow, somewhat embarrassed, looked round on all sides when he perceived in a glass some people sitting down who seemed very far off. He was at sea at first as to the direction in which they were, the mirror having deceived his eyes. Then he passed through two empty drawing-rooms and reached a small boudoir hung with blue silk, where four ladies were chatting round a table bearing cups of tea. Despite the assurance he had acquired in course of his Parisian life, and above all in his career as a reporter, which constantly brought him into contact with important personages, Duroy felt somewhat intimidated by the get-up of the entrance and the passage through the deserted drawing-room. He stammered: "Madame, I have ventured," as his eyes sought the mistress of the house.

She held out her hand, which he took with a bow, and having remarked: "You are very kind sir, to call and see me," she pointed to a chair, in seeking to sit down in which he almost fell, having thought it much higher.

They had become silent. One of the ladies began to talk again. It was a question of the frost, which was becoming sharper, though not enough, however, to check the epidemic of typhoid fever, nor to allow skating. Every one gave her opinion on this advent of frost in Paris, then they expressed their preference for the different seasons with all the trivial reasons that lie about in people's minds like dust in rooms. The faint noise made by a door caused Duroy to turn his head, and he saw in a glass a stout lady approaching. As soon as she made her appearance in the boudoir one of the other visitors rose, shook hands and left, and the young fellow followed her black back glittering with jet through the drawing-rooms with his eyes. When the agitation due to this change had subsided they spoke without transition of the Morocco question and the war in the East and also of the difficulties of England in South Africa. These ladies discussed these matters from memory, as if they had been reciting passages from a fashionable play, frequently rehearsed.

A fresh arrival took place, that of a little curly-headed blonde, which brought about the departure of a tall, thin lady of middle age. They now spoke of the chance Monsieur Linet had of getting into the Academie-Francaise. The new-comer formerly believed that he would be beaten by Monsieur Cabanon-Lebas, the author of the fine dramatic adaption of Don Quixote in verse.

“You know it is to be played at the Odeon next winter?”

“Really, I shall certainly go and see such a very excellent literary effort.”

Madame Walter answered gracefully with calm indifference, without ever hesitating as to what she should say, her mind being always made up beforehand. But she saw that night was coming on, and rang for the lamps, while listening to the conversation that trickled on like a stream of honey, and thinking that she had forgotten to call on the stationer about the invitation cards for her next dinner. She was a little too stout, though still beautiful, at the dangerous age when the general break-up is at hand. She preserved herself by dint of care, hygienic precautions, and salves for the skin. She seemed discreet in all matters; moderate and reasonable; one of those women whose mind is correctly laid out like a French garden. One walks through it with surprise, but experiencing a certain charm. She had keen, discreet, and sound sense, that stood her instead of fancy, generosity, and affection, together with a calm kindness for everybody and everything.

She noted that Duroy had not said anything, that he had not been spoken to, and that he seemed slightly ill at ease; and as the ladies had not yet quitted the Academy, that favorite subject always occupying them some time, she said: “And you who should be better informed than any one, Monsieur Duroy, who is your favorite?”

He replied unhesitatingly: “In this matter, madame, I should never consider the merit, always disputable, of the candidates, but their age and their state of health. I should not ask about their credentials, but their disease. I should not seek to learn whether they have made a metrical translation of Lope de Vega, but I should take care to obtain information as to the state of their liver, their heart, their lungs, and their spinal marrow. For me a good hypertrophy, a good aneurism, and above all, a good beginning of locomotor ataxy, would be a hundred times more valuable than forty volumes of disgressions on the idea of patriotism as embodied in barbaric poetry."

An astonished silence followed this opinion, and Madame Walter asked with a smile: "But why?"

He replied: "Because I never seek aught else than the pleasure that any one can give the ladies. But, Madame, the Academy only has any real interest for you when an Academician dies. The more of them die the happier you must be. But in order that they may die quickly they must be elected sick and old." As they still remained somewhat surprised, he continued. "Besides, I am like you, and I like to read of the death of an Academician. I at once ask myself: 'Who will replace him?' And I draw up my list. It is a game, a very pretty little game that is played in all Parisian salons at each decease of one of the Immortals, the game of 'Death and the Forty Fogies.'"

The ladies, still slightly disconcerted, began however, to smile, so true were his remarks. He concluded, as he rose: "It is you who really elect them, ladies, and you only elect them to see them die. Choose them old, therefore, very old; as old as possible, and do not trouble yourselves about anything else."

He then retired very gracefully. As soon as he was gone, one of the ladies said: "He is very funny, that young fellow. Who is he?"

Madame Walter replied: "One of the staff of our paper, who does not do much yet; but I feel sure that he will get on."

Duroy strode gayly down the Boulevard Malesherbes, content with his exit, and murmuring: "A capital start."

He made it up with Rachel that evening.

The following week two things happened to him. He was appointed chief reporter and invited to dinner at Madame Walter's. He saw at once a connection between these things. The *Vie Francaise* was before everything a financial paper, the head of it being a financier, to whom the press and the position of a deputy served as levers. Making use of every cordiality as a weapon, he had always worked under the smiling mask of a good fellow; but he only employed men whom he had sounded, tried, and proved; whom he knew to be crafty, bold, and supple. Duroy, appointed chief of the reporting staff, seemed to him a valuable fellow.

This duty had been filled up till then by the chief sub-editor, Monsieur Boisrenard, an old journalist, as correct, punctual, and scrupulous as a clerk. In course of thirty years he had been sub-editor of eleven different papers, without in any way modifying his way of thinking or acting. He passed from one office to another as one changes one's restaurant, scarcely noticing that the cookery was not quite the same. Political and religious opinions were foreign to him. He was devoted to his paper, whatever it might be, well up in his work, and valuable from his experience. He worked like a blind man who sees nothing, like a deaf man who hears nothing, and like a dumb man who never speaks of anything. He had, however, a strong instinct of professional loyalty, and would not stoop to aught he did not think honest and right from the special point of view of his business.

Monsieur Walter, who thoroughly appreciated him, had however, often wished for another man to whom to entrust the "Echoes," which he held to be the very marrow of the paper. It is through them that rumors are set afloat and the public and the funds influenced. It is necessary to know how to slip the all-important matter, rather hinted at than said right out, in between the description of two fashionable entertainments, without appearing to intend it. It is necessary to imply a thing by judicious reservations; let what is desired be guessed at; contradict in such a fashion as to confirm, or affirm in such a way that no one shall believe the statement. It is necessary that in the "Echoes" everyone shall find every day at least one line of interest, in order that every one may read them. Every one must be thought of, all classes, all professions, Paris and the provinces, the army and the art world, the clergy and the university, the bar and the world of gallantry. The man who has the conduct of them, and who commands an army of reporters, must be always on the alert and always on his guard; mistrustful, far-seeing, cunning, alert, and supple; armed with every kind of cunning, and gifted with an infallible knack of spotting false news at the first glance, of judging which is good to announce and good to hide, of divining what will catch the public, and of putting it forward in such a way as to double its effect.

Monsieur Boisrenard, who had in his favor the skill acquired by long habit, nevertheless lacked mastery and dash; he lacked, above all, the native cunning needed to put forth day by day the secret ideas of the manager. Duroy could do it to perfection, and was an admirable addition to the staff. The wire-pullers and real editors of the *Vie Francaise* were half a dozen deputies, interested in all the speculations brought out or backed up by the manager. They were known in the Chamber as “Walter’s gang,” and envied because they gained money with him and through him. Forestier, the political editor, was only the man of straw of these men of business, the worker-out of ideas suggested by them. They prompted his leaders, which he always wrote at home, so as to do so in quiet, he said. But in order to give the paper a literary and truly Parisian smack, the services of two celebrated writers in different styles had been secured — Jacques Rival, a descriptive writer, and Norbert de Varenne, a poet and story-writer. To these had been added, at a cheap rate, theatrical, musical and art critics, a law reporter, and a sporting reporter, from the mercenary tribe of all-round pressmen. Two ladies, “Pink Domino” and “Lily Fingers,” sent in fashion articles, and dealt with questions of dress, etiquette, and society.

Duroy was in all the joy of his appointment as chief of the “Echoes” when he received a printed card on which he read: “Monsieur and Madame Walter request the pleasure of Monsieur Geo. Duroy’s company at dinner, on Thursday, January 20.” This new mark of favor following on the other filled him with such joy that he kissed the invitation as he would have done a love letter. Then he went in search of the cashier to deal with the important question of money. A chief of the reporting staff on a Paris paper generally has his budget out of which he pays his reporters for the intelligence, important or trifling, brought in by them, as gardeners bring in their fruits to a dealer. Twelve hundred francs a month were allotted at the outset to Duroy, who proposed to himself to retain a considerable share of it. The cashier, on his pressing instances, ended by advancing him four hundred francs. He had at first the intention of sending Madame de Marelle the two hundred and eighty francs he owed her, but he almost immediately reflected that he would only have a hundred and twenty left, a sum utterly insufficient to carry on his new duties in suitable fashion, and so put off this resolution to a future day.

During a couple of days he was engaged in settling down, for he had inherited a special table and a set of pigeon holes in the large room serving for the whole of the staff. He occupied one end of the room, while Boisrenard, whose head, black as a crow’s, despite his age, was always bent over a sheet of paper, had the other. The long table in the middle belonged to the staff. Generally it served them to sit on, either with their legs dangling over the edges, or squatted like tailors in the center. Sometimes five or six would be sitting on it in that fashion, perseveringly playing cup and ball. Duroy had ended by having a taste for this amusement, and was beginning to get expert at it, under the guidance, and thanks to the advice of Saint-Potin. Forestier, grown worse, had lent him his fine cup and ball in West Indian wood, the last he had bought, and which he found rather too heavy for him, and Duroy swung with vigorous arm the big black ball at the end of its string, counting quickly to himself: “One — two — three — four — five — six.” It happened precisely that for the first time he spiked the ball twenty times running, the very day that he was to dine at Madame Walter’s. “A good day,” he thought, “I am successful in everything.” For skill at cup and ball really conferred a kind of superiority in the office of the *Vie Francaise*.

He left the office early to have time to dress, and was going up the Rue de Londres when he saw, trotting along in front of him, a little woman whose figure recalled that of Madame de Marelle. He felt his cheeks flush, and his heart began to beat. He crossed the road to get a view of her. She stopped, in order to cross over, too. He had made a mistake, and breathed again. He had often asked how he ought to behave if he met her face to face. Should he bow, or should he seem not to have seen her. “I should not see her,” he thought.

It was cold; the gutters were frozen, and the pavement dry and gray in the gas-light. When he got home he thought: “I must change my lodgings; this is no longer good enough for me.” He felt nervous and lively, capable of anything; and he said aloud, as he walked from his bed to the window: “It is fortune at last — it is fortune! I must write to father.” From time to time he wrote to his father, and the letter always brought happiness to the little Norman inn by the roadside, at the summit of the slope overlooking Rouen and the broad valley of the Seine. From time to time, too, he received a blue envelope, addressed in a large, shaky hand, and read the same unvarying lines at the beginning of the paternal epistle. “My Dear Son: This leaves your mother and myself in good health. There is not much news here. I must tell you, however,” etc. In his heart he retained a feeling of interest for the village matters, for the news of the neighbours, and the condition of the crops.

He repeated to himself, as he tied his white tie before his little looking-glass: “I must write to father to-morrow. Wouldn’t the old fellow be staggered if he could see me this evening in the house I am going to? By

Jove! I am going to have such a dinner as he never tasted." And he suddenly saw the dark kitchen behind the empty *café*; the copper stewpans casting their yellow reflections on the wall; the cat on the hearth, with her nose to the fire, in sphinx-like attitude; the wooden table, greasy with time and spilt liquids, a soup tureen smoking upon it, and a lighted candle between two plates. He saw them, too — his father and mother, two slow-moving peasants, eating their soup. He knew the smallest wrinkles on their old faces, the slightest movements of their arms and heads. He knew even what they talked about every evening as they sat at supper. He thought, too: "I must really go and see them;" but his toilet being ended, he blew out his light and went downstairs.

As he passed along the outer boulevard girls accosted him from time to time. He replied, as he pulled away his arm: "Go to the devil!" with a violent disdain, as though they had insulted him. What did they take him for? Could not these hussies tell what a man was? The sensation of his dress coat, put on in order to go to dinner with such well-known and important people, inspired him with the sentiment of a new impersonality — the sense of having become another man, a man in society, genuine society.

He entered the ante-room, lit by tall bronze candelabra, with confidence, and handed in easy fashion his cane and overcoat to two valets who approached. All the drawing-rooms were lit up. Madame Walter received her guests in the second, the largest. She welcomed him with a charming smile, and he shook hands with two gentlemen who had arrived before him — Monsieur Firmin and Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu, deputies, and anonymous editors of the *Vie Francaise*. Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu had a special authority at the paper, due to a great influence he enjoyed in the Chamber. No one doubted his being a minister some day. Then came the Forestiers; the wife in pink, and looking charming. Duroy was stupefied to see her on terms of intimacy with the two deputies. She chatted in low tones beside the fireplace, for more than five minutes, with Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu. Charles seemed worn out. He had grown much thinner during the past month, and coughed incessantly as he repeated: "I must make up my mind to finish the winter in the south." Norbert de Varenne and Jacques Rival made their appearance together. Then a door having opened at the further end of the room, Monsieur Walter came in with two tall young girls, of from sixteen to eighteen, one ugly and the other pretty.

Duroy knew that the governor was the father of a family; but he was struck with astonishment. He had never thought of his daughters, save as one thinks of distant countries which one will never see. And then he had fancied them quite young, and here they were grown-up women. They held out their hands to him after being introduced, and then went and sat down at a little table, without doubt reserved to them, at which they began to turn over a number of reels of silk in a work-basket. They were still awaiting someone, and all were silent with that sense of oppression, preceding dinners, between people who do not find themselves in the same mental atmosphere after the different occupations of the day.

Duroy having, for want of occupation, raised his eyes towards the wall, Monsieur Walter called to him from a distance, with an evident wish to show off his property: “Are you looking at my pictures? I will show them to you,” and he took a lamp, so that the details might be distinguished.

“Here we have landscapes,” said he.

In the center of the wall was a large canvas by Guillemet, a bit of the Normandy coast under a lowering sky. Below it a wood, by Harpignies, and a plain in Algeria, by Guillemet, with a camel on the horizon, a tall camel with long legs, like some strange monument. Monsieur Walter passed on to the next wall, and announced in a grave tone, like a master of the ceremonies: “High Art.” There were four: “A Hospital Visit,” by Gervex; “A Harvester,” by Bastien-Lepage; “A Widow,” by Bouguereau; and “An Execution,” by Jean Paul Laurens. The last work represented a Vendean priest shot against the wall of his church by a detachment of Blues. A smile flitted across the governor’s grave countenance as he indicated the next wall. “Here the fanciful school.” First came a little canvas by Jean Beraud, entitled, “Above and Below.” It was a pretty Parisian mounting to the roof of a tramcar in motion. Her head appeared on a level with the top, and the gentlemen on the seats viewed with satisfaction the pretty face approaching them, while those standing on the platform below considered the young woman’s legs with a different expression of envy and desire. Monsieur Walter held the lamp at arm’s length, and repeated, with a sly laugh: “It is funny, isn’t it?” Then he lit up “A Rescue,” by Lambert. In the middle of a table a kitten, squatted on its haunches, was watching with astonishment and perplexity a fly drowning in a glass of water. It had its paw raised ready to fish out the insect with a rapid sweep of it. But it had not quite made up its mind. It hesitated. What would it do? Then the governor showed a

Detaille, “The Lesson,” which represented a soldier in a barrack-room teaching a poodle to play the drum, and said: “That is very witty.”

Duroy laughed a laugh of approbation, and exclaimed: “It is charming, charm— “ He stopped short on hearing behind him the voice of Madame de Marelle, who had just come in.

The governor continued to light up the pictures as he explained them. He now showed a water-color by Maurice Leloir, “The Obstacle.” It was a sedan chair checked on its way, the street being blocked by a fight between two laborers, two fellows struggling like Hercules. From out of the window of the chair peered the head of a charming woman, who watched without impatience, without alarm, and with a certain admiration, the combat of these two brutes. Monsieur Walter continued: “I have others in the adjoining rooms, but they are by less known men. I buy of the young artists now, the very young ones, and hang their works in the more private rooms until they become known.” He then went on in a low tone: “Now is the time to buy! The painters are all dying of hunger! They have not a sou, not a sou!”

But Duroy saw nothing, and heard without understanding. Madame de Marelle was there behind him. What ought he to do? If he spoke to her, might she not turn her back on him, or treat him with insolence? If he did not approach her, what would people think? He said to himself: “I will gain time, at any rate.” He was so moved that for a moment he thought of feigning a sudden illness, which would allow him to withdraw. The examination of the walls was over. The governor went to put down his lamp and welcome the last comer, while Duroy began to re-examine the pictures as if he could not tire of admiring them. He was quite upset. What should he do? Madame Forestier called to him: “Monsieur Duroy.” He went to her. It was to speak to him of a friend of hers who was about to give a fête, and who would like to have a line to that effect in the *Vie Francaise*. He gasped out: “Certainly, Madame, certainly.”

Madame de Marelle was now quite close to him. He dared not turn round to go away. All at once he thought he was going mad; she had said aloud: “Good evening, Pretty-boy. So you no longer recognize me.”

He rapidly turned on his heels. She stood before him smiling, her eyes beaming with sprightliness and affection, and held out her hand. He took it tremblingly, still fearing some trick, some perfidy. She added, calmly: “What has become of you? One no longer sees anything of you.”

He stammered, without being able to recover his coolness: “I have a great deal to do, Madame, a great deal to do. Monsieur Walter has entrusted me with new duties which give me a great deal of occupation.”

She replied, still looking him in the face, but without his being able to discover anything save good will in her glance: “I know it. But that is no reason for forgetting your friends.”

They were separated by a lady who came in, with red arms and red face, a stout lady in a very low dress, got up with pretentiousness, and walking so heavily that one guessed by her motions the size and weight of her legs. As she seemed to be treated with great attention, Duroy asked Madame Forestier: “Who is that lady?”

“The Viscomtesse de Percemur, who signs her articles ‘Lily Fingers.’”

He was astounded, and seized on by an inclination to laugh.

“‘Lily Fingers!’ ‘Lily Fingers!’ and I imagined her young like yourself. So that is ‘Lily Fingers.’ That is very funny, very funny.”

A servant appeared in the doorway and announced dinner. The dinner was commonplace and lively, one of those dinners at which people talk about everything, without saying anything. Duroy found himself between the elder daughter of the master of the house, the ugly one, Mademoiselle Rose and Madame de Marelle. The neighborhood of the latter made him feel very ill at ease, although she seemed very much at her ease, and chatted with her usual vivacity. He was troubled at first, constrained, hesitating, like a musician who has lost the keynote. By degrees, however, he recovered his assurance, and their eyes continually meeting questioned one another, exchanging looks in an intimate, almost sensual, fashion as of old. All at once he thought he felt something brush against his foot under the table. He softly pushed forward his leg and encountered that of his neighbor, which did not shrink from the contact. They did not speak, each being at that moment turned towards their neighbor. Duroy, his heart beating, pushed a little harder with his knee. A slight pressure replied to him. Then he understood that their loves were beginning anew. What did they say then? Not much, but their lips quivered every time that they looked at one another.

The young fellow, however, wishing to do the amiable to his employer’s daughter, spoke to her from time to time. She replied as the mother would have done, never hesitating as to what she should say. On the right of Monsieur Walter the Viscomtesse de Percemur gave herself the airs of a princess, and Duroy, amused at watching her, said in a low voice to Madame de Marelle. “Do you know the other, the one who signs herself ‘Pink Domino’?”

“Yes, very well, the Baroness de Livar.”

“Is she of the same breed?”

“No, but quite as funny. A tall, dried-up woman of sixty, false curls, projecting teeth, ideas dating from the Restoration, and toilets of the same epoch.”

“Where did they unearth these literary phenomena?”

“The scattered waifs of the nobility are always sheltered by enriched cits.”

“No other reason?”

“None.”

Then a political discussion began between the master of the house, the two deputies, Norbert de Varenne, and Jacques Rival, and lasted till dessert.

When they returned to the drawing-room, Duroy again approached Madame de Marelle, and looking her in the eyes, said: “Shall I see you home to-night?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because Monsieur Laroche Mathieu, who is my neighbor, drops me at my door every time I dine here.”

“When shall I see you?”

“Come and lunch with me to-morrow.”

And they separated without saying anything more.

Duroy did not remain late, finding the evening dull. As he went downstairs he overtook Norbert de Varenne, who was also leaving. The old poet took him by the arm. No longer having to fear any rivalry as regards the paper, their work being essentially different, he now manifested a fatherly kindness towards the young fellow.

“Well, will you walk home a bit of my way with me?” said he.

“With pleasure, my dear master,” replied Duroy.

And they went out, walking slowly along the Boulevard Malesherbes. Paris was almost deserted that night — a cold night — one of those nights that seem vaster, as it were, than others, when the stars seem higher above, and the air seems to bear on its icy breath something coming from further than even the stars. The two men did not speak at first. Then Duroy, in order to say something, remarked: “Monsieur Laroche Mathieu seems very intelligent and well informed.”

The old poet murmured: “Do you think so?”

The young fellow, surprised at this remark, hesitated in replying: “Yes; besides, he passes for one of the most capable men in the Chamber.”

“It is possible. In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king. All these people are commonplace because their mind is shut in between two walls, money and politics. They are dullards, my dear fellow, with whom it is impossible to talk about anything we care for. Their minds are at the bottom mud, or rather sewage; like the Seine Asnières. Ah! how difficult it is to find a man with breadth of thought, one who causes you the same sensation as the breeze from across the broad ocean one breathes on the seashore. I have known some such; they are dead.”

Norbert de Varenne spoke with a clear but restrained voice, which would have rung out in the silence of the night had he given it rein. He seemed excited and sad, and went on: “What matter, besides, a little more or less talent, since all must come to an end.”

He was silent, and Duroy, who felt light hearted that evening, said with a smile: “You are gloomy to-day, dear master.”

The poet replied: “I am always so, my lad, so will you be in a few years. Life is a hill. As long as one is climbing up one looks towards the summit and is happy, but when one reaches the top one suddenly perceives the descent before one, and its bottom, which is death. One climbs up slowly, but one goes down quickly. At your age a man is happy. He hopes for many things, which, by the way, never come to pass. At mine, one no longer expects anything — but death.”

Duroy began to laugh: “You make me shudder all over.”

Norbert de Varenne went on: “No, you do not understand me now, but later on you will remember what I am saying to you at this moment. A day comes, and it comes early for many, when there is an end to mirth, for behind everything one looks at one sees death. You do not even understand the word. At your age it means nothing; at mine it is terrible. Yes, one understands it all at once, one does not know how or why, and then everything in life changes its aspect. For fifteen years I have felt death assail me as if I bore within me some gnawing beast. I have felt myself decaying little by little, month by month, hour by hour, like a house crumbling to ruin. Death has disfigured me so completely that I do not recognize myself. I have no longer anything about me of myself — of the fresh, strong man I was at thirty. I have seen death whiten my black hairs, and with what skillful and spiteful slowness. Death has taken my firm skin, my muscles, my teeth, my whole body of old, only leaving me a despairing soul, soon to be taken too. Every step brings me nearer to death, every moment, every breath hastens his odious work. To breathe, sleep, drink, eat, work, dream, everything we do is to die. To live, in short, is to die. I now see death so near that I often want to stretch my arms to push it back. I see it everywhere. The insects crushed on the path, the falling leaves, the white hair in a friend's head, rend my heart and cry to me, "Behold it!" It spoils for me all I do, all I see, all that I eat and drink, all that I love; the bright moonlight, the sunrise, the broad ocean, the noble rivers, and the soft summer evening air so sweet to breathe."

He walked on slowly, dreaming aloud, almost forgetting that he had a listener: "And no one ever returns — never. The model of a statue may be preserved, but my body, my face, my thoughts, my desires will never reappear again. And yet millions of beings will be born with a nose, eyes, forehead, cheeks, and mouth like me, and also a soul like me, without my ever returning, without even anything recognizable of me appearing in these countless different beings. What can we cling to? What can we believe in? All religions are stupid, with their puerile morality and their egoistical promises, monstrously absurd. Death alone is certain."

He stopped, reflected for a few moments, and then, with a look of resignation, said: "I am a lost creature. I have neither father nor mother, nor sister nor brother; no wife, no children, no God."

He added, after a pause: "I have only verse."

They reached the Pont de la Concorde, crossed it in silence, and walked past the Palais Bourbon. Norbert de Varenne began to speak again, saying: "Marry, my friend; you do not know what it is to live alone at my age. Solitude now fills me with horrible agony — solitude at home by the fireside of a night. It is so profound, so sad; the silence of the room in which one dwells alone. It is not alone silence about the body, but silence about the soul; and when the furniture creaks I shudder to the heart, for no sound but is unexpected in my gloomy dwelling." He was silent again for a moment, and then added: "When one is old it is well, all the same, to have children."

They had got half way down the Rue de Bourgoyne. The poet halted in front of a tall house, rang the bell, shook Duroy by the hand, and said: “Forget all this old man’s doddering, youngster, and live as befits your age. Good-night.”

And he disappeared in the dark passage.

Duroy resumed his route with a pain at his heart. It seemed to him as though he had been shown a hole filled with bones, an unavoidable gulf into which all must fall one day. He muttered: “By Jove, it can’t be very lively in his place. I should not care for a front seat to see the procession of his thoughts go by. The deuce, no.”

But having paused to allow a perfumed lady, alighting from her carriage and entering her house, to pass before him, he drew in with eager breath the scent of vervain and orris root floating in the air. His lungs and heart throbbed suddenly with hope and joy, and the recollection of Madame de Marelle, whom he was to see the next day, assailed him from head to foot. All smiled on him, life welcomed him with kindness. How sweet was the realization of hopes!

He fell asleep, intoxicated with this idea, and rose early to take a stroll down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne before keeping his appointment. The wind having changed, the weather had grown milder during the night, and it was as warm and as sunny as in April. All the frequenters of the Bois had sallied out that morning, yielding to the summons of a bright, clear day. Duroy walked along slowly. He passed the Arc de Triomphe, and went along the main avenue. He watched the people on horseback, ladies and gentlemen, trotting and galloping, the rich folk of the world, and scarcely envied them now. He knew them almost all by name — knew the amount of their fortune, and the secret history of their life, his duties having made him a kind of directory of the celebrities and the scandals of Paris.

Ladies rode past, slender, and sharply outlined in the dark cloth of their habits, with that proud and unassailable air many women have on horseback, and Duroy amused himself by murmuring the names, titles, and qualities of the lovers whom they had had, or who were attributed to them. Sometimes, instead of saying “Baron de Tanquelot,” “Prince de la Tour-Enguerrand,” he murmured “Lesbian fashion, Louise Michot of the Vaudeville, Rose Marquetin of the Opera.”

The game greatly amused him, as if he had verified, beneath grave outward appearances, the deep, eternal infamy of mankind, and as if this had excited, rejoiced, and consoled him. Then he said aloud: “Set of hypocrites!” and sought out with his eye the horsemen concerning whom the worst tales were current. He saw many, suspected of cheating at play, for whom their clubs were, at all events, their chief, their sole source of livelihood, a suspicious one, at any rate. Others, very celebrated, lived only, it was well known, on the income of their wives; others, again, it was affirmed, on that of their mistresses. Many had paid their debts, an honorable action, without it ever being guessed whence the money had come — a very equivocal mystery. He saw financiers whose immense fortune had had its origin in a theft, and who were received everywhere, even in the most noble houses; then men so respected that the lower middle-class took off their hats on their passage, but whose shameless speculations in connection with great national enterprises were a mystery for none of those really acquainted with the inner side of things. All had a haughty look, a proud lip, an insolent eye. Duroy still laughed, repeating: “A fine lot; a lot of blackguards, of sharpers.”

But a pretty little open carriage passed, drawn by two white ponies with flowing manes and tails, and driven by a pretty fair girl, a well-known courtesan, who had two grooms seated behind her. Duroy halted with a desire to applaud this mushroom of love, who displayed so boldly at this place and time set apart for aristocratic hypocrites the dashing luxury earned between her sheets. He felt, perhaps vaguely, that there was something in common between them — a tie of nature, that they were of the same race, the same spirit, and that his success would be achieved by daring steps of the same kind. He walked back more slowly, his heart aglow with satisfaction, and arrived a little in advance of the time at the door of his former mistress.

She received him with proffered lips, as though no rupture had taken place, and she even forgot for a few moments the prudence that made her opposed to all caresses at her home. Then she said, as she kissed the ends of his moustache: “You don’t know what a vexation has happened to me, darling? I was hoping for a nice honeymoon, and here is my husband home for six weeks. He has obtained leave. But I won’t remain six weeks without seeing you, especially after our little tiff, and this is how I have arranged matters. You are to come and dine with us on Monday. I have already spoken to him about you, and I will introduce you.”

Duroy hesitated, somewhat perplexed, never yet having found himself face to face with a man whose wife he had enjoyed. He was afraid lest something might betray him — a slight embarrassment, a look, no matter what. He stammered out: “No, I would rather not make your husband’s acquaintance.”

She insisted, very much astonished, standing before him with wide open, wondering eyes. “But why? What a funny thing. It happens every day. I should not have thought you such a goose.”

He was hurt, and said: “Very well, I will come to dinner on Monday.”

She went on: “In order that it may seem more natural I will ask the Forestiers, though I really do not like entertaining people at home.”

Until Monday Duroy scarcely thought any more about the interview, but on mounting the stairs at Madame de Marelle’s he felt strangely uneasy, not that it was so repugnant to him to take her husband’s hand, to drink his wine, and eat his bread, but because he felt afraid of something without knowing what. He was shown into the drawing-room and waited as usual. Soon the door of the inner room opened, and he saw a tall, white-bearded man, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, grave and correct, who advanced towards him with punctilious politeness, saying: “My wife has often spoken to me of you, sir, and I am delighted to make your acquaintance.”

Duroy stepped forward, seeking to impart to his face a look of expressive cordiality, and grasped his host’s hand with exaggerated energy. Then, having sat down, he could find nothing to say.

Monsieur de Marelle placed a log upon the fire, and inquired: “Have you been long engaged in journalism?”

“Only a few months.”

“Ah! you have got on quickly?”

“Yes, fairly so,” and he began to chat at random, without thinking very much about what he was saying, talking of all the trifles customary among men who do not know one another. He was growing seasoned now, and thought the situation a very amusing one. He looked at Monsieur de Marelle’s serious and respectable face, with a temptation to laugh, as he thought: “I have cuckolded you, old fellow, I have cuckolded you.” A vicious, inward satisfaction stole over him — the satisfaction of a thief who has been successful, and is not even suspected — a delicious, roguish joy.

He suddenly longed to be the friend of this man, to win his confidence, to get him to relate the secrets of his life.

Madame de Marelle came in suddenly, and having taken them in with a smiling and impenetrable glance, went toward Duroy, who dared not, in the presence of her husband, kiss her hand as he always did. She was calm, and light-hearted as a person accustomed to everything, finding this meeting simple and natural in her frank and native trickery. Laurine appeared, and went and held up her forehead to George more quietly than usual, her father's presence intimidating her. Her mother said to her: "Well, you don't call him Pretty-boy to-day." And the child blushed as if a serious indiscretion had been committed, a thing that ought not to have been mentioned, revealed, an intimate and, so to say, guilty secret of her heart laid bare.

When the Forestiers arrived, all were alarmed at the condition of Charles. He had grown frightfully thin and pale within a week, and coughed incessantly. He stated, besides, that he was leaving for Cannes on the following Thursday, by the doctor's imperative orders. They left early, and Duroy said, shaking his head: "I think he is very bad. He will never make old bones."

Madame de Marelle said, calmly: "Oh! he is done for. There is a man who was lucky in finding the wife he did."

Duroy asked: "Does she help him much?"

"She does everything. She is acquainted with everything that is going on; she knows everyone without seeming to go and see anybody; she obtains what she wants as she likes. Oh! she is keen, clever, and intriguing as no one else is. She is a treasure for anyone wanting to get on."

George said: "She will marry again very quickly, no doubt?"

Madame de Marelle replied: "Yes. I should not be surprised if she had some one already in her eye — a deputy, unless, indeed, he objects — for — for — there may be serious — moral — obstacles. But then — I don't really know."

Monsieur de Marelle grumbled with slow impatience: "You are always suspecting a number of things that I do not like. Do not let us meddle with the affairs of others. Our conscience is enough to guide us. That should be a rule with everyone."

Duroy withdrew, uneasy at heart, and with his mind full of vague plans. The next day he paid a visit to the Forestiers, and found them finishing their packing up. Charles, stretched on a sofa, exaggerated his difficulty of breathing, and repeated: “I ought to have been off a month ago.”

Then he gave George a series of recommendations concerning the paper, although everything had been agreed upon and settled with Monsieur Walter. As George left, he energetically squeezed his old comrade’s hand, saying: “Well, old fellow, we shall have you back soon.” But as Madame Forestier was showing him out, he said to her, quickly: “You have not forgotten our agreement? We are friends and allies, are we not? So if you have need of me, for no matter what, do not hesitate. Send a letter or a telegram, and I will obey.”

She murmured: “Thanks, I will not forget.” And her eye, too, said “Thanks,” in a deeper and tenderer fashion.

As Duroy went downstairs, he met slowly coming up Monsieur de Vaudrec, whom he had met there once before. The Count appeared sad, at this departure, perhaps. Wishing to show his good breeding, the journalist eagerly bowed. The other returned the salutation courteously, but in a somewhat dignified manner.

The Forestiers left on Thursday evening.

VII

Charles's absence gave Duroy increased importance in the editorial department of the *Vie Francaise*. He signed several leaders besides his "Echoes," for the governor insisted on everyone assuming the responsibility of his "copy." He became engaged in several newspaper controversies, in which he acquitted himself creditably, and his constant relations with different statesmen were gradually preparing him to become in his turn a clever and perspicuous political editor. There was only one cloud on his horizon. It came from a little free-lance newspaper, which continually assailed him, or rather in him assailed the chief writer of "Echoes" in the *Vie Francaise*, the chief of "Monsieur Walter's startlers," as it was put by the anonymous writer of the *Plume*. Day by day cutting paragraphs, insinuations of every kind, appeared in it.

One day Jacques Rival said to Duroy: "You are very patient."

Duroy replied: "What can I do, there is no direct attack?"

But one afternoon, as he entered the editor's room, Boisrenard held out the current number of the *Plume*, saying: "Here's another spiteful dig at you."

"Ah! what about?"

"Oh! a mere nothing — the arrest of a Madame Aubert by the police."

George took the paper, and read, under the heading, "Duroy's Latest":

"The illustrious reporter of the *Vie Francaise* to-day informs us that Madame Aubert, whose arrest by a police agent belonging to the odious *brigade des mœurs* we announced, exists only in our imagination. Now the person in question lives at 18 Rue de l'Ecureuil, Montmartre. We understand only too well, however, the interest the agents of Walter's bank have in supporting those of the Prefect of Police, who tolerates their commerce. As to the reporter of whom it is a question, he would do better to give us one of those good sensational bits of news of which he has the secret — news of deaths contradicted the following day, news of battles which have never taken place, announcements of important utterances by sovereigns who have not said anything — all the news, in short, which constitutes Walter's profits, or even one of those little indiscretions concerning entertainments given by would-be fashionable ladies, or the excellence of certain articles of consumption which are of such resource to some of our compeers."

The young fellow was more astonished than annoyed, only understanding that there was something very disagreeable for him in all this.

Boisrenard went on: "Who gave you this 'Echo'?"

Duroy thought for a moment, having forgotten. Then all at once the recollection occurred to him, "Saint-Potin." He re-read the paragraph in the *Plume* and reddened, roused by the accusation of venality. He exclaimed: "What! do they mean to assert that I am paid— "

Boisrenard interrupted him: "They do, though. It is very annoying for you. The governor is very strict about that sort of thing. It might happen so often in the 'Echoes.'"

Saint-Potin came in at that moment. Duroy hastened to him. "Have you seen the paragraph in the *Plume*?"

"Yes, and I have just come from Madame Aubert. She does exist, but she was not arrested. That much of the report has no foundation."

Duroy hastened to the room of the governor, whom he found somewhat cool, and with a look of suspicion in his eye. After having listened to the statement of the case, Monsieur Walter said: "Go and see the woman yourself, and contradict the paragraph in such terms as will put a stop to such things being written about you any more. I mean the latter part of the paragraph. It is very annoying for the paper, for yourself, and for me. A journalist should no more be suspected than Cæsar's wife."

Duroy got into a cab, with Saint-Potin as his guide, and called out to the driver: "Number 18 Rue de l'Ecureuil, Montmartre."

It was a huge house, in which they had to go up six flights of stairs. An old woman in a woolen jacket opened the door to them. "What is it you want with me now?" said she, on catching sight of Saint-Potin.

He replied: "I have brought this gentleman, who is an inspector of police, and who would like to hear your story."

Then she let him in, saying: "Two more have been here since you, for some paper or other, I don't know which," and turning towards Duroy, added: "So this gentleman wants to know about it?"

"Yes. Were you arrested by an *agent des mœurs*?"

She lifted her arms into the air. "Never in my life, sir, never in my life. This is what it is all about. I have a butcher who sells good meat, but who gives bad weight. I have often noticed it without saying anything; but the other day, when I asked him for two pounds of chops, as I had my daughter and my son-in-law to dinner, I caught him weighing in bits of trimmings — trimmings of chops, it is true, but not of mine. I could have made a stew of them, it is true, as well, but when I ask for chops it is not to get other people's trimmings. I refused to take them, and he calls me an old shark. I called him an old rogue, and from one thing to another we picked up such a row that there were over a hundred people round the shop, some of them laughing fit to split. So that at last a police agent came up and asked us to settle it before the commissary. We went, and he dismissed the case. Since then I get my meat elsewhere, and don't even pass his door, in order to avoid his slanders."

She ceased talking, and Duroy asked: "Is that all?"

"It is the whole truth, sir," and having offered him a glass of cordial, which he declined, the old woman insisted on the short weight of the butcher being spoken of in the report.

On his return to the office, Duroy wrote his reply:

"An anonymous scribbler in the *Plume* seeks to pick a quarrel with me on the subject of an old woman whom he states was arrested by an *agent des mœurs*, which fact I deny. I have myself seen Madame Aubert — who is at least sixty years of age — and she told me in detail her quarrel with the butcher over the weighing of some chops, which led to an explanation before the commissary of police. This is the whole truth. As to the other insinuations of the writer in the *Plume*, I despise them. Besides, a man does not reply to such things when they are written under a mask.

"George Duroy."

Monsieur Walter and Jacques Rival, who had come in, thought this note satisfactory, and it was settled that it should go in at once.

Duroy went home early, somewhat agitated and slightly uneasy. What reply would the other man make? Who was he? Why this brutal attack? With the brusque manners of journalists this affair might go very far. He slept badly. When he read his reply in the paper next morning, it seemed to him more aggressive in print than in manuscript. He might, it seemed to him, have softened certain phrases. He felt feverish all day, and slept badly again at night. He rose at dawn to get the number of the *Plume* that must contain a reply to him.

The weather had turned cold again, it was freezing hard. The gutters, frozen while still flowing, showed like two ribbons of ice alongside the pavement. The morning papers had not yet come in, and Duroy recalled the day of his first article, “The Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique.” His hands and feet getting numbed, grew painful, especially the tips of his fingers, and he began to trot round the glazed kiosque in which the newspaper seller, squatting over her foot warmer, only showed through the little window a red nose and a pair of cheeks to match in a woolen hood. At length the newspaper porter passed the expected parcel through the opening, and the woman held out to Duroy an unfolded copy of the *Plume*.

He glanced through it in search of his name, and at first saw nothing. He was breathing again, when he saw between two dashes:

“Monsieur Duroy, of the *Vie Francaise*, contradicts us, and in contradicting us, lies. He admits, however, that there is a Madame Aubert, and that an agent took her before the commissary of police. It only remains, therefore, to add two words, ‘*des mœurs*,’ after the word ‘agent,’ and he is right. But the conscience of certain journalists is on a level with their talent. And I sign,

“Louis Langremont.”

George’s heart began to beat violently, and he went home to dress without being too well aware of what he was doing. So he had been insulted, and in such a way that no hesitation was possible. And why? For nothing at all. On account of an old woman who had quarreled with her butcher.

He dressed quickly and went to see Monsieur Walter, although it was barely eight o’clock. Monsieur Walter, already up, was reading the *Plume*. “Well,” said he, with a grave face, on seeing Duroy, “you cannot draw back now.” The young fellow did not answer, and the other went on: “Go at once and see Rival, who will act for you.”

Duroy stammered a few vague words, and went out in quest of the descriptive writer, who was still asleep. He jumped out of bed, and, having read the paragraph, said: “By Jove, you must go out. Whom do you think of for the other second?”

“I really don’t know.”

“Boisrenard? What do you think?”

“Yes. Boisrenard.”

“Are you a good swordsman?”

“Not at all.”

“The devil! And with the pistol?”

"I can shoot a little."

"Good. You shall practice while I look after everything else. Wait for me a moment."

He went into his dressing-room, and soon reappeared washed, shaved, correct-looking.

"Come with me," said he.

He lived on the ground floor of a small house, and he led Duroy to the cellar, an enormous cellar, converted into a fencing-room and shooting gallery, all the openings on the street being closed. After having lit a row of gas jets running the whole length of a second cellar, at the end of which was an iron man painted red and blue; he placed on a table two pairs of breech-loading pistols, and began to give the word of command in a sharp tone, as though on the ground: "Ready? Fire — one — two — three."

Duroy, dumbfounded, obeyed, raising his arm, aiming and firing, and as he often hit the mark fair on the body, having frequently made use of an old horse pistol of his father's when a boy, against the birds, Jacques Rival, well satisfied, exclaimed: "Good — very good — very good — you will do — you will do."

Then he left George, saying: "Go on shooting till noon; here is plenty of ammunition, don't be afraid to use it. I will come back to take you to lunch and tell you how things are going."

Left to himself, Duroy fired a few more shots, and then sat down and began to reflect. How absurd these things were, all the same! What did a duel prove? Was a rascal less of a rascal after going out? What did an honest man, who had been insulted, gain by risking his life against a scoundrel? And his mind, gloomily inclined, recalled the words of Norbert de Varenne.

Then he felt thirsty, and having heard the sound of water dropping behind him, found that there was a hydrant serving as a douche bath, and drank from the nozzle of the hose. Then he began to think again. It was gloomy in this cellar, as gloomy as a tomb. The dull and distant rolling of vehicles sounded like the rumblings of a far-off storm. What o'clock could it be? The hours passed by there as they must pass in prisons, without anything to indicate or mark them save the visits of the warder. He waited a long time. Then all at once he heard footsteps and voices, and Jacques Rival reappeared, accompanied by Boisrenard. He called out as soon as he saw Duroy: "It's all settled."

The latter thought the matter terminated by a letter of apology, his heart beat, and he stammered: “Ah! thanks.”

The descriptive writer continued: “That fellow Langremont is very square; he accepted all our conditions. Twenty-five paces, one shot, at the word of command raising the pistol. The hand is much steadier that way than bringing it down. See here, Boisrenard, what I told you.”

And taking a pistol he began to fire, pointed out how much better one kept the line by raising the arm. Then he said: “Now let’s go and lunch; it is past twelve o’clock.”

They went to a neighboring restaurant. Duroy scarcely spoke. He ate in order not to appear afraid, and then, in course of the afternoon, accompanied Boisrenard to the office, where he got through his work in an abstracted and mechanical fashion. They thought him plucky. Jacques Rival dropped in in the course of the afternoon, and it was settled that his seconds should call for him in a landau at seven o’clock the next morning, and drive to the Bois de Vesinet, where the meeting was to take place. All this had been done so unexpectedly, without his taking part in it, without his saying a word, without his giving his opinion, without accepting or refusing, and with such rapidity, too, that he was bewildered, scared, and scarcely able to understand what was going on.

He found himself at home at nine o’clock, after having dined with Boisrenard, who, out of self-devotion, had not left him all day. As soon as he was alone he strode quickly up and down his room for several minutes. He was too uneasy to think about anything. One solitary idea filled his mind, that of a duel on the morrow, without this idea awakening in him anything else save a powerful emotion. He had been a soldier, he had been engaged with the Arabs, without much danger to himself though, any more than when one hunts a wild boar.

To reckon things up, he had done his duty. He had shown himself what he should be. He would be talked of, approved of, and congratulated. Then he said aloud, as one does under powerful impressions: “What a brute of a fellow.”

He sat down and began to reflect. He had thrown upon his little table one of his adversary’s cards, given him by Rival in order to retain his address. He read, as he had already done a score of times during the day: “Louis Langremont, 176 Rue Montmartre.” Nothing more. He examined these assembled letters, which seemed to him mysterious and full of some disturbing import. Louis Langremont. Who was this man? What was his age, his height, his appearance? Was it not disgusting that a stranger, an unknown, should thus come and suddenly disturb one's existence without cause and from sheer caprice, on account of an old woman who had had a quarrel with her butcher. He again repeated aloud: "What a brute."

And he stood lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the card. Anger was aroused in him against this bit of paper, an anger with which was blended a strange sense of uneasiness. What a stupid business it was. He took a pair of nail scissors which were lying about, and stuck their points into the printed name, as though he was stabbing someone. So he was to fight, and with pistols. Why had he not chosen swords? He would have got off with a prick in the hand or arm, while with the pistols one never knew the possible result. He said: "Come, I must keep my pluck up."

The sound of his own voice made him shudder, and he glanced about him. He began to feel very nervous. He drank a glass of water and went to bed.

As soon as he was in bed he blew out his candle and closed his eyes. He was warm between the sheets, though it was very cold in his room, but he could not manage to doze off. He turned over and over, remained five minutes on his back, then lay on his left side, then rolled on the right. He was still thirsty, and got up to drink. Then a sense of uneasiness assailed him. Was he going to be afraid? Why did his heart beat wildly at each well-known sound in the room? When his clock was going to strike, the faint squeak of the lever made him jump, and he had to open his mouth for some moments in order to breathe, so oppressed did he feel. He began to reason philosophically on the possibility of his being afraid.

No, certainly he would not be afraid, now he had made up his mind to go through with it to the end, since he was firmly decided to fight and not to tremble. But he felt so deeply moved that he asked himself: "Can one be afraid in spite of one's self?" This doubt assailed him. If some power stronger than his will overcame it, what would happen? Yes, what would happen? Certainly he would go on the ground, since he meant to. But suppose he shook? suppose he fainted? And he thought of his position, his reputation, his future.

A strange need of getting up to look at himself in the glass suddenly seized him. He relit the candle. When he saw his face so reflected, he scarcely recognized himself, and it seemed to him that he had never seen himself before. His eyes appeared enormous, and he was pale; yes, he was certainly pale, very pale. Suddenly the thought shot through his mind: “By this time to-morrow I may be dead.” And his heart began to beat again furiously. He turned towards his bed, and distinctly saw himself stretched on his back between the same sheets as he had just left. He had the hollow cheeks of the dead, and the whiteness of those hands that no longer move. Then he grew afraid of his bed, and in order to see it no longer he opened the window to look out. An icy coldness assailed him from head to foot, and he drew back breathless.

The thought occurred to him to make a fire. He built it up slowly, without looking around. His hands shook slightly with a kind of nervous tremor when he touched anything. His head wandered, his disjointed, drifting thoughts became fleeting and painful, an intoxication invaded his mind as though he had been drinking. And he kept asking himself: “What shall I do? What will become of me?”

He began to walk up and down, repeating mechanically: “I must pull myself together. I must pull myself together.” Then he added: “I will write to my parents, in case of accident.” He sat down again, took some notepaper, and wrote: “Dear papa, dear mamma.” Then, thinking these words rather too familiar under such tragic circumstances, he tore up the first sheet, and began anew, “My dear father, my dear mother, I am to fight a duel at daybreak, and as it might happen that— “ He did not dare write the rest, and sprang up with a jump. He was now crushed by one besetting idea. He was going to fight a duel. He could no longer avoid it. What was the matter with him, then? He meant to fight, his mind was firmly made up to do so, and yet it seemed to him that, despite every effort of will, he could not retain strength enough to go to the place appointed for the meeting. From time to time his teeth absolutely chattered, and he asked himself: “Has my adversary been out before? Is he a frequenter of the shooting galleries? Is he known and classed as a shot?” He had never heard his name mentioned. And yet, if this man was not a remarkably good pistol shot, he would scarcely have accepted that dangerous weapon without discussion or hesitation.

Then Duroy pictured to himself their meeting, his own attitude, and the bearing of his opponent. He wearied himself in imagining the slightest details of the duel, and all at once saw in front of him the little round black hole in the barrel from which the ball was about to issue. He was suddenly seized with a fit of terrible despair. His whole body quivered, shaken by short, sharp shudderings. He clenched his teeth to avoid crying out, and was assailed by a wild desire to roll on the ground, to tear something to pieces, to bite. But he caught sight of a glass on the mantelpiece, and remembered that there was in the cupboard a bottle of brandy almost full, for he had kept up a military habit of a morning dram. He seized the bottle and greedily drank from its mouth in long gulps. He only put it down when his breath failed him. It was a third empty. A warmth like that of flame soon kindled within his body, and spreading through his limbs, buoyed up his mind by deadening his thoughts. He said to himself: “I have hit upon the right plan.” And as his skin now seemed burning he reopened the window.

Day was breaking, calm and icy cold. On high the stars seemed dying away in the brightening sky, and in the deep cutting of the railway, the red, green, and white signal lamps were paling. The first locomotives were leaving the engine shed, and went off whistling, to be coupled to the first trains. Others, in the distance, gave vent to shrill and repeated screeches, their awakening cries, like cocks of the country. Duroy thought: “Perhaps I shall never see all this again.” But as he felt that he was going again to be moved by the prospect of his own fate, he fought against it strongly, saying: “Come, I must not think of anything till the moment of the meeting; it is the only way to keep up my pluck.”

And he set about his toilet. He had another moment of weakness while shaving, in thinking that it was perhaps the last time he should see his face. But he swallowed another mouthful of brandy, and finished dressing. The hour which followed was difficult to get through. He walked up and down, trying to keep from thinking. When he heard a knock at the door he almost dropped, so violent was the shock to him. It was his seconds. Already!

They were wrapped up in furs, and Rival, after shaking his principal’s hand, said: “It is as cold as Siberia.” Then he added: “Well, how goes it?”

“Very well.”

“You are quite steady?”

“Quite.”

“That’s it; we shall get on all right. Have you had something to eat and drink?”

“Yes; I don’t need anything.”

Boisrenard, in honor of the occasion, sported a foreign order, yellow and green, that Duroy had never seen him display before.

They went downstairs. A gentleman was awaiting them in the carriage. Rival introduced him as “Doctor Le Brument.” Duroy shook hands, saying, “I am very much obliged to you,” and sought to take his place on the front seat. He sat down on something hard that made him spring up again, as though impelled by a spring. It was the pistol case.

Rival observed: “No, the back seat for the doctor and the principal, the back seat.”

Duroy ended by understanding him, and sank down beside the doctor. The two seconds got in in their turn, and the driver started. He knew where to go. But the pistol case was in the way of everyone, above all of Duroy, who would have preferred it out of sight. They tried to put it at the back of the seat and it hurt their own; they stuck it upright between Rival and Boisrenard, and it kept falling all the time. They finished by stowing it away under their feet. Conversation languished, although the doctor related some anecdotes. Rival alone replied to him. Duroy would have liked to have given a proof of presence of mind, but he was afraid of losing the thread of his ideas, of showing the troubled state of his mind, and was haunted, too, by the disturbing fear of beginning to tremble.

The carriage was soon right out in the country. It was about nine o’clock. It was one of those sharp winter mornings when everything is as bright and brittle as glass. The trees, coated with hoar frost, seemed to have been sweating ice; the earth rang under a footstep, the dry air carried the slightest sound to a distance, the blue sky seemed to shine like a mirror, and the sun, dazzling and cold itself, shed upon the frozen universe rays which did not warm anything.

Rival observed to Duroy: “I got the pistols at Gastine Renette’s. He loaded them himself. The box is sealed. We shall toss up, besides, whether we use them or those of our adversary.”

Duroy mechanically replied: “I am very much obliged to you.”

Then Rival gave him a series of circumstantial recommendations, for he was anxious that his principal should not make any mistake. He emphasized each point several times, saying: “When they say, ‘Are you ready, gentlemen?’ you must answer ‘Yes’ in a loud tone. When they give the word ‘Fire!’ you must raise your arm quickly, and you must fire before they have finished counting ‘One, two, three.’”

And Duroy kept on repeating to himself: “When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm. When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm." He learnt it as children learn their lessons, by murmuring them to satiety in order to fix them on their minds. "When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm."

The carriage entered a wood, turned down an avenue on the right, and then to the right again. Rival suddenly opened the door to cry to the driver: "That way, down the narrow road." The carriage turned into a rutty road between two copses, in which dead leaves fringed with ice were quivering. Duroy was still murmuring: "When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm." And he thought how a carriage accident would settle the whole affair. "Oh! if they could only upset, what luck; if he could only break a leg."

But he caught sight, at the further side of a clearing, of another carriage drawn up, and four gentlemen stamping to keep their feet warm, and he was obliged to open his mouth, so difficult did his breathing become.

The seconds got out first, and then the doctor and the principal. Rival had taken the pistol-case and walked away with Boisrenard to meet two of the strangers who came towards them. Duroy watched them salute one another ceremoniously, and then walk up and down the clearing, looking now on the ground and now at the trees, as though they were looking for something that had fallen down or might fly away. Then they measured off a certain number of paces, and with great difficulty stuck two walking sticks into the frozen ground. They then reassembled in a group and went through the action of tossing, like children playing heads or tails.

Doctor Le Brument said to Duroy: "Do you feel all right? Do you want anything?"

"No, nothing, thanks."

It seemed to him that he was mad, that he was asleep, that he was dreaming, that supernatural influences enveloped him. Was he afraid? Perhaps. But he did not know. Everything about him had altered.

Jacques Rival returned, and announced in low tones of satisfaction: "It is all ready. Luck has favored us as regards the pistols."

That, so far as Duroy was concerned, was a matter of profound indifference.

They took off his overcoat, which he let them do mechanically. They felt the breast-pocket of his frock-coat to make certain that he had no pocketbook or papers likely to deaden a ball. He kept repeating to himself like a prayer: "When the word is given to fire, I must raise my arm."

They led him up to one of the sticks stuck in the ground and handed him his pistol. Then he saw a man standing just in front of him — a short, stout, bald-headed man, wearing spectacles. It was his adversary. He saw him very plainly, but he could only think: “When the word to fire is given, I must raise my arm and fire at once.”

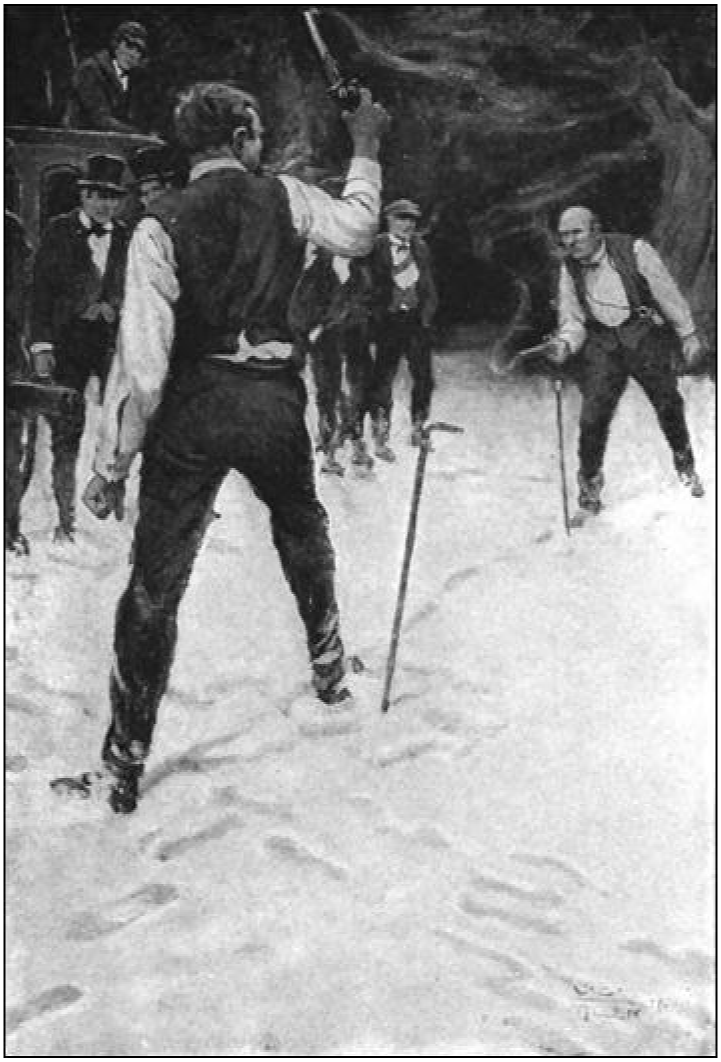
A voice rang out in the deep silence, a voice that seemed to come from a great distance, saying: “Are you ready, gentlemen?”

George exclaimed “Yes.”

The same voice gave the word “Fire!”

He heard nothing more, he saw nothing more, he took note of nothing more, he only knew that he raised his arm, pressing strongly on the trigger. And he heard nothing. But he saw all at once a little smoke at the end of his pistol barrel, and as the man in front of him still stood in the same position, he perceived, too, a little cloud of smoke drifting off over his head.

They had both fired. It was over.



His seconds and the doctor touched him, felt him and unbuttoned his clothes, asking, anxiously: “Are you hit?”

He replied at haphazard: “No, I do not think so.”

Langremont, too, was as unhurt as his enemy, and Jacques Rival murmured in a discontented tone: “It is always so with those damned pistols; you either miss or kill. What a filthy weapon.”

Duroy did not move, paralyzed by surprise and joy. It was over. They had to take away his weapon, which he still had clenched in his hand. It seemed to him now that he could have done battle with the whole world. It was over. What happiness! He felt suddenly brave enough to defy no matter whom.

The whole of the seconds conversed together for a few moments, making an appointment to draw up their report of the proceedings in the course of the day. Then they got into the carriage again, and the driver, who was laughing on the box, started off, cracking his whip. They breakfasted together on the boulevards, and in chatting over the event, Duroy narrated his impressions. “I felt quite unconcerned, quite. You must, besides, have seen it yourself.”

Rival replied: “Yes, you bore yourself very well.”

When the report was drawn up it was handed to Duroy, who was to insert it in the paper. He was astonished to read that he had exchanged a couple of shots with Monsieur Louis Langremont, and rather uneasily interrogated Rival, saying: “But we only fired once.”

The other smiled. “Yes, one shot apiece, that makes a couple of shots.”

Duroy, deeming the explanation satisfactory, did not persist. Daddy Walter embraced him, saying: “Bravo, bravo, you have defended the colors of *Vie Francaise*; bravo!”

George showed himself in the course of the evening at the principal newspaper offices, and at the chief *cafés* on the boulevards. He twice encountered his adversary, who was also showing himself. They did not bow to one another. If one of them had been wounded they would have shaken hands. Each of them, moreover, swore with conviction that he had heard the whistling of the other’s bullet.

The next day, at about eleven, Duroy received a telegram. “Awfully alarmed. Come at once. Rue de Constantinople. — Clo.”

He hastened to their meeting-place, and she threw herself into his arms, smothering him with kisses.

“Oh, my darling! if you only knew what I felt when I saw the papers this morning. Oh, tell me all about it! I want to know everything.”

He had to give minute details. She said: “What a dreadful night you must have passed before the duel.”

“No, I slept very well.”

“I should not have closed an eye. And on the ground — tell me all that happened.”

He gave a dramatic account. “When we were face to face with one another at twenty paces, only four times the length of this room, Jacques, after asking if we were ready, gave the word ‘Fire.’ I raised my arm at once, keeping a good line, but I made the mistake of trying to aim at the head. I had a pistol with an unusually stiff pull, and I am accustomed to very easy ones, so that the resistance of the trigger caused me to fire too high. No matter, it could not have gone very far off him. He shoots well, too, the rascal. His bullet skimmed by my temple. I felt the wind of it."

She was sitting on his knees, and holding him in her arms as though to share his dangers. She murmured: "Oh, my poor darling! my poor darling!"

When he had finished his narration, she said: "Do you know, I cannot live without you. I must see you, and with my husband in Paris it is not easy. Often I could find an hour in the morning before you were up to run in and kiss you, but I won't enter that awful house of yours. What is to be done?"

He suddenly had an inspiration, and asked: "What is the rent here?"

"A hundred francs a month."

"Well, I will take the rooms over on my own account, and live here altogether. Mine are no longer good enough for my new position."

She reflected a few moments, and then said: "No, I won't have that."

He was astonished, and asked: "Why not?"

"Because I won't."

"That is not a reason. These rooms suit me very well. I am here, and shall remain here. Besides," he added, with a laugh, "they are taken in my name."

But she kept on refusing, "No, no, I won't have it."

"Why not, then?"

Then she whispered tenderly: "Because you would bring women here, and I won't have it."

He grew indignant. "Never. I can promise you that."

"No, you will bring them all the same."

"I swear I won't."

"Truly?"

"Truly, on my word of honor. This is our place, our very own."

She clasped him to her in an outburst of love, exclaiming: "Very well, then, darling. But you know if you once deceive me, only once, it will be all over between us, all over for ever."

He swore again with many protestations, and it was agreed that he should install himself there that very day, so that she could look in on him as she passed the door. Then she said: "In any case, come and dine with us on Sunday. My husband thinks you are charming."

He was flattered "Really!"

"Yes, you have captivated him. And then, listen, you have told me that you were brought up in a country-house."

“Yes; why?”

“Then you must know something about agriculture?”

“Yes.”

“Well, talk to him about gardening and the crops. He is very fond of that sort of thing.”

“Good; I will not forget.”

She left him, after kissing him to an indefinite extent, the duel having stimulated her affection.

Duroy thought, as he made his way to the office, “What a strange being. What a feather brain. Can one tell what she wants and what she cares for? And what a strange household. What fanciful being arranged the union of that old man and this madcap? What made the inspector marry this giddy girl? A mystery. Who knows? Love, perhaps.” And he concluded: “After all, she is a very nice little mistress, and I should be a very big fool to let her slip away from me.”

VIII

His duel had given Duroy a position among the leader-writers of the *Vie Francaise*, but as he had great difficulty in finding ideas, he made a specialty of declamatory articles on the decadence of morality, the lowering of the standard of character, the weakening of the patriotic fiber and the anemia of French honor. He had discovered the word anemia, and was very proud of it. And when Madame de Marelle, filled with that skeptical, mocking, and incredulous spirit characteristic of the Parisian, laughed at his tirades, which she demolished with an epigram, he replied with a smile: "Bah! this sort of thing will give me a good reputation later on."

He now resided in the Rue de Constantinople, whither he had shifted his portmanteau, his hair-brush, his razor, and his soap, which was what his moving amounted to. Twice or thrice a week she would call before he was up, undress in a twinkling, and slip into bed, shivering from the cold prevailing out of doors. As a set off, Duroy dined every Thursday at her residence, and paid court to her husband by talking agriculture with him. As he was himself fond of everything relating to the cultivation of the soil, they sometimes both grew so interested in the subject of their conversation that they quite forgot the wife dozing on the sofa. Laurine would also go to sleep, now on the knee of her father and now on that of Pretty-boy. And when the journalist had left, Monsieur de Marelle never failed to assert, in that doctrinal tone in which he said the least thing: "That young fellow is really very pleasant company, he has a well-informed mind."

February was drawing to a close. One began to smell the violets in the street, as one passed the barrows of the flower-sellers of a morning. Duroy was living beneath a sky without a cloud.

One night, on returning home, he found a letter that had been slipped under his door. He glanced at the post-mark, and read "Cannes." Having opened it, he read:

"Villa Jolie, Cannes.

"Dear Sir and Friend, — You told me, did you not, that I could reckon upon you for anything? Well, I have a very painful service to ask of you; it is to come and help me, so that I may not be left alone during the last moments of Charles, who is dying. He may not last out the week, as the doctor has forewarned me, although he has not yet taken to his bed. I have no longer strength nor courage to witness this hourly death, and I think with terror of those last moments which are drawing near. I can only ask such a service of you, as my husband has no relatives. You were his comrade; he opened the door of the paper to you. Come, I beg of you; I have no one else to ask.

“Believe me, your very sincere friend,

“Madeleine Forestier.”

A strange feeling filled George’s heart, a sense of freedom and of a space opening before him, and he murmured: “To be sure, I’ll go. Poor Charles! What are we, after all?”

The governor, to whom he read the letter, grumblingly granted permission, repeating: “But be back soon, you are indispensable to us.”

George left for Cannes next day by the seven o’clock express, after letting the Marelles know of his departure by a telegram. He arrived the following evening about four o’clock. A commissionaire guided him to the Villa Jolie, built half-way up the slope of the pine forest clothed with white houses, which extends from Cannes to the Golfe Juan. The house — small, low, and in the Italian style — was built beside the road which winds zig-zag fashion up through the trees, revealing a succession of charming views at every turning it makes.

The man servant opened the door, and exclaimed: “Oh! Sir, madame is expecting you most impatiently.”

“How is your master?” inquired Duroy.

“Not at all well, sir. He cannot last much longer.”

The drawing-room, into which George was shown, was hung with pink and blue chintz. The tall and wide windows overlooked the town and the sea. Duroy muttered: “By Jove, this is nice and swell for a country house. Where the deuce do they get the money from?”

The rustle of a dress made him turn round. Madame Forestier held out both hands to him. “How good of you to come, how good of you to come,” said she.

And suddenly she kissed him on the cheek. Then they looked at one another. She was somewhat paler and thinner, but still fresh-complexioned, and perhaps still prettier for her additional delicacy. She murmured: “He is dreadful, do you know; he knows that he is doomed, and he leads me a fearful life. But where is your portmanteau?”

"I have left it at the station, not knowing what hotel you would like me to stop at in order to be near you."

She hesitated a moment, and then said: "You must stay here. Besides, your room is all ready. He might die at any moment, and if it were to happen during the night I should be alone. I will send for your luggage."

He bowed, saying: "As you please."

"Now let us go upstairs," she said.

He followed her. She opened a door on the first floor, and Duroy saw, wrapped in rugs and seated in an armchair near the window, a kind of living corpse, livid even under the red light of the setting sun, and looking towards him. He scarcely recognized, but rather guessed, that it was his friend. The room reeked of fever, medicated drinks, ether, tar, the nameless and oppressive odor of a consumptive's sick room. Forestier held out his hand slowly and with difficulty. "So here you are; you have come to see me die, then! Thanks."

Duroy affected to laugh. "To see you die? That would not be a very amusing sight, and I should not select such an occasion to visit Cannes. I came to give you a look in, and to rest myself a bit."

Forestier murmured, "Sit down," and then bent his head, as though lost in painful thoughts. He breathed hurriedly and pantingly, and from time to time gave a kind of groan, as if he wanted to remind the others how ill he was.

Seeing that he would not speak, his wife came and leaned against the window-sill, and indicating the view with a motion of her head, said, "Look! Is not that beautiful?"

Before them the hillside, dotted with villas, sloped downwards towards the town, which stretched in a half-circle along the shore with its head to the right in the direction of the pier, overlooked by the old city surmounted by its belfry, and its feet to the left towards the point of La Croisette, facing the Isles of Lerins. These two islands appeared like two green spots amidst the blue water. They seemed to be floating on it like two huge green leaves, so low and flat did they appear from this height. Afar off, bounding the view on the other side of the bay, beyond the pier and the belfry, a long succession of blue hills showed up against a dazzling sky, their strange and picturesque line of summits now rounded, now forked, now pointed, ending with a huge pyramidal mountain, its foot in the sea itself.

Madame Forestier pointed it out, saying: "This is L'Estherel."

The void beyond the dark hill tops was red, a glowing red that the eye would not fear, and Duroy, despite himself, felt the majesty of the close of the day. He murmured, finding no other term strong enough to express his admiration, “It is stunning.”

Forestier raised his head, and turning to his wife, said: “Let me have some fresh air.”

“Pray, be careful,” was her reply. “It is late, and the sun is setting; you will catch a fresh cold, and you know how bad that is for you.”

He made a feverish and feeble movement with his right hand that was almost meant for a blow, and murmured with a look of anger, the grin of a dying man that showed all the thinness of his lips, the hollowness of the cheeks, and the prominence of all the bones of the face: “I tell you I am stifling. What does it matter to you whether I die a day sooner or a day later, since I am done for?”

She opened the window quite wide. The air that entered surprised all three like a caress. It was a soft, warm breeze, a breeze of spring, already laden with the scents of the odoriferous shrubs and flowers which sprang up along this shore. A powerful scent of turpentine and the harsh savor of the eucalyptus could be distinguished.

Forestier drank it in with short and fevered gasps. He clutched the arm of his chair with his nails, and said in low, hissing, and savage tones: “Shut the window. It hurts me; I would rather die in a cellar.”

His wife slowly closed the window, and then looked out in space, her forehead against the pane. Duroy, feeling very ill at ease, would have liked to have chatted with the invalid and reassured him. But he could think of nothing to comfort him. At length he said: “Then you have not got any better since you have been here?”

Forestier shrugged his shoulders with low-spirited impatience. “You see very well I have not,” he replied, and again lowered his head.

Duroy went on: “Hang it all, it is ever so much nicer here than in Paris. We are still in the middle of winter there. It snows, it freezes, it rains, and it is dark enough for the lamps to be lit at three in the afternoon.”

“Anything new at the paper?” asked Forestier.

“Nothing. They have taken on young Lacrin, who has left the *Voltaire*, to do your work, but he is not up to it. It is time that you came back.”

The invalid muttered: “I — I shall do all my work six feet under the sod now.”

This fixed idea recurred like a knell *apropos* of everything, continually cropping up in every idea, every sentence. There was a long silence, a deep and painful silence. The glow of the sunset was slowly fading, and the mountains were growing black against the red sky, which was getting duller. A colored shadow, a commencement of night, which yet retained the glow of an expiring furnace, stole into the room and seemed to tinge the furniture, the walls, the hangings, with mingled tints of sable and crimson. The chimney-glass, reflecting the horizon, seemed like a patch of blood. Madame Forestier did not stir, but remained standing with her back to the room, her face to the window pane.

Forestier began to speak in a broken, breathless voice, heartrending to listen to. "How many more sunsets shall I see? Eight, ten, fifteen, or twenty, perhaps thirty — no more. You have time before you; for me it is all over. And it will go on all the same, after I am gone, as if I was still here." He was silent for a few moments, and then continued: "All that I see reminds me that in a few days I shall see it no more. It is horrible. I shall see nothing — nothing of all that exists; not the smallest things one makes use of — the plates, the glasses, the beds in which one rests so comfortably, the carriages. How nice it is to drive out of an evening! How fond I was of all those things!"

He nervously moved the fingers of both hands, as though playing the piano on the arms of his chair. Each of his silences was more painful than his words, so evident was it that his thoughts must be fearful. Duroy suddenly recalled what Norbert de Varenne had said to him some weeks before, "I now see death so near that I often want to stretch out my arms to put it back. I see it everywhere. The insects crushed on the path, the falling leaves, the white hair in a friend's beard, rend my heart and cry to me, 'Behold!'"

He had not understood all this on that occasion; now, seeing Forestier, he did. An unknown pain assailed him, as if he himself was sensible of the presence of death, hideous death, hard by, within reach of his hand, on the chair in which his friend lay gasping. He longed to get up, to go away, to fly, to return to Paris at once. Oh! if he had known he would not have come.

Darkness had now spread over the room, like premature mourning for the dying man. The window alone remained still visible, showing, within the lighter square formed by it, the motionless outline of the young wife.

Forestier remarked, with irritation, “Well, are they going to bring in the lamp to-night? This is what they call looking after an invalid.”

The shadow outlined against the window panes disappeared, and the sound of an electric bell rang through the house. A servant shortly entered and placed a lamp on the mantelpiece. Madame Forestier said to her husband, “Will you go to bed, or would you rather come down to dinner?”

He murmured: “I will come down.”

Waiting for this meal kept them all three sitting still for nearly an hour, only uttering from time to time some needless commonplace remark, as if there had been some danger, some mysterious danger in letting silence endure too long, in letting the air congeal in this room where death was prowling.

At length dinner was announced. The meal seemed interminable to Duroy. They did not speak, but ate noiselessly, and then crumbled their bread with their fingers. The man servant who waited upon them went to and fro without the sound of his footsteps being heard, for as the creak of a boot-sole irritated Charles, he wore list slippers. The harsh tick of a wooden clock alone disturbed the calm with its mechanical and regular sound.

As soon as dinner was over Duroy, on the plea of fatigue, retired to his room, and leaning on the window-sill watched the full moon, in the midst of the sky like an immense lamp, casting its cold gleam upon the white walls of the villas, and scattering over the sea a soft and moving dappled light. He strove to find some reason to justify a swift departure, inventing plans, telegrams he was to receive, a recall from Monsieur Walter.

But his resolves to fly appeared more difficult to realize on awakening the next morning. Madame Forestier would not be taken in by his devices, and he would lose by his cowardice all the benefit of his self-devotion. He said to himself: “Bah! it is awkward; well so much the worse, there must be unpleasant situations in life, and, besides, it will perhaps be soon over.”

It was a bright day, one of those bright Southern days that make the heart feel light, and Duroy walked down to the sea, thinking that it would be soon enough to see Forestier some time in course of the afternoon. When he returned to lunch, the servant remarked, “Master has already asked for you two or three times, sir. Will you please step up to his room, sir?”

He went upstairs. Forestier appeared to be dozing in his armchair. His wife was reading, stretched out on the sofa.

The invalid raised his head, and Duroy said, “Well, how do you feel? You seem quite fresh this morning.”

“Yes, I am better, I have recovered some of my strength. Get through your lunch with Madeleine as soon as you can, for we are going out for a drive.”

As soon as she was alone with Duroy, the young wife said to him, “There, to-day he thinks he is all right again. He has been making plans all the morning. We are going to the Golfe Juan now to buy some pottery for our rooms in Paris. He is determined to go out, but I am horribly afraid of some mishap. He cannot bear the shaking of the drive.”

When the landau arrived, Forestier came down stairs a step at a time, supported by his servant. But as soon as he caught sight of the carriage, he ordered the hood to be taken off. His wife opposed this, saying, “You will catch cold. It is madness.”

He persisted, repeating, “Oh, I am much better. I feel it.”

They passed at first along some of those shady roads, bordered by gardens, which cause Cannes to resemble a kind of English Park, and then reached the highway to Antibes, running along the seashore. Forestier acted as guide. He had already pointed out the villa of the Court de Paris, and now indicated others. He was lively, with the forced and feeble gayety of a doomed man. He lifted his finger, no longer having strength to stretch out his arm, and said, “There is the Ile Sainte Marguerite, and the chateau from which Bazaine escaped. How they did humbug us over that matter!”

Then regimental recollections recurred to him, and he mentioned various officers whose names recalled incidents to them. But all at once, the road making a turn, they caught sight of the whole of the Golfe Juan, with the white village in the curve of the bay, and the point of Antibes at the further side of it. Forestier, suddenly seized upon by childish glee, exclaimed, “Ah! the squadron, you will see the squadron.”

Indeed they could perceive, in the middle of the broad bay, half-a-dozen large ships resembling rocks covered with leafless trees. They were huge, strange, mis-shapen, with excrescences, turrets, rams, burying themselves in the water as though to take root beneath the waves. One could scarcely imagine how they could stir or move about, they seemed so heavy and so firmly fixed to the bottom. A floating battery, circular and high out of water, resembling the light-houses that are built on shoals. A tall three-master passed near them, with all its white sails set. It looked graceful and pretty beside these iron war monsters squatted on the water. Forestier tried to make them out. He pointed out the Colbert, the Suffren, the Admiral Duperre, the Redoubtable, the Devastation, and then checking himself, added, “No I made a mistake; that one is the Devastation.”

They arrived opposite a species of large pavilion, on the front of which was the inscription, “Art Pottery of the Golfe Juan,” and the carriage, driving up the sweep, stopped before the door. Forestier wanted to buy a couple of vases for his study. As he felt unequal to getting out of the carriage, specimens were brought out to him one after the other. He was a long time in making a choice, and consulted his wife and Duroy.

“You know,” he said, “it is for the cabinet at the end of the study. Sitting in my chair, I have it before my eyes all the time. I want an antique form, a Greek outline.” He examined the specimens, had others brought, and then turned again to the first ones. At length he made up his mind, and having paid, insisted upon the articles being sent on at once. “I shall be going back to Paris in a few days,” he said.

They drove home, but as they skirted the bay a rush of cold air from one of the valleys suddenly met them, and the invalid began to cough. It was nothing at first, but it augmented and became an unbroken fit of coughing, and then a kind of gasping hiccough.

Forestier was choking, and every time he tried to draw breath the cough seemed to rend his chest. Nothing would soothe or check it. He had to be borne from the carriage to his room, and Duroy, who supported his legs, felt the jerking of his feet at each convulsion of his lungs. The warmth of the bed did not check the attack, which lasted till midnight, when, at length, narcotics lulled its deadly spasm. The sick man remained till morning sitting up in his bed, with his eyes open.

The first words he uttered were to ask for the barber, for he insisted on being shaved every morning. He got up for this operation, but had to be helped back into bed at once, and his breathing grew so short, so hard, and so difficult, that Madame Forestier, in alarm, had Duroy, who had just turned in, roused up again in order to beg him to go for the doctor.

He came back almost immediately with Dr. Gavaut, who prescribed a soothing drink and gave some advice; but when the journalist saw him to the door, in order to ask his real opinion, he said, “It is the end. He will be dead to-morrow morning. Break it to his poor wife, and send for a priest. I, for my part, can do nothing more. I am, however, entirely at your service.”

Duroy sent for Madame Forestier. “He is dying,” said he. “The doctor advises a priest being sent for. What would you like done?”

She hesitated for some time, and then, in slow tones, as though she had calculated everything, replied, “Yes, that will be best — in many respects. I will break it to him — tell him the vicar wants to see him, or something or other; I really don’t know what. You would be very kind if you would go and find a priest for me and pick one out. Choose one who won’t raise too many difficulties over the business. One who will be satisfied with confession, and will let us off with the rest of it all.”

The young fellow returned with a complaisant old ecclesiastic, who accommodated himself to the state of affairs. As soon as he had gone into the dying man’s room, Madame Forestier came out of it, and sat down with Duroy in the one adjoining.

“It has quite upset him,” said she. “When I spoke to him about a priest his face assumed a frightful expression as if he had felt the breath — the breath of — you know. He understood that it was all over at last, and that his hours were numbered.” She was very pale as she continued, “I shall never forget the expression of his face. He certainly saw death face to face at that moment. He saw him.”

They could hear the priest, who spoke in somewhat loud tones, being slightly deaf, and who was saying, “No, no; you are not so bad as all that. You are ill, but in no danger. And the proof is that I have called in as a friend as a neighbor.”

They could not make out Forestier’s reply, but the old man went on, “No, I will not ask you to communicate. We will talk of that when you are better. If you wish to profit by my visit — to confess, for instance — I ask nothing better. I am a shepherd, you know, and seize on every occasion to bring a lamb back to the fold.”

A long silence followed. Forestier must have been speaking in a faint voice. Then all at once the priest uttered in a different tone, the tone of one officiating at the altar. “The mercy of God is infinite. Repeat the Comfiteor, my son. You have perhaps forgotten it; I will help you. Repeat after me: ‘Comfiteor Deo omnipotenti — Beata Maria semper virgini.’”

He paused from time to time to allow the dying man to catch him up. Then he said, “And now confess.”

The young wife and Duroy sat still seized on by a strange uneasiness, stirred by anxious expectation. The invalid had murmured something. The priest repeated, “You have given way to guilty pleasures — of what kind, my son?”

Madeleine rose and said, “Let us go down into the garden for a short time. We must not listen to his secrets.”

And they went and sat down on a bench before the door beneath a rose tree in bloom, and beside a bed of pinks, which shed their soft and powerful perfume abroad in the pure air. Duroy, after a few moments’ silence, inquired, “Shall you be long before you return to Paris?”

“Oh, no,” she replied. “As soon as it is all over I shall go back there.”

“Within ten days?”

“Yes, at the most.”

“He has no relations, then?”

“None except cousins. His father and mother died when he was quite young.”

They both watched a butterfly sipping existence from the pinks, passing from one to another with a soft flutter of his wings, which continued to flap slowly when he alighted on a flower. They remained silent for a considerable time.

The servant came to inform them that “the priest had finished,” and they went upstairs together.

Forestier seemed to have grown still thinner since the day before. The priest held out his hand to him, saying, “Good-day, my son, I shall call in again to-morrow morning,” and took his departure.

As soon as he had left the room the dying man, who was panting for breath, strove to hold out his two hands to his wife, and gasped, “Save me — save me, darling, I don’t want to die — I don’t want to die. Oh! save me — tell me what I had better do; send for the doctor. I will take whatever you like. I won’t die — I won’t die.”

He wept. Big tears streamed from his eyes down his fleshless cheeks, and the corners of his mouth contracted like those of a vexed child. Then his hands, falling back on the bed clothes, began a slow, regular, and continuous movement, as though trying to pick something off the sheet.

His wife, who began to cry too, said: “No, no, it is nothing. It is only a passing attack, you will be better to-morrow, you tired yourself too much going out yesterday.”

Forestier’s breathing was shorter than that of a dog who has been running, so quick that it could not be counted, so faint that it could scarcely be heard.

He kept repeating: “I don’t want to die. Oh! God — God — God; what is to become of me? I shall no longer see anything — anything any more. Oh! God.”

He saw before him some hideous thing invisible to the others, and his staring eyes reflected the terror it inspired. His two hands continued their horrible and wearisome action. All at once he started with a sharp shudder that could be seen to thrill the whole of his body, and jerked out the words, “The graveyard — I — Oh! God.”

He said no more, but lay motionless, haggard and panting.

Time sped on, noon struck by the clock of a neighboring convent. Duroy left the room to eat a mouthful or two. He came back an hour later. Madame Forestier refused to take anything. The invalid had not stirred. He still continued to draw his thin fingers along the sheet as though to pull it up over his face.

His wife was seated in an armchair at the foot of the bed. Duroy took another beside her, and they waited in silence. A nurse had come, sent in by the doctor, and was dozing near the window.

Duroy himself was beginning to doze off when he felt that something was happening. He opened his eyes just in time to see Forestier close his, like two lights dying out. A faint rattle stirred in the throat of the dying man, and two streaks of blood appeared at the corners of his mouth, and then flowed down into his shirt. His hands ceased their hideous motion. He had ceased to breathe.

His wife understood this, and uttering a kind of shriek, she fell on her knees sobbing, with her face buried in the bed-clothes. George, surprised and scared, mechanically made the sign of the cross. The nurse awakened, drew near the bed. “It is all over,” said she.

Duroy, who was recovering his self-possession, murmured, with a sigh of relief: “It was sooner over than I thought for.”

When the first shock was over and the first tears shed, they had to busy themselves with all the cares and all the necessary steps a dead man exacts. Duroy was running about till nightfall. He was very hungry when he got back. Madame Forestier ate a little, and then they both installed themselves in the chamber of death to watch the body. Two candles burned on the night-table beside a plate filled with holy water, in which lay a sprig of mimosa, for they had not been able to get the necessary twig of consecrated box.

They were alone, the young man and the young wife, beside him who was no more. They sat without speaking, thinking and watching.

George, whom the darkness rendered uneasy in presence of the corpse, kept his eyes on this persistently. His eye and his mind were both attracted and fascinated by this fleshless visage, which the vacillating light caused to appear yet more hollow. That was his friend Charles Forestier, who was chatting with him only the day before! What a strange and fearful thing was this end of a human being! Oh! how he recalled the words of Norbert de Varenne haunted by the fear of death: "No one ever comes back." Millions on millions would be born almost identical, with eyes, a nose, a mouth, a skull and a mind within it, without he who lay there on the bed ever reappearing again.

For some years he had lived, eaten, laughed, loved, hoped like all the world. And it was all over for him all over for ever. Life; a few days, and then nothing. One is born, one grows up, one is happy, one waits, and then one dies. Farewell, man or woman, you will not return again to earth. Plants, beast, men, stars, worlds, all spring to life, and then die to be transformed anew. But never one of them comes back — insect, man, nor planet.

A huge, confused, and crushing sense of terror weighed down the soul of Duroy, the terror of that boundless and inevitable annihilation destroying all existence. He already bowed his head before its menace. He thought of the flies who live a few hours, the beasts who live a few days, the men who live a few years, the worlds which live a few centuries. What was the difference between one and the other? A few more days' dawn that was all.

He turned away his eyes in order no longer to have the corpse before them. Madame Forestier, with bent head, seemed also absorbed in painful thoughts. Her fair hair showed so prettily with her pale face, that a feeling, sweet as the touch of hope flitted through the young fellow's breast. Why grieve when he had still so many years before him? And he began to observe her. Lost in thought she did not notice him. He said to himself, "That, though, is the only good thing in life, to love, to hold the woman one loves in one's arms. That is the limit of human happiness."

What luck the dead man had had to meet such an intelligent and charming companion! How had they become acquainted? How ever had she agreed on her part to marry that poor and commonplace young fellow? How had she succeeded in making someone of him? Then he thought of all the hidden mysteries of people's lives. He remembered what had been whispered about the Count de Vaudrec, who had dowered and married her off it was said.

What would she do now? Whom would she marry? A deputy, as Madame de Marelle fancied, or some young fellow with a future before him, a higher class Forestier? Had she any projects, any plans, any settled ideas? How he would have liked to know that. But why this anxiety as to what she would do? He asked himself this, and perceived that his uneasiness was due to one of those half-formed and secret ideas which one hides from even one's self, and only discovers when fathoming one's self to the very bottom.

Yes, why should he not attempt this conquest himself? How strong and redoubtable he would be with her beside him!

How quick, and far, and surely he would fly! And why should he not succeed too? He felt that he pleased her, that she had for him more than mere sympathy; in fact, one of those affections which spring up between two kindred spirits and which partake as much of silent seduction as of a species of mute complicity. She knew him to be intelligent, resolute, and tenacious, she would have confidence in him.

Had she not sent for him under the present grave circumstances? And why had she summoned him? Ought he not to see in this a kind of choice, a species of confession. If she had thought of him just at the moment she was about to become a widow, it was perhaps that she had thought of one who was again to become her companion and ally? An impatient desire to know this, to question her, to learn her intentions, assailed him. He would have to leave on the next day but one, as he could not remain alone with her in the house. So it was necessary to be quick, it was necessary before returning to Paris to become acquainted, cleverly and delicately, with her projects, and not to allow her to go back on them, to yield perhaps to the solicitations of another, and pledge herself irrevocably.

The silence in the room was intense, nothing was audible save the regular and metallic tick of the pendulum of the clock on the mantelpiece.

He murmured: “You must be very tired?”

She replied: “Yes; but I am, above all, overwhelmed.”

The sound of their own voices startled them, ringing strangely in this gloomy room, and they suddenly glanced at the dead man's face as though they expected to see it move on hearing them, as it had done some hours before.

Duroy resumed: “Oh! it is a heavy blow for you, and such a complete change in your existence, a shock to your heart and your whole life.”

She gave a long sigh, without replying, and he continued, “It is so painful for a young woman to find herself alone as you will be.”

He paused, but she said nothing, and he again went on, “At all events, you know the compact entered into between us. You can make what use of me you will. I belong to you.”

She held out her hand, giving him at the same time one of those sweet, sad looks which stir us to the very marrow.

“Thank you, you are very kind,” she said. “If I dared, and if I could do anything for you, I, too, should say, ‘You may count upon me.’”

He had taken the proffered hand and kept it clasped in his, with a burning desire to kiss it. He made up his mind to this at last, and slowly raising it to his mouth, held the delicate skin, warm, slightly feverish and perfumed, to his lips for some time. Then, when he felt that his friendly caress was on the point of becoming too prolonged, he let fall the little hand. It sank back gently onto the knee of its mistress, who said, gravely: “Yes, I shall be very lonely, but I shall strive to be brave.”

He did not know how to give her to understand that he would be happy, very happy, to have her for his wife in his turn. Certainly he could not tell her so at that hour, in that place, before that corpse; yet he might, it seemed to him, hit upon one of those ambiguous, decorous, and complicated phrases which have a hidden meaning under their words, and which express all one wants to by their studied reticence. But the corpse incommoded him, the stiffened corpse stretched out before them, and which he felt between them. For some time past, too, he fancied he detected in the close atmosphere of the room a suspicious odor, a fœtid breath exhaling from the decomposing chest, the first whiff of carrion which the dead lying on their bed throw out to the relatives watching them, and with which they soon fill the hollow of their coffin.

“Cannot we open the window a little?” said Duroy. “It seems to me that the air is tainted.”

“Yes,” she replied, “I have just noticed it, too.”

He went to the window and opened it. All the perfumed freshness of night flowed in, agitating the flame of the two lighted candles beside the bed. The moon was shedding, as on the former evening, her full mellow light upon the white walls of the villas and the broad glittering expanse of the sea. Duroy, drawing in the air to the full depth of his lungs, felt himself suddenly seized with hope, and, as it were buoyed up by the approach of happiness. He turned round, saying: “Come and get a little fresh air. It is delightful.”

She came quietly, and leant on the window-sill beside him. Then he murmured in a low tone: “Listen to me, and try to understand what I want to tell you. Above all, do not be indignant at my speaking to you of such a matter at such a moment, for I shall leave you the day after to-morrow, and when you return to Paris it may be too late. I am only a poor devil without fortune, and with a position yet to make, as you know. But I have a firm will, some brains I believe, and I am well on the right track. With a man who has made his position, one knows what one gets; with one who is starting, one never knows where he may finish. So much the worse, or so much the better. In short, I told you one day at your house that my brightest dream would have been to have married a woman like you. I repeat this wish to you now. Do not answer, let me continue. It is not a proposal I am making to you. The time and place would render that odious. I wish only not to leave you ignorant that you can make me happy with a word; that you can make me either a friend and brother, or a husband, at your will; that my heart and myself are yours. I do not want you to answer me now. I do not want us to speak any more about the matter here. When we meet again in Paris you will let me know what you have resolved upon. Until then, not a word. Is it not so?” He had uttered all this without looking at her, as though scattering his words abroad in the night before him. She seemed not to have heard them, so motionless had she remained, looking also straight before her with a fixed and vague stare at the vast landscape lit up by the moon. They remained for some time side by side, elbow touching elbow, silent and reflecting. Then she murmured: “It is rather cold,” and turning round, returned towards the bed.

He followed her. When he drew near he recognized that Forestier’s body was really beginning to smell, and drew his chair to a distance, for he could not have stood this odor of putrefaction long. He said: “He must be put in a coffin the first thing in the morning.”

“Yes, yes, it is arranged,” she replied. “The undertaker will be here at eight o’clock.”

Duroy having sighed out the words, “Poor fellow,” she, too, gave a long sigh of heartrending resignation.

They did not look at the body so often now, already accustomed to the idea of it, and beginning to mentally consent to the decease which but a short time back had shocked and angered them — them who were mortals, too. They no longer spoke, continuing to keep watch in befitting fashion without going to sleep. But towards midnight Duroy dozed off the first. When he woke up he saw that Madame Forestier was also slumbering, and having shifted to a more comfortable position, he reclosed his eyes, growling: “Confound it all, it is more comfortable between the sheets all the same.”

A sudden noise made him start up. The nurse was entering the room. It was broad daylight. The young wife in the armchair in front of him seemed as surprised as himself. She was somewhat pale, but still pretty, fresh-looking, and nice, in spite of this night passed in a chair.

Then, having glanced at the corpse, Duroy started and exclaimed: “Oh, his beard!” The beard had grown in a few hours on this decomposing flesh as much as it would have in several days on a living face. And they stood scared by this life continuing in death, as though in presence of some fearful prodigy, some supernatural threat of resurrection, one of these startling and abnormal events which upset and confound the mind.

They both went and lay down until eleven o’clock. Then they placed Charles in his coffin, and at once felt relieved and soothed. They had sat down face to face at lunch with an aroused desire to speak of the livelier and more consolatory matters, to return to the things of life again, since they had done with the dead. Through the wide-open window the soft warmth of spring flowed in, bearing the perfumed breath of the bed of pinks in bloom before the door.

Madame Forestier suggested a stroll in the garden to Duroy, and they began to walk slowly round the little lawn, inhaling with pleasure the balmy air, laden with the scent of pine and eucalyptus. Suddenly she began to speak, without turning her head towards him, as he had done during the night upstairs. She uttered her words slowly, in a low and serious voice.

“Look here, my dear friend, I have deeply reflected already on what you proposed to me, and I do not want you to go away without an answer. Besides, I am neither going to say yes nor no. We will wait, we will see, we will know one another better. Reflect, too, on your side. Do not give way to impulse. But if I speak to you of this before even poor Charles is lowered into the tomb, it is because it is necessary, after what you have said to me, that you should thoroughly understand what sort of woman I am, in order that you may no longer cherish the wish you expressed to me, in case you are not of a — of a — disposition to comprehend and bear with me. Understand me well. Marriage for me is not a charm, but a partnership. I mean to be free, perfectly free as to my ways, my acts, my going and coming. I could neither tolerate supervision, nor jealousy, nor arguments as to my behavior. I should undertake, be it understood, never to compromise the name of the man who takes me as his wife, never to render him hateful and ridiculous. But this man must also undertake to see in me an equal, an ally, and not an inferior or an obedient and submissive wife. My notions, I know, are not those of every one, but I shall not change them. There you are. I will also add, do not answer me; it would be useless and unsuitable. We shall see one another again, and shall perhaps speak of all this again later on. Now, go for a stroll. I shall return to watch beside him. Till this evening."

He printed a long kiss on her hand, and went away without uttering a word. That evening they only saw one another at dinnertime. Then they retired to their rooms, both exhausted with fatigue.

Charles Forestier was buried the next day, without any funeral display, in the cemetery at Cannes. George Duroy wished to take the Paris express, which passed through the town at half-past one.

Madame Forestier drove with him to the station. They walked quietly up and down the platform pending the time for his departure, speaking of trivial matters.

The train rolled into the station. The journalist took his seat, and then got out again to have a few more moments' conversation with her, suddenly seized as he was with sadness and a strong regret at leaving her, as though he were about to lose her for ever.

A porter shouted, "Take your seats for Marseilles, Lyons, and Paris." Duroy got in and leant out of the window to say a few more words. The engine whistled, and the train began to move slowly on.

The young fellow, leaning out of the carriage, watched the woman standing still on the platform and following him with her eyes. Suddenly, as he was about to lose sight of her, he put his hand to his mouth and threw a kiss towards her. She returned it with a discreet and hesitating gesture.

IX

George Duroy had returned to all his old habits.

Installed at present in the little ground-floor suite of rooms in the Rue de Constantinople, he lived soberly, like a man preparing a new existence for himself.

Madame Forestier had not yet returned. She was lingering at Cannes. He received a letter from her merely announcing her return about the middle of April, without a word of allusion to their farewell. He was waiting, his mind was thoroughly made up now to employ every means in order to marry her, if she seemed to hesitate. But he had faith in his luck, confidence in that power of seduction which he felt within him, a vague and irresistible power which all women felt the influence of.

A short note informed him that the decisive hour was about to strike: “I am in Paris. Come and see me. — Madeleine Forestier.”

Nothing more. He received it by the nine o’clock post. He arrived at her residence at three on the same day. She held out both hands to him smiling with her pleasant smile, and they looked into one another’s eyes for a few seconds. Then she said: “How good you were to come to me there under those terrible circumstances.”

“I should have done anything you told me to,” he replied.

And they sat down. She asked the news, inquired about the Walters, about all the staff, about the paper. She had often thought about the paper.

“I miss that a great deal,” she said, “really a very great deal. I had become at heart a journalist. What would you, I love the profession?”

Then she paused. He thought he understood, he thought he divined in her smile, in the tone of her voice, in her words themselves a kind of invitation, and although he had promised to himself not to precipitate matters, he stammered out: “Well, then — why — why should you not resume — this occupation — under — under the name of Duroy?”

She suddenly became serious again, and placing her hand on his arm, murmured: “Do not let us speak of that yet a while.”

But he divined that she accepted, and falling at her knees began to passionately kiss her hands, repeating: “Thanks, thanks; oh, how I love you!”

She rose. He did so, too, and noted that she was very pale. Then he understood that he had pleased her, for a long time past, perhaps, and as they found themselves face to face, he clasped her to him and printed a long, tender, and decorous kiss on her forehead. When she had freed herself, slipping through his arms, she said in a serious tone: “Listen, I have not yet made up my mind to anything. However, it may be — yes. But you must promise me the most absolute secrecy till I give you leave to speak.”

He swore this, and left, his heart overflowing with joy.

He was from that time forward very discreet as regards the visits he paid her, and did not ask for any more definite consent on her part, for she had a way of speaking of the future, of saying “by-and-by,” and of shaping plans in which these two lives were blended, which answered him better and more delicately than a formal acceptation.

Duroy worked hard and spent little, trying to save money so as not to be without a penny at the date fixed for his marriage, and becoming as close as he had been prodigal. The summer went by, and then the autumn, without anyone suspecting anything, for they met very little, and only in the most natural way in the world.

One evening, Madeleine, looking him straight in the eyes said: “You have not yet announced our intentions to Madame de Marelle?”

“No, dear, having promised you to be secret, I have not opened my mouth to a living soul.”

“Well, it is about time to tell her. I will undertake to inform the Walters. You will do so this week, will you not?”

He blushed as he said: “Yes, to-morrow.”

She had turned away her eyes in order not to notice his confusion, and said: “If you like we will be married in the beginning of May. That will be a very good time.”

“I obey you in all things with joy.”

“The tenth of May, which is a Saturday, will suit me very nicely, for it is my birthday.”

“Very well, the tenth of May.”

“Your parents live near Rouen, do they not? You have told me so, at least.”

“Yes, near Rouen, at Canteleu.”

“What are they?”

“They are — they are small annuitants.”

“Ah! I should very much like to know them.”

He hesitated, greatly perplexed, and said: “But, you see, they are— “ Then making up his mind, like a really clever man, he went on: “My dear, they are mere country folk, innkeepers, who have pinched themselves to the utmost to enable me to pursue my studies. For my part, I am not ashamed of them, but their — simplicity — their rustic manners — might, perhaps, render you uncomfortable.”

She smiled, delightfully, her face lit up with gentle kindness as she replied: “No. I shall be very fond of them. We will go and see them. I want to. I will speak of this to you again. I, too, am a daughter of poor people, but I have lost my parents. I have no longer anyone in the world.” She held out her hand to him as she added: “But you.”

He felt softened, moved, overcome, as he had been by no other woman.

“I had thought about one matter,” she continued, “but it is rather difficult to explain.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“Well, it is this, my dear boy, I am like all women, I have my weaknesses, my pettinesses. I love all that glitters, that catches the ear. I should have so delighted to have borne a noble name. Could you not, on the occasion of your marriage, ennoble yourself a little?”

She had blushed in her turn, as if she had proposed something indelicate.

He replied simply enough: “I have often thought about it, but it did not seem to me so easy.”

“Why so?”

He began to laugh, saying: “Because I was afraid of making myself look ridiculous.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Not at all, not at all Every one does it, and nobody laughs. Separate your name in two — Du Roy. That looks very well.”

He replied at once like a man who understands the matter in question: “No, that will not do at all. It is too simple, too common, too well-known. I had thought of taking the name of my native place, as a literary pseudonym at first, then of adding it to my own by degrees, and then, later on, of even cutting my name in two, as you suggest.”

“Your native place is Canteleu?” she queried.

“Yes.”

She hesitated, saying: “No, I do not like the termination. Come, cannot we modify this word Canteleu a little?”

She had taken up a pen from the table, and was scribbling names and studying their physiognomy. All at once she exclaimed: “There, there it is!” and held out to him a paper, on which read— “Madame Duroy de Cantel.”

He reflected a few moments, and then said gravely: “Yes, that does very well.”

She was delighted, and kept repeating “Duroy de Cantel, Duroy de Cantel, Madame Duroy de Cantel. It is capital, capital.” She went on with an air of conviction: “And you will see how easy it is to get everyone to accept it. But one must know how to seize the opportunity, for it will be too late afterwards. You must from to-morrow sign your descriptive articles D. de Cantel, and your ‘Echoes’ simply Duroy. It is done every day in the press, and no one will be astonished to see you take a pseudonym. At the moment of our marriage we can modify it yet a little more, and tell our friends that you had given up the ‘Du’ out of modesty on account of your position, or even say nothing about it. What is your father’s Christian name?”

“Alexander.”

She murmured: “Alexander, Alexander,” two or three times, listening to the sonorous roll of the syllables, and then wrote on a blank sheet of paper:

“Monsieur and Madame Alexander Du Roy de Cantel have the honor to inform you of the marriage of Monsieur George Du Roy de Cantel, their son, to Madame Madeleine Forestier.” She looked at her writing, holding it at a distance, charmed by the effect, and said: “With a little method we can manage whatever we wish.”

When he found himself once more in the street, firmly resolved to call himself in future Du Roy, and even Du Roy de Cantel, it seemed to him that he had acquired fresh importance. He walked with more swagger, his head higher, his moustache fiercer, as a gentleman should walk. He felt in himself a species of joyous desire to say to the passers-by: “My name is Du Roy de Cantel.”

But scarcely had he got home than the thought of Madame de Marelle made him feel uneasy, and he wrote to her at once to ask her to make an appointment for the next day.

“It will be a tough job,” he thought. “I must look out for squalls.”

Then he made up his mind for it, with the native carelessness which caused him to slur over the disagreeable side of life, and began to write a fancy article on the fresh taxes needed in order to make the Budget balance. He set down in this the nobiliary "De" at a hundred francs a year, and titles, from baron to prince, at from five hundred to five thousand francs. And he signed it "D. de Cantel."

He received a telegram from his mistress next morning saying that she would call at one o'clock. He waited for her somewhat feverishly, his mind made up to bring things to a point at once, to say everything right out, and then, when the first emotion had subsided, to argue cleverly in order to prove to her that he could not remain a bachelor for ever, and that as Monsieur de Marelle insisted on living, he had been obliged to think of another than herself as his legitimate companion. He felt moved, though, and when he heard her ring his heart began to beat.

She threw herself into his arms, exclaiming: "Good morning, Pretty-boy." Then, finding his embrace cold, looked at him, and said: "What is the matter with you?"

"Sit down," he said, "we have to talk seriously."

She sat down without taking her bonnet off, only turning back her veil, and waited.

He had lowered his eyes, and was preparing the beginning of his speech. He commenced in a low tone of voice: "My dear one, you see me very uneasy, very sad, and very much embarrassed at what I have to admit to you. I love you dearly. I really love you from the bottom of my heart, so that the fear of causing you pain afflicts me more than even the news I am going to tell you."

She grew pale, felt herself tremble, and stammered out: "What is the matter? Tell me at once."

He said in sad but resolute tones, with that feigned dejection which we make use of to announce fortunate misfortunes: "I am going to be married."

She gave the sigh of a woman who is about to faint, a painful sigh from the very depths of her bosom, and then began to choke and gasp without being able to speak.

Seeing that she did not say anything, he continued: "You cannot imagine how much I suffered before coming to this resolution. But I have neither position nor money. I am alone, lost in Paris. I needed beside me someone who above all would be an adviser, a consoler, and a stay. It is a partner, an ally, that I have sought, and that I have found.”

He was silent, hoping that she would reply, expecting furious rage, violence, and insults. She had placed one hand on her heart as though to restrain its throbbings, and continued to draw her breath by painful efforts, which made her bosom heave spasmodically and her head nod to and fro. He took her other hand, which was resting on the arm of the chair, but she snatched it away abruptly. Then she murmured, as though in a state of stupefaction: “Oh, my God!”

He knelt down before her, without daring to touch her, however, and more deeply moved by this silence than he would have been by a fit of anger, stammered out: “Clo! my darling Clo! just consider my situation, consider what I am. Oh! if I had been able to marry you, what happiness it would have been. But you are married. What could I do? Come, think of it, now. I must take a place in society, and I cannot do it so long as I have not a home. If you only knew. There are days when I have felt a longing to kill your husband.”

He spoke in his soft, subdued, seductive voice, a voice which entered the ear like music. He saw two tears slowly gather in the fixed and staring eyes of his mistress and then roll down her cheeks, while two more were already formed on the eyelids.

He murmured: “Do not cry, Clo; do not cry, I beg of you. You rend my very heart.”

Then she made an effort, a strong effort, to be proud and dignified, and asked, in the quivering tone of a woman about to burst into sobs: “Who is it?”

He hesitated a moment, and then understanding that he must, said:

“Madeleine Forestier.”

Madame de Marelle shuddered all over, and remained silent, so deep in thought that she seemed to have forgotten that he was at her feet. And two transparent drops kept continually forming in her eyes, falling and forming again.

She rose. Duroy guessed that she was going away without saying a word, without reproach or forgiveness, and he felt hurt and humiliated to the bottom of his soul. Wishing to stay her, he threw his arms about the skirt of her dress, clasping through the stuff her rounded legs, which he felt stiffen in resistance. He implored her, saying: “I beg of you, do not go away like that.”

Then she looked down on him from above with that moistened and despairing eye, at once so charming and so sad, which shows all the grief of a woman’s heart, and gasped out: “I — I have nothing to say. I have nothing to do with it. You — you are right. You — you have chosen well.”

And, freeing herself by a backward movement, she left the room without his trying to detain her further.

Left to himself, he rose as bewildered as if he had received a blow on the head. Then, making up his mind, he muttered: “Well, so much the worse or the better. It is over, and without a scene; I prefer that,” and relieved from an immense weight, suddenly feeling himself free, delivered, at ease as to his future life, he began to spar at the wall, hitting out with his fists in a kind of intoxication of strength and triumph, as if he had been fighting Fate.

When Madame Forestier asked: “Have you told Madame de Marelle?” he quietly answered, “Yes.”

She scanned him closely with her bright eyes, saying: “And did it not cause her any emotion?”

“No, not at all. She thought it, on the contrary, a very good idea.”

The news was soon known. Some were astonished, others asserted that they had foreseen it; others, again, smiled, and let it be understood that they were not surprised.

The young man who now signed his descriptive articles D. de Cantel, his “Echoes” Duroy, and the political articles which he was beginning to write from time to time Du Roy, passed half his time with his betrothed, who treated him with a fraternal familiarity into which, however, entered a real but hidden love, a species of desire concealed as a weakness. She had decided that the marriage should be quite private, only the witnesses being present, and that they should leave the same evening for Rouen. They would go the next day to see the journalist’s parents, and remain with them some days. Duroy had striven to get her to renounce this project, but not having been able to do so, had ended by giving in to it.

So the tenth of May having come, the newly-married couple, having considered the religious ceremony useless since they had not invited anyone, returned to finish packing their boxes after a brief visit to the Town Hall. They took, at the Saint Lazare terminus, the six o’clock train, which bore them away towards Normandy. They had scarcely exchanged twenty words up to the time that they found themselves alone in the railway carriage. As soon as they felt themselves under way, they looked at one another and began to laugh, to hide a certain feeling of awkwardness which they did not want to manifest.

The train slowly passed through the long station of Batignolles, and then crossed the mangy-looking plain extending from the fortifications to the Seine. Duroy and his wife from time to time made a few idle remarks, and then turned again towards the windows. When they crossed the bridge of Asniéres, a feeling of greater liveliness was aroused in them at the sight of the river covered with boats, fishermen, and oarsmen. The sun, a bright May sun, shed its slanting rays upon the craft and upon the smooth stream, which seemed motionless, without current or eddy, checked, as it were, beneath the heat and brightness of the declining day. A sailing boat in the middle of the river having spread two large triangular sails of snowy canvas, wing and wing, to catch the faintest puffs of wind, looked like an immense bird preparing to take flight.

Duroy murmured: “I adore the neighborhood of Paris. I have memories of dinners which I reckon among the pleasantest in my life.”

“And the boats,” she replied. “How nice it is to glide along at sunset.”

Then they became silent, as though afraid to continue their outpourings as to their past life, and remained so, already enjoying, perhaps, the poesy of regret.

Duroy, seated face to face with his wife, took her hand and slowly kissed it. “When we get back again,” said he, “we will go and dine sometimes at Chatou.”

She murmured: “We shall have so many things to do,” in a tone of voice that seemed to imply, “The agreeable must be sacrificed to the useful.”

He still held her hand, asking himself with some uneasiness by what transition he should reach the caressing stage. He would not have felt uneasy in the same way in presence of the ignorance of a young girl, but the lively and artful intelligence he felt existed in Madeleine, rendered his attitude an embarrassed one. He was afraid of appearing stupid to her, too timid or too brutal, too slow or too prompt. He kept pressing her hand gently, without her making any response to this appeal. At length he said: “It seems to me very funny for you to be my wife.”

She seemed surprised as she said: “Why so?”

"I do not know. It seems strange to me. I want to kiss you, and I feel astonished at having the right to do so."

She calmly held out her cheek to him, which he kissed as he would have kissed that of a sister.

He continued: "The first time I saw you — you remember the dinner Forestier invited me to — I thought, 'Hang it all, if I could only find a wife like that.' Well, it's done. I have one."

She said, in a low tone: "That is very nice," and looked him straight in the face, shrewdly, and with smiling eyes.

He reflected, "I am too cold. I am stupid. I ought to get along quicker than this," and asked: "How did you make Forestier's acquaintance?"

She replied, with provoking archness: "Are we going to Rouen to talk about him?"

He reddened, saying: "I am a fool. But you frighten me a great deal."

She was delighted, saying: "I — impossible! How is it?"

He had seated himself close beside her. She suddenly exclaimed: "Oh! a stag."

The train was passing through the forest of Saint Germaine, and she had seen a frightened deer clear one of the paths at a bound. Duroy, leaning forward as she looked out of the open window, printed a long kiss, a lover's kiss, among the hair on her neck. She remained still for a few seconds, and then, raising her head, said: "You are tickling me. Leave off."

But he would not go away, but kept on pressing his curly moustache against her white skin in a long and thrilling caress.

She shook herself, saying: "Do leave off."

He had taken her head in his right hand, passed around her, and turned it towards him. Then he darted on her mouth like a hawk on its prey. She struggled, repulsed him, tried to free herself. She succeeded at last, and repeated: "Do leave off."

He remained seated, very red and chilled by this sensible remark; then, having recovered more self-possession, he said, with some liveliness: "Very well, I will wait, but I shan't be able to say a dozen words till we get to Rouen. And remember that we are only passing through Poissy."

"I will do the talking then," she said, and sat down quietly beside him.

She spoke with precision of what they would do on their return. They must keep on the suite of apartments that she had resided in with her first husband, and Duroy would also inherit the duties and salary of Forestier at the *Vie Francaise*. Before their union, besides, she had planned out, with the certainty of a man of business, all the financial details of their household. They had married under a settlement preserving to each of them their respective estates, and every incident that might arise — death, divorce, the birth of one or more children — was duly provided for. The young fellow contributed a capital of four thousand francs, he said, but of that sum he had borrowed fifteen hundred. The rest was due to savings effected during the year in view of the event. Her contribution was forty thousand francs, which she said had been left her by Forestier.

She returned to him as a subject of conversation. "He was a very steady, economical, hard-working fellow. He would have made a fortune in a very short time."

Duroy no longer listened, wholly absorbed by other thoughts. She stopped from time to time to follow out some inward train of ideas, and then went on: "In three or four years you can be easily earning thirty to forty thousand francs a year. That is what Charles would have had if he had lived."

George, who began to find the lecture rather a long one, replied: "I thought we were not going to Rouen to talk about him."

She gave him a slight tap on the cheek, saying, with a laugh: "That is so. I am in the wrong."

He made a show of sitting with his hands on his knees like a very good boy.

"You look very like a simpleton like that," said she.

He replied: "That is my part, of which, by the way, you reminded me just now, and I shall continue to play it."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because it is you who take management of the household, and even of me. That, indeed, concerns you, as being a widow."

She was amazed, saying: "What do you really mean?"

"That you have an experience that should enlighten my ignorance, and matrimonial practice that should polish up my bachelor innocence, that's all."

"That is too much," she exclaimed.

He replied: "That is so. I don't know anything about ladies; no, and you know all about gentlemen, for you are a widow. You must undertake my education — this evening — and you can begin at once if you like."

She exclaimed, very much amused: “Oh, indeed, if you reckon on me for that!”

He repeated, in the tone of a school boy stumbling through his lesson: “Yes, I do. I reckon that you will give me solid information — in twenty lessons. Ten for the elements, reading and grammar; ten for finishing accomplishments. I don’t know anything myself.”

She exclaimed, highly amused: “You goose.”

He replied: “If that is the familiar tone you take, I will follow your example, and tell you, darling, that I adore you more and more every moment, and that I find Rouen a very long way off.”

He spoke now with a theatrical intonation and with a series of changes of facial expression, which amused his companion, accustomed to the ways of literary Bohemia. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye, finding him really charming, and experiencing the longing we have to pluck a fruit from the tree at once, and the check of reason which advises us to wait till dinner to eat it at the proper time. Then she observed, blushing somewhat at the thoughts which assailed her: “My dear little pupil, trust my experience, my great experience. Kisses in a railway train are not worth anything. They only upset one.” Then she blushed still more as she murmured: “One should never eat one’s corn in the ear.”

He chuckled, kindling at the double meanings from her pretty mouth, and made the sign of the cross, with a movement of the lips, as though murmuring a prayer, adding aloud: “I have placed myself under the protection of St. Anthony, patron-saint of temptations. Now I am adamant.”

Night was stealing gently on, wrapping in its transparent shadow, like a fine gauze, the broad landscape stretching away to the right. The train was running along the Seine, and the young couple began to watch the crimson reflections on the surface of the river, winding like a broad strip of polished metal alongside the line, patches fallen from the sky, which the departing sun had kindled into flame. These reflections slowly died out, grew deeper, faded sadly. The landscape became dark with that sinister thrill, that deathlike quiver, which each twilight causes to pass over the earth. This evening gloom, entering the open window, penetrated the two souls, but lately so lively, of the now silent pair.

They had drawn more closely together to watch the dying day. At Nantes the railway people had lit the little oil lamp, which shed its yellow, trembling light upon the drab cloth of the cushions. Duroy passed his arms round the waist of his wife, and clasped her to him. His recent keen desire had become a softened one, a longing for consoling little caresses, such as we lull children with.

He murmured softly: “I shall love you very dearly, my little Made.”

The softness of his voice stirred the young wife, and caused a rapid thrill to run through her. She offered her mouth, bending towards him, for he was resting his cheek upon the warm pillow of her bosom, until the whistle of the train announced that they were nearing a station. She remarked, flattening the ruffled locks about her forehead with the tips of her fingers: “It was very silly. We are quite childish.”

But he was kissing her hands in turn with feverish rapidity, and replied: “I adore you, my little Made.”

Until they reached Rouen they remained almost motionless, cheek against cheek, their eyes turned to the window, through which, from time to time, the lights of houses could be seen in the darkness, satisfied with feeling themselves so close to one another, and with the growing anticipation of a freer and more intimate embrace.

They put up at a hotel overlooking the quay, and went to bed after a very hurried supper.

The chambermaid aroused them next morning as it was striking eight. When they had drank the cup of tea she had placed on the night-table, Duroy looked at his wife, then suddenly, with the joyful impulse of the fortunate man who has just found a treasure, he clasped her in his arms, exclaiming: “My little Made, I am sure that I love you ever so much, ever so much, ever so much.”

She smiled with her confident and satisfied smile, and murmured, as she returned his kisses: “And I too — perhaps.”

But he still felt uneasy about the visit of his parents. He had already forewarned his wife, had prepared and lectured her, but he thought fit to do so again.

“You know,” he said, “they are only rustics — country rustics, not theatrical ones.”

She laughed.

“But I know that: you have told me so often enough. Come, get up and let me get up.”

He jumped out of bed, and said, as he drew on his socks:

“We shall be very uncomfortable there, very uncomfortable. There is only an old straw palliasse in my room. Spring mattresses are unknown at Canteleu.”

She seemed delighted.

“So much the better. It will be delightful to sleep badly — beside — beside you, and to be woke up by the crowing of the cocks.”

She had put on her dressing-gown — a white flannel dressing-gown — which Duroy at once recognized. The sight of it was unpleasant to him. Why? His wife had, he was aware, a round dozen of these morning garments. She could not destroy her trousseau in order to buy a new one. No matter, he would have preferred that her bed-linen, her night-linen, her under-clothing were not the same she had made use of with the other. It seemed to him that the soft, warm stuff must have retained something from its contact with Forestier.

He walked to the window, lighting a cigarette. The sight of the port, the broad stream covered with vessels with tapering spars, the steamers noisily unloading alongside the quay, stirred him, although he had been acquainted with it all for a long time past, and he exclaimed: “By Jove! it is a fine sight.”

Madeleine approached, and placing both hands on one of her husband’s shoulders, leaned against him with careless grace, charmed and delighted. She kept repeating: “Oh! how pretty, how pretty. I did not know that there were so many ships as that.”

They started an hour later, for they were to lunch with the old people, who had been forewarned some days beforehand. A rusty open carriage bore them along with a noise of jolting ironmongery. They followed a long and rather ugly boulevard, passed between some fields through which flowed a stream, and began to ascend the slope. Madeleine, somewhat fatigued, had dozed off beneath the penetrating caress of the sun, which warmed her delightfully as she lay stretched back in the old carriage as though in a bath of light and country air.

Her husband awoke her, saying: “Look!”

They had halted two-thirds of the way up the slope, at a spot famous for the view, and to which all tourists drive. They overlooked the long and broad valley through which the bright river flowed in sweeping curves. It could be caught sight of in the distance, dotted with numerous islands, and describing a wide sweep before flowing through Rouen. Then the town appeared on the right bank, slightly veiled in the morning mist, but with rays of sunlight falling on its roofs; its thousand squat or pointed spires, light, fragile-looking, wrought like gigantic jewels; its round or square towers topped with heraldic crowns; its belfries; the numerous Gothic summits of its churches, overtopped by the sharp spire of the cathedral, that surprising spike of bronze — strange, ugly, and out of all proportion, the tallest in the world. Facing it, on the other side of the river, rose the factory chimneys of the suburb of Saint Serves — tall, round, and broadening at their summit. More numerous than their sister spires, they reared even in the distant country, their tall brick columns, and vomited into the blue sky their black and coaly breath. Highest of all, as high as the second of the summits reared by human labor, the pyramid of Cheops, almost level with its proud companion the cathedral spire, the great steam-pump of La Foudre seemed the queen of the busy, smoking factories, as the other was the queen of the sacred edifices. Further on, beyond the workmen's town, stretched a forest of pines, and the Seine, having passed between the two divisions of the city, continued its way, skirting a tall rolling slope, wooded at the summit, and showing here and there its bare bone of white stone. Then the river disappeared on the horizon, after again describing a long sweeping curve. Ships could be seen ascending and descending the stream, towed by tugs as big as flies and belching forth thick smoke. Islands were stretched along the water in a line, one close to the other, or with wide intervals between them, like the unequal beads of a verdant rosary.

The driver waited until the travelers' ecstasies were over. He knew from experience the duration of the admiration of all the breed of tourists. But when he started again Duroy suddenly caught sight of two old people advancing towards them some hundreds of yards further on, and jumped out, exclaiming: “There they are. I recognize them.”

There were two country-folk, a man and a woman, walking with irregular steps, rolling in their gait, and sometimes knocking their shoulders together. The man was short and strongly built, high colored and inclined to stoutness, but powerful, despite his years. The woman was tall, spare, bent, careworn, the real hard-working country-woman who has toiled afield from childhood, and has never had time to amuse herself, while her husband has been joking and drinking with the customers. Madeleine had also alighted from the carriage, and she watched these two poor creatures coming towards them with a pain at her heart, a sadness she had not anticipated.

They had not recognized their son in this fine gentleman and would never have guessed this handsome lady in the light dress to be their daughter-in-law. They were walking on quickly and in silence to meet their long-looked-for boy, without noticing these city folk followed by their carriage.

They passed by when George, who was laughing, cried out: “Good-day, Daddy Duroy!”

They both stopped short, amazed at first, then stupefied with surprise. The old woman recovered herself first, and stammered, without advancing a step: “Is’t thou, boy?”

The young fellow answered: “Yes, it is I, mother,” and stepping up to her, kissed her on both cheeks with a son’s hearty smack. Then he rubbed noses with his father, who had taken off his cap, a very tall, black silk cap, made Rouen fashion, like those worn by cattle dealers.

Then George said: “This is my wife,” and the two country people looked at Madeleine. They looked at her as one looks at a phenomenon, with an uneasy fear, united in the father with a species of approving satisfaction, in the mother with a kind of jealous enmity.

The man, who was of a joyous nature and inspired by a loveliness born of sweet cider and alcohol, grew bolder, and asked, with a twinkle in the corner of his eyes: “I may kiss her all the same?”

“Certainly,” replied his son, and Madeleine, ill at ease, held out both cheeks to the sounding smacks of the rustic, who then wiped his lips with the back of his hand. The old woman, in her turn, kissed her daughter-in-law with a hostile reserve. No, this was not the daughter-in-law of her dreams; the plump, fresh housewife, rosy-cheeked as an apple, and round as a brood mare. She looked like a hussy, the fine lady with her furbelows and her musk. For the old girl all perfumes were musk.

They set out again, walking behind the carriage which bore the trunk of the newly-wedded pair. The old fellow took his son by the arm, and keeping him a little in the rear of the others, asked with interest: “Well, how goes business, lad?”

“Pretty fair.”

“So much the better. Has thy wife any money?”

“Forty thousand francs,” answered George.

His father gave vent to an admiring whistle, and could only murmur, “Dang it!” so overcome was he by the mention of the sum. Then he added, in a tone of serious conviction: “Dang it all, she’s a fine woman!” For he found her to his taste, and he had passed for a good judge in his day.

Madeleine and her mother-in-law were walking side by side without exchanging a word. The two men rejoined them. They reached the village, a little roadside village formed of half-a-score houses on each side of the highway, cottages and farm buildings, the former of brick and the latter of clay, these covered with thatch and those with slates. Father Duroy’s tavern, “The Bellevue,” a bit of a house consisting of a ground floor and a garret, stood at the beginning of the village to the left. A pine branch above the door indicated, in ancient fashion, that thirsty folk could enter.

The things were laid for lunch, in the common room of the tavern, on two tables placed together and covered with two napkins. A neighbor, come in to help to serve the lunch, bowed low on seeing such a fine lady appear; and then, recognizing George, exclaimed: “Good Lord! is that the youngster?”

He replied gayly: “Yes, it is I, Mother Brulin,” and kissed her as he had kissed his father and mother. Then turning to his wife, he said: “Come into our room and take your hat off.”

He ushered her through a door to the right into a cold-looking room with tiled floor, white-washed walls, and a bed with white cotton curtains. A crucifix above a holy-water stoup, and two colored pictures, one representing Paul and Virginia under a blue palm tree, and the other Napoleon the First on a yellow horse, were the only ornaments of this clean and dispiriting apartment.

As soon as they were alone he kissed Madeleine, saying: “Thanks, Made. I am glad to see the old folks again. When one is in Paris one does not think about it; but when one meets again, it gives one pleasure all the same.”

But his father, thumbing the partition with his fist, cried out: “Come along, come along, the soup is ready,” and they had to sit down to table.

It was a long, countrified repast, with a succession of ill-assorted dishes, a sausage after a leg of mutton, and an omelette after a sausage. Father Duroy, excited by cider and some glasses of wine, turned on the tap of his choicest jokes — those he reserved for great occasions of festivity, smutty adventures that had happened, as he maintained, to friends of his. George, who knew all these stories, laughed, nevertheless, intoxicated by his native air, seized on by the innate love of one’s birthplace and of spots familiar from childhood, by all the sensations and recollections once more renewed, by all the objects of yore seen again once more; by trifles, such as the mark of a knife on a door, a broken chair recalling some pretty event, the smell of the soil, the breath of the neighboring forest, the odors of the dwelling, the gutter, the dunghill.

Mother Duroy did not speak, but remained sad and grim, watching her daughter-in-law out of the corner of her eye, with hatred awakened in her heart — the hatred of an old toiler, an old rustic with fingers worn and limbs bent by hard work — for the city madame, who inspired her with the repulsion of an accursed creature, an impure being, created for idleness and sin. She kept getting up every moment to fetch the dishes or fill the glasses with cider, sharp and yellow from the decanter, or sweet, red, and frothing from the bottles, the corks of which popped like those of ginger beer.

Madeleine scarcely ate or spoke. She wore her wonted smile upon her lips, but it was a sad and resigned one. She was downcast. Why? She had wanted to come. She had not been unaware that she was going among country folk — poor country folk. What had she fancied them to be — she, who did not usually dream? Did she know herself? Do not women always hope for something that is not? Had she fancied them more poetical? No; but perhaps better informed, more noble, more affectionate, more ornamental. Yet she did not want them high-bred, like those in novels. Whence came it, then, that they shocked her by a thousand trifling, imperceptible details, by a thousand indefinable coarsenesses, by their very nature as rustics, by their words, their gestures, and their mirth? She recalled her own mother, of whom she never spoke to anyone — a governess, brought up at Saint Denis — seduced, and died from poverty and grief when she, Madeleine, was twelve years old. An unknown hand had had her brought up. Her father, no doubt. Who was he? She did not exactly know, although she had vague suspicions.

The lunch still dragged on. Customers were now coming in and shaking hands with the father, uttering exclamations of wonderment on seeing his son, and slyly winking as they scanned the young wife out of the corner of their eye, which was as much as to say: “Hang it all, she’s not a duffer, George Duroy’s wife.” Others, less intimate, sat down at the wooden tables, calling for “A pot,” “A jugful,” “Two brandies,” “A raspail,” and began to play at dominoes, noisily rattling the little bits of black and white bone. Mother Duroy kept passing to and fro, serving the customers, with her melancholy air, taking money, and wiping the tables with the corner of her blue apron.

The smoke of clay pipes and sou cigars filled the room. Madeleine began to cough, and said: “Suppose we go out; I cannot stand it.”

They had not quite finished, and old Duroy was annoyed at this. Then she got up and went and sat on a chair outside the door, while her father-in-law and her husband were finishing their coffee and their nip of brandy.

George soon rejoined her. “Shall we stroll down as far as the Seine?” said he.

She consented with pleasure, saying: “Oh, yes; let us go.”

They descended the slope, hired a boat at Croisset, and passed the rest of the afternoon drowsily moored under the willows alongside an island, soothed to slumber by the soft spring weather, and rocked by the wavelets of the river. Then they went back at nightfall.

The evening’s repast, eaten by the light of a tallow candle, was still more painful for Madeleine than that of the morning. Father Duroy, who was half drunk, no longer spoke. The mother maintained her dogged manner. The wretched light cast upon the gray walls the shadows of heads with enormous noses and exaggerated movements. A great hand was seen to raise a pitchfork to a mouth opening like a dragon’s maw whenever any one of them, turning a little, presented a profile to the yellow, flickering flame.

As soon as dinner was over, Madeleine drew her husband out of the house, in order not to stay in this gloomy room, always reeking with an acrid smell of old pipes and spilt liquor. As soon as they were outside, he said: “You are tired of it already.”

She began to protest, but he stopped her, saying: “No, I saw it very plainly. If you like, we will leave to-morrow.”

“Very well,” she murmured.

They strolled gently onward. It was a mild night, the deep, all-embracing shadow of which seemed filled with faint murmurings, rustlings, and breathings. They had entered a narrow path, overshadowed by tall trees, and running between two belts of underwood of impenetrable blackness.

“Where are we?” asked she.

“In the forest,” he replied.

“Is it a large one?”

“Very large; one of the largest in France.”

An odor of earth, trees, and moss — that fresh yet old scent of the woods, made up of the sap of bursting buds and the dead and moldering foliage of the thickets, seemed to linger in the path. Raising her head, Madeleine could see the stars through the tree-tops; and although no breeze stirred the boughs, she could yet feel around her the vague quivering of this ocean of leaves. A strange thrill shot through her soul and fleeted across her skin — a strange pain gripped her at the heart. Why, she did not understand. But it seemed to her that she was lost, engulfed, surrounded by perils, abandoned by everyone; alone, alone in the world beneath this living vault quivering there above her.

She murmured: “I am rather frightened. I should like to go back.”

“Well, let us do so.”

“And — we will leave for Paris to-morrow?”

“Yes, to-morrow.”

“To-morrow morning?”

“To-morrow morning, if you like.”

They returned home. The old folks had gone to bed. She slept badly, continually aroused by all the country sounds so new to her — the cry of the screech owl, the grunting of a pig in a sty adjoining the house, and the noise of a cock who kept on crowing from midnight. She was up and ready to start at daybreak.

When George announced to his parents that he was going back they were both astonished; then they understood the origin of his wish.

The father merely said: “Shall I see you again soon?”

“Yes, in the course of the summer.”

“So much the better.”

The old woman growled: “I hope you won’t regret what you have done.”

He left them two hundred francs as a present to assuage their discontent, and the carriage, which a boy had been sent in quest of, having made its appearance at about ten o’clock, the newly-married couple embraced the old country folk and started off once more.

As they were descending the hill Duroy began to laugh.

“There,” he said, “I had warned you. I ought not to have introduced you to Monsieur and Madame du Roy de Cantel, Senior.”

She began to laugh, too, and replied: “I am delighted now. They are good folk, whom I am beginning to like very well. I will send them some presents from Paris.” Then she murmured: “Du Roy de Cantel, you will see that no one will be astonished at the terms of the notification of our marriage. We will say that we have been staying for a week with your parents on their estate.” And bending towards him she kissed the tip of his moustache, saying: “Good morning, George.”

He replied: “Good morning, Made,” as he passed an arm around her waist.

In the valley below they could see the broad river like a ribbon of silver unrolled beneath the morning sun, the factory chimneys belching forth their clouds of smoke into the sky, and the pointed spires rising above the old town.

X

The Du Roys had been back in Paris a couple of days, and the journalist had taken up his old work pending the moment when he should definitely assume Forestier's duties, and give himself wholly up to politics. He was going home that evening to his predecessor's abode to dinner, with a light heart and a keen desire to embrace his wife, whose physical attractions and imperceptible domination exercised a powerful impulse over him. Passing by a florist's at the bottom of the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, he was struck by the notion of buying a bouquet for Madeleine, and chose a large bunch of half-open roses, a very bundle of perfumed buds.

At each story of his new staircase he eyed himself complacently in the mirrors, the sight of which continually recalled to him his first visit to the house. He rang the bell, having forgotten his key, and the same man-servant, whom he had also kept on by his wife's advice, opened the door.

"Has your mistress come home?" asked George.

"Yes, sir."

But on passing through the dining-room he was greatly surprised to find the table laid for three, and the hangings of the drawing-room door being looped up, saw Madeleine arranging in a vase on the mantelpiece a bunch of roses exactly similar to his own. He was vexed and displeased; it was as though he had been robbed of his idea, his mark of attention, and all the pleasure he anticipated from it.

"You have invited some one to dinner, then?" he inquired, as he entered the room.

She answered without turning round, and while continuing to arrange the flowers: "Yes, and no. It is my old friend, the Count de Vaudrec, who has been accustomed to dine here every Monday, and who has come as usual."

George murmured: "Ah! very good."

He remained standing behind her, bouquet in hand, with a longing to hide it or throw it away. He said, however: "I have brought you some roses."

She turned round suddenly, smiling, and exclaimed: "Ah! how nice of you to have thought of that."

And she held out her arms and lips to him with an outburst of joy so real that he felt consoled. She took the flowers, smelt them, and with the liveliness of a delighted child, placed them in the vase that remained empty opposite the other. Then she murmured, as she viewed the result: “How glad I am. My mantelpiece is furnished now.” She added almost immediately, in a tone of conviction: “You know Vaudrec is awfully nice; you will be friends with him at once.”

A ring announced the Count. He entered quietly, and quite at his ease, as though at home. After having gallantly kissed the young wife’s fingers, he turned to the husband and cordially held out his hand, saying: “How goes it, my dear Du Roy?”

It was no longer his former stiff and starched bearing, but an affable one, showing that the situation was no longer the same. The journalist, surprised, strove to make himself agreeable in response to these advances. It might have been believed within five minutes that they had known and loved one another for ten years past.

Then Madeleine, whose face was radiant, said: “I will leave you together, I must give a look to my dinner.” And she went out, followed by a glance from both men. When she returned she found them talking theatricals apropos of a new piece, and so thoroughly of the same opinion that a species of rapid friendship awoke in their eyes at the discovery of this absolute identity of ideas.

The dinner was delightful, so intimate and cordial, and the Count stayed on quite late, so comfortable did he feel in this nice little new household.

As soon as he had left Madeleine said to her husband: “Is he not perfect? He gains in every way by being known. He is a true friend — safe, devoted, faithful. Ah, without him— “

She did not finish the sentence, and George replied: “Yes, I find him very agreeable. I think that we shall get on very well together.”

She resumed: “You do not know, but we have some work to do together before going to bed. I had not time to speak to you about it before dinner, because Vaudrec came in at once. I have had some important news, news from Morocco. It was Laroche-Mathieu, the deputy, the future minister, who brought it to me. We must work up an important article, a sensational one. I have the facts and figures. We will set to work at once. Bring the lamp.”

He took it, and they passed into the study. The same books were ranged in the bookcase, which now bore on its summit the three vases bought at the Golfe Juan by Forestier on the eve of his death. Under the table the dead man's mat awaited the feet of Du Roy, who, on sitting down, took up an ivory penholder slightly gnawed at the end by the other's teeth. Madeleine leant against the mantelpiece, and having lit a cigarette related her news, and then explained her notions and the plan of the article she meditated. He listened attentively, scribbling notes as he did so, and when she had finished, raised objections, took up the question again, enlarged its bearing, and sketched in turn, not the plan of an article, but of a campaign against the existing Ministry. This attack would be its commencement. His wife had left off smoking, so strongly was her interest aroused, so vast was the vision that opened before her as she followed out George's train of thought.

She murmured, from time to time: "Yes, yes; that is very good. That is capital. That is very clever."

And when he had finished speaking in turn, she said: "Now let us write."

But he always found it hard to make a start, and with difficulty sought his expressions. Then she came gently, and, leaning over his shoulder, began to whisper sentences in his ear. From time to time she would hesitate, and ask: "Is that what you want to say?"

He answered: "Yes, exactly."

She had piercing shafts, the poisoned shafts of a woman, to wound the head of the Cabinet, and she blended jests about his face with others respecting his policy in a curious fashion, that made one laugh, and, at the same time, impressed one by their truth of observation.

Du Roy from time to time added a few lines which widened and strengthened the range of attack. He understood, too, the art of perfidious insinuation, which he had learned in sharpening up his "Echoes"; and when a fact put forward as certain by Madeleine appeared doubtful or compromising, he excelled in allowing it to be divined and in impressing it upon the mind more strongly than if he had affirmed it. When their article was finished, George read it aloud. They both thought it excellent, and smiled, delighted and surprised, as if they had just mutually revealed themselves to one another. They gazed into the depths of one another's eyes with yearnings of love and admiration, and they embraced one another with an ardor communicated from their minds to their bodies.

Du Roy took up the lamp again. "And now to bye-bye," said he, with a kindling glance.

She replied: "Go first, sir, since you light the way."

He went first, and she followed him into their bedroom, tickling his neck to make him go quicker, for he could not stand that.

The article appeared with the signature of George Duroy de Cantel, and caused a great sensation. There was an excitement about it in the Chamber. Daddy Walter congratulated the author, and entrusted him with the political editorship of the *Vie Francaise*. The "Echoes" fell again to Boisrenard.

Then there began in the paper a violent and cleverly conducted campaign against the Ministry. The attack, now ironical, now serious, now jesting, and now virulent, but always skillful and based on facts, was delivered with a certitude and continuity which astonished everyone. Other papers continually cited the *Vie Francaise*, taking whole passages from it, and those in office asked themselves whether they could not gag this unknown and inveterate foe with the gift of a prefecture.

Du Roy became a political celebrity. He felt his influence increasing by the pressure of hands and the lifting of hats. His wife, too, filled him with stupefaction and admiration by the ingenuity of her mind, the value of her information, and the number of her acquaintances. Continually he would find in his drawing-room, on returning home, a senator, a deputy, a magistrate, a general, who treated Madeleine as an old friend, with serious familiarity. Where had she met all these people? In society, so she said. But how had she been able to gain their confidence and their affection? He could not understand it.

"She would make a terrible diplomatist," he thought.

She often came in late at meal times, out of breath, flushed, quivering, and before even taking off her veil would say: "I have something good to-day. Fancy, the Minister of Justice has just appointed two magistrates who formed a part of the mixed commission. We will give him a dose he will not forget in a hurry."

And they would give the minister a dose, and another the next day, and a third the day after. The deputy, Laroche-Mathieu, who dined at the Rue Fontaine every Tuesday, after the Count de Vaudrec, who began the week, would shake the hands of husband and wife with demonstrations of extreme joy. He never ceased repeating: "By Jove, what a campaign! If we don't succeed after all?"

He hoped, indeed, to succeed in getting hold of the portfolio of foreign affairs, which he had had in view for a long time.

He was one of those many-faced politicians, without strong convictions, without great abilities, without boldness, and without any depth of knowledge, a provincial barrister, a local dandy, preserving a cunning balance between all parties, a species of Republican Jesuit and Liberal mushroom of uncertain character, such as spring up by hundreds on the popular dunghill of universal suffrage. His village machiavelism caused him to be reckoned able among his colleagues, among all the adventurers and abortions who are made deputies. He was sufficiently well-dressed, correct, familiar, and amiable to succeed. He had his successes in society, in the mixed, perturbed, and somewhat rough society of the high functionaries of the day. It was said everywhere of him: “Laroche will be a minister,” and he believed more firmly than anyone else that he would be. He was one of the chief shareholders in Daddy Walter’s paper, and his colleague and partner in many financial schemes.

Du Roy backed him up with confidence and with vague hopes as to the future. He was, besides, only continuing the work begun by Forestier, to whom Laroche-Mathieu had promised the Cross of the Legion of Honor when the day of triumph should come. The decoration would adorn the breast of Madeleine’s second husband, that was all. Nothing was changed in the main.

It was seen so well that nothing was changed that Du Roy’s comrades organized a joke against him, at which he was beginning to grow angry. They no longer called him anything but Forestier. As soon as he entered the office some one would call out: “I say, Forestier.”

He would pretend not to hear, and would look for the letters in his pigeon-holes. The voice would resume in louder tones, “Hi! Forestier.” Some stifled laughs would be heard, and as Du Roy was entering the manager’s room, the comrade who had called out would stop him, saying: “Oh, I beg your pardon, it is you I want to speak to. It is stupid, but I am always mixing you up with poor Charles. It is because your articles are so infernally like his. Everyone is taken in by them.”

Du Roy would not answer, but he was inwardly furious, and a sullen wrath sprang up in him against the dead man. Daddy Walter himself had declared, when astonishment was expressed at the flagrant similarity in style and inspiration between the leaders of the new political editor and his predecessor: “Yes, it is Forestier, but a fuller, stronger, more manly Forestier.”

Another time Du Roy, opening by chance the cupboard in which the cup and balls were kept, had found all those of his predecessor with crape round the handles, and his own, the one he had made use of when he practiced under the direction of Saint-Potin, ornamented with a pink ribbon. All had been arranged on the same shelf according to size, and a card like those in museums bore the inscription: “The Forestier-Du Roy (late Forestier and Co.) Collection.” He quietly closed the cupboard, saying, in tones loud enough to be heard: “There are fools and envious people everywhere.”

But he was wounded in his pride, wounded in his vanity, that touchy pride and vanity of the writer, which produce the nervous susceptibility ever on the alert, equally in the reporter and the genial poet. The word “Forestier” made his ears tingle. He dreaded to hear it, and felt himself redden when he did so. This name was to him a biting jest, more than a jest, almost an insult. It said to him: “It is your wife who does your work, as she did that of the other. You would be nothing without her.”

He admitted that Forestier would have been no one without Madeleine; but as to himself, come now!

Then, at home, the haunting impression continued. It was the whole place now that recalled the dead man to him, the whole of the furniture, the whole of the knicknacks, everything he laid hands on. He had scarcely thought of this at the outset, but the joke devised by his comrades had caused a kind of mental wound, which a number of trifles, unnoticed up to the present, now served to envenom. He could not take up anything without at once fancying he saw the hand of Charles upon it. He only looked at it and made use of things the latter had made use of formerly; things that he had purchased, liked, and enjoyed. And George began even to grow irritated at the thought of the bygone relations between his friend and his wife. He was sometimes astonished at this revolt of his heart, which he did not understand, and said to himself, “How the deuce is it? I am not jealous of Madeleine’s friends. I am never uneasy about what she is up to. She goes in and out as she chooses, and yet the recollection of that brute of a Charles puts me in a rage.” He added, “At the bottom, he was only an idiot, and it is that, no doubt, that wounds me. I am vexed that Madeleine could have married such a fool.” And he kept continually repeating, “How is it that she could have stomached such a donkey for a single moment?”

His rancor was daily increased by a thousand insignificant details, which stung him like pin pricks, by the incessant reminders of the other arising out of a word from Madeleine, from the man-servant, from the waiting-maid.

One evening Du Roy, who liked sweet dishes, said, “How is it we never have sweets at dinner?”

His wife replied, cheerfully, “That is quite true. I never think about them. It is all through Charles, who hated— “

He cut her short in a fit of impatience he was unable to control, exclaiming, “Hang it all! I am sick of Charles. It is always Charles here and Charles there, Charles liked this and Charles liked that. Since Charles is dead, for goodness sake leave him in peace.”

Madeleine looked at her husband in amazement, without being able to understand his sudden anger. Then, as she was sharp, she guessed what was going on within him; this slow working of posthumous jealousy, swollen every moment by all that recalled the other. She thought it puerile, may be, but was flattered by it, and did not reply.

He was vexed with himself at this irritation, which he had not been able to conceal. As they were writing after dinner an article for the next day, his feet got entangled in the foot mat. He kicked it aside, and said with a laugh:

“Charles was always chilly about the feet, I suppose?”

She replied, also laughing: “Oh! he lived in mortal fear of catching cold; his chest was very weak.”

Du Roy replied grimly: “He has given us a proof of that.” Then kissing his wife’s hand, he added gallantly: “Luckily for me.”

But on going to bed, still haunted by the same idea, he asked: “Did Charles wear nightcaps for fear of the draughts?”

She entered into the joke, and replied: “No; only a silk handkerchief tied round his head.”

George shrugged his shoulders, and observed, with contempt, “What a baby.”

From that time forward Charles became for him an object of continual conversation. He dragged him in on all possible occasions, speaking of him as “Poor Charles,” with an air of infinite pity. When he returned home from the office, where he had been accosted twice or thrice as Forestier, he avenged himself by bitter railleries against the dead man in his tomb. He recalled his defects, his absurdities, his littleness, enumerating them with enjoyment, developing and augmenting them as though he had wished to combat the influence of a dreaded rival over the heart of his wife. He would say, “I say, Made, do you remember the day when that duffer Forestier tried to prove to us that stout men were stronger than spare ones?”

Then he sought to learn a number of private and secret details respecting the departed, which his wife, ill at ease, refused to tell him. But he obstinately persisted, saying, “Come, now, tell me all about it. He must have been very comical at such a time?”

She murmured, “Oh! do leave him alone.”

But he went on, “No, but tell me now, he must have been a duffer to sleep with?” And he always wound up with, “What a donkey he was.”

One evening, towards the end of June, as he was smoking a cigarette at the window, the fineness of the evening inspired him with a wish for a drive, and he said, “Made, shall we go as far as the Bois de Boulogne?”

“Certainly.”

They took an open carriage and drove up the Champs Elysées, and then along the main avenue of the Bois de Boulogne. It was a breezeless night, one of those stifling nights when the overheated air of Paris fills the chest like the breath of a furnace. A host of carriages bore along beneath the trees a whole population of lovers. They came one behind the other in an unbroken line. George and Madeleine amused themselves with watching all these couples, the woman in summer toilet and the man darkly outlined beside her. It was a huge flood of lovers towards the Bois, beneath the starry and heated sky. No sound was heard save the dull rumble of wheels. They kept passing by, two by two in each vehicle, leaning back on the seat, silent, clasped one against the other, lost in dreams of desire, quivering with the anticipation of coming caresses. The warm shadow seemed full of kisses. A sense of spreading lust rendered the air heavier and more suffocating. All the couples, intoxicated with the same idea, the same ardor, shed a fever about them.

George and Madeleine felt the contagion. They clasped hands without a word, oppressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere and the emotion that assailed them. As they reached the turning which follows the line of the fortification, they kissed one another, and she stammered somewhat confusedly, “We are as great babies as on the way to Rouen.”

The great flood of vehicles divided at the entrance of the wood. On the road to the lake, which the young couple were following, they were now thinner, but the dark shadow of the trees, the air freshened by the leaves and by the dampness arising from the streamlets that could be heard flowing beneath them, and the coolness of the vast nocturnal vault bedecked with stars, gave to the kisses of the perambulating pairs a more penetrating charm.

George murmured, “Dear little Made,” as he pressed her to him.

“Do you remember the forest close to your home, how gloomy it was?” said she. “It seemed to me that it was full of horrible creatures, and that there was no end to it, while here it is delightful. One feels caresses in the breeze, and I know that Sevres lies on the other side of the wood.”

He replied, “Oh! in the forest at home there was nothing but deer, foxes, and wild boars, and here and there the hut of a forester.”

This word, akin to the dead man’s name, issuing from his mouth, surprised him just as if some one had shouted it out to him from the depths of a thicket, and he became suddenly silent, assailed anew by the strange and persistent uneasiness, and gnawing, invincible, jealous irritation that had been spoiling his existence for some time past. After a minute or so, he asked: “Did you ever come here like this of an evening with Charles?”

“Yes, often,” she answered.

And all of a sudden he was seized with a wish to return home, a nervous desire that gripped him at the heart. But the image of Forestier had returned to his mind and possessed and laid hold of him. He could no longer speak or think of anything else and said in a spiteful tone, “I say, Made?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Did you ever cuckold poor Charles?”

She murmured disdainfully, “How stupid you are with your stock joke.”

But he would not abandon the idea.

“Come, Made, dear, be frank and acknowledge it. You cuckolded him, eh? Come, admit that you cuckolded him?”

She was silent, shocked as all women are by this expression.

He went on obstinately, “Hang it all, if ever anyone had the head for a cuckold it was he. Oh! yes. It would please me to know that he was one. What a fine head for horns.” He felt that she was smiling at some recollection, perhaps, and persisted, saying, “Come out with it. What does it matter? It would be very comical to admit that you had deceived him, to me.”

He was indeed quivering with hope and desire that Charles, the hateful Charles, the detested dead, had borne this shameful ridicule. And yet — yet — another emotion, less definite. “My dear little Made, tell me, I beg of you. He deserved it. You would have been wrong not to have given him a pair of horns. Come, Made, confess."

She now, no doubt, found this persistence amusing, for she was laughing a series of short, jerky laughs.

He had put his lips close to his wife's ear and whispered: "Come, come, confess."

She jerked herself away, and said, abruptly: "You are crazy. As if one answered such questions."

She said this in so singular a tone that a cold shiver ran through her husband's veins, and he remained dumbfounded, scared, almost breathless, as though from some mental shock.

The carriage was now passing along the lake, on which the sky seemed to have scattered its stars. Two swans, vaguely outlined, were swimming slowly, scarcely visible in the shadow. George called out to the driver: "Turn back!" and the carriage returned, meeting the others going at a walk, with their lanterns gleaming like eyes in the night.

What a strange manner in which she had said it. Was it a confession? Du Roy kept asking himself. And the almost certainty that she had deceived her first husband now drove him wild with rage. He longed to beat her, to strangle her, to tear her hair out. Oh, if she had only replied: "But darling, if I had deceived him, it would have been with yourself," how he would have kissed, clasped, worshiped her.

He sat still, his arms crossed, his eyes turned skyward, his mind too agitated to think as yet. He only felt within him the rancor fermenting and the anger swelling which lurk at the heart of all mankind in presence of the caprices of feminine desire. He felt for the first time that vague anguish of the husband who suspects. He was jealous at last, jealous on behalf of the dead, jealous on Forestier's account, jealous in a strange and poignant fashion, into which there suddenly entered a hatred of Madeleine. Since she had deceived the other, how could he have confidence in her himself? Then by degrees his mind became calmer, and bearing up against his pain, he thought: "All women are prostitutes. We must make use of them, and not give them anything of ourselves." The bitterness in his heart rose to his lips in words of contempt and disgust. He repeated to himself: "The victory in this world is to the strong. One must be strong. One must be above all prejudices."

The carriage was going faster. It repassed the fortifications. Du Roy saw before him a reddish light in the sky like the glow of an immense forge, and heard a vast, confused, continuous rumor, made up of countless different sounds, the breath of Paris panting this summer night like an exhausted giant.

George reflected: “I should be very stupid to fret about it. Everyone for himself. Fortune favors the bold. Egotism is everything. Egotism as regards ambition and fortune is better than egotism as regards woman and love.”

The Arc de Triomphe appeared at the entrance to the city on its two tall supports like a species of shapeless giant ready to start off and march down the broad avenue open before him. George and Madeleine found themselves once more in the stream of carriages bearing homeward and bedwards the same silent and interlaced couples. It seemed that the whole of humanity was passing by intoxicated with joy, pleasure, and happiness. The young wife, who had divined something of what was passing through her husband’s mind, said, in her soft voice: “What are you thinking of, dear? You have not said a word for the last half hour.”

He answered, sneeringly: “I was thinking of all these fools cuddling one another, and saying to myself that there is something else to do in life.”

She murmured: “Yes, but it is nice sometimes.”

“It is nice — when one has nothing better to do.”

George’s thoughts were still hard at it, stripping life of its poesy in a kind of spiteful anger. “I should be very foolish to trouble myself, to deprive myself of anything whatever, to worry as I have done for some time past.” Forestier’s image crossed his mind without causing any irritation. It seemed to him that they had just been reconciled, that they had become friends again. He wanted to cry out: “Good evening, old fellow.”

Madeleine, to whom this silence was irksome, said: “Suppose we have an ice at Tortoni’s before we go in.”

He glanced at her sideways. Her fine profile was lit up by the bright light from the row of gas jets of a café. He thought, “She is pretty. Well, so much the better. Jack is as good as his master, my dear. But if ever they catch me worrying again about you, it will be hot at the North Pole.” Then he replied aloud: “Certainly, my dear,” and in order that she should not guess anything, he kissed her.

It seemed to the young wife that her husband’s lips were frozen. He smiled, however, with his wonted smile, as he gave her his hand to alight in front of the café.

XI

On reaching the office next day, Du Roy sought out Boisrenard.

"My dear fellow," said he, "I have a service to ask of you. It has been thought funny for some time past to call me Forestier. I begin to find it very stupid. Will you have the kindness to quietly let our friends know that I will smack the face of the first that starts the joke again? It will be for them to reflect whether it is worth risking a sword thrust for. I address myself to you because you are a calm-minded fellow, who can hinder matters from coming to painful extremities, and also because you were my second."

Boisrenard undertook the commission. Du Roy went out on business, and returned an hour later. No one called him Forestier.

When he reached home he heard ladies' voices in the drawing-room, and asked, "Who is there?"

"Madame Walter and Madame de Marelle," replied the servant.

His heart beat fast for a moment, and then he said to himself, "Well, let's see," and opened the door.

Clotilde was beside the fireplace, full in a ray of light from the window. It seemed to George that she grew slightly paler on perceiving him. Having first bowed to Madame Walter and her two daughters, seated like two sentinels on each side of their mother, he turned towards his late mistress. She held out her hand, and he took it and pressed it meaningly, as though to say, "I still love you." She responded to this pressure.

He inquired: "How have you been during the century that has elapsed since our last meeting?"

She replied with perfect ease: "Quite well; and you, Pretty-boy?" and turning to Madeleine, added: "You will allow me to call him Pretty-boy still?"

"Certainly, dear; I will allow whatever you please."

A shade of irony seemed hidden in these words.

Madame Walter spoke of an entertainment that was going to be given by Jacques Rival at his residence, a grand assault-at-arms, at which ladies of fashion were to be present, saying: "It will be very interesting. But I am so vexed we have no one to take us there, my husband being obliged to be away at that time."

Du Roy at once offered his services. She accepted, saying: “My daughters and I will be very much obliged to you.”

He looked at the younger daughter, and thought: “She is not at all bad looking, this little Susan; not at all.” She resembled a fair, fragile doll, too short but slender, with a small waist and fairly developed hips and bust, a face like a miniature, grayish-blue, enamel-like eyes, which seemed shaded by a careful yet fanciful painter, a polished, colorless skin, too white and too smooth, and fluffy, curly hair, in a charming aureola, like, indeed the hair of the pretty and expensive dolls we see in the arms of children much smaller than their plaything.

The elder sister, Rose, was ugly, dull-looking, and insignificant; one of those girls whom you do not notice, do not speak to, and do not talk about.

The mother rose, and, turning to George, said:

“Then I may reckon upon you for next Thursday, two o’clock?”

“You may reckon upon me, madame,” he replied.

As soon as she had taken her departure, Madame de Marelle rose in turn, saying: “Good afternoon, Pretty-boy.”

It was she who then clasped his hand firmly and for some time, and he felt moved by this silent avowal, struck again with a sudden caprice for this good-natured little, respectable Bohemian of a woman, who really loved him, perhaps.

As soon as he was alone with his wife, Madeleine broke out into a laugh, a frank, gay laugh, and, looking him fair in the face, said, “You know that Madame Walter is smitten with you.”

“Nonsense,” he answered, incredulously.

“It is so, I tell you; she spoke to me about you with wild enthusiasm. It is strange on her part. She would like to find two husbands such as you for her daughters. Fortunately, as regards her such things are of no moment.”

He did not understand what she meant, and inquired, “How of no moment?”

She replied with the conviction of a woman certain of the soundness of her judgment, “Oh! Madame Walter is one of those who have never even had a whisper about them, never, you know, never. She is unassailable in every respect. Her husband you know as well as I do. But with her it is quite another thing. She has suffered enough through marrying a Jew, but she has remained faithful to him. She is an honest woman.”

Du Roy was surprised. “I thought her a Jewess, too,” said he.

“She, not at all. She is a lady patroness of all the good works of the Church of Madeleine. Her marriage, even, was celebrated religiously. I do not know whether there was a dummy baptism as regards the governor, or whether the Church winked at it.”

George murmured: “Ah! so she fancied me.”

“Positively and thoroughly. If you were not bespoken, I should advise you to ask for the hand of — Susan, eh? rather than that of Rose.”

He replied, twisting his moustache: “Hum; their mother is not yet out of date.”

Madeleine, somewhat out of patience, answered:

“Their mother! I wish you may get her, dear. But I am not alarmed on that score. It is not at her age that a woman is guilty of a first fault. One must set about it earlier.”

George was reflecting: “If it were true, though, that I could have married Susan.” Then he shrugged his shoulders. “Bah! it is absurd. As if her father would have ever have accepted me as a suitor.”

He promised himself, though, to keep a more careful watch in the future over Madame Walter’s bearing towards him, without asking whether he might ever derive any advantage from this. All the evening he was haunted by the recollection of his love passages with Clotilde, recollections at once tender and sensual. He recalled her drolleries, her pretty ways, and their adventures together. He repeated to himself, “She is really very charming. Yes, I will go and see her to-morrow.”

As soon as he had lunched the next morning he indeed set out for the Rue de Verneuil. The same servant opened the door, and with the familiarity of servants of the middle-class, asked: “Are you quite well, sir?”

“Yes, thanks, my girl,” he replied, and entered the drawing-room, in which an unskilled hand could be heard practicing scales on the piano. It was Laurine. He thought that she would throw her arms round his neck. But she rose gravely, bowed ceremoniously like a grown-up person, and withdrew with dignity. She had so much the bearing of an insulted woman that he remained in surprise. Her mother came in, and he took and kissed her hands.

“How I have thought of you,” said he.

“And I,” she replied.

They sat down and smiled at one another, looking into each other’s eyes with a longing to kiss.

"My dear little Clo, I do love you."

"I love you, too."

"Then — then — you have not been so very angry with me?"

"Yes, and no. It hurt me a great deal, but I understood your reasons, and said to myself, 'He will come back to me some fine day or other.'"

"I dared not come back. I asked myself how I should be received. I did not dare, but I dearly wanted to. By the way, tell me what is the matter with Laurine. She scarcely said good-morning to me, and went out looking furious."

"I do not know. But we cannot speak of you to her since your marriage. I really believe she is jealous."

"Nonsense."

"It is so, dear. She no longer calls you Pretty-boy, but Monsieur Forestier."

Du Roy reddened, and then drawing close to her said:

"Kiss me."

She did so.

"Where can we meet again?" said he.

"Rue de Constantinople."

"Ah! the rooms are not let, then?"

"No, I kept them on."

"You kept them on?"

"Yes, I thought you would come back again."

A gush of joyful pride swelled his bosom. She loved him then, this woman, with a real, deep, constant love.

He murmured, "I love you," and then inquired, "Is your husband quite well?"

"Yes, very well. He has been spending a month at home, and was off again the day before yesterday."

Du Roy could not help laughing. "How lucky," said he.

She replied simply: "Yes, it is very lucky. But, all the same, he is not troublesome when he is here. You know that."

"That is true. Besides, he is a very nice fellow."

"And you," she asked, "how do you like your new life?"

"Not much one way or the other. My wife is a companion, a partner."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more. As to the heart— "

"I understand. She is pretty, though."

"Yes, but I do not put myself out about her."

He drew closer to Clotilde, and whispered. "When shall we see one another again?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"Yes, to-morrow at two o'clock."

"Two o'clock."

He rose to take leave, and then stammered, with some embarrassment: "You know I shall take on the rooms in the Rue de Constantinople myself. I mean it. A nice thing for the rent to be paid by you."

It was she who kissed his hands adoringly, murmuring: "Do as you like. It is enough for me to have kept them for us to meet again there."

Du Roy went away, his soul filled with satisfaction. As he passed by a photographer's, the portrait of a tall woman with large eyes reminded him of Madame Walter. "All the same," he said to himself, "she must be still worth looking at. How is it that I never noticed it? I want to see how she will receive me on Thursday?"

He rubbed his hands as he walked along with secret pleasure, the pleasure of success in every shape, the egotistical joy of the clever man who is successful, the subtle pleasure made up of flattered vanity and satisfied sensuality conferred by woman's affection.

On the Thursday he said to Madeleine: "Are you not coming to the assault-at-arms at Rival's?"

"No. It would not interest me. I shall go to the Chamber of Deputies."

He went to call for Madame Walter in an open landau, for the weather was delightful. He experienced a surprise on seeing her, so handsome and young-looking did he find her. She wore a light-colored dress, the somewhat open bodice of which allowed the fullness of her bosom to be divined beneath the blonde lace. She had never seemed to him so well-looking. He thought her really desirable. She wore her calm and ladylike manner, a certain matronly bearing that caused her to pass almost unnoticed before the eyes of gallants. She scarcely spoke besides, save on well-known, suitable, and respectable topics, her ideas being proper, methodical, well ordered, and void of all extravagance.

Her daughter, Susan, in pink, looked like a newly-varnished Watteau, while her elder sister seemed the governess entrusted with the care of this pretty doll of a girl.

Before Rival's door a line of carriages were drawn up. Du Roy offered Madame Walter his arm, and they went in.

The assault-at-arms was given under the patronage of the wives of all the senators and deputies connected with the *Vie Francaise*, for the benefit of the orphans of the Sixth Arrondissement of Paris. Madame Walter had promised to come with her daughters, while refusing the position of lady patroness, for she only aided with her name works undertaken by the clergy. Not that she was very devout, but her marriage with a Jew obliged her, in her own opinion, to observe a certain religious attitude, and the gathering organized by the journalist had a species of Republican import that might be construed as anti-clerical.

In papers of every shade of opinion, during the past three weeks, paragraphs had appeared such as: "Our eminent colleague, Jacques Rival, has conceived the idea, as ingenious as it is generous, of organizing for the benefit of the orphans of the Sixth Arrondissement of Paris a grand assault-at-arms in the pretty fencing-room attached to his apartments. The invitations will be sent out by Mesdames Laloigue, Remontel, and Rissolin, wives of the senators bearing these names, and by Mesdames Laroche-Mathieu, Percerol, and Firmin, wives of the well-known deputies. A collection will take place during the interval, and the amount will at once be placed in the hands of the mayor of the Sixth Arrondissement, or of his representative."

It was a gigantic advertisement that the clever journalist had devised to his own advantage.

Jacques Rival received all-comers in the hall of his dwelling, where a refreshment buffet had been fitted up, the cost of which was to be deducted from the receipts. He indicated with an amiable gesture the little staircase leading to the cellar, saying: "Downstairs, ladies, downstairs; the assault will take place in the basement."

He darted forward to meet the wife of the manager, and then shaking Du Roy by the hand, said: "How are you, Pretty-boy?"

His friend was surprised, and exclaimed: "Who told you that— "

Rival interrupted him with: "Madame Walter, here, who thinks the nickname a very nice one."

Madame Walter blushed, saying: "Yes, I will admit that, if I knew you better, I would do like little Laurine and call you Pretty-boy, too. The name suits you very well."

Du Roy laughed, as he replied: “But I beg of you, madame, to do so.”

She had lowered her eyes, and remarked: “No. We are not sufficiently intimate.”

He murmured: “Will you allow me the hope that we shall be more so?”

“Well, we will see then,” said she.

He drew on one side to let her precede him at the beginning of the narrow stairs lit by a gas jet. The abrupt transition from daylight to this yellow gleam had something depressing about it. A cellar-like odor rose up this winding staircase, a smell of damp heat and of moldy walls wiped down for the occasion, and also whiffs of incense recalling sacred offices and feminine emanations of vervain, orris root, and violets. A loud murmur of voices and the quivering thrill of an agitated crowd could also be heard down this hole.

The entire cellar was lit up by wreaths of gas jets and Chinese lanterns hidden in the foliage, masking the walls of stone. Nothing could be seen but green boughs. The ceiling was ornamented with ferns, the ground hidden by flowers and leaves. This was thought charming, and a delightful triumph of imagination. In the small cellar, at the end, was a platform for the fencers, between two rows of chairs for the judges. In the remaining space the front seats, ranged by tens to the right and to the left, would accommodate about two hundred people. Four hundred had been invited.

In front of the platform young fellows in fencing costume, with long limbs, erect figures, and moustaches curled up at the ends, were already showing themselves off to the spectators. People were pointing them out as notabilities of the art, professionals, and amateurs. Around them were chatting old and young gentlemen in frock coats, who bore a family resemblance to the fencers in fighting array. They were also seeking to be seen, recognized, and spoken of, being masters of the sword out of uniform, experts on foil play. Almost all the seats were occupied by ladies, who kept up a loud rustling of garments and a continuous murmur of voices. They were fanning themselves as though at a theater, for it was already as hot as an oven in this leafy grotto. A joker kept crying from time to time: “Orgeat, lemonade, beer.”

Madame Walter and her daughters reached the seats reserved for them in the front row. Du Roy, having installed them there, was about to quit them, saying: “I am obliged to leave you; we men must not collar the seats.”

But Madame Walter remarked, in a hesitating tone: “I should very much like to have you with us all the same. You can tell me the names of the fencers. Come, if you stand close to the end of the seat you will not be in anyone’s way.” She looked at him with her large mild eyes, and persisted, saying: “Come, stay with us, Monsieur — Pretty-boy. We have need of you.”

He replied: “I will obey with pleasure, madame.”

On all sides could be heard the remark: “It is very funny, this cellar; very pretty, too.”

George knew it well, this vault. He recalled the morning he had passed there on the eve of his duel, alone in front of the little white carton target that had glared at him from the depths of the inner cellar like a huge and terrible eye.

The voice of Jacques Rival sounded from the staircase: “Just about to begin, ladies.” And six gentlemen, in very tight-fitting clothes, to set off their chests, mounted the platform, and took their seats on the chairs reserved for the judges. Their names flew about. General de Reynaldi, the president, a short man, with heavy moustaches; the painter, Joséphin Roudet, a tall, ball-headed man, with a long beard; Matthéo de Ujar, Simon Ramoncel, Pierre de Carvin, three fashionable-looking young fellows; and Gaspard Merleron, a master. Two placards were hung up on the two sides of the vault. That on the right was inscribed “M. Crévecœur,” and that on the left “M. Plumeau.”

They were two professors, two good second-class masters. They made their appearance, both sparely built, with military air and somewhat stiff movements. Having gone through the salute with automatic action, they began to attack one another, resembling in their white costumes of leather and duck, two soldier pierrots fighting for fun. From time to time the word “Touched” was heard, and the six judges nodded with the air of connoisseurs. The public saw nothing but two living marionettes moving about and extending their arms; they understood nothing, but they were satisfied. These two men seemed to them, however, not over graceful, and vaguely ridiculous. They reminded them of the wooden wrestlers sold on the boulevards at the New Year’s Fair.

The first couple of fencers were succeeded by Monsieur Planton and Monsieur Carapin, a civilian master and a military one. Monsieur Planton was very little, and Monsieur Carapin immensely stout. One would have thought that the first thrust would have reduced his volume like that of a balloon. People laughed. Monsieur Planton skipped about like a monkey: Monsieur Carapin, only moved his arm, the rest of his frame being paralyzed by fat. He lunged every five minutes with such heaviness and such effort that it seemed to need the most energetic resolution on his part to accomplish it, and then had great difficulty in recovering himself. The connoisseurs pronounced his play very steady and close, and the confiding public appreciated it as such.

Then came Monsieur Porion and Monsieur Lapalme, a master and an amateur, who gave way to exaggerated gymnastics; charging furiously at one another, obliging the judges to scuttle off with their chairs, crossing and re-crossing from one end of the platform to the other, one advancing and the other retreating, with vigorous and comic leaps and bounds. They indulged in little jumps backwards that made the ladies laugh, and long springs forward that caused them some emotion. This galloping assault was aptly criticized by some young rascal, who sang out: “Don’t burst yourselves over it; it is a time job!” The spectators, shocked at this want of taste, cried “Ssh!” The judgment of the experts was passed around. The fencers had shown much vigor, and played somewhat loosely.

The first half of the entertainment was concluded by a very fine bout between Jacques Rival and the celebrated Belgian professor, Lebegue. Rival greatly pleased the ladies. He was really a handsome fellow, well made, supple, agile, and more graceful than any of those who had preceded him. He brought, even into his way of standing on guard and lunging, a certain fashionable elegance which pleased people, and contrasted with the energetic, but more commonplace style of his adversary. “One can perceive the well-bred man at once,” was the remark. He scored the last hit, and was applauded.

But for some minutes past a singular noise on the floor above had disturbed the spectators. It was a loud trampling, accompanied by noisy laughter. The two hundred guests who had not been able to get down into the cellar were no doubt amusing themselves in their own way. On the narrow, winding staircase fifty men were packed. The heat down below was getting terrible. Cries of “More air,” “Something to drink,” were heard. The same joker kept on yelping in a shrill tone that rose above the murmur of conversation, “Orgeat, lemonade, beer.” Rival made his appearance, very flushed, and still in his fencing costume. “I will have some refreshments brought,” said he, and made his way to the staircase. But all communication with the ground floor was cut off. It would have been as easy to have pierced the ceiling as to have traversed the human wall piled up on the stairs.

Rival called out: “Send down some ices for the ladies.” Fifty voices called out: “Some ices!” A tray at length made its appearance. But it only bore empty glasses, the refreshments having been snatched on the way.

A loud voice shouted: “We are suffocating down here. Get it over and let us be off.” Another cried out: “The collection.” And the whole of the public, gasping, but good-humored all the same, repeated: “The collection, the collection.”

Six ladies began to pass along between the seats, and the sound of money falling into the collecting-bags could be heard.

Du Roy pointed out the celebrities to Madame Walter. There were men of fashion and journalists, those attached to the great newspapers, the old-established newspapers, which looked down upon the *Vie Francaise* with a certain reserve, the fruit of their experience. They had witnessed the death of so many of these politico-financial sheets, offspring of a suspicious partnership, and crushed by the fall of a ministry. There were also painters and sculptors, who are generally men with a taste for sport; a poet who was also a member of the Academy, and who was pointed out generally, and a number of distinguished foreigners.

Someone called out: “Good-day, my dear fellow.” It was the Count de Vaudrec. Making his excuses to the ladies, Du Roy hastened to shake hands with him. On returning, he remarked: “What a charming fellow Vaudrec is! How thoroughly blood tells in him.”

Madame Walter did not reply. She was somewhat fatigued, and her bosom rose with an effort every time she drew breath, which caught the eye of Du Roy. From time to time he caught her glance, a troubled, hesitating glance, which lighted upon him, and was at once averted, and he said to himself: “Eh! what! Have I caught her, too?”

The ladies who had been collecting passed to their seats, their bags full of gold and silver, and a fresh placard was hung in front of the platform, announcing a “surprising novelty.” The judges resumed their seats, and the public waited expectantly.

Two women appeared, foil in hand and in fencing costume; dark tights, a very short petticoat half-way to the knee, and a plastron so padded above the bosom that it obliged them to keep their heads well up. They were both young and pretty. They smiled as they saluted the spectators, and were loudly applauded. They fell on guard, amidst murmured gallantries and whispered jokes. An amiable smile graced the lips of the judges, who approved the hits with a low "bravo." The public warmly appreciated this bout, and testified this much to the two combatants, who kindled desire among the men and awakened among the women the native taste of the Parisian for graceful indecency, naughty elegance, music hall singers, and couplets from operettas. Every time that one of the fencers lunged a thrill of pleasure ran through the public. The one who turned her back to the seats, a plump back, caused eyes and mouths to open, and it was not the play of her wrist that was most closely scanned. They were frantically applauded.

A bout with swords followed, but no one looked at it, for the attention of all was occupied by what was going on overhead. For some minutes they had heard the noise of furniture being dragged across the floor, as though moving was in progress. Then all at once the notes of a piano were heard, and the rhythmic beat of feet moving in cadence was distinctly audible. The people above had treated themselves to a dance to make up for not being able to see anything. A loud laugh broke out at first among the public in the fencing saloon, and then a wish for a dance being aroused among the ladies, they ceased to pay attention to what was taking place on the platform, and began to chatter out loud. This notion of a ball got up by the late-comers struck them as comical. They must be amusing themselves nicely, and it must be much better up there.

But two new combatants had saluted each other and fell on guard in such masterly style that all eyes followed their movements. They lunged and recovered themselves with such easy grace, such measured strength, such certainty, such sobriety in action, such correctness in attitude, such measure in their play, that even the ignorant were surprised and charmed. Their calm promptness, their skilled suppleness, their rapid motions, so nicely timed that they appeared slow, attracted and captivated the eye by their power of perfection. The public felt that they were looking at something good and rare; that two great artists in their own profession were showing them their best, all of skill, cunning, thought-out science and physical ability that it was possible for two masters to put forth. No one spoke now, so closely were they watched. Then, when they shook hands after the last hit, shouts of bravoes broke out. People stamped and yelled. Everyone knew their names — they were Sergent and Ravignac.

The excitable grew quarrelsome. Men looked at their neighbors with longings for a row. They would have challenged one another on account of a smile. Those who had never held a foil in their hand sketched attacks and parries with their canes.

But by degrees the crowd worked up the little staircase. At last they would be able to get something to drink. There was an outburst of indignation when they found that those who had got up the ball had stripped the refreshment buffet, and had then gone away declaring that it was very impolite to bring together two hundred people and not show them anything. There was not a cake, not a drop of champagne, syrup, or beer left; not a sweetmeat, not a fruit — nothing. They had sacked, pillaged, swept away everything. These details were related by the servants, who pulled long faces to hide their impulse to laugh right out. “The ladies were worse than the gentlemen,” they asserted, “and ate and drank enough to make themselves ill.” It was like the story of the survivors after the sack of a captured town.

There was nothing left but to depart. Gentlemen openly regretted the twenty francs given at the collection; they were indignant that those upstairs should have feasted without paying anything. The lady patronesses had collected upwards of three thousand francs. All expenses paid, there remained two hundred and twenty for the orphans of the Sixth Arrondissement.

Du Roy, escorting the Walter family, waited for his landau. As he drove back with them, seated in face of Madame Walter, he again caught her caressing and fugitive glance, which seemed uneasy. He thought: “Hang it all! I fancy she is nibbling,” and smiled to recognize that he was really very lucky as regarded women, for Madame de Marelle, since the recommencement of their amour, seemed frantically in love with him.

He returned home joyously. Madeleine was waiting for him in the drawing-room.

“I have some news,” said she. “The Morocco business is getting into a complication. France may very likely send out an expeditionary force within a few months. At all events, the opportunity will be taken of it to upset the Ministry, and Laroche-Mathieu will profit by this to get hold of the portfolio of foreign affairs.”

Du Roy, to tease his wife, pretended not to believe anything of the kind. They would never be mad enough to recommence the Tunisian bungle over again. But she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, saying: “But I tell you yes, I tell you yes. You don’t understand that it is a matter of money. Now-a-days, in political complications we must not ask: ‘Who is the woman?’ but ‘What is the business?’”

He murmured “Bah!” in a contemptuous tone, in order to excite her, and she, growing irritated, exclaimed: “You are just as stupid as Forestier.”

She wished to wound him, and expected an outburst of anger. But he smiled, and replied: “As that cuckold of a Forestier?”

She was shocked, and murmured: “Oh, George!”

He wore an insolent and chaffing air as he said: “Well, what? Did you not admit to me the other evening that Forestier was a cuckold?” And he added: “Poor devil!” in a tone of pity.

Madeleine turned her back on him, disdaining to answer; and then, after a moment’s silence, resumed: “We shall have visitors on Tuesday. Madame Laroche-Mathieu is coming to dinner with the Viscountess de Percemur. Will you invite Rival and Norbert de Varenne? I will call to-morrow and ask Madame Walter and Madame de Marelle. Perhaps we shall have Madame Rissolin, too.”

For some time past she had been strengthening her connections, making use of her husband’s political influence to attract to her house, willy-nilly, the wives of the senators and deputies who had need of the support of the *Vie Francaise*.

George replied: “Very well. I will see about Rival and Norbert.”

He was satisfied, and rubbed his hands, for he had found a good trick to annoy his wife and gratify the obscure rancor, the undefined and gnawing jealousy born in him since their drive in the Bois. He would never speak of Forestier again without calling him cuckold. He felt very well that this would end by enraging Madeleine. And half a score of times, in the course of the evening, he found means to mention with ironical good humor the name of “that cuckold of a Forestier.” He was no longer angry with the dead! he was avenging him.

His wife pretended not to notice it, and remained smilingly indifferent.

The next day, as she was to go and invite Madame Walter, he resolved to forestall her, in order to catch the latter alone, and see if she really cared for him. It amused and flattered him. And then — why not — if it were possible?

He arrived at the Boulevard Malesherbes about two, and was shown into the drawing-room, where he waited till Madame Walter made her appearance, her hand outstretched with pleased eagerness, saying: “What good wind brings you hither?”

“No good wind, but the wish to see you. Some power has brought me here, I do not know why, for I have nothing to say to you. I came, here I am; will you forgive me this early visit and the frankness of this explanation?”

He uttered this in a gallant and jesting tone, with a smile on his lips. She was astonished, and colored somewhat, stammering: “But really — I do not understand — you surprise me.”

He observed: “It is a declaration made to a lively tune, in order not to alarm you.”

They had sat down in front of one another. She took the matter pleasantly, saying: “A serious declaration?”

“Yes. For a long time I have been wanting to utter it — for a very long time. But I dared not. They say you are so strict, so rigid.”

She had recovered her assurance, and observed: “Why to-day, then?”

“I do not know.” Then lowering his voice he added: “Or rather, because I have been thinking of nothing but you since yesterday.”

She stammered, growing suddenly pale: “Come, enough of nonsense; let us speak of something else.”

But he had fallen at her feet so suddenly that she was frightened. She tried to rise, but he kept her seated by the strength of his arms passed round her waist, and repeated in a voice of passion: “Yes, it is true that I have loved you madly for a long time past. Do not answer me. What would you have? I am mad. I love you. Oh! if you knew how I love you!”

She was suffocating, gasping, and strove to speak, without being able to utter a word. She pushed him away with her two hands, having seized him by the hair to hinder the approach of the mouth that she felt coming towards her own. She kept turning her head from right to left and from left to right with a rapid motion, closing her eyes, in order no longer to see him. He touched her through her dress, handled her, pressed her, and she almost fainted under his strong and rude caress. He rose suddenly and sought to clasp her to him, but, free for a moment, she had managed to escape by throwing herself back, and she now fled from behind one chair to another. He felt that pursuit was ridiculous, and he fell into a chair, his face hidden by his hands, feigning convulsive sobs. Then he got up, exclaimed “Farewell, farewell,” and rushed away.

He quietly took his stick in the hall and gained the street, saying to himself: “By Jove, I believe it is all right there.” And he went into a telegraph office to send a wire to Clotilde, making an appointment for the next day.

On returning home at his usual time, he said to his wife: “Well, have you secured all the people for your dinner?”

She answered: “Yes, there is only Madame Walter, who is not quite sure whether she will be free to come. She hesitated and talked about I don’t know what — an engagement, her conscience. In short, she seemed very strange. No matter, I hope she will come all the same.”

He shrugged his shoulders, saying: “Oh, yes, she’ll come.”

He was not certain, however, and remained anxious until the day of the dinner. That very morning Madeleine received a note from her: “I have managed to get free from my engagements with great difficulty, and shall be with you this evening. But my husband cannot accompany me.”

Du Roy thought: “I did very well indeed not to go back. She has calmed down. Attention.”

He, however, awaited her appearance with some slight uneasiness. She came, very calm, rather cool, and slightly haughty. He became humble, discreet, and submissive. Madame Laroche-Mathieu and Madame Rissolin accompanied their husbands. The Viscountess de Percemur talked society. Madame de Marelle looked charming in a strangely fanciful toilet, a species of Spanish costume in black and yellow, which set off her neat figure, her bosom, her rounded arms, and her bird-like head.

Du Roy had Madame Walter on his right hand, and during dinner only spoke to her on serious topics, and with an exaggerated respect. From time to time he glanced at Clotilde. “She is really prettier and fresher looking than ever,” he thought. Then his eyes returned to his wife, whom he found not bad-looking either, although he retained towards her a hidden, tenacious, and evil anger.

But Madame Walter excited him by the difficulty of victory and by that novelty always desired by man. She wanted to return home early. “I will escort you,” said he.

She refused, but he persisted, saying: “Why will not you permit me? You will wound me keenly. Do not let me think that you have not forgiven me. You see how quiet I am.”

She answered: “But you cannot abandon your guests like that.”

He smiled. “But I shall only be away twenty minutes. They will not even notice it. If you refuse you will cut me to the heart.”

She murmured: “Well, then I agree.”

But as soon as they were in the carriage he seized her hand, and, kissing it passionately, exclaimed: “I love you, I love you. Let me tell you that much. I will not touch you. I only want to repeat to you that I love you.”

She stammered: “Oh! after what you promised me! This is wrong, very wrong.”

He appeared to make a great effort, and then resumed in a restrained tone: “There, you see how I master myself. And yet — But let me only tell you that I love you, and repeat it to you every day; yes, let me come to your house and kneel down for five minutes at your feet to utter those three words while gazing on your beloved face.”

She had yielded her hand to him, and replied pantingly: “No, I cannot, I will not. Think of what would be said, of the servants, of my daughters. No, no, it is impossible.”

He went on: “I can no longer live without seeing you. Whether at your house or elsewhere, I must see you, if only for a moment, every day, to touch your hand, to breathe the air stirred by your dress, to gaze on the outline of your form, and on your great calm eyes that madden me.”

She listened, quivering, to this commonplace love-song, and stammered: “No, it is out of the question.”

He whispered in her ear, understanding that he must capture her by degrees, this simple woman, that he must get her to make appointments with him, where she would at first, where he wished afterwards. “Listen, I must see you; I shall wait for you at your door like a beggar; but I will see you, I will see you to-morrow.”

She repeated: “No, do not come. I shall not receive you. Think of my daughters.”

“Then tell me where I shall meet you — in the street, no matter where, at whatever hour you like, provided I see you. I will bow to you; I will say ‘I love you,’ and I will go away.”

She hesitated, bewildered. And as the brougham entered the gateway of her residence she murmured hurriedly: "Well, then, I shall be at the Church of the Trinity to-morrow at half-past three." Then, having alighted, she said to her coachman: "Drive Monsieur Du Roy back to his house."

As he re-entered his home, his wife said: "Where did you get to?"

He replied, in a low tone: "I went to the telegraph office to send off a message."

Madame de Marelle approached them. "You will see me home, Pretty-boy?" said she. "You know I only came such a distance to dinner on that condition." And turning to Madeleine, she added: "You are not jealous?"

Madame Du Roy answered slowly: "Not over much."

The guests were taking their leave. Madame Laroche-Mathieu looked like a housemaid from the country. She was the daughter of a notary, and had been married to the deputy when he was only a barrister of small standing. Madame Rissolin, old and stuck-up, gave one the idea of a midwife whose fashionable education had been acquired through a circulating library. The Viscountess de Percemur looked down upon them. Her "Lily Fingers" touched these vulgar hands with repugnance.

Clotilde, wrapped in lace, said to Madeleine as she went out: "Your dinner was perfection. In a little while you will have the leading political drawing-room in Paris."

As soon as she was alone with George she clasped him in her arms, exclaiming: "Oh, my darling Pretty-boy, I love you more and more every day!"

XII

The Place de la Trinité lay, almost deserted, under a dazzling July sun. An oppressive heat was crushing Paris. It was as though the upper air, scorched and deadened, had fallen upon the city — a thick, burning air that pained the chests inhaling it. The fountains in front of the church fell lazily. They seemed weary of flowing, tired out, limp, too; and the water of the basins, in which leaves and bits of paper were floating, looked greenish, thick and glaucous. A dog having jumped over the stone rim, was bathing in the dubious fluid. A few people, seated on the benches of the little circular garden skirting the front of the church, watched the animal curiously.

Du Roy pulled out his watch. It was only three o'clock. He was half an hour too soon. He laughed as he thought of this appointment. "Churches serve for anything as far as she is concerned," said he to himself. "They console her for having married a Jew, enable her to assume an attitude of protestation in the world of politics and a respectable one in that of fashion, and serve as a shelter to her gallant rendezvous. So much for the habit of making use of religion as an umbrella. If it is fine it is a walking stick; if sunshiny, a parasol; if it rains, a shelter; and if one does not go out, why, one leaves it in the hall. And there are hundreds like that who care for God about as much as a cherry stone, but who will not hear him spoken against. If it were suggested to them to go to a hotel, they would think it infamous, but it seems to them quite simple to make love at the foot of the altar."

He walked slowly along the edge of the fountain, and then again looked at the church clock, which was two minutes faster than his watch. It was five minutes past three. He thought that he would be more comfortable inside, and entered the church. The coolness of a cellar assailed him, he breathed it with pleasure, and then took a turn round the nave to reconnoiter the place. Other regular footsteps, sometimes halting and then beginning anew, replied from the further end of the vast pile to the sound of his own, which rang sonorously beneath the vaulted roof. A curiosity to know who this other promenader was seized him. It was a stout, bald-headed gentleman who was strolling about with his nose in the air, and his hat behind his back. Here and there an old woman was praying, her face hidden in her hands. A sensation of solitude and rest stole over the mind. The light, softened by the stained-glass windows, was refreshing to the eyes. Du Roy thought that it was “deucedly comfortable” inside there.

He returned towards the door and again looked at his watch. It was still only a quarter-past three. He sat down at the entrance to the main aisle, regretting that one could not smoke a cigarette. The slow footsteps of the stout gentleman could still be heard at the further end of the church, near the choir.

Someone came in, and George turned sharply round. It was a poor woman in a woolen skirt, who fell on her knees close to the first chair, and remained motionless, with clasped hands, her eyes turned to heaven, her soul absorbed in prayer. Du Roy watched her with interest, asking himself what grief, what pain, what despair could have crushed her heart. She was worn out by poverty, it was plain. She had, perhaps, too, a husband who was beating her to death, or a dying child. He murmured mentally: “Poor creatures. How some of them do suffer.” Anger rose up in him against pitiless Nature. Then he reflected that these poor wretches believed, at any rate, that they were taken into consideration up above, and that they were duly entered in the registers of heaven with a debtor and creditor balance. Up above! And Du Roy, whom the silence of the church inclined to sweeping reflections, judging creation at a bound, muttered contemptuously: “What bosh all that sort of thing is!”

The rustle of a dress made him start. It was she.

He rose, and advanced quickly. She did not hold out her hand, but murmured in a low voice: “I have only a few moments. I must get back home. Kneel down near me, so that we may not be noticed.” And she advanced up the aisle, seeking a safe and suitable spot, like a woman well acquainted with the place. Her face was hidden by a thick veil, and she walked with careful footsteps that could scarcely be heard.

When she reached the choir she turned, and muttered, in that mysterious tone of voice we always assume in church: “The side aisles will be better. We are too much in view here.”

She bowed low to the high altar, turned to the right, and returned a little way towards the entrance; then, making up her mind, she took a chair and knelt down. George took possession of the next one to her, and as soon as they were in an attitude of prayer, began: “Thanks; oh, thanks; I adore you! I should like to be always telling you so, to tell you how I began to love you, how I was captivated the first time I saw you. Will you allow me some day to open my heart to tell you all this?"

She listened to him in an attitude of deep meditation, as if she heard nothing. She replied between her fingers: "I am mad to allow you to speak to me like this, mad to have come here, mad to do what I am doing, mad to let you believe that — that — this adventure can have any issue. Forget all this; you must, and never speak to me again of it."

She paused. He strove to find an answer, decisive and passionate words, but not being able to join action to words, was partially paralyzed. He replied: "I expect nothing, I hope for nothing. I love you. Whatever you may do, I will repeat it to you so often, with such power and ardor, that you will end by understanding it. I want to make my love penetrate you, to pour it into your soul, word by word, hour by hour, day by day, so that at length it impregnates you like a liquid, falling drop by drop; softens you, mollifies you, and obliges you later on to reply to me: 'I love you, too.'"

He felt her shoulder trembling against him and her bosom throbbing, and she stammered, abruptly: "I love you, too!"

He started as though he had received a blow, and sighed: "Good God."

She replied, in panting tones: "Ought I to have told you that? I feel I am guilty and contemptible. I, who have two daughters, but I cannot help it, I cannot help it. I could not have believed, I should never have thought — but it is stronger than I. Listen, listen: I have never loved anyone but you; I swear it. And I have loved you for a year past in secret, in my secret heart. Oh! I have suffered and struggled till I can do so no more. I love you."

She was weeping, with her hands crossed in front of her face, and her whole frame was quivering, shaken by the violence of her emotion.

George murmured: "Give me your hand, that I may touch it, that I may press it."

She slowly withdrew her hand from her face. He saw her cheek quite wet and a tear ready to fall on her lashes. He had taken her hand and was pressing it, saying: "Oh, how I should like to drink your tears!"

She said, in a low and broken voice, which resembled a moan: "Do not take advantage of me; I am lost."

He felt an impulse to smile. How could he take advantage of her in that place? He placed the hand he held upon his heart, saying: "Do you feel it beat?" For he had come to the end of his passionate phrases.

For some moments past the regular footsteps of the promenader had been coming nearer. He had gone the round of the altars, and was now, for the second time at least, coming down the little aisle on the right. When Madame Walter heard him close to the pillar which hid her, she snatched her fingers from George's grasp, and again hid her face. And both remained motionless, kneeling as though they had been addressing fervent supplications to heaven together. The stout gentleman passed close to them, cast an indifferent look upon them, and walked away to the lower end of the church, still holding his hat behind his back.

Du Roy, who was thinking of obtaining an appointment elsewhere than at the Church of the Trinity, murmured: "Where shall I see you to-morrow?"

She did not answer. She seemed lifeless — turned into a statue of prayer. He went on: "To-morrow, will you let me meet you in the Parc Monseau?"

She turned towards him her again uncovered face, a livid face, contracted by fearful suffering, and in a jerky voice ejaculated: "Leave me, leave me now; go away, go away, only for five minutes! I suffer too much beside you. I want to pray, and I cannot. Go away, let me pray alone for five minutes. I cannot. Let me implore God to pardon me — to save me. Leave me for five minutes."

Her face was so upset, so full of pain, that he rose without saying a word, and then, after a little hesitation, asked: "Shall I come back presently?"

She gave a nod, which meant, "Yes, presently," and he walked away towards the choir. Then she strove to pray. She made a superhuman effort to invoke the Deity, and with quivering frame and bewildering soul appealed for mercy to heaven. She closed her eyes with rage, in order no longer to see him who just left her. She sought to drive him from her mind, she struggled against him, but instead of the celestial apparition awaited in the distress of her heart, she still perceived the young fellow's curly moustache. For a year past she had been struggling thus every day, every night, against the growing possession, against this image which haunted her dreams, haunted her flesh, and disturbed her nights. She felt caught like a beast in a net, bound, thrown into the arms of this man, who had vanquished, conquered her, simply by the hair on his lip and the color of his eyes. And now in this church, close to God, she felt still weaker, more abandoned, and more lost than at home. She could no longer pray, she could only think of him. She suffered already that he had quitted her. She struggled, however, despairingly, resisted, implored help with all the strength of her soul. She would liked to have died rather than fall thus, she who had never faltered in her duty. She murmured wild words of supplication, but she was listening to George's footsteps dying away in the distance.

She understood that it was all over, that the struggle was a useless one. She would not yield, however; and she was seized by one of those nervous crises that hurl women quivering, yelling, and writhing on the ground. She trembled in every limb, feeling that she was going to fall and roll among the chairs, uttering shrill cries. Someone approached with rapid steps. It was a priest. She rose and rushed towards him, holding out her clasped hands, and stammering: "Oh! save me, save me!"

He halted in surprise, saying: "What is it you wish, madame?"

"I want you to save me. Have pity on me. If you do not come to my assistance, I am lost."

He looked at her, asking himself whether she was not mad, and then said: "What can I do for you?"

He was a tall, and somewhat stout young man, with full, pendulous cheeks, dark, with a carefully shaven face, a good-looking city curate belonging to a wealthy district, and accustomed to rich penitents.

"Hear my confession, and advise me, sustain me, tell me what I am to do."

He replied: "I hear confessions every Saturday, from three to six o'clock."

Having seized his arm, she gripped it tightly as she repeated: "No, no, no; at once, at once! You must. He is here, in the church. He is waiting for me."

"Who is waiting for you?" asked the priest.

"A man who will ruin me, who will carry me off, if you do not save me. I cannot flee from him. I am too weak — too weak! Oh, so weak, so weak!" She fell at his feet sobbing: "Oh, have pity on me, father! Save me, in God's name, save me!"

She held him by his black gown lest he should escape, and he with uneasiness glanced around, lest some malevolent or devout eye should see this woman fallen at his feet. Understanding at length that he could not escape, he said: "Get up; I have the key of the confessional with me."

And fumbling in his pocket he drew out a ring full of keys, selected one, and walked rapidly towards the little wooden cabin, dust holes of the soul into which believers cast their sins. He entered the center door, which he closed behind him, and Madame Walter, throwing herself into the narrow recess at the side, stammered fervently, with a passionate burst of hope: "Bless me father, for I have sinned."

Du Roy, having taken a turn round the choir, was passing down the left aisle. He had got half-way when he met the stout, bald gentleman still walking quietly along, and said to himself: "What the deuce is that customer doing here?"

The promenader had also slackened his pace, and was looking at George with an evident wish to speak to him. When he came quite close he bowed, and said in a polite fashion: "I beg your pardon, sir, for troubling you, but can you tell me when this church was built?"

Du Roy replied: "Really, I am not quite certain. I think within the last twenty or five-and-twenty years. It is, besides, the first time I ever was inside it."

"It is the same with me. I have never seen it."

The journalist, whose interest was awakened, remarked: "It seems to me that you are going over it very carefully. You are studying it in detail."

The other replied, with resignation: "I am not examining it; I am waiting for my wife, who made an appointment with me here, and who is very much behind time." Then, after a few moments' silence, he added: "It is fearfully hot outside."

Du Roy looked at him, and all at once fancied that he resembled Forestier.

"You are from the country?" said he, inquiringly.

"Yes, from Rennes. And you, sir, is it out of curiosity that you entered this church?"

"No, I am expecting a lady," and bowing, the journalist walked away, with a smile on his lips.

Approaching the main entrance, he saw the poor woman still on her knees, and still praying. He thought: "By Jove! she keeps hard at it." He was no longer moved, and no longer pitied her.

He passed on, and began quietly to walk up the right-hand aisle to find Madame Walter again. He marked the place where he had left her from a distance, astonished at not seeing her. He thought he had made a mistake in the pillar; went on as far as the end one, and then returned. She had gone, then. He was surprised and enraged. Then he thought she might be looking for him, and made the circuit of the church again. Not finding her, he returned, and sat down on the chair she had occupied, hoping she would rejoin him there, and waited. Soon a low murmur of voices aroused his attention. He had not seen anyone in that part of the church. Whence came this whispering? He rose to see, and perceived in the adjacent chapel the doors of the confessional. The skirt of a dress issuing from one of these trailed on the pavement. He approached to examine the woman. He recognized her. She was confessing.

He felt a violent inclination to take her by the shoulders and to pull her out of the box. Then he thought: “Bah! it is the priest’s turn now; it will be mine to-morrow.” And he sat down quietly in front of the confessional, biding his time, and chuckling now over the adventure. He waited a long time. At length Madame Walter rose, turned round, saw him, and came up to him. Her expression was cold and severe, “Sir,” said she, “I beg of you not to accompany me, not to follow me, and not to come to my house alone. You will not be received. Farewell.”

And she walked away with a dignified bearing. He let her depart, for one of his principles was never to force matters. Then, as the priest, somewhat upset, issued in turn from his box, he walked up to him, and, looking him straight in the eyes, growled to his face: “If you did not wear a petticoat, what a smack you would get across your ugly chops.” After which he turned on his heels and went out of the church, whistling between his teeth. Standing under the porch, the stout gentleman, with the hat on his head and his hands behind his back, tired of waiting, was scanning the broad squares and all the streets opening onto it. As Du Roy passed him they bowed to one another.

The journalist, finding himself at liberty, went to the office of the *Vie Francaise*. As soon as he entered he saw by the busy air of the messengers that something out of the common was happening, and at once went into the manager’s room. Daddy Walter, in a state of nervous excitement, was standing up dictating an article in broken sentences; issuing orders to the reporters, who surrounded him, between two paragraphs; giving instructions to Boisrenard; and opening letters.

As Du Roy came in, the governor uttered a cry of joy: “Ah! how lucky; here is Pretty-boy!” He stopped short, somewhat confused, and excused himself: “I beg your pardon for speaking like that, but I am very much disturbed by certain events. And then I hear my wife and daughter speaking of you as Pretty-boy from morning till night, and have ended by falling into the habit myself. You are not offended?”

"Not at all!" said George, laughingly; "there is nothing in that nickname to displease me."

Daddy Walter went on: "Very well, then, I christen you Pretty-boy, like everyone else. Well, the fact is, great things are taking place. The Ministry has been overthrown by a vote of three hundred and ten to a hundred and two. Our prorogation is again postponed — postponed to the Greek calends, and here we are at the twenty-eighth of July. Spain is angry about the Morocco business, and it is that which has overthrown Durand de l'Aine and his following. We are right in the swim. Marrot is entrusted with the formation of a new Cabinet. He takes General Boutin d'Acre as minister of war, and our friend Laroche-Mathieu for foreign affairs. We are going to become an official organ. I am writing a leader, a simple declaration of our principles, pointing out the line to be followed by the Ministry." The old boy smiled, and continued: "The line they intend following, be it understood. But I want something interesting about Morocco; an actuality; a sensational article; something or other. Find one for me."

Du Roy reflected for a moment, and then replied: "I have the very thing for you. I will give you a study of the political situation of the whole of our African colony, with Tunis on the left, Algeria in the middle, and Morocco on the right; the history of the races inhabiting this vast extent of territory; and the narrative of an excursion on the frontier of Morocco to the great oasis of Figuig, where no European has penetrated, and which is the cause of the present conflict. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably!" exclaimed Daddy Walter. "And the title?"

"From Tunis to Tangiers."

"Splendid!"

Du Roy went off to search the files of the *Vie Francaise* for his first article, "The Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique," which, rebaptized, touched up, and modified, would do admirably, since it dealt with colonial policy, the Algerian population, and an excursion in the province of Oran. In three-quarters of an hour it was rewritten, touched up, and brought to date, with a flavor of realism, and praises of the new Cabinet. The manager, having read the article, said: "It is capital, capital, capital! You are an invaluable fellow. I congratulate you."

And Du Roy went home to dinner delighted with his day's work, despite the check at the Church of the Trinity, for he felt the battle won. His wife was anxiously waiting for him. She exclaimed, as soon as she saw him: “Do you know that Laroche-Mathieu is Minister for Foreign Affairs?”

“Yes; I have just written an article on Algeria, in connection with it.”

“What?”

“You know, the first we wrote together, ‘The Recollections of a Chasseur d’Afrique,’ revised and corrected for the occasion.”

She smiled, saying: “Ah, that is very good!” Then, after a few moments’ reflection, she continued: “I was thinking — that continuation you were to have written then, and that you — put off. We might set to work on it now. It would make a nice series, and very appropriate to the situation.”

He replied, sitting down to table: “Exactly, and there is nothing in the way of it now that cuckold of a Forestier is dead.”

She said quietly, in a dry and hurt tone: “That joke is more than out of place, and I beg of you to put an end to it. It has lasted too long already.”

He was about to make an ironical answer, when a telegram was brought him, containing these words: “I had lost my senses. Forgive me, and come at four o’clock to-morrow to the Parc Monceau.”

He understood, and with heart suddenly filled with joy, he said to his wife, as he slipped the message into his pocket: “I will not do so any more, darling; it was stupid, I admit.”

And he began his dinner. While eating he kept repeating to himself the words: “I had lost my senses. Forgive me, and come at four o’clock to-morrow to the Parc Monceau.” So she was yielding. That meant: “I surrender, I am yours when you like and where you like.” He began to laugh, and Madeleine asked: “What is it?”

“Nothing,” he answered; “I was thinking of a priest I met just now, and who had a very comical mug.”

Du Roy arrived to the time at the appointed place next day. On the benches of the park were seated citizens overcome by heat, and careless nurses, who seemed to be dreaming while their children were rolling on the gravel of the paths. He found Madame Walter in the little antique ruins from which a spring flows. She was walking round the little circle of columns with an uneasy and unhappy air. As soon as he had greeted her, she exclaimed: “What a number of people there are in the garden.”

He seized the opportunity: “It is true; will you come somewhere else?”

“But where?”

“No matter where; in a cab, for instance. You can draw down the blind on your side, and you will be quite invisible.”

“Yes, I prefer that; here I am dying with fear.”

“Well, come and meet me in five minutes at the gate opening onto the outer boulevard. I will have a cab.”

And he darted off.

As soon as she had rejoined him, and had carefully drawn down the blind on her side, she asked: “Where have you told the driver to take us?”

George replied: “Do not trouble yourself, he knows what to do.”

He had given the man his address in the Rue de Constantinople.

She resumed: “You cannot imagine what I suffer on account of you, how I am tortured and tormented. Yesterday, in the church, I was cruel, but I wanted to flee from you at any cost. I was so afraid to find myself alone with you. Have you forgiven me?”

He squeezed her hands: “Yes, yes, what would I not forgive you, loving you as I do?”

She looked at him with a supplicating air: “Listen, you must promise to respect me — not to — not to — otherwise I cannot see you again.”

He did not reply at once; he wore under his moustache that keen smile that disturbed women. He ended by murmuring: “I am your slave.”

Then she began to tell him how she had perceived that she was in love with him on learning that he was going to marry Madeleine Forestier. She gave details, little details of dates and the like. Suddenly she paused. The cab had stopped. Du Roy opened the door.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Get out and come into this house,” he replied. “We shall be more at ease there.”

“But where are we?”

“At my rooms,” and here we will leave them to their *tête-à-tête*.

XIII

Autumn had come. The Du Roys had passed the whole of the summer in Paris, carrying on a vigorous campaign in the *Vie Francaise* during the short vacation of the deputies.

Although it was only the beginning of October, the Chambers were about to resume their sittings, for matters as regarded Morocco were becoming threatening. No one at the bottom believed in an expedition against Tangiers, although on the day of the prorogation of the Chamber, a deputy of the Right, Count de Lambert-Serrazin, in a witty speech, applauded even by the Center had offered to stake his moustache, after the example of a celebrated Viceroy of the Indies, against the whiskers of the President of the Council, that the new Cabinet could not help imitating the old one, and sending an army to Tangiers, as a pendant to that of Tunis, out of love of symmetry, as one puts two vases on a fireplace.

He had added: “Africa is indeed, a fireplace for France, gentleman — a fireplace which consumes our best wood; a fireplace with a strong draught, which is lit with bank notes. You have had the artistic fancy of ornamenting the left-hand corner with a Tunisian knick-knack which had cost you dear. You will see that Monsieur Marrot will want to imitate his predecessor, and ornament the right-hand corner with one from Morocco.”

This speech, which became famous, served as a peg for Du Roy for a half a score of articles upon the Algerian colony — indeed, for the entire series broken short off after his *début* on the paper. He had energetically supported the notion of a military expedition, although convinced that it would not take place. He had struck the chord of patriotism, and bombarded Spain with the entire arsenal of contemptuous arguments which we make use of against nations whose interests are contrary to our own. The *Vie Francaise* had gained considerable importance through its own connection with the party in office. It published political intelligence in advance of the most important papers, and hinted discreetly the intentions of its friends the Ministry, so that all the papers of Paris and the provinces took their news from it. It was quoted and feared, and people began to respect it. It was no longer the suspicious organ of a knot of political jugglers, but the acknowledged one of the Cabinet. Laroche-Mathieu was the soul of the paper, and Du Roy his mouthpiece. Daddy Walter, a silent member and a crafty manager, knowing when to keep in the background, was busying himself on the quiet, it is said, with an extensive transaction with some copper mines in Morocco.

Madeleine's drawing-room had been an influential center, in which several members of the Cabinet met every week. The President of the Council had even dined twice at her house, and the wives of the statesmen who had formerly hesitated to cross her threshold now boasted of being her friends, and paid her more visits than were returned by her. The Minister for Foreign Affairs reigned almost as a master in the household. He called at all hours, bringing dispatches, news, items of information, which he dictated either to the husband or the wife, as if they had been his secretaries.

When Du Roy, after the minister's departure, found himself alone with Madeleine, he would break out in a menacing tone with bitter insinuations against the goings-on of this commonplace parvenu.

But she would shrug her shoulders contemptuously, repeating: "Do as much as he has done yourself. Become a minister, and you can have your own way. Till then, hold your tongue."

He twirled his moustache, looking at her askance: "People do not know of what I am capable," he said, "They will learn it, perhaps, some day."

She replied, philosophically: "Who lives long enough will see it."

The morning on which the Chambers reassembled the young wife, still in bed, was giving a thousand recommendations to her husband, who was dressing himself in order to lunch with M. Laroche-Mathieu, and receive his instructions prior to the sitting for the next day's political leader in the *Vie Francaise*, this leader being meant to be a kind of semi-official declaration of the real objects of the Cabinet.

Madeleine was saying: "Above all, do not forget to ask him whether General Belloncle is to be sent to Oran, as has been reported. That would mean a great deal."

George replied irritably: "But I know just as well as you what I have to do. Spare me your preaching."

She answered quietly: "My dear, you always forget half the commissions I entrust you with for the minister."

He growled: "He worries me to death, that minister of yours. He is a nincompoop."

She remarked quietly: “He is no more my minister than he is yours. He is more useful to you than to me.”

He turned half round towards her, saying, sneeringly: “I beg your pardon, but he does not pay court to me.”

She observed slowly: “Nor to me either; but he is making our fortune.”

He was silent for a few moments, and then resumed: “If I had to make a choice among your admirers, I should still prefer that old fossil De Vaudrec. What has become of him, I have not seen him for a week?”

“He is unwell,” replied she, unmoved. “He wrote to me that he was even obliged to keep his bed from an attack of gout. You ought to call and ask how he is. You know he likes you very well, and it would please him.”

George said: “Yes, certainly; I will go some time to-day.”

He had finished his toilet, and, hat on head, glanced at himself in the glass to see if he had neglected anything. Finding nothing, he came up to the bed and kissed his wife on the forehead, saying: “Good-bye, dear, I shall not be in before seven o’clock at the earliest.”

And he went out. Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu was awaiting him, for he was lunching at ten o’clock that morning, the Council having to meet at noon, before the opening of Parliament. As soon as they were seated at table alone with the minister’s private secretary, for Madame Laroche-Mathieu had been unwilling to change her own meal times, Du Roy spoke of his article, sketched out the line he proposed to take, consulting notes scribbled on visiting cards, and when he had finished, said: “Is there anything you think should be modified, my dear minister?”

“Very little, my dear fellow. You are perhaps a trifle too strongly affirmative as regards the Morocco business. Speak of the expedition as if it were going to take place; but, at the same time, letting it be understood that it will not take place, and that you do not believe in it in the least in the world. Write in such a way that the public can easily read between the lines that we are not going to poke our noses into that adventure.”

“Quite so. I understand, and I will make myself thoroughly understood. My wife commissioned me to ask you, on this point, whether General Belloncle will be sent to Oran. After what you have said, I conclude he will not.”

The statesman answered, “No.”

Then they spoke of the coming session. Laroche-Mathieu began to spout, rehearsing the phrases that he was about to pour forth on his colleagues a few hours later. He waved his right hand, raising now his knife, now his fork, now a bit of bread, and without looking at anyone, addressing himself to the invisible assembly, he poured out his dulcet eloquence, the eloquence of a good-looking, dandified fellow. A tiny, twisted moustache curled up at its two ends above his lip like scorpion's tails, and his hair, anointed with brilliantine and parted in the middle, was puffed out like his temples, after the fashion of a provincial lady-killer. He was a little too stout, puffy, though still young, and his stomach stretched his waistcoat.

The private secretary ate and drank quietly, no doubt accustomed to these floods of loquacity; but Du Roy, whom jealousy of achieved success cut to the quick, thought: "Go on you proser. What idiots these political jokers are." And comparing his own worth to the frothy importance of the minister, he said to himself, "By Jove! if I had only a clear hundred thousand francs to offer myself as a candidate at home, near Rouen, and dish my sunning dullards of Normandy folk in their own sauce, what a statesman I should make beside these short-sighted rascals!"

Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu went on spouting until coffee was served; then, seeing that he was behind hand, he rang for his brougham, and holding out his hand to the journalist, said: "You quite understand, my dear fellow?"

"Perfectly, my dear minister; you may rely upon me."

And Du Roy strolled leisurely to the office to begin his article, for he had nothing to do till four o'clock. At four o'clock he was to meet, at the Rue de Constantinople, Madame de Marelle, whom he met there regularly twice a week — on Mondays and Fridays. But on reaching the office a telegram was handed to him. It was from Madame Walter, and ran as follows: "I must see you to-day. Most important. Expect me at two o'clock, Rue de Constantinople. Can render you a great service. Till death. — Virginie."

He began to swear: "Hang it all, what an infernal bore!" And seized with a fit of ill-temper, he went out again at once too irritated to work.

For six weeks he had been trying to break off with her, without being able to wear out her eager attachment. She had had, after her fall, a frightful fit of remorse, and in three successive rendezvous had overwhelmed her lover with reproaches and maledictions. Bored by these scenes and already tired of this mature and melodramatic conquest, he had simply kept away, hoping to put an end to the adventure in that way. But then she had distractedly clutched on to him, throwing herself into this amour as a man throws himself into a river with a stone about his neck. He had allowed himself to be recaptured out of weakness and consideration for her, and she had enwrapt him in an unbridled and fatiguing passion, persecuting him with her affection. She insisted on seeing him every day, summoning him at all hours to a hasty meeting at a street corner, at a shop, or in a public garden. She would then repeat to him in a few words, always the same, that she worshiped and idolized him, and leave him, vowing that she felt so happy to have seen him. She showed herself quite another creature than he had fancied her, striving to charm him with puerile glances, a childishness in love affairs ridiculous at her age. Having remained up till then strictly honest, virgin in heart, inaccessible to all sentiment, ignorant of sensuality, a strange outburst of youthful tenderness, of ardent, naive and tardy love, made up of unlooked-for outbursts, exclamations of a girl of sixteen, graces grown old without ever having been young, had taken place in this staid woman. She wrote him ten letters a day, maddeningly foolish letters, couched in a style at once poetic and ridiculous, full of the pet names of birds and beasts.

As soon as they found themselves alone together she would kiss him with the awkward prettiness of a great tomboy, pouting of the lips that were grotesque, and bounds that made her too full bosom shake beneath her bodice. He was above all, sickened with hearing her say, “My pet,” “My doggie,” “My jewel,” “My birdie,” “My treasure,” “My own,” “My precious,” and to see her offer herself to him every time with a little comedy of infantile modesty, little movements of alarm that she thought pretty, and the tricks of a depraved schoolgirl. She would ask, “Whose mouth is this?” and when he did not reply “Mine,” would persist till she made him grow pale with nervous irritability. She ought to have felt, it seemed to him, that in love extreme tact, skill, prudence, and exactness are requisite; that having given herself to him, she, a woman of mature years, the mother of a family, and holding a position in society, should yield herself gravely, with a kind of restrained eagerness, with tears, perhaps, but with those of Dido, not of Juliet.

She kept incessantly repeating to him, “How I love you, my little pet. Do you love me as well, baby?”

He could no longer bear to be called “my little pet,” or “baby,” without an inclination to call her “old girl.”

She would say to him, “What madness of me to yield to you. But I do not regret it. It is so sweet to love.”

All this seemed to George irritating from her mouth. She murmured, “It is so sweet to love,” like the village maiden at a theater.

Then she exasperated him by the clumsiness of her caresses. Having become all at once sensual beneath the kisses of this young fellow who had so warmed her blood, she showed an unskilled ardor and a serious application that made Du Roy laugh and think of old men trying to learn to read. When she would have gripped him in her embrace, ardently gazing at him with the deep and terrible glance of certain aging women, splendid in their last loves, when she should have bitten him with silent and quivering mouth, crushing him beneath her warmth and weight, she would wriggle about like a girl, and lisp with the idea of being pleasant: “Me love ‘ou so, ducky, me love ‘ou so. Have nice lovey-lovey with ‘ittle wifey.”

He then would be seized with a wild desire to take his hat and rush out, slamming the door behind him.

They had frequently met at the outset at the Rue de Constantinople; but Du Roy, who dreaded a meeting there with Madame de Marelle, now found a thousand pretexts for refusing such appointments. He had then to call on her almost every day at her home, now to lunch, now to dinner. She squeezed his hand under the table, held out her mouth to him behind the doors. But he, for his part, took pleasure above all in playing with Susan, who amused him with her whimsicalities. In her doll-like frame was lodged an active, arch, sly, and startling wit, always ready to show itself off. She joked at everything and everybody with biting readiness. George stimulated her imagination, excited it to irony and they understood one another marvelously. She kept appealing to him every moment, “I say, Pretty-boy. Come here, Pretty-boy.”

He would at once leave the mother and go to the daughter, who would whisper some bit of spitefulness, at which they would laugh heartily.

However, disgusted with the mother’s love, he began to feel an insurmountable repugnance for her; he could no longer see, hear, or think of her without anger. He ceased, therefore, to visit her, to answer her letters, or to yield to her appeals. She understood at length that he no longer loved her, and suffered terribly. But she grew insatiable, kept watch on him, followed him, waited for him in a cab with the blinds drawn down, at the door of the office, at the door of his dwelling, in the streets through which she hoped he might pass. He longed to ill-treat her, swear at her, strike her, say to her plainly, “I have had enough of it, you worry my life out.” But he observed some circumspection on account of the *Vie Francaise*, and strove by dint of coolness, harshness, tempered by attention, and even rude words at times, to make her understand that there must be an end to it. She strove, above all, to devise schemes to allure him to a meeting in the Rue de Constantinople, and he was in a perpetual state of alarm lest the two women should find themselves some day face to face at the door.

His affection for Madame de Marelle had, on the contrary, augmented during the summer. He called her his “young rascal,” and she certainly charmed him. Their two natures had kindred links; they were both members of the adventurous race of vagabonds, those vagabonds in society who so strongly resemble, without being aware of it, the vagabonds of the highways. They had had a summer of delightful love-making, a summer of students on the spree, bolting off to lunch or dine at Argenteuil, Bougival, Maisons, or Poissy, and passing hours in a boat gathering flowers from the bank. She adored the fried fish served on the banks of the Seine, the stewed rabbits, the arbors in the tavern gardens, and the shouts of the boating men. He liked to start off with her on a bright day on a suburban line, and traverse the ugly environs of Paris, sprouting with tradesmen’s hideous boxes, talking lively nonsense. And when he had to return to dine at Madame Walter’s he hated the eager old mistress from the mere recollection of the young one whom he had left, and who had ravished his desires and harvested his ardor among the grass by the water side.

He had fancied himself at length pretty well rid of Madame Walter, to whom he had expressed, in a plain and almost brutal fashion, his intentions of breaking off with her, when he received at the office of the paper the telegram summoning him to meet her at two o’clock at the Rue de Constantinople. He re-read it as he walked along, “Must see you to-day. Most important. Expect me two o’clock, Rue de Constantinople. Can render you a great service. Till death. — Virginie.”

He thought, “What does this old screech-owl want with me now? I wager she has nothing to tell me. She will only repeat that she adores me. Yet I must see what it means. She speaks of an important affair and a great service; perhaps it is so. And Clotilde, who is coming at four o’clock! I must get the first of the pair off by three at the latest. By Jove, provided they don’t run up against one another! What bothers women are.”

And he reflected that, after all, his own wife was the only one who never bothered him at all. She lived in her own way, and seemed to be very fond of him during the hours destined to love, for she would not admit that the unchangeable order of the ordinary occupations of life should be interfered with.

He walked slowly towards the rendezvous, mentally working himself up against Madame Walter. "Ah! I will just receive her nicely if she has nothing to tell me. Cambronne's language will be academical compared to mine. I will tell her that I will never set foot in her house again, to begin with."

He went in to wait for Madame Walter. She arrived almost immediately, and as soon as she caught sight of him, she exclaimed, "Ah, you have had my telegram! How fortunate."

He put on a grumpy expression, saying: "By Jove, yes; I found it at the office just as I was going to start off to the Chamber. What is it you want now?"

She had raised her veil to kiss him, and drew nearer with the timid and submissive air of an oft-beaten dog.

"How cruel you are towards me! How harshly you speak to me! What have I done to you? You cannot imagine how I suffer through you."

He growled: "Don't go on again in that style."

She was standing close to him, only waiting for a smile, a gesture, to throw herself into his arms, and murmured: "You should not have taken me to treat me thus, you should have left me sober-minded and happy as I was. Do you remember what you said to me in the church, and how you forced me into this house? And now, how do you speak to me? how do you receive me? Oh, God! oh, God! what pain you give me!"

He stamped his foot, and exclaimed, violently: "Ah, bosh! That's enough of it! I can't see you a moment without hearing all that foolery. One would really think that I had carried you off at twelve years of age, and that you were as ignorant as an angel. No, my dear, let us put things in their proper light; there was no seduction of a young girl in the business. You gave yourself to me at full years of discretion. I thank you. I am infinitely grateful to you, but I am not bound to be tied till death to your petticoat strings. You have a husband and I a wife. We are neither of us free. We indulged in a mutual caprice, and it is over."

"Oh, you are brutal, coarse, shameless," she said; "I was indeed no longer a young girl, but I had never loved, never faltered."

He cut her short with: "I know it. You have told me so twenty times. But you had had two children."

She drew back, exclaiming: "Oh, George, that is unworthy of you," and pressing her two hands to her heart, began to choke and sob.

When he saw the tears come he took his hat from the corner of the mantelpiece, saying: "Oh, you are going to cry, are you? Good-bye, then. So it was to show off in this way that you came here, eh?"

She had taken a step forward in order to bar the way, and quickly pulling out a handkerchief from her pocket, wiped her eyes with an abrupt movement. Her voice grew firmer by the effort of her will, as she said, in tones tremulous with pain, "No — I came to — to tell you some news — political news — to put you in the way of gaining fifty thousand francs — or even more — if you like."

He inquired, suddenly softening, "How so? What do you mean?"

"I caught, by chance, yesterday evening, some words between my husband and Laroche-Mathieu. They do not, besides, trouble themselves to hide much from me. But Walter recommended the Minister not to let you into the secret, as you would reveal everything."

Du Roy had put his hat down on a chair, and was waiting very attentively.

"What is up, then?" said he.

"They are going to take possession of Morocco."

"Nonsense! I lunched with Laroche-Mathieu, who almost dictated to me the intention of the Cabinet."

"No, darling, they are humbugging you, because they were afraid lest their plan should be known."

"Sit down," said George, and sat down himself in an armchair. Then she drew towards him a low stool, and sitting down on it between his knees, went on in a coaxing tone, "As I am always thinking about you, I pay attention now to everything that is whispered around me."

And she began quietly to explain to him how she had guessed for some time past that something was being hatched unknown to him; that they were making use of him, while dreading his co-operation. She said, "You know, when one is in love, one grows cunning."

At length, the day before, she had understood it all. It was a business transaction, a thumping affair, worked out on the quiet. She smiled now, happy in her dexterity, and grew excited, speaking like a financier's wife accustomed to see the market rigged, used to rises and falls that ruin, in two hours of speculation, thousands of little folk who have placed their savings in undertakings guaranteed by the names of men honored and respected in the world of politics of finance.

She repeated, "Oh, it is very smart what they have been up to! Very smart. It was Walter who did it all, though, and he knows all about such things. Really, it is a first-class job."

He grew impatient at these preliminaries, and exclaimed, "Come, tell me what it is at once."

"Well, then, this is what it is. The Tangiers expedition was decided upon between them on the day that Laroche-Mathieu took the ministry of foreign affairs, and little by little they have bought up the whole of the Morocco loan, which had fallen to sixty-four or sixty-five francs. They have bought it up very cleverly by means of shady brokers, who did not awaken any mistrust. They have even sold the Rothschilds, who grew astonished to find Morocco stock always asked for, and who were astonished by having agents pointed out to them — all lame ducks. That quieted the big financiers. And now the expedition is to take place, and as soon as we are there the French Government will guarantee the debt. Our friends will gain fifty or sixty millions. You understand the matter? You understand, too, how afraid they have been of everyone, of the slightest indiscretion?"

She had leaned her head against the young fellow's waistcoat, and with her arms resting on his legs, pressed up against him, feeling that she was interesting him now, and ready to do anything for a caress, for a smile.

"You are quite certain?" he asked.

"I should think so," she replied, with confidence.

"It is very smart indeed. As to that swine of a Laroche-Mathieu, just see if I don't pay him out one of these days. Oh, the scoundrel, just let him look out for himself! He shall go through my hands." Then he began to reflect, and went on, "We ought, though, to profit by all this."

"You can still buy some of the loan," said she; "it is only at seventy-two francs."

He said, "Yes, but I have no money under my hand."

She raised her eyes towards him, eyes full of entreaty, saying, "I have thought of that, darling, and if you were very nice, very nice, if you loved me a little, you would let me lend you some."

He answered, abruptly and almost harshly, “As to that, no, indeed.”

She murmured, in an imploring voice: “Listen, there is something that you can do without borrowing money. I wanted to buy ten thousand francs’ worth of the loan to make a little nest-egg. Well, I will take twenty thousand, and you shall stand in for half. You understand that I am not going to hand the money over to Walter. So there is nothing to pay for the present. If it all succeeds, you gain seventy thousand francs. If not, you will owe me ten thousand, which you can pay when you please.”

He remarked, “No, I do not like such pains.”

Then she argued, in order to get him to make up his mind. She proved to him that he was really pledging his word for ten thousand francs, that he was running risks, and that she was not advancing him anything, since the actual outlay was made by Walter’s bank. She pointed out to him, besides, that it was he who had carried on in the *Vie Francaise* the whole of the political campaign that had rendered the scheme possible. He would be very foolish not to profit by it. He still hesitated, and she added, “But just reflect that in reality it is Walter who is advancing you these ten thousand Francs, and that you have rendered him services worth a great deal more than that.”

“Very well, then,” said he, “I will go halves with you. If we lose, I will repay you the ten thousand francs.”

She was so pleased that she rose, took his head in both her hands, and began to kiss him eagerly. He did not resist at first, but as she grew bolder, clasping him to her and devouring him with caresses, he reflected that the other would be there shortly, and that if he yielded he would lose time and exhaust in the arms of the old woman an ardor that he had better reserve for the young one. So he repulsed her gently, saying, “Come, be good now.”

She looked at him disconsolately, saying, “Oh, George, can’t I even kiss you?”

He replied, “No, not to-day. I have a headache, and it upsets me.”

She sat down again docilely between his knees, and asked, “Will you come and dine with us to-morrow? You would give me much pleasure.”

He hesitated, but dared not refuse, so said, “Certainly.”

“Thanks, darling.”

She rubbed her cheek slowly against his breast with a regular and coaxing movement, and one of her long black hairs caught in his waistcoat. She noticed it, and a wild idea crossed her mind, one of those superstitious notions which are often the whole of a woman’s reason. She began to twist this hair gently round a button. Then she fastened another hair to the next button, and a third to the next. One to every button. He would tear them out of her head presently when he rose, and hurt her. What happiness! And he would carry away something of her without knowing it; he would carry away a tiny lock of her hair which he had never yet asked for. It was a tie by which she attached him to her, a secret, invisible bond, a talisman she left with him. Without willing it he would think of her, dream of her, and perhaps love her a little more the next day.

He said, all at once, "I must leave you, because I am expected at the Chamber at the close of the sitting. I cannot miss attending to-day."

She sighed, "Already!" and then added, resignedly, "Go, dear, but you will come to dinner to-morrow."

And suddenly she drew aside. There was a short and sharp pain in her head, as though needles had been stuck into the skin. Her heart throbbed; she was pleased to have suffered a little by him. "Good-bye," said she.

He took her in his arms with a compassionate smile, and coldly kissed her eyes. But she, maddened by this contact, again murmured, "Already!" while her suppliant glance indicated the bedroom, the door of which was open.

He stepped away from her, and said in a hurried tone, "I must be off; I shall be late."

Then she held out her lips, which he barely brushed with his, and having handed her her parasol, which she was forgetting, he continued, "Come, come, we must be quick, it is past three o'clock."

She went out before him, saying, "To-morrow, at seven," and he repeated, "To-morrow, at seven."

They separated, she turning to the right and he to the left. Du Roy walked as far as the outer boulevard. Then he slowly strolled back along the Boulevard Malesherbes. Passing a pastry cook's, he noticed some *marrons glaces* in a glass jar, and thought, "I will take in a pound for Clotilde."

He bought a bag of these sweetmeats, which she was passionately fond of, and at four o'clock returned to wait for his young mistress. She was a little late, because her husband had come home for a week, and said, "Can you come and dine with us to-morrow? He will be so pleased to see you."

"No, I dine with the governor. We have a heap of political and financial matters to talk over."

She had taken off her bonnet, and was now laying aside her bodice, which was too tight for her. He pointed out the bag on the mantel-shelf, saying, “I have bought you some *marrons glaces*.”

She clapped her hands, exclaiming: “How nice; what a dear you are.”

She took one, tasted them, and said: “They are delicious. I feel sure I shall not leave one of them.” Then she added, looking at George with sensual merriment: “You flatter all my vices, then.”

She slowly ate the sweetmeats, looking continually into the bag to see if there were any left. “There, sit down in the armchair,” said she, “and I will squat down between your knees and nibble my bon-bons. I shall be very comfortable.”

He smiled, sat down, and took her between his knees, as he had had Madame Walter shortly before. She raised her head in order to speak to him, and said, with her mouth full: “Do you know, darling, I dreamt of you? I dreamt that we were both taking a long journey together on a camel. He had two humps, and we were each sitting astride on a hump, crossing the desert. We had taken some sandwiches in a piece of paper and some wine in a bottle, and were dining on our humps. But it annoyed me because we could not do anything else; we were too far off from one another, and I wanted to get down.”

He answered: “I want to get down, too.”

He laughed, amused at the story, and encouraged her to talk nonsense, to chatter, to indulge in all the child’s play of conversation which lovers utter. The nonsense which he thought delightful in the mouth of Madame de Marelle would have exasperated him in that of Madame Walter. Clotilde, too, called him “My darling,” “My pet,” “My own.” These words seemed sweet and caressing. Said by the other woman shortly before, they had irritated and sickened him. For words of love, which are always the same, take the flavor of the lips they come from.

But he was thinking, even while amusing himself with this nonsense, of the seventy thousand francs he was going to gain, and suddenly checked the gabble of his companion by two little taps with his finger on her head. “Listen, pet,” said he.

“I am going to entrust you with a commission for your husband. Tell him from me to buy to-morrow ten thousand francs’ worth of the Morocco loan, which is quoted at seventy-two, and I promise him that he will gain from sixty to eighty thousand francs before three months are over. Recommend the most positive silence to him. Tell him from me that the expedition to Tangiers is decided on, and that the French government will guarantee the debt of Morocco. But do not let anything out about it. It is a State secret that I am entrusting to you."

She listened to him seriously, and murmured: "Thank you, I will tell my husband this evening. You can reckon on him; he will not talk. He is a very safe man, and there is no danger."

But she had eaten all the sweetmeats. She crushed up the bag between her hands and flung it into the fireplace. Then she said, "Let us go to bed," and without getting up, began to unbutton George's waistcoat. All at once she stopped, and pulling out between two fingers a long hair, caught in a buttonhole, began to laugh. "There, you have brought away one of Madeleine's hairs. There is a faithful husband for you."

Then, becoming once more serious, she carefully examined on her head the almost imperceptible thread she had found, and murmured: "It is not Madeleine's, it is too dark."

He smiled, saying: "It is very likely one of the maid's."

But she was inspecting the waistcoat with the attention of a detective, and collected a second hair rolled round a button; then she perceived a third, and pale and somewhat trembling, exclaimed: "Oh, you have been sleeping with a woman who has wrapped her hair round all your buttons."

He was astonished, and gasped out: "No, you are mad."

All at once he remembered, understood it all, was uneasy at first, and then denied the charge with a chuckle, not vexed at the bottom that she should suspect him of other loves. She kept on searching, and still found hairs, which she rapidly untwisted and threw on the carpet. She had guessed matters with her artful woman's instinct, and stammered out, vexed, angry, and ready to cry: "She loves you, she does — and she wanted you to take away something belonging to her. Oh, what a traitor you are!" But all at once she gave a cry, a shrill cry of nervous joy. "Oh! oh! it is an old woman — here is a white hair. Ah, you go in for old women now! Do they pay you, eh — do they pay you? Ah, so you have come to old women, have you? Then you have no longer any need of me. Keep the other one."

She rose, ran to her bodice thrown onto a chair, and began hurriedly to put it on again. He sought to retain her, stammering confusedly: "But, no, Clo, you are silly. I do not know anything about it. Listen now — stay here. Come, now — stay here."

She repeated: “Keep your old woman — keep her. Have a ring made out of her hair — out of her white hair. You have enough of it for that.”

With abrupt and swift movements she had dressed herself and put on her bonnet and veil, and when he sought to take hold of her, gave him a smack with all her strength. While he remained bewildered, she opened the door and fled.

As soon as he was alone he was seized with furious anger against that old hag of a Mother Walter. Ah, he would send her about her business, and pretty roughly, too! He bathed his reddened cheek and then went out, in turn meditating vengeance. This time he would not forgive her. Ah, no! He walked down as far as the boulevard, and sauntering along stopped in front of a jeweler’s shop to look at a chronometer he had fancied for a long time back, and which was ticketed eighteen hundred francs. He thought all at once, with a thrill of joy at his heart, “If I gain my seventy thousand francs I can afford it.”

And he began to think of all the things he would do with these seventy thousand francs. In the first place, he would get elected deputy. Then he would buy his chronometer, and would speculate on the Bourse, and would —

He did not want to go to the office, preferring to consult Madeleine before seeing Walter and writing his article, and started for home. He had reached the Rue Druot, when he stopped short. He had forgotten to ask after the Count de Vaudrec, who lived in the Chaussee d’Antin. He therefore turned back, still sauntering, thinking of a thousand things, mainly pleasant, of his coming fortune, and also of that scoundrel of a Laroche-Mathieu, and that old stickfast of a Madame Walter. He was not uneasy about the wrath of Clotilde, knowing very well that she forgave quickly.

He asked the doorkeeper of the house in which the Count de Vaudrec resided: “How is Monsieur de Vaudrec? I hear that he has been unwell these last few days.”

The man replied: “The Count is very bad indeed, sir. They are afraid he will not live through the night; the gout has mounted to his heart.”

Du Roy was so startled that he no longer knew what he ought to do. Vaudrec dying! Confused and disquieting ideas shot through his mind that he dared not even admit to himself. He stammered: “Thank you; I will call again,” without knowing what he was saying.

Then he jumped into a cab and was driven home. His wife had come in. He went into her room breathless, and said at once: “Have you heard? Vaudrec is dying.”

She was sitting down reading a letter. She raised her eyes, and repeating thrice: “Oh! what do you say, what do you say, what do you say?”

“I say that Vaudrec is dying from a fit of gout that has flown to the heart.” Then he added: “What do you think of doing?”

She had risen livid, and with her cheeks shaken by a nervous quivering, then she began to cry terribly, hiding her face in her hands. She stood shaken by sobs and torn by grief. But suddenly she mastered her sorrow, and wiping her eyes, said: “I — I am going there — don’t bother about me — I don’t know when I shall be back — don’t wait for me.”

He replied: “Very well, dear.” They shook hands, and she went off so hurriedly that she forgot her gloves.

George, having dined alone, began to write his article. He did so exactly in accordance with the minister’s instructions, giving his readers to understand that the expedition to Morocco would not take place. Then he took it to the office, chatted for a few minutes with the governor, and went out smoking, light-hearted, though he knew not why. His wife had not come home, and he went to bed and fell asleep.

Madeleine came in towards midnight. George, suddenly roused, sat up in bed. “Well?” he asked.

He had never seen her so pale and so deeply moved. She murmured: “He is dead.”

“Ah! — and he did not say anything?”

“Nothing. He had lost consciousness when I arrived.”

George was thinking. Questions rose to his lips that he did not dare to put. “Come to bed,” said he.

She undressed rapidly, and slipped into bed beside him, when he resumed: “Were there any relations present at his death-bed?”

“Only a nephew.”

“Ah! Did he see this nephew often?”

“Never. They had not met for ten years.”

“Had he any other relatives?”

“No, I do not think so.”

“Then it is his nephew who will inherit?”

“I do not know.”

"He was very well off, Vaudrec?"

"Yes, very well off."

"Do you know what his fortune was?"

"No, not exactly. One or two millions, perhaps."

He said no more. She blew out the light, and they remained stretched out, side by side, in the darkness — silent, wakeful, and reflecting. He no longer felt inclined for sleep. He now thought the seventy thousand francs promised by Madame Walter insignificant. Suddenly he fancied that Madeleine was crying. He inquired, in order to make certain: "Are you asleep?"

"No."

Her voice was tearful and quavering, and he said: "I forgot to tell you when I came in that your minister has let us in nicely."

"How so?"

He told her at length, with all details, the plan hatched between Laroche-Mathieu and Walter. When he had finished, she asked: "How do you know this?"

He replied: "You will excuse me not telling you. You have your means of information, which I do not seek to penetrate. I have mine, which I wish to keep to myself. I can, in any case, answer for the correctness of my information."

Then she murmured: "Yes, it is quite possible. I fancied they were up to something without us."

But George, who no longer felt sleepy, had drawn closer to his wife, and gently kissed her ear. She repulsed him sharply. "I beg of you to leave me alone. I am not in a mood to romp." He turned resignedly towards the wall, and having closed his eyes, ended by falling asleep.

XIV

The church was draped with black, and over the main entrance a huge scutcheon, surmounted by a coronet, announced to the passers-by that a gentleman was being buried. The ceremony was just over, and those present at it were slowly dispersing, defiling past the coffin and the nephew of the Count de Vaudrec, who was shaking extended hands and returning bows. When George Du Roy and his wife came out of the church they began to walk homeward side by side, silent and preoccupied. At length George said, as though speaking to himself: “Really, it is very strange.”

“What, dear?” asked Madeleine.

“That Vaudrec should not have left us anything.”

She blushed suddenly, as though a rosy veil had been cast over her white skin, and said: “Why should he have left us anything? There was no reason for it.” Then, after a few moments’ silence, she went on: “There is perhaps a will in the hands of some notary. We know nothing as yet.”

He reflected for a short time, and then murmured: “Yes, it is probable, for, after all, he was the most intimate friend of us both. He dined with us twice a week, called at all hours, and was at home at our place, quite at home in every respect. He loved you like a father, and had no children, no brothers and sisters, nothing but a nephew, and a nephew he never used to see. Yes, there must be a will. I do not care for much, only a remembrance to show that he thought of us, that he loved us, that he recognized the affection we felt for him. He certainly owed us some such mark of friendship.”

She said in a pensive and indifferent manner: “It is possible, indeed, that there may be a will.”

As they entered their rooms, the man-servant handed a letter to Madeleine. She opened it, and then held it out to her husband. It ran as follows:

“Office of Maitre Lamaneur, Notary,
“17 Rue des Vosges.

“Madame: I have the honor to beg you to favor me with a call here on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday between the hours of two and four, on business concerning you. — I am, etc. — Lamaneur.”

George had reddened in turn. “That is what it must be,” said he. “It is strange, though, that it is you who are summoned, and not myself, who am legally the head of the family.”

She did not answer at once, but after a brief period of reflection, said: “Shall we go round there by and by?”

“Yes, certainly.”

They set out as soon as they had lunched. When they entered Maitre Lamaneur’s office, the head clerk rose with marked attention and ushered them in to his master. The notary was a round, little man, round all over. His head looked like a ball nailed onto another ball, which had legs so short that they almost resembled balls too. He bowed, pointed to two chairs, and turning towards Madeleine, said: “Madame, I have sent for you in order to acquaint you with the will of the Count de Vaudrec, in which you are interested.”

George could not help muttering: “I thought so.”

The notary went on: “I will read to you the document, which is very brief.”

He took a paper from a box in front of him, and read as follows:

“I, the undersigned, Paul Emile Cyprien Gontran, Count de Vaudrec, being sound in body and mind, hereby express my last wishes. As death may overtake us at any moment, I wish, in provision of his attacks, to take the precaution of making my will, which will be placed in the hands of Maitre Lamaneur. Having no direct heirs, I leave the whole of my fortune, consisting of stock to the amount of six hundred thousand francs, and landed property worth about five hundred thousand francs, to Madame Claire Madeleine Du Roy without any charge or condition. I beg her to accept this gift of a departed friend as a proof of a deep, devoted, and respectful affection.”

The notary added: “That is all. This document is dated last August, and replaces one of the same nature, written two years back, with the name of Madame Claire Madeleine Forestier. I have this first will, too, which would prove, in the case of opposition on the part of the family, that the wishes of Count de Vaudrec did not vary.”

Madeleine, very pale, looked at her feet. George nervously twisted the end of his moustache between his fingers. The notary continued after a moment of silence: “It is, of course, understood, sir, that your wife cannot accept the legacy without your consent.”

Du Roy rose and said, dryly: “I must ask time to reflect.”

The notary, who was smiling, bowed, and said in an amiable tone: “I understand the scruples that cause you to hesitate, sir. I should say that the nephew of Monsieur de Vaudrec, who became acquainted this very morning with his uncle’s last wishes, stated that he was prepared to respect them, provided the sum of a hundred thousand francs was allowed him. In my opinion the will is unattackable, but a law-suit would cause a stir, which it may perhaps suit you to avoid. The world often judges things ill-naturedly. In any case, can you give me your answer on all these points before Saturday?”

George bowed, saying: “Yes, sir.”

Then he bowed again ceremoniously, ushered out his wife, who had remained silent, and went out himself with so stiff an air that the notary no longer smiled.

As soon as they got home, Du Roy abruptly closed the door, and throwing his hat onto the bed, said: “You were Vaudrec’s mistress.”

Madeleine, who was taking off her veil, turned round with a start, exclaiming: “I? Oh!”

“Yes, you. A man does not leave the whole of his fortune to a woman, unless— “

She was trembling, and was unable to remove the pins fastening the transparent tissue. After a moment’s reflection she stammered, in an agitated tone: “Come, come — you are mad — you are — you are. Did not you, yourself, just now have hopes that he would leave us something?”

George remained standing beside her, following all her emotions like a magistrate seeking to note the least faltering on the part of an accused. He said, laying stress on every word: “Yes, he might have left something to me, your husband — to me, his friend — you understand, but not to you — my wife. The distinction is capital, essential from the point of propriety and of public opinion.”

Madeleine in turn looked at him fixedly in the eyes, in profound and singular fashion, as though seeking to read something there, as though trying to discover that unknown part of a human being which we never fathom, and of which we can scarcely even catch rapid glimpses in those moments of carelessness or inattention, which are like doors left open, giving onto the mysterious depths of the mind. She said slowly: “It seems to me, however, that a legacy of this importance would have been looked on as at least equally strange left to you.”

He asked abruptly: “Why so?”

She said: “Because— “ hesitated, and then continued: “Because you are my husband, and have only known him for a short time, after all — because I have been his friend for a very long while — and because his first will, made during Forestier’s lifetime, was already in my favor.”

George began to stride up and down. He said: “You cannot accept.”

She replied in a tone of indifference: “Precisely so; then it is not worth while waiting till Saturday, we can let Maitre Lamaneur know at once.”

He stopped short in front of her, and they again stood for some moments with their eyes riveted on one another, striving to fathom the impenetrable secret of their hearts, to cut down to the quick of their thoughts. They tried to see one another’s conscience unveiled in an ardent and mute interrogation; the struggle of two beings who, living side by side, were always ignorant of one another, suspecting, sniffing round, watching, but never understanding one another to the muddy depths of their souls. And suddenly he murmured to her face, in a low voice: “Come, admit that you were De Vaudrec’s mistress.”

She shrugged her shoulders, saying: “You are ridiculous. Vaudrec was very fond of me, very — but there was nothing more — never.”

He stamped his foot. “You lie. It is not possible.”

She replied, quietly: “It is so, though.”

He began to walk up and down again, and then, halting once more, said: “Explain, then, how he came to leave the whole of his fortune to you.”

She did so in a careless and disinterested tone, saying: “It is quite simple. As you said just now, he had only ourselves for friends, or rather myself, for he has known me from a child. My mother was a companion at the house of some relatives of his. He was always coming here, and as he had no natural heirs he thought of me. That there was a little love for me in the matter is possible. But where is the woman who has not been loved thus? Why should not such secret, hidden affection have placed my name at the tip of his pen when he thought of expressing his last wishes? He brought me flowers every Monday. You were not at all astonished at that, and yet he did not bring you any, did he? Now he has given me his fortune for the same reason, and because he had no one to offer it to. It would have been, on the contrary, very surprising for him to have left it to you. Why should he have done so? What were you to him?"

She spoke so naturally and quietly that George hesitated. He said, however: "All the same, we cannot accept this inheritance under such conditions. The effect would be deplorable. All the world would believe it; all the world would gossip about it, and laugh at me. My fellow journalists are already only too disposed to feel jealous of me and to attack me. I should have, before anyone, a care for my honor and my reputation. It is impossible for me to allow my wife to accept a legacy of this kind from a man whom public report has already assigned to her as a lover. Forestier might perhaps have tolerated it, but not me."

She murmured, mildly: "Well, dear, do not let us accept it. It will be a million the less in our pockets, that is all."

He was still walking up and down, and began to think aloud, speaking for his wife's benefit without addressing himself directly to her: "Yes, a million, so much the worse. He did not understand, in making his will, what a fault in tact, what a breach of propriety he was committing. He did not see in what a false, a ridiculous position he would place me. Everything is a matter of detail in this life. He should have left me half; that would have settled everything."

He sat down, crossed his legs, and began to twist the end of his moustache, as he did in moments of boredom, uneasiness, and difficult reflection. Madeleine took up some embroidery at which she worked from time to time, and said, while selecting her wools: "I have only to hold my tongue. It is for you to reflect."

He was a long time without replying, and then said, hesitatingly: "The world will never understand that Vaudrec made you his sole heiress, and that I allowed it. To receive his fortune in that way would be an acknowledgment on your part of a guilty connection, and on mine of a shameful complaisance. Do you understand now how our acceptance of it would be interpreted? It would be necessary to find a side issue, some clever way of palliating matters. To let it go abroad, for instance, that he had divided the money between us, leaving half to the husband and half to the wife."

She observed: "I do not see how that can be done, since the will is plain."

"Oh, it is very simple. You could leave me half the inheritance by a deed of gift. We have no children, so it is feasible. In that way the mouth of public malevolence would be closed."

She replied, somewhat impatiently: "I do not see any the more how the mouth of public malevolence is to be closed, since the will is there, signed by Vaudrec?"

He said, angrily: "Have we any need to show it and to paste it up on all the walls? You are really stupid. We will say that the Count de Vaudrec left his fortune between us. That is all. But you cannot accept this legacy without my authorization. I will only give it on condition of a division, which will hinder me from becoming a laughing stock."

She looked at him again with a penetrating glance, and said: "As you like. I am agreeable."

Then he rose, and began to walk up and down again. He seemed to be hesitating anew, and now avoided his wife's penetrating glance. He was saying: "No, certainly not. Perhaps it would be better to give it up altogether. That is more worthy, more correct, more honorable. And yet by this plan nothing could be imagined against us — absolutely nothing. The most unscrupulous people could only admit things as they were." He paused in front of Madeleine. "Well, then, if you like, darling, I will go back alone to Maitre Lamaneur to explain matters to him and consult him. I will tell him of my scruples, and add that we have arrived at the notion of a division to prevent gossip. From the moment that I accept half this inheritance, it is plain that no one has the right to smile. It is equal to saying aloud: 'My wife accepts because I accept — I, her husband, the best judge of what she may do without compromising herself. Otherwise a scandal would have arisen.'"

Madeleine merely murmured: "Just as you like."

He went on with a flow of words: "Yes, it is all as clear as daylight with this arrangement of a division in two. We inherit from a friend who did not want to make any difference between us, any distinction; who did not wish to appear to say: 'I prefer one or the other after death, as I did during life.' He liked the wife best, be it understood, but in leaving the fortune equally to both, he wished plainly to express that his preference was purely platonic. And you may be sure that, if he had thought of it, that is what he would have done. He did not reflect. He did not foresee the consequences. As you said very appropriately just now, it was you to whom he offered flowers every week, it is to you he wished to leave his last remembrance, without taking into consideration that— “

She checked him, with a shade of irritation: “All right; I understand. You have no need to make so many explanations. Go to the notary’s at once.”

He stammered, reddening: “You are right. I am off.”

He took his hat, and then, at the moment of going out, said: “I will try to settle the difficulty with the nephew for fifty thousand francs, eh?”

She replied, with dignity: “No. Give him the hundred thousand francs he asks. Take them from my share, if you like.”

He muttered, shamefacedly: “Oh, no; we will share that. Giving up fifty thousand francs apiece, there still remains to us a clear million.” He added: “Good-bye, then, for the present, Made.” And he went off to explain to the notary the plan which he asserted had been imagined by his wife.

They signed the next day a deed of gift of five hundred thousand francs, which Madeleine Du Roy abandoned to her husband. On leaving the notary’s office, as the day was fine, George suggested that they should walk as far as the boulevards. He showed himself pleasant and full of attention and affection. He laughed, pleased at everything, while she remained thoughtful and somewhat severe.

It was a somewhat cool autumn day. The people in the streets seemed in a hurry, and walked rapidly. Du Roy led his wife to the front of the shop in which he had so often gazed at the longed-for chronometer. “Shall I stand you some jewelry?” said he.

She replied, indifferently: “Just as you like.”

They went in, and he asked: “What would you prefer — a necklace, a bracelet, or a pair of earrings?”

The sight of the trinkets in gold, and precious stones overcame her studied coolness, and she scanned with kindling and inquisitive eyes the glass cases filled with jewelry. And, suddenly moved by desire, said: “That is a very pretty bracelet.”

It was a chain of quaint pattern, every link of which had a different stone set in it.

George inquired: “How much is this bracelet?”

“Three thousand francs, sir,” replied the jeweler.

“If you will let me have it for two thousand five hundred, it is a bargain.”

The man hesitated, and then replied: “No, sir; that is impossible.”

Du Roy went on: “Come, you can throw in that chronometer for fifteen hundred; that will make four thousand, which I will pay at once. Is it agreed? If not, I will go somewhere else.”

The jeweler, in a state of perplexity, ended by agreeing, saying: “Very good, sir.”

And the journalist, after giving his address, added: “You will have the monogram, G. R. C., engraved on the chronometer under a baron’s coronet.”

Madeleine, surprised, began to smile, and when they went out, took his arm with a certain affection. She found him really clever and capable. Now that he had an income, he needed a title. It was quite right.

The jeweler bowed them out, saying: “You can depend upon me; it will be ready on Thursday, Baron.”

They paused before the Vaudeville, at which a new piece was being played.

“If you like,” said he, “we will go to the theater this evening. Let us see if we can have a box.”

They took a box, and he continued: “Suppose we dine at a restaurant.”

“Oh, yes; I should like that!”

He was as happy as a king, and sought what else they could do. “Suppose we go and ask Madame de Marelle to spend the evening with us. Her husband is at home, I hear, and I shall be delighted to see him.”

They went there. George, who slightly dreaded the first meeting with his mistress, was not ill-pleased that his wife was present to prevent anything like an explanation. But Clotilde did not seem to remember anything against him, and even obliged her husband to accept the invitation.

The dinner was lovely, and the evening pleasant. George and Madeleine got home late. The gas was out, and to light them upstairs, the journalist struck a wax match from time to time. On reaching the first-floor landing the flame, suddenly starting forth as he struck, caused their two lit-up faces to show in the glass standing out against the darkness of the staircase. They resembled phantoms, appearing and ready to vanish into the night.

Du Roy raised his hand to light up their reflections, and said, with a laugh of triumph: “Behold the millionaires!”

XV

The conquest of Morocco had been accomplished two months back. France, mistress of Tangiers, held the whole of the African shore of the Mediterranean as far as Tripoli, and had guaranteed the debt of the newly annexed territory. It was said that two ministers had gained a score of millions over the business, and Laroche-Mathieu was almost openly named. As to Walter, no one in Paris was ignorant of the fact that he had brought down two birds with one stone, and made thirty or forty millions out of the loan and eight to ten millions out of the copper and iron mines, as well as out of a large stretch of territory bought for almost nothing prior to the conquest, and sold after the French occupation to companies formed to promote colonization. He had become in a few days one of the lords of creation, one of those omnipotent financiers more powerful than monarchs who cause heads to bow, mouths to stammer, and all that is base, cowardly, and envious, to well up from the depths of the human heart. He was no longer the Jew Walter, head of a shady bank, manager of a fishy paper, deputy suspected of illicit jobbery. He was Monsieur Walter, the wealthy Israelite.

He wished to show himself off. Aware of the monetary embarrassments of the Prince de Carlsbourg, who owned one of the finest mansions in the Rue de Faubourg, Saint Honoré, with a garden giving onto the Champs Elysées, he proposed to him to buy house and furniture, without shifting a stick, within twenty-four hours. He offered three millions, and the prince, tempted by the amount, accepted. The following day Walter installed himself in his new domicile. Then he had another idea, the idea of a conqueror who wishes to conquer Paris, the idea of a Bonaparte. The whole city was flocking at that moment to see a great painting by the Hungarian artist, Karl Marcowitch, exhibited at a dealer's named Jacques Lenoble, and representing Christ walking on the water. The art critics, filled with enthusiasm, declared the picture the most superb masterpiece of the century. Walter bought it for four hundred thousand francs, and took it away, thus cutting suddenly short a flow of public curiosity, and forcing the whole of Paris to speak of him in terms of envy, blame, or approbation. Then he had it announced in the papers that he would invite everyone known in Parisian society to view at his house some evening this triumph of the foreign master, in order that it might not be said that he had hidden away a work of art. His house would be open; let those who would, come. It would be enough to show at the door the letter of invitation.

This ran as follows: “Monsieur and Madame Walter beg of you to honor them with your company on December 30th, between 9 and 12 p. m., to view the picture by Karl Marcowitch, ‘Jesus Walking on the Waters,’ lit up by electric light.” Then, as a postscript, in small letters: “Dancing after midnight.” So those who wished to stay could, and out of these the Walters would recruit their future acquaintances. The others would view the picture, the mansion, and their owners with worldly curiosity, insolent and indifferent, and would then go away as they came. But Daddy Walter knew very well that they would return later on, as they had come to his Israelite brethren grown rich like himself. The first thing was that they should enter his house, all these titled paupers who were mentioned in the papers, and they would enter it to see the face of a man who had gained fifty millions in six weeks; they would enter it to see and note who else came there; they would also enter it because he had had the good taste and dexterity to summon them to admire a Christian picture at the home of a child of Israel. He seemed to say to them: “You see I have given five hundred thousand francs for the religious masterpiece of Marcowitch, ‘Jesus Walking on the Waters.’ And this masterpiece will always remain before my eyes in the house of the Jew, Walter.”

In society there had been a great deal of talk over these invitations, which, after all, did not pledge one in any way. One could go there as one went to see watercolors at Monsieur Petit’s. The Walters owned a masterpiece, and threw open their doors one evening so that everyone could admire it. Nothing could be better. The *Vie Francaise* for a fortnight past had published every morning a note on this coming event of the 30th December, and had striven to kindle public curiosity.

Du Roy was furious at the governor’s triumph. He had thought himself rich with the five hundred thousand francs extorted from his wife, and now he held himself to be poor, fearfully poor, when comparing his modest fortune with the shower of millions that had fallen around him, without his being able to pick any of it up. His envious hatred waxed daily. He was angry with everyone — with the Walters, whom he had not been to see at their new home; with his wife, who, deceived by Laroche-Mathieu, had persuaded him not to invest in the Morocco loan; and, above all, with the minister who had tricked him, who had made use of him, and who dined at his table twice a week. George was his agent, his secretary, his mouthpiece, and when he was writing from his dictation felt wild longings to strangle this triumphant foe. As a minister, Laroche-Mathieu had shown modesty in mien, and in order to retain his portfolio, did not let it be seen that he was gorged with gold. But Du Roy felt the presence of this gold in the haughtier tone of the parvenu barrister, in his more insolent gestures, his more daring affirmation, his perfect self-confidence. Laroche-Mathieu now reigned in the Du Roy household, having taken the place and the days of the Count de Vaudrec, and spoke to the servants like a second master. George tolerated him with a quiver running through him like a dog who wants to bite, and dares not. But he was often harsh and brutal towards Madeleine, who shrugged her shoulders and treated him like a clumsy child. She was, besides, astonished at his continual ill-humor, and repeated: "I cannot make you out. You are always grumbling, and yet your position is a splendid one."

He would turn his back without replying.

He had declared at first that he would not go to the governor's entertainment, and that he would never more set foot in the house of that dirty Jew. For two months Madame Walter had been writing to him daily, begging him to come, to make an appointment with her whenever he liked, in order, she said, that she might hand over the seventy thousand francs she had gained for him. He did not reply, and threw these despairing letters into the fire. Not that he had renounced receiving his share of their profits, but he wanted to madden her, to treat her with contempt, to trample her under feet. She was too rich. He wanted to show his pride. The very day of the exhibition of the picture, as Madeleine pointed out to him that he was very wrong not to go, he replied: "Hold your tongue. I shall stay at home."

Then after dinner he suddenly said: "It will be better after all to undergo this affliction. Get dressed at once."

She was expecting this, and said: "I will be ready in a quarter of an hour." He dressed growling, and even in the cab he continued to spit out his spleen.

The court-yard of the Carlsbourg mansion was lit up by four electric lights, looking like four small bluish moons, one at each corner. A splendid carpet was laid down the high flight of steps, on each of which a footman in livery stood motionless as a statue.

Du Roy muttered: “Here’s a fine show-off for you,” and shrugged his shoulders, his heart contracted by jealousy.

His wife said: “Be quiet and do likewise.”

They went in and handed their heavy outer garments to the footmen who advanced to meet them. Several ladies were also there with their husbands, freeing themselves from their furs. Murmurs of: “It is very beautiful, very beautiful,” could be heard. The immense entrance hall was hung with tapestry, representing the adventures of Mars and Venus. To the right and left were the two branches of a colossal double staircase, which met on the first floor. The banisters were a marvel of wrought-iron work, the dull old gilding of which glittered with discreet luster beside the steps of pink marble. At the entrance to the reception-rooms two little girls, one in a pink folly costume, and the other in a blue one, offered a bouquet of flowers to each lady. This was held to be charming.

The reception-rooms were already crowded. Most of the ladies were in outdoor dress, showing that they came there as to any other exhibition. Those who intended remaining for the ball were bare armed and bare necked. Madame Walter, surrounded by her friends, was in the second room acknowledging the greetings of the visitors. Many of these did not know her, and walked about as though in a museum, without troubling themselves about the masters of the house.

When she perceived Du Roy she grew livid, and made a movement as though to advance towards him. Then she remained motionless, awaiting him. He greeted her ceremoniously, while Madeleine overwhelmed her with affection and compliments. Then George left his wife with her and lost himself in the crowd, to listen to the spiteful things that assuredly must be said.

Five reception-rooms opened one into the other, hung with costly stuffs, Italian embroideries, or oriental rugs of varying shades and styles, and bearing on their walls pictures by old masters. People stopped, above all, to admire a small room in the Louis XVI style, a kind of boudoir, lined with silk, with bouquets of roses on a pale blue ground. The furniture, of gilt wood, upholstered in the same material, was admirably finished.

George recognized some well-known people — the Duchess de Ferraciné, the Count and Countess de Ravenal, General Prince d’Andremont, the beautiful Marchioness des Dunes, and all those folk who are seen at first performances. He was suddenly seized by the arm, and a young and pleased voice murmured in his ear: “Ah! here you are at last, you naughty Pretty-boy. How is it one no longer sees you?”

It was Susan Walter, scanning him with her enamel-like eyes from beneath the curly cloud of her fair hair. He was delighted to see her again, and frankly pressed her hand. Then, excusing himself, he said: “I have not been able to come. I have had so much to do during the past two months that I have not been out at all.”

She said, with her serious air: “That is wrong, very wrong. You have caused us a great deal of pain, for we adore you, mamma and I. As to myself, I cannot get on without you. When you are not here I am bored to death. You see I tell you so plainly, so that you may no longer have the right of disappearing like that. Give me your arm, I will show you ‘Jesus Walking on the Waters’ myself; it is right away at the end, beyond the conservatory. Papa had it put there so that they should be obliged to see everything before they could get to it. It is astonishing how he is showing off this place.”

They went on quietly among the crowd. People turned round to look at this good-looking fellow and this charming little doll. A well-known painter said: “What a pretty pair. They go capitally together.”

George thought: “If I had been really clever, this is the girl I should have married. It was possible. How is it I did not think of it? How did I come to take that other one? What a piece of stupidity. We always act too impetuously, and never reflect sufficiently.”

And envy, bitter envy, sank drop by drop into his mind like a gall, embittering all his pleasures, and rendering existence hateful.

Susan was saying: “Oh! do come often, Pretty-boy; we will go in for all manner of things now, papa is so rich. We will amuse ourselves like madcaps.”

He answered, still following up his idea: “Oh! you will marry now. You will marry some prince, a ruined one, and we shall scarcely see one another.”

She exclaimed, frankly: “Oh! no, not yet. I want someone who pleases me, who pleases me a great deal, who pleases me altogether. I am rich enough for two.”

He smiled with a haughty and ironical smile, and began to point out to her people that were passing, very noble folk who had sold their rusty titles to the daughters of financiers like herself, and who now lived with or away from their wives, but free, impudent, known, and respected. He concluded with: “I will not give you six months before you are caught with that same bait. You will be a marchioness, a duchess or a princess, and will look down on me from a very great height, miss.”

She grew indignant, tapped him on the arm with her fan, and vowed that she would marry according to the dictates of her heart.

He sneered: “We shall see about all that, you are too rich.”

She remarked: “But you, too, have come in for an inheritance.”

He uttered in a tone of contempt: “Oh! not worth speaking about. Scarcely twenty thousand francs a year, not much in these days.”

“But your wife has also inherited.”

“Yes. A million between us. Forty thousand francs’ income. We cannot even keep a carriage on it.”

They had reached the last of the reception-rooms, and before them lay the conservatory — a huge winter garden full of tall, tropical trees, sheltering clumps of rare flowers. Penetrating beneath this somber greenery, through which the light streamed like a flood of silver, they breathed the warm odor of damp earth, and an air heavy with perfumes. It was a strange sensation, at once sweet, unwholesome, and pleasant, of a nature that was artificial, soft, and enervating. They walked on carpets exactly like moss, between two thick clumps of shrubs. All at once Du Roy noticed on his left, under a wide dome of palms, a broad basin of white marble, large enough to bathe in, and on the edge of which four large Delft swans poured forth water through their open beaks. The bottom of the basin was strewn with golden sand, and swimming about in it were some enormous goldfish, quaint Chinese monsters, with projecting eyes and scales edged with blue, mandarins of the waters, who recalled, thus suspended above this gold-colored ground, the embroideries of the Flowery Land. The journalist halted with beating heart. He said to himself: “Here is luxury. These are the houses in which one ought to live. Others have arrived at it. Why should not I?”

He thought of means of doing so; did not find them at once, and grew irritated at his powerlessness. His companion, somewhat thoughtful, did not speak. He looked at her in sidelong fashion, and again thought: “To marry this little puppet would suffice.”

But Susan all at once seemed to wake up. “Attention!” said she; and pushing George through a group which barred their way, she made him turn sharply to the right.

In the midst of a thicket of strange plants, which extended in the air their quivering leaves, opening like hands with slender fingers, was seen the motionless figure of a man standing on the sea. The effect was surprising. The picture, the sides of which were hidden in the moving foliage, seemed a black spot upon a fantastic and striking horizon. It had to be carefully looked at in order to understand it. The frame cut the center of the ship in which were the apostles, scarcely lit up by the oblique rays from a lantern, the full light of which one of them, seated on the bulwarks, was casting upon the approaching Savior. Jesus was advancing with his foot upon a wave, which flattened itself submissively and caressingly beneath the divine tread. All was dark about him. Only the stars shone in the sky. The faces of the apostles, in the vague light of the lantern, seemed convulsed with surprise. It was a wonderful and unexpected work of a master; one of those works which agitate the mind and give you something to dream of for years. People who look at such things at the outset remain silent, and then go thoughtfully away, and only speak later on of the worth of the painting. Du Roy, having contemplated it for some time, said: “It is nice to be able to afford such trifles.”

But as he was pushed against by others coming to see it, he went away, still keeping on his arm Susan’s little hand, which he squeezed slightly. She said: “Would you like a glass of champagne? Come to the refreshment buffet. We shall find papa there.”

And they slowly passed back through the saloons, in which the crowd was increasing, noisy and at home, the fashionable crowd of a public fête. George all at once thought he heard a voice say: “It is Laroche-Mathieu and Madame Du Roy.” These words flitted past his ear like those distant sounds borne by the wind. Whence came they? He looked about on all sides, and indeed saw his wife passing by on the minister’s arm. They were chatting intimately in a low tone, smiling, and with their eyes fixed on one another’s. He fancied he noticed that people whispered as they looked at them, and he felt within him a stupid and brutal desire to spring upon them, these two creatures, and smite them down. She was making him ridiculous. He thought of Forestier. Perhaps they were saying: “That cuckold Du Roy.” Who was she? A little parvenu sharp enough, but really not over-gifted with parts. People visited him because they feared him, because they felt his strength, but they must speak in unrestrained fashion of this little journalistic household. He would never make any great way with this woman, who would always render his home a suspected one, who would always compromise herself, whose very bearing betrayed the woman of intrigue. She would now be a cannon ball riveted to his ankle. Ah! if he had only known, if he had only guessed. What a bigger game he would have played. What a fine match he might have won with this little Susan for stakes. How was it he had been blind enough not to understand that?

They reached the dining-room — an immense apartment, with marble columns, and walls hung with old tapestry. Walter perceived his descriptive writer, and darted forward to take him by the hands. He was intoxicated with joy. "Have you seen everything? Have you shown him everything, Susan? What a lot of people, eh, Pretty-boy! Did you see the Prince de Guerche? He came and drank a glass of punch here just now," he exclaimed.

Then he darted towards the Senator Rissolin, who was towing along his wife, bewildered, and bedecked like a stall at a fair. A gentleman bowed to Susan, a tall, thin fellow, slightly bald, with yellow whiskers, and that air of good breeding which is everywhere recognizable. George heard his name mentioned, the Marquis de Cazolles, and became suddenly jealous of him. How long had she known him? Since her accession to wealth, no doubt. He divined a suitor.

He was taken by the arm. It was Norbert de Varenne. The old poet was airing his long hair and worn dress-coat with a weary and indifferent air. "This is what they call amusing themselves," said he. "By and by they will dance, and then they will go bed, and the little girls will be delighted. Have some champagne. It is capital."

He had a glass filled for himself, and bowing to Du Roy, who had taken another, said: "I drink to the triumph of wit over wealth." Then he added softly: "Not that wealth on the part of others hurts me; or that I am angry at it. But I protest on principle."

George no longer listened to him. He was looking for Susan, who had just disappeared with the Marquis de Cazolles, and abruptly quitting Norbert de Varenne, set out in pursuit of the young girl. A dense crowd in quest of refreshments checked him. When he at length made his way through it, he found himself face to face with the de Marelles. He was still in the habit of meeting the wife, but he had not for some time past met the husband, who seized both his hands, saying: "How can I thank you, my dear fellow, for the advice you gave me through Clotilde. I have gained close on a hundred thousand francs over the Morocco loan. It is to you I owe them. You are a valuable friend."

Several men turned round to look at the pretty and elegant brunette. Du Roy replied: "In exchange for that service, my dear fellow, I am going to take your wife, or rather to offer her my arm. Husband and wife are best apart, you know."

Monsieur de Marelle bowed, saying: "You are quite right. If I lose you, we will meet here in an hour."

"Exactly."

The pair plunged into the crowd, followed by the husband. Clotilde kept saying: "How lucky these Walters are! That is what it is to have business intelligence."

George replied: "Bah! Clever men always make a position one way or another."

She said: "Here are two girls who will have from twenty to thirty millions apiece. Without reckoning that Susan is pretty."

He said nothing. His own idea, coming from another's mouth, irritated him. She had not yet seen the picture of "Jesus Walking on the Water," and he proposed to take her to it. They amused themselves by talking scandal of the people they recognized, and making fun of those they did not. Saint-Potin passed by, bearing on the lapel of his coat a number of decorations, which greatly amused them. An ex-ambassador following him showed far fewer.

Du Roy remarked: "What a mixed salad of society."

Boisrenard, who shook hands with him, had also adorned his buttonhole with the green and yellow ribbon worn on the day of the duel. The Viscountess de Percemur, fat and bedecked, was chatting with a duke in the little Louis XVI boudoir.

George whispered: "An amorous *tête-à-tête*."

But on passing through the greenhouse, he noticed his wife seated beside Laroche-Mathieu, both almost hidden behind a clump of plants. They seemed to be asserting: "We have appointed a meeting here, a meeting in public. For we do not care a rap what people think."

Madame de Marelle agreed that the Jesus of Karl Marcowitch was astounding, and they retraced their steps. They had lost her husband. George inquired: "And Laurine, is she still angry with me?"

“Yes, still so as much as ever. She refuses to see you, and walks away when you are spoken of.”

He did not reply. The sudden enmity of this little girl vexed and oppressed him. Susan seized on them as they passed through a doorway, exclaiming: “Ah! here you are. Well, Pretty-boy, you must remain alone. I am going to take away Clotilde to show her my room.”

The two moved rapidly away, gliding through the throng with that undulating snake-like motion women know how to adopt in a crowd. Almost immediately a voice murmured: “George.”

It was Madame Walter, who went on in a low tone: “Oh! how ferociously cruel you are. How you do make me suffer without reason. I told Susan to get your companion away in order to be able to say a word to you. Listen, I must speak to you this evening, I must, or you don’t know what I will do. Go into the conservatory. You will find a door on the left leading into the garden. Follow the path in front of it. At the end of it you will find an arbor. Wait for me there in ten minutes’ time. If you won’t, I declare to you that I will create a scene here at once.”

He replied loftily: “Very well. I will be at the spot you mention within ten minutes.”

And they separated. But Jacques Rival almost made him behindhand. He had taken him by the arm and was telling him a lot of things in a very excited manner. He had no doubt come from the refreshment buffet. At length Du Roy left him in the hands of Monsieur de Marelle, whom he had come across, and bolted. He still had to take precautions not to be seen by his wife or Laroche-Mathieu. He succeeded, for they seemed deeply interested in something, and found himself in the garden. The cold air struck him like an ice bath. He thought: “Confound it, I shall catch cold,” and tied his pocket-handkerchief round his neck. Then he slowly went along the walk, seeing his way with difficulty after coming out of the bright light of the reception-rooms. He could distinguish to the right and left leafless shrubs, the branches of which were quivering. Light filtered through their branches, coming from the windows of the mansion. He saw something white in the middle of the path in front of him, and Madame Walter, with bare arms and bosom, said in a quivering voice; “Ah here you are; you want to kill me, then?”

He answered quickly: “No melodramatics, I beg of you, or I shall bolt at once.”

She had seized him round the neck, and with her lips close to his, said: "But what have I done to you? You are behaving towards me like a wretch. What have I done to you?"

He tried to repulse her. "You wound your hair round every one of my buttons the last time I saw you, and it almost brought about a rupture between my wife and myself."

She was surprised for a moment, and then, shaking her head, said: "Oh! your wife would not mind. It was one of your mistresses who had made a scene over it."

"I have no mistresses."

"Nonsense. But why do you no longer ever come to see me? Why do you refuse to come to dinner, even once a week, with me? What I suffer is fearful. I love you to that degree that I no longer have a thought that is not for you; that I see you continually before my eyes; that I can no longer say a word without being afraid of uttering your name. You cannot understand that, I know. It seems to me that I am seized in some one's clutches, tied up in a sack, I don't know what. Your remembrance, always with me, clutches my throat, tears my chest, breaks my legs so as to no longer leave me strength to walk. And I remain like an animal sitting all day on a chair thinking of you."

He looked at her with astonishment. She was no longer the big frolicsome tomboy he had known, but a bewildered despairing woman, capable of anything. A vague project, however, arose in his mind. He replied: "My dear, love is not eternal. We take and we leave one another. But when it drags on, as between us two, it becomes a terrible drag. I will have no more of it. That is the truth. However, if you can be reasonable, and receive and treat me as a friend, I will come as I used to. Do you feel capable of that?"

She placed her two bare arms on George's coat, and murmured: "I am capable of anything in order to see you."

"Then it is agreed on," said he; "we are friends, and nothing more."

She stammered: "It is agreed on;" and then, holding out her lips to him: "One more kiss; the last."

He refused gently, saying: "No, we must keep to our agreement."

She turned aside, wiping away a couple of tears, and then, drawing from her bosom a bundle of papers tied with pink silk ribbon, offered it to Du Roy, saying: "Here; it is your share of the profit in the Morocco affair. I was so pleased to have gained it for you. Here, take it."

He wanted to refuse, observing: “No, I will not take that money.”

Then she grew indignant. “Ah! so you won’t take it now. It is yours, yours, only. If you do not take it, I will throw it into the gutter. You won’t act like that, George?”

He received the little bundle, and slipped it into his pocket.

“We must go in,” said he, “you will catch cold.”

She murmured: “So much the better, if I could die.”

She took one of his hands, kissed it passionately, with rage and despair, and fled towards the mansion. He returned, quietly reflecting. Then he re-entered the conservatory with haughty forehead and smiling lip. His wife and Laroche-Mathieu were no longer there. The crowd was thinning. It was becoming evident that they would not stay for the dance. He perceived Susan arm-in-arm with her sister. They both came towards him to ask him to dance the first quadrille with the Count de Latour Yvelin.

He was astonished, and asked: “Who is he, too?”

Susan answered maliciously: “A new friend of my sister’s.” Rose blushed, and murmured: “You are very spiteful, Susan; he is no more my friend than yours.”

Susan smiled, saying: “Oh! I know all about it.”

Rose annoyed, turned her back on them and went away. Du Roy familiarly took the elbow of the young girl left standing beside him, and said in his caressing voice: “Listen, my dear, you believe me to be your friend?”

“Yes, Pretty-boy.”

“You have confidence in me?” “Quite.”

“You remember what I said to you just now?”

“What about?”

“About your marriage, or rather about the man you are going to marry.” “Yes.”

“Well, then, you will promise me one thing?”

“Yes; but what is it?”

“To consult me every time that your hand is asked for, and not to accept anyone without taking my advice.”

“Very well.”

“And to keep this a secret between us two. Not a word of it to your father or your mother.”

“Not a word.”

“It is a promise, then?” “It is a promise.”

Rival came up with a bustling air. “Mademoiselle, your papa wants you for the dance.”

She said: “Come along, Pretty-boy.”

But he refused, having made up his mind to leave at once, wishing to be alone in order to think. Too many new ideas had entered his mind, and he began to look for his wife. In a short time he saw her drinking chocolate at the buffet with two gentlemen unknown to him. She introduced her husband without mentioning their names to him. After a few moments, he said, “Shall we go?”

“When you like.”

She took his arm, and they walked back through the reception-rooms, in which the public were growing few. She said: “Where is Madame Walter, I should like to wish her good-bye?”

“It is better not to. She would try to keep us for the ball, and I have had enough of this.”

“That is so, you are quite right.”

All the way home they were silent. But as soon as they were in their room Madeleine said smilingly, before even taking off her veil. “I have a surprise for you.”

He growled ill-temperedly: “What is it?”

“Guess.” “I will make no such effort.”

“Well, the day after to-morrow is the first of January.”

“Yes.”

“The time for New Year’s gifts.”

“Yes.”

“Here’s one for you that Laroche-Mathieu gave me just now.”

She gave him a little black box resembling a jewel-case. He opened it indifferently, and saw the cross of the Legion of Honor. He grew somewhat pale, then smiled, and said: “I should have preferred ten millions. That did not cost him much.”

She had expected an outburst of joy, and was irritated at this coolness. “You are really incredible. Nothing satisfies you now,” said she.

He replied, tranquilly: “That man is only paying his debt, and he still owes me a great deal.”

She was astonished at his tone, and resumed: “It is though, a big thing at your age.”

He remarked: “All things are relative. I could have something bigger now.”

He had taken the case, and placing it on the mantel-shelf, looked for some moments at the glittering star it contained. Then he closed it and went to bed, shrugging his shoulders.

The *Journal Officiel* of the first of January announced the nomination of Monsieur Prosper George Du Roy, journalist, to the dignity of chevalier of the Legion of Honor, for special services. The name was written in two words, which gave George more pleasure than the derivation itself.

An hour after having read this piece of news he received a note from Madame Walter begging him to come and dine with her that evening with his wife, to celebrate his new honors. He hesitated for a few moments, and then throwing this note, written in ambiguous terms, into the fire, said to Madeleine:

“We are going to dinner at the Walter’s this evening.”

She was astonished. “Why, I thought you never wanted to set foot in the house again.”

He only remarked: “I have changed my mind.”

When they arrived Madame Walter was alone in the little Louis XVI. boudoir she had adopted for the reception of personal friends. Dressed in black, she had powdered her hair, which rendered her charming. She had the air at a distance of an old woman, and close at hand, of a young one, and when one looked at her well, of a pretty snare for the eyes.

“You are in mourning?” inquired Madeleine.

She replied, sadly: “Yes, and no. I have not lost any relative. But I have reached the age when one wears the mourning of one’s life. I wear it to-day to inaugurate it. In future I shall wear it in my heart.”

Du Roy thought: “Will this resolution hold good?”

The dinner was somewhat dull. Susan alone chattered incessantly. Rose seemed preoccupied. The journalist was warmly congratulated. During the evening they strolled chatting through the saloons and the conservatory. As Du Roy was walking in the rear with Madame Walter, she checked him by the arm.

“Listen,” said she, in a low voice, “I will never speak to you of anything again, never. But come and see me, George. It is impossible for me to live without you, impossible. It is indescribable torture. I feel you, I cherish you before my eyes, in my heart, all day and all night. It is as though you had caused me to drink a poison which was eating me away within. I cannot bear it, no, I cannot bear it. I am willing to be nothing but an old woman for you. I have made my hair white to show you so, but come here, only come here from time to time as a friend."

She had taken his hand and was squeezing it, crushing it, burying her nails in his flesh.

He answered, quietly: "It is understood, then. It is useless to speak of all that again. You see I came to-day at once on receiving your letter."

Walter, who had walked on in advance with his two daughters and Madeleine, was waiting for Du Roy beside the picture of "Jesus Walking on the Waters."

"Fancy," said he, laughing, "I found my wife yesterday on her knees before this picture, as if in a chapel. She was paying her devotions. How I did laugh."

Madame Walter replied in a firm voice — a voice thrilling with secret exultation: "It is that Christ who will save my soul. He gives me strength and courage every time I look at Him." And pausing in front of the Divinity standing amidst the waters, she murmured: "How handsome he is. How afraid of Him those men are, and yet how they love Him. Look at His head, His eyes — how simple yet how supernatural at the same time."

Susan exclaimed, "But He resembles you, Pretty-boy. I am sure He resembles you. If you had a beard, or if He was clean shaven, you would be both alike. Oh, but it is striking!"

She insisted on his standing beside the picture, and they all, indeed, recognized that the two faces resembled one another. Everyone was astonished. Walter thought it very singular. Madeleine, smiling, declared that Jesus had a more manly air. Madame Walter stood motionless, gazing fixedly at the face of her lover beside the face of Christ, and had become as white as her hair.

XVI

During the remainder of the winter the Du Roys often visited the Walters. George even dined there by himself continually, Madeleine saying she was tired, and preferring to remain at home. He had adopted Friday as a fixed day, and Madame Walter never invited anyone that evening; it belonged to Pretty-boy, to him alone. After dinner they played cards, and fed the goldfish, amusing themselves like a family circle. Several times behind a door or a clump of shrubs in the conservatory, Madame Walter had suddenly clasped George in her arms, and pressing him with all her strength to her breast, had whispered in his ear, “I love you, I love you till it is killing me.” But he had always coldly repulsed her, replying, in a dry tone: “If you begin that business once again, I shall not come here any more.”

Towards the end of March the marriage of the two sisters was all at once spoken about. Rose, it was said, was to marry the Count de Latour-Yvelin, and Susan the Marquis de Cazolles. These two gentlemen had become familiars of the household, those familiars to whom special favors and marked privileges are granted. George and Susan continued to live in a species of free and fraternal intimacy, romping for hours, making fun of everyone, and seeming greatly to enjoy one another’s company. They had never spoken again of the possible marriage of the young girl, nor of the suitors who offered themselves.

The governor had brought George home to lunch one morning. Madame Walter was called away immediately after the repast to see one of the tradesmen, and the young fellow said to Susan: “Let us go and feed the goldfish.”

They each took a piece of crumb of bread from the table and went into the conservatory. All along the marble brim cushions were left lying on the ground, so that one could kneel down round the basin, so as to be nearer the fish. They each took one of these, side by side, and bending over the water, began to throw in pellets of bread rolled between the fingers. The fish, as soon as they caught sight of them, flocked round, wagging their tails, waving their fins, rolling their great projecting eyes, turning round, diving to catch the bait as it sank, and coming up at once to ask for more. They had a funny action of the mouth, sudden and rapid movements, a strangely monstrous appearance, and against the sand of the bottom stood out a bright red, passing like flames through the transparent water, or showing, as soon as they halted, the blue edging to their scales. George and Susan saw their own faces looking up in the water, and smiled at them. All at once he said in a low voice: “It is not kind to hide things from me, Susan.”

“What do you mean, Pretty-boy?” asked she.

“Don’t you remember, what you promised me here on the evening of the fête?”

“No.”

“To consult me every time your hand was asked for.”

“Well?”

“Well, it has been asked for.”

“By whom?”

“You know very well.”

“No. I swear to you.”

“Yes, you do. That great fop, the Marquis de Cazolles.”

“He is not a fop, in the first place.”

“It may be so, but he is stupid, ruined by play, and worn out by dissipation. It is really a nice match for you, so pretty, so fresh, and so intelligent.”

She inquired, smiling: “What have you against him?”

“I, nothing.”

“Yes, you have. He is not all that you say.”

“Nonsense. He is a fool and an intriguer.”

She turned round somewhat, leaving off looking into the water, and said: “Come, what is the matter with you?”

He said, as though a secret was being wrenched from the bottom of his heart: “I — I — am jealous of him.”

She was slightly astonished, saying: “You?”

“Yes, I.”

“Why so?”

“Because I am in love with you, and you know it very well, you naughty girl.”

She said, in a severe tone: “You are mad, Pretty-boy.”

He replied; “I know very well that I am mad. Ought I to have admitted that — I, a married man, to you, a young girl? I am more than mad, I am guilty. I have no possible hope, and the thought of that drives me out of my senses. And when I hear it said that you are going to be married, I have fits of rage enough to kill someone. You must forgive me this, Susan."

He was silent. The whole of the fish, to whom bread was no longer being thrown, were motionless, drawn up in line like English soldiers, and looking at the bent heads of those two who were no longer troubling themselves about them. The young girl murmured, half sadly, half gayly: "It is a pity that you are married. What would you? Nothing can be done. It is settled."

He turned suddenly towards her, and said right in her face: "If I were free, would you marry me?"

She replied, in a tone of sincerity: "Yes, Pretty-boy, I would marry you, for you please me far better than any of the others."

He rose, and stammered: "Thanks, thanks; do not say 'yes' to anyone yet, I beg of you; wait a little longer, I entreat you. Will you promise me this much?"

She murmured, somewhat uneasily, and without understanding what he wanted: "Yes, I promise you."

Du Roy threw the lump of bread he still held in his hand into the water, and fled as though he had lost his head, without wishing her good-bye. All the fish rushed eagerly at this lump of crumb, which floated, not having been kneaded in the fingers, and nibbled it with greedy mouths. They dragged it away to the other end of the basin, and forming a moving cluster, a kind of animated and twisting flower, a live flower fallen into the water head downwards.

Susan, surprised and uneasy, got up and returned slowly to the dining-room. The journalist had left.

He came home very calm, and as Madeleine was writing letters, said to her: "Are you going to dine at the Walters' on Friday? I am going."

She hesitated, and replied: "No. I do not feel very well. I would rather stay at home."

He remarked: "Just as you like."

Then he took his hat and went out again at once. For some time past he had been keeping watch over her, following her about, knowing all her movements. The hour he had been awaiting was at length at hand. He had not been deceived by the tone in which she had said: "I would rather stay at home."

He was very amiable towards her during the next few days. He even appeared lively, which was not usual, and she said: “You are growing quite nice again.”

He dressed early on the Friday, in order to make some calls before going to the governor’s, he said. He started just before six, after kissing his wife, and went and took a cab at the Place Notre Dame de Lorette. He said to the driver: “Pull up in front of No. 17, Rue Fontaine, and stay there till I tell you to go on again. Then drive to the Cock Pheasant restaurant in the Rue Lafayette.”

The cab started at a slow trot, and Du Roy drew down the blinds. As soon as he was opposite the door he did not take his eyes off it. After waiting ten minutes he saw Madeleine come out and go in the direction of the outer boulevards. As soon as she had got far enough off he put his head through the window, and said to the driver: “Go on.” The cab started again, and landed him in front of the Cock Pheasant, a well-known middle-class restaurant. George went into the main dining-room and ate slowly, looking at his watch from time to time. At half-past seven, when he had finished his coffee, drank two liqueurs of brandy, and slowly smoked a good cigar, he went out, hailed another cab that was going by empty, and was driven to the Rue La Rochefoucauld. He ascended without making any inquiry of the doorkeeper, to the third story of the house he had told the man to drive to, and when a servant opened the door to him, said: “Monsieur Guibert de Lorme is at home, is he not?”

“Yes sir.”

He was ushered into the drawing-room, where he waited for a few minutes. Then a gentleman came in, tall, and with a military bearing, gray-haired though still young, and wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor. Du Roy bowed, and said: “As I foresaw, Mr. Commissionary, my wife is now dining with her lover in the furnished rooms they have hired in the Rue des Martyrs.”

The commissary of police bowed, saying: “I am at your service, sir.”

George continued: “You have until nine o’clock, have you not? That limit of time passed, you can no longer enter a private dwelling to prove adultery.”

“No, sir; seven o’clock in winter, nine o’clock from the 31st March. It is the 5th of April, so we have till nine o’clock.

"Very well, Mr. Commissionary, I have a cab downstairs; we can take the officers who will accompany you, and wait a little before the door. The later we arrive the best chance we have of catching them in the act."

"As you like, sir."

The commissary left the room, and then returned with an overcoat, hiding his tri-colored sash. He drew back to let Du Roy pass out first. But the journalist, who was preoccupied, declined to do so, and kept saying: "After you, sir, after you."

The commissary said: "Go first, sir, I am at home."

George bowed, and passed out. They went first to the police office to pick up three officers in plain clothes who were awaiting them, for George had given notice during the day that the surprise would take place that evening. One of the men got on the box beside the driver. The other two entered the cab, which reached the Rue des Martyrs. Du Roy said: "I have a plan of the rooms. They are on the second floor. We shall first find a little ante-room, then a dining-room, then the bedroom. The three rooms open into one another. There is no way out to facilitate flight. There is a locksmith a little further on. He is holding himself in readiness to be called upon by you."

When they arrived opposite the house it was only a quarter past eight, and they waited in silence for more than twenty minutes. But when he saw the three quarters about to strike, George said: "Let us start now."

They went up the stairs without troubling themselves about the doorkeeper, who, indeed, did not notice them. One of the officers remained in the street to keep watch on the front door. The four men stopped at the second floor, and George put his ear to the door and then looked through the keyhole. He neither heard nor saw anything. He rang the bell.

The commissary said to the officers: "You will remain in readiness till called on."

And they waited. At the end of two or three minutes George again pulled the bell several times in succession. They noted a noise from the further end of the rooms, and then a slight step approached. Someone was coming to spy who was there. The journalist then rapped smartly on the panel of the door. A voice, a woman's voice, that an attempt was evidently being made to disguise asked: "Who is there?"

The commissary replied: "Open, in the name of the law."

The voice repeated: "Who are you?"

"I am the commissary of police. Open the door, or I will have it broken in."

The voice went on: "What do you want?"

Du Roy said: "It is I. It is useless to seek to escape."

The light steps, the tread of bare feet, was heard to withdraw, and then in a few seconds to return.

George said: "If you won't open, we will break in the door."

He grasped the handle, and pushed slowly with his shoulder. As there was no longer any reply, he suddenly gave such a violent and vigorous shock that the old lock gave way. The screws were torn out of the wood, and he almost fell over Madeleine, who was standing in the ante-room, clad in a chemise and petticoat, her hair down, her legs bare, and a candle in her hand.

He exclaimed: "It is she, we have them," and darted forward into the rooms. The commissary, having taken off his hat, followed him, and the startled woman came after, lighting the way. They crossed a drawing-room, the uncleaned table of which displayed the remnants of a repast — empty champagne bottles, an open pot of fatted goose liver, the body of a fowl, and some half-eaten bits of bread. Two plates piled on the sideboard were piled with oyster shells.

The bedroom seemed disordered, as though by a struggle. A dress was thrown over a chair, a pair of trousers hung astride the arm of another. Four boots, two large and two small, lay on their sides at the foot of the bed. It was the room of a house let out in furnished lodgings, with commonplace furniture, filled with that hateful and sickening smell of all such places, the odor of all the people who had slept or lived there a day or six months. A plate of cakes, a bottle of chartreuse, and two liqueur glasses, still half full, encumbered the mantel-shelf. The upper part of the bronze clock was hidden by a man's hat.

The commissary turned round sharply, and looking Madeleine straight in the face, said: "You are Madame Claire Madeleine Du Roy, wife of Monsieur Prosper George Du Roy, journalist, here present?"

She uttered in a choking voice: "Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here?" She did not answer.

The commissary went on: "What are you doing here? I find you away from home, almost undressed, in furnished apartments. What did you come here for?" He waited for a few moments. Then, as she still remained silent, he continued: “Since you will not confess, madame, I shall be obliged to verify the state of things.”

In the bed could be seen the outline of a form hidden beneath the clothes. The commissary approached and said: “Sir.”

The man in bed did not stir. He seemed to have his back turned, and his head buried under a pillow. The commissary touched what seemed to be his shoulder, and said: “Sir, do not, I beg of you, force me to take action.”

But the form still remained as motionless as a corpse. Du Roy, who had advanced quickly, seized the bed-clothes, pulled them down, and tearing away the pillow, revealed the pale face of Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu. He bent over him, and, quivering with the desire to seize him by the throat and strangle him, said, between his clenched teeth: “Have at least the courage of your infamy.”

The commissary again asked: “Who are you?”

The bewildered lover not replying, he continued: “I am a commissary of police, and I summon you to tell me your name.”

George, who was quivering with brutal wrath, shouted: “Answer, you coward, or I will tell your name myself.”

Then the man in the bed stammered: “Mr. Commissary, you ought not to allow me to be insulted by this person. Is it with you or with him that I have to do? Is it to you or to him that I have to answer?”

His mouth seemed to be dried up as he spoke.

The commissary replied: “With me, sir; with me alone. I ask you who you are?”

The other was silent. He held the sheet close up to his neck, and rolled his startled eyes. His little, curled-up moustache showed up black upon his blanched face.

The commissary continued: “You will not answer, eh? Then I shall be forced to arrest you. In any case, get up. I will question you when you are dressed.”

The body wriggled in the bed, and the head murmured: “But I cannot, before you.”

The commissary asked: “Why not?”

The other stammered: “Because I am — I am — quite naked.”

Du Roy began to chuckle sneeringly, and picking up a shirt that had fallen onto the floor, threw it onto the bed, exclaiming: “Come, get up.

Since you have undressed in my wife's presence, you can very well dress in mine."

Then he turned his back, and returned towards the fireplace. Madeleine had recovered all her coolness, and seeing that all was lost, was ready to dare anything. Her eyes glittered with bravado, and twisting up a piece of paper she lit, as though for a reception, the ten candles in the ugly candelabra, placed at the corners of the mantel-shelf. Then, leaning against this, and holding out backwards to the dying fire one of her bare feet which she lifted up behind the petticoat, scarcely sticking to her hips, she took a cigarette from a pink paper case, lit it, and began to smoke. The commissary had returned towards her, pending that her accomplice got up.

She inquired insolently: "Do you often have such jobs as these, sir?"

He replied gravely: "As seldom as possible, madame."

She smiled in his face, saying: "I congratulate you; it is dirty work."

She affected not to look at or even to see her husband.

But the gentleman in the bed was dressing. He had put on his trousers, pulled on his boots, and now approached putting on his waistcoat. The commissary turned towards him, saying: "Now, sir, will you tell me who you are?"

He made no reply, and the official said: "I find myself obliged to arrest you."

Then the man exclaimed suddenly: "Do not lay hands on me. My person is inviolable."

Du Roy darted towards him as though to throw him down, and growled in his face: "Caught in the act, in the act. I can have you arrested if I choose; yes, I can." Then, in a ringing tone, he added: "This man is Laroche-Mathieu, Minister of Foreign Affairs."

The commissary drew back, stupefied, and stammered: "Really, sir, will you tell me who you are?"

The other had made up his mind, and said in forcible tones: "For once that scoundrel has not lied. I am, indeed, Laroche-Mathieu, the minister." Then, holding out his hand towards George's chest, in which a little bit of red ribbon showed itself, he added: "And that rascal wears on his coat the cross of honor which I gave him."

Du Roy had become livid. With a rapid movement he tore the bit of ribbon from his buttonhole, and, throwing it into the fireplace, exclaimed: "That is all that is fit for a decoration coming from a swine like you."

They were quite close, face to face, exasperated, their fists clenched, the one lean, with a flowing moustache, the other stout, with a twisted one. The commissary stepped rapidly between the pair, and pushing them apart with his hands, observed: “Gentlemen, you are forgetting yourselves; you are lacking in self-respect.”

They became quiet and turned on their heels. Madeleine, motionless, was still smoking in silence.

The police official resumed: “Sir, I have found you alone with Madame Du Roy here, you in bed, she almost naked, with your clothes scattered about the room. This is legal evidence of adultery. You cannot deny this evidence. What have you to say for yourself?”

Laroche-Mathieu murmured: “I have nothing to say; do your duty.”

The commissary addressed himself to Madeleine: “Do you admit, madame, that this gentleman is your lover?”

She said with a certain swagger: “I do not deny it; he is my lover.”

“That is enough.”

The commissary made some notes as to the condition and arrangement of the rooms. As he was finishing writing, the minister, who had finished dressing, and was waiting with his greatcoat over his arm and his hat in his hand, said: “Have you still need of me, sir? What am I to do? Can I withdraw?”

Du Roy turned towards him, and smiling insolently, said: “Why so? We have finished. You can go to bed again, sir; we will leave you alone.” And placing a finger on the official’s arm, he continued: “Let us retire, Mr. Commissary, we have nothing more to do in this place.”

Somewhat surprised, the commissary followed, but on the threshold of the room George stopped to allow him to pass. The other declined, out of politeness. Du Roy persisted, saying: “Pass first, sir.”

“After you, sir,” replied the commissary.

The journalist bowed, and in a tone of ironical politeness, said: “It is your turn, sir; I am almost at home here.”

Then he softly reclosed the door with an air of discretion.

An hour later George Du Roy entered the offices of the *Vie Francaise*. Monsieur Walter was already there, for he continued to manage and supervise with solicitude his paper, which had enormously increased in circulation, and greatly helped the schemes of his bank. The manager raised his head and said: “Ah! here you are. You look very strange. Why did you not come to dinner with us? What have you been up to?”

The young fellow, sure of his effect, said, emphasizing every word: “I have just upset the Minister of Foreign Affairs.”

The other thought he was joking, and said: “Upset what?”

“I am going to turn out the Cabinet. That is all. It is quite time to get rid of that rubbish.”

The old man thought that his leader-writer must be drunk. He murmured: “Come, you are talking nonsense.”

“Not at all. I have just caught Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu committing adultery with my wife. The commissary of police has verified the fact. The minister is done for.”

Walter, amazed, pushed his spectacles right back on his forehead, and said: “You are not joking?”

“Not at all. I am even going to write an article on it.”

“But what do you want to do?”

“To upset that scoundrel, that wretch, that open evil-doer.” George placed his hat on an armchair, and added: “Woe to those who cross my path. I never forgive.”

The manager still hesitated at understanding matters. He murmured: “But — your wife?”

“My application for a divorce will be lodged to-morrow morning. I shall send her back to the departed Forestier.”

“You mean to get a divorce?”

“Yes. I was ridiculous. But I had to play the idiot in order to catch them. That’s done. I am master of the situation.”

Monsieur Walter could not get over it, and watched Du Roy with startling eyes, thinking: “Hang it, here is a fellow to be looked after.”

George went on: “I am now free. I have some money. I shall offer myself as a candidate at the October elections for my native place, where I am well known. I could not take a position or make myself respected with that woman, who was suspected by every one. She had caught me like a fool, humbugged and ensnared me. But since I became alive to her little game I kept watch on her, the slut.” He began to laugh, and added: “It was poor Forestier who was cuckold, a cuckold without imagining it, confiding and tranquil. Now I am free from the leprosy he left me. My hands are free.

Now I shall get on." He had seated himself astride a chair, and repeated, as though thinking aloud, "I shall get on."

And Daddy Walter, still looking at him with unveiled eyes, his spectacles remaining pushed up on his forehead, said to himself: "Yes, he will get on, the rascal."

George rose. "I am going to write the article. It must be done discreetly. But you know it will be terrible for the minister. He has gone to smash. He cannot be picked up again. The *Vie Francaise* has no longer any interest to spare him."

The old fellow hesitated for a few moments, and then made up his mind. "Do so," said he; "so much the worse for those who get into such messes."

XVII

Three months had elapsed. Du Roy's divorce had just been granted. His wife had resumed the name of Forestier, and, as the Walters were to leave on the 15th of July for Trouville, it was decided that he and they should spend a day in the country together before they started. A Thursday was selected, and they started at nine in the morning in a large traveling landau with six places, drawn by four horses with postilions. They were going to lunch at the Pavilion Henri-Quatre at Saint Germain. Pretty-boy had asked to be the only man of the party, for he could not endure the presence of the Marquis de Cazolles. But at the last moment it was decided that the Count de Latour-Yvelin should be called for on the way. He had been told the day before.

The carriage passed up the Avenue of the Champs Elyseés at a swinging trot, and then traversed the Bois de Boulogne. It was splendid summer weather, not too warm. The swallows traced long sweeping lines across the blue sky that one fancied one could still see after they had passed. The three ladies occupied the back seat, the mother between her daughters, and the men were with their backs to the horses, Walter between the two guests. They crossed the Seine, skirted Mount Valerien, and gained Bougival in order to follow the river as far as Le Pecq.

The Count de Latour-Yvelin, a man advancing towards middle-age, with long, light whiskers, gazed tenderly at Rose. They had been engaged for a month. George, who was very pale, often looked at Susan, who was pale too. Their eyes often met, and seemed to concert something, to understand one another, to secretly exchange a thought, and then to flee one another. Madame Walter was quiet and happy.

The lunch was a long one. Before starting back for Paris, George suggested a turn on the terrace. They stopped at first to admire the view. All ranged themselves in a line along the parapet, and went into ecstasies over the far-stretching horizon. The Seine at the foot of a long hill flowed towards Maisons-Lafitte like an immense serpent stretched in the herbage. To the right, on the summit of the slope, the aqueduct of Marly showed against the skyline its outline, resembling that of a gigantic, long-legged caterpillar, and Marly was lost beneath it in a thick cluster of trees. On the immense plain extending in front of them, villages could be seen dotted. The pieces of water at Le Vesinet showed like clear spots amidst the thin foliage of the little forest. To the left, away in the distance, the pointed steeple of Sastrouville could be seen.

Walter said: “Such a panorama is not to be found anywhere in the world. There is not one to match it in Switzerland.”

Then they began to walk on gently, to have a stroll and enjoy the prospect. George and Susan remained behind. As soon as they were a few paces off, he said to her in a low and restrained voice: “Susan, I adore you. I love you to madness.”

She murmured: “So do I you, Pretty-boy.”

He went on: “If I do not have you for my wife, I shall leave Paris and this country.”

She replied: “Ask Papa for my hand. Perhaps he will consent.”

He made a gesture of impatience. “No, I tell you for the twentieth time that is useless. The door of your house would be closed to me. I should be dismissed from the paper, and we should not be able even to see one another. That is a pretty result, at which I am sure to arrive by a formal demand for you. They have promised you to the Marquis de Cazolles. They hope that you will end by saying ‘yes,’ and they are waiting for that.”

She asked: “What is to be done?”

He hesitated, glancing at her, sidelong fashion. “Do you love me enough to run a risk?”

She answered resolutely: “Yes.”

“A great risk?”

“Yes.”

“The greatest of risks?”

“Yes.”

“Have you the courage to set your father and mother at defiance?”

“Yes.”

“Really now?”

“Yes.”

“Very well, there is one way and only one. The thing must come from you and not from me. You are a spoilt child; they let you say whatever you like, and they will not be too much astonished at an act of daring the more on your part. Listen, then. This evening, on reaching home, you must go to your mamma first, your mamma alone, and tell her you want to marry me. She will be greatly moved and very angry— “

Susan interrupted him with: “Oh, mamma will agree.”

He went on quickly: “No, you do not know her. She will be more vexed and angrier than your father. You will see how she will refuse. But you must be firm, you must not give way, you must repeat that you want to marry me, and no one else. Will you do this?”

“I will.”

“On leaving your mother you must tell your father the same thing in a very serious and decided manner.”

“Yes, yes; and then?”

“And then it is that matters become serious. If you are determined, very determined — very, very determined to be my wife, my dear, dear little Susan — I will — run away with you.”

She experienced a joyful shock, and almost clapped her hands. “Oh! how delightful. You will run away with me. When will you run away with me?”

All the old poetry of nocturnal elopements, post-chaises, country inns; all the charming adventures told in books, flashed through her mind, like an enchanting dream about to be realized. She repeated: “When will you run away with me?”

He replied, in low tones: “This evening — to-night.”

She asked, quivering: “And where shall we go to?”

“That is my secret. Reflect on what you are doing. Remember that after such a flight you can only be my wife. It is the only way, but is — it is very dangerous — for you.”

She declared: “I have made up my mind; where shall I rejoin you?”

“Can you get out of the hotel alone?”

“Yes. I know how to undo the little door.”

“Well, when the doorkeeper has gone to bed, towards midnight, come and meet me on the Place de la Concorde. You will find me in a cab drawn up in front of the Ministry of Marine.”

“I will come.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

He took her hand and pressed it. “Oh! how I love you. How good and brave you are! So you don’t want to marry Monsieur de Cazolles?”

“Oh! no.”

“Your father was very angry when you said no?”

“I should think so. He wanted to send me back to the convent.”

“You see that it is necessary to be energetic.”

“I will be so.”

She looked at the vast horizon, her head full of the idea of being ran off with. She would go further than that with him. She would be ran away with. She was proud of it. She scarcely thought of her reputation — of what shame might befall her. Was she aware of it? Did she even suspect it?

Madame Walter, turning round, exclaimed: “Come along, little one. What are you doing with Pretty-boy?”

They rejoined the others and spoke of the seaside, where they would soon be. Then they returned home by way of Chatou, in order not to go over the same road twice. George no longer spoke. He reflected. If the little girl had a little courage, he was going to succeed at last. For three months he had been enveloping her in the irresistible net of his love. He was seducing, captivating, conquering her. He had made himself loved by her, as he knew how to make himself loved. He had captured her childish soul without difficulty. He had at first obtained of her that she should refuse Monsieur de Cazolles. He had just obtained that she would fly with him. For there was no other way. Madame Walter, he well understood, would never agree to give him her daughter. She still loved him; she would always love him with unmanageable violence. He restrained her by his studied coldness; but he felt that she was eaten up by hungry and impotent passion. He could never bend her. She would never allow him to have Susan. But once he had the girl away he would deal on a level footing with her father. Thinking of all this, he replied by broken phrases to the remarks addressed to him, and which he did not hear. He only seemed to come to himself when they returned to Paris.

Susan, too, was thinking, and the bells of the four horses rang in her ears, making her see endless miles of highway under eternal moonlight, gloomy forests traversed, wayside inns, and the hurry of the hostlers to change horses, for every one guesses that they are pursued.

When the landau entered the court-yard of the mansion, they wanted to keep George to dinner. He refused, and went home. After having eaten a little, he went through his papers as if about to start on a long journey. He burnt some compromising letters, hid others, and wrote to some friends. From time to time he looked at the clock, thinking: “Things must be getting warm there." And a sense of uneasiness gnawed at his heart. Suppose he was going to fail? But what could he fear? He could always get out of it. Yet it was a big game he was playing that evening.

He went out towards eleven o'clock, wandered about some time, took a cab, and had it drawn up in the Place de la Concorde, by the Ministry of Marine. From time to time he struck a match to see the time by his watch. When he saw midnight approaching, his impatience became feverish. Every moment he thrust his head out of the window to look. A distant clock struck twelve, then another nearer, then two together, then a last one, very far away. When the latter had ceased to sound, he thought: "It is all over. It is a failure. She won't come." He had made up his mind, however, to wait till daylight. In these matters one must be patient.

He heard the quarter strike, then the half-hour, then the quarter to, and all the clocks repeated "one," as they had announced midnight. He no longer expected her; he was merely remaining, racking his brain to divine what could have happened. All at once a woman's head was passed through the window, and asked: "Are you there, Pretty-boy?"

He started, almost choked with emotion, "Is that you, Susan?"

"Yes, it is I."

He could not manage to turn the handle quickly enough, and repeated: "Ah! it is you, it is you; come inside."

She came in and fell against him. He said, "Go on," to the driver, and the cab started.

She gasped, without saying a word.

He asked: "Well, how did it go off?"

She murmured, almost fainting: "Oh! it was terrible, above all with mamma."

He was uneasy and quivering. "Your mamma. What did she say? Tell me."

"Oh! it was awful. I went into her room and told her my little story that I had carefully prepared. She grew pale, and then she cried: 'Never, never.' I cried, I grew angry. I vowed I would marry no one but you. I thought that she was going to strike me. She went on just as if she were mad; she declared that I should be sent back to the convent the next day. I had never seen her like that — never. Then papa came in, hearing her shouting all her nonsense. He was not so angry as she was, but he declared that you were not a good enough match. As they had put me in a rage, too, I shouted louder than they did. And papa told me to leave the room, with a melodramatic air that did not suit him at all. This is what decided me to run off with you. Here I am. Where are we going to?”

He had passed his arm gently round her and was listening with all his ears, his heart throbbing, and a ravenous hatred awakening within him against these people. But he had got their daughter. They should just see.

He answered: “It is too late to catch a train, so this cab will take us to Sevres, where we shall pass the night. To-morrow we shall start for La Roche-Guyon. It is a pretty village on the banks of the Seine, between Nantes and Bonnieres.”

She murmured: “But I have no clothes. I have nothing.”

He smiled carelessly: “Bah! we will arrange all that there.”

The cab rolled along the street. George took one of the young girl’s hands and began to kiss it slowly and with respect. He scarcely knew what to say to her, being scarcely accustomed to platonic love-making. But all at once he thought he noted that she was crying. He inquired, with alarm: “What is the matter with you, darling?”

She replied in tearful tones: “Poor mamma, she will not be able to sleep if she has found out my departure.”

Her mother, indeed, was not asleep.

As soon as Susan had left the room, Madame Walter remained face to face with her husband. She asked, bewildered and cast down: “Good heavens! What is the meaning of this?”

Walter exclaimed furiously: “It means that that schemer has bewitched her. It is he who made her refuse Cazolles. He thinks her dowry worth trying for.” He began to walk angrily up and down the room, and went on: “You were always luring him here, too, yourself; you flattered him, you cajoled him, you could not cosset him enough. It was Pretty-boy here, Pretty-boy there, from morning till night, and this is the return for it.”

She murmured, livid: “I — I lured him?”

He shouted in her face: “Yes, you. You were all mad over him — Madame de Marelle, Susan, and the rest. Do you think I did not see that you could not pass a couple of days without having him here?”

She drew herself up tragically: “I will not allow you to speak to me like that. You forget that I was not brought up like you, behind a counter.”

He stood for a moment stupefied, and then uttered a furious “Damn it all!” and rushed out, slamming the door after him. As soon as she was alone she went instinctively to the glass to see if anything was changed in her, so impossible and monstrous did what had happened appear. Susan in love with Pretty-boy, and Pretty-boy wanting to marry Susan! No, she was mistaken; it was not true. The girl had had a very natural fancy for this good-looking fellow; she had hoped that they would give him her for a husband, and had made her little scene because she wanted to have her own way. But he — he could not be an accomplice in that. She reflected, disturbed, as one in presence of great catastrophes. No, Pretty-boy could know nothing of Susan's prank.

She thought for a long time over the possible innocence or perfidy of this man. What a scoundrel, if he had prepared the blow! And what would happen! What dangers and tortures she foresaw. If he knew nothing, all could yet be arranged. They would travel about with Susan for six months, and it would be all over. But how could she meet him herself afterwards? For she still loved him. This passion had entered into her being like those arrowheads that cannot be withdrawn. To live without him was impossible. She might as well die.

Her thoughts wandered amidst these agonies and uncertainties. A pain began in her head; her ideas became painful and disturbed. She worried herself by trying to work things out; grew mad at not knowing. She looked at the clock; it was past one. She said to herself: "I cannot remain like this, I shall go mad. I must know. I will wake up Susan and question her."

She went barefooted, in order not to make a noise, and with a candle in her hand, towards her daughter's room. She opened the door softly, went in, and looked at the bed. She did not comprehend matters at first, and thought that the girl might still be arguing with her father. But all at once a horrible suspicion crossed her mind, and she rushed to her husband's room. She reached it in a bound, blanched and panting. He was in bed reading.

He asked, startled: "Well, what is it? What is the matter with you?"

She stammered: "Have you seen Susan?"

"I? No. Why?"

"She has — she has — gone! She is not in her room."

He sprang onto the carpet, thrust his feet into his slippers, and, with his shirt tails floating in the air, rushed in turn to his daughter's room. As soon as he saw it, he no longer retained any doubt. She had fled. He dropped into a chair and placed his lamp on the ground in front of him.

His wife had rejoined him, and stammered: "Well?"

He had no longer the strength to reply; he was no longer enraged, he only groaned: "It is done; he has got her. We are done for."

She did not understand, and said: "What do you mean? done for?"

"Yes, by Jove! He will certainly marry her now."

She gave a cry like that of a wild beast: "He, never! You must be mad!"

He replied, sadly: "It is no use howling. He has run away with her, he has dishonored her. The best thing is to give her to him. By setting to work in the right way no one will be aware of this escapade."

She repeated, shaken by terrible emotion: "Never, never; he shall never have Susan. I will never consent."

Walter murmured, dejectedly: "But he has got her. It is done. And he will keep her and hide her as long as we do not yield. So, to avoid scandal, we must give in at once."

His wife, torn by pangs she could not acknowledge, repeated: "No, no, I will never consent."

He said, growing impatient: "But there is no disputing about it. It must be done. Ah, the rascal, how he has done us! He is a sharp one. All the same, we might have made a far better choice as regards position, but not as regards intelligence and prospects. He will be a deputy and a minister."

Madame Walter declared, with savage energy: "I will never allow him to marry Susan. You understand — never."

He ended by getting angry and taking up, as a practical man, the cudgels on behalf of Pretty-boy. "Hold your tongue," said he. "I tell you again that it must be so; it absolutely must. And who knows? Perhaps we shall not regret it. With men of that stamp one never knows what may happen. You saw how he overthrew in three articles that fool of a Laroche-Mathieu, and how he did it with dignity, which was infernally difficult in his position as the husband. At all events, we shall see. It always comes to this, that we are nailed. We cannot get out of it."

She felt a longing to scream, to roll on the ground, to tear her hair out. She said at length, in exasperated tones: "He shall not have her. I won't have it."

Walter rose, picked up his lamp, and remarked: "There, you are stupid, just like all women. You never do anything except from passion. You do not know how to bend yourself to circumstances. You are stupid. I will tell you that he shall marry her. It must be."

He went out, shuffling along in his slippers. He traversed — a comical phantom in his nightshirt — the broad corridor of the huge slumbering house, and noiselessly re-entered his room.

Madame Walter remained standing, torn by intolerable grief. She did not yet quite understand it. She was only conscious of suffering. Then it seemed to her that she could not remain there motionless till daylight. She felt within her a violent necessity of fleeing, of running away, of seeking help, of being succored. She sought whom she could summon to her. What man? She could not find one. A priest; yes, a priest! She would throw herself at his feet, acknowledge everything, confess her fault and her despair. He would understand that this wretch must not marry Susan, and would prevent it. She must have a priest at once. But where could she find one? Whither could she go? Yet she could not remain like that.

Then there passed before her eyes, like a vision, the calm figure of Jesus walking on the waters. She saw it as she saw it in the picture. So he was calling her. He was saying: “Come to me; come and kneel at my feet. I will console you, and inspire you with what should be done.”

She took her candle, left the room, and went downstairs to the conservatory. The picture of Jesus was right at the end of it in a small drawing-room, shut off by a glass door, in order that the dampness of the soil should not damage the canvas. It formed a kind of chapel in a forest of strange trees. When Madame Walter entered the winter garden, never having seen it before save full of light, she was struck by its obscure profundity. The dense plants of the tropics made the atmosphere thick with their heavy breath; and the doors no longer being open, the air of this strange wood, enclosed beneath a glass roof, entered the chest with difficulty; intoxicated, caused pleasure and pain, and imparted a confused sensation of enervation, pleasure, and death. The poor woman walked slowly, oppressed by the shadows, amidst which appeared, by the flickering light of her candle, extravagant plants, recalling monsters, living creatures, hideous deformities. All at once she caught sight of the picture of Christ. She opened the door separating her from it, and fell on her knees. She prayed to him, wildly, at first, stammering forth words of true, passionate, and despairing invocations. Then, the ardor of her appeal slackening, she raised her eyes towards him, and was struck with anguish. He resembled Pretty-boy so strongly, in the trembling light of this solitary candle, lighting the picture from below, that it was no longer Christ — it was her lover who was looking at her. They were his eyes, his forehead, the expression of his face, his cold and haughty air.

She stammered: “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!” and the name “George” rose to her lips. All at once she thought that at that very moment, perhaps, George had her daughter. He was alone with her somewhere. He with Susan! She repeated: “Jesus, Jesus!” but she was thinking of them — her daughter and her lover. They were alone in a room, and at night. She saw them. She saw them so plainly that they rose up before her in place of the picture. They were smiling at one another. They were embracing. She rose to go towards them, to take her daughter by the hair and tear her from his clasp. She would seize her by the throat and strangle her, this daughter whom she hated — this daughter who was joining herself to this man. She touched her; her hands encountered the canvas; she was pressing the feet of Christ. She uttered a loud cry and fell on her back. Her candle, overturned, went out.

What took place then? She dreamed for a long time wild, frightful dreams. George and Susan continually passed before her eyes, with Christ blessing their horrible loves. She felt vaguely that she was not in her room. She wished to rise and flee; she could not. A torpor had seized upon her, which fettered her limbs, and only left her mind on the alert, tortured by frightful and fantastic visions, lost in an unhealthy dream — the strange and sometimes fatal dream engendered in human minds by the soporific plants of the tropics, with their strange and oppressive perfumes.

The next morning Madame Walter was found stretched out senseless, almost asphyxiated before “Jesus Walking on the Waters.” She was so ill that her life was feared for. She only fully recovered the use of her senses the following day. Then she began to weep. The disappearance of Susan was explained to the servants as due to her being suddenly sent back to the convent. And Monsieur Walter replied to a long letter of Du Roy by granting him his daughter’s hand.

Pretty-boy had posted this letter at the moment of leaving Paris, for he had prepared it in advance the evening of his departure. He said in it, in respectful terms, that he had long loved the young girl; that there had never been any agreement between them; but that finding her come freely to him to say, “I wish to be your wife,” he considered himself authorized in keeping her, even in hiding her, until he had obtained an answer from her parents, whose legal power had for him less weight than the wish of his betrothed. He demanded that Monsieur Walter should reply, “post restante,” a friend being charged to forward the letter to him.

When he had obtained what he wished he brought back Susan to Paris, and sent her on to her parents, abstaining himself from appearing for some little time.

They had spent six days on the banks of the Seine at La Roche-Guyon.

The young girl had never enjoyed herself so much. She had played at pastoral life. As he passed her off as his sister, they lived in a free and chaste intimacy — a kind of loving friendship. He thought it a clever stroke to respect her. On the day after their arrival she had purchased some linen and some country-girl’s clothes, and set to work fishing, with a huge straw hat, ornamented with wild flowers, on her head. She thought the country there delightful. There was an old tower and an old chateau, in which beautiful tapestry was shown.

George, dressed in a boating jersey, bought ready-made from a local tradesman, escorted Susan, now on foot along the banks of the river, now in a boat. They kissed at every moment, she in all innocence, and he ready to succumb to temptation. But he was able to restrain himself; and when he said to her, “We will go back to Paris to-morrow; your father has granted me your hand,” she murmured simply, “Already? It was so nice being your wife here.”

XVIII

It was dark in the little suite of rooms in the Rue de Constantinople; for George Du Roy and Clotilde de Marelle, having met at the door, had gone in at once, and she had said to him, without giving him time to open the Venetian blinds: “So you are going to marry Susan Walter?”

He admitted it quietly, and added: “Did not you know it?”

She exclaimed, standing before him, furious and indignant:

“You are going to marry Susan Walter? That is too much of a good thing. For three months you have been humbugging in order to hide that from me. Everyone knew it but me. It was my husband who told me of it.”

Du Roy began to laugh, though somewhat confused all the same; and having placed his hat on a corner of the mantel-shelf, sat down in an armchair. She looked at him straight in the face, and said, in a low and irritated tone: “Ever since you left your wife you have been preparing this move, and you only kept me on as a mistress to fill up the interim nicely. What a rascal you are!”

He asked: “Why so? I had a wife who deceived me. I caught her, I obtained a divorce, and I am going to marry another. What could be simpler?”

She murmured, quivering: “Oh! how cunning and dangerous you are.”

He began to smile again. “By Jove! Simpletons and fools are always someone’s dupes.”

But she continued to follow out her idea: “I ought to have divined your nature from the beginning. But no, I could not believe that you could be such a blackguard as that.”

He assumed an air of dignity, saying: “I beg of you to pay attention to the words you are making use of.”

His indignation revolted her. “What? You want me to put on gloves to talk to you now. You have behaved towards me like a vagabond ever since I have known you, and you want to make out that I am not to tell you so. You deceive everyone; you take advantage of everyone; you filch money and enjoyment wherever you can, and you want me to treat you as an honest man!”

He rose, and with quivering lip, said: “Be quiet, or I will turn you out of here.”

She stammered: “Turn me out of here; turn me out of here! You will turn me out of here — you — you?” She could not speak for a moment for choking with anger, and then suddenly, as though the door of her wrath had been burst open, she broke out with: “Turn me out of here? You forget, then, that it is I who have paid for these rooms from the beginning. Ah, yes, you have certainly taken them on from time to time. But who first took them? I did. Who kept them on? I did. And you want to turn me out of here. Hold your tongue, you good-for-nothing fellow. Do you think I don’t know you robbed Madeleine of half Vaudrec’s money? Do you think I don’t know how you slept with Susan to oblige her to marry you?”

He seized her by the shoulders, and, shaking her with both hands, exclaimed: “Don’t speak of her, at any rate. I won’t have it.”

She screamed out: “You slept with her; I know you did.”

He would have accepted no matter what, but this falsehood exasperated him. The truths she had told him to his face had caused thrills of anger to run through him, but this lie respecting the young girl who was going to be his wife, awakened in the palm of his hand a furious longing to strike her.

He repeated: “Be quiet — have a care — be quiet,” and shook her as we shake a branch to make the fruit fall.

She yelled, with her hair coming down, her mouth wide open, her eyes aglow: “You slept with her!”

He let her go, and gave her such a smack on the face that she fell down beside the wall. But she turned towards him, and raising herself on her hands, once more shouted: “You slept with her!”

He rushed at her, and, holding her down, struck her as though striking a man. She left off shouting, and began to moan beneath his blows. She no longer stirred, but hid her face against the bottom of the wall and uttered plaintive cries. He left off beating her and rose up. Then he walked about the room a little to recover his coolness, and, an idea occurring to him, went into the bedroom, filled the basin with cold water, and dipped his head into it. Then he washed his hands and came back to see what she was doing, carefully wiping his fingers. She had not budged. She was still lying on the ground quietly weeping.

“Shall you have done grizzling soon?”

She did not answer. He stood in the middle of the room, feeling somewhat awkward and ashamed in the presence of the form stretched out before him. All at once he formed a resolution, and took his hat from the mantel-shelf, saying: “Good-night. Give the key to the doorkeeper when you leave. I shan’t wait for your convenience.”

He went out, closed the door, went to the doorkeeper’s, and said: “Madame is still there. She will be leaving in a few minutes. Tell the landlord that I give notice to leave at the end of September. It is the 15th of August, so I am within the limits.”

And he walked hastily away, for he had some pressing calls to make touching the purchase of the last wedding gifts.

The wedding was fixed for the 20th of October after the meeting of the Chambers. It was to take place at the Church of the Madeleine. There had been a great deal of gossip about it without anyone knowing the exact truth. Different tales were in circulation. It was whispered that an elopement had taken place, but no one was certain about anything. According to the servants, Madame Walter, who would no longer speak to her future son-in-law, had poisoned herself out of rage the very evening the match was decided on, after having taken her daughter off to a convent at midnight. She had been brought back almost dead. Certainly, she would never get over it. She had now the appearance of an old woman; her hair had become quite gray, and she had gone in for religion, taking the Sacrament every Sunday.

At the beginning of September the *Vie Francaise* announced that the Baron Du Roy de Cantel had become chief editor, Monsieur Walter retaining the title of manager. A battalion of well-known writers, reporters, political editors, art and theatrical critics, detached from old important papers by dint of monetary influence, were taken on. The old journalists, the serious and respectable ones, no longer shrugged their shoulders when speaking of the *Vie Francaise*. Rapid and complete success had wiped out the contempt of serious writers for the beginnings of this paper.

The marriage of its chief editor was what is styled a Parisian event, George Du Roy and the Walters having excited a great deal of curiosity for some time past. All the people who are written about in the papers promised themselves to be there.

The event took place on a bright autumn day.

At eight in the morning the sight of the staff of the Madeleine stretching a broad red carpet down the lofty flight of steps overlooking the Rue Royale caused passers-by to pause, and announced to the people of Paris that an important ceremony was about to take place. The clerks on the way to their offices, the work-girls, the shopmen, paused, looked, and vaguely speculated about the rich folk who spent so much money over getting spliced. Towards ten o'clock idlers began to halt. They would remain for a few minutes, hoping that perhaps it would begin at once, and then moved away. At eleven squads of police arrived and set to work almost at once to make the crowd move on, groups forming every moment. The first guests soon made their appearance — those who wanted to be well placed for seeing everything. They took the chairs bordering the main aisles. By degrees came others, ladies in rustling silks, and serious-looking gentlemen, almost all bald, walking with well-bred air, and graver than usual in this locality.

The church slowly filled. A flood of sunlight entered by the huge doorway lit up the front row of guests. In the choir, which looked somewhat gloomy, the altar, laden with tapers, shed a yellow light, pale and humble in face of that of the main entrance. People recognized one another, beckoned to one another, and gathered in groups. The men of letters, less respectful than the men in society, chatted in low tones and looked at the ladies.

Norbert de Varenne, who was looking out for an acquaintance, perceived Jacques Rival near the center of the rows of chair, and joined him. "Well," said he, "the race is for the cunning."

The other, who was not envious, replied: "So much the better for him. His career is safe." And they began to point out the people they recognized.

"Do you know what became of his wife?" asked Rival.

The poet smiled. "Yes, and no. She is living in a very retired style, I am told, in the Montmartre district. But — there is a but — I have noticed for some time past in the *Plume* some political articles terribly like those of Forestier and Du Roy. They are by Jean Le Dal, a handsome, intelligent young fellow, of the same breed as our friend George, and who has made the acquaintance of his late wife. From whence I conclude that she had, and always will have, a fancy for beginners. She is, besides, rich. Vaudrec and Laroche-Mathieu were not assiduous visitors at the house for nothing."

Rival observed: "She is not bad looking, Madeleine. Very clever and very sharp. She must be charming on terms of intimacy. But, tell me, how is it that Du Roy comes to be married in church after a divorce?"

Norbert replied: "He is married in church because, in the eyes of the Church, he was not married before."

"How so?"

"Our friend, Pretty-boy, from indifference or economy, thought the registrar sufficient when marrying Madeleine Forestier. He therefore dispensed with the ecclesiastical benediction, which constituted in the eyes of Holy Mother Church a simple state of concubinage. Consequently he comes before her to-day as a bachelor, and she lends him all her pomp and ceremony, which will cost Daddy Walter a pretty penny."

The murmur of the augmented throng swelled beneath the vaulted room. Voices could be heard speaking almost out loud. People pointed out to one another celebrities who attitudinized, pleased to be seen, and carefully maintained the bearing adopted by them towards the public accustomed to exhibit themselves thus at all such gatherings, of which they were, it seemed to them, the indispensable ornaments.

Rival resumed: "Tell me, my dear fellow, you who go so often to the governor's, is it true that Du Roy and Madame Walter no longer speak to one another?"

"Never. She did not want to give him the girl. But he had a hold, it seems, on the father through skeletons in the house — skeletons connected with the Morocco business. He threatened the old man with frightful revelations. Walter recollected the example he made of Laroche-Mathieu, and gave in at once. But the mother, obstinate like all women, swore that she would never again speak a word to her son-in-law. She looks like a statue, a statue of Vengeance, and he is very uneasy at it, although he puts a good face on the matter, for he knows how to control himself, that fellow does."

Fellow-journalists came up and shook hands with them. Bits of political conversation could be caught. Vague as the sound of a distant sea, the noise of the crowd massed in front of the church entered the doorway with the sunlight, and rose up beneath the roof, above the more discreet murmur of the choicer public gathered within it.

All at once the beadle struck the pavement thrice with the butt of his halberd. Every one turned round with a prolonged rustling of skirts and a moving of chairs. The bride appeared on her father's arm in the bright light of the doorway.

She had still the air of a doll, a charming white doll crowned with orange flowers. She stood for a few moments on the threshold, then, when she made her first step up the aisle, the organ gave forth a powerful note, announcing the entrance of the bride in loud metallic tones. She advanced with bent head, but not timidly; vaguely moved, pretty, charming, a miniature bride. The women smiled and murmured as they watched her pass. The men muttered: "Exquisite! Adorable!" Monsieur Walter walked with exaggerated dignity, somewhat pale, and with his spectacles straight on his nose. Behind them four bridesmaids, all four dressed in pink, and all four pretty, formed the court of this gem of a queen. The groomsmen, carefully chosen to match, stepped as though trained by a ballet master. Madame Walter followed them, giving her arm to the father of her other son-in-law, the Marquis de Latour-Yvelin, aged seventy-two. She did not walk, she dragged herself along, ready to faint at each forward movement. It could be felt that her feet stuck to the flagstones, that her legs refused to advance, and that her heart was beating within her breast like an animal bounding to escape. She had grown thin. Her white hair made her face appear still more blanched and her cheeks hollower. She looked straight before her in order not to see any one — in order not to recall, perhaps, that which was torturing her.

Then George Du Roy appeared with an old lady unknown. He, too, kept his head up without turning aside his eyes, fixed and stern under his slightly bent brows. His moustache seemed to bristle on his lip. He was set down as a very good-looking fellow. He had a proud bearing, a good figure, and a straight leg. He wore his clothes well, the little red ribbon of the Legion of Honor showing like a drop of blood on his dress coat.

Then came the relations, Rose with the Senator Rissolin. She had been married six weeks. The Count de Latour-Yvelin accompanied by the Viscountess de Percemur. Finally, there was a strange procession of the friends and allies of Du Roy, whom he introduced to his new family; people known in the Parisian world, who became at once the intimates, and, if need be, the distant cousins of rich parvenus; gentlemen ruined, blemished; married, in some cases, which is worse. There were Monsieur de Belvigne, the Marquis de Banjolin, the Count and Countess de Ravenel, Prince Kravalow, the Chevalier, Valréali; then some guests of Walter's, the Prince de Guerche, the Duke and the Duchess de Ferraciné, the beautiful

Marchioness des Dunes. Some of Madame Walter's relatives preserved a well-to-do, countrified appearance amidst the throng.

The organ was still playing, pouring forth through the immense building the sonorous and rhythmic accents of its glittering throats, which cry aloud unto heaven the joy or grief of mankind. The great doors were closed, and all at once it became as gloomy as if the sun had just been turned out.

Now, George was kneeling beside his wife in the choir, before the lit-up altar. The new Bishop of Tangiers, crozier in hand and miter on head, made his appearance from the vestry to join them together in the Eternal name. He put the customary questions, exchanged the rings, uttered the words that bind like chains, and addressed the newly-wedded couple a Christian allocution. He was a tall, stout man, one of those handsome prelates to whom a rounded belly lends dignity.

The sound of sobs caused several people to look round. Madame Walter was weeping, with her face buried in her hands. She had to give way. What could she have done else? But since the day when she had driven from her room her daughter on her return home, refusing to embrace her; since the day when she had said, in a low voice, to Du Roy, who had greeted her ceremoniously on again making his appearance: "You are the vilest creature I know of; never speak to me again, for I shall not answer you," she had been suffering intolerable and unappeasable tortures. She hated Susan with a keen hatred, made up of exasperated passion and heartrending jealousy, the strange jealousy of a mother and mistress — unacknowledgable, ferocious, burning like a new wound. And now a bishop was marrying them — her lover and her daughter — in a church, in presence of two thousand people, and before her. And she could say nothing. She could not hinder it. She could not cry out: "But that man belongs to me; he is my lover. This union you are blessing is infamous!"

Some ladies, touched at the sight, murmured: "How deeply the poor mother feels it!"

The bishop was declaiming: "You are among the fortunate ones of this world, among the wealthiest and most respected. You, sir, whom your talent raises above others; you who write, who teach, who advise, who guide the people, you who have a noble mission to fulfill, a noble example to set."

Du Roy listened, intoxicated with pride. A prelate of the Roman Catholic Church was speaking thus to him. And he felt behind him a crowd, an illustrious crowd, gathered on his account. It seemed to him that some power impelled and lifted him up. He was becoming one of the masters of the world — he, the son of two poor peasants at Canteleu. He saw them all at once in their humble wayside inn, at the summit of the slope overlooking the broad valley of Rouen, his father and mother, serving the country-folk of the district with drink, He had sent them five thousand francs on inheriting from the Count de Vaudrec. He would now send them fifty thousand, and they would buy a little estate. They would be satisfied and happy.

The bishop had finished his harangue. A priest, clad in a golden stole, ascended the steps of the altar, and the organ began anew to celebrate the glory of the newly-wedded couple. Now it gave forth long, loud notes, swelling like waves, so sonorous and powerful that it seemed as though they must lift and break through the roof to spend abroad into the sky. Their vibrating sound filled the church, causing body and spirit to thrill. Then all at once they grew calmer, and delicate notes floated through the air, little graceful, twittering notes, fluttering like birds; and suddenly again this coquettish music waxed once more, in turn becoming terrible in its strength and fullness, as if a grain of sand had transformed itself into a world. Then human voices rose, and were wafted over the bowed heads — Vauri and Landeck, of the Opera, were singing. The incense shed abroad a delicate odor, and the Divine Sacrifice was accomplished on the altar, to consecrate the triumph of the Baron George Du Roy!

Pretty-boy, on his knees beside Susan, had bowed his head. He felt at that moment almost a believer, almost religious; full of gratitude towards the divinity who had thus favored him, who treated him with such consideration. And without exactly knowing to whom he was addressing himself, he thanked him for his success.

When the ceremony was concluded he rose up, and giving his wife his arm, he passed into the vestry. Then began the interminable defiling past of the visitors. George, with wild joy, believed himself a king whom a nation had come to acclaim. He shook hands, stammered unmeaning remarks, bowed, and replied: “You are very good to say so.”

All at once he caught sight of Madame de Marelle, and the recollection of all the kisses that he had given her, and that she had returned; the recollection of all their caresses, of her pretty ways, of the sound of her voice, of the taste of her lips, caused the desire to have her once more for his own to shoot through his veins. She was so pretty and elegant, with her boyish air and bright eyes. George thought to himself: “What a charming mistress, all the same.”

She drew near, somewhat timid, somewhat uneasy, and held out her hand. He took it in his, and retained it. Then he felt the discreet appeal of a woman’s fingers, the soft pressure that forgives and takes possession again. And for his own part, he squeezed it, that little hand, as though to say: “I still love you; I am yours.”

Their eyes met, smiling, bright, full of love. She murmured in her pleasant voice: “I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again soon, sir.”

He replied, gayly: “Soon, madame.”

She passed on. Other people were pushing forward. The crowd flowed by like a stream. At length it grew thinner. The last guests took leave.

George took Susan’s arm in his to pass through the church again. It was full of people, for everyone had regained their seats in order to see them pass together. They went by slowly, with calm steps and uplifted heads, their eyes fixed on the wide sunlit space of the open door. He felt little quiverings run all over his skin those cold shivers caused by over-powering happiness. He saw no one. His thoughts were solely for himself. When he gained the threshold he saw the crowd collected — a dense, agitated crowd, gathered there on his account — on account of George Du Roy. The people of Paris were gazing at and envying him. Then, raising his eyes, he could see afar off, beyond the Palace de la Concorde, the Chamber of Deputies, and it seemed to him that he was going to make but one jump from the portico of the Madeleine to that of the Palais Bourbon.

He slowly descended the long flight of steps between two ranks of spectators. But he did not see them; his thoughts had now flown backwards, and before his eyes, dazzled by the brilliant sun, now floated the image of Madame de Marelle, re-adjusting before the glass the little curls on her temples, always disarranged when she rose.

MONT ORIOL

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

First published in 1887, Maupassant's third novel tells the story of Christiane Andermatt, who lives in Auvergne, in the Enval area of central France. Christiane is ill-treated by her husband, William Andermatt, who accuses her of sterility. However, she when she falls for the reckless local boy, Paul Brétigny, she later gives birth to a daughter, disproving her husband's foolish accusations. The novel teems with financial intrigue, to which is added a satire of the medical community, as well as much satirical commentary on the status of women through the character of Christiane and her pregnancy.

Enval, a commune in the Puy-de-Dôme department in Auvergne — the setting of the novel

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CHAPTER I. THE SPA

THE first bathers, the early risers, who had already been at the water, were walking slowly, in pairs or alone, under the huge trees along the stream which rushes down the gorges of Enval.

Others arrived from the village, and entered the establishment in a hurried fashion. It was a spacious building, the ground floor being reserved for thermal treatment, while the first story served as a casino, *café,* and billiard-room. Since Doctor Bonnefille had discovered in the heart of Enval the great spring, baptized by him the Bonnefille Spring, some proprietors of the country and the surrounding neighborhood, timid speculators, had decided to erect in the midst of this superb glen of Auvergne, savage and gay withal, planted with walnut and giant chestnut trees, a vast house for every kind of use, serving equally for the purpose of cure and of pleasure, in which mineral waters, douches, and baths were sold below, and beer, liqueurs, and music above.

A portion of the ravine along the stream had been inclosed, to constitute the park indispensable to every spa; and three walks had been made, one nearly straight, and the other two zigzag. At the end of the first gushed out an artificial spring detached from the parent spring, and bubbling into a great basin of cement, sheltered by a straw roof, under the care of an impassive woman, whom everyone called “Marie” in a familiar sort of way. This calm Auvergnat, who wore a little cap always as white as snow, and a big apron, perfectly clean at all times, which concealed her working-dress, rose up slowly as soon as she saw a bather coming along the road in her direction.

The bather would smile with a melancholy air, drink the water, and return her the glass, saying, “Thanks, Marie.” Then he would turn on his heel and walk away. And Marie sat down again on her straw chair to wait for the next comer.

They were not, however, very numerous. The Enval station had just been six years open for invalids, and scarcely could count more patients at the end of these six years than it had at the start. About fifty had come there, attracted more than anything else by the beauty of the district, by the charm of this little village lost under enormous trees, whose twisted trunks seemed as big as the houses, and by the reputation of the gorges at the end of this strange glen which opened on the great plain of Auvergne and ended abruptly at the foot of the high mountain bristling with craters of unknown age — a savage and magnificent crevasse, full of rocks fallen or threatening, from which rushed a stream that cascaded over giant stones, forming a little lake in front of each.

This thermal station had been brought to birth as they all are, with a pamphlet on the spring by Doctor Bonnefille. He opened with a eulogistic description, in a majestic and sentimental style, of the Alpine seductions of the neighborhood. He selected only adjectives which convey a vague sense of delightfulness and enjoyment — those which produce effect without committing the writer to any material statement. All the surroundings were picturesque, filled with splendid sites or landscapes whose graceful outlines aroused soft emotions. All the promenades in the vicinity possessed a remarkable originality, such as would strike the imagination of artists and tourists. Then abruptly, without any transition, he plunged into the therapeutic qualities of the Bonnefille Spring, bicarbonate, sodium, mixed, lithineous, ferruginous, *et cetera, et cetera,* capable of curing every disease. He had, moreover, enumerated them under this heading: Chronic affections or acute specially associated with Enval. And the list of affections associated with Enval was long — long and varied, consoling for invalids of every kind. The pamphlet concluded with some information of practical utility, the cost of lodgings, commodities, and hotels — for three hotels had sprung up simultaneously with the casino-medical establishment. These were the Hotel Splendid, quite new, built on the slope of the glen looking down on the baths; the Thermal Hotel, an old inn with a new coat of plaster; and the Hotel Vidaillet, formed very simply by the purchase of three adjoining houses, which had been altered so as to convert them into one.

Then, all at once, two new doctors had installed themselves in the locality one morning, without anyone well knowing how they came, for at spas doctors seem to dart up out of the springs, like gas-jets. These were Doctor Honorat, a native of Auvergne, and Doctor Latonne, of Paris. A fierce antagonism soon burst out between Doctor Latonne and Doctor Bonnefille, while Doctor Honorat, a big, clean-shaven man, smiling and pliant, stretched forth his right hand to the first, and his left hand to the second, and remained on good terms with both. But Doctor Bonnefille was master of the situation, with his title of Inspector of the Waters and of the thermal establishment of Enval-les-Bains.

This title was his strength and the establishment his chattel. There he spent his days, and even his nights, it was said. A hundred times, in the morning, he would go from his house which was quite near in the village to his consultation-study fixed at the right-hand side facing the entrance to the thermal baths. Lying in wait there, like a spider in his web, he watched the comings and goings of the invalids, inspecting his own patients with a severe eye and those of the other doctors with a look of fury. He questioned everybody almost in the style of a ship's captain, and he struck terror into newcomers, unless it happened that he made them smile.

This day, as he arrived with rapid steps, which made the big flaps of his old frock coat fly up like a pair of wings, he was stopped suddenly by a voice exclaiming: "Doctor!"

He turned round. His thin face, full of big ugly wrinkles, and looking quite black at the end with a grizzled beard rarely cut, made an effort to smile; and he took off the tall silk hat, shabby, stained, and greasy, that covered his thick pepper-and-salt head of hair— "pepper and soiled," as his rival, Doctor Latonne, put it. Then he advanced a step, made a bow, and murmured:

"Good morning, Marquis — are you quite well this morning?"

The Marquis de Ravenel, a little man well preserved, stretched out his hand to the doctor, as he replied:

"Very well, doctor, very well, or, at least, not ill. I am always suffering from my kidneys; but indeed I am better, much better; and I am as yet only at my tenth bath. Last year I did not obtain the effect until the sixteenth, you recollect?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"But it is not about this I want to talk to you. My daughter has arrived this morning, and I wish to have a chat with you about her case first of all, because my son-in-law, William Andermatt, the banker— "

"Yes, I know."

"My son-in-law has a letter of recommendation addressed to Doctor Latonne. As for me, I have no confidence except in you, and I beg of you to have the kindness to come up to the hotel before — you understand? I prefer to say things to you candidly. Are you free at the present moment?"

Doctor Bonnefille had put on his hat again, and looked excited and troubled. He answered at once:

"Yes, I shall be free immediately. Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"Why, certainly."

And, turning their backs on the establishment, they directed their steps up a circular walk leading to the door of the Hotel Splendid, built on the slope of the mountain so as to offer a view of it to travelers.

They made their way to the drawing-room in the first story adjoining the apartments occupied by the Ravenel and Andermatt families, and the Marquis left the doctor by himself while he went to look for his daughter.

He came back with her presently. She was a fair young woman, small, pale, very pretty, whose features seemed like those of a child, while her blue eyes, boldly fixed, cast on people a resolute look that gave an alluring impression of firmness and a peculiar charm to this refined and fascinating creature. There was not much the matter with her — vague languors, sadnesses, bursts of tears without apparent cause, angry fits for which there seemed no season, and lastly anæmia. She craved above all for a child, which had been vainly looked forward to since her marriage, more than two years before.

Doctor Bonnefille declared that the waters of Enval would be effectual, and proceeded forthwith to write a prescription. The doctor's prescriptions had always the formidable aspect of an indictment. On a big white sheet of paper such as schoolboys use, his directions exhibited themselves in numerous paragraphs of two or three lines each, in an irregular handwriting, bristling with letters resembling spikes. And the potions, the pills, the powders, which were to be taken fasting in the morning, at midday, and in the evening, followed in ferocious-looking characters. One of these prescriptions might read:

"Inasmuch as M. X. is affected with a chronic malady, incurable and mortal, he will take, first, sulphate of quinine, which will render him deaf, and will make him lose his memory; secondly, bromide of potassium, which will destroy his stomach, weaken all his faculties, cover him with pimples, and make his breath foul; thirdly, salicylate of soda, whose curative effects have not yet been proved, but which seems to lead to a terrible and speedy death the patient treated by this remedy. And concurrently, chloral, which causes insanity, and belladonna, which attacks the eyes; all vegetable solutions and all mineral compositions which corrupt the blood, corrode the organs, consume the bones, and destroy by medicine those whom disease has spared."

For a long time he went on writing on the front page and on the back, then signed it just as a judge might have signed a death-sentence.

The young woman, seated opposite to him, stared at him with an inclination to laugh that made the corners of her lips rise up.

When, with a low bow, he had taken himself off, she snatched up the paper blackened with ink, rolled it up into a ball, and flung it into the fire. Then, breaking into a hearty laugh, said:

"Oh! father, where did you discover this fossil? Why, he looks for all the world like an old-clothesman. Oh! how clever of you to dig up a physician that might have lived before the Revolution! Oh! how funny he is, aye, and dirty — ah, yes! dirty — I believe really he has stained my penholder."

The door opened, and M. Andermatt's voice was heard saying, "Come in, doctor."

And Doctor Latonne appeared. Erect, slender, circumspect, comparatively young, attired in a fashionable morning-coat, and holding in his hand the high silk hat which distinguishes the practicing doctor in the greater part of the thermal stations of Auvergne, the physician from Paris, without beard or mustache, resembled an actor who had retired into the country.

The Marquis, confounded, did not know what to say or do, while his daughter put her handkerchief to her mouth to keep herself from bursting out laughing in the newcomer's face. He bowed with an air of self-confidence, and at a sign from the young woman took a seat.

M. Andermatt, who followed him, minutely detailed for him his wife's condition, her illnesses, together with their accompanying symptoms, the opinions of the physicians consulted in Paris, and then his own opinion based on special grounds which he explained in technical language.

He was a man still quite youthful, a Jew, who devoted himself to financial transactions. He entered into all sorts of speculations, and displayed in all matters of business a subtlety of intellect, a rapidity of penetration, and a soundness of judgment that were perfectly marvelous. A little too stout already for his figure, which was not tall, chubby, bald, with an infantile expression, fat hands, and short thighs, he looked much too greasy to be quite healthy, and spoke with amazing facility.

By means of tact he had been able to form an alliance with the daughter of the Marquis de Ravenel with a view to extending his speculations into a sphere to which he did not belong. The Marquis, besides, possessed an income of about thirty thousand francs, and had only two children; but, when M. Andermatt married, though scarcely thirty years of age, he owned already five or six millions, and had sown enough to bring him in a harvest of ten or twelve. M. de Ravenel, a man of weak, irresolute, shifting, and undecided character, at first angrily repulsed the overtures made to him with respect to this union, and was indignant at the thought of seeing his daughter allied to an Israelite. Then, after six months' resistance, he gave way, under the pressure of accumulated wealth, on the condition that the children should be brought up in the Catholic religion.

But they waited for a long time and no offspring was yet announced. It was then that the Marquis, enchanted for the past two years with the waters of Enval, recalled to mind the fact that Doctor Bonnefille's pamphlet also promised the cure for sterility.

Accordingly, he sent for his daughter, whom his son-in-law accompanied, in order to install her and to intrust her, acting on the advice of his Paris physician, to the care of Doctor Latonne. Therefore, Andermatt, since his arrival, had gone to look for this practitioner, and went on enumerating the symptoms which presented themselves in his wife's case. He finished by mentioning how much he had been pained at finding his hopes of paternity unrealized.

Doctor Latonne allowed him to go on to the end; then, turning toward the young woman: "Have you anything to add, Madame?"

She replied gravely: "No, Monsieur, nothing at all." He went on: "In that case, I will trouble you to take off your traveling-dress and your corset, and to put on a simple white dressing-gown, all white."

She was astonished; he rapidly explained his system: "Good heavens, Madame, it is very simple. Formerly, the belief was that all diseases came from a poison in the blood or from an organic cause; to-day, we simply assume that, in many cases, and, above all, in your particular case, the uncertain ailments from which you suffer, and even certain serious troubles, very serious, mortal, may proceed only from the fact that some organ or other, having taken, under influences easy to determine, an abnormal development, to the detriment of the neighboring organs, destroys all the harmony, all the equilibrium of the human body, modifies or arrests its functions, and obstructs the play of all the other organs. A swelling of the stomach may be sufficient to make us believe in a disease of the heart, which, impeded in its movements, becomes violent, irregular, sometimes even intermittent. The dilatation of the liver or of certain glands may cause ravages which unobservant physicians attribute to a thousand different causes. Therefore, the first thing that we should do is to ascertain whether all the organs of a patient have their true compass and their normal position, for a very little thing is enough to upset a person's health. I am going, then, Madame, if you will allow me, to examine you with great care, and to mark out on your dressing-gown the limits, the dimensions, and the positions of your organs."

He had put down his hat on a chair, and he spoke in a facile manner. His large mouth, in opening and closing, made two deep hollows in his shaven cheeks, which gave him a certain ecclesiastical air.

Andermatt, delighted, exclaimed: "Capital, capital! That is very clever, very ingenious, very new, very modern."

"Very modern" in his mouth was the height of admiration.

The young woman, highly amused, rose and passed into her own apartment. She came back, after the lapse of a few minutes, in a white dressing-gown.

The physician made her lie down on a sofa, then, drawing from his pocket a pencil with three points, a black, a red, and a blue, he commenced to auscultate and to tap his new patient, riddling the dressing-gown all over with little dots of color by way of noting each observation.

She resembled, after a quarter of an hour of this work, a map indicating continents, seas, capes, rivers, kingdoms, and cities, and bearing the names of all these terrestrial divisions, for the doctor wrote on every line of demarcation two or three Latin words intelligible to himself alone.

Now, when he had listened to all the internal sounds in Madame Andermatt's body, and tapped on all the parts of her person that were irritated or hollow-sounding, he drew forth from his pocket a notebook of red leather with gold threads to fasten it, divided in alphabetical order, consulted the index, opened it, and wrote: "Observation 6347. — Madame A — , 21 years."

Then, collecting from her head to her feet the colored notes on her dressing-gown, and reading them as an Egyptologist deciphers hieroglyphics, he entered them in the notebook.

He observed, when he had finished: “Nothing disquieting, nothing abnormal, save a slight, a very slight deviation, which some thirty acidulated baths will cure. You will take furthermore three halfglasses of water each morning before noon. Nothing else I will come back to see you in four or five days.” Then he rose, bowed, and went out with such promptitude that everyone remained stupefied at it. This abrupt style of departure was a part of his mannerism, his tact, his special stamp. He considered it very good form, and thought it made a great impression on the patient.

Madame Andermatt ran to look at herself in the glass, and, shaking all over with a joyous burst of childlike laughter, said:

“Oh! how amusing they are, how droll they are! Tell me, is there not one more left of them? I want to see him immediately! Will, go and find him for me! We must have the third one here — I want to see him.”

Her husband, surprised, asked:

“How, a third, a third what?”

The Marquis deemed it advisable to explain, while offering excuses, for he was a little afraid of his son-in-law. He related, therefore, how Doctor Bonnefille had come to see himself, and how he had introduced him to Christiane, in order to ascertain his opinion, as he had great confidence in the experience of the old physician, who was a native of the district, and who had discovered the spring.

Andermatt shrugged his shoulders, and declared that Doctor Latonne alone would take care of his wife, so that the Marquis, very uneasy, began to reflect on the best course to take in order to arrange matters without offending his irascible physician.

Christiane asked: “Is Gontran here?” This was her brother.

Her father replied: “Yes, for the past four days, with a friend of his of whom he has often spoken, M. Paul Bretigny. They are making a tour together in Auvergne. They have come from Mont Doré and from Bourboule, and will be setting out for Cantal at the end of next week.”

Then he asked the young woman whether she desired to rest till luncheon after the night in the train; but she had slept perfectly in the sleeping car, and only required an hour for her toilette, after which she wished to visit the village and the establishment.

Her father and her husband went back to their rooms to wait till she was ready. She soon came out to call them, and they descended together. She grew enthusiastic at first sight over the aspect of the village, built in the middle of a wood in a deep valley, which seemed hemmed in on every side by chestnut-trees lofty as mountains. These could be seen everywhere, springing up just as they chanced to have shot forth here and there in a century, in front of doorways, in the courtyards, in the streets. Then, again, there were fountains everywhere made of a great black stone standing upright pierced with a small aperture, through which dashed a streamlet of clear water that whirled about in a circle before it fell into the trough. A fresh odor of grass and of stables floated over those masses of verdure; and they saw the peasant women of Auvergne standing in front of their dwellings, spinning at their distaffs with lively movements of their fingers the black wool attached to their girdles. Their short petticoats showed their thin ankles covered with blue stockings, and the bodies of their dresses fastened over their shoulders with straps left exposed the linen sleeves of their chemises, out of which stretched their hard, dry arms and bony hands.

But, suddenly, queer lilting kind of music burst on the promenaders' ears. It was like a barrel-organ with piping sounds, a barrel-organ used up, broken-winded, invalided.

Christiane exclaimed: "What is that?"

Her father began to laugh: "It is the orchestra of the Casino. It takes four of them to make that noise." And he led her up to a red bill affixed to a corner of a farmhouse, on which appeared in black letters:

CASINO OF ENVAL

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF M. PETRUS MARTEL, OF THE ODEON.

Saturday, 6th of July.

GRAND CONCERT organized by the *Maestro*, Saint Landri, second grand prize winner at the Conservatoire.

The piano will be presided over by M. Javel, grand laureate of the Conservatoire.

Flute, M. Noirot, laureate of the Conservatoire. Double-bass, M. Nicordi, laureate of the Royal Academy of Brussels. After the Concert, grand representation of *Lost in the Forest*, a Comedy in one act, by M. Pointellet.

Characters:

Pierre de Lapointe — M. Petrus Martel, of the Odéon.
Oscar Leveillé — M. Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville.
Jean — M. Lapalme, of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.
Philippine — Mademoiselle Odelin, of the Odéon.

During the representation, the Orchestra will be likewise conducted by the *Maestro,* Saint Landri.

Christiane read this aloud, laughed, and was astonished.

Her father went on: “Oh! they will amuse you. Come and look at them.”

They turned to the right, and entered the park. The bathers promenaded gravely, slowly, along the three walks. They drank their glasses of water, and then went away. Some of them, seated on benches, traced lines in the sand with the ends of their walking-sticks or their umbrellas. They did not talk, seemed not to think, scarcely to live, enervated, paralyzed by the *ennui* of the thermal station. Only the odd music of the orchestra broke the sweet silence as it leaped into the air, coming one knew not whence, produced one knew not how, passing under the foliage and appearing to stir up these melancholy walkers.

A voice cried: “Christiane!”

She turned round. It was her brother. He rushed toward her, embraced her, and, having pressed Andermatt’s hand, took his sister by the arm, and drew her along with him, leaving his father and his brother-in-law in the rear.

They chatted. He was a tall, well-made young fellow, prone to laughter like her, light-hearted as the Marquis, indifferent to events, but always on the lookout for a thousand francs.

“I thought you were asleep,” said he. “But for that I would have come to embrace you. And then Paul carried me off this morning to the chateau of Tournoel.”

“Who is Paul? Oh, yes, your friend!”

“Paul Bretigny. It is true you don’t know him. He is taking a bath at the present moment.”

“He is a patient, then?”

“No, but he is curing himself, all the same. He is trying to get over a love episode.”

“And so he’s taking acidulated baths — they’re called acidulated, are they not? — in order to restore himself.”

“Yes. He’s doing all I told him to do. Oh! he has been hit hard. He’s a violent youth, terrible, and has been at death’s door. He wanted to kill himself, too. It was an actress — a well-known actress. He was madly in love with her. And then she was not faithful to him, do you see? The result was a frightful drama. So I brought him away. He’s going on better now, but he’s still thinking about it.”

She smiled for a moment, then, becoming grave, she returned:

“It will amuse me to see him.”

For her, however, this thing, “Love,” did not mean very much. She sometimes bestowed a thought on it, just as you think, when you are poor, now and then of a pearl necklace, of a diadem of brilliants, with a desire awakened in you for this thing — possible though far away. This fancy would come to her after reading some novel to kill time, without attaching to it, beyond that, any special importance. She had never dreamed about it much, having been born with a happy soul, tranquil and contented, and, although now two years and a half married, she had not yet awakened out of that sleep in which innocent young girls live, that sleep of the heart, of the mind, and of the senses, which, with some women, lasts until death. For her life was simple and good, without complications. She had never looked for the causes or the hidden meaning of things. She had lived on from day to day, slept soundly, dressed with taste, laughed, and felt satisfied. What more could she have asked for?

When Andermatt had been introduced to her as her future husband, she refused to wed him at first with a childish indignation at the idea of becoming the wife of a Jew. Her father and her brother, sharing her repugnance, replied with her and like her by formally declining the offer. Andermatt disappeared, acted as if he were dead, but, at the end of three months, had lent Gontran more than twenty thousand francs; and the Marquis, for other reasons, was beginning to change his opinion.

In the first place, he always on principle yielded when one persisted, through sheer egotistical desire not to be disturbed. His daughter used to say of him: “All papa’s ideas are jumbled up together”; and this was true. Without opinions, without beliefs, he had only enthusiasms, which varied every moment. At one time, he would attach himself, with a transitory and poetic exaltation, to the old traditions of his race, and would long for a king, but an intellectual king, liberal, enlightened, marching along with the age. At another time, after he had read a book by Michelet or some democratic thinker, he would become a passionate advocate of human equality, of modern ideas, of the claims of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering. He believed in everything, just as each thing harmonized with his passing moods; and, when his old friend, Madame Icardon, who, connected as she was with many Israelites, desired the marriage of Christiane and Andermatt, and began to preach in favor of it, she knew full well the kind of arguments with which she should attack him.

She pointed out to him that the Jewish race had arrived at the hour of vengeance. It had been a race crushed down as the French people had been before the Revolution, and was now going to oppress others by the power of gold. The Marquis, devoid of religious faith, but convinced that the idea of God was rather a legislative idea, which had more effect in keeping the foolish, the ignorant, and the timid in the right path than the simple notion of Justice, regarded dogmas with a respectful indifference, and held in equal and sincere esteem Confucius, Mohammed, and Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the fact that the latter was crucified did not at all present itself as an original wrongdoing but as a gross, political blunder. In consequence it only required a few weeks to make him admire the toil, hidden, incessant, and all-powerful, of the persecuted Jews everywhere. And, viewing with different eyes their brilliant triumph, he looked upon it as a just reparation for the indignities that so long had been heaped upon them. He saw them masters of kings, who are the masters of the people — sustaining thrones or allowing them to collapse, able to make a nation bankrupt as one might a wine-merchant, proud in the presence of princes who had grown humble, and casting their impure gold into the half-open purses of the most Catholic sovereigns, who thanked them by conferring on them titles of nobility and lines of railway. So he consented to the marriage of William Andermatt with Christiane de Ravenel.

As for Christiane, under the unconscious pressure of Madame Icardon, her mother's old companion, who had become her intimate adviser since the Marquise's death, a pressure to which was added that of her father and the interested indifference of her brother, she consented to marry this big, overrich youth, who was not ugly but scarcely pleased her, just as she would have consented to spend a summer in a disagreeable country.

She found him a good fellow, kind, not stupid, nice in intimate relations; but she frequently laughed at him along with Gontran, whose gratitude was of the perfidious order.

He would say to her: “Your husband is rosier and balder than ever. He looks like a sickly flower, or a sucking pig with its hair shaved off. Where does he get these colors?” —

She would reply: “I assure you I have nothing to do with it. There are days when I feel inclined to paste him on a box of sugar-plums.”

But they had arrived in front of the baths. Two men were seated on straw chairs with their backs to the wall, smoking their pipes, one at each side of the door.

Said Gontran: “Look, here are two good types. Watch the fellow at the right, the hunchback with the Greek cap! That’s Père Printemps, an ex-jailer from Riom, who has become the guardian, almost the manager, of the Enval establishment. For him nothing is changed, and he governs the invalids just as he did his prisoners in former days. The bathers are always prisoners, their bathing-boxes are cells, the douche-room a black-hole, and the place where Doctor Bonnefille practices his stomach-washings with the aid of the Baraduc sounding-line a chamber of mysterious torture. He does not salute any of the men on the strength of the principle that all convicts are contemptible beings. He treats women with much more consideration, upon my honor — a consideration mingled with astonishment, for he had none of them under his control in the prison of Riom. That retreat being destined for males only, he has not yet got accustomed to talking to members of the fair sex. The other fellow is the cashier. I defy you to make him write your name. You are just going to see.”

And Gontran, addressing the man at the left, slowly said:

“Monsieur Seminois, this is my sister, Madame Andermatt, who wants to subscribe for a dozen baths.”

The cashier, very tall, very thin, with a poor appearance, rose up, went into his office, which exactly faced the study of the medical inspector, opened his book, and asked:

“What name?”

“Andermatt.”

“What did you say?”

“Andermatt.”

“How do you spell it?”

“A-n-d-e-r-m-a-t-t.”

“All right.”

And he slowly wrote it down. When he had finished, Gontran asked:

“Would you kindly read over my sister’s name?”

“Yes, Monsieur! Madame Anterpat.”

Christiane laughed till the tears came into her eyes, paid for her tickets, and then asked:

“What is it that one hears up there?”

Gontran took her arm in his. Two angry voices reached their ears on the stairs. They went up, opened a door, and saw a large coffee-room with a billiard table in the center. Two men in their shirtsleeves at opposite sides of the billiard-table, each with a cue in his hand, were furiously abusing one another.

“Eighteen!”

“Seventeen!”

“I tell you I’m eighteen.”

“That’s not true — you’re only seventeen!”

It was the director of the Casino, M. Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who was playing his ordinary game with the comedian of his company, M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.

Petrus Martel, whose stomach, stout and inactive, swayed underneath his shirt above a pair of pantaloons fastened anyhow, after having been a strolling player in various places, had undertaken the directorship of the Casino of Enval, and spent his days in drinking the allowances intended for the bathers. He wore an immense mustache like a dragoon, which was steeped from morning till night in the froth of bocks and the sticky syrup of liqueurs, and he had aroused in the old comedian whom he had enlisted in his service an immoderate passion for billiards.

As soon as they got up in the morning, they proceeded to play a game, insulted and threatened one another, expunged the record, began over again, scarcely gave themselves time for breakfast, and could not tolerate two clients coming to drive them away from their green cloth.

They soon put everyone to flight, and did not find this sort of existence unpleasant, though Petrus Martel always found himself at the end of the season in a bankrupt condition.

The female attendant, overwhelmed, would have to look on all day at this endless game, listen to the interminable discussion, and carry from morning till night glasses of beer or half-glasses of brandy to the two indefatigable players.

But Gontran carried off his sister: “Come into the park. ’Tis fresher.”

At the end of the establishment they suddenly perceived the orchestra under a Chinese *kiosque. A* fair-haired young man, frantically playing the violin, was conducting with movements of his head. His hair was shaking from one side to the other in the effort to keep time, and his entire torso bent forward and rose up again, swaying from left to right, like the stick of the leader of an orchestra. Facing him sat three strange-looking musicians. This was the *maestro,* Saint Landri.

He and his assistants — a pianist, whose instrument, mounted on rollers, was wheeled each morning from the vestibule of the baths to the *kiosque*; an enormous flautist, who presented the appearance of sucking a match while tickling it with his big swollen fingers, and a double-bass of consumptive aspect — produced with much fatigue this perfect imitation of a bad barrel-organ, which had astonished Christiane in the village street.

As she stopped to look at them, a gentleman saluted her brother.

“Good day, my dear Count.”

“Good day, doctor.”

And Gontran introduced them: “My sister — Doctor Honorat.”

She could scarcely restrain her merriment at the sight of this third physician. The latter bowed and made some complimentary remark.

“I hope that Madame is not an invalid?”

“Yes — slightly.”

He did not go farther with the matter, and changed the subject.

“You are aware, my dear Count, that you will shortly have one of the most interesting spectacles that could await you on your arrival in this district.”

“What is it, pray, doctor?”

“Père Oriol is going to blast his hill. This is of no consequence to you, but for us it is a big event.” And he proceeded to explain. “Père Oriol — the richest peasant in this part of the country — he is known to be worth over fifty thousand francs a year

—— owns all the vineyards along the plain up to the outlet of Enval. Now, just as you go out from the village at the division of the valley, rises a little mountain, or rather a high knoll, and on this knoll are the best vineyards of Père Oriol. In the midst of two of them, facing the road, at two paces from the stream, stands a gigantic stone, an elevation which has impeded the cultivation and put into the shade one entire side of the field, on which it looks down. For six years, Père Oriol has every week been announcing that he was going to blast his hill; but he has never made up his mind about it.

"Every time a country boy went to be a soldier, the old man would say to him: 'When you're coming home on furlough, bring me some powder for this rock of mine.' And all the young soldiers would bring back in their knapsacks some powder that they stole for Père Oriol's rock. He has a chest full of this powder, and yet the hill has not been blasted. At last, for a week past, he has been noticed scooping out the stone, with his son, big Jacques, surnamed Colosse, which in Auvergne is pronounced 'Coloche.' This very morning they filled with powder the empty belly of the enormous rock; then they stopped up the mouth of it, only letting in the fuse bought at the tobacconist's. In two hours' time they will set fire to it. Then, five or ten minutes afterward, it will go off, for the end of the fuse is pretty long."

Christiane was interested in this narrative, amused already at the idea of this explosion, finding here again a childish sport that pleased her simple heart. They had now reached the end of the park.

"Where do you go now?" she said.

Doctor Honorat replied: "To the End of the World, Madame; that is to say, into a gorge that has no outlet and which is celebrated in Auvergne. It is one of the loveliest natural curiosities in the district." But a bell rang behind them. Gontran cried: "Look here! breakfast-time already!"

They turned back. A tall, young man came up to meet them.

Gontran said: "My dear Christiane, let me introduce to you M. Paul Bretigny." Then, to his friend: "This is my sister, my dear boy."

She thought him ugly. He had black hair, close-cropped and straight, big, round eyes, with an expression that was almost hard, a head also quite round, very strong, one of those heads that make you think of cannon-balls, herculean shoulders, a rather savage expression, heavy and brutish. But from his jacket, from his linen, from his skin perhaps, came a very subtle perfume, with which the young woman was not familiar, and she asked herself:

"I wonder what odor that is?"

He said to her: "You arrived this morning, Madame?" His voice was a little hollow.

She replied: “Yes, Monsieur.”

But Gontran saw the Marquis and Andermatt making signals to them to come in quickly to breakfast.

Doctor Honorat took leave of them, asking as he left whether they really meant to go and see the hill blasted. Christiane declared that she would go; and, leaning on her brother’s arm, she murmured as she dragged him along toward the hotel:

“I am as hungry as a wolf. I shall be very much ashamed to eat as much as I feel inclined before your friend.”

CHAPTER II. THE DISCOVERY

THE breakfast was long, as the meals usually are at a *table d'hôte.* Christiane, who was not familiar with all the faces of those present, chatted with her father and her brother. Then she went up to her room to take a rest till the time for blasting the rock.

She was ready long before the hour fixed, and made the others start along with her so that they might not miss the explosion. Just outside the village, at the opening of the glen, stood, as they had heard, a high knoll, almost a mountain, which they proceeded to climb under a burning sun, following a little path through the vine-trees. When they reached the summit the young woman uttered a cry of astonishment at the sight of the immense horizon displayed before her eyes. In front of her stretched a limitless plain, which immediately gave her soul the sensation of an ocean. This plain, overhung by a veil of light blue vapor, extended as far as the most distant mountain-ridges, which were scarcely perceptible, some fifty or sixty kilometers away. And under the transparent haze of delicate fineness, which floated above this vast stretch, could be distinguished towns, villages, woods, vast yellow squares of ripe crops, vast green squares of herbage, factories with long, red chimneys and blackened steeples and sharp-pointed structures, with the solidified lava of dead volcanoes.

"Turn around," said her brother.

She turned around. And behind she saw the mountain, the huge mountain indented with craters. This was the entrance to the foundation on which Enval stood, a great expanse of greenness in which one could scarcely trace the hidden gash of the gorge. The trees in a waving mass scaled the high slope as far as the first crater and shut out the view of those beyond. But, as they were exactly on the line that separated the plains from the mountain, the latter stretched to the left toward Clermont-Ferrand, and, wandering away, unrolled over the blue sky their strange mutilated tops, like monstrous blotches —— extinct volcanoes, dead volcanoes. And yonder — over yonder, between two peaks — could be seen another, higher still, more distant still, round and majestic, and bearing on its highest pinnacle something of fantastic shape resembling a ruin. This was the Puy de Dome, the king of the mountains of Auvergne, strong and unwieldy, wearing on its head, like a crown placed thereon by the mightiest of peoples, the remains of a Roman temple.

Christiane exclaimed: “Oh! how happy I shall be here!”

And she felt herself happy already, penetrated by that sense of well-being which takes possession of the flesh and the heart, makes you breathe with ease, and renders you sprightly and active when you find yourself in a spot which enchants your eyes, charms and cheers you, seems to have been awaiting you, a spot for which you feel that you were born.

Some one called out to her: “Madame, Madame!” And, at some distance away, she saw Doctor Honorat, recognizable by his big hat. He rushed across to them, and conducted the family toward the opposite side of the hill, over a grassy slope beside a grove of young trees, where already some thirty persons were waiting, strangers and peasants mingled together.

Beneath their feet, the steep hillside descended toward the Riom road, overshadowed by willows that sheltered the shallow river; and in the midst of a vineyard at the edge of this stream rose a sharp-pointed rock before which two men on bended knees seemed to be praying. This was the scene of action.

The Oriols, father and son, were attaching the fuse. On the road, a crowd of curious spectators had stationed themselves, with a line of people lower down in front, among whom village brats were scampering about.

Doctor Honorat chose a convenient place for Christiane to sit down, and there she waited with a beating heart, as if she were going to see the entire population blown up along with the rock.

The Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul Bretigny lay down on the grass at the young woman’s side, while Gontran remained standing. He said, in a bantering tone:

“My dear doctor, you must be much less busy than your brother-practitioners, who apparently have not an hour to spare to attend this little *fête?”* Honorat replied in a good-humored tone:

“I am not less busy; only my patients occupy less of my time. And again I prefer to amuse my patients rather than to physic them.”

He had a quiet manner which greatly pleased Gontran. Other persons now arrived, fellow-guests at the *table d’hôte* — the ladies Paille, two widows, mother and daughter; the Monecus, father and daughter; and a very small, fat, man, who was puffing like a boiler that had burst, M. Aubry-Pasteur, an exengineer of mines, who had made a fortune in Russia.

M. Pasteur and the Marquis were on intimate terms. He seated himself with much difficulty after some preparatory movements, circumspect and cautious, which considerably amused Christiane. Gontran sauntered away from them, in order to have a look at the other persons whom curiosity had attracted toward the knoll.

Paul Bretigny pointed out to Christiane Andermatt the views, of which they could catch glimpses in the distance. First of all, Riom made a red patch with its row of tiles along the plain; then Ennezat, Maringues, Lezoux, a heap of villages scarcely distinguishable, which only broke the wide expanse of verdure with a somber indentation here and there, and, further down, away down below, at the base of the mountains, he pretended that he could trace out Thiers.

He said, in an animated fashion: “Look, look! Just in front of my finger, exactly in front of my finger. For my part, I can see it quite distinctly.”

She could see nothing, but she was not surprised at his power of vision, for he looked like a bird of prey, with his round, piercing eyes, which appeared to be as powerful as telescopes. He went on:

“The Allier flows in front of us, in the middle of that plain, but it is impossible to perceive it. It is very far off, thirty kilometers from here.”

She scarcely took the trouble to glance toward the place which he indicated, for she had riveted her eyes on the rock and given it her entire attention. She was saying to herself that presently this enormous stone would no longer exist, that it would disappear in powder, and she felt herself seized with a vague pity for the stone, the pity which a little girl would feel for a broken plaything. It had been there so long, this stone; and then it was imposing —— it had a picturesque look. The two men, who had by this time risen, were heaping up pebbles at the foot of it, and digging with the rapid movements of peasants working hurriedly.

The crowd gathered along the road, increasing every moment, had pushed forward to get a better view. The brats brushed against the two diggers, and kept rushing and capering round them like young animals in a state of delight; and from the elevated point at which Christiane was sitting, these people looked quite small, a crowd of insects, an anthill in confusion.

The buzz of voices ascended, now slight, scarcely noticeable, then more lively, a confused mixture of cries and human movements, but scattered through the air, evaporated already — a dust of sounds, as it were. On the knoll likewise the crowd was swelling in numbers, incessantly arriving from the village, and covering up the slope which looked down on the condemned rock.

They were distinguished from each other, as they gathered together, according to their hotels, their classes, their castes. The most clamorous portion of the assemblage was that of the actors and musicians, presided over and generaled by the conductor, Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who, under the circumstances, had given up his incessant game of billiards.

With a Panama flapping over his forehead, a black alpaca jacket covering his shoulders and allowing his big stomach to protrude in a semicircle, for he considered a waistcoat useless in the open country, the actor, with his thick mustache, assumed the airs of a commander-in-chief, and pointed out, explained, and criticised all the movements of the two Oriols. His subordinates, the comedian Lapalme, the young premier Petitnivelle, and the musicians, the *maestro* Saint Landri, the pianist Javel, the huge flautist Noirot, the double-bass Nicordi, gathered round him to listen. In front of them were seated three women, sheltered by three parasols, a white, a red, and a blue, which, under the sun of two o’clock, formed a strange and dazzling French flag. These were Mademoiselle Odelin, the young actress; her mother, — a mother that she had hired out, as Gontran put it, — and the female attendant of the coffee-room, three ladies who were habitual companions. The arrangement of these three parasols’ so as to suit the national colors was an invention of Petrus Martel, who, having noticed at the commencement of the season the blue and the white in the hands of the ladies Odelin, had made a present of the red to the coffee-room attendant.

Quite close to them, another group excited interest and observation, that of the chefs and scullions of the hotels, to the number of eight, for there was a war of rivalry between the kitchen-folk, who had attired themselves in linen jackets to make an impression on the bystanders, extending even to the scullery-maids. Standing all in a group they let the crude light of day fall on their flat white caps, presenting, at the same time, the appearance of fantastic staff-officers of lancers and a deputation of cooks.

The Marquis asked Doctor Honorat: “Where do all these people come from? I never would have imagined Enval was so thickly populated!”

“Oh! they come from all parts, from Chatel-Guyon, from Tournoel, from La Roche-Pradière, from Saint-Hippolyte. For this affair has been talked of a long time in the country, and then Père Oriol is a celebrity, an important personage on account of his influence and his wealth, besides a true

Auvergnat, remaining still a peasant, working himself, hoarding, piling up gold on gold, intelligent, full of ideas and plans for his children's future."

Gontran came back, excited, his eyes sparkling.

He said, in a low tone: "Paul, Paul, pray come along with me; I'm going to show you two pretty girls; yes, indeed, nice girls, you know!"

The other raised his head, and replied: "My dear fellow, I'm in very good quarters here; I'll not budge."

"You're wrong. They are charming!" Then, in a louder tone: "But the doctor is going to tell me who they are. Two little girls of eighteen or nineteen, rustic ladies, oddly dressed, with black silk dresses that have close-fitting sleeves, some kind of uniform dresses, convent-gowns — two brunettes— "Doctor Honorat interrupted him: "That's enough. They are Père Oriol's daughters, two pretty young girls indeed, educated at the Benedictine Convent at Clermont, and sure to make very good matches. They are two types, but simply types of our race, of the fine race of women of Auvergne, Marquis. I will show you these two little lasses— "

Gontran here slyly interposed: "You are the medical adviser of the Oriol family, doctor?"

The other appreciated this sly question, and simply responded with a "By Jove, I am!" uttered in atone of the utmost good-humor.

The young man went on: "How did you come to win the confidence of this rich patient?"

"By ordering him to drink a great deal of good wine." And he told a number of anecdotes about the Oriols. Moreover, he was distantly related to them, and had known them for a considerable time. The old fellow, the father, quite an original, was very proud of his wine; and above all he had one vine-garden, the produce of which was reserved for the use of the family, solely for the family and their guests. In certain years they happened to empty the casks filled with the growth of this aristocratic vineyard, but in other years they scarcely succeeded in doing so. About the month of May or June, when the father saw that it would be hard to drink all that was still left, he would proceed to encourage his big son, Colosse, and would repeat: "Come on, son, we must finish it." Then they would go on pouring down their throats pints of red wine from morning till night. Twenty times during every meal, the old chap would say in a grave tone, while he held the jug over his son's glass: "We must finish it." And, as all this liquor with its mixture of alcohol heated his blood and prevented him from sleeping, he would rise up in the middle of the night, draw on his breeches, light a lantern, wake up Colosse, and off they would go to the cellar, after snatching a crust of bread each out of the cupboard, in order to steep it in their glasses, filled up again and again out of the same cask. Then, when they had swallowed so much wine that they could feel it rolling about in their stomachs, the father would tap the resounding wood of the cask to find out whether the level of the liquor had gone down.

The Marquis asked: "Are these the same people that are working at the hillock?"

"Yes, yes, exactly."

Just at that moment the two men hurried off with giant strides from the rock charged with powder, and all the crowd that surrounded them down below began to run away like a retreating army. They fled in the direction of Riom and Enval, leaving behind them by itself the huge rock on the top of the hillock covered with thin grass and pebbles, for it divided the vineyard into two sections, and its immediate surroundings had not been grubbed up yet.

The crowd assembled on the slope above, now as dense as that below, waited in trembling expectancy; and the loud voice of Petrus Martel exclaimed:

"Attention! the fuse is lit!"

Christiane shivered at the thought of what was about to happen, but the doctor murmured behind her back:

"Ho! if they left there all the fuse I saw them buying, we'll have ten minutes of it!"

All eyes were fixed on the stone, and suddenly a dog, a little black dog, a kind of pug, was seen approaching it. He ran round it, began smelling, and no doubt, discovered a suspicious odor, for he commenced yelping as loudly as ever he could, his paws stiff, the hair on his back standing on end, his tail sticking out, and his ears erect.

A burst of laughter came from the spectators, a cruel burst of laughter; people expressed a hope that he would not keep riveted to the spot up to the time of the blast. Then voices called out to him to make him come back; some men whistled to him; they tried to hit him with stones to prevent him from going on the whole way. But the pug did not budge an inch, and kept barking furiously at the rock.

Christiane began to tremble. A horrible fear of seeing the animal disemboweled took possession of her; all her enjoyment was at an end. She cried repeatedly, with nerves unstrung, stammering, vibrating all over with anguish:

"Oh! good heavens! Oh! good heavens! it will be killed. I don't want to look at it! I don't want to look at it! I will not wait to see it! Come away!"

Paul Bretigny, who had been sitting by her side, arose, and, without saying one word, began to descend toward the hillock with all the speed of which his long legs were capable.

Cries of terror escaped from many lips; a panic agitated the crowd; and the pug, seeing this big man coming toward him, took refuge behind the rock. Paul pursued him; the dog ran off to the other side; and, for a minute or two, they kept rushing round the stone, now to right, now to left, as if they were playing a game of hide and seek. Seeing at last that he could not overtake the animal, the young man proceeded to reascend the slope, and the dog, seized once more with fury, renewed his barking.

Vociferations of anger greeted the return of the imprudent youth, who was quite out of breath, for people do not forgive those who excite terror in their breasts. Christiane v/as suffocating with emotion, her two hands pressed against her palpitating heart. She had lost her head so completely that she sobbed: "At least you are not hurt?" while Gontran cried angrily:

"He is mad, that idiot; he never does anything but tomfooleries of this kind. I never met a greater donkey!"

But the soil was now shaking; it rose in air. A formidable detonation made the entire country all around vibrate, and for a full minute thundered over the mountain, while all the echoes repeated it, like so many cannon-shots.

Christiane saw nothing but a shower of stones falling, and a high column of light clay sinking in a heap. And immediately afterward the crowd from above rushed down like a wave, uttering wild shouts. The battalion of kitchen-drudges came racing down in the direction of the knoll, leaving behind them the regiment of theatrical performers, who descended more slowly, with Petrus Martel at their head. The three parasols forming a tricolor were nearly carried away in this descent.

And all ran, men, women, peasants, and villagers. They could be seen falling, getting up again, starting on afresh, while in long procession the two streams of people, which had till now been kept back by fear, rolled along so as to knock against one another and get mixed up on the very spot where the explosion had taken place.

"Let us wait a while," said the Marquis, "till all this curiosity is satisfied, so that we may go and look in our turn."

The engineer, M. Aubry-Pasteur, who had just arisen with very great difficulty, replied:

"For my part, I am going back to the village by the footpaths. There is nothing further to keep me here."

He shook hands, bowed, and went away.

Doctor Honorat had disappeared. The party talked about him, and the Marquis said to his son:

"You have only known him three days, and all the time you have been laughing at him. You will end by offending him."

But Gontran shrugged his shoulders: "Oh! he's a wise man, a good sceptic, that doctor. I tell you in reply that he will not bother himself. When we are both alone together, he laughs at all the world and everything, commencing with his patients and his waters. I will give you a free thermal course if you ever see him annoyed by my nonsense."

Meanwhile, there was considerable agitation further down around the site of the vanished hillock. The enormous crowd, swelling, rising up, and sinking down like billows, broke out into exclamations, manifestly swayed by some emotion, some astonishing occurrence which nobody had foreseen. Andermatt, ever eager and inquisitive, was repeating:

"What is the matter with them now? What can be the matter with them?"

Gontran announced that he was going to find out, and walked off. Christiane, who had now sunk into a state of indifference, was reflecting that if the igniting substance had been only a little shorter, it would have been sufficient to have caused the death of their foolish companion or led to his being mutilated by the blasting of the rock, and all because she was afraid of a dog losing its life. She could not help thinking that he must, indeed, be very violent and passionate — this man — to expose himself to such a risk in this way without any good reason for it — simply owing to the fact that a woman who was a stranger to him had given expression to a desire.

People could be observed running along the road toward the village. The Marquis now asked, in his turn: "What is the matter with them?" And

Andermatt, unable to stand it any longer, began to run down the side of the hill. Gontran, from below, made a sign to him to come on.

Paul Bretigny asked: “Will you take my arm, Madame?” She took his arm, which seemed to her as immovable as iron, and, as her feet glided along the warm grass, she leaned on it as she would have leaned on a baluster with a sense of absolute security. Gontran, who had just come back after making inquiries, exclaimed: “It is a spring. The explosion has made a spring gush out!”

And they fell in with the crowd. Then, the two young men, Paul and Gontran, moving on in front, scattered the spectators by jostling against them, and without paying any heed to their gruntings, opened a way for Christiane and her father. They walked through a chaos of sharp stones, broken, and blackened with powder, and arrived in front of a hole full of muddy water which bubbled up and then flowed away toward the river over the feet of the bystanders. Andermatt was there already, having effected a passage through the multitude by insinuating ways peculiar to himself, as Gontran used to say, and was watching with rapt attention the water escaping through the broken soil.

Doctor Honorat, facing him at the opposite side of the hole, was observing him with an air of mingled surprise and boredom.

Andermatt said to him: “It might be desirable to taste it; it is perhaps a mineral spring.”

The physician returned: “No doubt it is mineral. There are any number of mineral waters here. There will soon be more springs than invalids.”

The other in reply said: “But it is necessary to taste it.”

The physician displayed little or no interest in the matter: “It is necessary at least to wait till we see whether it is clean.”

And everyone wanted to see. Those in the second row pushed those in front almost into the muddy water. A child fell in, and caused a laugh. The Oriols, father and son, were there, contemplating gravely this unexpected phenomenon, not knowing yet what they ought to think about it. The father was a spare man, with a long, thin frame, and a bony head — the hard head of a beardless peasant; and the son, taller still, a giant, thin also, and wearing a mustache, had the look at the same time of a trooper and a vinedresser.

The bubblings of the water appeared to increase, its volume to grow larger, and it was beginning to get clearer. A movement took place among the people, and Doctor Latonne appeared with a glass in his hand. He perspired, panted, and stood quite stupefied at the sight of his brother-physician, Doctor Honorat, with one foot planted at the side of the newly discovered spring, like a general who has been the first to enter a fortress.

He asked, breathlessly: “Have you tasted it?”

“No, I am waiting to see whether ’tis clear.” Then Doctor Latonne thrust his glass into it, and drank with that solemnity of visage which experts assume when tasting wines. After that, he exclaimed, “Excellent!” which in no way compromised him, and extending the glass toward his rival said: “Do you wish to taste it?”

But Doctor Honorat, decidedly, had no love for mineral waters, for he smilingly replied:

“Many thanks. ’Tis quite sufficient that you have appreciated it. I know the taste of them.”

He did know the taste of them all, and he appreciated it, too, though in quite a different fashion. Then, turning toward Pére Oriol said:

“’Tisn’t as good as your excellent vine-growth.” The old man was flattered. Christiane had seen, enough, and wanted to go away. Her brother and Paul once more forced a path for her through the populace. She followed them, leaning on her father’s arm. Suddenly she slipped and was near falling, and glancing down at her feet she saw that she had stepped on a piece of bleeding flesh, covered with black hairs and sticky with mud. It was a portion of the pug-dog, who had been mangled by the explosion and trampled underfoot by the crowd. She felt a choking sensation, and was so much moved that she could not restrain her tears. And she murmured, as she dried her eyes with her handkerchief: “Poor little animal! poor little animal!”

She wanted to know nothing more about it. She wished to go back, to shut herself up in her room. That day, which had begun so pleasantly, had ended sadly for her. Was it an omen? Her heart, shriveling up, beat with violent palpitations. They were now alone on the road, and in front of them they saw a tall hat and the two skirts of a frock-coat flapping like wings. It was Doctor Bonnefille, who had been the last to hear the news, and who was now rushing to the spot, glass in hand, like Doctor Latonne.

When he recognized the Marquis, he drew up. “What is this I hear, Marquis? They tell me it is a spring — a mineral spring?”

“Yes, my dear doctor.”

"Abundant?"

"Why, yes."

"Is it true that — that they are there?"

Gontran replied with an air of gravity: "Why, yes, certainly; Doctor Latonne has even made the analysis already."

Then Doctor Bonnefille began to run, while Christiane, a little tickled and enlivened by his face, said: "Well, no, I am not going back yet to the hotel. Let us go and sit down in the park."

Andermatt had remained at the site of the knoll, watching the flowing of the water.

CHAPTER III. BARGAINING

THE *table d'hôte* was noisy that evening at the Hotel Splendid. The blasting of the hillock and the discovery of the new spring gave a brisk impetus to conversation. The diners were not numerous, however, —— a score all told, — people usually taciturn and quiet, patients who, after having vainly tried all the well-known waters, had now turned to the new stations. At the end of the table occupied by the Ravenels and the Andermatts were, first, the Monecus, a little man with white hair and face and his daughter, a very pale, big girl, who sometimes rose up and went out in the middle of a meal, leaving her plate half full; fat M. Aubry-Pasteur, the exengineer; the Chaufours, a family in black, who might be met every day in the walks of the park behind a little vehicle which carried their deformed child, and the ladies Paille, mother and daughter, both of them widows, big and strong, strong everywhere, before and behind. "You may easily see," said Gontran, "that they ate up their husbands; that's how their stomachs got affected." It was, indeed, for a stomach affection that they had come to the station.

Further on, a man of extremely red complexion, brick-colored, M. Riquier, whose digestion was also very indifferent, and then other persons with bad complexions, travelers of that mute class who usually enter the dining-rooms of hotels with slow steps, the wife in front, the husband behind, bow as soon as they have passed the door, and then take their seats with a timid and modest air.

All the other end of the table was empty, although the plates and the covers were laid there for the guests of the future.

Andermatt talked in an animated fashion. He had spent the afternoon chatting with Doctor Latonne, giving vent in a flood of words to vast schemes with reference to Enval. The doctor had enumerated to him, with burning conviction, the wonderful qualities of his water, far superior to those of Chatel-Guyon, whose reputation nevertheless had been definitely established for the last ten years. Then, at the right, they had that hole of a place, Royat, at the height of success, and at the left, that other hole, Chatel-Guyon, which had lately been set afloat. What could they not do with Enval, if they knew how to set about it properly?

He said, addressing the engineer: “Yes, Monsieur, there’s where it all is, to know the way to set about it. It is all a matter of skill, of tact, of opportunism, and of audacity. In order to establish a spa, it is necessary to know how to launch it, nothing more, and in order to launch it, it is necessary to interest the great medical body of Paris in the matter. I, Monsieur, always succeed in what I undertake, because I always seek the practical method, the only one that should determine success in every particular case with which I occupy myself; and, as long as I have not discovered it, I do nothing — I wait. It is not enough to have the water, it is necessary to get people to drink it; and to get people to drink it, it is not enough to get it cried up as unrivaled in the newspapers and elsewhere; it is necessary to know how to get this discreetly said by the only men who have influence on the public that will drink it, on the invalids whom we require, on the peculiarly credulous public that pays for drugs — in short, by the physicians. You can only address a Court of Justice through the mouths of advocates; it will only hear them, and understands only them. So you can only address the patient through the doctors — he listens only to them.”

The Marquis, who greatly admired the practical common sense of his son-in-law, exclaimed:

“Ah! how true this is! Apart from this, my dear boy, you are unique for giving the right touch.” Andermatt, who was excited, went on: “There is a fortune to be made here. The country is admirable, the climate excellent. One thing alone disturbs my mind — would we have water enough for a large establishment? — for things that are only half done always miscarry. We would require a very large establishment, and consequently a great deal of water, enough of water to supply two hundred baths at the same time, with a rapid and continuous current; and the new spring added to the old one, would not supply fifty, whatever Doctor Latonne may say about it— “

M. Aubry-Pasteur interrupted him. “Oh! as for water, I will give you as much as you want of it.”

Andermatt was stupefied. “You?”

“Yes, I. That astonishes you? Let me explain myself. Last year, I was here about the same time as this year, for I really find myself improved by the Enval baths. Now one morning, I lay asleep in my own room, when a stout gentleman arrived. He was the president of the governing body of the establishment. He was in a state of great agitation, and the cause of it was this: the Bonnefille Spring had lowered so much that there were some apprehensions lest it might entirely disappear. Knowing that I was a mining engineer, he had come to ask me if I could not find a means of saving the establishment.

"I accordingly set about studying the geological system of the country. You know that in each stratum of the soil original disturbances have led to different changes and conditions in the surface of the ground. The question, therefore, was to discover how the mineral water came — by what fissures — and what were the direction, the origin, and the nature of these fissures. I first inspected the establishment with great care, and, noticing in a corner an old disused pipe of a bath, I observed that it was already almost stopped up with limestone. Now the water, by depositing the salts which it contained on the coatings of the ducts, had rapidly led to an obstruction of the passage. It would inevitably happen likewise in the natural passages in the soil, this soil being granitic. So it was that the Bonnefille Spring had stopped up. Nothing more. It was necessary to get at it again farther on.

"Most people would have searched above its original point of egress. As for me, after a month of study, observation, and reasoning, I sought for and found it fifty meters lower down. And this was the explanation of the matter: I told you before that it was first necessary to determine the origin, nature, and direction of the fissures in the granite which enabled the water to spring forth. It was easy for me to satisfy myself that these fissures ran from the plain toward the mountain and not from the mountain toward the plain, inclined like a roof undoubtedly, in consequence of a depression of this plain which in breaking up had carried along with it the primitive buttresses of the mountains. Accordingly, the water, in place of descending, rose up again between the different interstices of the granitic layers. And I then discovered the cause of this unexpected phenomenon.

"Formerly the Limagne, that vast expanse of sandy and argillaceous soil, of which you can scarcely see the limits, was on a level with the first table-land of the mountains; but owing to the geological character of its lower portions, it subsided, so as to tear away the edge of the mountain, as I explained to you a moment ago. Now this immense sinking produced, at the point of separating the earth and the granite, an immense barrier of clay of great depth and impenetrable by liquids. And this is what happens: The mineral water comes from the beds of old volcanoes. That which comes from the greatest distance gets cooled on its way, and rises up perfectly cold like ordinary springs; that which comes from the volcanic beds that are nearer gushes up still warm, at varying degrees of heat, according to the distance of the subterranean fire.

“Here is the course it pursues. It is expelled from some unknown depths, up to the moment when it meets the clay barrier of the Limagne. Not being able to pass through it, and pushed on by enormous pressure, it seeks a vent. Finding then the inclined gaps of granite, it gets in there, and reascends to the point at which they reach the level of the soil. Then, resuming its original direction, it again proceeds to flow toward the plain along the ordinary bed of the streams. I may add that we do not see the hundredth part of the mineral waters of these glens. We can only discover those whose point of egress is open. As for the others, arriving as they do at the side of the fissures in the granite under a thick layer of vegetable and cultivated soil, they are lost in the earth, which absorbs them.

“From this I draw the conclusion: first, that to have the water, it is sufficient to search by following the inclination and the direction of the superimposed strips of granite; secondly, that in order to preserve it, it is enough to prevent the fissures from being stopped up by calcareous deposits, that is to say, to maintain carefully the little artificial wells by digging; thirdly, that in order to obtain the adjoining spring, it is necessary to get at it by means of a practical sounding as far as the same fissure of granite below, and not above, it being well understood that you must place yourself at the side of the barrier of clay which forces the waters to reascend. From this point of view, the spring discovered to-day is admirably situated only some meters away from this barrier. If you want to set up a new establishment, it is here you should erect it.”

When he ceased speaking, there was an interval of silence.

Andermatt, ravished, said merely: “That’s it! When you see the curtain drawn, the entire mystery vanishes. You are a most valuable man, M. Aubry-Pasteur.”

Besides him, the Marquis and Paul Bretigny alone had understood what he was talking about. Gontran had not heard a single word. The others, with their ears and mouths open, while the engineer was talking, were simply stupefied with amazement. The ladies Paille especially, being very religious women, asked themselves if this explanation of a phenomenon ordained by God and accomplished by mysterious means had not in it something profane. The mother thought she ought to say: “Providence is very wonderful.” The ladies seated at the center of the table conveyed their approval by nods of the head, disturbed also by listening to these unintelligible remarks.

M. Riquier, the brick-colored man, observed: “They may well come from volcanoes or from the moon, these Enval waters — here have I been taking them ten days, and as yet I experience no effect from them!”

M. and Madame Chaufour protested in the name of their child, who was beginning to move the right leg, a thing that had not happened during the six years they had been nursing him.

Riquier replied: “That proves, by Jove, that we have not the same ailment; it doesn’t prove that the Enval water cures affections of the stomach.” He seemed in a rage, exasperated by this fresh, useless experiment.

But M. Monecu also spoke in the name of his daughter, declaring -that for the last eight days she was beginning to be able to retain food without being obliged to go out at every meal. And his big daughter blushed, with her nose in her plate. The ladies Paille likewise thought they had improved.

Then Riquier was vexed, and abruptly turning toward the two women said:

“Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames.”

They replied together: “Why, yes, Monsieur. We can digest nothing.”

He nearly leaped out of his chair, stammering: “You — you! Why, ’tis enough to look at you. Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames. That is to say, you eat too much.”

Madame Paille, the mother, became very angry, and she retorted: “As for you, Monsieur, there is no doubt about it, you exhibit certainly the appearance of persons whose stomachs are destroyed. It has been well said that good stomachs make nice men.”

A very thin, old lady, whose name was not known, said authoritatively: “I am sure everyone would find the waters of Enval better if the hotel chef would only bear in mind a little that he is cooking for invalids. Truly, he sends us up things that it is impossible to digest.”

And suddenly the entire table agreed on the point, and indignation was expressed against the hotelkeeper, who served them with crayfish, porksteaks, salt eels, cabbage, yes, cabbage and sausages, all the most indigestible kinds of food in the world for persons for whom Doctors Bonnefille, Latonne, and Honorât had prescribed only white meats, lean and tender, fresh vegetables, and milk diet.

Riquier was shaking with fury: “Why should not the physicians inspect the table at thermal stations without leaving such an important thing as the selection of nutriment to the judgment of a brute? Thus, every day, they give us hard eggs, anchovies, and ham as side-dishes— “

M. Monecu interrupted him: “Oh! excuse me! My daughter can digest nothing well except ham, which, moreover has been prescribed for her by Mas-Roussel and Remusot.”

Riquier exclaimed: “Ham! ham! why, that’s poison, Monsieur.”

And an interminable argument arose, which each day was taken up afresh, as to the classification of foods. Milk itself was discussed with passionate warmth. Riquier could not drink a glass of claret and milk without immediately suffering from indigestion.

Aubry-Pasteur, in answer to his remarks, irritated in his turn, observed that people questioned the properties of things which he adored:

“Why, gracious goodness, Monsieur, if you were attacked with dyspepsia and I with gastralgia, we would require food as different as the glass of the spectacles that suits short-sighted and long-sighted people, both of whom, however, have diseased eyes.”

He added: “For my part I begin to choke when I swallow a glass of red wine, and I believe there is nothing worse for man than wine. All water-drinkers live a hundred years, while we— “

Gontran replied with a laugh: “Faith, without wine and without marriage, I would find life monotonous enough.”

The ladies Paille lowered their eyes. They drank a considerable quantity of Bordeaux of the best quality without any water in it, and their double widowhood seemed to indicate that they had applied the same treatment to their husbands, the daughter being twenty-two and the mother scarcely forty.

But Andermatt, usually so chatty, remained taciturn and thoughtful. He suddenly asked Gontran: “Do you know where the Oriols live?”

“Yes, their house was pointed out to me a little while ago.”

“Could you bring me there after dinner?”

“Certainly. It will even give me pleasure to accompany you. I shall not be sorry to have another look at the two lassies.”

And, as soon as dinner was over, they went off, while Christiane, who was tired, went up with the Marquis and Paul Bretigny to spend the rest of the day in the drawing-room.

It was still broad daylight, for they dine early at thermal stations.

Andermatt took his brother-in-law's arm.

"My dear Gontran, if this old man is reasonable, and if the analysis realizes Doctor Latonne's expectations, I am probably going to try a big stroke of business here — a spa. I am going to start a spa!"

He stopped in the middle of the street, and seized his companion by both sides of his jacket.

"Ha! you don't understand, fellows like you, how amusing business is, not the business of merchants or traders, but big undertakings such as we go in for! Yes, my boy, when they are properly understood, we find in them everything that men care for —— they cover, at the same time, politics, war, diplomacy, everything, everything! It is necessary to be always searching, finding, inventing, to understand everything, to foresee everything, to combine everything, to dare everything. The great battle to-day is being fought by means of money. For my part, I see in the hundred-sou pieces raw recruits in red breeches, in the twenty-franc pieces very glittering lieutenants, captains in the notes for a hundred francs, and in those for a thousand I see generals. And I fight, by heavens! I fight from morning till night against all the world, with all the world. And this is how to live, how to live on a big scale, just as the mighty lived in days of yore. We are the mighty of to-day — there you are — the only true mighty ones!

"Stop, look at that village, that poor village! I will make a town of it, yes, I will, a lovely town full of big hotels which will be filled with visitors, with elevators, with servants, with carriages, a crowd of rich folk served by a crowd of poor; and all this because it pleased me one evening to fight with Royat, which is at the right, with Chatel-Guyon, which is at the left, with Mont Doré, La Bourboule, Châteauneuf, Saint Nectaire, which are behind us, with Vichy, which is facing us. And shall succeed because I have the means, the only means. I have seen it in one glance, just as a great general sees the weak side of an enemy. It is necessary too to know how to lead men, in our line of business, both to carry them along with us and to subjugate them.

"Good God! life becomes amusing when you can do such things. I have now three years of pleasure to look forward to with this town of mine. And then see what a chance it is to find this engineer, who told us such interesting things at dinner, most interesting things, my dear fellow. It is as clear as day, my system. Thanks to it, I can smash the old company, without even having any necessity of buying it up.”

He then resumed his walk, and they quietly went up the road to the left in the direction of Chatel-Guyon.”

Gontran presently observed: “When I am walking by my brother-in-law’s side, I feel that the same noise disturbs his brain as that heard in the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo — that noise of gold moved about, shuffled, drawn away, raked off, lost or gained.”

Andermatt did, indeed, suggest the idea of a strange human machine, constructed only for the purpose of calculating and debating about money, and mentally manipulating it. Moreover, he exhibited much vanity about his special knowledge of the world, and plumed himself on his power of estimating at one glance of his eye the actual value of anything whatever. Accordingly, he might be seen, wherever he happened to be, every moment taking up an article, examining it, turning it round, and declaring: “This is worth so much.”

His wife and his brother-in-law, diverted by this mania, used to amuse themselves by deceiving him, exhibiting to him queer pieces of furniture and asking him to estimate them; and when he remained perplexed, at the sight of their unexpected finds, they would both burst out laughing like fools. Sometimes also, in the street at Paris, Gontran would stop in front of a warehouse and force him to make a calculation of an entire shop-window, or perhaps of a horse with a jolting vehicle, or else again of a luggage-van laden with household goods.

One evening, while seated at his sister’s dinner-table before fashionable guests, he called on William to tell him what would be the approximate value of the Obelisk; then, when the other happened to name some figure, he would put the same question as to the Solferino Bridge, and the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile. And he gravely concluded: “You might write a very interesting work on the valuation of the principal monuments of the globe.” Andermatt never got angry, and fell in with all his pleasantries, like a superior man sure of himself.

Gontran having asked one day: “And I — how much am I worth?” William declined to answer; then, as his brother-in-law persisted, saying: “Look here! If I should be captured by brigands, how much would you give to release me?” he replied at last: “Well, well, my dear fellow, I would give a bill.” And his smile said so much that the other, a little disconcerted, did not press the matter further.

Andermatt, besides, was fond of artistic objects, and having fine taste and appreciating such things thoroughly, he skillfully collected them with that bloodhound’s scent which he carried into all commercial transactions.

They had arrived in front of a house of a middle-class type. Gontran stopped him and said: “Here it is.” An iron knocker hung over a heavy oaken door; they knocked, and a lean servant-maid came to open it.

The banker asked: “Monsieur Oriol?”

The woman said: “Come in.”

They entered a kitchen, a big farm-kitchen, in which a little fire was still burning under a pot; then they were ushered into another part of the house, where the Oriol family was assembled.

The father was asleep, seated on one chair with his feet on another. The son, with both elbows on the table, was reading the “Petit Journal” with the spasmodic efforts of a feeble intellect always wandering; and the two girls, in the recess of the same window, were working at the same piece of tapestry, having begun it one at each end.

They were the first to rise, both at the same moment, astonished at this unexpected visit; then, big Jacques raised his head, a head congested by the pressure of his brain; then, at last, Père Oriol waked up, and took down his long legs from the second chair one after the other.

The room was bare, with whitewashed walls, a stone flooring, and furniture consisting of straw seats, a mahogany chest of drawers, four engravings by Epinal with glass over them, and big white curtains.

They were all staring at each other, and the servant-maid, with her petticoat raised up to her knees, was waiting at the door, riveted to the spot by curiosity.

Andermatt introduced himself, mentioning his name as well as that of his brother-in-law, Count de Ravenel, made a low bow to the two young girls, bending his head with extreme politeness, and then calmly seated himself, adding:

“Monsieur Oriol, I came to talk to you about a matter of business. Moreover, I will not take four roads to explain myself. See here. You have just discovered a spring on your property. The analysis of this water is to be made in a few days. If it is of no value, you will understand that I will have nothing to do with it; if, on the contrary, it fulfills my anticipations, I propose to buy from you this piece of ground, and all the lands around it. Think on this. No other person but myself could make you such an offer. The old company is nearly bankrupt; it will not, therefore, have the least notion of building a new establishment, and the ill success of this enterprise will not encourage fresh attempts. Don't give me an answer to-day. Consult your family. When the analysis is known you will fix your price. If it suits me, I will say 'yes'; if it does not suit me, I will say 'no.' I never haggle for my part."

The peasant, a man of business in his own way, and sharp as anyone could be, courteously replied that he would see about it, that he felt honored, that he would think it over — and then he offered them a glass of wine.

Andermatt made no objection, and, as the day was declining, Oriol said to his daughters, who had resumed their work, with their eyes lowered over the piece of tapestry: "Let us have some light, girls."

They both got up together, passed into an adjoining room, then came back, one carrying two lighted wax-candles, the other four wineglasses without stems, glasses such as the poor use. The wax-candles were fresh looking and were garnished with red paper — placed, no doubt, by way of ornament on the young girl's mantelpiece.

Then, Colosse rose up; for only the male members of the family visited the cellar. Andermatt had an idea. "It would give me great pleasure to see your cellar. You are the principal vinedresser of the district, and it must be a very fine one."

Oriol, touched to the heart, hastened to conduct them, and, taking up one of the wax-candles, led the way. They had to pass through the kitchen again, then they got into a court where the remnant of daylight that was left enabled them to discern empty casks standing on end, big stones of giant granite in a corner pierced with a hole in the middle, like the wheels of some antique car of colossal size, a dismounted winepress with wooden screws, its brown divisions rendered smooth by wear and tear, and glittering suddenly in the light thrown by the candle on the shadows that surrounded it. Close to it, the working implements of polished steel on the ground had the glitter of arms used in warfare. All these things gradually grew more distinct, as the old man drew nearer to them with the candle in his hand, making a shade of the other.

Already they got the smell of the wine, the pounded grapes drained dry. They arrived in front of a door fastened with two locks. Oriol opened it, and quickly raising the candle above his head vaguely pointed toward a long succession of barrels standing in a row, and having on their swelling flanks a second line of smaller casks. He showed them first of all that this cellar, all on one floor, sank right into the mountain, then he explained the contents of its different casks, the ages, the nature of the various vine-crops, and their merits; then, having reached the supply reserved for the family, he caressed the cask with his hand just as one might rub the crupper of a favorite horse, and in a proud tone said:

"You are going to taste this. There's not a wine bottled equal to it — not one, either at Bordeaux or elsewhere."

For he possessed the intense passion of countrymen for wine kept in a cask.

Colosse followed him, carrying a jug, stooped down, turned the cock of the funnel, while his father cautiously held the light for him, as though he were accomplishing some difficult task requiring minute attention. The candle's flame fell directly on their faces, the father's head like that of an old attorney, and the son's like that of a peasant soldier.

Andermatt murmured in Gontran's ear: "Hey, what a fine Teniers!"

The young man replied in a whisper: "I prefer the girls."

Then they went back into the house. It was necessary, it seemed, to drink this wine, to drink a great deal of it, in order to please the two Oriols.

The lassies had come across to the table where they continued their work as if there had been no visitors. Gontran kept incessantly staring at them, asking himself whether they were twins, so closely did they resemble one another. One of them, however, was plumper and smaller, while the other was more ladylike. Their hair, dark-brown rather than black, drawn over their temples in smooth bands, gleamed with every slight movement of their heads. They had the rather heavy jaw and forehead peculiar to the people of Auvergne, cheek-bones somewhat strongly marked, but charming mouths, ravishing eyes, with brows of rare neatness, and delightfully fresh complexions. One felt, on looking at them, that they had not been brought up in this house, but in a select boarding-school, in the convent to which the daughters of the aristocracy of Auvergne are sent, and that they had acquired there the well-bred manners of cultivated young ladies.

Meanwhile, Gontran, seized with disgust before this red glass in front of him, pressed Andermatt's foot to induce him to leave. At length he rose, and they both energetically grasped the hands of the two peasants; then they bowed once more ceremoniously, the young girls each responding with a slight nod, without again rising from their seats.

As soon as they had reached the village, Andermatt began talking again. —

"Hey, my dear boy, what an odd family! How manifest here is the transition from people in good society. A son's services are required to cultivate the vine so as to save the wages of a laborer, — stupid economy, — however, he discharges this function, and is one of the people. As for the girls, they are like girls of the better class — almost quite so already.

Let them only make good matches, and they would pass as well as any of the women of our own class, and even much better than most of them. I am as much gratified at seeing these people as a geologist would be at finding an animal of the tertiary period."

Gontran asked: "Which do you prefer?"

"Which? How, which? Which what?"

"Of the lassies?"

"Oh! upon my honor, I haven't an idea on the subject. I have not looked at them from the standpoint of comparison. But what difference can this make to you? You have no intention to carry off one of them?"

Gontran began to laugh: "Oh! no, but I am delighted to meet for once fresh women, really fresh, fresh as women never are with us. I like looking at them, just as you like looking at a Teniers. There is nothing pleases me so much as looking at a pretty girl, no matter where, no matter of what class. These are my objects of vertu. I don't collect them, but I admire them — I admire them passionately, artistically, my friend, in the spirit of a convinced and disinterested artist. What would you have? I love this! By the bye, could you lend me five thousand francs?"

The other stopped, and murmured an "Again!" energetically.

Gentran replied, with an air of simplicity: "Always!" Then they resumed their walk.

Andermatt then said: "What the devil do you do with the money?"

"I spend, it."

"Yes, but you spend it to excess."

"My dear friend, I like spending money as much as you like making it. Do you understand?"

"Very fine, but you don't make it."

"That's true. I know it. One can't have everything. You know how to make it, and, upon my word, you don't at all know how to spend it. Money appears to you no use except to get interest on it. I, on the other hand, don't know how to make it, but I know thoroughly how to spend it. It procures me a thousand things of which you don't know the name. We were cut out for brothers-in-law. We complete one another admirably."

Andermatt murmured: "What stuff! No, you sha'n't have five thousand francs, but I'll lend you fifteen hundred francs, because — because in a few days I shall, perhaps, have need of you."

Gontran rejoined: "Then I accept them on account." The other gave him a slap on the shoulder without saying anything by way of answer.

They reached the park, which was illuminated with lamps hung to the branches of the trees. The orchestra of the Casino was playing in slow time a classical piece that seemed to stagger along, full of breaks and silences, executed by the same four performers, exhausted with constant playing, morning and evening, in this solitude for the benefit of the leaves and the brook, with trying to produce the effect of twenty instruments, and tired also of never being fully paid at the end of the month. Petrus Martel always completed their remuneration, when it fell short, with hampers of wine or pints of liqueurs which the bathers might have left unconsumed.

Amid the noise of the concert could also be distinguished that of the billiard-table, the clicking of the balls and the voices calling out: "Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Andermatt and Gontran went in. M. Aubry-Pasteur and Doctor Honorat, by themselves, were drinking their coffee, at the side facing the musicians. Petrus Martel and Lapalme were playing their game with desperation; and the female attendant woke up to ask:

"What do these gentlemen wish to take?"

CHAPTER IV. A TEST AND AN AVOWAL

PERE ORIOL and his son had remained for a long time chatting after the girls had gone to bed. Stirred up and excited by Andermatt's proposal, they were considering how they could inflame his desire more effectually without compromising their own interests. Like the cautious, practically-minded peasants that they were, they weighed nil the chances carefully, understanding very clearly that in a country in which mineral springs gushed out along all the streams, it was not advisable to repel by an exaggerated demand this unexpected enthusiast, the like of whom they might never find again. And at the same time it would not do either to leave entirely in his hands this spring, which might, some day, yield a flood of liquid money, Royat and Chatel-Guyon serving as a precedent for them.

Therefore, they asked themselves by what course of action they could kindle into frenzy the banker's ardor; they conjured up combinations of imaginary companies covering his offers, a succession of clumsy schemes, the defects of which they felt, without succeeding in inventing more ingenious ones. They slept badly; then, in the morning, the father, having awakened first, thought in his own mind that the spring might have disappeared during the night. It was possible, after all, that it might have gone as it had come, and re-entered the earth, so that it could not be brought back. He got up in a state of unrest, seized with avaricious fear, shook his son, and told him about his alarm; and big Colosse, dragging his legs out of his coarse sheets, dressed himself in order to go out with his father, to make sure about the matter.

In any case, they would put the field and the spring in proper trim themselves, would carry off the stones, and make it nice and clean, like an animal that they wanted to sell. So they took their picks and their spades, and started for the spot side by side with great, swinging strides.

They looked at nothing as they walked on, their minds being preoccupied with the business, replying with only a single word to the "Good morning" of the neighbors and friends whom they chanced to meet. When they reached the Riom road they began to get agitated, peering into the distance to see whether they could observe the water bubbling up and glittering in the morning sun. The road was empty, white, and dusty, the river running beside it sheltered by willow-trees. Beneath one of the trees Oriol suddenly noticed two feet, then, having advanced three steps further, he recognized Père Clovis seated at the edge of the road, with his crutches lying beside him on the grass.

This was an old paralytic, well known in the district, where for the last ten years he had prowled about on his supports of stout oak, as he said himself, like a poor man made of stone.

Formerly a poacher in the woods and streams, often arrested and imprisoned, he had got rheumatic pains by his long watchings stretched on the moist grass and by his nocturnal fishings in the rivers, through which he used to wade up to his middle in water. Now he whined, and crawled about, like a crab that had lost its claws. He stumped along, dragging his right leg after him like a piece of ragged cloth. But the boys of the neighborhood, who used in foggy weather to run after the girls or the hares, declared that they used to meet Père Clovis, swiftfooted as a stag, and supple as an adder, under the bushes and in the glades, and that, in short, his rheumatism was only “a dodge on the gendarmes.” Colosse, especially, insisted on maintaining that he had seen him, not once, but fifty times, straining his neck with his crutches under his arms.

And Père Oriol stopped in front of the old vagabond, his mind possessed by an idea which as yet was undefined, for the brain works slowly in the thick skulls of Auvergne. He said “Good morning” to him. The other responded “Good morning.” Then they spoke about the weather, the ripening of the vine, and two or three other things; but, as Colosse had gone ahead, his father with long steps hastened to overtake him.

The spring was still flowing, clear by this time, and all the bottom of the hole was red, a fine, dark red, which had arisen from an abundant deposit of iron. The two men gazed at it with smiling faces, then they proceeded to clear the soil that surrounded it, and to carry off the stones of which they made a heap. And, having found the last remains of the dead dog, they buried them with jocose remarks. But all of a sudden Père Oriol let his spade fall. A roguish leer of delight and triumph wrinkled the corners of his leathery lips and the edges of his cunning eyes, and he said to his son: “Come on, till we see.” The other obeyed. They got on the road once more, and retraced their steps. Père Clovis was still toasting his limbs and his crutches in the sun.

Oriol, drawing up before him, asked: “Do you want to earn a hundred-franc piece?”

The other cautiously refrained from answering.

The peasant said: “Hey! a hundred francs?” Thereupon the vagabond made up his mind, and murmured: “Of course, but what am I asked to do?”

“Well, father, here’s what I want you to do.” And he explained to the other at great length with tricky circumlocutions, easily understood hints, and innumerable repetitions, that, if he would consent to take a bath for an hour every day from ten to eleven in a hole which they, Colosse and he, intended to dig at the side of the spring, and to be cured at the end of a month, they would give him a hundred francs in cash.

The paralytic listened with a stupid air, and then said: “Since all the drugs haven’t been able to help me, ’tisn’t your water that’ll cure me.”

But Colosse suddenly got into a passion. “Come, my old play-actor, you’re talking rubbish. I know what your disease is — don’t tell me about it’ What were you doing on Monday last in the Comberombe wood at eleven o’clock at night?”

The old fellow promptly answered: “That’s not true.”

But Colosse, firing up: “Isn’t it true, you old blackguard, that you jumped over the ditch to Jean Cannezat and that you made your way along the Paulin chasm?”

The other energetically repeated: “It is not true!”

“Isn’t it true that I called out to you: ‘Oho, Clovis, the gendarmes!’ and that you turned up the Moulinet road?”

“No, it is not.”

Big Jacques, raging, almost menacing, exclaimed: “Ah! it’s not true! Well, old three paws, listen! The next time I see you there in the wood at night or else in the water, I’ll take a grip of you, as my legs are rather longer than your own, and I’ll tie you up to some tree till morning, when we’ll go and take you away, the whole village together— “

Père Oriol stopped his son; then, in a very wheedling tone: “Listen, Clovis! you can easily do the thing. We prepare a bath for you, Coloche and myself. You come there every day for a month. For that I give you, not one hundred, but two hundred francs. And then, listen! if you’re cured at the end of the month, it will mean five hundred francs more. Understand clearly, five hundred in ready money, and two hundred more — that makes seven hundred. Therefore you get two hundred for taking a bath for a month and five hundred more for the curing. And listen again! Suppose the pains come back. If this happens you in the autumn, there will be nothing more for us to do, for the water will have none the less produced its effect!"

The old fellow coolly replied: "In that case I'm quite willing. If it won't succeed, we'll always see it." And the three men pressed one another's hands to seal the bargain they had concluded. Then, the two Oriols returned to their spring, in order to dig the bath for Père Clovis.

They had been working at it for a quarter of an hour, when they heard voices on the road. It was Andermatt and Doctor Latonne. The two peasants winked at one another, and ceased digging the soil.

The banker came across to them, and grasped their hands; then the entire four proceeded to fix their eyes on the water without uttering a word. It stirred about like water set in movement above a big fire, threw out bubbles and steam, then it flowed away in the direction of the brook through a tiny gutter which it had already traced out. Oriol, with a smile of pride on his lips, said suddenly: "Hey, that's iron, isn't it?"

In fact the bottom was now all red, and even the little pebbles which it washed as it flowed along seemed covered with a sort of purple mold.

Doctor Latonne replied: "Yes, but that is nothing to the purpose. We would require to know its other qualities."

The peasant observed: "Coloche and myself first drank a glass of it yesterday evening, and it has already made our bodies feel fresh. Isn't that true, son?"

The big youth replied in a tone of conviction: "Sure enough, it was very refreshing."

Andermatt remained motionless, his feet on the edge of the hole. He turned toward the physician: "We would want nearly six times this volume of water for what I would wish to do, would we not?"

"Yes, nearly."

"Do you think that we'll be able to get it?"

"Oh! as for me, I know nothing about it."

"See here! The purchase of the grounds can only be definitely effected after the soundings. It would be necessary, first of all, to have a promise of sale drawn up by a notary, once the analysis is known, but not to take effect unless the consecutive soundings give the results hoped for."

Père Oriol became restless. He did not understand. Andermatt thereupon explained to him the insufficiency of only one spring, and demonstrated to him that he could not purchase unless he found others. But he could not search for these other springs till after the signature of a promise of sale.

The two peasants appeared forthwith to be convinced that their fields contained as many springs as vine-stalks. It would be sufficient to dig for them — they would see, they would see.

Andermatt said simply: “Yes, we shall see.”

But Père Oriol dipped his fingers in the water, and remarked: “Why, ’tis hot enough to boil an egg, much hotter than the Bonnefille one!”

Latonne in his turn steeped his fingers in it, and realized that this was possible.

The peasant went on: “And then it has more taste and a better taste; it hasn’t a false taste, like the other. Oh! this one, I’ll answer for it, is good!

I know the waters of the country for the fifty years that I’ve seen them flowing. I never seen a finer one than this, never, never!”

He remained silent for a few seconds, and then continued: “It is not in order to puff the water that I say this! — certainly not. I would like to make a trial of it before you, a fair trial, not what your chemists make, but a trial of it on a person who has a disease. I’ll bet that it will cure a paralytic, this one, so hot is it and so good to taste — I’ll make a bet on it!”

He appeared to be searching his brain, then cast a look at the tops of the neighboring mountains to see whether he could discover the paralytic that he required. Not having made the discovery, he lowered his eyes to the road.

Two hundred meters away from it, at the side of the road could be distinguished the two inert legs of the vagabond, whose body was hidden by the trunk of a willow tree.

Oriol placed his hand on his forehead as a shade, and said questioningly to his son: “That isn’t Père Clovis over there still?”

Colosse laughingly replied: “Yes, yes. ’Tis he — he doesn’t go as quick as a hare.”

Then Oriol stepped over to Andermatt’s side, and with an air of serious and deep conviction: “Look here, Monchieu! Listen to me. There’s a paralytic over yonder, who is well known to the doctor, a genuine one, who hasn’t been seen to make a single step for the last ten years. Isn’t that so, doctor?”

Latonne returned: “Oh! if you cure that fellow, I would pay a franc a glass for your water!”

Then, turning toward Andermatt: “Tis an old fellow suffering from rheumatic gout with a sort of spasmodic contraction of the left leg and a complete paralysis of the right; in fact, I believe, an incurable.”

Oriol had allowed him to talk; he resumed in a deliberate fashion: “Well, doctor, would you like to make a trial of it on him for a month? I don’t say that it will succeed, — I say nothing on the matter, — I only ask to have a trial made. Hold on! Coloche and myself are going to dig a hole for the stones — well, we’ll make a hole for Cloviche; he’ll remain an hour there every morning, and then we’ll see — there!

—— we’ll see.”

The physician murmured: “You may try. I answer confidently that you will not succeed.”

But Andermatt, beguiled by the prospect of an almost miraculous cure, gladly fell in with the peasant’s suggestion; and the entire four directed their steps toward the vagabond, who, all this time, had been lying motionless in the sun. The old poacher, understanding the dodge, pretended to refuse, resisted for a long time, then allowed himself to be persuaded, on the condition that Andermatt would give him two francs a day for the hour which he would spend in the water.

So the matter was settled. It was even decided that, as soon as the hole was dug, Père Clovis should take his bath that very day. Andermatt would supply him with clothes to dress himself afterward, and the two Oriols would bring him a disused shepherd’s hut, which was lying in their yard, so that the invalid might shut himself in there, and change his apparel.

Then the banker and the physician returned to the village. When they reached it, they parted, the doctor going to his own house for his consultations, and Andermatt hurrying to attend on his wife, who had to come to the establishment at half past nine o’clock.

She appeared almost immediately, dressed from head to foot in pink — with a pink hat, a pink parasol, and a pink complexion, she looked like an aurora, and she descended the steps of the hotel to avoid the turn of the road with the hopping movements of a bird, as it goes from stone to stone, without opening its wing. As soon as she saw her husband, she exclaimed:

“Oh! what a pretty country it is! I am quite delighted with it.”

A few bathers wandering sadly through the little park in silence turned round as she passed by, and Petrus Martel, who was smoking his pipe in his shirt-sleeves at the window of the billiard-room, called to his chum, Lapalme, sitting in a corner before a glass of white wine, and said, smacking the roof of his mouth with his tongue:

"Deuce take it, there's something sweet!" Christiane made her way into the establishment, bowed smilingly toward the cashier, who sat at the left of the entrance-door, and saluted the ex-jailer seated at the right with a "Good morning"; then, holding out a ticket to a bath-attendant dressed like the girl in the refreshment-room, followed her into a corridor facing the doors of the bath-rooms. The lady was shown into one of them, rather large, with bare walls, furnished with a chair, a glass, and a shoe-horn, while a large oval orifice, coated, like the floor, with yellow cement, served the purposes of a bath.

The woman turned a cock like those used for making the street-gutters flow, and the water gushed through a little round grated aperture at the bottom of the bath so that it was soon full to the brim, and its overflow was diverted through a furrow sunk into the wall.

Christiane, having left her chambermaid at the hotel, declined the attendant's services in undressing, and remained there alone, saying that if she required anything, she would ring, and would do the same when she wanted her linen.

She slowly disrobed, watching as she did so the almost invisible movement of the wave gently stirring on the clear surface of the basin. When she had divested herself of all her clothing she dipped her foot in, and the pleasant warm sensation mounted to her throat; then she plunged into the tepid water first one leg, and after it the other, and sat down in the midst of this caressing heat, in this transparent bath, in this spring, which flowed over her, around her, covering her body with tiny globules all along her legs, all along her arms, and also all over her breasts. She noticed with surprise those particles of air innumerable and minute which clothed her from head to foot with an entire mail-suit of little pearls. And these pearls, so minute, flew off incessantly from her white flesh, and evaporated on the surface of the bath, driven on by others that sprung to life over her form. They sprung up over her skin, like light fruits incapable of being grasped yet charming, the fruits of this exquisite body rosy and fresh, which had generated those pearls in the water.

And Christiane felt herself so happy in it, so sweetly, so softly, so deliciously caressed and clasped by the restless wave, the living wave, the animated wave from the spring which gushed up from the depths of the basin under her legs and fled through the little opening toward the edge of the bath, that she would have liked to have remained there forever, without moving, almost without thinking. The sensation of a calm delight composed of rest and comfort, of tranquil dreamfulness, of health, of discreet joy, and silent gaiety, entered into her with the soothing warmth of this. And her spirit mused, vaguely lulled into repose by the gurgling of the overflow which was escaping — dreamed of what she would be doing by and by, of what she would be doing to-morrow, of promenades, of her father, of her husband, of her brother, and of that big boy who had made her feel slightly ill at ease since the adventure of the dog. She did not care for persons of violent tendencies.

No desire agitated her soul, calm as her heart in this grateful moist warmth, no desires save the shadowy hopes of a child, no desire of any other life, of emotion, or passion. She felt that it was well with her, and she was satisfied with the happiness of her lot.

She was suddenly startled — the door flew open; it was the Auvergnat carrying the linen. Twenty minutes had passed; it was already time for her to be dressed. It was almost a pang, almost a calamity, this awakening; she felt a longing to beg of the woman to give her a few minutes more; then she reflected that every day she would find again the same delight, and she regretfully left the bath to be wrapped in a white dressing-gown whose scorching heat felt somewhat unpleasant.

Just as she was going out, Doctor Bonnefille opened the door of his consultation-room and invited her to enter, bowing ceremoniously. He inquired about her health, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, took note of her appetite and her digestion, asked her how she slept, and then accompanied her to the door, repeating:

“Come, come, that’s right, that’s right. My respects, if you please, to your father, one of the most distinguished men that I have met in my career.”

At last, she got away, bored by these undesirable attentions, and at the door she saw the Marquis chatting with Andermatt, Gontran, and Paul Bretigny. Her husband, in whose head every new idea was continually buzzing, like a fly in a bottle, was relating the story of the paralytic, and wanted to go back to see whether the vagabond was taking his bath. They were about to go with him to the spot in order to please him. But Christiane very gently detained her brother, and, when they were a short distance away from the others:

“Tell me now! I wanted to talk to you about your friend; I must say I don’t much care for him. Explain to me exactly what he is like.”

And Gontran, who had known Paul for many years, told her about this passionate nature, uncouth, sincere, and kindly by starts. He was, according to Gontran, a clever young fellow, whose wild spirit impetuously flung itself into every new idea. Yielding to every impulse, unable to control or to direct his passions, or to fight against his feelings with the aid of reason, or to govern his life by a system based on settled convictions, he obeyed the promptings of his heart, whether they were virtuous or vicious, the moment that any desire, any thought, any emotion whatever, agitated his excitable nature.

He had already fought seven duels, as ready to insult people as to become their friend. He had been madly in love with women of every class, adored them with the same transports from the working-girl whom he picked up in the corner of some store to the actress whom he carried off, yes, carried off, on the night of a first performance, just as she was stepping into a vehicle on her way home, bearing her away in his arms in the midst of the astonished spectators, and pushing her into a carriage, which disappeared at a gallop before anyone could follow it or overtake it.

And Gontran concluded: “There you are! He is a good fellow, but a fool; very rich, moreover, and capable of anything, of anything at all, when he loses his head.”

Christiane said: “What a strange perfume he carries about him! It is rather nice. What is it?”

Gontran answered: “I don’t really know; he doesn’t want to tell about it. I believe it comes from Russia. ’Tis the actress, his actress, she whom I cured him of this time, that gave it to him. Yes, indeed, it has a very pleasant odor.”

They saw, on their way, a group of bathers and of peasants, for it was the custom every morning before breakfast to take a turn along the road.

Christiane and Gontran joined the Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul, and soon they beheld, in the place where the knoll had stood the day before, a queer-looking human head covered with a ragged felt hat, and wearing a big white beard, looking as if it had sprung up out of the ground, the head of a decapitated man, as it were, growing there like a plant. Around it, some vinedressers were looking on, amazed, impassive, the peasantry of

Auvergne not being scoffers, while three tall gentlemen, visitors at second-class hotels, were laughing and joking.

Oriol and his son stood there contemplating the vagabond, who was steeped in his hole, sitting on a stone, with the water up to his chin. He might have been taken for a desperate criminal of olden times condemned to death for some unusual kind of sorcery; and he had not let go his crutches, which were by his sides in the water.

Andermatt kept repeating enthusiastically: “Bravo! bravo! there’s an example which all the people in the country suffering from rheumatic pains should imitate.”

And, bending toward the old man, he shouted at him as if he were deaf: “Do you feel well?”

The other, who seemed completely stupefied by this boiling water, replied: “It seems to me that I’m melting!”

But Père Oriol exclaimed: “The hotter it is, the more good it will do you.”

A voice behind the Marquis said: “What is that?”

And M. Aubry-Pasteur, always puffing, stopped on his way back from his daily walk. Then Andermatt explained his experiment in curing. But the old man kept repeating: “Devil take it! how hot it is!” And he wanted to get out, asking some one to help him up. The banker succeeded eventually in calming him by promising him twenty sous more for each bath. The spectators formed a circle round the hole, in which the dirty, grayish rags were soaking wherewith this old body was covered.

A voice said: “Nice meat for broth! I wouldn’t care to make soup of it!”

Another rejoined: “The meat would scarcely agree with me!”

But the Marquis observed that the bubbles of carbonic acid seemed more numerous, larger, and brighter in this new spring than in that of the baths.

The vagabond’s rags were covered with them; and these bubbles rose to the surface in such abundance that the water appeared to be crossed by innumerable little chains, by an infinity of beads of exceedingly small, round diamonds, the strong midday sun making them as clear as brilliants.

Then Aubry-Pasteur burst out laughing: “Egad,” said he, “I must tell you what they do at the establishment. You know they catch a spring like a bird in a kind of snare, or rather in a bell. That’s what they call coaxing it. Now last year here is what happened to the spring that supplies the baths. The carbonic acid, lighter than water, was stored up to the top of the bell; then, when it was collected there in a very large quantity, it was driven back into the ducts, reascended in abundance into the baths, filled up the compartments, and all but suffocated the invalids. We have had three accidents in the course of three months. Then they consulted me again, and I invented a very simple apparatus consisting of two pipes which led off separately the liquid and the gas in the bell in order to combine them afresh immediately under the bath, and thus to reconstitute the water in its normal state while avoiding the dangerous excess of carbonic acid. But my apparatus would have cost a thousand francs. Do you know what the custodian does then? I give you a thousand guesses to find out. He bores a hole in the bell to get rid of the gas, which flies out, you understand, so that they sell you acidulated baths without any acid, or so little acid that it is not worth much. Whereas here, why just look!"

Everybody became indignant. They no longer laughed, and they cast envious looks toward the paralytic. Every bather would gladly have seized a pickax to make another hole beside that of the vagabond. But Andermatt took the engineer's arm, and they went off chatting together. From time to time Aubry-Pasteur stopped, made a show of drawing lines with his walking-stick, indicating certain points, and the banker wrote down notes in a memorandum-book.

Christiane and Paul Bretigny entered into conversation. He told her about his journey to Auvergne, and all that he had seen and experienced. He loved the country, with those warm instincts of his, with which always mingled an element of animality. He had a sensual love of nature because it excited his blood, and made his nerves and organs quiver. He said: "For my part, Madame, it seems to me as if I were open, so that everything enters into me, everything passes through me, makes me weep or gnash my teeth. Look here! when I cast a glance at that hillside facing us, that vast expanse of green, that race of trees clambering up the mountain, I feel the entire wood in my eyes; it penetrates me, takes possession of me, runs through my whole frame; and it seems to me also that I am devouring it, that it fills my being — I become a wood myself!"

He laughed, while he told her this, strained his big, round eyes, now on the wood, now on Christiane; and she, surprised, astonished, but easily impressed, felt herself devoured also, like the wood, by his great avid glance.

Paul went on: “And if you only knew what delights I owe to my sense of smell. I drink in this air through my nostrils. I become intoxicated with it; I live in it, and I feel that there is within it everything — absolutely everything. What can be sweeter? It intoxicates one more than wine; wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the imagination. With perfume you taste the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the universe — you taste the flowers, the trees, the grass of the fields; you can even distinguish the soul of the dwellings of olden days which sleep in the old furniture, the old carpets, the old curtains. Listen! I am going to tell you something.

“Did you notice, when first you came here, a delicious odor, to which no other odor can be compared —— so fine, so light, that it seems almost — how shall I express it? — an immaterial odor? You find it everywhere — you can seize it nowhere — you cannot discern where it comes from. Never, never has anything more divine than it arisen in my heart. Well, this is the odor of the vine in bloom. Ah! it has taken me four days to discover it. And is it not charming to think, Madame, that the vine-tree, which gives us wine, wine which only superior spirits can understand and relish, gives us, too, the most delicate and most exciting of perfumes, which only persons of the most refined sensibility can discover? And then do you recognize also the powerful smell of the chestnut-trees, the luscious savor of the acacias, the aroma of the mountains, and the grass, whose scent is so sweet, so sweet — sweeter than anyone imagines?”

She listened to these words of his in amazement, not that they were surprising so much as that they appeared so different in their nature from everything encompassing her every day. Her mind remained possessed, moved, and disturbed by them.

He kept talking uninterruptedly in a voice somewhat hollow but full of passion.

“And again, just think, do you not feel in the air, along the roads, when the day is hot, a slight savor of vanilla. Yes, am I not right? Well, that is — that is — but I dare not tell it to you!”

And now he broke into a great laugh, and waving his hand in front of him all of a sudden said: “Look there!”

A row of wagons laden with hay was coming up drawn by cows yoked in pairs. The slow-footed beasts, with their heads hung down, bent by the yoke, their horns fastened with pieces of wood, toiled painfully along; and under their skin, as it rose up and down, the bones of their legs could be seen moving. Before each team, a man in shirt-sleeves, waistcoat, and black hat, was walking with a switch in his hand, directing the pace of the animals. From time to time the driver would turn round, and, without ever hitting, would barely touch the shoulder or the forehead of a cow who would blink her big, wandering eyes, and obey the motion of his arm. Christiane and Paul drew up to let them pass.

He said to her: “Do you feel it?”

She was amazed: “What then? That is the smell of the stable.”

“Yes, it is the smell of the stable; and all these cows going along the roads — for they use no horses in this part of the country — scatter on their way that odor of the stable, which, mingled with the fine dust, gives to the wind a savor of vanilla.”

Christiane, somewhat disgusted, murmured: “Oh!” He went on: “Excuse me, at that moment, I was analyzing it like a chemist. In any case, we are, Madame, in the most seductive country, the most delightful, the most restful, that I have ever seen — a country of the golden age. And the Limagne — oh! the Limagne! But I must not talk to you about it; I want to show it to you. You shall see for yourself.”

The Marquis and Gontran came up to them. The Marquis passed his arm under that of his daughter, and, making her turn round and retrace her steps, in order to get back to the hotel for breakfast, he said: “Listen, young people! this concerns you all three. William, who goes mad when an idea comes into his head, dreams of nothing any longer but of building this new town of his, and he wants to win over to him the Oriol family. He is, therefore, anxious that Christiane should make the acquaintance of the two young girls, in order to see if they are ‘possible.’ But it is not necessary that the father should suspect our ruse. So I have got an idea; it is to organize a charitable *fête.* You, my dear, must go and see the curé; you will together hunt up two of his parishioners to make collections along with you. You understand what people you will get him to nominate, and he will invite them on his own responsibility. As for you, young men, you are going to get up a *tombola* at the Casino with the assistance of Petrus Martel with his company and orchestra. And if the little Oriols are nice girls, as it is said they have been well brought up at the convent, Christiane will make a conquest of them.”

CHAPTER V. DEVELOPMENTS

For eight days, Christiane wholly occupied herself with preparations for this *fete.* The curé, indeed, was able to find no one among his female parishioners except the Oriol girls who could be deemed worthy of collecting along with the Marquis de Ravenel's daughter; and, happy at having the opportunity of making himself prominent, he took all the necessary steps, organized everything, regulated everything, and himself invited the young girls, as if the idea had originated with him.

The inhabitants were in a state of excitement, and the gloomy bathers, finding a new topic of conversation, entertained one another at the *table d'hôte* with various estimates as to the possible receipts from the two portions of the *fête*, the sacred and the profane.

The day opened finely. It was admirable summer weather, warm and clear, with bright sunshine in the open plain and a grateful shade under the village trees. The mass was fixed for nine o'clock — a quick mass with Church music. Christiane, who had arrived before the office, in order to inspect the ornamentation of the church with garlands of flowers that had been sent from Royat and Clermont-Ferrand, consented to walk behind it. The curé, Abbé Litre, followed her accompanied by the Oriol girls, and he introduced them to her. Christiane immediately invited the young girls to luncheon. They accepted her invitation with blushes and respectful bows.

The faithful were now making their appearance. Christiane and her girls sat down on three chairs of honor reserved for them at the side of the choir, facing three other chairs, which were occupied by young lads dressed in their Sunday clothes, sons of the mayor, of the deputy, and of a municipal councilor, selected to accompany the lady-collectors and to flatter the local authorities. Everything passed off well.

The office was short. The collection realized one hundred and ten francs, which, added to Andermatt's five hundred francs, the Marquis's fifty francs, and a hundred francs contributed by Paul Bretigny, made a total of seven hundred and sixty, an amount never before reached in the parish of Enval. Then, after the conclusion of the ceremony, the Oriol girls were brought to the hotel. They appeared to be a little abashed, without any display of awkwardness, however, and scarcely uttered one word, through modesty rather than through timidity. They sat down to luncheon at the *table d'hôte,* and pleased the merry all the men.

The elder the more serious of the pair, the younger the more sprightly, the elder better bred, in the common-place acceptation of the word, the younger more pleasant, they yet resembled one another as closely as two sisters possibly could.

As soon as the meal was finished, they repaired to the Casino for the lottery-drawing at the *tombola,* which was fixed for two o'clock.

The park, already invaded by the mixed crowd of bathers and peasants, presented the aspect of an out landish *fête.*

Under their Chinese *kiosque* the musicians were executing a rural symphony, a work composed by Saint Landri himself. Paul, who accompanied Christiane, suddenly drew up:

"Look here!" said he, "that's pretty! He has some talent, that chap! With an orchestra, he could produce a fine effect."

Then he asked: "Are you fond of music, Madame?"

"Exceedingly."

"As for me, it overwhelms me. When I am listening to a work that I like, it seems to me first that the opening notes detach my skin from my flesh, melt it, dissolve it, cause it to disappear, and leave me like one flayed alive, under the combined attacks of the instruments. And in fact it is on my nerves that the orchestra is playing, on my nerves stripped bare, vibrating, trembling at every note.! hear it, the music, not merely with my ears, but with all the sensibility of my body quivering from head to foot. Nothing gives me such exquisite pleasure, or rather such exquisite happiness."

She smiled, and then said: "Your sensibilities are keen."

"By Jove, they are! What is the good of living if one has not keen sensibilities? I do not envy those people who wear over their hearts a tortoise's shell or a hippopotamus's hide. Those alone are happy who feel their sensations acutely, who receive them like shocks, and savor them like dainty morsels. For it is necessary to reason out all our emotions, joyous and sad, to be satiated with them, to be intoxicated with them to the most intense degree of bliss or the most extreme pitch of suffering."

She raised her eyes to look up at his face, with that sense of astonishment which she had experienced during the past eight days at all the things that he said. Indeed, during these eight days, this new friend — for, despite her repugnance toward him, on first acquaintance, he had in this short interval become her friend — was every moment shaking the tranquillity of her soul, and disturbing it as a pool of water is disturbed by flinging stones into it. And he flung stones, big stones, into this soul which had calmly slumbered until now.

Christiane's father, like all fathers, had always treated her as a little girl, to whom one ought not to say anything of a serious nature; her brother made her laugh rather than reflect; her husband did not consider it right for a man to speak of anything whatever to his wife outside the interests of their common life; and so she had hitherto lived perfectly contented, her mind steeped in a sweet torpor.

This newcomer opened her intellect with ideas which fell upon it like strokes of a hatchet. Moreover, he was one of those men who please women, all women, by his very nature, by the vibrating acuteness of his emotions. He knew how to talk to them, to tell them everything, and he made them understand everything. Incapable of continuous effort but extremely intelligent, always loving or hating passionately, speaking of everything with the ingenious ardor of a man fanatically convinced, variable as he was enthusiastic, he possessed to an excessive degree the true feminine temperament, the credulity, the charm, the mobility, the nervous sensibility of a woman, with the superior intellect, active, comprehensive, and penetrating, of a man.

Gontran came up to them in a hurry. "Come back," said he, "and give a look at the Honorât family."

They returned, and saw Doctor Honorât, accompanied by a fat, old woman in a blue dress, whose head looked like a nursery-garden, for every variety of plants and flowers were gathered together on her head.

Christiane asked in astonishment: "This is his wife, then? But she is fifteen years older than her husband."

"Yes, she is sixty-five — an old midwife whom he fell in love with between two confinements. This, however, is one of those households in which they are nagging at one another from morning till night."

They made their way toward the Casino, attracted by the exclamations of the crowd. On a large table, in front of the establishment, were displayed the lots of the *tombola*, which were drawn by Petrus Martel, assisted by Mademoiselle Odelin of the Odéon, a very small brunette, who also announced the numbers, with mountebank's tricks, which greatly diverted the spectators. The Marquis, accompanied by the Oriol girls and Andermatt, reappeared, and asked: “Are we to remain here? It is very noisy.” —

They accordingly resolved to take a walk halfway up the hill on the road from Enval to La Roche-Pradière. In order to reach it, they first ascended, one behind the other, a narrow path through vine-trees. Christiane walked on in front with a light and rapid step. Since her arrival in this neighborhood, she felt as if she existed in a new sort of way, with an active sense of enjoyment and of vitality which she had never known before. Perhaps, the baths, by improving her health, and so ridding her of that slight disturbance of the vital organs which annoyed and saddened her without any apparent cause, disposed her to perceive and to relish everything more thoroughly. Perhaps she simply felt herself animated, lashed by the presence and by the ardor of spirit of that unknown youth who had taught her how to understand. She drew a long, deep breath, as she thought of all he had said to her about the perfumes that were scattered through the atmosphere. “It is true,” she mused, “that he has shown me how to feel the air.” And she found again all the odors, especially that of the vine, so light, so delicate, so fleeting.

She gained the level road, and they formed themselves into groups. Andermatt and Louise Oriol, the elder girl, started first side by side, chatting about the produce of lands in Auvergne. She knew, this Auvergnat, true daughter of her sire, endowed with the hereditary instinct, all the correct and practical details of agriculture, and she spoke about them in her grave tone, in the ladylike fashion, and with the careful pronunciation which they had taught her at the convent. While listening to her, he cast a side glance at her, every now and then, and thought this little girl quite charming with her gravity of manner and her mind so full already of practical knowledge. He occasionally repeated with some surprise: “What! is the land in the Limagne worth so much as thirty thousand francs for each hectare?”

“Yes, Monsieur, when it is planted with beautiful apple-trees, which supply dessert apples. It is our country which furnishes nearly all the fruit used in Paris.”

Then, they turned back in order to make a more careful estimate of the Limagne, for from the road they were pursuing they could see, as far as their eyes could reach, the vast plain always covered with a light haze of blue vapor.

Christiane and Paul also halted in front of this immense veiled tract of country, so agreeable to the eye that they would have liked to remain there incessantly gazing at it. The road was bordered by enormous walnut-trees, the dense shade of which made the skin feel a refreshing sensation of coolness. It no longer ascended, but took a winding course halfway up on the slope of the hillside adorned lower down with a tapestry of vines, and then with short green herbage as far as the crest, which at this point looked rather steep.

Paul murmured: "Is it not lovely? Tell me, is it not lovely? And why does this landscape move me? Yes, why? It diffuses a charm so profound, so wide, that it penetrates to my very heart. It seems, as you gaze at this plain, that thought opens its wings, does it not? And it flies away, it soars, it passes on, it goes off there below, farther and farther, toward all the countries seen in dreams which we shall never see. Yes, see here, this is worthy of admiration because it is much more like a thing we dream of than a thing that we have seen."

She listened to him without saying anything, waiting, expectant, gathering up each of his words; and she felt herself affected without too well knowing how to explain her emotions. She caught glimpses, indeed, of other countries, blue countries, rose-hued countries, countries unlikely and marvelous, countries undiscoverable though ever sought for, which make us look upon all others as commonplace.

He went on: "Yes, it is lovely, because it is lovely. Other horizons are more striking but less harmonious. Ah! Madame, beauty, harmonious beauty! There is nothing but that in the world. Nothing exists but beauty. But how few understand it! The line of a body, of a statue, or of a mountain, the color of a painting or of that plain, the inexpressible something of the 'Joconde,' a phrase that bites you to the soul, that — nothing more — which makes an artist a creator just like God, which, therefore, distinguishes him among men. Wait! I am going to recite for you two stanzas of Baudelaire."

And he declaimed:

"Whether you come from heaven or hell I do not care,
O Beauty, monster of splendor and terror, yet sweet at the core,
As long as your eye, your smile, your feet lay the infinite bare,
Unveiling a world of love that I never have known before!

“From Satan or God, what matter, whether angel or siren you be,
What matter if you can give, enchanting, velvet-eyed fay,
Rhythm, perfume, and light, and be queen of the earth for me,
And make all things less hideous, and the sad moments fly away.”

Christiane now was gazing at him, struck with wonder by his lyricism, questioning him with her eyes, not comprehending well what extraordinary meaning might be embodied in this poetry. He divined her thoughts, and was irritated at not having communicated his own enthusiasm to her, for he had recited those verses very effectively, and he resumed, with a shade of disdain:

“I am a fool to wish to force you to relish a poet of such subtle inspiration. A day will come, I hope, when you will feel those things just as I do. Women, endowed rather with intuition than comprehension, do not seize the secret and veiled purposes of art in the same way as if a sympathetic appeal had first been made to their minds.”

And, with a bow, he added: “I will strive, Madame, to make this sympathetic appeal.”

She did not think him impertinent, but fantastic; and moreover she did not seek any longer to understand, suddenly struck by a circumstance which she had not previously noticed: he was very elegant, though he was a little too tall and too strongly-built, with a gait so virile that one could not immediately perceive the studied refinement of his attire. And then his head had a certain brutishness about it, an incompleteness, which gave to his entire person a somewhat heavy aspect at first glance. But when one had got accustomed to his features, one found in them some charm, a charm powerful and fierce, which at moments became very pleasant according to the inflections of his voice, which always seemed veiled.

Christiane said to herself, as she observed for the first time what attention he had paid to his external appearance from head to foot: “Decidedly this is a man whose qualities must be discovered one by one.”

But here Gontran came rushing toward them. He exclaimed: “Sister, I say, Christiane, waitl” And when he had overtaken them, he said to them, still laughing: “Oh! just come and listen to the younger Oriol girl! She is as droll as anything — she has wonderful wit. Papa has succeeded in putting her at her ease, and she has been telling us the most comical things in the world. Wait for them."

And they awaited the Marquis, who presently appeared with the younger of the two girls, Charlotte Oriol. She was relating with a childlike, knowing liveliness some village tales, accounts of rustic simplicity and roguery. And she imitated them with their slow movements, their grave remarks, their "fouchtras," their innumerable "bougrres," mimicking, in a fashion that made her pretty, sprightly face look charming, all the changes of their physiognomies. Her bright eyes sparkled; her rather large mouth was opened wide, displaying her white teeth; her nose, a little tip-tilted, gave her a humorous look; and she was fresh, with a flower's freshness that might make lips quiver with desire.

The Marquis, having spent nearly his entire life on his estate, in the family château where Christiane and Gontran had been brought up in the midst of rough, big Norman farmers who were occasionally invited to dine there, in accordance with custom, and whose children, companions of theirs from the period of their first communion, had been on terms of familiarity with them, knew how to talk to this little girl, already three-fourths a woman of the world, with a friendly candor which awakened at once in her a gay and self-confident assurance.

Andermatt and Louise returned after having walked as far as the village, which they did not care to enter. And they all sat down at the foot of a tree, on the grassy edge of a ditch. There they remained for a long time pleasantly chatting about everything and nothing in a torpor of languid ease. Now and then, a wagon would roll past, always drawn by the two cows whose heads were bent and twisted by the yoke, and always driven by a peasant with a shrunken frame and a big black hat on his head, guiding the animals with the end of his thin switch in the swaying style of the conductor of an orchestra.

The man would take off his hat, bowing to the Oriol girls, and they would reply with a familiar, "Good day," flung out by their fresh young voices.

Then, as the hour was growing late, they went back. As they drew near the park, Charlotte Oriol exclaimed: "Oh! the boree! the boree!" In fact, the boree was being danced to an old air well known in Auvergne.

There they were, male and female peasants stepping out, hopping, making courtesies, — turning and bowing to each other, — the women taking hold of their petticoats and lifting them up with two fingers of each hand, the men swinging their arms or holding them akimbo. The pleasant monotonous air was also dancing in the fresh evening wind; it was always the same refrain played in a very high note by the violin, and taken up in concert by the other instruments, giving a more rattling pace to the dance. And it was not unpleasant, this simple rustic music, lively and artless, keeping time as it did with this shambling country minuet.

The bathers, too, made an attempt to dance. Petrus Martel went skipping in front of little Odelin, who affected the style of a *danseuse* walking through a ballet, and the comic Lapalme mimicked a fantastic step round the attendant at the Casino, who seemed agitated by recollections of Bullier.

But suddenly Gontran saw Doctor Honorat dancing away with all his heart and all his limbs, and executing the classical boree like a true-blue native of Auvergne.

The orchestra became silent. All stopped. The doctor came over and bowed to the Marquis. He was wiping his forehead and puffing.

"'Tis good," said he, "to be young sometimes." Gontran laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder, and smiling with a mischievous air: "You never told me you were married."

The physician stopped wiping his face, and gravely responded: "Yes, I am, and marred."

"What do you say?"

"I say, married and marred. Never commit that folly, young man."

"Why?"

"Why! See here! I have been married now for twenty years, and haven't got used to it yet. Every evening, when I reach home, I say to myself, 'Hold hard! this old woman is still in my house! So then she'll never go away?'" Everyone began to laugh, so serious and convinced was his tone.

But the bells of the hotel were ringing for dinner. The *fête* was over. Louise and Charlotte were accompanied back to their father's house; and when their new friends had left them, they commenced talking about them. Everyone thought them charming, Andermatt alone preferred the elder girl.

The Marquis said: "How pliant the feminine nature is! The mere vicinity of the paternal gold, of which they do not even know the use, has made ladies of these country girls."

Christiane, having asked Paul Bretigny: "And you, which of them do you prefer?" he murmured:

"Oh! I? I have not even looked at them. It is not they whom I prefer."

He had spoken in a very low voice; and she made no reply.

CHAPTER VI. ON THE BRINK

THE days that followed were charming for Christiane Andermatt. She lived, light-hearted, her soul full of joy. The morning bath was her first pleasure, a delicious pleasure that made the skin tingle, an exquisite half hour in the warm, flowing water, which disposed her to feel happy all day long. She was, indeed, happy in all her thoughts and in all her desires. The affection with which she felt herself surrounded and penetrated, the intoxication of youthful life throbbing in her veins, and then again this new environment, this superb country, made for daydreams and repose, wide and odorous, enveloping her like a great caress of nature, awakened in her fresh emotions. Everything that approached, everything that touched her, continued this sensation of the morning, this sensation of a tepid bath, of a great bath of happiness wherein she plunged herself body and soul.

Andermatt, who had to leave Enval for a fortnight or perhaps a month, had gone back to Paris, having previously reminded his wife to take good care that the paralytic should not discontinue his course of treatment. So each day, before breakfast, Christiane, her father, her brother, and Paul, went to look at what Gontran called “the poor man’s soup.” Other bathers came there also, and they formed a circular group around the hole, while chatting with the vagabond.

He was not better able to walk, he declared, but he had a feeling as if his legs were covered with ants; and he told how these ants ran up and down, climbing as far as his thighs, and then going back again to the tips of his toes. And even at night he felt these insects tickling and biting him, so that he was deprived of sleep.

All the visitors and the peasants, divided into two camps, that of the believers and that of the sceptics, were interested in this cure.

After breakfast, Christiane often went to look for the Oriol girls, so that they might take a walk with her. They were the only members of her own sex at the station to whom she could talk or with whom she could have friendly relations, sharing a little of her confidence and asking in return for some feminine sympathy. She had at once taken a liking for the grave common sense allied with amiability which the elder girl exhibited and still more for the spirit of sly humor possessed by the younger; and it was less to please her husband than for her own amusement that she now sought the friendship of the two sisters.

They used to set forth on excursions sometimes in a landau, an old traveling landau with six seats, got from a livery-man at Riom, and at other times on foot. They were especially fond of a little wild valley near Chatel-Guyon, leading toward the hermitage of Sans-Souci. Along the narrow road, which they slowly traversed, under the pine-trees, on the bank of the little river, they would saunter in pairs, each pair chatting together. At every stage along their track, where it was necessary to cross the stream, Paul and Gontran, standing on stepping-stones in the water, seized the women each with one arm, and carried them over with a jump, so as to deposit them at the opposite side. And each of these fordings changed the order of the pedestrians. Christiane went from one to another, but found the opportunity of remaining a little while alone with Paul Bretigny either in front or in the rear.

He had no longer the same ways while in her company as in the first days of their acquaintanceship; he was less disposed to laugh, less abrupt in manner, less like a comrade, but more respectful and attentive. Their conversations, however, assumed a tone of intimacy, and the things that concerned the heart held in them the foremost place. He talked to her about sentiment and love, like a man well versed in such subjects, who had sounded the depths of women’s tenderness, and who owed to them as much happiness as suffering.

She, ravished and rather touched, urged him on to confidences with an ardent and artful curiosity. All that she knew of him awakened in her a keen desire to learn more, to penetrate in thought into one of those male existences of which she had got glimpses out of books, one of those existences full of tempests and mysteries of love. Yielding to her importunities, he told her each day a little more about his life, his adventures, and his griefs, with a warmth of language which his burning memories sometimes rendered impassioned, and which the desire to please made also seductive. He opened to her gaze a world till now unknown to her, found eloquent words to express the subtleties of desire and expectation, the ravages of growing hopes, the religion of flowers and bits of ribbons, all the little objects treasured up as sacred, the enervating effect of sudden doubts, the anguish of alarming conjectures, the tortures of jealousy, and the inexpressible frenzy of the first kiss.

And he knew how to describe all these things in a very seemly fashion, veiled, poetic, and captivating. Like all men who are perpetually haunted by desire and thoughts about woman he spoke discreetly of those whom he had loved with a fever that throbbed within him still. He recalled a thousand romantic incidents calculated to move the heart, a thousand delicate circumstances calculated to make tears gather in the eyes, and all those sweet futilities of gallantry which render amorous relationships between persons of refined souls and cultivated minds the most beautiful and most entrancing experiences that can be conceived.

All these disturbing and familiar chats, renewed each day and each day more prolonged, fell on Christiane's soul like grains cast into the earth. And the charm of this country spread wide around her, the odorous air, that blue Limagne, so vast that it seemed to make the spirit expand, those extinguished volcanoes on the mountain, furnaces of the antique world serving now only to warm springs for invalids, the cool shades, the rippling music of the streams as they rushed over the stones — all this, too, penetrated the heart and the flesh of the young woman, penetrated them and softened them like a soft shower of warm rain on soil that is yet virgin, a rain that will cause to bourgeon and blossom in it the flowers of which it had received the seed.

She was quite conscious that this youth was paying court to her a little, that he thought her pretty, even more than pretty; and the desire to please him spontaneously suggested to her a thousand inventions, at the same time designing and simple, to fascinate him and to make a conquest of him.

When he looked moved, she would abruptly leave him; when she anticipated some tender allusion on his lips, she would cast toward him, ere the words were finished, one of those swift, unfathomable glances which pierce men's hearts like fire. She would greet him with soft utterances, gentle movements of her head, dreamy gestures with her hands, or sad looks quickly changed into smiles, as if to show him, even when no words had been exchanged between them, that his efforts had not been in vain.

What did she desire? Nothing. What did she expect from all this? Nothing.

She amused herself with this solely because she was a woman, because she did not perceive the danger of it, because, without foreseeing anything, she wished to find out what he would do.

And then she had suddenly developed that native coquetry which lies hidden in the veins of all feminine beings. The slumbering, innocent child of yesterday had unexpectedly waked up, subtle and keen-witted, when facing this man who talked to her unceasingly about love. She divined the agitation that swept across his mind when he was by her side, she saw the increasing emotion that his face expressed, and she understood all the different intonations of his voice with that special intuition possessed by women who feel themselves solicited to love.

Other men had ere now paid attentions to her in the fashionable world without getting anything from her in return save the mockery of a playful young woman. Their commonplace flatteries diverted her; their looks of melancholy love filled her with merriment; and to all their manifestations of passion she responded only with derisive laughter. In the case of this man, however, she felt herself suddenly confronted with a seductive and dangerous adversary; and she had been changed into one of those clever creatures, instinctively clear-sighted, armed with audacity and coolness, who, so long as their hearts remain untrammeled, watch for, surprise, and draw men into the invisible net of sentiment.

As for him, he had, at first, thought her rather silly. Accustomed to women versed in intrigues, exercised in love just as an old soldier is in military maneuvers, skilled in all the wiles of gallantry and tenderness, he considered this simple heart commonplace, and treated it with a light disdain.

But, little by little, her ingenuousness had amused him, and then fascinated him; and yielding to his impressionable nature, he had begun to make her the object of his affectionate attentions. He knew full well that the best way to excite a pure soul was to talk incessantly about love, while exhibiting the appearance of thinking about others; and accordingly, humoring in a crafty fashion the dainty curiosity which he had aroused in her, he proceeded, under the pretense of confiding his secrets to her, to teach her what passion really meant, under the shadow of the wood.

He, too, found this play amusing, showed her, by all the little gallantries that men know how to display, the growing pleasure that he found in her society, and assumed the attitude of a lover without suspecting that he would become one in reality. And all this came about as naturally in the course of their protracted walks as it does to take a bath on a warm day, when you find yourself at the side of a river.

But, from the first moment when Christiane began to indulge in coquetry, from the time when she resorted to all the native skill of woman in beguiling men, when she conceived the thought of bringing this slave of passion to his knees, in the same way that she would have undertaken to win a game at croquet, he allowed himself to yield, this candid libertine, to the attack of this simpleton, and began to love her.

And now he became awkward, restless, nervous, and she treated him as a cat does a mouse. With another woman he would not have been embarrassed; he would have spoken out; he would have conquered by his irresistible ardor; with her he did not dare, so different did she seem from all those whom he had known. The others, in short, were women already singed by life, to whom everything might be said, with whom one could venture on the boldest appeals, murmuring close to their lips the trembling words which set the blood aflame. He knew his power, he felt that he was bound to triumph when he was able to communicate freely to the soul, the heart, the senses of her whom he loved, the impetuous desire by which he was ravaged.

With Christiane, he imagined himself by the side of a young girl, so great a novice did he consider her; and all his resources seemed paralyzed. And then he cared for her in a new sort of way, partly as a man cares for a child, and partly as he does for his betrothed. He desired her; and yet he was afraid of touching her, of soiling her, of withering her bloom. He had no longing to clasp her tightly in his arms, such as he had felt toward others, but rather to fall on his knees, to kiss her robe, and to touch gently with his lips, with an infinitely chaste and tender slowness, the little hairs about her temples, the corners of her mouth, and her eyes, her closed eyes, whose blue he could feel glancing out toward him, the charming glance awakened under the drooping lids. He would have liked to protect her against everyone and against everything, not to let her be elbowed by common people, gaze at ugly people, or go near unclean people. He would have liked to carry away the dirt of the street over which she walked, the pebbles on the roads, the brambles and the branches in the wood, to make all things easy and delicious around her, and to carry her always, so that she should never walk. And he felt annoyed because she had to talk to the other guests at the hotel, to eat the same food at the *table d'hôte,* and submit to all the disagreeable and inevitable little things that belong to everyday existence.

He knew not what to say to her so much were his thoughts absorbed by her; and his powerlessness to express the state of his heart, to accomplish any of the things that he wished to do, to testify to her the imperious need of devoting himself to her which burned in his veins, gave him some of the aspects of a chained wild beast, and, at the same time, made him feel a strange desire to break into sobs.

All this she perceived without completely understanding it, and felt amused by it with the malicious enjoyment of a coquette. When they had lingered behind the others, and she felt from his look that he was about to say something disquieting, she would abruptly begin to run, in order to overtake her father, and, when she got up to him, would exclaim: “Suppose we make a four-cornered game.”

Four-cornered games served generally for the termination of the excursions. They looked out for a glade at the end of a wider road than usual, and they began to play like boys out for a walk.

The Oriol girls and Gontran himself took great delight in this amusement, which satisfied that incessant longing to run that is to be found in all young creatures. Paul Bretigny alone grumbled, beset by other thoughts; then, growing animated by degrees he would join in the game with more desperation than any of the others, in order to catch Christiane, to touch her, to place his hand abruptly on her shoulder or on her corsage.

The Marquis, whose indifferent and listless nature yielded in everything, as long as his rest was not disturbed, sat down at the foot of a tree, and watched his boarding-school at play, as he said. He thought this quiet life very agreeable, and the entire world perfect.

However, Paul’s behavior soon alarmed Christiane. One day she even got afraid of him. One morning, they went with Gontran to the most remote part of the oddly-shaped gap which is called the End of the World. The gorge, becoming more and more narrow and winding, sank into the mountain. They climbed over enormous rocks; they crossed the little river by means of stepping-stones, and, having wheeled round a lofty crag more than fifty meters in height which entirely blocked up the cleft of the ravine, they found themselves in a kind of trench encompassed between two gigantic walls, bare as far as their summits, which Were covered with trees and with verdure.

The stream formed a wide lake of bowl-like shape, and truly it was a wild-looking chasm, strange and unexpected, such as one meets more frequently in narratives than in nature. Now, on this day, Paul, gazing at the projections of the rocky eminence which barred them out from the road at the right where all pedestrians were compelled to halt, remarked that it bore traces of having been scaled. He said: “Why, we can go on farther.”

Then, having clambered up the first ledge, not without difficulty, he exclaimed: “Oh! this is charming! a little grove in the water — come on, then!”

And, leaning backward, he drew Christiane up by the two hands, while Gontran, feeling his way, planted his feet on all the slight projections of the rock. The soil which had drifted down from the summit had formed on this ledge a savage and bushy garden, in which the stream ran across the roots. Another step, a little farther on, formed a new barrier of this granite corridor. They climbed it, too, —— then a third; and they found themselves at the foot of an impassable wall from which fell, straight and clear, a cascade twenty meters high into a deep basin hollowed out by it, and buried under bindweeds and branches.

The cleft of the mountain had become so narrow that the two men, clinging on by their hands, could touch its sides. Nothing further could be seen, save a line of sky; nothing could be heard save the murmur of the water. It might have been taken for one of those undiscoverable retreats in which the Latin poets were wont to conceal the antique nymphs. It seemed to Christiane as if she had just intruded on the chamber of a fay.

Paul Bretigny said nothing. Gontran exclaimed: “Oh! how nice it would be if a woman white and rosy-red were bathing in that water!”

They returned. The first two shelves were as easy to descend, but the third frightened Christiane, so high and straight was it, without any visible steps. Bretigny let himself slip down the rock; then, stretching out his two arms toward her, “Jump,” said he.

She would not venture. Not that she was afraid of falling, but she felt afraid of him, afraid above all of his eyes. He gazed at her with the avidity of a famished beast, with a passion which had grown ferocious; and his two hands extended toward her had such an imperious attraction for her that she was suddenly terrified and seized with a mad longing to shriek, to run away, to climb up the mountain perpendicularly to escape this irresistible appeal.

Her brother standing up behind her, cried: “Go on then!” and pushed her forward. Feeling herself falling she shut her eyes, and, caught in a gentle but powerful clasp, she felt, without seeing it, all the huge body of the young man, whose panting warm breath passed over her face. Then, she found herself on her feet once more, smiling, now that her terror had vanished, while Gontran descended in his turn.

This emotion having rendered her prudent, she took care, for some days, not to be alone with Bretigny, who now seemed to be prowling round her like the wolf in the fable round a lamb.

But a grand excursion had been planned. They were to carry provisions in the landau with six seats, and go to dine with the Oriol girls on the border of the little lake of Tazenat, which in the language of the country was called the "gour" of Tazenat, and then return at night by moonlight. Accordingly, they started one afternoon of a day of burning heat, under a devouring sun, which made the granite of the mountain as hot as the floor of an oven.

The carriage ascended the mountain-side drawn by three horses, blowing, and covered with sweat. The coachman was nodding on his seat, his head hanging down; and at the side of the road ran legions of green lizards. The heated atmosphere seemed filled with an invisible and oppressive dust of fire. Sometimes it seemed hard, unyielding, dense, as they passed through it, sometimes it stirred about and sent across their faces ardent breaths of flame in which floated an odor of resin in the midst of the long pine-wood.

Nobody in the carriage uttered a word. The three ladies, at the lower end, closed their dazzled eyes, which they shaded with their red parasols. The Marquis and Gontran, their foreheads wrapped round with handkerchiefs, had fallen asleep. Paul was looking toward Christiane, who was also watching him from under her lowered eyelids. And the landau, sending up a column of smoking white dust, kept always toiling up this interminable ascent.

When it had reached the plateau, the coachman straightened himself up, the horses broke into a trot; and they drove through a beautiful, undulating country, thickly-wooded, cultivated, studded with villages and solitary houses here and there. In the distance, at the left, could be seen the great truncated summits of the volcanoes. The lake of Tazenat, which they were going to see, had been formed by the last crater in the mountain chain of Auvergne. After they had been driving for three hours, Paul said suddenly: "Look here, the lava-currents!"

Brown rocks, fantastically twisted, made cracks in the soil at the border of the road. At the right could be seen a mountain, snub-nosed in appearance, whose wide summit had a flat and hollow look. They took a path, which seemed to pass into it through a triangular cutting; and Christiane, who was standing erect, discovered all at once, in the midst of a vast deep crater, a lovely lake, bright and round, like a silver coin. The steep slopes of the mountain, wooded at the right and bare at the left, sank toward the water, which they surrounded with a high inclosure, regular in shape. And this placid water, level and glittering, like the surface of a medal, reflected the trees on one side, and on the other the barren slope, with a clearness so complete that the edges escaped one's attention, and the only thing one saw in this funnel, in whose center the blue sky was mirrored, was a transparent, bottomless opening, which seemed to pass right through the earth, pierced from end to end up to the other firmament.

The carriage could go no farther. They got down, and took a path through the wooded side winding round the lake, under the trees, halfway up the declivity of the mountain. This track, along which only the woodcutters passed, was as green as a prairie; and, through the branches, they could see the opposite side, and the water glittering at the bottom of this mountain-lake.

Then they reached, through an opening in the wood, the very edge of the water, where they sat down upon a sloping carpet of grass, overshadowed by oak-trees.

They all stretched themselves on the green turf with sensuous and exquisite delight. The men rolled themselves about in it, plunged their hands into it; while the women, softly lying down on their sides, placed their cheeks close to it, as if to seek there a refreshing caress.

After the heat of the road, it was one of those sweet sensations so deep and so grateful that they almost amount to pure happiness.

Then once more the Marquis went to sleep; Gontran speedily followed his example. Paul began chatting with Christiane and the two young girls. About what? About nothing in particular. From time to time, one of them gave utterance to some phrase; another replied after a minute's pause, and the lingering words seemed torpid in their mouths like the thoughts within their minds.

But, the coachman having brought across to them the hamper which contained the provisions, the Oriol girls, accustomed to domestic duties in their own house, and still clinging to their active habits, quickly proceeded to unpack it, and to prepare the dinner, of which the party would by and by partake on the grass.

Paul lay on his back beside Christiane, who was in a reverie. And he murmured, in so low a tone that she scarcely heard him, so low that his words just grazed her ear, like those confused sounds that are borne on by the wind: “These are the best days of my life.”

Why did these vague words move her even to the bottom of her heart? Why did she feel herself suddenly touched by an emotion such as she had never experienced before?

She was gazing through the trees at a tiny house, a hut for persons engaged in hunting and fishing, so narrow that it could barely contain one small apartment. Paul followed the direction of her glance, and said:

“Have you ever thought, Madame, what days passed together in a hut like that might be for two persons who loved one another to distraction? They would be alone in the world, truly alone, face to face! And, if such a thing were possible, ought not one be ready to give up everything in order to realize it, so rare, unseizable, and short-lived is happiness? Do we find it in our everyday life? What more depressing than to rise up without any ardent hope, to go through the same duties dispassionately, to drink in moderation, to eat with discretion, and to sleep tranquilly like a mere animal?”

She kept, all the time, staring at the little house; and her heart swelled up, as if she were going to burst into tears; for, in one flash of thought, she divined intoxicating joys, of whose existence she had no conception till that moment.

Indeed, she was thinking how sweet it would be for two to be together in this tiny abode hidden under the trees, facing that plaything of a lake, that jewel of a lake, true mirror of love! One might feel happy with nobody near, without a neighbor, without one sound of life, alone with a lover, who would pass his hours kneeling at the feet of the adored one, looking up at her, while her gaze wandered toward the blue wave, and whispering tender words in her ear, while he kissed the tips of her fingers. They would live there, amid the silence, beneath the trees, at the bottom of that crater, which would hold all their passion, like the limpid, unfathomable water, in the embrace of its firm and regular inclosure, with no other horizon for their eyes save the round line of the mountain’s sides, with no other horizon for their thoughts save the bliss of loving one another, with no other horizon for their desires save kisses lingering and endless.

Were there, then, people on the earth who could enjoy days like this? Yes, undoubtedly! And why not? Why had she not sooner known that such joys exist?

The girls announced that dinner was ready. It was six o’clock already. They roused up the Marquis and Gontran in order that they might squat in Turkish fashion a short distance off, with the plates glistening beside them in the grass. The two sisters kept waiting on them, and the heedless men did not gainsay them. They ate at their leisure, flinging the cast-off pieces and the bones of the chickens into the water. They had brought champagne with them; the sudden noise of the first cork jumping up produced a surprising effect on everyone, so unusual did it appear in this solitary spot.

The day was declining; the air became impregnated with a delicious coolness. As the evening stole on, a strange melancholy fell on the water that lay sleeping at the bottom of the crater. Just as the sun was about to disappear, the western sky burst out into flame, and the lake suddenly assumed the aspect of a basin of fire. Then, when the sun had gone to rest, the horizon becoming red like a brasier on the point of being extinguished, the lake looked like a basin of blood. And suddenly above the crest of mountain, the moon nearly at its full rose up all pale in the still, cloudless firmament. Then, as the shadows gradually spread over the earth, it ascended glittering and round above the crater which was round also. It looked as if it were going to let itself drop down into the chasm; and when it had risen far up into the sky, the lake had the aspect of a basin of silver. Then, on its surface, motionless all day long, trembling movements could now be seen sometimes slow and sometimes rapid. It seemed as if some spirits skimming just above the water were drawing across it invisible veils.

It was the big fish at the bottom, the venerable carp and the voracious pike, who had come up to enjoy themselves in the moonlight.

The Oriol girls had put back all the plates, dishes, and bottles into the hamper, which the coachman came to take away. They rose up to go.

As they were passing into the path under the trees, where rays of light fell, like a silver shower, through the leaves and glittered on the grass, Christiane, who was following the others with Paul in the rear, suddenly heard a panting voice saying close to her ear: “I love youl — I love you! — I love you!”

Her heart began to beat so wildly that she was near sinking to the ground, and felt as if she could not move her limbs. Still she walked on, like one distraught, ready to turn round, her arms hanging wide and her lips tightly drawn. He had by this time caught the edge of the little shawl which she had drawn over her shoulders, and was kissing it frantically. She continued walking with such tottering steps that she no longer could feel the soil beneath her feet.

And now she emerged from under the canopy of trees, and finding herself in the full glare of the moonlight, she got the better of her agitation with a desperate effort; but, before stepping into the landau and losing sight of the lake, she half turned round to throw a long kiss with both hands toward the water, which likewise embraced the man who was following her.

On the return journey, she remained inert both in soul and body, dizzy, cramped up, as if after a fall; and, the moment they reached the hotel, she quickly rushed up to her own apartment, where she locked herself in. Even when the door was bolted and the key turned in the lock, she pressed her hand on it again, so much did she feel herself pursued and desired. Then she remained trembling in the middle of the room, which was nearly quite dark and had an empty look. The wax-candle placed on the table cast on the walls the quivering shadows of the furniture and of the curtains. Christiane sank into an armchair. All her thoughts were rushing, leaping, flying away from her so that she found it impossible to seize them, to hold them, to link them together. She felt now ready to weep, without well knowing why, broken-hearted, wretched, abandoned, in this empty room, lost in existence, just as in a forest. Where was she going, what would she do?

Breathing with difficulty, she rose up, flung open the window and the shutters in front of it, and leaned on her elbows over the balcony. The air was refreshing. In the depths of the sky, wide and empty, too, the distant moon, solitary and sad, having ascended now into the blue heights of night, cast forth a hard, cold luster on the trees and on the mountains.

The entire country lay asleep. Only the light strain of Saint Landri’s violin, which he played till a late hour every night, broke the deep silence of the valley with its melancholy music. Christiane scarcely heard it. It ceased, then began again — the shrill and dolorous cry of the thin fiddlestrings.

And that moon lost in a desert sky, that feeble sound lost in the silent night, filled her heart with such a sense of solitude that she burst into sobs. She trembled and quivered to the very marrow of her bones, shaken by anguish and by the shuddering sensations of people attacked by some formidable malady; for suddenly it dawned upon her mind that she, too, was all alone in existence.

She had never realized this until to-day, and now she felt it so vividly in the distress of her soul that she imagined she was going mad.

She had a father! a brother! a husband! She loved them still, and they loved her. And here she was all at once separated from them, she had become a stranger to them as if she scarcely knew them. The calm affection of her father, the friendly companionship of her brother, the cold tenderness of her husband, appeared to her nothing any longer, nothing any longer. Her husband! This, her husband, the rosy-cheeked man who was accustomed to say to her in a careless tone, “Are you going far, dear, this morning?” She belonged to him, to this man, body and soul, by the mere force of a contract. Was this possible? Ah! how lonely and lost she felt herself! She closed her eyes to look into her own mind, into the lowest depths of her thoughts.

And she could see, as she evoked them out of her inner consciousness the faces of all those who lived around her — her father, careless and tranquil, happy as long as nobody disturbed his repose; her brother, scoffing and sceptical; her husband moving about, his head full of figures, and with the announcement on his lips, “I have just done a fine stroke of business!” when he should have said, “I love you!”

Another man had murmured that word a little while ago, and it was still vibrating in her ear and in her heart. She could see him also, this other man, devouring her with his fixed look; and, if he had been near her at that moment, she would have flung herself into his arms!

CHAPTER VII. ATTAINMENT

Christiane, who had not gone to I sleep till a very late hour, awoke as soon as the sun cast a flood of red light into her room through the window which she had left wide open. She glanced at her watch — it was five o'clock — and remained lying on her back deliciously in the warmth of the bed. It seemed to her, so active and full of joy did her soul feel, that a happiness, a great happiness, had come to her during the night. What was it? She sought to find out what it was; she sought to find out what was this new source of happiness which had thus penetrated her with delight. All her sadness of the night before had vanished, melted away, during sleep.

So Paul Bretigny loved her! How different he appeared to her from the first day! In spite of all the efforts of her memory, she could not bring back her first impression of him; she could not even recall to her mind the man introduced to her by her brother. He whom she knew to-day had retained nothing of the other, neither the face nor the bearing — nothing —— for his first image had passed, little by little, day by day, through all the slow modifications which take place in the soul with regard to a being who from a mere acquaintance has come to be a familiar friend and a beloved object. You take possession of him hour by hour without suspecting it; possession of his movements, of his attitudes, of his physical and moral characteristics. He enters into you, into your eyes and your heart, by his voice, by all his gestures, by what he says and by what he thinks. You absorb him; you comprehend him; you divine him in all the meanings of his smiles and of his words; it seems at last that he belongs entirely to you, so much do you love, unconsciously still, all that is his and all that comes from him.

Then, too, it is impossible to remember what this being was like — to your indifferent eyes — when first he presented himself to your gaze. So then Paul Bretigny loved her! Christiane experienced from this discovery neither fear nor anguish, but a profound tenderness, an immense joy, new and exquisite, of being loved — of knowing that she was loved.

She was, however, a little disturbed as to the attitude that he would assume toward her and that she should preserve toward him. But, as it was a matter of delicacy for her conscience even to think of these things, she ceased to think about them, trusting to her own tact and ingenuity to direct the course of events.

She descended at the usual hour, and found Paul smoking a cigarette before the door of the hotel. He bowed respectfully to her:

“Good day, Madame. You feel well this morning?”

“Very well, Monsieur. I slept very soundly.”

And she put out her hand to him, fearing lest he might hold it in his too long. But he scarcely pressed it; and they began quietly chatting as if they had forgotten one another.

And the day passed off without anything being done by him to recall his ardent avowal of the night before. He remained, on the days that followed, quite as discreet and calm; and she placed confidence in him. He realized, she thought, that he would wound her by becoming bolder; and she hoped, she firmly believed, that they might be able to stop at this delightful halting-place of tenderness, where they could love, while looking into the depths of one another’s eyes, without remorse, inasmuch as they would be free from defilement. Nevertheless, she was careful never to wander out with him alone.

Now, one evening, the Saturday of the same week in which they had visited the lake of Tazenat, as they were returning to the hotel about ten o’clock, — the Marquis, Christiane, and Paul, — for they had left Gontran playing *écarté* with Aubrey and Riquier and Doctor Honorat in the great hall of the Casino, Bretigny exclaimed, as he watched the moon shining through the branches:

“How nice it would be to go and see the ruins of Tournoel on a night like this!”

At this thought alone, Christiane was filled with emotion, the moon and ruins having on her the same influence which they have on the souls of all women.

She pressed the Marquis’s hands. “Oh! father dear, would you mind going there?”

He hesitated, being exceedingly anxious to go to bed.

She insisted: “Just think a moment, how beautiful Tournoel is even by day! You said yourself that you had never seen a ruin so picturesque, with that great tower above the château. What must it be at night!”

At last he consented: “Well, then, let us go! But we’ll only look at it for five minutes, and then come back immediately. For my part, I want to be in bed at eleven o'clock."

"Yes, we will come back immediately. It takes * only twenty minutes to get there."

They set out all three, Christiane leaning on her father's arm, and Paul walking by her side.

He spoke of his travels in Switzerland, in Italy, in Sicily. He told what his impressions were in the presence of certain phenomena, his enthusiasm on seeing the summit of Monte Rosa, when the sun, rising on the horizon of this row of icy peaks, this congealed world of eternal snows, cast on each of those lofty mountain-tops a dazzling white radiance, and illumined them, like the pale beacon-lights that must shine down upon the kingdoms of the dead. Then he spoke of his emotion on the edge of the monstrous crater of Etna, when he felt himself, an imperceptible mite, many meters above the cloud line, having nothing any longer around him save the sea and the sky, the blue sea beneath, the blue sky above, and leaning over this dreadful chasm of the earth, whose breath stifled him. He enlarged the objects which he described in order to excite the young woman; and, as she listened, she panted with visions she conjured up, by a flight of imagination, of those wonderful things that he had seen.

Suddenly, at a turn of the road, they discovered Tournoel. The ancient château, standing on a mountain peak, overlooked by its high and narrow tower, letting in the light through its chinks, and dismantled by time and by the wars of bygone days, traced, upon a sky of phantoms, its huge silhouette of a fantastic manor-house.

They stopped, all three surprised. The Marquis said, at length: "Indeed, it is impressive — like a dream of Gustave Doré realized. Let us sit down for five minutes."

And he sat down on the sloping grass.

But Christiane, wild with enthusiasm, exclaimed: "Oh! father, let us go on farther! It is so beautiful! so beautiful! Let us walk to the foot, I beg of you!" This time the Marquis refused: "No, my darling, I have walked enough; I can't go any farther. If you want to see it more closely, go on there with M. Bretigny. I will wait here for you."

Paul asked: "Will you come, Madame?"

She hesitated, seized by two apprehensions, that of finding herself alone with him, and that of wounding an honest man by having the appearance of suspecting him.

The Marquis repeated: “Go on! Go on! I will wait for you.”

Then she took it for granted that her father would remain within reach of their voices, and she said resolutely: “Let us go on, Monsieur.”

But scarcely had she walked on for some minutes when she felt herself possessed by a poignant emotion, by a vague, mysterious fear — fear of the ruin, fear of the night, fear of this man. Suddenly she felt her legs trembling under her, just as she felt the other night by the lake of Tazenat; they refused to bear her any further, bent under her, appeared to be sinking into the soil, where her feet remained fixed when she strove to raise them.

A large chestnut-tree, planted close to the path they had been pursuing, sheltered one side of a meadow. Christiane, out of breath just as if she had been running, let herself sink against the trunk. And she stammered: “I shall remain here — we can see very well.”

Paul sat down beside her. She heard his heart beating with great emotional throbs. He said, after a brief silence: “Do you believe that we have had a previous life?”

She murmured, without having well understood his question: “I don’t know. I have never thought on it.”

He went on: “But I believe it — at moments — or rather I feel it. As being is composed of a soul and a body, which seem distinct, but are, without doubt, only one whole of the same nature, it must reappear when the elements which have originally formed it find themselves together for the second time. It is not the same individual assuredly, but it is the same man who comes back when a body like the previous form finds itself inhabited by a soul like that which animated him formerly. Well, I, to-night, feel sure, Madame, that I lived in that chateau, that I possessed it that I fought there, that I defended it. I recognized it — it was mine, I am certain of it!

And I am also certain that I loved there a woman who resembled you, and who, like you, bore the name of Christiane. I am so certain of it that I seem to see you still calling me from the top of that tower.

“Search your memory! recall it to your mind! There is a wood at the back, which descends into a deep valley. We have often walked there. You had light robes in the summer evenings, and I wore heavy armor, which clanked beneath the trees. You do not recollect? Look back, then, Christiane! Why, your name is as familiar to me as those we hear in childhood! Were we to inspect carefully all the stones of this fortress, we should find it there carved by my hand in days of yore! I declare to you that I recognize my dwelling-place, my country, just as I recognized you, you, the first time I saw you!”

He spoke in an exalted tone of conviction, poetically intoxicated by contact with this Woman, and by the night, by the moon, and by the ruin.

He abruptly flung himself on his knees before Christiane, and, in a trembling voice said: “Let me adore you still since I have found you again! Here have I been searching for you a long time!”

She wanted to rise and to go away, to join her father, but she had not the strength; she had not the courage, held back, paralyzed by a burning desire to listen to him still, to hear those ravishing words entering her heart. She felt herself carried away in a dream, in the dream always hoped for, so sweet, so poetic, full of rays of moonlight and lays of love.

He had seized her hands, and was kissing the ends of her finger-nails, murmuring:

“Christiane — Christiane — take me — kill me! I love you, Christiane!”

She felt him quivering, shuddering at her feet. And now he kissed her knees, while his chest heaved with sobs. She was afraid that he was going mad, and started up to make her escape. But he had risen more quickly, and seizing her in his arms he pressed his mouth against hers.

Then, without a cry, without revolt, without resistance, she let herself sink back on the grass, as if this caress, by breaking her will, had crushed her physical power to struggle. And he possessed her with as much ease as if he were culling a ripe fruit.

But scarcely had he loosened his clasp when she rose up distracted, and rushed away shuddering and icy-cold all of a sudden, like one who had just fallen into the water. He overtook her with a few strides, and caught her by the arm, whispering: “Christiane, Christiane! Be on your guard with your father!”

She walked on without answering, without turning round, going straight before her with stiff, jerky steps. He followed her now without venturing to speak to her.

As soon as the Marquis saw them, he rose up: “Hurry,” said he; “I was beginning to get cold. These things are very fine to look at, but bad for one undergoing thermal treatmentl.”

Christiane pressed herself close to her father’s side, as if to appeal to him for protection and take refuge in his tenderness.

As soon as she had re-entered her apartment, she undressed herself in a few seconds and buried herself in her bed, hiding her head under the clothes; then she wept. She wept with her face pressed against the pillow for a long, long time, inert, annihilated. She did not think, she did not suffer, she did not regret. She wept without thinking, without reflecting, without knowing why. She wept instinctively as one sings when one feels gay. Then, when her tears were exhausted, overwhelmed, paralyzed with sobbing, she fell asleep from fatigue and lassitude.

She was awakened by light taps at the door of her room, which looked out on the drawing-room. It was broad daylight, as it was nine o'clock.

"Come in," she cried.

And her husband presented himself, joyous, animated, wearing a traveling-cap and carrying by his side his little money-bag, which he was never without while on a journey.

He exclaimed: "What? You were sleeping still, my dear! And I had to awaken you. There you are! I arrived without announcing myself. I hope you are going on well. It is superb weather in Paris."

And having taken off his cap, he advanced to embrace her. She drew herself away toward the wall, seized by a wild fear, by a nervous dread of this little man, with his smug, rosy countenance, who had stretched out his lips toward her.

Then, abruptly, she offered him her forehead, while she closed her eyes. He planted there a chaste kiss, and asked: "Will you allow me to wash in your dressing-room? As no one attended on me to-day, my room was not prepared."

She stammered: "Why, certainly."

And he disappeared through a door at the end of the bed.

She heard him moving about, splashing, snorting; then he cried: "What news here? For my part, I have splendid news. The analysis of the water has given unexpected results. We can cure at least three times more patients than they can at Royat. It is superb!"

She was sitting in the bed, suffocating, her brain overwrought by this unforeseen return, which hurt her like a physical pain and gripped her like a pang of remorse. He reappeared, self-satisfied, spreading around him a strong odor of verbena. Then he sat down familiarly at the foot of the bed, and asked: "And the paralytic? How is he going on? Is he beginning to walk? It is not possible that he is not cured with what we found in the water!”

She had forgotten all about it for several days, and she faltered: “Why, I — I believe he is beginning to walk better. Besides, I have not seen him this week. I — I am a little unwell.”

He looked at her with interest, and returned: “It is true, you are a little pale. All the same, it becomes you very well. You look charming thus — quite charming.”

And he drew nearer, and bending toward her was about to pass one arm into the bed under her waist.

But she made such a backward movement of terror that he remained stupefied, with his hands extended and his mouth held toward her. Then he asked: “What’s the matter with you nowadays? One cannot touch you any longer. I assure you I do not intend to hurt you.”

And he pressed close to her eagerly, with a glow of sudden desire in his eyes. Then she stammered: “No — let me be — let me be! The fact is, I believe — I believe I am pregnant!”

She had said this, maddened by the mental agony she was enduring, without thinking about her words, to avoid his touch, just as she would have said: “I have leprosy, or the plague.”

He grew pale in his turn, moved by a profound joy; and he merely murmured: “Already!” He yearned now to embrace her a long time, softly, tenderly, as a happy and grateful father. Then, he was seized with uneasiness.

“Is it possible? — What? — Are you sure? — So soon?”

She replied: “Yes — it is possible!”

Then he jumped about the room, and rubbing his hands, exclaimed: “Christi! Christi! What a happy day!”

There was another tap at the door. Andermatt opened it, and a chambermaid said to him: “Doctor Latonne would like to speak to Monsieur immediately.”

“All right. Bring him into our drawing-room.

I am going there.”

He hurried away to the adjoining apartment. The doctor presently appeared. His face had a solemn look, and his manner was starched and cold. He bowed, touched the hand which the banker, a little surprised, held toward him, took a seat, and explained in the tone of a second in an affair of honor: “A very disagreeable matter has arisen with reference to me, my dear Monsieur, and, in order to explain my conduct, I must give you an account of it. When you did me the honor to call me in to see Madame Andermatt, I hastened to come at the appointed hour; now it has transpired that, a few minutes before me, my brother-physician, the medical inspector, who, no doubt, inspires more confidence in the lady, had been sent for, owing to the attentions of the Marquis de Ravenel.

“The result of this is that, having been the second to see her I create the impression of having taken by a trick from Doctor Bonnefille a patient who already belonged to him — I create the impression of having committed an indelicate act, one unbecoming and unjustifiable from one member of the profession toward another. Now it is necessary for us to carry, Monsieur, into the exercise of our art certain precautions and unusual tact in order to avoid every collision which might lead to grave consequences. Doctor Bonnefille, having been apprised of my visit here, believing me capable of this want of delicacy, appearances being in fact against me, has spoken about me in such terms that, were it not for his age, I would have found myself compelled to demand an explanation from him. There remains for me only one thing to do, in order to exculpate myself in his eyes, and in the eyes of the entire medical body of the country, and that is to cease, to my great regret, to give my professional attentions to your wife, and to make the entire truth about this matter known, begging of you in the meantime to accept my excuses.” Andermatt replied with embarrassment:

“I understand perfectly well, doctor, the difficult situation in which you find yourself. The fault is not mine or my wife’s, but that of my father-in-law, who called in M. Bonnefille without giving us notice. Could I not go to look for your brother-doctor, and tell him?— “

Doctor Latonne interrupted him: “It is useless, my dear Monsieur. There is here a question of dignity and professional honor, which I am bound to respect before everything, and, in spite of my lively regrets— “

Andermatt, in his turn, interrupted him. The rich man, the man who pays, who buys a prescription for five, ten, twenty, or forty francs, as he does a box of matches for three sous, to whom everything should belong by the power of his purse, and who only appreciates beings and objects in virtue of an assimilation of their value with that of money, of a relation, rapid and direct, established between coined metal and everything else in the world, was irritated at the presumption of this vendor of remedies on paper. He said in a stiff tone:

"Be it so, doctor. Let us stop where we are. But I trust for your own sake that this step may not have a damaging influence on your career. We shall see, indeed, which of us two shall have the most to suffer from your decision."

The physician, offended, rose up and bowing with the utmost politeness, said: "I have no doubt, Monsieur, it is I who will suffer. That which I have done to-day is very painful to me from every point of view. But I never hesitate between my interests and my conscience."

And he went out. As he emerged through the open door, he knocked against the Marquis, who was entering, with a letter in his hand. And M. de Ravenel exclaimed, as soon as he was alone with his son-in-law: "Look here, my dear fellow! this is a very troublesome thing, which has happened me through your fault. Doctor Bonnefille, hurt by the circumstance that you sent for his brother-physician to see Christiane, has written me a note couched in very dry language informing me that I cannot count any longer on his professional services."

Thereupon, Andermatt got quite annoyed. He walked up and down, excited himself by talking, gesticulated, full of harmless and noisy anger, that kind of anger which is never taken seriously. He went on arguing in a loud voice. Whose fault was it, after all? That of the Marquis alone, who had called in that pack-ass Bonnefille without giving any notice of the fact to him, though he had, thanks to his Paris physician, been informed as to the relative value of the three charlatans at Enval! And then what business had the Marquis to consult a doctor, behind the back of the husband, the husband who was the only judge, the only person responsible for his wife's health? In short, it was the same thing day after day with everything! People did nothing but stupid things around him, nothing but stupid things! He repeated it incessantly; but he was only crying in the desert, nobody understood, nobody put faith in his experience, until it was too late.

And he said, "My physician,"

"My experience," with the authoritative tone of a man who has possession of unique things. In his mouth the possessive pronouns had the sonorous ring of metals. And when he pronounced the words "My wife," one felt very clearly that the Marquis had no longer any rights with regard to his daughter since Andermatt had married her, to marry and to buy having the same meaning in the latter's mind.

Gontran came in, at the most lively stage of the discussion, and seated himself in an armchair with a smile of gaiety on his lips. He said nothing, but listened, exceedingly amused. When the banker stopped talking, having fairly exhausted his breath, his brother-in-law raised his hand, exclaiming:

"I request permission to speak. Here are both of you without physicians, isn't that so? Well, I propose my candidate, Doctor Honorat, the only one who has formed an exact and unshaken opinion on the water of Enval. He makes people drink it, but he would not drink it himself for all the world. Do you wish me to go and look for him? I will take the negotiations on myself."

It was the only thing to do, and they begged of Gontran to send for him immediately. The Marquis, filled with anxiety at the idea of a change of regimen and of nursing wanted to know immediately the opinion of this new physician; and Andermatt desired no less eagerly to consult him on Christiane's behalf.

She heard their voices through the door without listening to their words or understanding what they were talking about. As soon as her husband had left her, she had risen from the bed, as if from a dangerous spot, and hurriedly dressed herself, without the assistance of the chambermaid, shaken by all these occurrences.

The world appeared to her to have changed around her, her former life seemed to have vanished since last night, and people themselves looked quite different.

The voice of Andermatt was raised once more: "Hallo, my dear Bretigny, how are you getting on?"

He no longer used the word "Monsieur." Another voice could be heard saying in reply: "Why, quite well, my dear Andermatt. You only arrived, I suppose, this morning?"

Christiane, who was in the act of raising her hair over her temples, stopped with a choking sensation, her arms in the air. Through the partition, she fancied she could see them grasping one another's hands. She sat down, no longer able to hold herself erect; and her hair, rolling down, fell over her shoulders.

It was Paul who was speaking now, and she shivered from head to foot at every word that came from his mouth. Each word, whose meaning she did not seize, fell and sounded on her heart like a hammer striking a bell.

Suddenly, she articulated in almost a loud tone: “But I love him! — I love him!” as though she were affirming something new and surprising, which saved her, which consoled her, which proclaimed her innocence before the tribunal of her conscience. A sudden energy made her rise up; in one second, her resolution was taken. And she proceeded to rearrange her hair, murmuring: “I have a lover, that is all. I have a lover.” Then, in order to fortify herself still more, in order to get rid of all mental distress, she determined there and then, with a burning faith, to love him to distraction, to give up to him her life, her happiness, to sacrifice everything for him, in accordance with the moral exaltation of hearts conquered but still scrupulous, that believe themselves to be purified by devotedness and sincerity.

And, from behind the wall which separated them, she threw out kisses to him. It was over; she abandoned herself to him, without reserve, as she might have offered herself to a god. The child already coquettish and artful, but still timid, still trembling, had suddenly died within her; and the woman was born, ready for passion, the woman resolute, tenacious, announced only up to this time by the energy hidden in her blue eye, which gave an air of courage and almost of bravado to her dainty white face.

She heard the door opening, and did not turn round, divining that it was her husband, without seeing him, as though a new sense, almost an instinct, had just been generated in her also.

He asked: “Will you be soon ready? We are all going presently to the paralytic’s bath, to see if he is really getting better.”

She replied calmly: “Yes, my dear Will, in five minutes.”

But Gontran, returning to the drawing-room, was calling back Andermatt.

“Just imagine,” said he; “I met that idiot Honorat in the park, and he, too, refuses to attend you for fear of the others. He talks of professional etiquette, deference, usages. One would imagine that he creates the impression of — in short, he is a fool, like his two brother-physicians. Certainly, I thought he was less of an ape than that.”

The Marquis remained overwhelmed. The idea of taking the waters without a physician, of bathing for five minutes longer than necessary, of drinking one glass less than he ought, tortured him with apprehension, for he believed all the doses, the hours, and the phases of the treatment, to be regulated by a law of nature, which had made provision for invalids in causing the flow of those mineral springs, all whose mysterious secrets the doctors knew, like priests inspired and learned.

He exclaimed: “So then we must die here — we may perish like dogs, without any of these gentlemen putting himself about!”

And rage took possession of him, the rage egotistical and unreasoning of a man whose health is endangered.

“Have they any right to do this, since they pay for a license like grocers, these blackguards? We ought to have the power of forcing them to attend people, as trains can be forced to take all passengers. I am going to write to the newspapers to draw attention to the matter.”

He walked about, in a state of excitement; and he went on, turning toward his son:

“Listen! It will be necessary to send for one to Royat or Clermont. We can’t remain in this state.” Gontran replied, laughing: “But those of Clermont and of Royat are not well acquainted with the liquid of Enval, which has not the same special action as their water on the digestive system and on the circulatory apparatus. And then, be sure, they won’t come any more than the others in order to avoid the appearance of taking the bread out of their brother-doctors’ mouths.”

The Marquis, quite scared, faltered: “But what, then, is to become of us?”

Andermatt snatched up his hat, saying: “Let me settle it, and I’ll answer for it that we’ll have the entire three of them this evening — you understand clearly, the — entire — three — at our knees. Let us go now and see the paralytic.”

He cried: “Are you ready, Christiane?”

She appeared at the door, very pale, with a look of determination. Having embraced her father and her brother, she turned toward Paul, and extended her hand toward him. He took it, with downcast eyes, quivering with emotion. As the Marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran had gone on before, chatting, and without minding them, she said, in a firm voice, fixing on the young man a tender and decided glance: “I belong to you, body and soul. Do with me henceforth what you please.” Then she walked on, without giving him an opportunity of replying.

As they drew near the Oriols’ spring, they perceived, like an enormous mushroom, the hat of Père Clovis, who was sleeping beneath the rays of the sun, in the warm water at the bottom of the hole. He now spent the entire morning there, having got accustomed to this boiling water which made him, he said, more lively than a yearling.

Andermatt woke him up: “Well, my fine fellow, you are going on better?”

When he had recognized his patron, the old fellow made a grimace of satisfaction: “Yes, yes, I am going on — I am going on as well as you please.”

“Are you beginning to walk?”

“Like a rabbit, Mochieu — like a rabbit. I will dance a boree with my sweetheart on the first Sunday of the month.”

Andermatt felt his heart beating; he repeated: “It is true, then, that you are walking?”

Père Clovis ceased jesting. “Oh! not very much, not very much. No matter — I’m getting on — I’m getting on!”

Then the banker wanted to see at once how the vagabond walked. He kept rushing about the hole, got agitated, gave orders, as if he were going to float again a ship that had foundered.

“Look here, Gontran! you take the right arm. You, Bretigny, the left arm. I am going to keep up his back. Come on! together! — one — two — three! My dear father-in-law, draw the leg toward you — no, the other, the one that’s in the water. Quick, pray! I can’t hold out longer. There we are — one, two — there! — ouf!”

They had put the old trickster sitting on the ground; and he allowed them to do it with a jeering look, without in any way assisting their efforts.

Then they raised him up again, and set him on his legs, giving him his crutches, which he used like walking-sticks; and he began to step out, bent double, dragging his feet after him, whining and blowing. He advanced in the fashion of a slug, and left behind him a long trail of water on the white dust of the road.

Andermatt, in a state of enthusiasm, clapped his hands, crying out as people do at theaters when applauding the actors: “Bravo, bravo, admirable, bravo!!!”

Then, as the old fellow seemed exhausted, he rushed forward to hold him up, seized him in his arms, although his clothes were streaming, and he kept repeating:

“Enough, don’t fatigue yourself! We are going to put you back into your bath.”

And Père Clovis was plunged once more into his hole by the four men who caught him by his four limbs and carried him carefully like a fragile and precious object.

Then, the paralytic observed in a tone of conviction: “It is good water, all the same, good water that hasn’t an equal. It is worth a treasure, water like that!”

Andermatt turned round suddenly toward his father-in-law: “Don’t keep breakfast waiting for me.

I am going to the Oriols’, and I don’t know when I’ll be free. It is necessary not to let these things drag!”

And he set forth in a hurry, almost running, and twirling his stick about like a man bewitched.

The others sat down under the willows, at the side of the road, opposite Père Clovis’s hole.

Christiane, at Paul’s side, saw in front of her the high knoll from which she had seen the rock blown up.

She had been up there that day, scarcely a month ago. She had been sitting on that russet grass. One month! Only one month! She recalled the most trifling details, the tricolored parasols, the scullions, the slightest things said by each of them! And the dog, the poor dog crushed by the explosion! And that big youth, then a stranger to her, who had rushed forward at one word uttered by her lips in order to save the animal. To-day, he was her lover! her lover! So then she had a lover! She was his mistress — his mistress! She repeated this word in the recesses of her consciousness — his mistress! What a strange word! This man, sitting by her side, whose hand she saw tearing up one by one blades of grass, close to her dress, which he was seeking to touch, this man was now bound to her flesh and to his heart, by that mysterious chain, buried in secrecy and mystery, which nature has stretched between woman and man.

With that voice of thought, that mute voice which seems to speak so loudly in the silence of troubled souls, she incessantly repeated to herself: “I am his mistress! his mistress!” How strange, how unforeseen, a thing this was!

“Do I love him?” She cast a rapid glance at him. Their eyes met, and she felt herself so much caressed by the passionate look with which he covered her, that she trembled from head to foot. She felt a longing now, a wild, irresistible longing, to take that hand which was toying with the grass, and to press it very tightly in order to convey to him all that may be said by a clasp. She let her own hand slip along her dress down to the grass, then laid it there motionless, with the fingers spread wide. Then she saw the other come softly toward it like an amorous animal seeking his companion. It came nearer and nearer; and their little fingers touched. They grazed one another at the ends gently, barely, lost one another and found one another again, like lips meeting. But this imperceptible caress, this slight contact entered into her being so violently that she felt herself growing faint as if he were once more straining her between his arms.

And she suddenly understood how a woman can belong to some man, how she no longer is anything under the love that possesses her, how that other being takes her body and soul, flesh, thought, will, blood, nerves, — all, all, all that is in her, — just as a huge bird of prey with large wings swoops down on a wren.

The Marquis and Gontran talked about the future station, themselves won over by Will's enthusiasm. And they spoke of the banker's merits, the clearness of his mind, the sureness of his judgment, the certainty of his system of speculation, the boldness of his operations, and the regularity of his character. Father-in-law and brother-in-law, in the face of this probable success, of which they felt certain, were in agreement, and congratulated one another on this alliance.

Christiane and Paul did not seem to hear, so much occupied were they with each other.

The Marquis said to his daughter: "Hey! darling, you may perhaps one day be one of the richest women in France, and people will talk of you as they do about the Rothschilds. Will has truly a remarkable, very remarkable — a great intelligence."

But a morose and whimsical jealousy entered all at once into Paul's heart.

"Let me alone now," said he, "I know it, the intelligence of all those engaged in stirring up business. They have only one thing in their heads — money! All the thoughts that we bestow on beautiful things, all the actions that we waste on our caprices, all the hours which we fling away for our distractions, all the strength that we squander on our pleasures, all the ardor and the power which love, divine love, takes from us, they employ in seeking for gold, in thinking of gold, in amassing gold!

The man of intelligence lives for all the great disinterested tendernesses, the arts, love, science, travels, books; and, if he seeks money, it is because this facilitates the true pleasures of intellect and even the happiness of the heart! But they — they have nothing in their minds or their hearts but this ignoble taste for traffic! They resemble men of worth, these skimmers of life, just as much as the picture-dealer resembles the painter, as the publisher resembles the writer, as the theatrical manager resembles the dramatic poet."

He suddenly became silent, realizing that he had allowed himself to be carried away, and in a calmer voice he went on: "I don't say that of Andermatt, whom I consider a charming man. I like him a great deal, because he is a hundred times superior to all the others."

Christiane had withdrawn her hand. Paul once more stopped talking. Gontran began to laugh; and, in his malicious voice, with which he ventured to say everything, in his hours of mocking and raillery:

"In any case, my dear fellow, these men have one rare merit: that is, to marry our sisters and to have rich daughters, who become our wives."

The Marquis, annoyed, rose up: "Oh! Gontran, you are perfectly revolting."

Paul thereupon turned toward Christiane, and murmured: "Would they know how to die for one woman, or even to give her all their fortune — all — without keeping anything?"

This meant so clearly: "All I have is yours, including my life," that she was touched, and she adopted this device in order to take his hands in hers:

"Rise, and lift me up. I am benumbed from not moving."

He stood erect, seized her by the wrists, and drawing her up placed her standing on the edge of the road close to his side. She saw his mouth articulating the words, "I love you," and she quickly turned aside, to avoid saying to him in reply three words which rose to her lips in spite of her, in a burst of passion which was drawing her toward him.

They returned to the hotel. The hour for the bath was passed. They awaited the breakfast-bell. It rang, but Andermatt did not make his appearance. After taking another turn in the park, they resolved to sit down to table. The meal, although a long one, was finished before the return of the banker. They went back to sit down under the trees. And the hours stole by, one after another; the sun glided over the leaves, bending toward the mountains; the day was ebbing toward its close; and yet Will did not present himself.

All at once, they saw him. He was walking quickly, his hat in his hand, wiping his forehead, his necktie on one side, his waistcoat half open, as if after a journey, after a struggle, after a terrible and prolonged effort.

As soon as he beheld his father-in-law, he exclaimed: “Victory! ’tis done! But what a day, my friends! Ah! the old fox, what trouble he gave me!”

And immediately he explained the steps he had taken and the obstacles he had met with.

Père Oriol had, at first, shown himself so unreasonable that Andermatt was breaking off the negotiations and going away. Then the peasant called him back. The old man pretended that he would not sell his lands but would assign them to the Company with the right to resume possession of them in case of ill success. In case of success, he demanded half the profits.

The banker had to demonstrate to him, with figures on paper and tracings to indicate the different bits of land, that the fields all together would not be worth more than forty-five thousand francs at the present hour, while the expenses of the Company would mount up at one swoop to a million.

But the Auvergnat replied that he expected to benefit by the enormously increased value that would be given to his property by the erection of the establishment and hotels, and to draw his interest in the undertaking in accordance with the acquired value and not the previous value.

Andermatt had then to represent to him that the risks should be proportionate with the possible gains, and to terrify him with the apprehension of the loss.

They accordingly arrived at this agreement: Père Oriol was to assign to the Company all the grounds stretching as far as the banks of the stream, that is to say, all those in which it appeared possible to find mineral water, and in addition the top of the knoll, in order to erect there a casino and a hotel, and some vine-plots on the slope which should be divided into lots and offered to the leading physicians of Paris.

The peasant, in return for this apportionment valued at two hundred and fifty thousand francs, that is, at about four times its value, would participate to the extent of a quarter in the profits of the Company. As there was very much more land, which he did not part with, round the future establishment, he was sure, in case of success, to realize a fortune by selling on reasonable terms these grounds, which would constitute, he said, the dowry of his daughters.

As soon as these conditions had been arrived at, Will had to carry the father and the son with him to the notary's office in order to have a promise of sale drawn up defeasible in the event of their not finding the necessary water. And the drawing up of the agreement, the discussion of every point, the indefinite repetition of the same arguments, the eternal commencement over again of the same contentions, had lasted all the afternoon.

At last the matter was concluded. The banker had got his station. But he repeated, devoured by a regret: "It will be necessary for me to confine myself to the water without thinking of the questions about the land. He has been cunning, the old ape."

Then he added: "Bah! I'll buy up the old Company, and it is on that I may speculate! No matter —— it is necessary that I should start this evening again for Paris."

The Marquis, astounded, cried out: "What? This evening?"

"Why, yes, my dear father-in-law, in order to get the definitive instrument prepared, while M. Aubry-Pasteur will be making excavations. It is necessary also that I should make arrangements to commence the works in a fortnight. I haven't an hour to lose. With regard to this, I must inform you that you are to constitute a portion of my board of directors in which I will need a strong majority. I give you ten shares. To you, Gontran, also I give ten shares." Gontran began to laugh: "Many thanks, my dear fellow. I sell them back to you. That makes five thousand francs you owe me."

But Andermatt no longer felt in a mood for joking, when dealing with business of so much importance. He resumed dryly: "If you are not serious, I will address myself to another person."

Gontran ceased laughing: "No, no, my good friend, you know that I have cleared off everything with you."

The banker turned toward Paul: "My dear Monsieur, will you render me a friendly service, that is, to accept also ten shares with the rank of director?" Paul, with a bow, replied: "You will permit me, Monsieur, not to accept this graceful offer, but to put a hundred thousand francs into the undertaking, which I consider a superb one. So then it is I who have to ask for a favor from you."

William, ravished, seized his hands. This confidence had conquered him. Besides he always experienced an irresistible desire to embrace persons who brought him money for his enterprises.

But Christiane crimsoned to her temples, pained, bruised. It seemed to her that she had just been bought and sold. If he had not loved her, would Paul have offered these hundred thousand francs to her husband? No, undoubtedly! He should not, at least, have entered into this transaction in her presence.

The dinner-bell rang. They re-entered the hotel. As soon as they were seated at table, Madame Paille, the mother, asked Andermatt:

“So you are going to set up another establishment?”

The news had already gone through the entire district, was known to everyone, it put the bathers into a state of commotion.

William replied: “Good heavens, yes! The existing one is too defective!”

And turning round to M. Aubry-Pasteur: “You will excuse me, dear Monsieur, for speaking to you at dinner of a step which I wished to take with regard to you; but I am starting again for Paris, and time presses on me terribly. Will you consent to direct the work of excavation, in order to find a volume of superior water?”

The engineer, feeling flattered, accepted the office. In five minutes everything had been discussed and settled with the clearness and precision which Andermatt imported into all matters of business. Then they talked about the paralytic. He had been seen crossing the park in the afternoon with only one walking-stick, although that morning he had used two. The banker kept repeating: “This is a miracle, a real miracle. His cure proceeds with giant strides!” Paul, to please the husband, rejoined: “It is Père Clovis himself who walks with giant strides.”

A laugh of approval ran round the table. Every eye was fixed on Will; every mouth complimented him.

The waiters of the restaurant made it their business to serve him the first, with a respectful deference, which disappeared from their faces as soon as they passed the dishes to the next guest.

One of them presented to him a card on a plate. He took it up, and read it, half aloud:

“Doctor Latonne of Paris would be happy if M. Andermatt would be kind enough to give him an interview of a few seconds before hit departure.”

“Tell him in reply that I have no time, but that I will be back in eight or ten days.”

At the same moment, a box of flowers sent by Doctor Honorat was presented to Christiane.

Gontran laughed: “Père Bonnefille is a bad third,” said he.

The dinner was nearly over. Andermatt was informed that his landau was waiting for him. He went up to look for his little bag; and when he came down again he saw half the village gathered in front of the door.

Petrus Martel came to grasp his hand, with the familiarity of a strolling actor, and murmured in his ear: “I shall have a proposal to make to you — something stunning — with reference to your undertaking.”

Suddenly, Doctor Bonnefille appeared, hurrying in his usual fashion. He passed quite close to Will, and bowing very low to him as he would do to the Marquis, he said to him:

“A pleasant journey, Baron.”

“That settles it!” murmured Gontran.

Andermatt, triumphant, swelling with joy and pride, pressed the hands extended toward him, thanked them, and kept repeating: *“Au revoir!”*

He was nearly forgetting to embrace his wife, so much was he thinking about other things. This indifference was a relief to her, and, when she saw the landau moving away on the darkening road, as the horses broke into a quick trot, it seemed to her that she had nothing more to fear from anyone for the rest of her life.

She spent the whole evening seated in front of the hotel, between her father and Paul Bretigny, Gontran having gone to the Casino, where he went every evening.

She did not want either to walk or to talk, and remained motionless, her hands clasped over her knees, her eyes lost in the darkness, languid and weak, a little restless and yet happy, scarcely thinking, not even dreaming, now and then struggling against a vague remorse, which she thrust away from her, always repeating to herself, “I love him! I love him!”

She went up to her apartment at an early hour, in order to be alone and to think. Seated in the depths of an armchair and covered with a dressing-gown which floated around her, she gazed at the stars through the window, which was left open; and in the frame of that window she evoked every minute the image of him who had conquered her. She saw him, kind, gentle, and powerful — so strong and so yielding in her presence. This man had taken herself to himself, — she felt it, — taken her forever. She was alone no longer; they were two, whose two hearts would henceforth form but one heart, whose two souls would henceforth form but one soul. Where was he? She knew not; but she knew full well that he was dreaming of her, just as she was thinking of him. At each throb of her heart she believed she heard another throb answering somewhere. She felt a desire wandering round her and fanning her cheek like a bird's wing. She felt it entering through that open window, this desire coming from him, this burning desire, which entreated her in the silence of the night.

How good it was, how sweet and refreshing to be loved! What joy to think of some one, with a longing in your eyes to weep, to weep with tenderness, and a longing also to open your arms, even without seeing him, in order to invite him to come, to stretch one's arms toward the image that presents itself, toward that kiss which your lover casts unceasingly from far or near, in the fever of his waiting.

And she stretched toward the stars her two white arms in the sleeves of her dressing-gown. Suddenly she uttered a cry. A great black shadow, striding over her balcony, had sprung up into her window.

She sprang wildly to her feet! It was he! And, without even reflecting that somebody might see them, she threw herself upon his breast.

CHAPTER VIII. ORGANIZATION

THE absence of Andermatt was prolonged. M. Aubry-Pasteur got the soil dug up. He found, in addition, four springs, which supplied the new Company with more than twice as much water as they required. The entire district, driven crazy by these searches, by these discoveries, by the great news which circulated everywhere, by the prospects of a brilliant future, became agitated and enthusiastic, talked of nothing else, and thought of nothing else. The Marquis and Gontran themselves spent their days hanging round the workmen, who were boring through the veins of granite; and they listened with increasing interest to the explanations and the lectures of the engineer on the geological character of Auvergne. And Paul and Christiane loved one another freely, tranquilly, in absolute security, without anyone suspecting anything, without anyone thinking even of spying on them, for the attention, the curiosity, and the zeal of all around them were absorbed in the future station.

Christiane acted like a young girl under the intoxication of a first love. The first draught, the first kiss, had burned, had stunned her. She had swallowed the second very quickly, and had found it better, and now again and again she raised the intoxicating cup to her lips.

Since the night when Paul had broken into her apartment, she no longer took any heed of what was happening in the world. For her, time, events, beings, no longer had any existence; there was nothing else in life save one man, he whom she loved. Henceforth, her eyes saw only him, her mind thought only of him, her hopes were fixed on him alone. She lived, went from place to place, ate, dressed herself, seemed to listen and to reply, without consciousness or thought about what she was doing. No disquietude haunted her, for no misfortune could have fallen on her. She had become insensible to everything. No physical pain could have taken hold of her flesh, as love alone could, so as to make her shudder. No moral suffering could have taken hold of her soul, paralyzed by happiness. Moreover, he, loving her with the self-abandonment which he displayed in all his attachments, excited the young woman’s tenderness to distraction.

Often, toward evening, when he knew that the Marquis and Gontran had gone to the springs, he would say, “Come and look at our heaven.” He called a cluster of pine-trees growing on the hillside above even the gorges their heaven. They ascended to this spot through a little wood, along a steep path, to climb which took away Christiane’s breath. As their time was limited, they proceeded rapidly, and, in order that she might not be too much fatigued, he put his arm round her waist and lifted her up. Placing one hand on his shoulder, she let herself be borne along; and, from time to time, she would throw herself on his neck and place her mouth against his lips. As they mounted higher, the air became keener; and, when they reached the cluster of pine-trees, the odor of the balsam refreshed them like a breath of the sea.

They sat down under the shadowy trees, she on a grassy knoll, and he lower down, at her feet. The wind in the stems sang that sweet chant of the pine-trees which is like a wail of sorrow; and the immense Limagne, with its unseen backgrounds steeped in fog, gave them a sensation exactly like that of the ocean. Yes, the sea was there in front of them, down below. They could have no doubt of it, for they felt its breath fanning their faces.

He talked to her in the coaxing tone that one uses toward a child.

“Give me your fingers and let me eat them — they are my bonbons, mine!”

He put them one after the other into his mouth, and seemed to be tasting them with gluttonous delight.

“Oh! how nice they are! — especially the little one. I have never eaten anything better than the little one.”

Then he threw himself on his knees, placed his elbows on Christiane’s lap, and murmured:

“‘Liane,’ are you looking at me?” He called her Liane because she entwined herself around him in order to embrace him the more closely, as a plant clings around a tree. “Look at me. I am going to enter your soul.”

And they exchanged that immovable, persistent glance, which seems truly to make two beings mingle with one another!

“We can only love thoroughly by thus possessing one another,” he said. “All the other things of love are but foul pleasures.”

And, face to face, their breaths blending into one, they sought to see one another’s images in the depths of their eyes.

He murmured: “I love you, Liane. I see your adored heart.”

She replied: “I, too, Paul, see your heart!”

And, indeed, they did see one another even to the depths of their hearts and souls, for there was no longer in their hearts and souls anything but a mad transport of love for one another.

He said: “Liane, your eye is like the sky. It is blue, with so many reflections, with so much clearness. It seems to me that I see swallow’s passing through them — these, no doubt, must be vour thoughts.”

And when they had thus contemplated one another for a long, long time, they drew nearer still to one another, and embraced softly with little jerks, gazing once more into each other’s eyes between each kiss. Sometimes he would take her in his arms, and carry her, while he ran along the stream, which glided toward the gorges of Enval, before dashing itself into them. It was a narrow glen, where meadows and woods alternated. Paul rushed over the grass, and now and then he would raise her up high with his powerful wrists, and exclaim: “Liane, let us fly away.” And with this yearning to fly away, love, their impassioned love, filled them, harassing, incessant, sorrowful. And everything around them whetted this desire of their souls, the light atmosphere — a bird’s atmosphere, he said — and the vast blue horizon, in which they both would fain have taken wing, holding each other by the hand, so as to disappear above the boundless plain when the night spread its shadows across it. They would have flown thus across the hazy evening sky, never to return. Where would they have gone? They knew not; but what a glorious dream! When he had got out of breath from running while carrying her in this way, he placed her sitting on a rock in order to kneel down before her; and, kissing her ankles, he adored her, murmuring infantile and tender words.

Had they been lovers in a city, their passion, no doubt, would have been different, more prudent, more sensual, less ethereal, and less romantic. But there, in that green country, whose horizon widened the flights of the soul, alone, without anything to distract them, to attenuate their instinct of awakened love, they had suddenly plunged into a passionately poetic attachment made up of ecstasy and frenzy. The surrounding scenery, the balmy air, the woods, the sweet perfume of the fields, played for them all day and all night the music of their love — music which excited them even to madness, as the sound of tambourines and of shrill flutes drives to acts of savage unreason the dervish who whirls round with fixed intent.

One evening, as they were returning to the hotel for dinner, the Marquis said to them, suddenly: “Andermatt is coming back in four days. Matters are all arranged. We are to leave the day after his return. We have been here a long time. We must not prolong mineral water seasons too much."

They were as much taken by surprise as if they had heard the end of the world announced, and during the meal neither of them uttered a word, so much were they thinking with astonishment of what was about to happen. So then they would, in a few days, be separated and would no longer be able to see one another freely. That appeared so impossible and so extraordinary to them that they could not realize it.

Andermatt did, in fact, come back at the end of the week. He had telegraphed in order that two landaus might be sent on to him to meet the first train.

Christiane, who had not slept, tormented as she was by a strange and new emotion, a sort of fear of her husband, a fear mingled with anger, with inexplicable contempt, and a desire to set him at defiance, had risen at daybreak, and was awaiting him. He appeared in the first carriage, accompanied by three gentlemen well attired but modest in demeanor. The second landau contained four others, who seemed persons of rank somewhat inferior to the first. The Marquis and Gontran were astonished. The latter asked: "Who are these people?"

Andermatt replied: "My shareholders. We are going to establish the Company this very day, and to nominate the board of directors immediately."

He embraced his wife without speaking to her, and almost without looking at her, so preoccupied was he; and, turning toward the seven gentlemen, who were standing behind him, silent and respectful:

"Go and have breakfast, and take a walk," said he. "We'll meet again here at twelve o'clock."

They went off without saying anything, like soldiers obeying orders, and mounting the steps of the hotel one after another, they went in. Gontran, who had been watching them as they disappeared from view, asked in a very serious tone:

"Where did you find them, these 'supers' of yours?"

The banker smiled: "They are very well-to-do men, moneyed men, capitalists."

And, after a pause, he added, with a more significant smile: "They busy themselves about my affairs."

Then he repaired to the notary's office to read over again the documents, of which he had sent the originals, all prepared, some days before. There he found Doctor Latonne, with whom, moreover, he had been in correspondence, and they chatted for a long time in low tones, in a corner of the office, while the clerks' pens ran along the paper, with the buzzing noise of insects.

The meeting to establish the Company was fixed for two o'clock. The notary's study had been fitted up as if for a concert. Two rows of chairs were placed for the shareholders in front of the table, where Maître Alain was to take his seat beside his principal clerk. Maître Alain had put on his official garment in consideration of the importance of the business in hand. He was a very small man, a stuttering ball of white flesh.

Andermatt entered just as it struck two, accompanied by the Marquis, his brother-in-law, and Bretigny, and followed by the seven gentlemen, whom Gontran described as "supers." He had the air of a general. Père Oriol also made his appearance with Colosse by his side. He seemed uneasy, distrustful, as people always are when about to sign a document. The last to arrive was Doctor Latonne. He had made his peace with Andermatt by a complete submission preceded by excuses skillfully turned, and followed by an offer of his services without any reserve or restrictions.

Thereupon, the banker, feeling that he had Latonne in his power, promised him the post he longed for, of medical inspector of the new establishment.

When everyone was in the room, a profound silence reigned. The notary addressed the meeting: "Gentlemen, take your seats." He gave utterance to a few words more, which nobody could hear in the confusion caused by the moving about of the chairs.

Andermatt lifted up a chair, and placed it in front of his army, in order to keep his eye on all his supporters; then, when he was seated, he said:

"Messieurs, I need not enter into any explanations with you as to the motive that brings us together. We are going, first of all, to establish the new Company in which you have consented to become shareholders. It is my duty, however, to apprise you of a few details, which have caused us a little embarrassment. I have found it necessary, before even entering on the undertaking at all, to assure myself that we could obtain the required authority for the creation of a new establishment of public utility. This assurance I have got. What remains to be done with respect to this, I will make it my business to do. I have the Minister's promise. But another point demands my attention. We are going, Messieurs, to enter on a struggle with the old Company of the Enval waters. We shall come forth victorious in this struggle, victorious and enriched, you may be certain; but, just as in the days of old, a war cry was necessary for the combatants, we, combatants in the modern battle, require a name for our station, a name sonorous, attractive, well fashioned for advertising purposes, which strikes the ear like the note of a clarion, and penetrates the ear like a flash of lightning. Now, Messieurs, we are in Enval, and we can not unbaptize this district. One resource only is left to us. To designate our establishment, our establishment alone, by a new appellation.

"Here is what I propose to you: If our bathhouse is to be at the foot of the knoll, of which M. Oriol, here present, is the proprietor, our future Casino will be erected on the summit of this same knoll. We may, therefore, say that this knoll, this mountain —— for it is a mountain, a little mountain — furnishes the site of our establishment, inasmuch as we have the foot and the top of it. Is it not, therefore, natural to call our baths the Baths of Mont Oriol, and to attach to this station, which will become one of the most important in the entire world, the name of the original proprietor? Render to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar.

"And observe, Messieurs, that this is an excellent vocable. People will talk of the Mont Oriol' as they talk of 'the Mont Doré.' It fixes itself on the eye and in the ear; we can see it well; we can hear it well; it abides in us — Mont Oriol! — Mont Oriol! — The baths of Mont Oriol!"

And Andermatt made this word ring, flung it out like a ball, listening to the echo of it. He went on, repeating imaginary dialogues: "'You are going to the baths of Mont Oriol?'

"'Yes, Madame. People say they are perfect, these waters of Mont Oriol.'

"'Excellent, indeed. Besides, Mont Oriol is a delightful district.'"

And he smiled, assumed the air of people chatting to one another, altered his voice to indicate when the lady was speaking, saluted with the hand when representing the gentleman.

Then he resumed, in his natural voice: "Has anyone an objection to offer?"

The shareholders answered in chorus: "No, none."

All the "supers" applauded. Père Oriol, moved, flattered, conquered, overcome by the deep-rooted pride of an upstart peasant, began to smile while he twisted his hat about between his hands, and he made a sign of assent with his head in spite of him, a movement which revealed his satisfaction, and which Andermatt observed without pretending to see it. Colosse remained impassive, but was quite as much satisfied as his father.

Then Andermatt said to the notary: “Kindly read the instrument whereby the Company is incorporated, Maître Alain.”

And he resumed his seat. The notary said to his clerk: “Go on, Marinet.”

Marinet, a wretched consumptive creature, coughed, and with the intonations of a preacher, and an attempt at declamation, began to enumerate the statutes relating to the incorporation of an anonymous Company, called the Company of the Thermal Establishment of Mont Oriol at Enval with a capital of two millions.

Père Oriol interrupted him: “A moment, a moment,” said he. And he drew forth from his pocket a few sheets of greasy paper, which during the past eight days had passed through the hands of all the notaries and all the men of business of the department. It was a copy of the statutes which his son and himself by this time were beginning to know by heart. Then, he slowly fixed his spectacles on his nose, raised up his head, looked out for the exact point where he could easily distinguish the letters, and said in a tone of command:

“Go on from that place, Marinet.”

Colosse, having got close to his chair, also kept his eye on the paper along with his father.

And Marinet commenced over again. Then old Oriol, bewildered by the double task of listening and reading at the same time, tortured by the apprehension of a word being changed, beset also by the desire to see whether Andermatt was making some sign to the notary, did not allow a single line to be got through without stopping ten times the clerk whose elocutionary efforts he interrupted.

He kept repeating: “What did you say? What did you say there? I didn’t understand — not so quick!” Then turning aside a little toward his son: “What place is he at, Coloche?”

Coloche, more self-controlled, replied: “It’s all right, father — let him go on — it’s all right.”

The peasant was still distrustful. With the end of his crooked finger he went on tracing on the paper the words as they were read out, muttering them between his lips; but he could not fix his attention at the same time on both matters. When he listened, he did not read, and he did not hear when he was reading. And he puffed as if he had been climbing a mountain; he perspired as if he had been digging his vine-fields under a midday sun, and from time to time, he asked for a few minutes' rest to wipe his forehead and to take breath, like a man fighting a duel.

Andermatt, losing patience, stamped with his foot on the ground. Gontran, having noticed on a table the "Moniteur du Puy-de-Dome," had taken it up and was running his eye over it, and Paul, astride on his chair, with downcast eyes and an anxious heart, was reflecting that this little man, rosy and corpulent, sitting in front of him, was going to carry off, next day, the woman whom he loved with all his soul, Christiane, his Christiane, his fair Christiane, who was his, his entirely, nothing to anyone save him. And he asked himself whether he was not going to carry her off this very evening.

The seven gentlemen remained serious and tranquil.

At the end of an hour, it was finished. The deed was signed. The notary made out certificates for the payments on the shares. On being appealed to, the cashier, M. Abraham Levy, declared that he had received the necessary deposits. Then the company, from that moment legally constituted, was announced to be gathered together in general assembly, all the shareholders being in attendance, for the appointment of a board of directors and the election of their chairman.

All the votes with the exception of two, were recorded in favor of Andermatt's election to the post of chairman. The two dissentients — the old peasant and his son — had nominated Oriol. Bretigny was appointed commissioner of superintendence. Then, the Board, consisting of MM. Andermatt, the Marquis and the Count de Ravenel, Bretigny, the Oriols, father and son, Doctor Latonne, Abraham Levy, and Simon Zidler, begged of the remaining shareholders to withdraw, as well as the notary and his clerk, in order that they, as the governing body, might determine on the first resolutions, and settle the most important points.

Andermatt rose up again: "Messieurs, we are entering on the vital question, that of success, which we must win at any cost.

"It is with mineral waters as with everything. It is necessary to get them talked about a great deal, and continually, so that invalids may drink them.

"The great modern question, Messieurs, is that of advertising. It is the god of commerce and of contemporary industry. Without advertising there is no security. The art of advertising, moreover, is difficult, complicated, and demands a considerable amount of tact. The first persons who resorted to this new expedient employed it rudely, attracting attention by noise, by beating the big drum, and letting off cannon-shots. Mangin, Messieurs, was only a forerunner.

To-day, clamor is regarded with suspicion, showy placards cause a smile, the crying out of names in the streets awakens distrust rather than curiosity. And yet it is necessary to attract public attention, and after having fixed it, it is necessary to produce conviction. The art, therefore, consists in discovering the means, the only means which can succeed, having in our possession something that we desire to sell. We, Messieurs, for our part, desire to sell water. It is by the physicians that we are to get the better of the invalids.

“The most celebrated physicians, Messieurs, are men like ourselves — who have weaknesses like us. I do not mean to convey that we can corrupt them. The reputation of the illustrious masters, whose assistance we require, places them above all suspicion of venality. But what man is there that cannot be won over by going properly to work with him? There are also women who cannot be purchased. These it is necessary to fascinate.

“Here, then, Messieurs, is the proposition which I am going to make to you, after having discussed it at great length with Doctor Latonne:

“We have, in the first place, classified in three leading groups the maladies submitted for our treatment. These are, first, rheumatism in all its forms, skin-disease, arthritis, gout, and so forth; secondly, affections of the stomach, of the intestines and of the liver; thirdly, all the disorders arising from disturbed circulation, for it is indisputable that our acidulated baths have an admirable effect on the circulation.

“Moreover, Messieurs, the marvelous cure of Père Clovis promises us miracles. Accordingly, when we have to deal with maladies which these waters are calculated to cure, we are about to make to the principal physicians who attend patients for such diseases the following proposition: ‘Messieurs,’ we shall say to them, ‘come and see, come and see with your own eyes; follow your patients; we offer you hospitality. ‘The country is magnificent; you require a rest after your severe labors during the winter — come! And come not to our houses, worthy professors, but to your own, for we offer you a cottage, which will belong to you, if you choose, on exceptional conditions.’”

Andermatt took breath, and went on in a more subdued tone:

“Here is how I have tried to work out this idea. We have selected six lots of land of a thousand meters each. On each of these six lots, the Bernese ‘Chalets Mobiles’ Company undertakes to fix one of their model buildings. We shall place gratuitously these dwellings, as elegant as they are comfortable, at the disposal of our physicians. If they are pleased with them, they need only buy the houses from the Bernese Company; as for the grounds, we shall assign them to the physicians, who are to pay us back — in invalids. Therefore, Messieurs, we obtain these multiplied advantages of covering our property with charming villas which cost us nothing, of attracting thither the leading physicians of the world and their legion of clients, and above all of convincing the eminent doctors who will very rapidly become proprietors in the district of the efficacy of our waters. As to all the negotiations necessary to bring about these results I take them upon myself, Messieurs; and I will do so, not as a speculator but as a man of the world.”

Père Oriol interrupted him. The parsimony which he shared with the peasantry of Auvergne made him object to this gratuitous assignment of land.

Andermatt was inspired with a burst of eloquence. He compared the agriculturist on a large scale who casts his seed in handfuls into the teeming soil with the rapacious peasant who counts the grains and never gets more than half a harvest.

Then, as Oriol, annoyed by this language, persisted in his objections, the banker made his board divide, and shut the old man’s mouth with six votes against two.

He next opened a large morocco portfolio and took out of it plans of the new establishment — the hotel and the Casino — as well as the estimates, and the most economical methods of procuring materials, which had been all prepared by the contractors, so that they might be approved of and signed before the end of the meeting. The works should be commenced by the beginning of the week after next.

The two Oriols alone wanted to investigate and discuss matters. But Andermatt, becoming irritated, said to them: “Did I ask you for money? No! Then give me peace! And, if you are not satisfied, we’ll take another division on it.”

Thereupon, they signed along with the remaining members of the Board; and the meeting terminated.

All the inhabitants of the place were waiting to see them going out, so intense was the excitement. The people bowed respectfully to them. As the two peasants were about to return home, Andermatt said to them:

“Do not forget that we are all dining together at the hotel. And bring your girls; I have brought them presents from Paris.”

They were to meet at seven o’clock in the drawing-room of the Hotel Splendid.

It was a magnificent dinner to which the banker had invited the principal bathers and the authorities of the village. Christiane, who was the hostess, had the curé at her right, and the mayor at her left.

The conversation was all about the future establishment and the prospects of the district. The two Oriol girls had found under their napkins two caskets containing two bracelets of pearls and emeralds, and wild with delight, they talked as they had never done before with Gontran sitting between them. The elder girl herself laughed with all her heart at the jokes of the young man, who became animated, while he talked to them, and in his own mind formed about them those masculine judgments, those judgments daring and secret, which are generated in the flesh and in the mind, at the sight of every pretty woman.

Paul did not eat, and did not open his lips. It seemed to him that his life was going to end tonight. Suddenly he remembered that just a month had glided away, day by day, since the open-air dinner by the lake of Tazenat. He had in his soul that vague sense of pain caused rather by presentiments than by grief, known to lovers alone, that sense of pain which makes the heart so heavy, the nerves so vibrating that the slightest noise makes us pant, and the mind so wretchedly sad that everything we hear assumes a somber hue so as to correspond with the fixed idea.

As soon as they had quitted the table, he went to join Christiane in the drawing-room.

“I must see you this evening,” he said, “presently, immediately, since I no longer can tell when we may be able to meet. Are you aware that it is just a month to-day?”

She replied: “I know it.”

He went on: “Listen! I am going to wait for you on the road to La Roche Pradière, in front of the village, close to the chestnut-trees. Nobody will notice your absence at the time. Come quickly in order to bid me adieu, since to-morrow we part.”

She murmured: “I’ll be there in a quarter of an hour.”

And he went out to avoid being in the midst of this crowd which exasperated him.

He took the path through the vineyards which they had followed one day — the day when they had gazed together at the Limagne for the first time. And soon he was on the highroad. He was alone, and he felt alone, alone in the world. The immense, invisible plain increased still more this sense of isolation. He stopped in the very spot where they had seated themselves on the occasion when he recited Baudelaire’s lines on Beauty. How far away it was already! And, hour by hour, he retraced in his memory all that had since taken place. Never had he been so happy, never! Never had he loved so distractedly, and at the same time so chastely, so devotedly. And he recalled that evening by the “gour” of Tazenat, only a month from to-day — the cool wood mellowed with a pale luster, the little lake of silver, and the big fishes that skimmed along its surface; and their return, when he saw her walking in front of him with light and shadow falling on her in turn, the moon’s rays playing on her hair, on her shoulders, and on her arms through the leaves of the trees. These were the sweetest hours he had tasted in his life. He turned round to ascertain whether she might not have arrived. He did not see her, but he perceived the moon, which appeared at the horizon. The same moon which had risen for his first declaration of love had risen now for his first adieu.

A shiver ran through his body, an icy shiver. The autumn had come — the autumn that precedes the winter. He had not till now felt this first touch of cold, which pierced his frame suddenly like a menace of misfortune.

The white road, full of dust, stretched in front of him, like a river between its banks. A form at that moment rose up at the turn of the road. He recognized her at once; and he waited for her without flinching, trembling with the mysterious bliss of feeling her drawing near, of seeing her coming toward him, for him.

She walked with lingering steps, without venturing to call out to him, uneasy at not finding him yet, for he remained concealed under a tree, and disturbed by the deep silence, by the clear solitude of the earth and sky. And, before her, her shadow advanced, black and gigantic, some distance away from her, appearing to carry toward him something of her, before herself.

Christiane stopped, and the shadow remained also motionless, lying down, fallen on the road.

Paul quickly took a few steps forward as far as the place where the form of the head rounded itself on her path. Then, as if he wanted to lose no portion of her, he sank on his knees, and prostrating himself, placed his mouth on the edge of the dark silhouette. Just as a thirsty dog drinks crawling on his belly in a spring he began to kiss the dust passionately, following the outlines of the beloved shadow. In this way, he moved toward her on his hands and knees, covering with caresses the lines of her body, as if to gather up with his lips the obscure image, dear because it was hers, that lay spread along the ground.

She, surprised, a little frightened even, waited till he was at her feet before she had the courage to speak to him; then, when he had lifted up his head, still remaining on his knees, but now straining her with both arms, she asked:

“What is the matter with you, to-night?”

He replied: “Liane, I am going to lose you.”

She thrust all her fingers into the thick hair of her lover, and, bending down, held back his forehead in order to kiss his eyes.

“Why lose me?” said she, smiling, full of confidence.

“Because we are going to separate to-morrow.”

“We separate? For a very short time, darling.”

“One never knows. We shall not again find days like those that we passed here.”

“We shall have others which will be as lovely.” She raised him up, drew him under the tree, where he had been awaiting her, made him sit down close to her, but lower down, so that she might have her hand constantly in his hair; and she talked in a serious strain, like a thoughtful, ardent, and resolute woman, who loves, who has already provided against everything, who instinctively knows what must be done, who has made up her mind for everything.

“Listen, my darling. I am very free at Paris. William never bothers himself about me. His business concerns are enough for him. Therefore, as you are not married, I will go to see you. I will go to see you every day, sometimes in the morning before breakfast, sometimes in the evening, on account of the servants, who might chatter if I went out at the same hour. We can meet as often as here, even more than here, for we shall not have to fear inquisitive persons."

But he repeated with his head on her knees, and her waist tightly clasped: "Liane, Liane, I am going to lose you!"

She became impatient at this unreasonable grief, at this childish grief in this vigorous frame, while she, so fragile compared with him, was yet so sure of herself, so sure that nothing could part them.

He murmured: "If you wished it, Liane, we might fly off together, we might go far away, into a beautiful country full of flowers where we could love one another. Say, do you wish that we should go off together this evening — are you willing?"

But she shrugged her shoulders, a little nervous, a little dissatisfied, at his not having listened to her, for this was not the time for dreams and soft puerilities. It was necessary now for them to show themselves energetic and prudent, and to find out a way in which they could continue to love one another without rousing suspicion.

She said in reply: "Listen, darling! we must thoroughly understand our position, and commit no mistakes or imprudences. First of all, are you sure about your servants? The thing to be most feared is lest some one should give information or write an anonymous letter to my husband. Of his own accord, he will guess nothing. I know William well." This name, twice repeated, all at once had an irritating effect on Paul's nerves. He said: "Oh! don't speak to me about him this evening."

She was astonished: "Why? It is quite necessary, however. Oh! I assure you that he has scarcely anything to do with me."

She had divined his thoughts. An obscure jealousy, as yet unconscious, was awakened within him. And suddenly, sinking on his knees and seizing her hands:

"Listen, Liane! What terms are you on with him?"

"Why — why — very good!"

"Yes, I know. But listen — understand me clearly. He is — he is your husband, in fact — and — and — you don't know how much I have been brooding over this for some time past — how much it torments, tortures me. You know what I mean. Tell me!"

She hesitated a few seconds, then in a flash she realized his entire meaning, and with an outburst of indignant candor:

"Oh! my darling! — can you — can you think such a thing? Oh! I am yours — do you understand? — yours alone — since I love you — oh! Paul!"

He let his head sink on the young woman's lap, and in a very soft voices, said:

"But! — after all, Liane, you know he is your husband. What will you do? Have you thought of that? Tell me! What will you do this evening or to-morrow? For you cannot — always, always say 'No' to him!"

She murmured, speaking also in a very low tone: "I have pretended to be *enceinte,* and — and that is enough for him. Oh! there is scarcely anything between us — Come! say no more about this, my darling. You don't know how this" wounds me. Trust me, since I love you!"

He did not move, breathing hard and kissing her dress, while she caressed his face with her amorous, dainty fingers.

But, all of a sudden, she said: "We must go back, for they will notice that we are both absent." They embraced each other, clinging for a long time to one another in a clasp that might well have crushed their bones.

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Then she rushed away so as to be back first and to enter the hotel quickly, while he watched her departing and vanishing from his sight, oppressed with sadness, as if all his happiness and all his hopes had taken flight along with her.

CHAPTER IX. THE SPA AGAIN

THE station of Enval could hardly be recognized on the first of July of the following year. On the summit of the knoll, standing between the two outlets of the valley, rose a building in the Moorish style of architecture, bearing on its front the word “Casino” in letters of gold.

A little wood had been utilized for the purpose of creating a small park on the slope facing the Limagne. Lower down, among the vines, six chalets here and there showed their *façades* of polished wood.

On the slope facing the south, an immense structure was visible at a distance to travelers, who perceived it on their way from Riom.

This was the Grand Hotel of Mont Oriol. And exactly below it, at the very foot of the hill, a square house, simpler and more spacious, surrounded by a garden, through which ran the rivulet which flowed down from the gorges, offered to invalids the miraculous cure promised by a pamphlet of Doctor Latonne.

On the *façade* could be read: “Thermal baths of Mont Oriol.” Then, on the right wing, in smaller letters: “ Hydropathy. — Stomach-washing. — Piscina with running water.” And, on the left wing: “Medical institute of automatic gymnastics.”

All this was white, with a fresh whiteness, shining and crude. Workmen were still occupied in completing it — house-painters, plumbers, and laborers employed in digging, although the establishment had already been a month open.

Its success, moreover, had since the start, surpassed the hopes of its founders. Three great physicians, three celebrities, Professor Mas-Roussel, Professor Cloche, and Professor Remusot, had taken the new station under their patronage, and consented to sojourn for sometime in the villas of the Bernese “Chalets Mobiles” Company, placed at their disposal by the Board intrusted with the management of the waters.

Under their influence a crowd of invalids flocked to the place. The Grand Hotel of Mont Oriol was full.

Although the baths had commenced working since the first days of June, the official opening of the station had been postponed till the first of July, in order to attract a great number of people. The *fête* was to commence at three o'clock with the ceremony of blessing the springs; and in the evening, a magnificent performance, followed by fireworks and a ball, would bring together all the bathers of the place, as well as those of the adjoining stations, and the principal inhabitants of Clermont-Ferrand and Riom.

The Casino on the summit of the hill was hidden from view by the flags. Nothing could be seen any longer but blue, red, white, yellow, a kind of dense and palpitating cloud; while from the tops of the gigantic masts planted along the walks in the park, huge oriflammes curled themselves in the blue sky with serpentine windings.

M. Petrus Martel, who had been appointed conductor of this new Casino, seemed to think that under this cloud of flags he had become the allpowerful captain of some fantastic ship; and he gave orders to the white-aproned waiters with the resounding and terrible voice which admirals need in order to exercise command under fire. His vibrating words, borne on by the wind, were heard even in the village.

Andermatt, out of breath already, appeared on the terrace. Petrus Martel advanced to meet him and bowed to him in a lordly fashion.

"Everything is going on well?" inquired the banker.

"Everything is going on well, my dear President."

"If anyone wants me, I am to be found in the medical inspector's study. We have a meeting this morning."

And he went down the hill again. In front of the door of the thermal establishment, the overseer and the cashier, carried off also from the other Company, which had become the rival Company, but doomed without a possible contest, rushed forward to meet their master. The ex-jailer made a military salute. The other bent his head like a poor person receiving alms. Andermatt asked:

"Is the inspector here?"

The overseer replied: "Yes, Monsieur le President, all the gentlemen have arrived."

The banker passed through the vestibule, in the midst of bathers and respectful waiters, turned to the right, opened a door, and found in a spacious apartment of serious aspect, full of books and busts of men of science, all the members of the Board at present in Enval assembled: his father-in-law the Marquis, and his brother-in-law Gontran, the Oriols, father and son, who had almost been transformed into gentlemen wearing frock-coats of such length that —— with their own tallness, they looked like advertisements for a mourning-warehouse — Paul Bretigny, and Doctor Latonne.

After some rapid hand-shaking, they took their seats, and Andermatt commenced to address them:

“It remains for us to regulate an important matter, the naming of the springs. On this subject I differ entirely in opinion from the inspector. The doctor proposes to give to our three principal springs the names of the three leaders of the medical profession who are here. Assuredly, there would in this be a flattery which might touch them and win them over to us still more. But be sure, Messieurs, that it would alienate from us forever those among their distinguished professional brethren who have not yet responded to our invitation, and whom we should convince, at the cost of our best efforts and of every sacrifice, of the sovereign efficacy of our waters. Yes, Messieurs, human nature is unchangeable; it is necessary to know it and to make use of it. Never would Professors Plantureau, De Larenard, and Pascalis, to refer only to these three specialists in affections of the stomach and intestines, send their patients to be cured by the water of the Mas-Roussel Spring, the Cloche Spring, or the Remusot Spring. For these patients and the entire public would in that case be somewhat disposed to believe that it was by Professors Remusot, Cloche, and Mas-Roussel that our water and all its therapeutic properties had been discovered. There is no doubt, Messieurs, that the name of Gubler, with which the original spring at Chatel-Guyon was baptized, for a long time prejudiced against these waters, to-day in a prosperous condition, a section, at least, of the great physicians, who might have patronized it from the start.

“I accordingly propose to give quite simply the name of my wife to the spring first discovered and the names of the Mademoiselles Oriol to the other two. We shall thus have the Christiane, the Louise, and the Charlotte Springs. This suits very well; it is very nice. What do you say to it?”

His suggestion was adopted even by Doctor Latonne, who added: “We might then beg of MM. Mas-Roussel, Cloche, and Remusot to be godfathers and to offer their arms to the godmothers.”

“Excellent, excellent,” said Andermatt. “I am hurrying to meet them. And they will consent. I may answer for them — they will consent. Let us, therefore, reassemble at three o’clock in the church where the procession is to be formed.”

And he went off at a running pace. The Marquis and Gontran followed him almost immediately. The Oriols, father and son, with tall hats on their heads, hastened to walk in their turn side by side, grave looking and all in black, on the white road; and Doctor Latonne said to Paul, who had only arrived the previous evening, to be present at the *fête:*

"I have detained you, Monsieur, in order to show you a thing from which I expect marvelous results. It is my medical institute of automatic gymnastics." He took him by the arm, and led him in. But they had scarcely reached the vestibule when a waiter at the baths stopped the doctor:

"M. Riquier is waiting for his wash."

Doctor Latonne had, last year, spoken disparagingly of the stomach washings, extolled and practiced by Doctor Bonnefille, in the establishment of which he was inspector. But time had modified his opinion, and the Baraduc probe had become the great instrument of torture of the new inspector, who plunged it with an infantile delight into every gullet.

He inquired of Paul Bretigny: "Have you ever seen this little operation?"

The other replied: "No, never."

"Come on then, my dear fellow — it is very curious."

They entered the shower-bath room, where M. Riquier, the brick-colored man, who was this year trying the newly discovered springs, as he had tried, every summer, every fresh station, was waiting in a wooden armchair.

Like some executed criminal of olden times, he was squeezed and choked up in a kind of straight waistcoat of oilcloth, which was intended to preserve his clothes from stains and splashes; and he had the wretched, restless, and pained look of patients on whom a surgeon is about to operate.

As soon as the doctor appeared, the waiter took up a long tube, which had three divisions near the middle, and which had the appearance of a thin serpent with a double tail. Then the man fixed one of the ends to the extremity of a little cock communicating with the spring. The second was let fall into a glass receiver, into which would be presently discharged the liquids rejected by the patient's stomach; and the medical inspector, seizing with a steady hand the third arm of this conduit-pipe, drew it, with an air of amiability, toward M. Riquier's jaw, passed it into his mouth, and guiding it dexterously, slipped it into his throat, driving it in more and more with the thumb and index-finger, in a gracious and benevolent fashion, repeating:

"Very good! very good! very good! That will do, that will do; that will do; that will do exactly!" M. Riquier, with staring eyes, purple cheeks, lips covered with foam, panted for breath, gasped as if ha were suffocating, and had agonizing fits of coughing; and, clutching the arms of the chair, he made terrible efforts to get rid of that beastly india-rubber which was penetrating into his body.

When he had swallowed about a foot and a halt of it, the doctor said: “We are at the bottom. Turn it on!”

The attendant thereupon turned on the cock, and soon the patient’s stomach became visibly swollen, having been filled up gradually with the warm water of the spring.

“Cough,” said the physician, “cough, in order to facilitate the descent.”

In place of coughing, the poor man had a rattling in the throat, and shaken with convulsions, he looked as if his eyes were going to jump out of his head.

Then suddenly a light gurgling could be heard on the ground close to the armchair. The spout of the tube with the two passages had at last begun to work; and the stomach now emptied itself into this glass receiver where the doctor searched eagerly for the indications of catarrh and the recognizable traces of imperfect digestion.

“You are not to eat any more green peas,” said he, “or salad. Oh! no salad! You cannot digest it at all. No more strawberries either! I have already repeated to you ten times, no strawberries!”

M. Riquier seemed raging with anger. He excited himself now without being able to utter a word on account of this tube, which stopped up his throat. But when, the washing having been finished, the doctor had delicately drawn out the probe from his interior, he exclaimed:

“Is it my fault if I am eating every day filth that ruins my health? Isn’t it you that should watch the meals supplied by your hotel-keeper? I have come to your new cook-shop because they used to poison me at the old one with abominable food, and I am worse than ever in your big barrack of a Mont Oriol inn, upon my honor!”

The doctor had to appease him, and promised over and over again to have the invalids’ food at the *table d’hote* submitted beforehand to his inspection. Then, he took Paul Bretigny’s arm again, and said as he led him away:

“Here are the extremely rational principles on which I have established my special treatment by the self-moving gymnastics, which we are going to inspect. You know my system of organometric medicine, don’t you? I maintain that a great portion of our maladies entirely proceed from the excessive development of some one organ which encroaches on a neighboring organ, impedes its functions, and, in a little while, destroys the general harmony of the body, whence arise the most serious disturbances.

"Now, the exercise is, along with the shower-bath and the thermal treatment, one of the most powerful means of restoring the equilibrium and bringing back the encroaching parts to their normal proportions.

"But how are we to determine the man to make the exercise? There is not merely the act of walking, of mounting on horseback, of swimming or rowing — a considerable physical effort. There is also and above all a moral effort. It is the mind which determines, draws along, and sustains the body. The men of energy are men of movement. Now energy is in the soul and not in the muscles. The body obeys the vigorous will.

"It is not necessary to think, my dear friend, of giving courage to the cowardly or resolution to the weak. But we can do something else, we can do more — we can suppress mental energy, suppress moral effort and leave only physical subsisting. This moral effort, I replace with advantage by a foreign and purely mechanical force. Do you understand? No, not very well. Let us go in."

He opened a door leading into a large apartment, in which were ranged fantastic looking instruments, big armchairs with wooden legs, horses made of rough deal, articulated boards, and movable bars stretched in front of chairs fixed in the ground. And all these objects were connected with complicated machinery, which was set in motion by turning handles.

The doctor went on: "Look here. We have four principal kinds of exercise. These are walking, equitation, swimming, and rowing. Each of these exercises develops different members, acts in a special fashion. Now, we have them here — the entire four —— produced by artificial means. All you have to do is to let yourself act, while thinking of nothing, and you can run, mount on horseback, swim, or row for an hour, without the mind taking any part — the slightest part in the world — in this entirely muscular work."

At that moment, M. Aubry-Pasteur entered, followed by a man whose tucked-up sleeves displayed the vigorous biceps on each arm. The engineer was as fat as ever. He was walking with his legs spread Wide apart and his arms held out from his body, While he panted for breath.

The doctor said: "You will understand by looking on at it yourself."

And addressing his patient: “Well, my dear Monsieur, what are we going to do to-day? Walking or equitation?”

M. Aubry-Pasteur, who pressed Paul’s hand, replied: “I would like a little walking seated; that fatigues me less.”

M. Latonne continued: “We have, in fact, walking seated and walking erect. Walking erect, while more efficacious, is rather painful. I procure it by means of pedals on which you mount and which set your legs in motion while you maintain your equilibrium by clinging to rings fastened to the wall. But here is an example of walking while seated.”

The engineer had fallen back into a rocking armchair, and he placed his legs in the wooden legs with movable joints attached to this seat. His thighs, calves, and ankles were strapped down in such a way that he was unable to make any voluntary movement; then, the man with the tucked-up sleeves, seizing the handle, turned it round with all his strength. The armchair, at first, swayed to and fro like a hammock; then, suddenly, the patient’s legs went out, stretching forward and bending back, advancing and returning, with extreme speed.

“He is running,” said the doctor, who then gave the order: “Quietly! Go at a walking pace.”

The man, turning the handle more slowly, caused the fat engineer to do the sitting walk in a more moderate fashion, which ludicrously distorted all the movements of his body.

Two other patients next made their appearance, both of them enormous, and followed also by two attendants with naked arms.

They were hoisted upon wooden horses, which, set in motion, began immediately to jump along the room, shaking their riders in an abominable manner.

“Gallop!” cried the doctor. And the artificial animals, rushing like waves and capsizing like ships, fatigued the two patients so much that they began to scream out together in a panting and pitiful tone:

“Enough! enough! I can’t stand it any longer! Enough!”

The physician said in a tone of command: “Stop!” He then added: “Take breath for a little while. You will go on again in five minutes.”

Paul Bretigny, who was choking with suppressed laughter, drew attention to the fact that the riders were not warm, while the handle-turners were perspiring.

“If you inverted the rôles,” said he, “would it not be better?”

The doctor gravely replied: “Oh! not at all, my dear friend. We must not confound exercise and fatigue. The movement of the man who is turning the wheel is injurious, while the movement of the walker or the rider is beneficial.”

But Paul noticed a lady’s saddle.

“Yes,” said the physician; “the evening is reserved for the other sex. The men are no longer admitted after twelve o’clock. Come, then, and look at the dry swimming.”

A system of movable little boards screwed together at their ends and at their centers, stretched out in lozenge-shape or closing into squares, like that children’s game which carries along soldiers who are spurred on, permitted three swimmers to be garroted and mangled at the same time.

The doctor said: “I need not extol to you the benefits of dry swimming, which does not moisten the body except by perspiration, and consequently does not expose our imaginary bather to any danger of rheumatism.”

But a waiter, with a card in his hand, came to look for the doctor.

“The Duc de Ramas, my dear friend. I must leave you. Excuse me.”

Paul, left there alone, turned round. The two cavaliers were trotting afresh. M. Aubry-Pasteur was walking still; and the three natives of Auvergne, with their arms all but broken and their backs cracking with thus shaking the patients on whom they were operating, were quite out of breath. They looked as if they were grinding coffee.

When he had reached the open air, Bretigny saw Doctor Honorât watching, along with his wife, the preparations for the *fête.* They began to chat, gazing at the flags which crowned the hill with a kind of halo.

“Is it at the church the procession is to be formed?” the physician asked his wife.

“It is at the church.”

“At three o’clock?”

“At three o’clock.”

“The professors will be there?”

“Yes, they will accompany the lady-sponsors.” The next persons to stop were the ladies Paille. Then, came the Monecus, father and daughter. But as he was going to breakfast alone with his friend Gontran at the Casino Café, he slowly made his way up to it. Paul, who had arrived the night before, had not had an interview with his comrade for the past month; and he was longing to tell him many boulevard stories — stories about gay women and houses of pleasure.

They remained chattering away till half past two when Petrus Martel came to inform them that people were on their way to the church.

“Let us go and look for Christiane,” said Gontran.

“Let us go,” returned Paul.

They found her standing on the steps of the new hotel. She had the hollow cheeks and the swarthy complexion of pregnant women; and her figure indicated a near accouchement.

“I was waiting for you,” she said. “William is gone on before us. He has so many things to do to-day.”

She cast toward Paul Bretigny a glance full of tenderness, and took his arm. They went quietly on their way, avoiding the stones.

She kept repeating: “How heavy I am! How heavy I am! I am no longer able to walk. I am so much afraid of falling!”

He did not reply, and carefully held her up, without seeking to meet her eyes which she turned toward him incessantly.

In front of the church, a dense crowd was awaiting them.

Andermatt cried: “At last! at last! Come, make haste. See, this is the order: two choir-boys, two chanters in surplices, the cross, the holy water, the priest, then Christiane with Professor Cloche, Mademoiselle Louise with Professor Remusot, and Mademoiselle Charlotte with Professor Mas-Roussel. Next come the members of the Board, the medical body, then the public. This is understood. Forward!”

The ecclesiastical staff thereupon left the church, taking their places at the head of the procession. Then a tall gentleman with white hair brushed back over his ears, the typical “scientist,” in accordance with the academic form, approached Madame Andermatt, and saluted her with a low bow.

When he had straightened himself up again, with his head uncovered, in order to display his beautiful, scientific head, and his hat resting on his thigh with an imposing air as if he had learned to walk at the Comédie Française, and to show the people his rosette of officer of the Legion of Honor, too big for a modest man.

He began to talk: “Your husband, Madame, has been speaking to me about you just now, and about your condition which gives rise to some affectionate disquietude. He has told me about your doubts and your hesitations as to the probable moment of your delivery.”

She reddened to the temples, and she murmured: “Yes, I believed that I would be a mother a very long time before the event. Now I can’t tell either — I can’t tell either— “

She faltered in a state of utter confusion.

A voice from behind them said: “This station has a very great future before it. I have already obtained surprising effects.”

It was Professor Remusot addressing his companion, Louise Oriol. This gentleman was small, with yellow, unkempt hair, and a frock-coat badly cut, the dirty look of a slovenly savant.

Professor Mas-Roussel, who gave his arm to Charlotte Oriol, was a handsome physician, without beard or mustache, smiling, well-groomed, hardly turning gray as yet, a little fleshy, and, with his smooth, clean-shaven face, resembling neither a priest nor an actor, as was the case with Doctor Latonne.

Next came the members of the Board, with Andermatt at their head, and the tall hats of old Oriol and his son towering above them.

Behind them came another row of tall hats, the medical body of Enval, among whom Doctor Bonnefille was not included, his place, indeed, being taken by two new physicians, Doctor Black, a very short old man almost a dwarf, whose excessive piety had surprised the whole district since the day of his arrival; then a very good-looking young fellow, very much given to flirtation, and wearing a small hat, Doctor Mazelli, an Italian attached to the person of the Duc de Ramas — others said, to the person of the Duchesse.

And behind them could be seen the public, a flood of people — bathers, peasants, and inhabitants of the adjoining towns.

The ceremony of blessing the springs was very short. The Abbé Litre sprinkled them one after the other with holy water, which made Doctor Honorât say that he was going to give them new properties with chloride of sodium. Then all the persons specially invited entered the large reading-room, where a collation had been served.

Paul said to Gontran: “How pretty the little Oriol girls have become!”

“They are charming, my dear fellow.”

“You have not seen M. le President?” suddenly inquired the ex-jailer overseer.

“Yes, he is over there, in the corner.”

“Père Clovis is gathering a big crowd in front of the door.”

Already, while moving in the direction of the springs for the purpose of having them blessed, the entire procession had filed off in front of the old invalid, cured the year before, and now again more paralyzed than ever. He would stop the visitors on the road and the last-comers as a matter of choice, in order to tell them his story:

"These waters here, you see, are no good — they cure, 'tis true, but you relapse again afterward, and after this relapse you're half a corpse. As for me, my legs were better before, and here I am now with my arms gone in consequence of the cure. And my legs, they're iron, but iron that you have to cut before it bends."

Andermatt, filled with vexation, had tried to prosecute him in a court of justice and to get him sent to jail for having depreciated the waters of Mont Oriol and having attempted extortion. But he had not succeeded in obtaining a conviction or in shutting the old fellow's mouth.

The moment he was informed that the old vagabond was babbling before the door of the establishment, he rushed out to make Clovis keep silent.

At the side of the highroad, in the center of an excited crowd, he heard angry voices. People pressed forward to listen and to see. Some ladies asked: "What is this?" Some men replied: "'Tis an invalid, whom the waters here have finished." Others believed that an infant had just been squashed. It was also said that a poor woman had got an attack of epilepsy.

Andermatt broke through the crowd, as he knew how to do, by violently pushing his little round stomach between the stomachs of other people. "It proves," Gontran remarked, "the superiority of balls to points."

Père Clovis, sitting on the ditch, whined about his pains, recounted his sufferings in a sniveling tone, while standing in front of him, and separating him from the public, the Oriols, father and son, exasperated, were hurling insults and threats at him as loudly as ever they could.

"That's not true," cried Colosse. "This fellow is a liar, a sham, a poacher, who runs all night through the wood."

But the old fellow, without getting excited, kept reiterating in a high, piercing voice which was heard above the vociferations of the two Oriols: "They've killed me, my good monchieus, they've killed me with their water. They bathed me in it by force last year. And here I am at this moment — here I am!" Andermatt imposed silence on all, and stooping toward the impotent man, said to him, looking into the depths of his eyes: "If you are worse, it is your own fault, mind. If you listen to me, I undertake to cure you, I do, with fifteen or twenty baths at most. Come and look me up at the establishment in an hour, when the people have all gone away, my good father. In the meantime, hold your tongue."

The old fellow had understood. He became silent, then, after a pause, he answered: "I'm always willing to give it a fair trial. You'll see."

Andermatt caught the two Oriols by the arms and quickly dragged them away; while Père Clovis remained stretched on the grass between his crutches, at the side of the road, blinking his eyes under the rays of the sun.

The puzzled crowd kept pressing round him. Some gentlemen questioned him, but he did not reply, as though he had not heard or understood; and as this curiosity, futile just now, ended by fatiguing him, he began to sing, bareheaded, in a voice as false as it was shrill, an interminable ditty in an unintelligible dialect.

The crowd ebbed away gradually. Only a few children remained standing a long time in front of him, with their fingers in their noses, contemplating him.

Christiane, exceedingly tired, had gone in to take a rest. Paul and Gontran walked about through the new park in the midst of the visitors. Suddenly they saw the company of players, who had also deserted the old Casino, to attach themselves to the growing fortunes of the new.

Mademoiselle Odelin, who had become quite fashionable, was leaning as she walked on the arm of her mother, who had assumed an air of importance. M. Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville, appeared very attentive to these ladies, who followed M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux, arguing with the musicians just as of old, the *maestro* Saint Landri, the pianist Javel, the flautist Noirot, and the double-bass Nicordi.

On perceiving Paul and Gontran, Saint Landri rushed toward them. He had, during the winter, got a very small musical composition performed in a very small out-of-the-way theater; but the newspapers had spoken of him with a certain favor, and he now treated Massenet, Beyer, and Gounod contemptuously.

He stretched forth both hands with an outburst of friendly regard, and immediately proceeded to repeat what he had been saying to those gentlemen of the orchestra over whom he was the conductor.

"Yes, my dear friend, it is finished, finished, finished, the hackneyed style of the old school. The melodists have had their day. This is what people cannot understand. Music is a new art, melody is its first lisping. The ignorant ear loves the burden of a song. It takes a child's pleasure, a savage's pleasure in it. I may add that the ears of the people or of the ingenuous public, the simple ears, will always love little songs, airs, in a word. It is an amusement similar to that in which the frequenters of *café* concerts indulge. I am going to make use of a comparison in order to make myself understood. The eye of the rustic loves crude colors and glaring pictures; the eye of the intelligent representative of the middle class who is not artistic loves shades benevolently pretentious and affecting subjects; but the artistic eye, the refined eye, loves, understands, and distinguishes the imperceptible modulations of a single tone, the mysterious harmonies of light touches invisible to most people.

"It is the same with literature. Doorkeepers like romances of adventure, the middle class like novels which appeal to the feelings; while the real lovers of literature care only for the artistic books which are incomprehensible to the others. When an ordinary citizen talks music to me I feel a longing to kill him. And when it is at the opera, I. ask him: 'Are you capable of telling me whether the third violin has made a false note in the overture of the third act? No. Then be silent. You have no ear. The man who does not understand, at the same time, the whole and all the instruments separately in an orchestra has no ear, and is no musician. There you are! Good night!'"

He turned round on his heel, and resumed: "For an artist all music is in a chord. Ah! my friend, certain chords madden me, cause a flood of inexpressible happiness to penetrate all my flesh. I have to-day an ear so well exercised, so finished, so matured, that I end by liking even certain false chords, just like a virtuoso whose fully-developed taste amounts to a form of depravity. I am beginning to be a vitiated person who seeks for extreme sensations of hearing. Yes, my friends, certain false notes. What delights! What perverse and profound delights! How this moves, how it shakes the nerves! how it scratches the ear — how it scratches! how it scratches!"

He rubbed his hands together rapturously, and he hummed: "You shall hear my opera — my opera — my opera. You shall hear my opera."

Gontran said: "You are composing an opera?"

"Yes, I have finished it." But the commanding voice of Petrus Martel resounded:

"You understand perfectly! A yellow rocket, and off you go!"

He was giving orders for the fireworks. They joined him, and he explained his arrangements by showing with his outstretched arm, as if he were threatening a hostile fleet, stakes of white wood on the mountain above the gorge, on the opposite side of the valley.

"It is over there that they are to be shot out. I told my pyrotechnist to be at his post at half past eight. The very moment the spectacle is over, I will give the signal from here by a yellow rocket, and then he will illuminate the opening piece."

The Marquis made his appearance: "I am going to drink a glass of water," he said.

Paul and Gontran accompanied him, and again descended the hill. On reaching the establishment, they saw Père Clovis, who had got there, sustained by the two Oriols, followed by Andermatt and by the doctor, and making, every time he trailed his legs on the ground, contortions suggestive of extreme pain.

"Let us go in," said Gontran, "this will be funny."

The paralytic was placed sitting in an armchair. Then Andermatt said to him: "Here is what I propose, old cheat that you are. You are going to be cured immediately by taking two baths a day. And the moment you walk you'll have two hundred francs."

The paralytic began to groan: "My legs, they are iron, my good Monchieu!"

Andermatt made him hold his tongue, and went on: "Now, listen! You shall again have two hundred francs every year up to the time of your death —— you understand — up to the time of your death, if you continue to experience the salutary effect of our waters."

The old fellow was in a state of perplexity. The continuous cure was opposed to his plan of action. He asked in a hesitating tone: "But when — when it is closed up — this box of yours — if this should take hold of me again — I can do nothing then — I —— seeing that it will be shut up — your water— "

Doctor Latonne interrupted him, and, turning toward Andermatt, said: "Excellent! excellent! We'll cure him every year. This will be even better, and will show the necessity of annual treatment, the indispensability of returning hither. Excellent — this is perfectly clear!"

But the old man repeated afresh: "It will not suit this time, my good Monchieu. My legs, they're iron, iron in bars."

A new idea sprang up in the doctor’s mind: “If I got him to try a course of seated walking,” he said, “I might hasten the effect of the waters considerably. It is an experiment worth trying.”

“Excellent idea,” returned Andermatt, adding: “Now, Père Clovis, take yourself off, and don’t forget our agreement.”

The old fellow went away still groaning; and, when evening came on, all the directors of Mont Oriol came back to dine, for the theatrical representation was announced to take place at half past seven.

The great hall of the new Casino was the place where they were to dine. It was capable of holding a thousand persons.

At seven o’clock the visitors who had not numbered seats presented themselves. At half past seven the hall was filled, and the curtain was raised for the performance of a vaudeville in two acts, which preceded Saint Landri’s operetta, interpreted by vocalists from Vichy, who had given their services for the occasion.

Christiane in the front row, between her brother and her husband, suffered a great deal from the heat. Every moment she repeated: “I feel quite exhausted! I feel quite exhausted!”

After the vaudeville, as the operetta was opening, she was becoming ill, and turning round to her husband, said: “My dear Will, I shall have to leave. I am suffocating!”

The banker was annoyed. He was desirous above everything in the world that this *fête* should be a success, from start to finish, without a single hitch. He replied:

“Make every effort to hold out. I beg of you to do so! Your departure would upset everything. You would have to pass through the entire hall!”

But Gontran, who was sitting along with Paul behind her, had overheard. He leaned toward his sister: “You are too warm?” said he.

“Yes, I am suffocating.”

“Good. Stay! You are going to have a laugh.” There was a window near. He slipped toward it, got upon a chair, and jumped out without attracting hardly any notice. Then he entered the *café*, which was perfectly empty, stretched his hand out under the bar where he had seen Petrus Martel conceal the signal-rocket, and, having filched it, he ran off to hide himself under a group of trees, and then set it on fire. The swift yellow sheaf flew up toward the clouds, describing a curve, and casting across the sky a long shower of flame-drops. Almost instantaneously a terrible detonation burst forth over the neighboring mountain, and a cluster of stars sent flying sparks through the darkness of the night.

Somebody exclaimed in the hall where the spectators were gathered, and where at the moment Saint Landri's chords were quivering: "They're letting off the fireworks!"

The spectators who were nearest to the door abruptly rose to their feet to make sure about it, and went out with light steps. All the rest turned their eyes toward the windows, but saw nothing, for they were looking at the Limagne. People kept asking: "Is it true? Is it true?"

The impatient assembly got excited, hungering above everything for simple amusements. A voice from outside announced: "It is true! The firework's are let off!"

Then, in a second everyone in the hall was standing up. They rushed toward the door; they jostled against each other; they yelled at those who obstructed their egress: "Hurry on! hurry on!"

The entire audience, in a short time, had emerged into the park. Saint Landri alone, in a state of exasperation continued beating time in front of his distracted orchestra. Meanwhile, fiery suns succeeded Roman candles in the midst of detonations.

Suddenly, a formidable voice sent forth thrice this wild exclamation: "Stop, in God's name! Stop, in God's name! Stop, in God's name!"

And, as an immense Bengal fire next illuminated the mountain and lighted up in red to the right and blue to the left, the enormous rocks and trees, Petrus Martel could be seen standing on one of the vases of imitation marble that decorated the terrace of the Casino, bareheaded, with his arms in the air, gesticulating and howling.

Then, the great illumination being extinguished, nothing could be seen any longer save the real stars. But immediately another rocket shot up, and Petrus Martel, jumping on the ground, exclaimed: "What a disaster! what a disaster! My God, what a disaster!"

And he passed through the crowd with tragic gestures, with blows of his fist in the empty air, furious stampings of his feet, always repeating: "What a disaster! My God, what a disaster!"

Christiane had taken Paul's arm to get a seat in the open air, and kept looking with delight at the rockets which ascended into the sky.

Her brother came up to her suddenly, and said: "Hey, is it a success? Do you think it is funny?" She murmured: "What, it is you?"

"Why, yes, it is I. Is it good, hey?"

She began to laugh, finding it really amusing. But Andermatt arrived in a state of great mental distress. He did not understand how such a blow could have come. The rocket had been stolen from the bar to give the signal agreed upon. Such an infamy could only have been perpetrated by some emissary of the old Company, some agent of Doctor Bonnefille!

And he repeated: "Tis maddening, positively maddening. Here are fireworks worth two thousand three hundred francs destroyed, entirely destroyed!" Gontran replied: "No, my dear fellow, on a proper calculation, the loss does not mount up to more than a quarter; let us put it at a third, if you like; say seven hundred and sixty-six francs. Your guests will, therefore, have enjoyed fifteen hundred and thirty-four francs' worth of rockets. This truly is not bad."

The banker's anger turned against his brother-in-law. He caught him roughly by the arm: "Gontran, I want to talk seriously to you. Since I have a hold of you, let us take a turn in the walks. Besides, I have five minutes to spare."

Then, turning toward Christiane: "I place you in charge of our friend Bretigny, my dear; but don't remain a long time out — take care of yourself. You might catch cold, you know. Be careful! careful!"

She murmured: "Never fear, dear."

So Andermatt carried off Gontran. When they were alone, at a little distance from the crowd, the banker stopped: "My dear fellow, 'tis about your financial position that I want to talk."

"About my financial position?"

"Yes, you know it well, your financial position."

"No. But you ought to know it for me, since you lent money to me."

"Well, yes, I do know it, and 'tis for that reason I want to talk to you."

"It seems to me, to say the least of it, that the moment is ill chosen — in the midst of a display of fireworks!"

"The moment, on the contrary, is very well chosen. I am not talking to you in the midst of a display of fireworks, but before a ball."

"Before a ball? I don't understand."

"Well, you are going to understand. Here is your position: you have nothing except debts; and you'll never have anything but debts."

Gontran gravely replied: "You tell me that a little bluntly."

"Yes, because it is necessary. Listen to me! You have eaten up the share which came to you as a fortune from your mother. Let us say no more about that."

"Let us say no more about it."

"As for your father, he possesses a yearly income of thirty thousand francs, say, a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs. Your share, later on, will, therefore, be four hundred thousand francs. Now you owe me — me, personally — one hundred and ninety thousand francs. You owe money besides to usurers."

Gontran muttered in a haughty tone: "Say, to Jews."

"Be it so, to Jews, although among the number there is a churchwarden from Saint Sulpice who made use of a priest as an intermediary between himself and you — but I will not cavil about such trifles. You owe, then, to various usurers, Israelites or Catholics, nearly as much. Let us put it at a hundred and fifty thousand at the lowest estimate. This makes a total of three hundred and forty thousand francs, on which you are paying interest, always borrowing, except with regard to mine, which you do not pay."

"That's right," said Gontran.

"So then, you have nothing more left."

"Nothing, indeed — except my brother-in-law."

"Except your brother-in-law, who has had enough of lending money to you."

"What then?"

"What then, my dear fellow? The poorest peasant living in one of these huts is richer than you."

"Exactly — and next?"

"Next — next — ? If your father were to die tomorrow, you would no longer have any resource to get bread — to get bread, mind you — except to take a post as a clerk in my house. And this again would only be a means of disguising the pension which I should be allowing you."

Gontran, in a tone of irritation, said: "My dear William, these things bore me. I know them, besides, just as well as you do, and, I repeat, the moment is ill chosen to remind me about them — with — with so little diplomacy."

"Allow me, let me finish. You can only extricate yourself from it by a marriage. Now, you are a wretched match, in spite of your name, which sounds well without being illustrious. In short, it is not one of those which an heiress, even a Jewish one, buys with a fortune. Therefore, we must find you a wife acceptable and rich — which is not very easy— “Gontran interrupted him: “Give her name at once —— that is the best way.”

“Be it so — one of Père Oriol’s daughters, whichever you prefer. And this is why I wanted to talk to you before the ball.”

“And now explain yourself at greate” length,” returned Gontran, coldly.

“It is very simple. You see the success I have obtained at the start with this station. Now if I had in my hands, or rather if we had in our hands all the land which this cunning peasant has kept for himself, I could turn it into gold. To speak only of the vineyards which lie between the establishment and the hotel and between the hotel and the Casino, I would pay a million francs for them to-morrow — I, Andermatt. Now, these vineyards and others all round the knoll will be the dowries of these girls. The father told me so again a short time since, not without an object, perhaps. Well, if you were willing, we could do a big stroke of business there, the two of us.”

Gontran muttered, with a thoughtful air: “’Tis possible. I’ll think over it.”

“Do think over it, my dear boy, and don’t forget that I never speak of things that are not very sure, or without having given matters every consideration, and realized all the possible consequences and all the decided advantages.”

But Gontran, lifting up his arm, as if he had suddenly forgotten all that his brother-in-law had been saying to him: “Look! How beautiful that is!”

The bunch of rockets flamed up, in imitation of a burning palace on which a blazing flag had inscribed on it “Mont Oriol” in letters of fire perfectly red and, right opposite to it, above the plain, the moon, red also, seemed to have come out to contemplate this spectacle. Then, when the palace, after it had been burning for some minutes, exploded like a ship which is blown up, flinging toward the wide heavens fantastic stars which burst in their turn, the moon remained all alone, calm and round, on the horizon.

The public applauded wildly, exclaiming: “Hurrah! Bravo! bravo!”

Andermatt, all of a sudden, said: “Let us go and open the ball, my dear boy. Are you willing to dance the first quadrille face to face with me?”

“Why, certainly, my dear brother-in-law.”

“Who have you thought of asking to dance with you? As for me, I have bespoken the Duchesse de Ramas.”

Gontran answered in a tone of indifference: “I will ask Charlotte Oriol.”

They reascended. As they passed in front of the spot where Christiane was resting with Paul Bretigny, they did not notice the pair. William murmured: “She has followed my advice. She went home to go to bed. She was quite tired out to-day.” And he advanced toward the ballroom which the attendants had been getting ready during the fireworks.

But Christiane had not returned to her room, as her husband supposed. As soon as she realized that she was alone with Paul she said to him in a very low tone, while she pressed his hand:

“So then you came. I was waiting for you for the past month. Every morning I kept asking myself, ‘Shall I see him to-day?’ and every night I kept saying to myself, ‘It will be to-morrow then.’ Why have you delayed so long, my love?”

He replied with some embarrassment: “I had matters to engage my attention — business.”

She leaned toward him, murmuring: “It was not right to leave me here alone with them, especially in my state.”

He moved his chair a little away from her.

“Be careful! We might be seen. These rockets light up the whole country around.”

She scarcely bestowed a thought on it; she said: “I love you so much!” Then, with sudden starts of joy: “Ah! how happy I feel, how happy I feel at finding that we are once more together, here! Are you thinking about it? What joy, Paul! How we are going to love one another again!”

She sighed, and her voice was so weak that it seemed a mere breath.

“I feel a foolish longing to embrace you, but it is foolish — there! — foolish. It is such a long time since I saw you!”

Then, suddenly, with the fierce energy of an impassioned woman, to whom everything should give way: “Listen! I want — you understand — I want to go with you immediately to the place where we said adieu to one another last year! You remember well, on the road from La Roche Pradière?”

He replied, stupefied: “But this is senseless! You cannot walk farther. You have been standing all day. This is senseless; I will not allow it.”

She had risen to her feet, and she said: “I am determined on it! If you do not accompany me, I’ll go alone!”

And pointing out to him the moon which had risen: “See here! It was an evening just like this! Do you remember how you kissed my shadow?”

He held her back: “Christiane — listen — this is ridiculous — Christiane!”

She did not reply, and walked toward the descent leading to the vineyards. He knew that calm will which nothing could divert from its purpose, the graceful obstinacy of these blue eyes, of that little forehead of a fair woman that could not be stopped; and he took her arm to sustain her on her way. “Supposing we are seen, Christiane?”

“You did not say that to me last year. And then, everyone is at the *fete.* We’ll be back before our absence can be noticed.”

It was soon necessary to ascend by the stony path. She panted, leaning with her whole weight on him, and at every step she said:

“It is good, it is good, to suffer thus!”

He stopped, wishing to bring her back. But she would not listen to him.

“No, no. I am happy. You don’t understand this, you. Listen! I feel it leaping in me — our child —— your child — what happiness. Give me your hand.”

She did not realize that he — this man — was one of the race of lovers who are not of the race of fathers. Since he discovered that she was pregnant, he kept away from her, and was disgusted with her, in spite of himself. He had often in bygone days said that a woman who has performed the function of reproduction is no longer worthy of love. What raised him to a high pitch of tenderness was that soaring of two hearts toward an inaccessible ideal, that entwining of two souls which are immaterial — all those artificial and unreal elements which poets have associated with this passion. In the physical woman he adored the Venus whose sacred side must always preserve the pure form of sterility. The idea of a little creature which owed its birth to him, a human larva stirring in that body defiled by it and already grown ugly, inspired him with an almost unconquerable repugnance. Maternity had made this woman a brute. She was no longer the exceptional being adored and dreamed about, but the animal that reproduces its species. And even a material disgust was mingled in him with these loathings of his mind.

How could she have felt or divined this — she whom each movement of the child she yearned for attached the more closely to her lover? This man whom she adored, whom she had every day loved a little more since the moment of their first kiss, had not only penetrated to the bottom of her heart, but had given her the proof that he had also entered into the very depths of her flesh, that he had sown his own life there, that he was going to come forth from her, again becoming quite small. Yes, she carried him there under her crossed hands, himself, her good, her dear, her tenderly beloved one, springing up again in her womb by the mystery of nature. And she loved him doubly, now that she had him in two forms — the big, and the little one as yet unknown, the one whom she saw, touched, embraced, and could hear speaking to her, and the one whom she could up to this only feel stirring under her skin. They had by this time reached the road.

“You were waiting for me over there that evening,” said she. And she held her lips out to him.

He kissed them, without replying, with a cold kiss.

She murmured for the second time: “Do you remember how you embraced me on the ground. We were like this — look!”

And in the hope that he would begin it all over again she commenced running to get some distance away from him. Then she stopped, out of breath, and waited, standing in the middle of the road. But the moon, which lengthened out her profile on the ground, traced there the protuberance of her swollen figure. And Paul, beholding at his feet the shadow of her pregnancy, remained unmoved at sight of it, wounded in his pcetic sense with shame, exasperated that she was not able to share his feelings or divine his thoughts, that she had not sufficient coquetry, tact, and feminine delicacy to understand all the shades which give such a different complexion to circumstances; and he said to her with impatience in his voice:

“Look here, Christiane! This child’s play is ridiculous.”

She came back to him moved, saddened, with outstretched arms, and, flinging herself on his breast:

“Ah! you love me less. I feel it! I am sure of it!’’

He took pity on her, and, encircling her head with his arms, he imprinted two long sweet kisses on her eyes.

Then in silence they retraced their steps. He could find nothing to say to her; and, as she leaned on him, exhausted by fatigue, he quickened his pace so that he might no longer feel against his side the touch of this enlarged figure. When they were near the hotel, they separated, and she went up to her own apartment.

The orchestra at the Casino was playing dance-music; and Paul went to look at the ball. It was a waltz; and they were all waltzing — Doctor

Latonne with the younger Madame Paille, Andermatt with Louise Oriol, handsome Doctor Mazelli with the Duchesse de Ramas, and Gontran with Charlotte Oriol. He was whispering in her ear in that tender fashion which denotes a courtship begun; and she was smiling behind her fan, blushing, and apparently delighted.

Paul heard a voice saying behind him: “Look here! look here at M. de Ravenel whispering gallantries to my fair patient.”

He added, after a pause: “And there is a pearl, good, gay, simple, devoted, upright, you know, an excellent creature. She is worth ten of the elder sister. I have known them since their childhood — these little girls. And yet the father prefers the elder one, because she is more — more like him — more of a peasant — less upright — more thrifty — more cunning —— and more — more jealous. Ah! she is a good girl, all the same. I would not like to say anything bad of her; but, in spite of myself, I compare them, you understand — and, after having compared them, I judge them — there you are!”

The waltz was coming to an end; Gontran went to join his friend, and, perceiving the doctor:

“Ah! tell me now — there appears to me to be a remarkable increase in the medical body at Enval. We have a Doctor Mazelli who waltzes to perfection and an old little Doctor Black who seems on very good terms with Heaven.”

But Doctor Honorat was discreet. He did not like to sit in judgment on his professional brethren.

CHAPTER X. GONTRAN’S CHOICE

THE burning question now was that of the physicians at Enval. They had suddenly made themselves the masters of the district, and absorbed all the attention and all the enthusiasm of the inhabitants. Formerly the springs flowed under the authority of Doctor Bonnefille alone, in the midst of the harmless animosities of restless Doctor Latonne and placid Doctor Honorat.

Now, it was a very different thing. Since the success planned during the winter by Andermatt had quite taken definite shape, thanks to the powerful co-operation of Professors Cloche, Mas-Roussel, and Remusot, who had each brought there a contingent of two or three hundred patients at least, Doctor Latonne, inspector of the new establishment, had become a big personage, specially patronized by Professor Mas-Roussel, whose pupil he had been, and whose deportment and gestures he imitated.

Docter Bonnefille was scarcely ever talked about any longer. Furious, exasperated, railing against Mont Oriol, the old physician remained the whole day in the old establishment with a few old patients who had kept faithful to him.

In the minds of some invalids, indeed, he was the only person that understood the true properties of the waters; he possessed, so to speak, their secret, since he had officially administered them from the time the station was first established.

Doctor Honorat barely managed to retain his practice among the natives of Auvergne. With the moderate income he derived from this source he contented himself, keeping on good terms with everybody, and consoled himself by much preferring cards and wine to medicine. He did not, however, go quite so far as to love his professional brethren.

Doctor Latonne would, therefore, have continued to be the great soothsayer of Mont Oriol, if one morning there had not appeared a very small man, nearly a dwarf, whose big head sunk between his shoulders, big round eyes, and big hands combined to produce a very odd-looking individual. This new physician, M. Black, introduced into the district by Professor Remusot immediately excited attention by his excessive devotion. Nearly every morning, between two visits, he went into a church for a few minutes, and he received communion nearly every Sunday. The curé soon got him some patients, old maids, poor people whom he attended for nothing, pious ladies who asked the advice of their spiritual director before calling on a man of science, whose sentiments, reserve, and professional modesty, they wished to know before everything else.

Then, one day, the arrival of the Princess de Maldebourg, an old German Highness, was announced —— a very fervent Catholic, who on the very evening when she first appeared in the district, sent for Doctor Black on the recommendation of a Roman cardinal. From that moment he was the fashion. It was good taste, good form, the correct thing, to be attended by him. He was the only doctor, it was said, who was a perfect gentleman — the only one in whom a woman could repose absolute confidence.

And from morning till evening this little man with the bulldog's head, who always spoke in a subdued tone in every corner with everybody, might be seen rushing from one hotel to the other. He appeared to have important secrets to confide or to receive, for he could constantly be met holding long mysterious conferences in the lobbies with the masters of the hotels, with his patients' chambermaids, with anyone who was brought into contact with the invalids. As soon as he saw any lady of his acquaintance in the street, he went straight up to her with his short, quick step, and immediately began to mumble fresh and minute directions, after the fashion of a priest at confession.

The old women especially adored him. He would listen to their stories to the end without interrupting them, took note of all their observations, all their questions, and all their wishes.

He increased or diminished each day the proportion of water to be consumed by his patients, which made them feel perfect confidence in the care taken of them by him.

"We stopped yesterday at two glasses and three-quarters," he would say; "well, to-day we shall only take two glasses and a half, and to-morrow three glasses. Don't forget! To-morrow, three glasses.

I am very, very particular about it!"

And all the patients were convinced that he was very particular about it, indeed.

In order not to forget these figures and fractions of figures, he wrote them down in a memorandum-book, in order that he might never make a mistake. For the patient does not pardon a mistake of a single half-glass. He regulated and modified with equal minuteness the duration of the daily baths in virtue of principles known only to himself.

Doctor Latonne, jealous and exasperated, disdainfully shrugged his shoulders, and declared: “This is a swindler!” His hatred against Doctor Black had even led him occasionally to run down the mineral waters. “Since we can scarcely tell how they act, It is quite impossible to prescribe every day modifications of the dose, which any therapeutic law cannot regulate. Proceedings of this kind do the greatest injury to medicine.”

Doctor Honorat contented himself with smiling. He always took care” to forget, five minutes after a consultation, the number of glasses which he had ordered. “Two more or less,” said he to Gontran in his hours of gaiety, “there is only the spring to take notice of it; and yet this scarcely incommodes it!” The only wicked pleasantry that he permitted himself on his religious brother-physician consisted in describing him as “the doctor of the Holy Sitting-Bath.” His jealousy was of the prudent, sly, and tranquil kind.

He added sometimes: “Oh, as for him, he knows the patient thoroughly; and this is often better than to know the disease!”

But lo! there arrived one morning at the hotel of Mont Oriol a noble Spanish family, the Duke and Duchess of Ramas-Aldavarra, who brought with her her own physician, an Italian, Doctor Mazelli from Milan. He was a man of thirty, a tall, thin, very handsome young fellow, wearing only mustaches. From the first evening, he made a conquest of the *table d’hote,* for the Duke, a melancholy man, attacked with monstrous obesity, had a horror of isolation, and desired to take his meals in the same dining-room as the other patients. Doctor Mazelli already knew by their names almost all the frequenters of the hotel; he had a kindly word for every man, a compliment for every woman, a smile even for every servant.

Placed at the right-hand side of the Duchess, a beautiful woman of between thirty-five and forty, with a pale complexion, black eyes, blue-black hair, he would say to her as each dish came round:

“Very little,” or else, “No, not this,” or else, “Yes, take some of that.” And he would himself pour out the liquid which she was to drink with very great care, measuring exactly the proportions of wine and water which he mingled.

He also regulated the Duke’s food, but with visible carelessness. The patient, however, took no heed of his advice, devoured everything with bestial voracity, drank at every meal two decanters of pure wine, then went tumbling about in a chaise for air in front of the hotel, and began whining with pain and groaning over his bad digestion.

After the first dinner, Doctor Mazelli, who had judged and weighed all around him with a single glance, went to join Gontran, who was smoking a cigar on the terrace of the Casino, told his name, and began to chat. At the end of an hour, they were on intimate terms. Next day, he got himself introduced to Christiane just as she was leaving the bath, won her good-will after ten minutes' conversation, and brought her that very day into contact with the Duchess, who no longer cared for solitude.

He kept watch over everything in the abode of the Spaniards, gave excellent advice to the chef about cooking, excellent hints to the chambermaid on the hygiene of the head in order to preserve in her mistress's hair its luster, its superb shade, and its abundance, very useful information to the coachman about veterinary medicine; and he knew how to make the hours swift and light, to invent distractions, and to pick up in the hotels casual acquaintances but always prudently chosen.

The Duchess said to Christiane, when speaking of him: "He is a wonderful man, dear Madame. He knows everything; he does everything. It is to him that I owe my figure."

"How, your figure?"

"Yes, I was beginning to grow fat, and he saved me with his regimen and his liqueurs."

Moreover, Mazelli knew how to make medicine itself interesting; he spoke about it with such ease, with such gaiety, and with a sort of light scepticism which helped to convince his listeners of his superiority.

"'Tis very simple," said he; "I don't believe in remedies — or rather I hardly believe in them. The old-fashioned medicine started with this principle — that there is a remedy for everything. God, they believe, in His divine bounty, has created drugs for all maladies, only He has left to men, through malice, perhaps, the trouble of discovering these drugs. Now, men have discovered an incalculable number of them without ever knowing exactly what disease each of them is suited for. In reality there are no remedies; there are only maladies. When a malady declares itself, it is necessary to interrupt its course, according to some, to precipitate it, according to others, by some means or another. Each school extols its own method. In the same case, we see the most antagonistic systems employed, and the most opposed kinds of medicine — ice by one and extreme heat by the other, dieting by this doctor and forced nourishment by that. I am not speaking of the innumerable poisonous products extracted from minerals or vegetables, which chemistry procures for us. All this acts, ’tis true, but nobody knows how. Sometimes it succeeds, and sometimes it kills.”

And, with much liveliness, he pointed out the impossibility of certainty, the absence of all scientific basis as long as organic chemistry, biological chemistry had not become the starting-point of a new medicine. He related anecdotes, monstrous errors of the greatest physicians, and proved the insanity and the falsity of their pretended science.

“Make the body discharge its functions,” said he. “Make the skin, the muscles, all the organs, and, above all, the stomach, which is the foster-father of the entire machine, its regulator and life-warehouse, discharge their functions.”

He asserted that, if he liked, by nothing save regimen, he could make people gay or sad, capable of physical work or intellectual work, according to the nature of the diet which he imposed on them. He could even act on the faculties of the brain, on the memory, the imagination, on all the manifestations of intelligence. And he ended jocosely with these words:

“For my part, I nurse my patients with massage and curaçoa.”

He attributed marvelous results to massage, and spoke of the Dutchman Hamstrang as of a god performing miracles. Then, showing his delicate white hands:

“With those, you might resuscitate the dead.” And the Duchess added: “The fact is that he performs massage to perfection.”

He also lauded alcoholic beverages, in small proportions to excite the stomach at certain moments; and he composed mixtures, cleverly prepared, which the Duchess had to drink, at fixed hours, either before or after her meals.

He might have been seen each morning entering the Casino Café about half past nine and asking for his bottles. They were brought to him fastened with little silver locks of which he had the key. He would pour out a little of one, a little of another, slowly into a very pretty blue glass, which a very correct footman held up respectfully.

Then the doctor would give directions: “See! Bring this to the Duchess in her bath, to drink it, before she dresses herself, when coming out of the water.”

And when anyone asked him through curiosity: “What have you put into it?” he would answer: “Nothing but refined aniseed-cordial, very pure curaçoa, and excellent bitters,”

This handsome doctor, in a few days, became the center of attraction for all the invalids. And every sort of device was resorted to, in order to attract a few opinions from him.

When he was passing along through the walks in the park, at the hour of promenade, one heard nothing but that exclamation of “Doctor” on all the chairs where sat the beautiful women, the young women, who were resting themselves a little between two glasses of the Christiane Spring. Then, when he stopped with a smile on his lip, they would draw him aside for some minutes into the little path beside the river. At first, they talked about one thing or another; then discreetly, skillfully, coquettishly, they came to the question of health, but in an indifferent fashion as if they were touching on sundry topics.

For this medical man was not at the disposal of the public. He was not paid by them, and people could not get him to visit them at their own houses. He belonged to the Duchess, only to the Duchess. This situation even stimulated people’s efforts, and provoked their desires. And, as it was whispered positively that the Duchess was jealous, very jealous, there was a desperate struggle between all these ladies to get advice from the handsome Italian doctor. He gave it without forcing them to entreat him very strenuously.

Then, among the women whom he had favored with his advice arose an interchange of intimate confidences, in order to give clear proof of nis solicitude.

“Oh! my dear, he asked me questions — but such questions!”

“Very indiscreet?”

“Oh! indiscreet! Say frightful. I actually did not know what answers to give him. He wanted to know things — but such things!”

“It was the same way with me. He questioned me a great deal about my husband!”

“And me, also — together with details so — so personal! These questions are very embarrassing. However, we understand perfectly well that it is necessary to ask them.”

“Oh! of course. Health depends on these minute details. As for me, he promised to perform massage on me at Paris this winter. I have great need of it to supplement the treatment here.”

“Tell me, my dear, what do you intend to do in return? He cannot take fees.”

“Good heavens! my idea was to present him with a scarf-pin. He must be fond of them, for he has already two or three very nice ones.”

“Oh! how you embarrass me! The same notion was in my head. In that case I’ll give him a ring.” And they concocted surprises in order to please him, thought of ingenious presents in order to touch him, graceful pleasantries in order to fascinate him. He became the “talk of the day,” the great subject of conversation, the sole object of public attention, till the news spread that Count Gontran de Ravenel was paying his addresses to Charlotte Oriol with a view to marrying her. And this at once led to a fresh outburst of deafening clamor in Enval.

Since the evening when he had opened with her the inaugural ball at the Casino, Gontran had tied himself to the young girl’s skirts. He publicly showed her all those little attentions of men who want to please without hiding their object; and their ordinary relations assumed at the same time a character of gallantry, playful and natural, which seemed likely to lead to love.

They saw one another nearly every day, for the two girls had conceived feelings of strong friendship toward Christiane, into which, no doubt, there entered a considerable element of gratified vanity. Gontran suddenly showed a disposition to remain constantly at his sister’s side; and he began to organize parties for the morning and entertainments for the evening, which greatly astonished Christiane and Paul. Then they noticed that he was devoting himself to Charlotte; he gaily teased her, paid her compliments without appearing to do so, and manifested toward her in a thousand ways that tender care which tends to unite two beings in bonds of affection. The young girl, already accustomed to the free and familiar manners of this gay Parisian youth, did not at first see anything remarkable in these attentions; and, abandoning herself to the impulses of her honest and confiding heart, she began to laugh and enjoy herself with him as she might have done with a brother.

Now, she had returned home with her elder sister, after an evening party at which Gontran had several times attempted to kiss her in consequence of forfeits due by her in a game of “fly-pigeon,” when Louise, who had appeared anxious and nervous for some time past, said to her in an abrupt tone:

"You would do well to be a little careful about your deportment. M. Gontran is not a suitable companion for you."

"Not a suitable companion? What has he done?"

"You know well what I mean — don't play the ninny! In the way you're going on, you would soon compromise yourself; and if you don't know how to watch over your conduct, it is my business to see after it."

Charlotte, confused, and filled with shame, faltered: "But I don't know — I assure you — I have seen nothing— "

Her sister sharply interrupted her: "Listen! Things must not go on this way. If he wants to marry you, it is for papa — for papa to consider the matter and to give an answer; but, if he only wants to trifle with you, he must desist at once!"

Then, suddenly, Charlotte got annoyed without knowing why or with what. She was indignant at her sister having taken it on herself to direct her actions and to reprimand her; and, in a trembling voice, and with tears in her eyes, she told her that she should not have interfered in what did not concern her. She stammered in her exasperation, divining by a vague but unerring instinct the jealousy that had been aroused in the embittered heart of Louise.

They parted without embracing one another, and Charlotte wept when she got into bed, as she thought over things that she had never foreseen or suspected.

Gradually her tears ceased to flow, and she began to reflect. It was true, nevertheless, that Gontran's demeanor toward her had altered. She had enjoyed his acquaintance hitherto without understanding him. She understood him now. At every turn he kept repeating to her pretty compliments full of delicate flattery. On one occasion he had kissed her hand. What were his intentions? She pleased him, but to what extent? Was it possible by any chance that he desired to marry her? And all at once she imagined that she could hear somewhere in the air, in the silent night through whose empty spaces her dreams were flitting, a voice exclaiming, "Comtesse de Ravenel." —

The emotion was so vivid that she sat up in the bed; then, with her naked feet, she felt for her slippers under the chair over which she had thrown her clothes, and she went to open the window without consciousness of what she was doing, in order to find space for her hopes. She could hear what they were saying in the room below stairs, and Colosse's voice was raised: "Let it alone! let it alone! There will be time enough to see to it. Father will arrange that. There is no harm up to this. 'Tis father that will do the thing."

She noticed that the window in front of the house, just below that at which she was standing, was still lighted up. She asked herself: "Who is there now? What are they talking about?" A shadow passed over the luminous wall. It was her sister. So then, she had not yet gone to bed. Why? But the light was presently extinguished; and Charlotte began to think about other things that were agitating her heart.

She could not go to sleep now. Did he love her? Oh! no; not yet. But he might love her, since she had caught his fancy. And if he came to love her much, desperately, as people love in society, he would certainly marry her.

Born in a house of vinedressers, she had preserved, although educated in the young ladies' convent at Clermont, the modesty and humility of a peasant girl. She used to think that she might marry a notary, perhaps, or a barrister or a doctor; but the ambition to become a real lady of high social position, with a title of nobility attached to her name had never entered her mind. Even when she had just finished the perusal of some love-story, and was musing over the glimpse presented to her of such a charming prospect for a few minutes, it would speedily Vanish from her soul just as chimeras vanish. Now, here was this unforeseen, inconceivable thing, which had been suddenly conjured up by some words of her sister, apparently drawing near her after the fashion of a ship's sail driven onward by the wind.

Every time she drew breath, she kept repeating with her lips: "Comtesse de Ravenel." And the shades of her dark eyelashes, as they closed in the night, were illuminated with visions. She saw beautiful drawing-rooms brilliantly lighted up, beautiful women greeting her with smiles, beautiful carriages waiting before the steps of a chateau, and grand servants in livery bowing as she passed.

She felt heated in her bed; her heart was beating. She rose up a second time in order to drink a glass of water, and to remain standing in her bare feet for a few moments on the cold floor of her apartment.

Then, somewhat calmed, she ended by falling asleep. But she awakened at dawn, so much had the agitation of her heart passed into her veins.

She felt ashamed of her little room with its white walls, washed with water by a rustic glazier, her poor cotton curtains, and some straw-chairs which never quitted their place at the two corners of her chest of drawers.

She realized that she was a peasant in the midst of these rude articles of furniture which bespoke her origin. She felt herself lowly, unworthy of this handsome, mocking young fellow, whose fair hair and laughing face had floated before her eyes, had disappeared from her vision and then come back, had gradually engrossed her thoughts, and had already found a place in her heart.

Then she jumped out of bed and ran to look for her glass, her little toilette-glass, as large as the center of a plate; after that, she got into bed again, her mirror between her hands; and she looked at her face surrounded by her hair which hung loose on the white background of the pillow.

Presently she laid down on the bedclothes the little piece of glass which reflected her lineaments, and she thought how difficult it would be for such an alliance to take place, so great was the distance between them. Thereupon a feeling of vexation seized her by the throat. But immediately afterward she gazed at her image, once more smiling at herself in order to look nice, and, as she considered herself pretty, the difficulties disappeared.

When she went down to breakfast, her sister, who wore a look of irritation, asked her:

“What do you propose to do to-day?”

Charlotte replied unhesitatingly: “Are we not going in the carriage to Royat with Madame Andermatt?”

Louise returned: “You are going alone, then; but you might do something better, after what I said to you last night.”

The younger sister interrupted her: “I don’t ask for your advice — mind your own business!”

And they did not speak to one another again.

Père Oriol and Jacques came in, and took their seats at the table. The old man asked almost immediately: “What are you doing to-day, girls?” Charlotte said without giving her sister time to answer: “As for me, I am going to Royat with Madame Andermatt.”

The two men eyed her with an air of satisfaction; and the father muttered with that engaging smile which he could put on when discussing any business of a profitable character: “That’s good! that’s good!”

She was more surprised at this secret complacency which she observed in their entire bearing than at the visible anger of Louise; and she asked herself, in a somewhat disturbed frame of mind: “Can they have been talking this over all together?” As soon as the meal was over, she went up again to her room, put on her hat, seized her parasol, threw a light cloak over her arm, and she went off in the direction of the hotel, for they were to start at half past one.

Christiane expressed her astonishment at finding that Louise had not come.

Charlotte felt herself flushing as she replied: “She is a little fatigued; I believe she has a headache.”

And they stepped into the landau, the big landau with six seats, which they always used. The Marquis and his daughter remained at the lower end, while the Oriol girl found herself seated at the opposite side between the two young men.

They passed in front of Tournoel; they proceeded along the foot of the mountain, by a beautiful winding road, under the walnut and chestnut-trees. Charlotte several times felt conscious that Gontran was pressing close up to her, but was too prudent to take offense at it. As he sat at her right-hand side, he spoke with his face close to her cheek; and she did not venture to turn round to answer him, through fear of touching his mouth, which she felt already on her lips, and also through fear of his eyes, whose glance would have unnerved her.

He whispered in her ear gallant absurdities, laughable fooleries, agreeable and well-turned compliments.

Christiane scarcely uttered a word, heavy and sick from her pregnancy. And Paul appeared sad, preoccupied. The Marquis alone chatted without unrest or anxiety, in the sprightly, graceful style of a selfish old nobleman.

They got down at the park of Royat to listen to the music, and Gontran, offering Charlotte his arm, set forth with her in front. The army of bathers, on the chairs, around the kiosk, where the leader of the orchestra was keeping time with the brass instruments and the violins, watched the promenaders filing past. The women exhibited their dresses by stretching out their legs as far as the bars of the chairs in front of them, and their dainty summer head-gear made them look more fascinating.

Charlotte and Gontran sauntered through the midst of the people who occupied the seats, looking out for faces of a comic type to find materials for their pleasantries.

Every moment he heard some one saying behind them: “Look there! what a pretty girl!” He felt flattered, and asked himself whether they took her for his sister, his wife, or his mistress.

Christiane, seated between her father and Paul, saw them passing several times, and thinking they exhibited too much youthful frivolity, she called them over to her to soberize them. But they paid no attention to her, and went on vagabondizing through the crowd, enjoying themselves with their whole hearts.

She said in a whisper to Paul Bretigny: “He will finish by compromising her. It will be necessary that we should speak to him this evening when he comes back.”

Paul replied: “I had already thought about it. You are quite right.”

They went to dine in one of the restaurants of Clermont-Ferrand, those of Royat being no good, according to the Marquis, who was a gourmand, and they returned at nightfall.

Charlotte had become serious, Gontran having strongly pressed her hand, while presenting her gloves to her, before she quitted the table. Her young girl’s conscience was suddenly troubled. This was an avowal! an advance! an impropriety! What ought she to do? Speak to him? but about what? To be offended would be ridiculous. There was need of so much tact in these circumstances. But by doing nothing, by saying nothing, she produced the impression of accepting his advances, of becoming his accomplice, of answering “yes” to this pressure of the hand.

And she weighed the situation, accusing herself of having been too gay and too familiar at Royat, thinking just now that her sister was right, that she was compromised, lost! The carriage rolled along the road. Paul and Gontran smoked in silence; the Marquis slept; Christiane gazed at the stars; and Charlotte found it hard to keep back her tears — for she had swallowed three glasses of champagne.

When they had got back, Christiane said to her father: “As it is dark, you have to see this young girl home.”

The Marquis, without delay, offered her his arm, and went off with her.

Paul laid his hands on Gontran’s shoulders, and whispered in his ear: “Come and have five minutes’ talk with your sister and myself.”

And they went up to the little drawing-room communicating with the apartments of Andermatt and his wife.

When they were seated, Christiane said: “Listen! M. Paul and I want to give you a good lecture.”

“A good lecture! But about what? I’m as wise as an image for want of opportunities.”

“Don’t trifle! You are doing a very imprudent and very dangerous thing without thinking on it. You are compromising this young girl.”

He appeared much astonished. “Who is that? Charlotte?”

“Yes, Charlotte!”

“I’m compromising Charlotte? — I?”

“Yes, you are compromising her. Everyone here is talking about it, and this evening again in the park at Royat you have been very — very light. Isn’t that so, Bretigny?”

Paul answered: “Yes, Madame, I entirely share your sentiments.”

Gontran turned his chair around, bestrode it like a horse, took a fresh cigar, lighted it, then burst out laughing.

“Ha! so then I am compromising Charlotte Oriol?” He waited a few seconds to see the effect of his words, then added: “And who told you I did not intend to marry her?”

Christiane gave a start of amazement.

“Marry her? You? Why, you’re mad!”

“Why so?”

“That — that little peasant girl!”

“Tra! la! la! Prejudices! Is it from your husband you learned them?”

As she made no response to this direct argument, he went on, putting both questions and answers himself:

“Is she pretty? — Yes! Is she well educated? — Yes! And more ingenuous, more simple, and more honest than girls in good society. She knows as much as another, for she can speak both English and the language of Auvergne — that makes two foreign languages. She will be as rich as any heiress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain — as it was formerly called (they are now going to christen it Faubourg Sainte-Deche) — and finally, if she is a peasant’s daughter, she’ll be only all the more healthy to present me with fine children. Enough!”

As he had always the appearance of laughing and jesting, Christiane asked hesitatingly: “Come! are you speaking seriously?”

“Faith, I am! She is charming, this little girl! She has a good heart and a pretty face, a genial character and a good temper, rosy cheeks, bright eyes, white teeth, ruby lips, and flowing tresses, glossy, thick, and full of soft folds. And then her vinedressing father will be as rich as Croesus, thanks to your husband, my dear sister. What more do you want? The daughter of a peasant! Well, is not the daughter of a peasant as good as any of those moneylenders' daughters who pay such high prices for dukes with doubtful titles, or any of the daughters born of aristocratic prostitution whom the Empire has given us, or any of the daughters with double sires whom we meet in society? Why, if I did marry this girl I should be doing the first wise and rational act of my life!"

Christiane reflected, then, all of a sudden, convinced, overcome, delighted, she exclaimed:

"Why, all you have said is true! It is quite true, quite right! So then you are going to marry her, my little Gontran?"

It was he who now sought to moderate her ardor. "Not so quick — not so quick — let me reflect in my turn. I only declare that, if I did marry her, I would be doing the first wise and rational act of my life. That does not go so far as saying that I will marry her; but I am thinking over it; I am studying her, I am paying her a little attention to see if I can like her sufficiently. In short, I don't answer 'yes' or 'no,' but it is nearer to 'yes' than to 'no.'"

Christiane turned toward Paul: "What do you think of it, Monsieur Bretigny?"

She called him at one time Monsieur Bretigny, and at another time Bretigny only.

He, always fascinated by the things in which he imagined he saw an element of greatness, by unequal matches which seemed to him to exhibit generosity, by all the sentimental parade in which the human heart masks itself, replied: "For my part I think he is right in this. If he likes her, let him marry her; he could not find better."

But, the Marquis and Andermatt having returned, they had to talk about other subjects; and the two young men went to the Casino to see whether the gaming-room was still open.

From that day forth Christiane and Paul appeared to favor Gontran's open courtship of Charlotte.

The young girl was more frequently invited to the hotel by Christiane, and was treated in fact as if she were already a member of the family. She saw all this clearly, understood it, and was quite delighted at it. Her little head throbbed like a drum, and went building fantastic castles in Spain. Gontran, in the meantime had said nothing definite to her; but his demeanor, all his words, the tone that he assumed with her, his more serious air of gallantry, the caress of his glance seemed every day to keep repeating to her: “I have chosen you; you are to be my wife.”

And the tone of sweet affection, of discreet selfsurrender, of chaste reserve which she now adopted toward him, seemed to give this answer: “I know it, and I’ll say ‘yes’ whenever you ask for my hand.”

In the young girl’s family, the matter was discussed in confidential whispers. Louise scarcely opened her lips now except to annoy her with hurtful allusions, with sharp and sarcastic remarks. Père Oriol and Jacques appeared to be content.

She did not ask herself, all the same, whether she loved this good-looking suitor, whose wife she was, no doubt, destined to become. She liked him, she was constantly thinking about him; she considered him handsome, witty, elegant — she was speculating, above all, on what she would do when she was married to him.

In Enval people had forgotten the malignant rivalries of the physicians and the proprietors of springs, the theories as to the supposed attachment of the Duchess de Ramas for her doctor, all the scandals that flow along with the waters of thermal stations, in order to occupy their minds entirely with this extraordinary circumstance — that Count Gontran de Ravenel was going to marry the younger of the Oriol girls.

When Gontran thought the moment had arrived, taking Andermatt by the arm, one morning, as they were rising from the breakfast-table, he said to him: “My dear fellow, strike while the iron is hot! Here is the exact state of affairs: The little one is waiting for me to propose, without my having committed myself at all; but, you may be quite certain she will not refuse me. It is necessary to sound her father about it in such a way as to promote, at the same time, your interests and mine.”

Andermatt replied: “Make your mind easy. I’ll take that on myself. I am going to sound him this very day without compromising you and without thrusting you forward; and when the situation is perfectly clear, I’ll talk about it.”

“Capital!”

Then, after a few moments’ silence, Gontran added: “Hold on! This is perhaps my last day of bachelorhood. I am going on to Royat, where I saw some acquaintances of mine the other day. I’ll be back to-night, and I’ll tap at your door to know the result.”

He saddled his horse, and proceeded along by the mountain, inhaling the pure, genial air, and sometimes starting into a gallop to feel the keen caress of the breeze brushing the fresh skin of his cheek and tickling his mustache.

The evening-party at Royat was a jolly affair. He met some of his friends there who had brought girls along with them. They lingered a long time at supper; he returned home at a very late hour. Everyone had gone to bed in the hotel of Mont Oriol when Gontran went to tap at Andermatt's door. There was no answer at first; then, as the knocking became much louder, a hoarse voice, the voice of one disturbed while asleep, grunted from within: "Who's there?"

"'Tis I, Gontran."

"Wait — I'm opening the door."

Andermatt appeared in his nightshirt, with puffed-up face, bristling chin, and a silk handkerchief tied round his head. Then he got back into bed, sat down in it, and with his hands stretched over the sheets:

"Well, my dear fellow, this won't do me. Here is how matters stand: I have sounded this old fox Oriol, without mentioning you, referring merely to a certain friend of mine — I have perhaps allowed him to suppose that the person I meant was Paul Bretigny — as a suitable match for one of his daughters, and I asked what dowry he would give her. He answered me by asking in his turn what were the young man's means; and I fixed the amount at three hundred thousand francs with expectations."

"But I have nothing," muttered Gontran.

"I am lending you the money, my dear fellow. If we work this business between us, your lands would yield me enough to reimburse me."

Gontran sneered: "All right. I'll have the woman and you the money."

But Andermatt got quite annoyed. "If I am to interest myself in your affairs in order that you might insult me, there's an end of it — let us say no more about it!"

Gontran apologized: "Don't get vexed, my dear fellow, and excuse me! I know that you are a very honest man of irreproachable loyalty in matters of business. I would not ask you for the price of a drink if I were your coachman; but I would intrust my fortune to you if I were a millionaire."

William, less excited, rejoined: "We'll return presently to that subject. Let us first dispose of the principal question. The old man was not taken in by my wiles, and said to me in reply: 'It depends on which of them is the girl you're talking about. If 'tis Louise, the elder one, here's her dowry.' And he enumerated for me all the lands that are around the establishment, those which are between the baths and the hotel and between the hotel and the Casino, all those, in short, which are indispensable to us, those which have for me an inestimable value. He gives, on the contrary, to the younger girl the other side of the mountain, which will be worth as much money later on, no doubt, but which is worth nothing to me. I tried in every possible way to make him modify their partition and invert the lots. I was only knocking my head against the obstinacy of a mule. He will not change; he has fixed his resolution. Reflect — what do you think of it?"

Gontran, much troubled, much perplexed, replied: "What do you think of it yourself? Do you believe that he was thinking of me in thus distributing the shares in the land?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. The clown said to himself: 'As he likes the younger one, let us take care of the bag.' He hopes to give you his daughter while keeping his best lands. And again perhaps his object is to give the advantage to the elder girl. He prefers her — who knows? — she is more like himself — she is more cunning — more artful — more practical. I believe she is a strapping lass, this one — for my part, if I were in your place, I would change my stick from one shoulder to the other."

But Gontran, stunned, began muttering: "The devil! the devil! the devil! And Charlotte's lands — you don't want them?"

Andermatt exclaimed: "I — no — a thousand times, no! I want those which are close to my baths, my hotel, and my Casino. It is very simple, I wouldn't give anything for the others, which could only be sold, at a later period, in small lots to private individuals."

Gontran kept still repeating: "The devil! the devil! the devil! here's a plaguy business! So then you advise me?"

"I don't advise you at all. I think you would do well to reflect before deciding between the two sisters."

"Yes — yes — that's true — I will reflect — I am going to sleep first — that brings counsel."

He rose up; Andermatt held him back.

"Excuse me, my dear boy! — a word or two on another matter. I may not appear to understand, but I understand very well the allusions with which you sting me incessantly, and I don't want any more of them. You reproach me with being a Jew — that is to say, with making money, with being avaricious, with being a speculator, so as to come close to sheer swindling.

Now, my friend, I spend my life in lending you this money that I make — not without trouble —— or rather in giving it to you. However, let that be! But there is one point that I don't admit! No, I am not avaricious. The proof of it is that I have made presents to your sister, presents of twenty thousand francs at a time, that I gave your father a Theodore Rousseau worth ten thousand francs, to which he took a fancy, and that I presented you, when you were coming here, with the horse on which you rode a little while ago to Royat. In what then am I avaricious? In not letting myself be robbed. And we are all like that among my race, and we are right, Monsieur. I want to say it to you once for all. We are regarded as misers because we know the exact value of things. For you a piano is a piano, a chair is a chair, a pair of trousers is a pair of trousers. For us also, but it represents, at the same time, a value, a mercantile value appreciable and precise, which a practical man should estimate with a single glance, not through stinginess, but in order not to countenance fraud. What would you say if a tobacconist asked you four sous for a postage-stamp or for a box of wax-matches? You would go to look for a policeman, Monsieur, for one sou, yes, for one sou — so indignant would you be! And that because you knew, by chance, the value of these two articles. Well, as for me, I know the value of all salable articles; and that indignation which would take possession of you, if you were asked four sous for a postage-stamp, I experience when I am asked twenty francs for an umbrella which is worth fifteen! I protest against the established theft, ceaseless and abominable, of merchants, servants, and coachmen. I protest against the commercial dishonesty of all your race which despises us. I give the price of a drink which I am bound to give for a service rendered, and not that which as the result of a whim you fling away without knowing why, and which ranges from five to a hundred sous according to the caprice of your temper! Do you understand?" Gontran had risen by this time, and smiling with that refined irony which came happily from his lips: "Yes, my dear fellow, I understand, and you are perfectly right, and so much the more right because my grandfather, the old Marquis de Ravenel, scarcely left anything to my poor father in consequence of the bad habit which he had of never picking up the change handed to him by the shopkeepers when he was paying for any article whatsoever. He thought that unworthy of a gentleman, and always gave the round sum and the entire coin."

And Gontran went out with a self-satisfied air.

CHAPTER XI. A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

THEY were just ready to go in to dinner, on the following day, in the Private dining-room of the Andermatt and Ravenel families, when Gontran opened the door announcing the “Mesdemoiselles Oriol.”

They entered, with an air of constraint, pushed forward by Gontran, who laughed while he explained:

“Here they are! I have carried them both off through the middle of the street. Moreover, it excited public attention. I brought them here by force to you because I want to explain myself to Madame Louise, and could not do so in the open air.”

He took from them their hats and their parasols, which they were still carrying, as they had been on their way back from a promenade, made them sit down, embraced his sister, pressed the hands of his father, of his brother-in-law, and of Paul, and then, approaching Louise Oriol once more, said:

“Here now, Mademoiselle, kindly tell me what you have against me for some time past?”

She seemed scared, like a bird caught in a net, and carried away by the hunter.

“Why, nothing, Monsieur, nothing at all! What has made you believe that?”

“Oh! everything, Mademoiselle, everything at all! You no longer come here — you no longer come in the Noah’s Ark [so he had baptized the big landau]. You assume a harsh tone whenever I meet you and when I speak to you.”

“Why, no, Monsieur, I assure you!”

“Why, yes, Mam’zelle, I declare to you! In any case, I don’t want this to continue, and I am going to make peace with you this very day. Oh! you know I am obstinate. There’s no use in your looking black at me. I’ll know easily how to get the better of your hoity-toity airs, and make you be nice toward your sister, who is an angel of grace.”

It was announced that dinner was ready; and they made their way to the dining-room. Gontran took Louise’s arm in his. He was exceedingly attentive to her and to her sister, dividing his compliments between them with admirable tact, and remarking to the younger girl: “As for you, you are a comrade of ours — I am going to neglect you for a few days. One goes to less expense for friends than for strangers, you are aware.”

And he said to the elder: “As for you, I want to bewitch you, Mademoiselle, and I warn you as a loyal foe! I will even make love to you. Ha! you are blushing — that’s a good sign. You’ll see that I am very nice, when I take pains about it. Isn’t that so, Mademoiselle Charlotte?”

And they were both, indeed, blushing, and Louise stammered with her serious air: “Oh! Monsieur, how foolish you are!”

He replied: “Bah! you will hear many things said by others by and by in society, when you are married, which will not be long. ’Tis then they will really pay you compliments.”

Christiane and Paul Bretigny expressed their approval of his action in having brought back Louise Oriol; the Marquis smiled, amused by these childish affectations. Andermatt was thinking: “He’s no fool, the sly dog.” And Gontran, irritated by the part which he was compelled to play, drawn by his senses toward Charlotte and by his interests toward Louise, muttered between his teeth with a sly smile in her direction: “Ah! your rascal of a father thought to play a trick fupon me; but I am going to carry it with a high hand over you, my lassie, and you will see whether I won’t go about it the right way!”

And he compared the two, inspecting them one after the other. Certainly, he liked the younger more; she was more amusing, more lively, with her nose tilted slightly, her bright eyes, her straight forehead, and her beautiful teeth a little too prominent in a mouth which was somewhat too wide.

However, the other was pretty, too, colder, less gay. She would never be lively or charming in the intimate relations of life; but when at the opening of a ball “the Comtesse de Ravenel” would be announced, she could carry her title well — better perhaps than her younger sister, when she got a little accustomed to it, and had mingled with persons of high birth. No matter; he was annoyed. He was full of spite against the father and the brother also, and he promised himself that he would pay them off afterward for his mischance when he was the master. When they returned to the drawing-room, he got Louise to read the cards, as she was skilled in foretelling the future. The Marquis, Andermatt, and Charlotte listened attentively, attracted, in spite of themselves, by the mystery of the unknown, by the possibility of the improbable, by that invincible credulity with reference to the marvelous which haunts man, and often disturbs the strongest minds in the presence of the silly inventions of charlatans.

Paul and Christiane chatted in the recess of an open window. For some time past she had been miserable, feeling that she was no longer loved in the same fashion; and their misunderstanding as lovers was every day accentuated by their mutual error. She had suspected this unfortunate state of things for the first time on the evening of the *fete* when she brought Paul along the road. But while she understood that he had no longer the same tenderness in his look, the same caress in his voice, the same passionate anxiety about her as in the days of their early love, she had not been able to divine the cause of this change.

It had existed for a long time now, ever since the day when she had said to him with a look of happiness on reaching their daily meeting-place: "You know, I believe I am really *enceinte."* He had felt at that moment an unpleasant little shiver running all over his skin. Then at each of their meetings she would talk to him about her condition, which made her heart dance with joy; but this preoccupation with a matter which he regarded as vexatious, ugly, and unclean clashed with his devoted exaltation about the idol that he had adored. At a later stage, when he saw her altered, thin, her cheeks hollow, her complexion yellow, he thought that she might have spared him that spectacle, and might have vanished for a few months from his sight, to reappear afterward fresher and prettier than ever, thus knowing how to make him forget this accident, or perhaps knowing how to unite to her coquettish fascinations as a mistress, another charm, the thoughtful reserve of a young mother, who only allows her baby to be seen at a distance covered up in red ribbons.

She had, besides, a rare opportunity of displaying that tact which he expected of her by spending the summer apart from him at Mont Oriol, and leaving him in Paris so that he might not see her robbed of her freshness and beauty. He had fondly hoped that she might have understood him.

But, immediately on reaching Auvergne, she had appealed to him in incessant and despairing letters so numerous and so urgent that he had come to her through weakness, through pity. And now she was boring him to death with her ungracious and lugubrious tenderness; and he felt an extreme longing to get away from her, to see no more of her, to listen no longer to her talk about love, so irritating and out of place. He would have liked to tell her plainly all that he had in his mind, to point out to her how unskillful and foolish she showed herself; but he could not bring himself to do this, and he dared not take his departure. As a result he could not restrain himself from testifying his impatience with her in bitter and hurtful words.

She was stung by them the more because, every day more ill, more heavy, tormented by all the sufferings of pregnant women, she had more need than ever of being consoled, fondled, encompassed with affection. She loved him with that utter abandonment of body and soul, of her entire being, which sometimes renders love a sacrifice without reservations and without bounds. She no longer looked upon herself as his mistress, but as his wife, his companion, his devotee, his worshiper, his prostrate slave, his chattel. For her there seemed no further need of any gallantry, coquetry, constant desire to please, or fresh indulgence between them, since she belonged to him entirely, since they were linked together by that chain so sweet and so strong — the child which would soon be born. When they were alone at the window, she renewed her tender lamentation: “Paul, my dear Paul, tell me, do you love me as much as ever?”

“Yes, certainly! Come now, you keep repeating this every day — it will end by becoming monotonous.”

“Pardon me. It is because I find it impossible to believe it any longer, and I want you to reassure me; I want to hear you saying it to me forever that word which is so sweet; and, as you don’t repeat it to me so often as you used to do, I am compelled to ask for it, to implore it, to beg for it from you.”

“Well, yes, I love you! But let us talk of something else, I entreat of you.”

“Ah! how hard you are!”

“Why, no! I am not hard. Only — only you do not understand — you do not understand that— ““Oh! yes! I understand well that you no longer love me. If you knew how I am suffering!”

“Come, Christiane, I beg of you not to make me nervous. If you knew yourself how awkward what you are now doing is!”

“Ah! if you loved me, you would not talk to me in this way.”

“But, deuce take it! if I did not love you, I would not have come.”

“Listen. You belong to me now. You are mine; I am yours. There is between us that tie of a budding life which nothing can break; but will you promise me that, if one day, you should come ‘to love me no more, you will tell me so?”

“Yes, I do promise you.”

“You swear it to me?”

“I swear it to you.”

“But then, all the same, we would remain friends, would we not?”

“Certainly, let us remain friends.”

“On the day when you no longer regard me with love you’ll come to find me and you’ll say to me: ‘My little Christiane, I am very fond of you, but it is not the same thing any more. Let us be friends, there! nothing but friends.’”

“That is understood; I promise it to you.”

“You swear it to me?”

“I swear it to you.”

“No matter, it would cause me great grief. How you adored me last year!”

A voice called out behind them: “The Duchess de Ramas-Aldavarra.”

She had come as a neighbor, for Christiane held receptions each day for the principal bathers, just as princes hold receptions in their kingdoms.

Doctor Mazelli followed the lovely Spaniard with a smiling and submissive air. The two women pressed one another’s hands, sat down, and commenced to chat.

Andermatt called Paul across to him: “My dear friend come here! Mademoiselle Oriol reads the cards splendidly; she has told me some astonishing things! “ He took Paul by the arm, and added: “What an odd being you are! At Paris, we never saw you, even once a month, in spite of the entreaties of my wife. Here it required fifteen letters to get you to come. And since you have come, one would think you are losing a million a day, you look so disconsolate. Come, are you hearing any matter that ruffles you? We might be able to assist you. You should tell us about it.”

“Nothing at all, my dear fellow. If I haven’t visited you more frequently in Paris— ’tis because at Paris, you understand— “

“Perfectly — I grasp your meaning. But here, at least, you ought to be in good spirits. I am preparing for you two or three *fêtes,* which will, I am sure, be very successful.”

“Madame Barre and Professor Cloche” were announced. He entered with his daughter, a young widow, red-haired and bold-faced. Then, almost in the same breath, the manservant called out: “Professor Mas-Roussel.”

His wife accompanied him, pale, worn, with flat headbands drawn over her temples.

Professor Remusot had left the day before, after having, it was said, purchased his chalet on exceptionally favorable conditions.

The two other doctors would have liked to know what these conditions were, but Andermatt merely said in reply to them: “Oh! we have made little advantageous arrangements for everybody. If you desired to follow his example, we might see our way to a mutual understanding — we might see our way. When you have made up your mind, you can let me know, and then we’ll talk about it.”

Doctor Latonne appeared in his turn, then Doctor Honorât, without his wife, whom he did not bring with him. A din of voices now filled the drawingroom, the loud buzz of conversation. Gontran never left Louise Oriol’s side, put his head over her shoulder in addressing her, and said with a laugh every now and again to whoever was passing near him: “This is an enemy of whom I am making a conquest.”

Mazelli took a seat beside Professor Cloche’s daughter. For some days he had been constantly following her about; and she had received his advances with provoking audacity.

The Duchess, who kept him well in view, appeared irritated and trembling. Suddenly she rose, crossed the drawing-room, and interrupted her doctor’s confidential chat with the pretty red-haired widow, saying: “Come, Mazelli, we are going to retire. I feel rather ill at ease.”

As soon as they had gone out, Christiane drew close to Paul’s side, and said to him: “Poor woman! she must suffer so much!”

He asked heedlessly: “Who, pray?”

“The Duchess! You don’t see how jealous she is.” He replied abruptly: “If you begin to groan over everything you can lay hold of now, you’ll have no end of weeping.”

She turned away, ready, indeed, to shed tears, so cruel did she find him, and, sitting down near Charlotte Oriol, who was all alone in a dazed condition, unable to comprehend the meaning of Gontran’s conduct, she said to the young girl, without letting the latter realize what her words conveyed: “There are days when one would like to be dead.”

Andermatt, in the midst of the doctors, was relating the extraordinary case of Père Clovis, whose legs were beginning to come to life again. He appeared so thoroughly convinced that nobody could doubt his good faith.

Since he had seen through the trick of the peasants and the paralytic, understood that he had let himself be duped and persuaded, the year before, through the sheer desire to believe in the efficacy of the waters with which he had been bitten, since, above all, he had not been able to free himself, without paying, from the formidable complaints of the old man, he had converted it into a strong advertisement, and worked it wonderfully well.

Mazelli had just come back, after having accompanied his patient to her own apartments.

Gontran caught hold of his arm: “Tell me your opinion, my good doctor. Which of the Oriol girls do you prefer?”

The handsome physician whispered in his ear: “The younger one, to love; the elder one, to marry.”

“Look at that! We are exactly of the same way of thinking. I am delighted at it!”

Then, going over to his sister, who was still talking to Charlotte: “You are not aware of it? I have made up my mind that we are to visit the Puy de la Nugère on Thursday. It is the finest crater of the chain. Everyone consents. It is a settled thing.” Christiane murmured with an air of indifference: “I consent to anything you like.”

But Professor Cloche, followed by his daughter, was about to take his leave, and Mazelli, offering to see them home, started off behind the young widow. In five minutes, everyone had left, for Christiane went to bed at eleven o’clock. The Marquis, Paul, and Gontran accompanied the Oriol girls. Gontran and Louise walked in front, and Bretigny, some paces behind them, felt Charlotte’s arm trembling a little as it leaned on his.

They separated with the agreement: “On Thursday at eleven for breakfast at the hotel!”

On their way back they met Andermatt, detained in a corner of the park by Professor Mas-Roussel, who was saying to him: “Well, if it does not put you about, I’ll come and have a chat with you to-morrow morning about that little business of the chalet.” William joined the young men to go in with them, and, drawing himself up to his brother-in-law’s ear, said: “My best compliments, my dear boy! You have acted your part admirably.”

Gontran, for the past two years, had been harassed by pecuniary embarrassments which had spoiled his existence. So long as he was spending the share which came to him from his mother, he had allowed his life to pass in that carelessness and indifference which he inherited from his father, in the midst of those young men, rich, *blasé,* and corrupted, whose doings we read about every morning in the newspapers, who belong to the world of fashion but mingle in it very little, preferring the society of women of easy virtue and purchasable hearts.

There were a dozen of them in the same set, who were to be found every night at the same *café* on the boulevard between midnight and three o'clock in the morning. Very well dressed, always in black coats and white waistcoats, wearing shirt-buttons worth twenty louis changed every month, and bought in one of the principal jewelers' shops, they lived careless of everything, save amusing themselves, picking up women, making them a subject of talk, and getting money by every possible means.

As the only things they had any knowledge of were the scandals of the night before, the echoes of alcoves and stables, duels and stories about gambling transactions, the entire horizon of their thoughts was shut in by these barriers. They had had all the women who were for sale in the market of gallantry, had passed them through their hands, given them up, exchanged them with one another, and talked among themselves as to their erotic qualities as they might have talked about the qualities of race-horses. They also associated with people of rank whose voluptuous habits excited comment and whose women nearly all kept up intrigues which were matters of notoriety, under the eyes of husbands indifferent or averted or closed or devoid of perception; and they passed judgment on these women as on the others, forming much the same estimate about them, save that they made a slight distinction on the grounds of birth and social position.

By dint of resorting to dodges to get the money necessary for the life which they led, outwitting usurers, borrowing on all sides, putting off tradesmen, laughing in the faces of their tailors when presented with a big bill every six months, listening to girls telling about the infamies they perpetrated in order to gratify their feminine greed, seeing systematic cheating at clubs, knowing and feeling that they were individually robbed by everyone, by servants, merchants, keepers of big restaurants and others, becoming acquainted with certain sharp practices and shady transactions in which they themselves had a hand in order to knock out a few Louis, their moral sense had become blunted, used up, and their sole point of honor consisted in fighting duels when they realized that they were suspected of all the things of which they were either capable or actually guilty.

Everyone of these young *roués,* after some years of this existence, ended with a rich marriage, or a scandal, or a suicide, or a mysterious disappearance as complete as death. But they put their principal reliance on the rich marriage. Some trusted to their families to procure such a thing for them; others looked out themselves for it without letting it be noticed; and they had lists of heiresses just as people have lists of houses for sale. They kept their eyes fixed especially on the exotics, the Americans of the north and of the south, whom they dazzled by their “chic,” by their reputation as fast men, by talk about their successes, and by the elegance of their persons. And their tradesmen also placed reliance on the rich marriage.

But this hunt after the girl with a fortune was bound to be protracted. In any case it involved inquiries, the trouble of winning a female heart, fatigues, visits, all that exercise of energy of which Gontran, careless by nature, remained utterly incapable. For a long time past, he had been saying to himself, feeling each day more keenly the unpleasantness of impecuniosity: “I must, for all that, think over it.” But he did not think over it, and so he found nothing. He had been reduced to the ingenious pursuit of paltry sums, to all the questionable steps of people at the end of their resources, and, to crown all, to long sojourns in the family, when Andermatt had suddenly suggested to him the idea of marrying one of the Oriol girls.

He had, at first, said nothing through prudence, although the young girl appeared to him, at first blush, too much beneath him for him to consent to such an unequal match. But a few minutes’ reflection had very speedily modified his view; and he forthwith made up his mind to make love to her in a bantering sort of way — the love-making of a spa — which would not compromise him, and would permit him to back out of it.

Thoroughly acquainted with his brother-in-law’s character, he knew that this proposition must have been cogitated for a long time, and weighed and matured by him — that she meant to him a valuable prize such as it would be hard to find elsewhere.

It would cost him no trouble but that of stooping down and picking up a pretty girl, for he liked the younger sister very much, and he had often said to himself that she would be nice to associate with later on. He had accordingly selected Charlotte Oriol; and in a little time would have brought matters to the point when a regular proposal might have been made to her.

Now, as the father was bestowing on his other daughter the dowry coveted by Andermatt, Gontran had either to renounce this union or turn round to the elder sister. He felt intense dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and he had been thinking in his first moments of vexation of sending his brother-in-law to the devil and remaining a bachelor until a fresh opportunity arose. But just at that very time he found himself quite cleaned out, so that he had to ask, for his play at the Casino, a sum of twenty-five louis from Paul, after many similar loans, which he had never paid back. And again, he would have to look for a rich wife, find her, and captivate her, while without any change of place, with only a few days of attention and gallantry, he could capture the elder of the Oriol girls just as he had been able to make a conquest of the younger. In this way he would make sure in his brother-in-law of a banker whom he might render always responsible, on whom he might cast endless reproaches, and whose cash-box would always be open for him.

As for his wife, he could bring her to Paris, and there introduce her into society as the daughter of Andermatt's partner. Moreover, she bore the name of the spa, to which he would never bring her back!

Never! never! in virtue of the natural law that streams do not return to their sources. She had a nice face and figure, sufficiently distinguished already to become entirely so, sufficiently intelligent to understand the ways of society, to hold her own in it, to make a good show in it, and even to do him honor. People would say: "This joker here has married a lovely girl, at whom he looks as if he were not making a bad joke of it." And he would not make a bad joke of it, in fact, for he counted on resuming by her side his bachelor existence with the money in his pockets.

So he turned toward Louise Oriol, and, taking advantage of the jealousy awakened in the skittish heart of the young girl, without being aware of it, had excited in her a coquetry which had hitherto slumbered, and a vague desire to take away from her sister this handsome lover whom people addressed as "Monsieur le Comte."

She had not said this in her own mind. She had neither thought it out nor contrived it, being surprised at their being thrown together and going off in one another's company. But when she saw him assiduous and gallant toward her, she felt from his demeanor, from his glances, and his entire attitude, that he was not enamored of Charlotte, and without trying to see beyond that, she was in a happy, joyous, almost triumphant frame of mind as she lay down to sleep.

They hesitated for a long time on the following Thursday before starting for the Puy de la Nugère. The gloomy sky and the heavy atmosphere made them anticipate rain. But Gontran insisted so strongly on going that he carried the waverers along with him. The breakfast was a melancholy affair. Christiane and Paul had quarreled the night before, without apparent cause. Andermatt was afraid that Gontran's marriage might not take place, for Père Oriol had, that very morning, spoken of him in equivocal terms. Gontran, on being informed of this, got angry and made up his mind that he would succeed. Charlotte, foreseeing her sister's triumph, without at all understanding this transfer of Gontran's affections, strongly desired to remain in the village. With some difficulty they prevailed on her to come.

Accordingly the Noah's Ark carried its full number of ordinary passengers in the direction of the high plateau which looks down on Volvic. Louise Oriol, suddenly becoming loquacious, acted as their guide along the road. She explained how the stone of Volvic, which is nothing else but the lava-current of the surrounding peaks, had helped to build all the churches and all the houses in the district — a circumstance which gives to the towns in Auvergne the dark and charred-looking aspect that they present.

She pointed out the yards where this stone was cut, showed them the molten rock that was worked as a quarry, from which was extracted the rough lava, and made them view with admiration, standing on a hilltop and bending over Volvic, the immense black Virgin who protects the town. Then they ascended toward the upper plateau, embossed with extinct volcanoes. The horses went at a walking pace over the long and toilsome road. Their path was bordered with beautiful green woods, and nobody talked any longer.

Christiane was thinking about Tazenat. It was the same carriage; they were the same persons; but their hearts were no longer the same. Everything seemed as it had been — and yet? and yet? What then had happened? Almost nothing. A little love the more on her part! A little love the less on his! Almost nothing — the invisible rent which weariness makes in an intimate attachment — oh! almost nothing — and the look in the changed eyes, because the same eyes no longer saw the same faces in the same way. What is this but a look? Almost nothing!

The coachman drew up, and said: "It is here, at the right, through that path in the wood. You have only to follow it in order to get there.

All descended, save the Marquis, who thought the weather too warm. Louise and Gontran went on in front, and Charlotte remained behind with Paul and Christiane, who found difficulty in walking. The path appeared to them long, right through the wood; then they reached a crest covered with tall grass which led by a steep ascent to the sides of the old crater. Louise and Gontran, halting when they got to the top, both looking tall and slender, had the appearance of standing in the clouds. When the others had come up with them, Paul Bretigny's enthusiastic soul was inflamed with poetic rapture.

Around them, behind them, to right, to left, they were surrounded by strange cones, decapitated, some shooting forth, others crushed into a mass, but all preserving their fantastic physiognomy of dead volcanoes. These heavy fragments of mountains with flat summits rose from south to west along an im mense plateau of desolate appearance, which, itself a thousand meters above the Limagne, looked down upon it, as far as the eye could reach, toward the east and the north, on to the invisible horizon, always veiled, always blue.

The Puy de Dome, at the right, towered above all its fellows, with from seventy to eighty craters now gone to sleep. Further on were the Puy de Gravenoire, the Puy de Crouel, the Puy de la Pedge, the Puy de Sault, the Puy de Noschamps, the Puy de la Vache. Nearer, were the Puy de Come, the Puy de Jumes, the Puy de Tressoux, the Puy de Louchadière —— a vast cemetery of volcanoes.

The young men gazed at the scene in amazement. At their feet opened the first crater of La Nugère, a deep grassy basin at the bottom of which could be seen three enormous blocks of brown lava, lifted up with the monster's last puff and then sunk once more into his throat as he expired, remaining there from century to century forever.

Gontran exclaimed: "As for me, I am going down to the bottom. I want to see how they give up the ghost — creatures of this sort. Come along, Mesdemoiselles, for a little run down the slope." And seizing Louise's arm, he dragged her after him. Charlotte followed them, running after them. Then, all of a sudden, she stopped, watched them as they flew along, jumping with their arms linked, and, turning back abruptly, she reascended toward Christiane and Paul, who were seated on the grass at the top of the declivity. When she reached them, she fell upon her knees, and, hiding her face in the young girl's robe she wore, she burst out sobbing.

Christiane, who understood what was the matter, and whom all the sorrows of others had, for some time past, pierced like wounds inflicted upon herself, flung her arms around the girl's neck, and, moved also by her tears, murmured: "Poor little thing! poor little thing!" The girl kept crying incessantly, and with her hands dropping listlessly to the ground, she tore up the grass unconscious of what she was doing.

Bretigny had risen up in order to avoid the appearance of having observed her, but this misery endured by a young girl, this distress of an innocent creature, filled him suddenly with indignation against Gontran. He, whom Christiane's deep anguish only exasperated, was touched to the bottom of his heart by a girl's first disillusion.

He came back, and kneeling down in his turn, in order to speak to her, said: "Come, calm yourself, I beg of you. They are going to return presently. They must not see you crying."

She sprang to her feet, scared by this idea that her sister might find her with tears in her eyes. Her throat remained choking with sobs, which she held back, which she swallowed down, which she sent back into her heart, filling it with more poignant grief. She faltered: "Yes — yes — it is over — it is nothing — it is over. Look here! It cannot be noticed now. Isn't that so? It cannot be noticed now."

Christiane wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief, then passed it also across her own. She said to Paul:

"Go, pray, and see what they are doing. We cannot see them any longer. They have disappeared under the blocks of lava. I will look after this little one, and console her."

Bretigny had again stood up, and in a trembling voice, said: "I am going there — and I'll bring them back, but it will be my affair — your brother — this very day — and he shall give me an explanation of his unjustifiable conduct, after what he said to us the other day." He began to descend, running toward the center of the crater.

Gontran, hurrying Louise along, had pulled her with all his strength over the steep side of the chasm, in order to hold her up, to sustain her, to put her out of breath, to make her dizzy, and to frighten her. She, carried along by his wild rush, attempted to stop him, gasping: "Oh! not so quickly — I'm going to fall — why, you're mad — I'm going to fall!"

They knocked against the blocks of lava, and remained standing up, both breathless. Then they walked round the crater staring at the big gaps which formed below a kind of cavern, with a double outlet.

When at the end of its life, the volcano had cast out this last mouthful of foam, unable to shoot it up to the sky as in former times, he had spat it forth, so that, thick and half-cooled, it fixed itself upon his dying lips.

“We must enter under there,” said Gontran. And he pushed the young girl before him. Then, when they were in the grotto, he said: “Well, Mademoiselle, this is the moment to make a declaration to you.” She was stupefied: “A declaration — to me!”

“Why, yes, in four words — l find you charming!’: “It is to my sister you should say that!”

“Oh! you know well that I am not making a declaration to your sister.”

“Come, now!”

“Look here! you would not be a woman if you did not understand that I have paid attentions to her to see what you would think of it! — and what looks you gave me on account of it. Why, you looked daggers at me! Oh! I’m quite satisfied. So then I have tried to prove to you, by all the consideration in my power, how much I thought about you.” Nobody had ever before talked to her in this way. She felt confused and delighted, her heart full of joy and pride. He went on: “I know well that I have been nasty toward your little sister. So much the worse. She is not deceived by it, never fear. You see how she remained on the hillside, how she was not inclined to follow us. Oh! she understands! she understands!”

He had caught hold of one of Louise Oriol’s hands, and he kissed the ends of her fingers softly, gallantly, murmuring: “How nice you are! How nice you are!”

She, leaning against the wall of lava, heard his heart beating with emotion without uttering a word. The thought, the sole thought, which floated in her agitated mind, was one of triumph; she had got the better of her sister! But a shadow appeared at the entrance to the grotto. Paul Bretigny was looking at them. Gontran, in a natural fashion, let fall the little hand which he had been raising to his lips, and said: “Hallo! you here? Are you alone?”

“Yes. We were surprised to see you disappearing down here.”

“Oh! well, let us go back. We were looking at this. Isn’t it rather curious?”

Louise, flushed up to her temples, went out first, and began to reascend the slope, followed by the two young men, who were talking behind in a low tone.

Christiane and Charlotte saw them approaching, and awaited them with clasped hands.

They went back to the carriage in which the Marquis had remained, and the Noah's Ark set out again for Enval.

Suddenly, in the midst of a little forest of pine-trees the landau stopped, and the coachman began to swear. An old dead ass blocked the way.

Everyone wanted to look at it, and they got down off the carriage. He lay stretched on the blackened dust, himself discolored, and so lean that his worn skin at the places where the bones projected seemed as if it would have been burst through if the animal had not breathed forth his last sigh. The entire carcass outlined itself under the gnawed hair of his sides, and his head looked enormous — a poor-looking head, with the eyes closed, tranquil now on its bed of broken stones, so tranquil, so calm in death, that it appeared happy and surprised at this new-found rest. His big ears, now relaxed, lay like rags. Two raw wounds on his knees told how often he had fallen that very day before sinking down for the last time; and another wound on the side showed the place where his master, for years and years, had been pricking him with an iron spike attached to the end of a stick, to hasten his slow pace.

The coachman, having caught its hind legs, dragged it toward a ditch, and the neck was strained as if the dead brute were going to bray once more, to give vent to a last complaint. When this was done, the man, in a rage, muttered: "What brutes, to leave this in the middle of the road!"

No other person had said a word; they again stepped into the carriage. Christiane, heartbroken, crushed, saw all the miserable life of this animal ended thus at the side of the road: the merry little donkey with his big head, in which glittered-a pair of big eyes, comical and good-tempered, with his rough hair and his long ears, gamboling about, still free, close to his mother's legs; then the first cart; the first uphill journey; the first blows; and, after that, the ceaseless and terrible walking along interminable roads, the overpowering heat of the sun, and nothing for food save a little straw, a little hay, or some branches, while all along the hard roads there was the temptation of the green meadows.

And then, again, as age came upon him, the iron spike replacing the pliant switch; and the frightful martyrdom of the animal, worn out, bereft of breath, bruised, always dragging after it excessive loads, and suffering in all its limbs, in all its old body, shabby as a beggar's cart. And then the death, the beneficent death, three paces away from the grass of the ditch, to which a man, passing by, drags it with oaths, in order to clear the road.

Christiane, for the first time, understood the wretchedness of enslaved creatures; and death appeared to her also a very good thing at times.

Suddenly they passed by a little cart, which a man nearly naked, a woman in tatters, and a lean dog were dragging along, exhausted by fatigue. The occupants of the carriage noticed that they were sweating and panting. The dog, with his tongue out, fleshless and mangy, was fastened between the wheels. There were in this cart pieces of wood picked up everywhere, stolen, no doubt, roots, stumps, broken branches, which seemed to hide other things; then over these branches rags, and on these rags a child, nothing but a head starting out through gray old scraps of cloth, a round ball with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth!

This was a family, a human family! The ass had succumbed to fatigue, and the man, without pity for his dead servant, without pushing it even into the rut, had left it in the open road, in front of any vehicles which might be coming up. Then, yoking himself in his turn with his wife in the empty shafts, they proceeded to drag it along as the beast had dragged it a short time before. They were going on. Where? To do what? Had they even a few sous? That cart — would they be dragging it forever, not being in a position to buy another animal? What would they live on? Where would they stop? They would probably die as their donkey had died.

Were they married, these beggars, or merely living together? And their child would do the same as they did, this little brute as yet unformed, concealed under sordid wrappings. Christiane was thinking on all these things; and new sensations rose up in the depths of her pitying soul. She had a glimpse of the misery of the poor.

Gontran said, all of a sudden: “I don’t know why, but I would think it a delicious thing if we were all to dine together this evening at the Café Anglais. It would give me pleasure to have a look at the boulevard.”

And the Marquis muttered: “Bah! we are well enough here. The new hotel is much better than the old one.”

They passed in front of Tournoel. A recollection of the spot made Christiane’s heart palpitate, as she recognized a certain chestnut-tree. She glanced toward Paul, who had closed his eyes, so that he did not see her meek, appealing face.

Soon they perceived two men before the carriage, two vinedressers returning from work carrying their rakes on their shoulders, and walking with the long, weary steps of laborers. The Oriol girls reddened to their very temples. It was their father and their brother, who had gone back to their vine-lands as in former times, and passed their days sweating over the soil which they had enriched, and bent double, with their buttocks in the air, kept toiling at it from morning until evening, while the fine frock-coats, carefully folded up, were at rest in the chest of drawers, and the tall hats in a press.

The two peasants bowed with a friendly smile, while everyone in the landau waved a hand in response to their "Good evening."

When they got back, just as Gontran was stepping out of the Ark to go up to the Casino, Bretigny accompanied him, and stopping on the first steps, said:

"Listen, my friend! What you're doing is not right, and I've promised your sister to speak to you about it."

"To speak about what?"

"About the way you have been acting during the last few days."

Gontran had resumed his impertinent air.

"Acting? Toward whom?"

"Toward this girl whom you are meanly jilting."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do think so — and I am right in thinking so."

"Bah! you are becoming very scrupulous on the subject of jilting."

"Ah, my friend, 'tis not a question of a loose woman here, but of a young girl."

"I know that perfectly; therefore, I have not seduced her. The difference is very marked."

They went on walking together side by side. Gontran's demeanor exasperated Paul, who replied:

"If I were not your friend, I would say some very severe things to you."

"And for my part I would not permit you to say them."

"Look here, listen to me, my friend! This young girl excites my pity. She was weeping a little while ago."

"Bah! she was weeping! Why, that's a compliment to me!"

"Come, don't trifle! What do you mean to do?"

"I? Nothing!"

"Just consider! You have gone so far with her that you have compromised her. The other day you told your sister and me that you were thinking of marrying her."

Gontran stopped in his walk, and in that mocking tone through which a menace showed itself:

"My sister and you would do better not to bother yourselves about other people's love affairs. I told you that this girl pleases me well enough, and that if I happened to marry her, I would be doing a wise and reasonable act. That's all. Now it turns out that to-day I like the elder girl better. I have changed my mind. That's a thing that happens to everyone."

Then, looking him full in the face: "What is it that you do yourself when you cease to care about a woman? Do you look after her?"

Paul Bretigny, astonished, sought to penetrate the profound meaning, the hidden sense, of these words. A little feverishness also mounted into his brain. He said in a violent tone:

"I tell you again this is not a question of a hussy or a married woman, but of a young girl whom you have deceived, if not by promises, at least by your advances. That is not, mark you, the part of a man of honor! — or of an honest man!"

Gontran, pale, his voice quivering, interrupted him: "Hold your tongue! You have already said too much — and I have listened to too much of this. In my turn, if I were not your friend I — I might show you that I have a short temper. Another word, and there is an end of everything between us forever!"

Then, slowly weighing his words, and flinging them in Paul's face, he said: "I have no explanations to offer you — I might rather have to demand them from you. There is a certain kind of indelicacy of which it is not the part of a man of honor or of an honest man to be guilty — which might take many forms — from which friendship ought to keep certain people — and which love does not excuse."

All of a sudden, changing his tone, and almost jesting, he added:

"As for this little Charlotte, if she excites your pity, and if you like her, take her, and marry her. Marriage is often a solution of difficult cases. It is a solution, and a stronghold, in which one may barricade himself against desperate obstacles. She is pretty and rich! It would be very desirable for you to finish with an accident like this! — it would be amusing for us to marry here, the same day, for I certainly will marry the elder one. I tell it to you as a secret, and don't repeat it as yet. Now don't forget that you have less right than anyone else yourself ever to talk about integrity in matters of

sentiment, and scruples of affection. And now go and look after your own affairs. I am going to look after mine. Good night!”

And suddenly turning off in another direction, he went down toward the village. Paul Bretigny, with doubts in his mind and uneasiness in his heart, returned with lingering steps to the hotel of Mont Oriol.

He tried to understand thoroughly, to recall each word, in order to determine its meaning, and he was amazed at the secret byways, shameful and unfit to be spoken of, which may be hidden in certain souls.

When Christiane asked him: “What reply did you get from Gontran?”

He faltered: “My God! he — he prefers the elder, just now. I believe he even intends to marry her — and in answer to my rather sharp reproaches he shut my mouth by allusions that are — disquieting to both of us.”

Christiane sank into a chair, murmuring: “Oh! my God! my God!”

But, as Gontran had just come in, for the bell had rung for dinner, he kissed her gaily on the forehead, asking: “Well, little sister, how do you feel now? You are not too tired?”

Then he pressed Paul’s hand, and, turning toward Andermatt, who had come in after him:

“I say, pearl of brothers-in-law, of husbands, and of friends, can you tell me exactly what an old ass dead on a road is worth?”

CHAPTER XII. A BETROTHAL

Andermatt and Doctor Latonne were walking in front of the Casino on a terrace adorned with vases made of imitation marble.

"He no longer salutes me," the doctor was saying, referring to his brother-physician Bonnefille. "He is over there in his pit, like a wild-boar. I believe he would poison our springs, if he could!"

Andermatt, with his hands behind his back and his hat — a small round hat of gray felt — thrown back over his neck, so as to let the baldness above his forehead be seen, was deeply plunged in thought. At length he said:

"Oh! in three months the Company will have knuckled under. We might buy it over at ten thousand francs. It is that wretched Bonnefille who is exciting them against me, and who makes them fancy that I will give way. But he is mistaken."

The new inspector returned: "You are aware that they have shut up their Casino since yesterday. They have no one any longer."

"Yes, I am aware of it; but we have not enough of people here ourselves. They stick in too much at the hotels; and people get bored in the hotels, my dear fellow. It is necessary to amuse the bathers, to distract them, to make them think the season too short. Those staying at our Mont Oriol hotel come every evening, because they are quite near, but the others hesitate and remain in their abodes. It is a question of routes — nothing else. Success always depends on certain imperceptible causes which we ought to know how to discover. It is necessary that the routes leading to a place of recreation should be a source of recreation in themselves, the commencement of the pleasure which one will be enjoying presently.

"The ways which lead to this place are bad, stony, hard; they cause fatigue. When a route which goes to any place, to which one has a vague desire of paying a visit, is pleasant, wide, and full of shade in the daytime, easy and not too steep at night, one selects it naturally in preference to others. If you knew how the body preserves the recollection of a thousand things which the mind has not taken the trouble to retain! I believe this is how the memory of animals is constructed. Have you felt too hot when repairing to such a place? Have you tired your feet on badly broken stones?

Have you found an ascent too rough, even while you were thinking of something else? If so, you will experience invincible repugnance to revisiting that spot. You were chatting with a friend; you took no notice of the slight annoyances of the journey; you were looking at nothing, remarking notice; but your legs, your muscles, your lungs, your whole body have not forgotten, and they say to the mind, when it wants to take them along the same route: 'No, I won't go; I have suffered too much there.' And the mind yields to this refusal without disputing it, submitting to this mute language of the companions who carry it along.

"So then, we want fine pathways, which comes back to saying that I require the bits of ground belonging to that donkey of a Père Oriol. But patience! Ha! with reference to that point, Mas-Roussel has become the proprietor of his own chalet on the same conditions as Remusot. It is a trifling sacrifice for which he will amply indemnify us. Try, therefore, to find out exactly what are Cloche's intentions."

"He'll do just the same thing as the others," said the physician. "But there is something else, of which I have been thinking for the last few days, and which we have completely forgotten — it is the meteorological bulletin."

"What meteorological bulletin?"

"In the big Parisian newspapers. It is indispensable, this is! It is necessary that the temperature of a thermal station should be better, less variable, more uniformly mild than that of the neighboring and rival stations. You subscribe to the meteorological bulletin in the leading organs of opinion, and I will send every evening by telegraph the atmospheric situation.

I will do it in such a way that the average arrived at when the year is at an end may be higher than the best mean temperatures of the surrounding stations. The first thing that meets our eyes when we open the big newspapers are the temperatures of Vichy, of Royat, of Mont Doré, of Chatel-Guyon, and other places during the summer season, and, during the winter season, the temperatures of Cannes, Mentone, Nice, Saint Raphael. It is necessary that the weather should always be hot and always fine in these places, in order that the Parisian might say: 'Christi! how lucky the people are who go down there!'"

Andermatt exclaimed: "Upon my honor, you're right. Why have I never thought of that? I will attend to it this very day. With regard to useful things, have you written to Professors Larenard and Pascalis? There are two men I would like very much to have here."

“Unapproachable, my dear President — unless — unless they are satisfied of themselves after many trials that our waters are of a superior character. But, as far as they are concerned, you will accomplish nothing by persuasion — by anticipation.”

They passed by Paul and Gontran, who had come to take coffee after luncheon. Other bathers made their appearance, especially men, for the women, on rising from the table, always went up to their rooms for an hour or two. Petrus Martel was looking after his waiters, and crying out: “A kummel, a nip of brandy, a glass of aniseed cordial,” in the same rolling, deep voice which he would assume an hour later while conducting rehearsals, and giving the keynote to the young *première.*

Andermatt stopped a few moments for a short chat with the two young men; then he resumed his promenade by the side of the inspector.

Gontran, with legs crossed and folded arms, lolling in his chair, with the nape of his neck against the back of it, and his eyes and his cigar facing the sky, was puffing in a state of absolute contentment.

Suddenly, he asked: “‘Would you mind taking a turn, presently, in the valley of Sans-Souci? The girls will be there.”

Paul hesitated; then, after some reflection: “Yes, I am quite willing.” Then he added: “Is your affair progressing?”

“Egad, it is! Oh! I have a hold of her. She won’t escape me now.”

Gontran had, by this time, taken his friend into his confidence, and told him, day by day, how he was going on and how much ground he had gained. He even got him to be present, as a confederate, at his appointments, for he had managed to obtain appointments with Louise Oriol by a little bit of ingenuity.

After their promenade at the Puy de la Nugère, Christiane put an end to these excursions by not going out at all, and so rendered it more and more difficult for the lovers to meet. Her brother, put out at first by this attitude on her part, bethought him of some means of extricating himself from this predicament. Accustomed to Parisian morals, according to which women are regarded by men of his stamp as game, the chase of which is often no easy one, he had in former days made use of many artifices in order to gain access to those for whom he had conceived a passion. He knew better than anyone else how to make use of pimps, to discover those who were accommodating through interested motives, and to determine with a single glance the men or women who were disposed to aid him in his designs.

The unconscious support of Christiane having suddenly been withdrawn from him, he had looked about him for the requisite connecting link, the “pliant nature,” as he expressed it himself, whereby he could replace his sister; and his choice speedily fixed itself on Doctor Honorat’s wife. Many reasons pointed at her as a suitable person. In the first place, her husband, closely associated with the Oriols, had been for the past twenty years attending this family. He had been present at the birth of the children, had dined with them every Sunday, and had entertained them at his own table every Tuesday. His wife, a fat old woman of the lower-middle class, trying to pass as a lady, full of pretension, easy to overcome through her vanity, was sure to lend both hands to every desire of the Comte de Ravenel, whose brother-in-law owned the establishment of Mont Oriol.

Besides, Gontran, who was a good judge of a go-between, had satisfied himself that this woman was naturally well adapted for the part, by merely seeing her walking through the street.

“She has the physique,” was his reflection, “and when one has the physique for an employment, one has the soul required for it, too!”

Accordingly, he made his way into her abode, one day, after having accompanied her husband to his own door. He sat down, chatted, complimented the lady, and, when the dinner-bell rang, he said, as he rose up: “You have a very savory smell here. You cook better than they do at the hotel.”

Madame Honorat, swelling with pride, faltered: “Good heavens! if I might make so bold — if I might make so bold, Monsieur le Comte, as— “

“If you might make so bold as what, dear Madame?”

“As to ask you to share our humble meal.” “Faith — faith, I would say ‘yes.’”

The doctor, ill at ease, muttered: “But we have nothing, nothing — soup, a joint of beef, and a chicken, that’s all!”

Gontran laughed: “Thai’s quite enough for me. I accept the invitation.”

And he dined at the Honorat household. The fat woman rose up, went to take the dishes out of the servant-maid’s hands, in order that the latter might not spill the sauce over the tablecloth, and, in spite of her husband’s impatience, insisted on attending at table herself.

The Comte congratulated her on the excellence of the cooking, on the good house she kept, on her attention to the duties of hospitality, and he left her inflamed with enthusiasm.

He returned to leave his card, accepted a fresh invitation, and thenceforth made his way constantly to Madame Honorat’s house, to which the Oriol girls had paid visits frequently also for many years as neighbors and friends.

So then he spent hours there, in the midst of the three ladies, attentive to both sisters, but accentuating clearly, from day to day, his marked preference for Louise.

The jealousy that had sprung up between the girls since the time when he had begun to make love to Charlotte had assumed an aspect of spiteful hostility on the side of the elder girl and of disdain on the side of the younger. Louise, with her reserved air, imported into her reticences and her demure ways in Gontran’s society much more coquetry and encouragement than the other had formerly shown with all her free and joyous unconstraint. Charlotte, wounded to the quick, concealed through pride the pain that she endured, pretended not to see or hear anything of what was happening around her, and continued her visits to Madame Honorat’s house with a beautiful appearance of indifference to all these lovers’ meetings. She would not remain behind at her own abode lest people might think that her heart was sore, that she was weeping, that she was making way for her sister.

Gontran, too proud of his achievement to throw a veil over it, could not keep himself from talking about it to Paul. And Paul, thinking it amusing, began to laugh. He had, besides, since the first equivocal remarks of his friend, resolved not to interfere in his affairs, and he often asked himself with uneasiness: “Can it be possible that he knows something about Christiane and me?”

He knew Gontran too well not to believe him capable of shutting his eyes to an intrigue on the part of his sister. But then, why did he not let it be understood sooner that he guessed it or was aware of it? Gontran was, in fact, one of those in whose opinion every woman in society ought to have a lover or lovers, one of those for whom the family is merely a society of mutual help, for whom morality is an attitude that is indispensable in order to veil the different appetites which nature has implanted in us, and for whom worldly honor is a front behind which amiable vices should be hidden. Moreover, if he had egged on his dear sister to marry Andermatt was it not with the vague, if not clearly-defined, idea that this Jew might be utilized, in every way, by all the family? — and he would probably have despised Christiane for being faithful to this husband of convenience, of utility, just as much as he would have despised himself for not borrowing freely from his brother-in-law’s purse.

Paul pondered over all this, and it disturbed his modern Don Quixote’s soul, which, in any event, was disposed toward compromise. He had, therefore, become very reserved with this enigmatic friend of his. When, accordingly, Gontran told him the use that he was making of Madame Honorat, Bretigny burst out laughing; and he had even, for some time past, allowed himself to be brought to that lady’s house, and found great pleasure in chatting with Charlotte there.

The doctor’s wife lent herself, with the best grace in the world, to the part she was made to play, and offered them tea about five o’clock, like the Parisian ladies, with little cakes manufactured by her own hands. On the first occasion when Paul made his way into this household, she welcomed him as if he were an old friend, made him sit down, removed his hat herself, in spite of his protests, and placed it beside the clock upon the mantelpiece. Then, eager, bustling, going from one to the other, tremendously big and fat, she asked:

“Do you feel inclined for a little dinner?”

Gontran told funny stories, joked, and laughed quite at his ease. Then, he took Louise into the recess of a window under the troubled eyes of Charlotte.

Madame Honorat, who sat chatting with Paul, said to him in a maternal tone:

“These dear children, they come here to have a few minutes’ conversation with one another. ’Tis very innocent — isn’t it, Monsieur Bretigny?”

“Oh! very innocent, Madame!”

When he came the next time, she familiarly addressed him as “Monsieur Paul,” treating him more or less as a crony.

And from that time forth, Gontran told him, with a sort of teasing liveliness, all about the complaisant behavior of the doctor’s wife, to whom he had said, the evening before: “Why do you never go out for a walk along the Sans-Souci road?”

“But we will go, M. le Comte — we will go.”‘Say, to-morrow about three o’clock.”

“To-morrow, about three o’clock, M. le Comte.” And Gontran explained to Paul: “You understand that in this drawing-room, I cannot say anything of a very confidential nature to the elder girl before the younger. But in the wood I can go on before or remain behind with Louise. So then you will come?”

“Yes, I have no objection.”

“Let us go on then.”

And they rose up, and set forth at a leisurely pace along the highroad; then, having passed through La Roche Pradière, they turned to the left and descended into the wooded glen in the midst of tangled brushwood. When they had passed the little river, they sat down at the side of the path and waited.

The three ladies soon arrived, walking in single file, Louise in front, and Madame Honorat in the rear.

They exhibited surprise on both sides at having met in this way. Gontran exclaimed: “Well, now, what a good idea this was of yours to come along here!” The doctor’s wife replied: “Yes, the idea was mine.”

They continued their walk. Louise and Gontran gradually quickened their steps, went on in advance, and rambled so far together that they disappeared from view at a turn of the narrow path.

The fat lady, who was breathing hard, murmured, as she cast an indulgent eye in their direction: “Bah! they’re young — they have legs. As for me, I can’t keep up with them.”

Charlotte exclaimed: “Wait! I’m going to call them back!”

She was rushing away. The doctor’s wife held her back: “Don’t interfere with them, child, if they want to chat! It would not be nice to disturb them. They will come back all right by themselves.”

And she sat down on the grass, under the shade of a pine-tree, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief. Charlotte cast a look of distress toward Paul, a look imploring and sorrowful.

He understood, and said: “Well, Mademoiselle, we are going to let Madame take a rest, and we’ll both go and overtake your sister.”

She answered impetuously: “Oh, yes, Monsieur.” Madame Honorat made no objection: “Go, my children, go. As for me, I’ll wait for you here. Don’t be too long.”

And they started off in their turn. They walked quickly at first, as they could see no sign of the two others, and hoped to come up with them; then, after a few minutes, it struck them that Louise and Gontran might have turned off to the right or to the left through the wood, and Charlotte began to call them in a trembling and undecided voice. There was no response. She exclaimed: “Oh! good heavens, where can they be?”

Paul felt himself overcome once more by that profound pity, by that sympathetic tenderness toward her which had previously taken possession of him on the edge of the crater of La Nugère.

He did not know what to say to this afflicted young creature. He felt a longing, a paternal and passionate longing to take her in his arms, to embrace her, to find sweet and consoling words with which to soothe her. But what words?

She looked about on every side, searched the branches with wild glances, listening to the faintest sounds, murmuring: “I think that they are here — No, there — Do you hear nothing?”

“No, Mademoiselle, I don’t hear anything. The best thing we can do is to wait here.”

“Oh! heavens, no. We must find them!”

He hesitated for a few seconds, and then said to her in a low tone: “This, then, causes you much pain?”

She raised toward his her eyes, in which there was a look of wild alarm, while the gathering tears filled them with a transparent watery mist, as yet held back by the lids, over which drooped the long, brown lashes. She strove to speak, but could not, and did not venture to open her lips. But her heart swollen, choked with grief, was yearning to pour itself out.

He went on: “So then you loved him very much. He is not worthy of your love. Take heart!”

She could not restrain herself any longer, and hiding with her hands the tears that now gushed forth from her eyes, she sobbed: “No! — no! — I do not love him — he — it is too base to have acted as he did. He made a fool of me — it is too base — too cowardly — but, all the same, it does pain me — a great deal — for it is hard — very hard — oh! yes. But what grieves me most is that my sister — my sister does not care for me any longer — she who has been even more wicked than he was! I feel that she no longer cares for me — not a bit — that she hates me —— I have only her — I have no one else — and I, I have done nothing!”

He only saw her ear and her neck with its young flesh sinking into the collar of her dress under the light material she wore till it was lost in the curves of her bust. And he felt himself overpowered with compassion, with sympathy, carried away by that impetuous desire of self-devotion which got the better of him every time that a woman touched his heart. And that heart of his, responsive to outbursts of enthusiasm, was excited by this innocent sorrow, agitating, ingenuous, and cruelly charming.

He stretched forth his hand toward her with an unstudied movement such as one might use in order to caress, to calm a child, and he drew it round her waist from behind over her shoulder. Then he felt her heart beating with rapid throbs, as he might have heard the little heart of a bird that he had caught. And this beating, continuous, precipitate, sent a thrill all over his arm into his heart, accelerating its movements. And he felt those quick heart-beats coming from her and penetrating him through his flesh, his muscles, and his nerves, so that between them there was now only one heart wounded by the same pain, agitated by the same palpitation, living the same life, like clocks connected by a string at some distance from one another and made to keep time together second by second.

But suddenly she uncovered her flushed face, still tear-dimmed, quickly wiped it, and said:

“Come, I ought not to have spoken to you about this. I am foolish. Let us go back at once to Madame Honorat, and forget. Do you promise me?”

“I do promise you.”

She gave him her hand. “I have confidence in you. I believe you are very honest!”

They turned back. He lifted her up in crossing the stream, just as he had lifted up Christiane, the year before. How often had he passed along this path with her in the days when he adored her! He reflected, wondering at his own changed feelings: “How short a time this passion lasted!”

Charlotte, laying a finger on his arm, murmured: “Madame Honorat is asleep. Let us sit down without making a noise.”

Madame Honorat was, indeed, slumbering, with her back to a pine-tree, her handkerchief over her face and her hands crossed over her stomach. They seated themselves a few paces away from her, and refrained from speaking in order not to awaken her. Then the stillness of the wood was so profound that it became as painful to them as actual suffering. Nothing could be heard save the water gurgling over the stones, a little lower down, then those imperceptible quiverings of insects passing by, those light buzzings of flies or of other living creatures whose movements made the dead leaves flutter.

Where then were Louise and Gontran? What were they doing? All at once, the sound of their voices reached them from a distance. They were returning. Madame Honorat woke up and looked astonished.

“What! you are here again! I did not notice you coming back. And the others, have you found them?”

Paul replied: “There they are! They are coming.”

They recognized Gontran’s laughter. This laughter relieved Charlotte from a crushing weight, which had oppressed her mind — she could not have explained why.

They were soon able to distinguish the pair. Gontran had almost broken into a running pace, dragging by the arm the young girl, who was quite flushed. And, even before they had come up, so great a hurry was he in to tell his story, he shouted:

“You don’t know what we surprised. I give you a thousand guesses to discover it! The handsome Doctor Mazelli along with the daughter of the illustrious Professor Cloche, as Will would say, the pretty widow with the red hair. Oh! yes, indeed — surprised, you understand? He was embracing her, the scamp. Oh! yes — oh! yes.”

Madame Honorat, at this immoderate display of gaiety, made a dignified movement:

“Oh! M. le Comte, think of these young ladies!”

Gontran made a respectful obeisance.

“You are perfectly right, dear Madame, to recall me to the proprieties. All your inspirations are excellent.”

Then, in order that they might not be all seen going back together, the two young men bowed to the ladies, and returned through the wood to the village.

“Well?” asked Paul.

“Well, I told her that I adored her and that I would be delighted to marry her.”

“And she said?”

“She said, with charming discretion, ‘That concerns my father. It is to him that I will give my answer.’”

“So then you are going to— “

“To intrust my ambassador Andermatt at once with the official application. And if the old boor makes any row about it, I’ll compromise his daughter with a splash.”

And, as Andermatt was again engaged in conversation with Doctor Latonne on the terrace of the Casino, Gontran stopped here, and immediately made his brother-in-law acquainted with the situation.

Paul went off along the road to Riom. He wanted to be alone so much did he find himself invaded by that agitation of the entire mind and body into which every meeting with a woman casts a man who is on the point of falling in love. For some time past he had felt, without quite realizing it, the penetrating and youthful fascination of this forsaken girl. He found her so nice, so good, so simple, so upright, so innocent, that from the first he had been moved by compassion for her, by that tender compassion with which the sorrows of women always inspire us. Then, when he had seen her frequently, he had allowed to bud forth in his heart that grain, that tiny grain, of tenderness which they sow in us so quickly, and which grows to such a height. And now, for the last hour especially, he was beginning to feel himself possessed, to feel within him that constant presence of the absent which is the first sign of love. He proceeded along the road, haunted by the remembrance of her glance, by the sound of her voice, by the way in which she smiled or wept, by the gait with which she walked, even by the color and the flutter of her dress. And he said to himself:

“I believe I am bitten. I know it. It is annoying, this! The best thing, perhaps, would be to go back to Paris. Deuce take it, it is a young girl! However, I can’t make her my mistress.”

Then, he began dreaming about it, just as he had dreamed about Christiane, the year before. How different was this one, too, from all the women he had hitherto known, born and brought up in the city, different even from those young maidens sophisticated from their childhood by the coquetry of their mothers or the coquetry which shows itself in the streets. There was in her none of the artificiality of the woman prepared for seduction, nothing studied in her words, nothing conventional in her actions, nothing deceitful in her looks. Not only was she a being fresh and pure, but she came of a primitive race; she was a true daughter of the soil at the moment when she was about to be transformed into a woman of the city.

And he felt himself stirred up, pleading for her against that vague resistance which still struggled in his breast. The forms of heroines in sentimental novels passed before his mind’s eye — the creations of Walter Scott, of Dickens, and of George Sand, exciting the more his imagination, always goaded by ideal pictures of women.

Gontran passed judgment on him thus: “Paul! he is a pack-horse with a Cupid on his back. When he flings one on the ground, another jumps up in its place.” But Bretigny saw that night was falling. He had been a long time walking. He returned to the village.

As he was passing in front of the new baths, he saw Andermatt and the two Oriols surveying and measuring the vinefields; and he knew from their gestures that they were disputing in an excited fashion.

An hour afterward, Will, entering the drawingroom, where the entire family had assembled, said to the Marquis: “My dear father-in-law, I have to inform you that your son Gontran is going to marry, in six weeks or two months, Mademoiselle Louise Oriol.”

M. de Ravenel was startled: “Gontran? You ‘say?”

“I say that he is going to marry in six weeks or two months, with your consent, Mademoiselle Louise Oriol, who will be very rich.”

Thereupon the Marquis said simply: “Good heavens! if he likes it, I have no objection.”

And the banker related how he had dealt with the old countryman. As soon as he had learned from the Comte that the young girl would consent, he wanted to obtain, at one interview, the vinedresser’s assent without giving him time to prepare any of his dodges. He accordingly hurried to Oriol’s house, and found him making up his accounts with great difficulty, assisted by Colosse, who was adding figures together with his fingers.

Seating himself: “I would like to drink of your excellent wine,” said he.

When big Colosse had returned with the glasses and the jug brimming over, he asked whether Mademoiselle Louise had come home; then he begged of them to send for her. When she stood facing him, he rose, and, making her a low bow:

“Mademoiselle, will you regard me at this moment as a friend to whom one may say everything? Is it not so? Well, I am charged with a very delicate mission with reference to you. My brother-in-law, Comte Raoul-Olivier-Gontran de Ravenel, is smitten with you — a thing for which I commend him — and he has commissioned me to ask you, in the presence of your family, whether you will consent to become his wife.”

Taken by surprise in this way, she turned toward her father her eyes, which betrayed her confusion. And Père Oriol, scared, looked at his son, his usual counselor, while Colosse looked at Andermatt, who went on, with a certain amount of pomposity:

"You understand, Mademoiselle, that I am only intrusted with this mission on the terms of an immediate reply being given to my brother-in-law. He is quite conscious of the fact that you may not care for him, and in that case he will quit this neighborhood to-morrow, never to come back to it again. I am aware, besides, that you know him sufficiently to say to me, a simple intermediary, 'I consent,' or 'I do not consent.'"

She hung down her head, and, blushing, but resolute, she faltered: "I consent, Monsieur."

Then she fled so quickly that she knocked herself against the door as she went out.

Thereupon, Andermatt sat down, and, pouring out a glass of wine after the fashion of peasants:

"Now we are going to talk about business," said he. And, without admitting the possibility even of hesitation, he attacked the question of the dowry, relying on the declarations made to him by the vinedresser three months before. He estimated at three hundred thousand francs, in addition to expectations, the actual fortune of Gontran, and he let it be understood that if a man like the Comte de Ravenel consented to ask for the hand of Oriol's daughter, a very charming young lady in other respects, it was unquestionable that the girl's family were bound to show their appreciation of this honor by a sacrifice of money.

Then the countryman, much disconcerted, but flattered — almost disarmed, tried to make a fight for his property. The discussion was a long one. An admission on Andermatt's part had, however, rendered it easy from the start:

"We don't ask for ready money nor for bills — nothing but the lands, those which you have already indicated as forming Mademoiselle Louise's dowry, in addition to some others which I am going to point you."

The prospect of not having to pay money, that money slowly heaped together, brought into the house franc after franc, sou after sou, that good money, white or yellow, worn by the hands, the purses, the pockets, the tables of *cafés,* the deep drawers of old presses, that money in whose ring was told the history of so many troubles, cares, fatigues, labors, so sweet to the heart, to the eyes, to the fingers of the peasant, dearer than the cow, than the vine, than the field, than the house, that money harder to part with sometimes than life itself — the prospect of not seeing it go v/ith the girl brought on immediately a great calm, a desire to conciliate, a secret but restrained joy, in the souls of the father and the son.

They continued the discussion, however, in order to keep a few more acres of soil. On the table was spread out a minute plan of Mont Oriol; and they marked one by one with a cross the portions assigned to Louise. It took an hour for Andermatt to secure the last two pieces. Then, in order that there might not be any deceit on one side or the other, they went over all the places on the plan. After that, they identified carefully all the slices designated by crosses, and marked them afresh.

But Andermatt got uneasy, suspecting that the two Oriols were capable of denying, at their next interview, a part of the grants to which they had consented and would seek to take back ends of vinefields, corners useful for his project; and he thought of a practical and certain means of giving definiteness to the agreement.

An idea crossed his mind, made him smile at first, then appeared to him excellent, although singular.

“If you like,” said he, “we’ll write it all out so as not to forget it later on.”

And as they were entering the village, he stopped before a tobacconist’s shop to buy two stamped sheets of paper. He knew that the list of lands drawn up on these leaves with their legal aspect would take an almost inviolable character in the peasant’s eyes, for these leaves would represent the law, always invisible and menacing, vindicated by gendarmes, fines, and imprisonment.

Then he wrote on one sheet and copied on the other:

“In pursuance of the promise of marriage exchanged between Comte Gontran de Ravenel and Mademoiselle Louise Oriol, M. Oriol, Senior, surrenders as a dowry to his daughter the lands designated below— “

And he enumerated them minutely, with the figures attached to them in the register of lands for the district.

Then, having dated and signed the document, he made Père Oriol affix his signature, after the latter had exacted in turn a written statement of the intended husband’s fortune, and he went back to the hotel with the document in his pocket.

Everyone laughed at his narrative and Gontran most of all. Then the Marquis said to his son with a lofty air of dignity: “We shall both go this evening to pay a visit to this family, and I shall myself renew the application previously made by my son-in-law in order that it may be more regular.”

CHAPTER XIII. PAUL CHANGES HIS MIND

GONTRAN made an admirable *fiance,* as I courteous as he was assiduous. With the aid of Andermatt's purse, he made presents to everyone; and he constantly visited the young girl, either at her own house, or that of Madame Honorat. Paul nearly always accompanied him now, in order to have the opportunity of meeting Charlotte, saying to himself, after each visit, that he would see her no more. She had bravely resigned herself to her sister's marriage, and she referred to it with apparent unconcern, as if it did not cause her the slightest anxiety. Her character alone seemed a little altered, more sedate, less open. While Gontran was talking soft nothings to Louise in a half-whisper in a corner, Bretigny conversed with her in a serious fashion, and allowed himself to be slowly vanquished, allowed this fresh love to inundate his soul like a flowing tide. He knew what was happening to him, and gave himself up to it, thinking: "Bah! when the moment arrives. I will make my escape — that's all."

When he left her, he would go up to see Christiane, who now lay from morning till night stretched on a long chair. At the door, he could not help feeling nervous and irritated, prepared beforehand for those light quarrels to which weariness gives birth. All that she said, all that she was thinking of, annoyed him, even ere she had opened her lips. Her appearance of suffering, her resigned attitude, her looks of reproach and of supplication, made words of anger rise to his lips, which he repressed through good-breeding; and, even when by her side, he kept before his mind the constant memory, the fixed image, of the young girl whom he had just quitted.

As Christiane, tormented with seeing so little of him, overwhelmed him with questions as to how he spent his days, he invented stories, to which she listened attentively, seeking to find out whether he was thinking of some other woman. The powerlessness which she felt in herself to keep a hold on this man, the powerlessness to pour into him a little of that love with which she was tortured, the physical powerlessness to fascinate him still, to give herself to him, to win him back by caresses, since she could not regain him by the tender intimacies of love, made her suspect the worst, without knowing on what to fix her fears.

She vaguely realized that some danger was lowering over her, some great unknown danger. And she was filled with undefined jealousy, jealousy of everything — of women whom she saw passing by her window, and whom she thought charming, without even having any proof that Bretigny had ever spoken to them.

She asked of him: “Have you noticed a very pretty woman, a brunette, rather tall, whom I saw a little while ago, and who must have arrived here within the past few days?”

When he replied, “No, I don’t know her,” she at once jumped to the conclusion that he was lying, turned pale, and went on: “But it is not possible that you have not seen her. She appears to me very beautiful.”

He was astonished at her persistency. “I assure you I have not seen her. I’ll try to come across her.”

She thought: “Surely it must be she!” She felt persuaded, too, on certain days, that he was hiding some intrigue in the locality, that he had sent for his mistress, an actress perhaps. And she questioned everybody, her father, her brother, and her husband, about all the women young and desirable, whom they observed in the neighborhood of Enval. If only she could have walked about, and seen for herself, she might have reassured herself a little; but the almost complete loss of motion which her condition forced upon her now made her endure an intolerable martyrdom.

When she spoke to Paul, the tone of her voice alone revealed her anguish, and intensified his nervous impatience with this love, which for him was at an end. He could no longer talk quietly about anything with her save the approaching marriage of Gontran, a subject which enabled him to pronounce Charlotte’s name, and to give vent to his thoughts aloud about the young girl. And it was a mysterious source of delight to him even to hear Christiane articulating that name, praising the grace and all the qualities of this little maiden, compassionating her, regretting that her brother should have sacrificed her, and expressing a desire that some man, some noble heart, should appreciate her, love her, and marry her.

He said: “Oh! yes, Gontran acted foolishly there. She is perfectly charming, that young girl.”

Christiane, without any misgiving, echoed: “Perfectly charming. She is a pearl! a piece of perfection!”

Never had she thought that a man like Paul could love a little maid like this, or that he would be likely to marry her. She had no apprehensions save of his mistresses. And it was a singular phenomenon of the heart that praise of Charlotte from Christiane's lips assumed in his eyes an extreme value, excited his love, whetted his desire, and surrounded the young girl with an irresistible attraction.

Now, one day, when he called at Madame Honorat's house to meet there the Oriol girls, they found Doctor Mazelli installed there as if he was at home. He stretched forth both hands to the two young men, with that Italian smile of his, which seemed to give away his entire heart with every word and every movement.

Gontran and he were linked by a friendship at once familiar and futile, made up of secret affinities, of hidden likenesses, of a sort of confederacy of instincts, rather than any real affection or confidence.

The Comte asked: "What about your little blonde of the Sans-Souci wood?"

The Italian smiled: "Bah! we are on terms of indifference toward one another. She is one of those women who offer everything and give nothing."

And they began to chat. The handsome physician performed certain offices for the young girls, especially for Charlotte. When addressing women, he manifested a perpetual adoration in his voice, his gestures, and his looks. His entire person, from head to foot, said to them, "I love you" with an eloquence in his attitude which never failed to win their favor. He displayed the graces of an actress, the light pirouettes of a *danseuse,* the supple movements of a juggler, an entire science of seduction natural and acquired, of which he constantly made use.

Paul, when returning to the hotel with Gontran, exclaimed in a tone of sullen vexation: "What does this charlatan come to that house for?"

The Comte replied quietly: "How can you ever tell when dealing with such adventurers? These sort of people slip in everywhere. This fellow must be tired of his vagabond existence, and of giving way to every caprice of his Spaniard, of whom he is rather the valet than the physician — and perhaps something more. He is looking about him. Professor Cloche's daughter was a good catch — he has failed with her, he says. The second of the Oriol girls would not be less valuable to him. He is making the attempt, feeling his way, smelling about, sounding. He would become co-proprietor of the waters, would try to knock over that idiot, Latonne, would in any case get an excellent practice here every summer for himself, which would last him over the winter. Faith! this is his plan exactly — no doubt of it!"

A dull rage, a jealous animosity, was aroused in Paul's heart. A voice exclaimed: "Hey! hey!" It was Mazelli, who had overtaken them. Bretigny said to him, with aggressive irony: "Where are you rushing so quickly, doctor? One would say that you were pursuing fortune." The Italian smiled, and, without stopping, but skipping backward, he plunged, with a mimic's graceful movement, his hands into his two pockets, quickly turned them out and showed them, both empty, holding them wide between two fingers by the ends of the seams. Then he said: "I have not got hold of it yet." And, turning on his toes, he rushed away like a man in a great hurry.

They found him again several times, on the following days, at Doctor Honorat's house, where he made himself useful to the three ladies by a thousand graceful little services, by the same clever tactics which he had no doubt adopted when dealing with the Duchess. He knew how to do everything to perfection, from paying compliments to making macaroni. He was, moreover, an excellent cook, and protecting himself from stains by means of a servant's blue apron, and wearing a chef's cap made of paper on his head, while he sang Neapolitan ditties in Italian, he did the work of a scullion, without appearing a bit ridiculous, amusing and fascinating everybody, down to the half-witted housekeeper, who said of him: "He is a marvel!"

His plans were soon obvious, and Paul no longer had any doubt that he was trying to get Charlotte to fall in love with him. He seemed to be succeeding in this. He was so profuse of flattery, so eager, so artful in striving to please, that the young girl's face had, when she looked at him, that air of contentment which indicates that the heart is gratified.

Paul, in his turn, without being even able to account to himself for his conduct, assumed the attitude of a lover, and set himself up as a rival. When he saw the doctor with Charlotte, he would come on the scene, and, with his more direct manner, exert himself to win the young girl's affections. He showed himself straigthforward and sympathetic, fraternal, devoted, repeating to her, with the sincerity of a friend, in a tone so frank that one could scarcely see in it an avowal of love: "I am very fond of you; cheer up!"

Mazelli, astonished at this unexpected rivalry, had recourse to all his powers of captivation; and, when Bretigny, bitten with jealousy, that naïve jealousy which takes possession of a man when he is dealing with any woman, even without being in love with her, provided only he has taken a fancy to her — when, filled with this natural violence, he became aggressive and haughty, the other, more pliant, always master of himself, replied with sly allusions, witticisms, well-turned and mocking compliments.

It was a daily warfare which they both waged fiercely, without either of them perhaps having a well-defined object in view. They did not want to give way, like two dogs who have gained a grip of the same quarry.

Charlotte had recovered her good humor, but along with it she now exhibited a more biting waggery, a certain sphinx-like attitude, less candor in her smile and in her glance. One would have said that Gontran's desertion had educated her, prepared her for possible deceptions, disciplined, and armed her.

She played off her two admirers against one another in a sly and dexterous fashion, saying to each of them what she thought necessary, without letting the one fall foul of the other, without ever letting the one suppose that she preferred the other, laughing slightly at each of them in turn in the presence of his rival, leaving them an equal match without appearing even to take either of them seriously. But all this was done simply, in the manner of a schoolgirl rather than in that of a coquette, with that mischievous air exhibited by young girls which sometimes renders them irresistible.

Mazelli, however, seemed suddenly to be having the advantage. He had apparently become more intimate with her, as if a secret understanding had been established between them. While talking to her, he played lightly with her parasol and with one of the ribbons of her dress, which appeared to Paul, as it were, an act of moral possession, and exasperated him so much that he longed to box the Italian's ears.

But, one day, at Père Oriol's house, while Bretigny was chatting with Louise and Gontran, and, at the same time, keeping his eye fixed on Mazelli, who was telling Charlotte in a subdued voice some things that made her smile, he suddenly saw her blush with such an appearance of embarrassment as to leave no doubt for one moment on his mind that the other had spoken of love. She had cast down her eyes, and ceased to smile, but still continued listening; and Paul, who felt disposed to make a scene, said to Gontran: "Will you have the goodness to come out with me for five minutes?"

The Comte made his excuses to his betrothed, and followed his friend.

When they were in the street, Paul exclaimed: “My dear fellow, this wretched Italian must, at any cost, be prevented from inveigling this girl, who is defenseless against him.”

“What do you wish me to do?”

“To warn her of the fact that he is an adventurer.”

“Hey, my dear boy, those things are no concern of mine.”

“After all, she is to be your sister-in-law.”

“Yes, but there is nothing to show me conclusively that Mazelli has guilty designs upon her. He exhibits the same gallantry toward all women, and he has never said or done anything improper.”

“Well, if you don’t want to take it on yourself, I’ll do it, although it concerns me less assuredly than it does you.”

“So then you are in love with Charlotte?”

“I? No — but I see clearly through this blackguard’s game.”

“My dear fellow, you are mixing yourself up in matters of a delicate nature, and — unless you are in love with Charlotte— “

“No — I am not in love with her — but I am hunting down imposters, that’s what I mean!”

“May I ask what you intend to do?”

“To thrash this beggar.”

“Good! the best way to make her fall in love with him. You fight with him, and whether he wounds you, or you wound him, he will become a hero in her eyes.”

“What would you do then?”

“In your place?”

“In my place.”

“I would speak to the girl as a friend. She has great confidence in you. Well, I would say to her simply in a few words what these hangers-on of society are. You know very well how to say these things. You possess an eloquent tongue. And I would make her understand, first, why he is attached to the Spaniard; secondly, why he attempted to lay siege to Professor Cloche’s daughter; thirdly, why, not having succeeded in this effort, he is striving, in the last place, to make a conquest of Mademoiselle Charlotte Oriol.”

“Why do you not do that, yourself, who will be her brother-in-law?”

“Because — because — on account of what passed between us — come! I can’t.”

“That’s quite right. I am going to speak to her.”

“Do you want me to procure for you a private conversation with her immediately?”

“Why, yes, assuredly.”

“Good! Walk about for ten minutes. I am going to carry off Louise and Mazelli, and, when you come back, you will find the other alone.”

Paul Bretigny rambled along the side of the Enval gorges, thinking over the best way of opening this difficult conversation.

He found Charlotte Oriol alone, indeed, on his return, in the cold, whitewashed parlor of the paternal abode; and he said to her, as he sat down beside her: “It is I, Mademoiselle, who asked Gontran to procure me this interview with you.”

She looked at him with her clear eyes: “Why, pray?”

“Oh! it is not to pay you insipid compliments in the Italian fashion. It is to speak to you as a friend —— as a very devoted friend, who owes you good advice.”

“Tell me what it is.”

He took up the subject in a roundabout style, dwelt upon his own experience, and upon her inexperience, so as to lead gradually by discreet but explicit phrases to a reference to those adventurers who are everywhere going in quest of fortune, taking advantage with their professional skill of every ingenuous and good-natured being, man or woman, whose purses or hearts they explored.

She turned rather pale as she listened to him.

Then she said: “I understand and I don’t understand. You are speaking of some one — of whom?”

“I am speaking of Doctor Mazelli.”

Then, she lowered her eyes, and remained a few seconds without replying; after this, in a hesitating voice: “You are so frank that I will be the same with you. Since — since my sister’s marriage has been arranged, I have become a little less — a little less stupid! Well, I had already suspected what you tell me — and I used to feel amused of my own accord at seeing him coming.”

She raised her face to his as she spoke, and in her smile, in her arch look, in her little *retroussé* nose, in the moist and glittering brilliancy of her teeth which showed themselves between her lips, so much open-hearted gracefulness, sly gaiety, and charming frolicsomeness appeared that

Bretigny felt himself drawn toward her by one of those tumultuous transports which flung him distracted with passion at the feet of the woman who was his latest love. And his heart exulted with joy because Mazelli had not been preferred to him. So then he had triumphed.

He asked: “You do not love him, then?”

“Whom? Mazelli?”

“Yes.”

She looked at him with such a pained expression in her eyes that he felt thrown off his balance, and stammered, in a supplicating voice: “What? — you don’t love — anyone?”

She replied, with a downward glance: “I don’t know — I love people who love me.”

He seized the young girl’s two hands, all at once, and kissing them wildly in one of those moments of impulse in which the head loses its controlling power, and the words which rise to the lips come from the excited flesh rather than the wandering mind, he faltered:

“I! — I love you, my little Charlotte; yes, I love you!”

She quickly drew away one of her hands, and placed it on his mouth, murmuring: “Be silent! — be silent, I beg of you! It would cause me too much pain if this were another falsehood.”

She stood erect; he rose up, caught her in his arms, and embraced her passionately.

A sudden noise parted them; Père Oriol had just come in, and he was gazing at them, quite scared. Then, he cried: “Ah! bougrrre! ah! bougrrre! ah! bougrrre of a savage!”

Charlotte had rushed out, and the two men remained face to face. After some seconds of agitation, Paul made an attempt to explain his position.

“My God! Monsieur — I have conducted myself — it is true — like a— “

But the old man would not listen to him. Anger, furious anger, had taken possession of him, and he advanced toward Bretigny, with clenched fists, repeating:

“Ah! bougrrre of a savage— “

Then, when they were nose to nose, he seized Paul by the collar with his knotted peasant’s hands.

But the other, as tall, and strong with that superior strength acquired by the practice of athletics, freed himself with a single push from the countryman’s grip, and, pushing him up against the wall:

“Listen, Père Oriol, this is not a matter for us to fight about, but to settle quietly. It is true, I was embracing your daughter. I swear to you that this is the first time — and I swear to you, too, that I desire to marry her.”

The old man, whose physical excitement had subsided under the assault ot his adversary, but whose anger had not yet been calmed, stuttered:

“Ha! that’s how it is! You want to steal my daughter; you want my money. Bougrrre of a deceiver!” Thereupon, he allowed all that was on his mind to escape from him in a heap of grumbling words. He found no consolation for the dowry promised with his elder girl, for his vinelands going into the hands of these Parisians. He now had his suspicions as to Gontran’s want of money, Andermatt’s craft, and, without forgetting the unexpected fortune which the banker brought him, he vented his bile and his secret rancor against those mischievous people who did not let him sleep any longer in peace.

One would have thought that his family and his friends were coming every night to plunder him, to rob him of everything, his lands, his springs, and his daughters. And he cast these reproaches into Paul’s face, accusing him also of wanting to get hold of his property, of being a rogue, and of taking Charlotte in order to have his lands.

The other, soon losing all patience, shouted under his very nose: “Why, I am richer than you, you infernally currish old donkey. I would bring you money.”

The old man listened in silence to these words, incredulous but vigilant, and then, in a milder tone, he renewed his complaints.

Paul then answered him and entered into explanations; and, believing that an obligation was imposed on him, owing to the circumstances under which he had been surprised, and for which he was solely responsible, he proposed to marry the girl without asking for any dowry.

Père Oriol shook his head and his ears, heard Paul reiterating his statements, but was unable to understand. To him this young man seemed still a pauper, a penniless wretch.

And, when Bretigny, exasperated, yelled, in his teeth: “Why, you old rascal, I have an income of more than a hundred and twenty thousand francs a year — do you understand? — three millions,” the other suddenly asked: “Will you write that down on a piece of paper?”

“Yes, I will write it down!”

“And you’ll sign it?”

“Yes, I will sign it.”

“On a sheet of notary’s paper?”

“Yes, certainly — on a sheet of notary’s paper!” Thereupon, he rose up, opened a press, took out of it two leaves marked with the Government stamp, and, seeking for the undertaking which Andermatt, a few days before, had required from him, he drew up an odd promise of marriage, in which it was made a condition that the *fiancé* vouched for his being worth three millions; and, at the end of it Bretigny affixed his signature.

When Paul found himself in the open air once more, he felt as if the earth no longer turned round in the same way. So then, he was engaged, in spite of himself, in spite of her, by one of those accidents, by one of those tricks of circumstance, which shut out from you every point of escape. He muttered: “What madness!” Then he reflected: “Bah! I could not have found better perhaps in all the world!” And in his secret heart he rejoiced at this snare of destiny.

CHAPTER XIV. CHRISTIANE'S VIA CRUCIS

THE dawn of the following day brought bad news to Andermatt.

He learned on his arrival at the bath-establishment that M. Aubry-Pasteur had died during the night from an attack of apoplexy at the Hotel Splendid. In addition to the fact that the deceased was very useful to him on account of his vast scientific attainments, disinterested zeal, and attachment to the Mont Oriol station, which, in some measure, he looked upon as a daughter, it was much to be regretted that a patient who had come there to fight against a tendency toward congestion should have died exactly in this fashion, in the midst of his treatment, in the very height of the season, at the very moment when the rising spa was beginning to prove a success.

The banker, exceedingly annoyed, walked up and down in the study of the absent inspector, thinking of some device whereby this misfortune might be attributed to some other cause, such as an accident, a fall, a want of prudence, the rupture of an artery; and he impatiently awaited Doctor Latonne's arrival in order that the decease might be ingeniously certified without awakening any suspicion as to the initial cause of the fatality.

All at once, the medical inspector appeared on the scene, his face pale and indicative of extreme agitation; and, as soon as he had passed through the door, he asked: "Have you heard the lamentable news?"

"Yes, the death of M. Aubry-Pasteur."

"No, no, the flight of Doctor Mazelli with Professor Cloche's daughter."

Andermatt felt a shiver running along his skin.

"What? you tell me— "

"Oh! my dear manager, it is a frightful catastrophe, a crash!"

He sat down and wiped his forehead; then he related the facts as he got them from Petrus Martel, who had learned them directly through the professor's valet.

Mazelli had paid very marked attentions to the pretty red-haired widow, a coarse coquette, a wanton, whose first husband had succumbed to consumption, brought on, it was said, by excessive devotion to his matrimonial duties. But M. Cloche, having discovered the projects of the Italian physician, and not desiring this adventurer as a second son-in-law, violently turned him out of doors on surprising him kneeling at the widow's feet.

Mazelli, having been sent out by the door, soon re-entered through the window by the silken ladder of lovers. Two versions of the affair were current. According to the first, he had rendered the professor's daughter mad with love and jealousy; according to the second, he had continued to see her secretly, while pretending to be devoting his attention to another woman; and ascertaining finally through his mistress that the professor remained inflexible, he had carried her off, the same night, rendering a marriage inevitable, in consequence of this scandal.

Doctor Latonne rose up and, leaning his back against the mantelpiece, while Andermatt, astounded, continued walking up and down, he exclaimed:

"A physician, Monsieur, a physician to do such a thing! — a doctor of medicine! — what an absence of character!"

Andermatt, completely crushed, appreciated the consequences, classified them, and weighed them, as one does a sum in addition. They were: "First, the disagreeable report spreading over the neighboring spas and all the way to Paris. If, however, they went the right way about it, perhaps they could make use of this elopement as an advertisement. A fortnight's echoes well written and prominently printed in the newspapers would strongly attract attention to Mont Oriol. Secondly: Professor Cloche's departure an irreparable loss. Thirdly: The departure of the Duchess and the Duke de Ramas-Aldavarra, a second inevitable loss without possible compensation. In short, Doctor Latonne was right. It was a frightful catastrophe."

Then, the banker, turning toward the physician: "You ought to go at once to the Hotel Splendid, and draw up the certificate of the death of Aubry-Pasteur in such a way that no one could suspect it to be a case of congestion."

Doctor Latonne put on his hat; then just as he was leaving: "Ha! another rumor which is circulating! Is it true that your friend Paul Bretigny is going to marry Charlotte Oriol?"

Andermatt gave a start of astonishment. "Bretigny? Come now! — who told you that?"

"Why, as in the other case, Petrus Martel, who had it from Père Oriol himself."

"From Père Oriol?"

“Yes, from Père Oriol, who declared that his future son-in-law possessed a fortune of three millions.” William did not know what to think. He muttered: “In point of fact, it is possible. He has been rather hot on her for some time past! But in that case the whole knoll is ours — the whole knoll! Oh! I must make certain of this immediately.” And he went out after the doctor in order to meet Paul before breakfast.

As he was entering the hotel, he was informed that his wife had several times asked to see him. He found her still in bed, chatting with her father and with her brother, who was looking through the newspapers with a rapid and wandering glance. She felt poorly, very poorly, restless. She was afraid, without knowing why. And then an idea had come to her, and had for some days been growing stronger in her brain, as usually happens with pregnant women. She wanted to consult Doctor Black. From the effect of hearing around her some jokes at Doctor Latonne’s expense, she had lost all confidence in him, and she wanted another opinion, that of Doctor Black, whose success was constantly increasing. Fears, all the fears, all the hauntings, by which women toward the close of pregnancy are besieged, now tortured her from morning until night. Since the night before, in consequence of a dream, she imagined that the Cæsarian operation might be necessary. And she was present in thought at this operation performed on herself. She saw herself lying on her back in a bed covered with blood, while something red was being taken away, which did not move, which did not cry, and which was dead! And for ten minutes she shut her eyes, in order to witness this over again, to be present once more at her horrible and painful punishment. She had, therefore, become impressed with the notion that Doctor Black alone could tell her the truth, and she wanted him at once; she required him to examine her immediately, immediately, immediately! Andermatt, greatly agitated, did not know what answer to give her.

“But my dear child, it is difficult, having regard to my relations with Latonne it is even impossible. Listen! an idea occurs to me: I will look up Professor Mas-Roussel, who is a hundred times better than Black. He will not refuse to come when I ask him.”

But she persisted. She wanted Black, and no one else. She required to see him with his big bulldog’s head beside her. It was a longing, a wild, superstitious desire. She considered it necessary for him to see her.

Then William attempted to change the current of her thoughts:

"You haven't heard how that intriguer Mazelli carried off Professor Cloche's daughter the other night.

They are gone away; nobody can tell where they levanted to. There's a nice story for you!"

She was propped up on her pillow, her eyes strained with grief, and she faltered: "Oh! the poor Duchess — the poor woman — how I pity her!" Her heart had long since learned to understand that other woman's heart, bruised and impassioned! She suffered from the same malady and wept the same tears. But she resumed: "Listen, Will! Go and find M. Black for me. I know I shall die unless he comes!"

Andermatt caught her hand, and tenderly kissed it: "Come, my little Christiane, be reasonable — understand."

He saw her eyes filled with tears, and, turning toward the Marquis:

"It is you that ought to do this, my dear father-in-law. As for me, I can't do it. Black comes here every day about one o'clock to see the Princess de Maldebourg. Stop him in the passage, and send him in to your daughter. You can easily wait an hour, can you not, Christiane?"

She consented to wait an hour, but refused to get up to breakfast with the men, who passed alone into the dining-room.

Paul was there already. Andermatt, when he saw him, exclaimed: "Ah! tell me now, what is it I have been told a little while ago? You are going to marry Charlotte Oriol? It is not true, is it?"

The young man replied in a low tone, casting a restless look toward the closed door: "Good God! it is true!" Nobody having been sure of it till now, the three stared at him in amazement.

William asked: "What came over you? With your fortune, to marry — to embarrass yourself with one woman, when you have the whole of them? And then, after all, the family leaves something to be desired in the matter of refinement. It is all very well for Gontran, who hasn't a sou!"

Bretigny began to laugh: "My father made a fortune out of flour; he was then a miller on a large scale. If you had known him, you might have said he lacked refinement. As for the young girl— "

Andermatt interrupted him: "Oh! perfect — charming — perfect — and you know — she will be as rich as yourself — if not more so. I answer for it — I — I answer for it!"

Gontran murmured: "Yes, this marriage interferes with nothing, and covers retreats. Only he was wrong in not giving us notice beforehand. How the devil was this business managed, my friend?"

Thereupon, Paul related all that had occurred with some slight modifications. He told about his hesitation, which he exaggerated, and his sudden determination on discovering from the young girl's own lips that she loved him. He described the unexpected entrance of Père Oriol, their quarrel, which he enlarged upon, the countryman's doubts concerning his fortune, and the incident of the stamped paper drawn by the old man out of the press.

Andermatt, laughing till the tears ran down his face, hit the table with his fist: "Ha! he did that over again, the stamped paper touch! It's my invention, that is!"

But Paul stammered, reddening a little: "Pray don't let your wife know about it yet. Owing to the terms which we are on at present, it is more suitable that I should announce it to her myself." Gontran eyed his friend with an odd, good-humored smile, which seemed to say: "This is quite right, all this, quite right! That's the way things ought to end, without noise, without scandals, without any dramatic situations."

He suggested: "If you like, my dear Paul, we'll go together, after dinner, when she's up, and you will inform her of your decision."

Their eyes met, fixed, full of unfathomable thoughts, then looked in another direction. And Paul replied with an air of indifference:

"Yes, willingly. We'll talk about this presently." A waiter from the hotel came to inform them that Doctor Black had just arrived for his visit to the Princess; and the Marquis forthwith went out to catch him in the passage. He explained the situation to the doctor, his son-in-law's embarrassment and his daughter's earnest wish, and he brought him in without resistance.

As soon as the little man with the big head had entered Christiane's apartment, she said: "Papa, leave us alone!" And the Marquis withdrew.

Thereupon, she enumerated her disquietudes, her terrors, her nightmares, in a low, sweet voice, as though she were at confession. And the physician listened to her like a priest, covering her sometimes with his big round eyes, showed his attention by a little nod of the head, murmured a "That's it," which seemed to mean, "I know your case at the end of my fingers, and I will cure you whenever I like."

When she had finished speaking, he began in his turn to question her with extreme minuteness of detail about her life, her habits, her course of diet, her treatment. At one moment he appeared to express approval with a gesture, at another to convey blame with an "Oh!" full of reservations. When she came to her great fear that the child was misplaced, he rose up, and with an ecclesiastical modesty, lightly passed his hand over the counterpane, and then remarked, "No, it's all right."

And she felt a longing to embrace him. What a good man this physician was!

He sat down at the table, took a sheet of paper, and wrote out the prescription. It was long, very long. Then he came back close to the bed, and, in an altered tone, clearly indicating that he had finished his professional and sacred duty, he began to chat. He had a deep, unctuous voice, the powerful voice of a thickset dwarf, and there were hidden questions in his most ordinary phrases. He talked about everything. Gontran's marriage seemed to interest him considerably. Then, with his ugly smile like that of an ill-shaped being:

"I have said nothing yet to you about M. Bretigny's marriage, although it cannot be a secret, for Père Oriol has told it to everybody."

A kind of fainting fit took possession of her, commencing at the end of her fingers, then invading her entire body — her arms, her breast, her stomach, her legs. She did not, however, quite understand; but a horrible fear of not learning the truth suddenly restored her powers of observation, and she faltered: "Ha! Père Oriol has told it to everybody?"

"Yes, yes. He was speaking to myself about it less than ten minutes ago. It appears that M. Bretigny is very rich, and that he has been in love with little Charlotte for some time past. Moreover, it is Madame Honorat who made these two matches. She lent her hands and her house for the meetings of the young people."

Christiane had closed her eyes. She had lost consciousness. In answer to the doctor's call, a chambermaid rushed in; then appeared the Marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran, who went to search for vinegar, ether, ice, twenty different things all equally useless. Suddenly, the young woman moved, opened her eyes, lifted up her arms, and uttered a heartrending cry, writhing in the bed. She tried to speak, and in a broken voice said:

"Oh! what pain I feel — my God! — what pain I feel — in my back — something is tearing me — Oh! my God!" And she broke out into fresh shrieks.

The symptoms of confinement were speedily recognized. Then Andermatt rushed off to find Doctor Latonne, and came upon him finishing his meal.

"Come on quickly — my wife has met with a mishap — hurry on!" Then he made use of a little deception, telling how Doctor Black had been found in the hotel at the moment of the first pains. Doctor Black himself confirmed this falsehood by saying to his brother-physician:

"I had just come to visit the Princess when I was informed that Madame Andermatt was taken ill. I hurried to her. It was time!"

But William, in a state of great excitement, his heart beating, his soul filled with alarm was all at once seized with doubts as to the competency of the two professional men, and he started off afresh, bareheaded, in order to run in the direction of Professor Mas-Roussel's house, and to entreat him to come. The professor consented to do so at once, buttoned on his frock-coat with the mechanical movement of a physician going out to pay a visit, and set forth with great, rapid strides, the eager strides of an eminent man whose presence may save a life.

When he arrived on the scene, the two other doctors, full of deference, consulted him with an air of humility, repeating together or nearly at the same time:

"Here is what has occurred, dear master. Don't you think, dear master? Isn't there reason to believe, dear master?"

Andermatt, in his turn, driven crazy with anguish at the moanings of his wife, harassed M. Mas-Roussel with questions, and also addressed him as "dear master" with wide-open mouth.

Christiane, almost naked in the presence of these men, no longer saw, noticed, or understood anything. She was suffering so dreadfully that everything else had vanished from her consciousness. It seemed to her that they were drawing from the tops of her hips along her side and her back a long saw, with blunt teeth, which was mangling her bones and muscles slowly and in an irregular fashion, with shakings, stoppages, and renewals of the operation, which became every moment more and more frightful.

When this torture abated for a few seconds, when the rendings of her body allowed her reason to come back, one thought then fixed itself in her soul, more cruel, more keen, more terrible, than her physical pain: "He was in love with another woman, and was going to marry her!"

And, in order to get rid of this pang, which was eating into her brain, she struggled to bring on once more the atrocious torment of her flesh; she shook her sides; she strained her back; and when the crisis returned again, she had, at least, lost all capacity for thought.

For fifteen hours she endured this martyrdom, so much bruised by suffering and despair that she longed to die, and strove to die in those spasms in which she writhed.

But, after a convulsion longer and more violent than the rest, it seemed to her that everything inside her body suddenly escaped from her. It was over; her pangs were assuaged, like the waves of the sea, when they are calmed; and the relief which she experienced was so intense that, for a time, even her grief became numbed. They spoke to her. She answered in a voice very weak, very low.

Suddenly, Andermatt stooped down, his face toward hers, and he said: “She will live — she is almost at the end of it. It is a girl!”

Christiane was only able to articulate: “Ah! my God!”

So then she had a child, a living child, who would grow big — a child of Paul! She felt a desire to cry out, all this fresh misfortune crushed her heart. She had a daughter. She did not want it! She would not look at it! She would never touch it!

They had laid her down again on the bed, taken care of her, tenderly embraced her. Who had done this? No doubt, her father and her husband. She could not tell. But he — where was he? What was he doing? How happy she would have felt at that moment, if only he still loved her!

The hours dragged along, following each other without any distinction between day and night so far as she was concerned, for she felt only this one thought burning into her soul: he loved another woman.

Then she said to herself all of a sudden: “What if it were false? Why should I not have known about his marriage sooner than this doctor?” After that, came the reflection that it had been kept hidden from her. Paul had taken care that she should not hear about it.

She glanced around her room to see who was there. A woman whom she did not know was keeping watch by her side, a woman of the people. She did not venture to question her. From whom, then, could she make inquiries about this matter?

The door was suddenly pushed open. Her husband entered on the tips of his toes. Seeing that her eyes were open, he came over to her.

“Are you better?”

“Yes, thanks.”

"You frightened us very much since yesterday. But there is an end of the danger! By the bye, I am quite embarrassed about your case. I telegraphed to our friend, Madame lcardon, who was to have come to stay with you during your confinement, informing her about your premature illness, and imploring her to hasten down here. She is with her nephew, who has an attack of scarlet fever. You cannot, however, remain without anyone near you, without some woman who is a little — a little suitable for the purpose. Accordingly, a lady from the neighborhood has offered to nurse you, and to keep you company every day, and, faith, I have accepted the offer. It is Madame Honorat."

Christiane suddenly remembered Doctor Black's words. A start of fear shook her; and she groaned: "Oh! no — no — not she!"

William did not understand, and went on: "Listen, I know well that she is very common; but your brother has a great esteem for her; she has been of great service to him; and then it has been thrown out that she was originally a midwife, whom Honorat made the acquaintance of while attending a patient. If you take a strong dislike to her, I will send her away the next day. Let us try her at any rate. Let her come once or twice."

She remained silent, thinking. A craving to know, to know everything, entered into her, so violent that the hope of milking this woman chatter freely, of tearing from her one by one the words that would rend her own heart, now filled her with a yearning to reply: "Go, go, and look for her immediately — immediately. Go, pray!"

And to this irresistible desire to know was also superadded a strange longing to suffer more intensely, to roll herself about in her misery, as she might have rolled herself on thorns, the mysterious longing, morbid and feverish, of a martyr calling for fresh pain.

So she faltered: "Yes, I have no objection. Bring me Madame Honorat."

Then, suddenly, she felt that she could not wait any longer without making sure, quite sure, of this treason; and she asked William in a voice weak as a breath:

"Is it true that M. Bretigny is getting married?"

He replied calmly: "Yes, it is true. We would have told you before this if we could have talked with you."

She continued: "With Charlotte?"

"With Charlotte."

Now William had also a fixed idea himself which from this time forth never left him — his daughter, as yet barely alive, whom every moment he was going to look at. He felt indignant because Christiane's first words were not to ask for the baby; and in a tone of gentle reproach: "Well, look here! you have not yet inquired about the little one. You are aware that she is going on very well?"

She trembled as if he had touched a living wound; but it was necessary for her to pass through all the stations of this Calvary.

"Bring her here," she said.

He vanished to the foot of the bed behind the curtain, then he came back, his face lighted up with pride and happiness, and holding in his hands, in an awkward fashion, a bundle of white linen.

He laid it down on the embroidered pillow close to the head of Christiane, who was choking with emotion, and he said: "Look here, see how lovely she is!"

She looked. He opened with two of his fingers the fine lace with which was hidden from view a little red face, so small, so red, with closed eyes, and mouth constantly moving.

And she thought, as she leaned over this beginning of being: "This is my daughter — Paul's daughter. Here then is what made me suffer so much. This — this — this is my daughter!"

Her repugnance toward the child, whose birth had so fiercely torn her poor heart and her tender woman's body had, all at once, disappeared; she now contemplated it with ardent and sorrowing curiosity, with profound astonishment, the astonishment of a being who sees her firstborn come forth from her.

Andermatt was waiting for her to caress it passionately. He was surprised and shocked, and asked: "Are you not going to kiss it?"

She stooped quite gently toward this little red forehead; and in proportion as she drew her lips closer to it, she felt them drawn, called by it. And when she had placed them upon it, when she touched it, a little moist, a little warm, warm with her own life, it seemed to her that she could not withdraw her lips from that infantile flesh, that she would leave them there forever.

Something grazed her cheek; it was her husband's beard as he bent forward to kiss her. And when he had pressed her a long time against himself with a grateful tenderness, he wanted, in his turn, to kiss his daughter, and with his outstretched mouth he gave it very soft little strokes on the nose.

Christiane, her heart shriveled up by this caress, gazed at both of them there by her side, at her daughter and at him — him!

He soon wanted to carry the infant back to its cradle.

“No,” said she, “let me have it a few minutes longer, that I may feel it close to my face. Don’t speak to me any more — don’t move — leave us alone, and wait.”

She passed one of her arms over the body hidden under the swaddling-clothes, put her forehead close to the little grinning face, shut her eyes, and no longer stirred, or thought about anything.

But, at the end of a few minutes, William softly touched her on the shoulder: “Come, my darling, you must be reasonable! No emotions, you know, no emotions!”

Thereupon, he bore away their little daughter, while the mother’s eyes followed the child till it had disappeared behind the curtain of the bed.

After that, he came back to her: “Then it is understood that I am to bring Madame Honorat to you to-morrow morning, to keep you company?”

She replied in a firm tone: “Yes, my dear, you may send her to me — to-morrow morning.”

And she stretched herself out in the bed, fatigued, worn out, perhaps a little less unhappy.

Her father and her brother came to see her in the evening, and told her news about the locality — the precipitate departure of Professor Cloche in search of his daughter, and the conjectures with reference to the Duchess de Ramas, who was no longer to be seen, and who was also supposed to have started on Mazelli’s track. Gontran laughed at these adventures, and drew a comic moral from the occurrences:

“The history of those spas is incredible. They are the only fairylands left upon the earth! In two months more things happen in them than in the rest of the universe during the remainder of the year. One might say with truth that the springs are not mineralized but bewitched. And it is everywhere the same, at Aix, Royat, Vichy, Luchon, and also at the sea-baths, at Dieppe, Étretat, Trouville, Biarritz, Cannes, and Nice. You meet there specimens of all kinds of people, of every social grade — admirable adventures, a mixture of races and people not to be found elsewhere, and marvelous incidents. Women play pranks there with facility and charming promptitude.

At Paris one resists temptation — at the waters one falls; there you are! Some men find fortune at them, like Andermatt; others find death, like Aubry-Pasteur; others find worse even than that — and get married there — like myself and Paul. Isn't it queer and funny, this sort of thing? You have heard about Paul's intended marriage — have you not?"

She murmured: "Yes; William told me about it a little while ago."

Gontran went on: "He is right, quite right. She is a peasant's daughter. Well, what of that? She is better than an adventurer's daughter or a daughter who's too short. I knew Paul. He would have ended by marrying a street-walker, provided she resisted him for six months. And to resist him it needed a jade or an innocent. He has lighted on the innocent. So much the better for him!"

Christiane listened, and every word, entering through her ears, went straight to her heart, and inflicted on her pain, horrible pain.

Closing her eyes, she said: "I am very tired. I would like to have a little rest."

They embraced her and went out.

She could not sleep, so wakeful was her mind, active and racked with harrowing thoughts. That idea that he no longer loved her at all became so intolerable that, were it not for the presence of this woman, this nurse nodding asleep in the armchair, she would have got up, opened the window, and flung herself out on the steps of the hotel. A very thin ray of moonlight penetrated through an opening in the curtains, and formed a round bright spot on the floor. She observed it; and in a moment a crowd of memories rushed together into her brain: the lake, the wood, that first "I love you," scarcely heard, so agitating, at Tournoel, and all their caresses, in the evening, beside the shadowy paths, and the road from La Roche Pradière.

Suddenly, she saw this white road, on a night when the heavens were filled with stars, and he, Paul, with his arm round a woman's waist, kissing her at every step they walked. It was Charlotte! He pressed her against him, smiled as he knew how to smile, murmured in her ear sweet words, such as he knew how to utter, then flung himself on his knees and kissed the ground in front of her, just as he had kissed it in front of herself! It was so hard, so hard for her to bear, that turning round and hiding her face in the pillow, she burst out sobbing. She almost shrieked, so much did despair rend her soul. Every beat of her heart, which jumped into her throat, which throbbed in her temples, sent forth from her one word— "Paul — Paul — Paul" —

endlessly re-echoed. She stopped up her ears with her hands in order to hear nothing more, plunged her head under the sheets; but then his name sounded in the depths of her bosom with every pant of her tormented heart.

The nurse, waking up, asked of her: “Are you worse, Madame?”

Christiane turned round, her face covered with tears, and murmured: “No, I was asleep — I was dreaming — I was frightened.”

Then, she begged of her to light two wax-candles, so that the ray of moonlight might be no longer visible. Toward morning, however, she slumbered.

She had been asleep for a few hours when Andermatt came in, bringing with him Madame Honorât. The fat lady, immediately adopting a familiar tone, questioned her like a doctor; then, satisfied with her answers, said: “Come, come! you’re going on very nicely!” Then she took off her hat, her gloves, and her shawl, and, addressing the nurse: “You may go, my girl. You will come when we ring for you.” Christiane, already inflamed with dislike to the woman, said to her husband: “Give me my daughter for a little while.”

As on the previous day, William carried the child to her, tenderly embracing it as he did so, and placed it upon the pillow. And, as on the previous day, too, when she felt close to her cheek, through the wrappings, the heat of this little stranger’s body, imprisoned in linen, she was suddenly penetrated with a grateful sense of peace.

Then, all at once, the baby began to cry, screaming out in a shrill and piercing voice. “She wants nursing,” said Andermatt.

He rang, and the wet-nurse appeared, a big red woman, with a mouth like an ogress, full of large, shining teeth, which almost terrified Christiane. And from the open body of her dress she drew forth a breast, soft and heavy with milk. And when Christiane beheld her daughter drinking, she felt a longing to snatch away and take back the baby, moved by a certain sense of jealousy. Madame Honorat now gave directions to the wet-nurse, who went off, carrying the baby in her arms. Andermatt, in his turn, went out, and the two women were left alone together.

Christiane did not know how to speak of what tortured her soul, trembling lest she might give way to too much emotion, lose her head, burst into tears, and betray herself. But Madame Honorat began to babble of her own accord, without having been asked a single question. When she had related all the scandalous stories that were circulating through the neighborhood, she came to the Oriol family: “They are good people,” said she, “very good people. If you had known the mother, what a worthy, brave woman she was! She was worth ten women, Madame. The girls take after her, for that matter.” Then, as she was passing on to another topic, Christiane asked: “Which of the two do you prefer, Louise or Charlotte?”

“Oh! for my own part, Madame. I prefer Louise, your brother’s intended wife; she is more sensible, more steady. She is a woman of order. But my husband likes the other better. Men you know, have tastes different from ours.”

She ceased speaking. Christiane, whose strength was giving way, faltered: “My brother has often met his betrothed at your house.”

“Oh! yes, Madame — I believe really every day. Everything was brought about at my house, everything! As for me, 1 let them talk, these young people, I understood the thing thoroughly. But what truly gave me pleasure was when I saw that M. Paul was getting smitten by the younger one.”

Then, Christiane, in an almost inaudible voice: “Is he deeply in love with her?”

“Ah! Madame, is he in love with her? He had lost his head about her some time since. And then, when the Italian — he who ran off with Doctor Cloche’s daughter — kept hanging about the girl a little, it was something worth seeing and watching —

I thought they were going to fight! Ah! if you had seen M. Paul’s eyes. And he looked upon her as if she were a holy Virgin, nothing less — it’s a pleasant thing to see people so much in love as that!”

Thereupon, Christiane asked her about all that had taken place in her presence, about all they had said, about all they had done, about their promenades in the glen of Sans-Souci, where he had so often told her of his love for her. She put unexpected questions, which astonished the fat lady, about matters that nobody would have dreamed of, for she was constantly making comparisons; she recalled a thousand details of what had occurred the year before, all Paul’s delicate gallantries, his thoughtfulness about her, his ingenious devices to please her, all that display of charming attentions and tender anxieties which on the part of a man show an imperious desire to win a woman’s affections; and she wanted to find out whether he had manifested the same affectionate interest toward the other, whether he had commenced afresh this siege of a soul with the same ardor, with the same enthusiasm, with the same irresistible passion.

And every time she recognized a little circumstance, a little trait, one of those nothings which cause such exquisite bliss, one of those disquieting surprises which cause the heart to beat fast, and of which Paul was so prodigal when he loved, Christiane, as she lay prostrate in the bed, gave utterance to a little “Ah!” expressive of keen suffering.

Amazed at this strange exclamation, Madame Honorat declared more emphatically: “Why, yes. ’Tis as I tell you, exactly as I tell you. I never saw a man so much in love!”

“Has he recited verses to her?”

“I believe so indeed, Madame, and very pretty ones, too!”

And, when they had relapsed into silence, nothing more could be heard save the monotonous and soothing song of the nurse as she rocked the baby to sleep in the adjoining room.

Steps were drawing near in the corridor outside. Doctors Mas-Roussel and Latonne had come to visit their patient. They found her agitated, not quite so well as she had been on the previous day.

When they had left, Andermatt opened the door again, and without coming in: “Doctor Black would like to see you. Will you see him?”

She exclaimed, as she raised herself up in the bed: “No — no — I will not — no!”

William came over to her, looking quite astounded: “But listen to me now — it would only be right — it is his due — you ought to!”

She looked, with her wide-open eyes and quivering lips, as if she had lost her reason. She kept repeating in a piercing voice, so loud that it must have penetrated through the walls: “No! — no! — never!” And then, no longer knowing what she said, and pointing with outstretched arm toward Madame Honorat, who was standing in the center of the apartment:

“I do not want her either! — send her away! — 1 don’t want to see her! — send her away!”

Then he rushed to his wife’s side, took her in his arms, and kissed her on the forehead: “My little Christiane, be calm! What is the matter with you?
 —— come now, be calm!”

She had by this time lost the power of raising her voice. The tears gushed from her eyes.

“Send them all away,” said she, “and remain alone with me!”

He went across, in a distracted frame of mind, to the doctor’s wife, and gently pushing her toward the door: “Leave us for a few minutes, pray. It is the fever — the milk-fever. I will calm her. I will look for you again by and by.”

When he came back to the bedside Christiane was lying down, weeping quietly, without moving in any way, quite prostrated.

And then, for the first time in his life, he, too, began to weep.

In fact, the milk-fever had broken out during the night, and delirium supervened. After some hours of extreme excitement, the recently delivered woman suddenly began to speak.

The Marquis and Andermatt, who had resolved to remain near her, and who passed the time playing cards, counting the tricks in hushed tones, imagined that she was calling them, and, rising up, approached the bed. She did not see them; she did not recognize them. Intensely pale, on her white pillow, with her fair tresses hanging loose over her shoulders, she was gazing, with her clear blue eyes, into that unknown, mysterious, and fantastic world, in which dwell the insane.

Her hands, stretched over the bedclothes, stirred now and then, agitated by rapid and involuntary movements, tremblings, and starts.

She did not, at first, appear to be talking to anyone, but to be seeing things and telling what she saw. And the things she said seemed disconnected, incomprehensible. She found a rock too high to jump off. She was afraid of a sprain, and then she was not on intimate terms enough with the man who reached out his arms toward her. Then she spoke about perfumes. She was apparently trying to remember some forgotten phrases. “What can be sweeter? This intoxicates one like wine — wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the imagination. With perfume you taste the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the universe — you taste the flowers — the trees — the grass of the fields —— you can even distinguish the soul of the dwellings of olden days which sleeps in the old furniture, the old carpets, and the old curtains.” Then her face contracted as if she had undergone a long spell of fatigue. She was ascending a hillside slowly, heavily, and was saying to some one: “Oh! carry me once more, I beg of you. I am going to die here! I can walk no farther. Carry me as you did above the gorges. Do you remember? — how you loved me!” Then she uttered a cry of anguish — a look of horror came into her eyes. She saw in front of her a dead animal, and she was imploring to have it taken away without giving her pain. The Marquis said in a whisper to his son-in-law: “She is thinking about an ass that we came across on our way back from La

Nugère.” And now she was addressing this dead beast, consoling it, telling it that she, too, was very unhappy, because she had been abandoned.

Then, on a sudden, she refused to do something required of her. She cried: “Oh! no, not that! Oh! it is you, you who want me to drag this cart!” Then she panted, as if indeed she were dragging A vehicle along. She wept, moaned, uttered exclamations, and always, during a period of half an hour, she was climbing up this hillside, dragging after her with horrible efforts the ass’s cart, beyond a doubt.

And some one was harshly beating her, for she said: “Oh! how you hurt me! At least, don’t beat me! I will walk — but don’t beat me any more, I entreat you! I’ll do whatever you wish, but don’t beat me any more!”

Then her anguish gradually abated, and all she did was to go on quietly talking in her incoherent fashion till daybreak. After that, she became drowsy, and ended by going to sleep.

Until the following day, however, her mental powers remained torpid, somewhat wavering, fleeting. She could not immediately find the words she wanted, and fatigued herself terribly in searching for them. But, after a night of rest, she completely regained possession of herself.

Nevertheless, she felt changed, as if this crisis had transformed her soul. She suffered less and thought more. The dreadful occurrences, really so recent, seemed to her to have receded into a past already far off; and she regarded them with a clearness of conception with which her mind had never been illuminated before. This light, which had suddenly dawned on her brain, and which comes to certain beings in certain hours of suffering, showed her life, men, things, the entire earth and all that it contains as she had never seen them before.

Then, more than on the evening when she had felt herself so much alone in the universe in her room, after her return from the lake of Tazenat, she looked upon herself as utterly abandoned in existence. She realized that all human beings walk along side by side in the midst of circumstances without anything ever truly uniting two persons together. She learned from the treason of him in whom she had reposed her entire confidence that the others, all the others, would never again be to her anything but indifferent neighbors in that journey short or long, sad or gay, that followed to-morrows no one could foresee.

She comprehended that even in the clasp of this man’s arms, when she believed that she was intermingling with him, entering into him, when she believed that their flesh and their souls had become only one flesh and one soul, they had only drawn a little nearer to one another, so as to bring into contact the impenetrable envelopes in which mysterious nature has isolated and shut up each human creature. And she saw as well that nobody has ever been able, or ever will be able, to break through that invisible barrier which places living beings as far from each other as the stars of heaven. She divined the impotent effort, ceaseless since the first days of the world, the indefatigable effort of men and women to tear off the sheath in which their souls forever imprisoned, forever solitary, are struggling — an effort of arms, of lips, of eyes, of mouths, of trembling, naked flesh, an effort of love, which exhausts itself in kisses, to finish only by giving life to some other forlorn being.

Then an uncontrollable desire to gaze on her daughter took possession of her. She asked for it, and when it was brought to her, she begged to have it stripped, for as yet she only knew its face.

The wet-nurse thereupon unfastened the swaddling-clothes, and discovered the poor little body of the newborn infant agitated by those vague movements which life puts into these rough sketches of humanity. Christiane touched it with a timid, trembling hand, then wanted to kiss the stomach, the back, the legs, the feet, and then she stared at the child full of fantastic thoughts.

Two beings came together, loved one another with rapturous passion; and from their embrace, this being was born. It was he and she intermingled; until the death of this little child, it was he and she, living again both together; it was a little of him, and a little of her, with an unknown something which make it different from them. It reproduced them both in the form of its body as well as in that of its mind, in its features, its gestures, its eyes, its movements, its tastes, its passions, even in the sound of its voice and its gait in walking, and yet it would be a new being!

They were separated now — he and she — forever! Never again would their eyes blend in one of those outbursts of love which make the human race indestructible. And pressing the child against her heart, she murmured: “Adieu! adieu!” It was to him that she was saying “adieu” in her baby’s ear, the brave and sorrowing “adieu” of a woman who would yet have much to suffer, always, it might be, but who would know how to hide her tears.

“Ha! ha!” cried William through the half-open door. “1 catch you there! Will you be good enough to give me back my daughter?”

Running toward the bed, he seized the little one in his hands already practiced in the art of handling it, and lifting it over his head, he went on repeating: “Good day, Mademoiselle Andermatt — good day, Mademoiselle Andermatt.”

Christiane was thinking: “Here, then, is my husband!”

And she contemplated him, with eyes as astonished as if they were beholding him for the first time. This was he, the man who ought to be, according to human ideas of religion, of society, the other half of her — more than that, her master, the master of her days and of her nights, of her heart and of her body! She felt almost a desire to smile, so strange did this appear to her at the moment, for between her and him no bond could ever exist, none of those bonds alas! so quickly broken, but which seem eternal, ineffably sweet, almost divine.

No remorse even came to her for having deceived him, for having betrayed him. She was surprised at this, and asked herself why it was. Why? No doubt, there was too great a difference between them, they were too far removed from one another, of races too widely dissimilar. He did not understand her at all; she did not understand him at all. And yet he was good, devoted, complaisant.

But only perhaps beings of the same shape, of the same nature, of the same moral essence can feel themselves attached to one another by the sacred bond of voluntary duty.

They dressed the baby again. William sat down. “Listen, my darling,” said he; “I don’t venture to announce Doctor Black’s visit to you, since you have been so nice toward myself. There is, however, one person whom I would very much like you to see — I mean Doctor Bonnefille.”

Then, for the first time, she laughed, with a colorless sort of laugh, which fixed itself on her lips, without going near her heart; and she asked:

“Doctor Bonnefille! what a miracle! So then you are reconciled?”

“Why, yes! Listen! I am going to tell you, as a secret, a great bit of news. I have just bought up the old establishment. I have all the district now. Hey! what a victory. That poor Doctor Bonnefille knew it before anybody, be it understood. So then he has been sly. He came every day to obtain information as to how you were, leaving his card with a word of sympathy written on it. For my part, I responded to these advances with a single visit; and at present we are on excellent terms.”

"Let him come," said Christiane, "whenever he likes. I will be glad to see him."

"Good. Thank you. I'll bring him here to you tomorrow morning. I need scarcely tell you that Paul is constantly asking me to convey to you a thousand compliments from him, and he inquires a great deal about the little one. He is very anxious to see her." In spite of her resolutions she felt a sense of oppression. She was able, however, to say: "You will thank him on my behalf."

Andermatt rejoined: "He was very uneasy to learn whether you had been told about his intended marriage. I informed him that you had; then he asked me several times what you thought about it."

She exerted her strength to the utmost, and felt able to murmur: "You will tell him that I entirely approve of it."

William, with cruel persistency, went on: "He wishes also to know for certain what name you mean to call your daughter. I told him we were hesitating between Marguerite and Genevieve."

"I have changed my mind," said she. "I intend to call her Arlette."

Formerly, in the early days of her pregnancy, she had discussed with Paul the name which they ought to select whether for a son or for a daughter; and for a daughter they had remained undecided between Genevieve and Marguerite. She no longer wanted these two names.

William repeated: "Arlette! Arlette! That's a very nice name — you are right. For my part, I would have liked to call her Christiane, like you. I adore that name — Christiane!"

She sighed deeply: "Oh! it forebodes too much suffering to bear the name of the Crucified."

He reddened, never having dreamed of this comparison, and rising up: "Besides, Arlette is very nice. By-bye, my darling."

As soon as he had left the room, she called the wet-nurse, and directed her for the future to place the cradle beside the bed.

When the little couch in the form of a wherry, always rocking, and carrying its white curtain like a sail on its mast of twisted copper, had been rolled close to the big bed, Christiane stretched out her hand to the sleeping infant, and she said in a very hushed voice: "Go by-bye, my baby! You will never find anyone who will love you as much as I."

She passed the next few days in a state of tranquil melancholy, thinking a great deal, building up within herself a resisting soul, an energetic heart, in order to resume her life again in a few weeks. Her chief occupation now consisted in gazing into the eyes of her child, seeking to surprise in them a first look, but only seeing there two little bluish caverns invariably turned toward the sunlight coming in through the window.

And she experienced a feeling of profound sadness as she reflected that these eyes now closed in sleep would look out on the world, as she herself had looked on it, through the illusion of those secret dreamings which make the souls of young women trustful and joyous. They would love all that she had loved, the beautiful bright days, the flowers, the wood, and alas! living beings too! They would, no doubt, love a man! They would carry in their depths his image, well known, cherished, would see it when he would be far away, would be inflamed on seeing him again. And then — and then they would learn to weep! Tears, horrible tears, would flow over these little cheeks. And the frightful sufferings of love betrayed would render them unrecognizable, those poor wandering eyes which would be blue.

And she wildly embraced the child, saying to it: “Love me alone, my child!”

At length, one day, Professor Mas-Roussel, who came every morning to see her, declared: “You can soon get up for a little, Madame.”

Andermatt, when the physician had left, said to his wife: “It is very unfortunate that you are not quite well, for we have a very interesting experiment to-day at the establishment. Doctor Latonne has performed a real miracle with Père Clovis by subjecting him to his system of self-moving gymnastics. Just imagine! This old vagabond is now able to walk as well as anyone. The progress of the cure, moreover, is manifest after each exhibition!”

To please him, she asked: “And are you going to have a public exhibition?”

“Yes, and no. We are having an exhibition before the medical men and a few friends.”

“At what hour?”

“Three o’clock.”

“Will M. Bretigny be there?”

“Yes, yes. He promised me that he would come to it. From a medical point of view, it is exceedingly curious.”

“Well,” she said, “as I’ll just have risen myself at that time, you will ask M. Bretigny to come and see me. He will keep me company while you are looking at the experiment."

"Yes, my darling."

"You won't forget?"

"No, no. Make your mind easy."

And he went off in search of those who were to witness the exhibition.

After having been imposed upon by the Oriols at the time of the first treatment of the paralytic, he had in his turn imposed upon the credulity of invalids — so easy to get the better of, when it is a question of curing. And now he imposed upon himself with the farce of this cure, talking about it so frequently, with so much ardor and such an air of conviction that it would have been hard to determine whether he believed or disbelieved in it.

About three o'clock, all the persons whom he had induced to attend found themselves gathered together before the door of the establishment, expecting Père Clovis's arrival. He made his appearance, leaning on two walking-sticks, always dragging his legs after him, and bowing politely to everyone as he passed.

The two Oriols followed him, together with the two young girls. Paul and Gontran accompanied their intended wives.

In the great hall where the articulated instruments were fixed, Doctor Latonne was waiting, and killed time by chatting with Andermatt and Doctor Honorat.

When he saw Père Clovis, a smile of delight passed over his clean-shaven lips. He asked: "Well! how are we going on to-day?"

"Oh! all right, all right."

Petrus Martel and Saint Landri presented themselves. They wanted to satisfy their minds. The first believed; the second doubted. Behind them, people saw with astonishment Doctor Bonnefille coming up, saluting his rival, and extending his hand toward Andermatt. Doctor Black was the last to arrive.

"Well, Messieurs and Mesdemoiselles," said Doctor Latonne, as he bowed to Louise and Charlotte Oriol, "you are going to witness a very curious phenomenon. Observe first, before the experiment, this worthy fellow walking a little, but very little. Can you walk without your sticks, Père Clovis?"

"Oh! no, Mochieu!"

"Good, then let us begin."

The old fellow was hoisted on the armchair; his legs were strapped to the movable feet of the sitting-machine; then, at the command of the inspector: "Go quietly!" the attendant, with bare arms, turned the handle.

Thereupon, the right knee of the vagabond was seen rising up, stretching out, bending, then moving forward again; after that, the left knee did the same; and Père Clovis, seized with a sudden delight, began to laugh, while he repeated with his head and his long, white beard all the movements imposed on his legs.

The four physicians and Andermatt, stooping over him, examined him with the gravity of augurs, while Colosse exchanged sly winks with the old chap.

As the door had been left open, other persons kept constantly crowding in, and convinced and anxious bathers pressed forward to behold the experiment.

"Quicker!" said Doctor Latonne; and, in obedience to his command, the man who worked the handle turned it with greater energy. The old fellow's legs began to go at a running pace, and he, seized with irresistible gaiety, like a child being tickled, laughed as loudly as ever he could, moving his head about wildly. And, in the midst of his peals of laughter, he kept repeating: "What a *rigolo!* what a *rigolo!"* having, no doubt, picked up this word from the mouth of some foreigner.

Colosse, in his turn, broke out, and, stamping on the ground with his foot and striking his thighs with his hands, he exclaimed: "Ha! bougrrre of a Cloviche! bougrrre of a Cloviche!"

"Enough!" was the inspector's next command.

The vagabond was unfastened, and the physicians drew apart in order to verify the result.

Then Père Clovis was seen rising from the armchair, stepping on the ground, and walking. He proceeded with short steps, it was true, quite bent, and grimacing from fatigue at every effort, but still he walked!

Doctor Bonnefille was the first to declare: "This is quite a remarkable case!" Doctor Black immediately improved upon his brother-physician. Doctor Honorat, alone, said nothing.

Gontran whispered in Paul's ear: "I don't understand. Look at their heads. Are they dupes or humbugs?"

But Andermatt was speaking. He told the history of this cure since the first day, the relapse, and the final recovery which was declared to be settled and absolute.

He gaily added: “If our patient goes back a little every winter, we’ll cure him again every summer.”

Then he pompously eulogized the waters of Mont Oriol, extolled their properties, all their properties: “For my own part,” said he; “I have had a proof of their efficacy in the case of a being who is very dear to me; and, if my family is not extinct, it is to Mont Oriol that I will owe it.”

But, all at once, he had a flash of recollection. He had promised his wife a visit from Paul Bretigny. He was filled with regret for his forgetfulness, as he was most anxious to gratify her every wish. Accordingly he glanced around him, espied Paul, and coming up to him: “My dear friend, I completely forgot to tell you that Christiane is expecting you at this moment.”

Bretigny said falteringly: “Me — at this moment?”

“Yes, she has got up to-day; and she desires to see you before anyone. Hurry then as quickly as possible, and excuse me.”

Paul directed his steps toward the hotel, his heart throbbing with emotion. On his way he met the Marquis de Ravenel, who said to him:

“My daughter is up, and is surprised at not having seen you yet.”

He halted, however, on the first steps of the staircase in order to consider what he would say to her. How would she receive him? Would she be alone? If she spoke about his marriage, what reply should he make?

Since he had heard of her confinement, he could not think about her without groaning, so uneasy did he feel; and the thought of their first meeting, every time it floated through his mind, made him suddenly redden or grow pale with anguish. He had also thought with deep anxiety of this unknown child, of which he was the father; and he remained harassed by a desire to see it, mingled with a dread of looking at it. He felt himself sunk in one of those moral foulnesses which stain a man’s conscience up to the hour of his death. But he feared above all the glance of this woman, for whom his love had been so fierce and so short-lived.

Would she meet him with reproaches, with tears, or with disdain? Would she receive him, only to drive him away?

And what attitude ought he to assume toward her? Humble, crushed, suppliant, or cold? Should he explain himself or should he listen without replying? Ought he to sit down or to remain standing?

And when the child was shown to him, what should he do? What should he say? With what feeling should he appear to be agitated?

Before the door he stopped again, and at the moment when he was on the point of ringing, he noticed that his hand was trembling. However, he placed his finger on the little ivory button, and he heard the sound of the electric bell coming from the interior of the apartment.

A female servant opened the door, and admitted him. And, at the drawing-room door, he saw Christiane, at the end of the second room, lying on her long chair with her eyes fixed upon him.

These two rooms seemed to him interminable as he was passing through them. He felt himself tottering. He was afraid of knocking against the seats, and he did not venture to look down toward his feet in order to avoid lowering his eyes. She did not make a single gesture, or utter a single word. She waited till he was close beside her. Her right hand remained stretched out over her robe and her left leaned over the side of the cradle, covered all round with its curtains.

When he was three paces away from her he stopped, not knowing what best to do. The chambermaid had closed the door after him.

They were alone!

Then, he felt a longing to sink upon his knees, and implore her pardon. But she slowly raised the hand which had rested on her robe, and, extending it slightly toward him, said, “Good day,” in a grave tone.

He did not venture to touch her fingers, which, however, he brushed with his lips, while he bowed to her.

She added: “Sit down.” And he sat down on a lower chair, close to her feet.

He felt that he ought to speak, but he could not find a word or an idea, and he dared not even look at her. However, he ended by stammering out: “Your husband forgot to let me know that you were waiting for me; but for that, I would have come sooner.”

She replied: “Oh! it matters little, since we were bound to see one another again — a little sooner —— a little later!”

As she added nothing more, he hastened to say in an inquiring tone: “I hope you are getting on well by this time?”

“Thanks. As well as one can get on, after such shocks!”

She was very pale and thin, but prettier than before her confinement. Her eyes especially had gained a depth of expression which he had never seen in them before. They seemed to have acquired a darker shade, a blue less clear, less transparent, more intense. Her hands were so white that their flesh looked like that of a corpse.

She went on: "Those are hours very hard to live through. But, when one has suffered thus, one feels strong till the end of one's days."

Much affected, he murmured: "Yes; they are terrible experiences!"

She repeated, like an echo: "Terrible."

For some moments there had been light movements in the cradle — the all but imperceptible sounds of an infant awakening from sleep. Bretigny could not longer avert his gaze, preyed upon by a melancholy, morbid yearning which gradually grew stronger, tortured by the desire to behold what lived within there.

Then he observed that the curtains of the tiny bed were fastened from top to bottom with the gold pins which Christiane was accustomed to wear in her corsage. Often had he amused himself in bygone days by taking them out and pinning them again on the shoulders of his beloved, those fine pins with crescent-shaped heads. He understood what she meant; and a poignant emotion seized him, made him feel shriveled up before this barrier of golden spikes which forever separated him from this child.

A little cry, a shrill plaint arose in this white prison. Christiane quickly rocked the wherry, and in a rather abrupt tone:

"I must ask your pardon for allowing you so little time; but I must look after my daughter."

He rose, and once more kissed the hand which she extended toward him; and, as he was on the point of leaving, she said:

"I pray that you may be happy."

THE END

PIERRE AND JEAN

Translated by Clara Bell

This naturalist novel was written by Maupassant in Étretat in his native Normandy, between June and September 1887. Maupassant's shortest novel, *Pierre et Jean* appeared in three instalments in the *Nouvelle Revue* and then in book form in 1888, together with the essay *Le Roman* (The Novel). It is a realist work, exploring themes of the knowledge of one's heredity and legitimacy, the bourgeoisie and the financial problems facing all members of society.

The novel introduces Pierre, a doctor, and Jean, a lawyer, as the sons of Gérôme Roland, a jeweller who has retired to Le Havre, with his wife Louise. The lives of the middle-class family are changed when Léon Maréchal, a wealthy family friend, leaves his inheritance to Jean. This provokes Pierre to doubt the fidelity of his mother and the legitimacy of his brother. Pierre discovers that his theories about his brother's illegitimacy are correct when he finds and reads old letters that his mother and Léon Marechal had been sending to each other. Conflict now threatens to disrupt any hope of peace in the family.

Maupassant, close to the time of publication

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Le Roman – ‘The Novel’

I do not intend in these pages to put in a plea for this little novel. On the contrary, the ideas I shall try to set forth will rather involve a criticism of the class of psychological analysis which I have undertaken in *Pierre et Jean*. I propose to treat of novels in general.

I am not the only writer who finds himself taken to task in the same terms each time he brings out a new book. Among many laudatory phrases, I invariably meet with this observation, penned by the same critics: “The greatest fault of this book is that it is not, strictly speaking, a novel.”

The same form might be adopted in reply:

“The greatest fault of the writer who does me the honor to review me is that he is not a critic.”

For what are, in fact, the essential characteristics of a critic?

It is necessary that, without preconceived notions, prejudices of “School,” or partisanship for any class of artists, he should appreciate, distinguish, and explain the most antagonistic tendencies and the most dissimilar temperaments, recognizing and accepting the most varied efforts of art.

Now the Critic who, after reading *Manon Lescaut*, *Paul and Virginia*, *Don Quixote*, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, *Werther*, *Elective Affinities* (*Wahlverwandschaften*), *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Émile*, *Candide*, *Cinq-Mars*, *René*, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, *Mauprat*, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Colomba*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Salammbo*, *Madame Bovary*, *Adolphe*, *M. de Camors*, *l’Assommoir*, *Sapho*, etc., still can be so bold as to write “This or that is, or is not, a novel,” seems to me to be gifted with a perspicacity strangely akin to incompetence. Such a critic commonly understands by a novel a more or less improbable narrative of adventure, elaborated after the fashion of a piece for the stage, in three acts, of which the first contains the exposition, the second the action, and the third the catastrophe or *dénouement*.

And this method of construction is perfectly admissible, but on condition that all others are accepted on equal terms.

Are there any rules for the making of a novel, which, if we neglect, the tale must be called by another name? If *Don Quixote* is a novel, then is *Le*

Rouge et le Noir a novel? If *Monte Christo* is a novel, is *l'Assommoir*? Can any conclusive comparison be drawn between Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, *The Three Mousqueteers*, by Dumas, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, *M. de Camors* by Octave Feuillet, and *Germinal*, by Zola? Which of them all is The Novel? What are these famous rules? Where did they originate? Who laid them down? And in virtue of what principle, of whose authority, and of what reasoning?

And yet, as it would appear, these critics know in some positive and indisputable way what constitutes a novel, and what distinguishes it from other tales which are not novels. What this amounts to is that without being producers themselves they are enrolled under a School, and that, like the writers of novels, they reject all work which is conceived and executed outside the pale of their esthetics. An intelligent critic ought, on the contrary, to seek out everything which least resembles the novels already written, and urge young authors as much as possible to try fresh paths.

All writers, Victor Hugo as much as M. Zola, have insistently claimed the absolute and incontrovertible right to compose — that is to say, to imagine or observe — in accordance with their individual conception of originality, and that is a special manner of thinking, seeing, understanding, and judging. Now the critic who assumes that "the novel" can be defined in conformity with the ideas he has based on the novels he prefers, and that certain immutable rules of construction can be laid down, will always find himself at war with the artistic temperament of a writer who introduces a new manner of work. A critic really worthy of the name ought to be an analyst, devoid of preferences or passions; like an expert in pictures, he should simply estimate the artistic value of the object of art submitted to him. His intelligence, open to everything, must so far supersede his individuality as to leave him free to discover and praise books which as a man he may not like, but which as a judge he must duly appreciate.

But critics, for the most part, are only readers; whence it comes that they almost always find fault with us on wrong grounds, or compliment us without reserve or measure.

The reader, who looks for no more in a book than that it should satisfy the natural tendencies of his own mind, wants the writer to respond to his predominant taste, and he invariably praises a work or a passage which appeals to his imagination, whether idealistic, gay, licentious, melancholy, dreamy, or positive, as "striking" or "well written."

The public as a whole is composed of various groups, whose cry to us writers is:

"Comfort me."

"Amuse me."

"Touch me."

"Make me dream."

"Make me laugh."

"Make me shudder."

"Make me weep."

"Make me think."

And only a few chosen spirits say to the artist:

"Give me something fine in any form which may suit you best, according to your own temperament."

The artist makes the attempt; succeeds or fails.

The critic ought to judge the result only in relation to the nature of the attempt; he has no right to concern himself about tendencies. This has been said a thousand times already; it will always need repeating.

Thus, after a succession of literary schools which have given us deformed, superhuman, poetical, pathetic, charming or magnificent pictures of life, a realistic or naturalistic school has arisen, which asserts that it shows us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

All these theories of art must be recognized as of equal interest, and we must judge the works which are their outcome solely from the point of view of artistic value, with an *a priori* acceptance of the general notions which gave birth to each. To dispute the author's right to produce a poetical work or a realistic work, is to endeavor to coerce his temperament, to take exception to his originality, to forbid his using the eyes and wits bestowed on him by Nature. To blame him for seeing things as beautiful or ugly, as mean or epic, as gracious or sinister, is to reproach him for not being made on this or that pattern, and for having eyes which do not see exactly as ours see.

Let him be free by all means to conceive of things as he pleases, provided he is an artist. Let us rise to poetic heights to judge an idealist, and then prove to him that his dream is commonplace, ordinary, not mad or magnificent enough. But if we judge a materialistic writer, let us show him wherein the truth of life differs from the truth in his book.

It is self-evident that schools so widely different must have adopted diametrically opposite processes in composition.

The novelist who transforms truth — immutable, uncompromising, and displeasing as it is — to extract from it an exceptional and delightful plot, must necessarily manipulate events without an exaggerated respect for probability, molding them to his will, dressing and arranging them so as to attract, excite, or affect the reader. The scheme of his romance is no more than a series of ingenious combinations, skillfully leading to the issue. The incidents are planned and graduated up to the culminating point and effect of the conclusion, which is the crowning and fatal result, satisfying the curiosity aroused from the first, closing the interest, and ending the story so completely that we have no further wish to know what happened on the morrow to the most engaging actors in it.

The novelist who, on the other hand, proposes to give us an accurate picture of life, must carefully eschew any concatenation of events which might seem exceptional. His aim is not to tell a story to amuse us, or to appeal to our feelings, but to compel us to reflect, and to understand the occult and deeper meaning of events. By dint of seeing and meditating he has come to regard the world, facts, men, and things in a way peculiar to himself, which is the outcome of the sum total of his studious observation. It is this personal view of the world which he strives to communicate to us by reproducing it in a book. To make the spectacle of life as moving to us as it has been to him, he must bring it before our eyes with scrupulous exactitude. Hence he must construct his work with such skill, it must be so artful under so simple a guise, that it is impossible to detect and sketch the plan, or discern the writer’s purpose.

Instead of manipulating an adventure and working it out in such a way as to make it interesting to the last, he will take his actor or actors at a certain period of their lives, and lead them by natural stages to the next. In this way he will show either how men’s minds are modified by the influence of their environment, or how their passions and sentiments are evolved; how they love or hate, how they struggle in every sphere of society, and how their interests clash — social interests, pecuniary interests, family interests, political interests. The skill of his plan will not consist in emotional power or charm, in an attractive opening or a stirring catastrophe, but in the happy grouping of small but constant facts from which the final purpose of the work may be discerned. If within three hundred pages he depicts ten years of a life so as to show what its individual and characteristic significance may have been in the midst of all the other human beings which surrounded it, he ought to know how to eliminate from among the numberless trivial incidents of daily life all which do not serve his end, and how to set in a special light all those which might have remained invisible to less clear-sighted observers, and which give his book caliber and value as a whole.

It is intelligible that this method of construction, so unlike the old manner which was patent to all, must often mislead the critics, and that they will not all detect the subtle and secret wires — almost invisibly fine — which certain modern artists use instead of the one string formerly known as the "plot."

In a word, while the novelist of yesterday preferred to relate the crises of life, the acute phases of the mind and heart, the novelist of to-day writes the history of the heart, soul, and intellect in their normal condition. To achieve the effects he aims at — that is to say, the sense of simple reality, and to point the artistic lesson he endeavors to draw from it — that is to say, a revelation of what his contemporary man is before his very eyes, he must bring forward no facts that are not irrefragible and invariable.

But even when we place ourselves at the same point of view as these realistic artists, we may discuss and dispute their theory, which seems to be comprehensively stated in these words: "The whole Truth and nothing but the Truth." Since the end they have in view is to bring out the philosophy of certain constant and current facts, they must often correct events in favor of probability and to the detriment of truth; for

"Le vrai peut quelquefois, n'être pas le vraisemblable." (Truth may sometimes not seem probable.)

The realist, if he is an artist, will endeavor not to show us a commonplace photograph of life, but to give us a presentment of it which shall be more complete, more striking, more cogent than reality itself. To tell everything is out of the question; it would require at least a volume for each day to enumerate the endless, insignificant incidents which crowd our existence. A choice must be made — and this is the first blow to the theory of "the whole truth."

Life, moreover, is composed of the most dissimilar things, the most unforeseen, the most contradictory, the most incongruous; it is merciless, without sequence or connection, full of inexplicable, illogical, and contradictory catastrophes, such as can only be classed as miscellaneous facts. This is why the artist, having chosen his subject, can only select such characteristic details as are of use to it, from this life overladen with chances and trifles, and reject everything else, everything by the way.

To give an instance from among a thousand. The number of persons who, every day, meet with an accidental death, all over the world, is very considerable. But how can we bring a tile onto the head of an important character, or fling him under the wheels of a vehicle in the middle of a story, under the pretext that accident must have its due?

Again, in life there is no difference of foreground and distance, and events are sometimes hurried on, sometimes left to linger indefinitely. Art, on the contrary, consists in the employment of foresight, and elaboration in arranging skillful and ingenious transitions, in setting essential events in a strong light, simply by the craft of composition, and giving all else the degree of relief, in proportion to their importance, requisite to produce a convincing sense of the special truth to be conveyed.

“Truth” in such work consists in producing a complete illusion by following the common logic of facts and not by transcribing them pell-mell, as they succeed each other.

Whence I conclude that the higher order of Realists should rather call themselves Illusionists.

How childish it is, indeed, to believe in this reality, since to each of us the truth is in his own mind, his own organs. Our own eyes and ears, taste and smell, create as many different truths as there are human beings on earth. And our brains, duly and differently informed by those organs, apprehend, analyze, and decide as differently as if each of us were a being of an alien race. Each of us, then, has simply his own illusion of the world — poetical, sentimental, cheerful, melancholy, foul, or gloomy, according to his nature. And the writer has no other mission than faithfully to reproduce this illusion, with all the elaborations of art which he may have learnt and have at his command. The illusion of beauty — which is merely a conventional term invented by man! The illusion of ugliness — which is a matter of varying opinion! The illusion of truth — never immutable! The illusion of depravity — which fascinates so many minds! All the great artists are those who can make other men see their own particular illusion.

Then we must not be wroth with any theory, since each is simply the outcome, in generalizations, of a special temperament analyzing itself.

Two of these theories have more particularly been the subject of discussion, and set up in opposition to each other instead of being admitted on an equal footing: that of the purely analytical novel, and that of the objective novel.

The partisans of analysis require the writer to devote himself to indicating the smallest evolutions of a soul, and all the most secret motives of our every action, giving but a quite secondary importance to the act and fact in itself. It is but the goal, a simple milestone, the excuse for the book. According to them, these works, at once exact and visionary, in which imagination merges into observation, are to be written after the fashion in which a philosopher composes a treatise on psychology, seeking out causes in their remotest origin, telling the why and wherefore of every impulse, and detecting every reaction of the soul's movements under the promptings of interest, passion, or instinct.

The partisans of objectivity — odious word — aiming, on the contrary, at giving us an exact presentment of all that happens in life, carefully avoid all complicated explanations, all disquisitions on motive, and confine themselves to let persons and events pass before our eyes. In their opinion, psychology should be concealed in the book, as it is in reality, under the facts of existence.

The novel as conceived of on these lines gains in interest; there is more movement in the narrative, more color, more of the stir of life.

Hence, instead of giving long explanations of the state of mind of an actor in the tale, the objective writer tries to discover the action or gesture which that state of mind must inevitably lead to in that personage, under certain given circumstances. And he makes him so demean himself from one end of the volume to the other, that all his actions, all his movements shall be the expression of his inmost nature, of all his thoughts, and all his impulses or hesitancies. Thus they conceal psychology instead of flaunting it; they use it as the skeleton of the work, just as the invisible bony framework is the skeleton of the human body. The artist who paints our portrait does not display our bones.

To me it seems that the novel executed on this principle gains also in sincerity. It is, in the first place, more probable, for the persons we see moving about us do not divulge to us the motives from which they act.

We must also take into account the fact that, even if by close observation of men and women we can so exactly ascertain their characters as to predict their behavior under almost any circumstances, if we can say decisively: “Such a man, of such a temperament, in such a case, will do this or that”; yet it does not follow that we could lay a finger, one by one, on all the secret evolutions of his mind — which is not our own; all the mysterious pleadings of his instincts — which are not the same as ours; all the mingled promptings of his nature — in which the organs, nerves, blood, and flesh are different from ours.

However great the genius of a gentle, delicate man, guileless of passions and devoted to science and work, he never can so completely transfuse himself into the body of a dashing, sensual, and violent man, of exuberant vitality, torn by every desire or even by every vice, as to understand and delineate the inmost impulses and sensations of a being so unlike himself, even though he may very adequately foresee and relate all the actions of his life.

In short, the man who writes pure psychology can do no more than put himself in the place of all his puppets in the various situations in which he places them. It is impossible that he should change his organs, which are the sole intermediary between external life and ourselves, which constrain us by their perceptions, circumscribe our sensibilities, and create in each of us a soul essentially dissimilar to all those about us. Our purview and knowledge of the world, and our ideas of life, are acquired by the aid of our senses, and we cannot help transferring them, in some degree, to all the personages whose secret and unknown nature we propose to reveal. Thus, it is always ourselves that we disclose in the body of a king or an assassin, a robber or an honest man, a courtesan, a nun, a young girl, or a coarse market woman; for we are compelled to put the problem in this personal form: “If *I* were a king, a murderer, a prostitute, a nun, or a market woman, what should *I* do, what should *I* think, how should *I* act?” We can only vary our characters by altering the age, the sex, the social position, and all the circumstances of life, of that *ego* which nature has in fact inclosed in an insurmountable barrier of organs of sense. Skill consists in not betraying this *ego* to the reader, under the various masks which we employ to cover it.

Still, though on the point of absolute exactitude, pure psychological analysis is impregnable, it can nevertheless produce works of art as fine as any other method of work.

Here, for instance we have the *Symbolists*. And why not? Their artistic dream is a worthy one; and they have this especially interesting feature: that they know and proclaim the extreme difficulty of art.

And, indeed, a man must be very daring or foolish to write at all nowadays. And so many and such various masters of the craft, of such multifarious genius, what remains to be done that has not been done, or what to say that has not been said? Which of us all can boast of having written a page, a phrase, which is not to be found — or something very like it — in some other book? When we read, we who are so soaked in (French) literature that our whole body seems as it were a mere compound of words, do we ever light on a line, a thought, which is not familiar to us, or of which we have not had at least some vague forecast?

The man who only tries to amuse his public by familiar methods, writes confidently, in his candid mediocrity, works intended only for the ignorant and idle crowd. But those who are conscious of the weight of centuries of past literature, whom nothing satisfies, whom everything disgusts because they dream of something better, to whom the bloom is off everything, and who always are impressed with the uselessness, the commonness of their own achievements — these come to regard literary art as a thing unattainable and mysterious, scarcely to be detected save in a few pages by the greatest masters.

A score of phrases suddenly discovered thrill us to the heart like a startling revelation; but the lines which follow are just like all other verse, the further flow of prose is like all other prose.

Men of genius, no doubt, escape this anguish and torment because they bear within themselves an irresistible creative power. They do not sit in judgment on themselves. The rest of us, who are no more than persevering and conscientious workers, can only contend against invincible discouragement by unremitting effort.

Two men by their simple and lucid teaching gave me the strength to try again and again: Louis Bouilhet and Gustave Flaubert.

If I here speak of myself in connection with them, it is because their counsels, as summed up in a few lines, may prove useful to some young writers who may be less self-confident than most are when they make their *début* in print. Bouilhet, whom I first came to know somewhat intimately about two years before I gained the friendship of Flaubert, by dint of telling me that a hundred lines — or less — if they are without a flaw and contain the very essence of the talent and originality of even a second-rate man, are enough to establish an artist's reputation, made me understand that persistent toil and a thorough knowledge of the craft, might, in some happy hour of lucidity, power, and enthusiasm, by the fortunate occurrence of a subject in perfect concord with the tendency of our mind, lead to the production of a single work, short but as perfect as we can make it. Then I learned to see that the best-known writers have hardly ever left us more than one such volume; and that needful above all else is the good fortune which leads us to hit upon and discern, amid the multifarious matter which offers itself for selection, the subject which will absorb all our faculties, all that is of worth in us, all our artistic powers.

At a later date, Flaubert, whom I had occasionally met, took a fancy to me. I ventured to show him a few attempts. He read them kindly and replied: "I cannot tell whether you will have any talent. What you have brought me proves a certain intelligence; but never forget this, young man: talent — as Chateaubriand says — is nothing but long patience. Go and work."

The idea did not originate with Chateaubriand.

I worked; and I often went to see him, feeling that he liked me, for he had taken to calling me, in jest, his disciple. For seven years I wrote verses, I wrote tales, I even wrote a villainous play. Nothing of all this remains. The master read it all; then, the next Sunday while we breakfasted together, he would give me his criticisms, driving into me by degrees two or three principles which sum up the drift of his long and patient exhortations: "If you have any originality," said he, "you must above all things bring it out; if you have not you must acquire it."

Talent is long patience.

Everything you want to express must be considered so long, and so attentively, as to enable you to find some aspect of it which no one has yet seen and expressed. There is an unexplored side to everything, because we are wont never to use our eyes but with the memory of what others before us have thought of the things we see. The smallest thing has something unknown in it; we must find it. To describe a blazing fire, a tree in a plain, we must stand face to face with that fire or that tree, till to us they are wholly unlike any other fire or tree. Thus we may become original.

Then, having established the truth that there are not in the whole world two grains of sand, two flies, two hands, or two noses absolutely alike, he would make me describe in a few sentences some person or object, in such a way as to define it exactly, and distinguish it from every other of the same race or species.

"When you pass a grocer sitting in his doorway," he would say, "a porter smoking his pipe, or a cab stand, show me that grocer and that porter, their attitude and their whole physical aspect, including, as indicated by the skill of the portrait, their whole moral nature, in such a way that I could never mistake them for any other grocer or porter; and by a single word give me to understand wherein one cab horse differs from fifty others before or behind it."

I have explained his notions of style at greater length in another place; they bear a marked relation to the theory of observation I have just laid down. Whatever the thing we wish to say, there is but one word to express it, but one verb to give it movement, but one adjective to qualify it. We must seek till we find this noun, this verb, and this adjective, and never be content with getting very near it, never allow ourselves to play tricks, even happy ones, or have recourse to sleights of language to avoid a difficulty. The subtlest things may be rendered and suggested by applying the hint conveyed in Boileau's line:

"D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir." "He taught the power of a word put in the right place."

There is no need for an eccentric vocabulary to formulate every shade of thought — the complicated, multifarious, and outlandish words which are put upon us nowadays in the name of artistic writing; but every modification of the value of a word by the place it fills must be distinguished with extreme clearness. Give us fewer nouns, verbs, and adjectives, with almost inscrutable shades of meaning, and let us have a greater variety of phrases, more variously constructed, ingeniously divided, full of sonority and learned rhythm. Let us strive to be admirable in style, rather than curious in collecting rare words.

It is in fact more difficult to bend a sentence to one's will and make it express everything — even what it does not say, to fill it full of implications of covert and inexplicit suggestions, than to invent new expressions, or seek out in old and forgotten books all those which have fallen into disuse and lost their meaning, so that to us they are as a dead language.

The French tongue, to be sure, is a pure stream, which affected writers never have and never can trouble. Each age has flung into the limpid waters its pretentious archaisms and euphuisms, but nothing has remained on the surface to perpetuate these futile attempts and impotent efforts. It is the nature of the language to be clear, logical, and vigorous. It does not lend itself to weakness, obscurity, or corruption.

Those who describe without duly heeding abstract terms, those who make rain and hail fall on the *cleanliness* of the window panes, may throw stones at the simplicity of their brothers of the pen. The stones may indeed hit their brothers, who have a body, but will never hurt simplicity — which has none.

Guy de Maupassant.

La Guillette, Etretat, September, 1887.

CHAPTER I

"Tschah!" exclaimed old Roland suddenly, after he had remained motionless for a quarter of an hour, his eyes fixed on the water, while now and again he very slightly lifted his line sunk in the sea.

Mme. Roland, dozing in the stern by the side of Mme. Rosemilly, who had been invited to join the fishing-party, woke up, and turning her head to look at her husband, said:

"Well, well! Gerome."

And the old fellow replied in a fury:

"They do not bite at all. I have taken nothing since noon. Only men should ever go fishing. Women always delay the start till it is too late."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, who each held a line twisted round his forefinger, one to port and one to starboard, both began to laugh, and Jean remarked:

"You are not very polite to our guest, father."

M. Roland was abashed, and apologized.

"I beg your pardon, Mme. Rosemilly, but that is just like me. I invite ladies because I like to be with them, and then, as soon as I feel the water beneath me, I think of nothing but the fish."

Mme. Roland was now quite awake, and gazing with a softened look at the wide horizon of cliff and sea.

"You have had good sport, all the same," she murmured.

But her husband shook his head in denial, though at the same time he glanced complacently at the basket where the fish caught by the three men were still breathing spasmodically, with a low rustle of clammy scales and struggling fins, and dull, ineffectual efforts, gasping in the fatal air. Old Roland took the basket between his knees and tilted it up, making the silver heap of creatures slide to the edge that he might see those lying at the bottom, and their death-throes became more convulsive, while the strong smell of their bodies, a wholesome reek of brine, came up from the full depths of the creel. The old fisherman sniffed it eagerly, as we smell at roses, and exclaimed:

"Cristi! But they are fresh enough!" and he went on: "How many did you pull out, doctor?"

His eldest son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers trimmed square like a lawyer's, his mustache and beard shaved away, replied:

"Oh, not many; three or four."

The father turned to the younger. "And you, Jean?" said he.

Jean, a tall fellow, much younger than his brother, fair, with a full beard, smiled and murmured:

"Much the same as Pierre — four or five."

Every time they told the same fib, which delighted father Roland. He had hitched his line round a row-lock, and folding his arms he announced:

"I will never again try to fish after noon. After ten in the morning it is all over. The lazy brutes will not bite; they are taking their siesta in the sun." And he looked round at the sea on all sides, with the satisfied air of a proprietor.

He was a retired jeweller who had been led by an inordinate love of seafaring and fishing to fly from the shop as soon as he had made enough money to live in modest comfort on the interest of his savings. He retired to le Havre, bought a boat, and became an amateur skipper. His two sons, Pierre and Jean, had remained at Paris to continue their studies, and came for the holidays from time to time to share their father's amusements.

On leaving school, Pierre, the elder, five years older than Jean, had felt a vocation to various professions and had tried half a dozen in succession, but, soon disgusted with each in turn, he started afresh with new hopes. Medicine had been his last fancy, and he had set to work with so much ardour that he had just qualified after an unusually short course of study, by a special remission of time from the minister. He was enthusiastic, intelligent, fickle, but obstinate, full of Utopias and philosophical notions.

Jean, who was as fair as his brother was dark, as deliberate as his brother was vehement, as gentle as his brother was unforgiving, had quietly gone through his studies for the law and had just taken his diploma as a licentiate, at the time when Pierre had taken his in medicine. So they were now having a little rest at home, and both looked forward to settling in Havre if they could find a satisfactory opening.

But a vague jealousy, one of those dormant jealousies which grow up between brothers or sisters and slowly ripen till they burst, on the occasion of a marriage perhaps, or of some good fortune happening to one of them, kept them on the alert in a sort of brotherly and non-aggressive animosity. They were fond of each other, it is true, but they watched each other. Pierre, five years old when Jean was born, had looked with the eyes of a little petted animal at that other little animal which had suddenly come to lie in his father's and mother's arms and to be loved and fondled by them. Jean, from his birth, had always been a pattern of sweetness, gentleness, and good temper, and Pierre had by degrees begun to chafe at ever-lastingly hearing the praises of this great lad, whose sweetness in his eyes was indolence, whose gentleness was stupidity, and whose kindliness was blindness. His parents, whose dream for their sons was some respectable and undistinguished calling, blamed him for so often changing his mind, for his fits of enthusiasm, his abortive beginnings, and all his ineffectual impulses towards generous ideas and the liberal professions.

Since he had grown to manhood they no longer said in so many words: "Look at Jean and follow his example," but every time he heard them say "Jean did this — Jean does that," he understood their meaning and the hint the words conveyed.

Their mother, an orderly person, a thrifty and rather sentimental woman of the middle class, with the soul of a soft-hearted book-keeper, was constantly quenching the little rivalries between her two big sons to which the petty events of their life constantly gave rise. Another little circumstance, too, just now disturbed her peace of mind, and she was in fear of some complications; for in the course of the winter, while her boys were finishing their studies, each in his own line, she had made the acquaintance of a neighbour, Mme. Rosemilly, the widow of a captain of a merchantman who had died at sea two years before. The young widow — quite young, only three-and-twenty — a woman of strong intellect who knew life by instinct as the free animals do, as though she had seen, gone through, understood, and weighted every conceivable contingency, and judged them with a wholesome, strict, and benevolent mind, had fallen into the habit of calling to work or chat for an hour in the evening with these friendly neighbours, who would give her a cup of tea.

Father Roland, always goaded on by his seafaring craze, would question their new friend about the departed captain; and she would talk of him, and his voyages, and his old-world tales, without hesitation, like a resigned and reasonable woman who loves life and respects death.

The two sons on their return, finding the pretty widow quite at home in the house, forthwith began to court her, less from any wish to charm her than from the desire to cut each other out.

Their mother, being practical and prudent, sincerely hoped that one of them might win the young widow, for she was rich; but then she would have liked that the other should not be grieved.

Mme. Rosemilly was fair, with blue eyes, a mass of light waving hair, fluttering at the least breath of wind, and an alert, daring, pugnacious little way with her, which did not in the least answer to the sober method of her mind.

She already seemed to like Jean best, attracted, no doubt, by an affinity of nature. This preference, however, she betrayed only by an almost imperceptible difference of voice and look and also by occasionally asking his opinion. She seemed to guess that Jean's views would support her own, while those of Pierre must inevitably be different. When she spoke of the doctor's ideas on politics, art, philosophy, or morals, she would sometimes say: "Your crotchets." Then he would look at her with the cold gleam of an accuser drawing up an indictment against women — all women, poor weak things.

Never till his sons came home had M. Roland invited her to join his fishing expeditions, nor had he ever taken his wife; for he liked to put off before daybreak, with his ally, Captain Beausire, a master mariner retired, whom he had first met on the quay at high tides and with whom he had struck up an intimacy, and the old sailor Papagris, known as Jean Bart, in whose charge the boat was left.

But one evening of the week before, Mme. Rosemilly, who had been dining with them, remarked, "It must be great fun to go out fishing." The jeweller, flattered by her interest and suddenly fired with the wish to share his favourite sport with her, and to make a convert after the manner of priests, exclaimed: "Would you like to come?"

"To be sure I should."

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

"Are you the woman to be ready to start at five in the morning?"

She exclaimed in horror:

"No, indeed: that is too much."

He was disappointed and chilled, suddenly doubting her true vocation. However, he said:

"At what hour can you be ready?"

"Well — at nine?"

"Not before?"

"No, not before. Even that is very early."

The old fellow hesitated; he certainly would catch nothing, for when the sun has warmed the sea the fish bite no more; but the two brothers had eagerly pressed the scheme, and organized and arranged everything there and then.

So on the following Tuesday the Pearl had dropped anchor under the white rocks of Cape la Heve; they had fished till midday, then they had slept awhile, and then fished again without catching anything; and then it was that father Roland, perceiving, rather late, that all that Mme. Rosemilly really enjoyed and cared for was the sail on the sea, and seeing that his lines hung motionless, had uttered in a spirit of unreasonable annoyance, that vehement "Tschah!" which applied as much to the pathetic widow as to the creatures he could not catch.

Now he contemplated the spoil — his fish — with the joyful thrill of a miser; seeing as he looked up at the sky that the sun was getting low: "Well, boys," said he, "suppose we turn homeward."

The young men hauled in their lines, coiled them up, cleaned the hooks and stuck them into corks, and sat waiting.

Roland stood up to look out like a captain.

"No wind," said he. "You will have to pull, young 'uns."

And suddenly extending one arm to the northward, he exclaimed:

"Here comes the packet from Southampton."

Away over the level sea, spread out like a blue sheet, vast and sheeny and shot with flame and gold, an inky cloud was visible against the rosy sky in the quarter to which he pointed, and below it they could make out the hull of the steamer, which looked tiny at such a distance. And to southward other wreaths of smoke, numbers of them, could be seen, all converging towards the Havre pier, now scarcely visible as a white streak with the lighthouse, upright, like a horn, at the end of it.

Roland asked: "Is not the Normandie due to-day?" And Jean replied:

"Yes, to-day."

"Give me my glass. I fancy I see her out there."

The father pulled out the copper tube, adjusted it to his eye, sought the speck, and then, delighted to have seen it, exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, there she is. I know her two funnels. Would you like to look, Mme. Rosemilly?"

She took the telescope and directed it towards the Atlantic horizon, without being able, however, to find the vessel, for she could distinguish nothing — nothing but blue, with a coloured halo round it, a circular rainbow — and then all manner of queer things, winking eclipses which made her feel sick.

She said as she returned the glass:

“I never could see with that thing. It used to put my husband in quite a rage; he would stand for hours at the windows watching the ships pass.”

Old Roland, much put out, retorted:

“Then it must be some defect in your eye, for my glass is a very good one.”

Then he offered it to his wife.

“Would you like to look?”

“No, thank you. I know before hand that I could not see through it.”

Mme. Roland, a woman of eight-and-forty but who did not look it, seemed to be enjoying this excursion and this waning day more than any of the party.

Her chestnut hair was only just beginning to show streaks of white. She had a calm, reasonable face, a kind and happy way with her which it was a pleasure to see. Her son Pierre was wont to say that she knew the value of money, but this did not hinder her from enjoying the delights of dreaming. She was fond of reading, of novels, and poetry, not for their value as works of art, but for the sake of the tender melancholy mood they would induce in her. A line of poetry, often but a poor one, often a bad one, would touch the little chord, as she expressed it, and give her the sense of some mysterious desire almost realized. And she delighted in these faint emotions which brought a little flutter to her soul, otherwise as strictly kept as a ledger.

Since settling at Havre she had become perceptibly stouter, and her figure, which had been very supple and slight, had grown heavier.

This day on the sea had been delightful to her. Her husband, without being brutal, was rough with her, as a man who is the despot of his shop is apt to be rough, without anger or hatred; to such men to give an order is to swear. He controlled himself in the presence of strangers, but in private he let loose and gave himself terrible vent, though he was himself afraid of every one. She, in sheer horror of the turmoil, of scenes, of useless explanations, always gave way and never asked for anything; for a very long time she had not ventured to ask Roland to take her out in the boat. So she had joyfully hailed this opportunity, and was keenly enjoying the rare and new pleasure.

From the moment when they started she surrendered herself completely, body and soul, to the soft, gliding motion over the waves. She was not thinking; her mind was not wandering through either memories or hopes; it seemed to her as though her heart, like her body, was floating on something soft and liquid and delicious which rocked and lulled it.

When their father gave the word to return, "Come, take your places at the oars!" she smiled to see her sons, her two great boys, take off their jackets and roll up their shirt-sleeves on their bare arms.

Pierre, who was nearest to the two women, took the stroke oar, Jean the other, and they sat waiting till the skipper should say: "Give way!" For he insisted on everything being done according to strict rule.

Simultaneously, as if by a single effort, they dipped the oars, and lying back, pulling with all their might, began a struggle to display their strength. They had come out easily, under sail, but the breeze had died away, and the masculine pride of the two brothers was suddenly aroused by the prospect of measuring their powers. When they went out alone with their father they plied the oars without any steering, for Roland would be busy getting the lines ready, while he kept a lookout in the boat's course, guiding it by a sign or a word: "Easy, Jean, and you, Pierre, put your back into it." Or he would say, "Now, then, number one; come, number two — a little elbow grease." Then the one who had been dreaming pulled harder, the one who had got excited eased down, and the boat's head came round.

But to-day they meant to display their biceps. Pierre's arms were hairy, somewhat lean but sinewy; Jean's were round and white and rosy, and the knot of muscles moved under the skin.

At first Pierre had the advantage. With his teeth set, his brow knit, his legs rigid, his hands clinched on the oar, he made it bend from end to end at every stroke, and the Pearl was veering landward. Father Roland, sitting in the bows, so as to leave the stern seat to the two women, wasted his breath shouting, "Easy, number one; pull harder, number two!" Pierre pulled harder in his frenzy, and "number two" could not keep time with his wild stroke.

At last the skipper cried: "Stop her!" The two oars were lifted simultaneously, and then by his father's orders Jean pulled alone for a few minutes. But from that moment he had it all his own way; he grew eager and warmed to his work, while Pierre, out of breath and exhausted by his first vigorous spurt, was lax and panting. Four times running father Roland made them stop while the elder took breath, so as to get the boat into her right course again. Then the doctor, humiliated and fuming, his forehead dropping with sweat, his cheeks white, stammered out:

"I cannot think what has come over me; I have a stitch in my side. I started very well, but it has pulled me up."

Jean asked: "Shall I pull alone with both oars for a time?"

"No, thanks, it will go off."

And their mother, somewhat vexed, said:

"Why, Pierre, what rhyme or reason is there in getting into such a state. You are not a child."

And he shrugged his shoulders and set to once more.

Mme. Rosemilly pretended not to see, not to understand, not to hear. Her fair head went back with an engaging little jerk every time the boat moved forward, making the fine wayward hairs flutter about her temples.

But father Roland presently called out:

"Look, the Prince Albert is catching us up!"

They all looked round. Long and low in the water, with her two raking funnels and two yellow paddle-boxes like two round cheeks, the Southampton packet came ploughing on at full steam, crowded with passengers under open parasols. Its hurrying, noisy paddle-wheels beating up the water which fell again in foam, gave it an appearance of haste as of a courier pressed for time, and the upright stem cut through the water, throwing up two thin translucent waves which glided off along the hull.

When it had come quite near the Pearl, father Roland lifted his hat, the ladies shook their handkerchiefs, and half a dozen parasols eagerly waved on board the steamboat responded to this salute as she went on her way, leaving behind her a few broad undulations on the still and glassy surface of the sea.

There were other vessels, each with its smoky cap, coming in from every part of the horizon towards the short white jetty, which swallowed them up, one after another, like a mouth. And the fishing barks and lighter craft with broad sails and slender masts, stealing across the sky in tow of inconspicuous tugs, were coming in, faster and slower, towards the devouring ogre, who from time to time seemed to have had a surfeit, and spewed out to the open sea another fleet of steamers, brigs, schooners, and three-masted vessels with their tangled mass of rigging. The hurrying steamships flew off to the right and left over the smooth bosom of the ocean, while sailing vessels, cast off by the pilot-tugs which had hauled them out, lay motionless, dressing themselves from the main-mast to the fore-tops in canvas, white or brown, and ruddy in the setting sun.

Mme. Roland, with her eyes half-shut, murmured: “Good heavens, how beautiful the sea is!”

And Mme. Rosemilly replied with a long sigh, which, however, had no sadness in it:

“Yes, but it is sometimes very cruel, all the same.”

Roland exclaimed:

“Look, there is the Normandie just going in. A big ship, isn’t she?”

Then he described the coast opposite, far, far away, on the other side of the mouth of the Seine — that mouth extended over twenty kilometres, said he. He pointed out Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the little river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados which make the coast unsafe as far as Cherbourg. Then he enlarged on the question of the sand-banks in the Seine, which shift at every tide so that even the pilots of Quilleboeuf are at fault if they do not survey the channel every day. He bid them notice how the town of Havre divided Upper from Lower Normandy. In Lower Normandy the shore sloped down to the sea in pasture-lands, fields, and meadows. The coast of Upper Normandy, on the contrary, was steep, a high cliff, ravined, cleft and towering, forming an immense white rampart all the way to Dunkirk, while in each hollow a village or a port lay hidden: Etretat, Fecamp, Saint-Valery, Treport, Dieppe, and the rest.

The two women did not listen. Torpid with comfort and impressed by the sight of the ocean covered with vessels rushing to and fro like wild beasts about their den, they sat speechless, somewhat awed by the soothing and gorgeous sunset. Roland alone talked on without end; he was one of those whom nothing can disturb. Women, whose nerves are more sensitive, sometimes feel, without knowing why, that the sound of useless speech is as irritating as an insult.

Pierre and Jean, who had calmed down, were rowing slowly, and the Pearl was making for the harbour, a tiny thing among those huge vessels.

When they came alongside of the quay, Papagris, who was waiting there, gave his hand to the ladies to help them out, and they took the way into the town. A large crowd, the crowd which haunts the pier every day at high tide

— was also drifting homeward. Mme. Roland and Mme. Rosemilly led the way, followed by the three men. As they went up the Rue de Paris they stopped now and then in front of a milliner’s or a jeweller’s shop, to look at a bonnet or an ornament; then after making their comments they went on again. In front of the Place de la Bourse Roland paused, as he did every day, to gaze at the docks full of vessels — the *Bassin du Commerce*, with other docks beyond, where the huge hulls lay side by side, closely packed in rows, four or five deep. And masts innumerable; along several kilometres of quays the endless masts, with their yards, poles, and rigging, gave this great gap in the heart of the town the look of a dead forest. Above this leafless forest the gulls were wheeling, and watching to pounce, like a falling stone, on any scraps flung overboard; a sailor boy, fixing a pulley to a cross-beam, looked as if he had gone up there bird’s-nesting.

“Will you dine with us without any sort of ceremony, just that we may end the day together?” said Mme. Roland to her friend.

“To be sure I will, with pleasure; I accept equally without ceremony. It would be dismal to go home and be alone this evening.”

Pierre, who had heard, and who was beginning to be restless under the young woman’s indifference, muttered to himself: “Well, the widow is taking root now, it would seem.” For some days past he had spoken of her as “the widow.” The word, harmless in itself, irritated Jean merely by the tone given to it, which to him seemed spiteful and offensive.

The three men spoke not another word till they reached the threshold of their own house. It was a narrow one, consisting of a ground-floor and two floors above, in the Rue Belle-Normande. The maid, Josephine, a girl of nineteen, a rustic servant-of-all-work at low wages, gifted to excess with the startled animal expression of a peasant, opened the door, went up stairs at her master’s heels to the drawing-room, which was on the first floor, and then said:

“A gentleman called — three times.”

Old Roland, who never spoke to her without shouting and swearing, cried out:

“Who do you say called, in the devil’s name?”

She never winced at her master’s roaring voice, and replied:

“A gentleman from the lawyer’s.”

“What lawyer?”

“Why, M’sieu ‘Canu — who else?”

“And what did this gentleman say?”

“That M’sieu ‘Canu will call in himself in the course of the evening.”

Maitre Lecanu was M. Roland’s lawyer, and in a way his friend, managing his business for him. For him to send word that he would call in the evening, something urgent and important must be in the wind; and the four Rolands looked at each other, disturbed by the announcement as folks of small fortune are wont to be at any intervention of a lawyer, with its suggestions of contracts, inheritance, lawsuits — all sorts of desirable or formidable contingencies. The father, after a few moments of silence, muttered:

“What on earth can it mean?”

Mme. Rosemilly began to laugh.

“Why, a legacy, of course. I am sure of it. I bring good luck.”

But they did not expect the death of any one who might leave them anything.

Mme. Roland, who had a good memory for relationships, began to think over all their connections on her husband’s side and on her own, to trace up pedigrees and the ramifications of cousin-ship.

Before even taking off her bonnet she said:

“I say, father” (she called her husband “father” at home, and sometimes “Monsieur Roland” before strangers), “tell me, do you remember who it was that Joseph Lebru married for the second time?”

“Yes — a little girl named Dumenil, a stationer’s daughter.”

“Had they any children?”

“I should think so! four or five at least.”

“Not from that quarter, then.”

She was quite eager already in her search; she caught at the hope of some added ease dropping from the sky. But Pierre, who was very fond of his mother, who knew her to be somewhat visionary and feared she might be disappointed, a little grieved, a little saddened if the news were bad instead of good, checked her:

“Do not get excited, mother; there is no rich American uncle. For my part, I should sooner fancy that it is about a marriage for Jean.”

Every one was surprised at the suggestion, and Jean was a little ruffled by his brother’s having spoken of it before Mme. Rosemilly.

“And why for me rather than for you? The hypothesis is very disputable. You are the elder; you, therefore, would be the first to be thought of.

Besides, I do not wish to marry."

Pierre smiled sneeringly:

"Are you in love, then?"

And the other, much put out, retorted: "Is it necessary that a man should be in love because he does not care to marry yet?"

"Ah, there you are! That 'yet' sets it right; you are waiting."

"Granted that I am waiting, if you will have it so."

But old Roland, who had been listening and cogitating, suddenly hit upon the most probable solution.

"Bless me! what fools we are to be racking our brains. Maitre Lecanu is our very good friend; he knows that Pierre is looking out for a medical partnership and Jean for a lawyer's office, and he has found something to suit one of you."

This was so obvious and likely that every one accepted it.

"Dinner is ready," said the maid. And they all hurried off to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down to table.

Ten minutes later they were at dinner in the little dining-room on the ground-floor.

At first they were silent; but presently Roland began again in amazement at this lawyer's visit.

"For after all, why did he not write? Why should he have sent his clerk three times? Why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought it quite natural.

"An immediate decision is required, no doubt; and perhaps there are certain confidential conditions which it does not do to put into writing."

Still, they were all puzzled, and all four a little annoyed at having invited a stranger, who would be in the way of their discussing and deciding on what should be done.

They had just gone upstairs again when the lawyer was announced. Roland flew to meet him.

"Good-evening, my dear Maitre," said he, giving his visitor the title which in France is the official prefix to the name of every lawyer.

Mme. Rosemilly rose.

"I am going," she said. "I am very tired."

A faint attempt was made to detain her; but she would not consent, and went home without either of the three men offering to escort her, as they always had done.

Mme. Roland did the honours eagerly to their visitor.

"A cup of coffee, monsieur?"

"No, thank you. I have just had dinner."

"A cup of tea, then?"

"Thank you, I will accept one later. First we must attend to business."

The deep silence which succeeded this remark was broken only by the regular ticking of the clock, and below stairs the clatter of saucepans which the girl was cleaning — too stupid even to listen at the door.

The lawyer went on:

"Did you, in Paris, know a certain M. Marechal — Leon Marechal?"

M. and Mme. Roland both exclaimed at once: "I should think so!"

"He was a friend of yours?"

Roland replied: "Our best friend, monsieur, but a fanatic for Paris; never to be got away from the boulevard. He was a head clerk in the exchequer office. I have never seen him since I left the capital, and latterly we had ceased writing to each other. When people are far apart you know — — "

The lawyer gravely put in:

"M. Marechal is deceased."

Both man and wife responded with the little movement of pained surprise, genuine or false, but always ready, with which such news is received.

Maitre Lecanu went on:

"My colleague in Paris has just communicated to me the main item of his will, by which he makes your son Jean — Monsieur Jean Roland — his sole legatee."

They were all too much amazed to utter a single word. Mme. Roland was the first to control her emotion and stammered out:

"Good heavens! Poor Leon — our poor friend! Dear me! Dear me! Dead!"

The tears started to her eyes, a woman's silent tears, drops of grief from her very soul, which trickle down her cheeks and seem so very sad, being so clear. But Roland was thinking less of the loss than of the prospect announced. Still, he dared not at once inquire into the clauses of the will and the amount of the fortune, so to work round to these interesting facts he asked:

"And what did he die of, poor Marechal?"

Maitre Lecanu did not know in the least.

"All I know is," said he, "that dying without any direct heirs, he has left the whole of his fortune — about twenty thousand francs a year ($3,840) in three per cents — to your second son, whom he has known from his birth up, and judges worthy of the legacy. If M. Jean should refuse the money, it is to go to the foundling hospitals."

Old Roland could not conceal his delight and exclaimed:

"Sacristi! It is the thought of a kind heart. And if I had had no heir I would not have forgotten him; he was a true friend."

The lawyer smiled.

"I was very glad," he said, "to announce the event to you myself. It is always a pleasure to be the bearer of good news."

It had not struck him that this good news was that of the death of a friend, of Roland's best friend; and the old man himself had suddenly forgotten the intimacy he had but just spoken of with so much conviction.

Only Mme. Roland and her sons still looked mournful. She, indeed, was still shedding a few tears, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, which she then pressed to her lips to smother her deep sobs.

The doctor murmured:

"He was a good fellow, very affectionate. He often invited us to dine with him — my brother and me."

Jean, with wide-open, glittering eyes, laid his hand on his handsome fair beard, a familiar gesture with him, and drew his fingers down it to the tip of the last hairs, as if to pull it longer and thinner. Twice his lips parted to utter some decent remark, but after long meditation he could only say this:

"Yes, he was certainly fond of me. He would always embrace me when I went to see him."

But his father's thoughts had set off at a gallop — galloping round this inheritance to come; nay, already in hand; this money lurking behind the door, which would walk in quite soon, to-morrow, at a word of consent.

"And there is no possible difficulty in the way?" he asked. "No lawsuit — no one to dispute it?"

Maitre Lecanu seemed quite easy.

"No; my Paris correspondent states that everything is quite clear. M. Jean has only to sign his acceptance."

"Good. Then — then the fortune is quite clear?"

"Perfectly clear."

"All the necessary formalities have been gone through?"

“All.”

Suddenly the old jeweller had an impulse of shame — obscure, instinctive, and fleeting; shame of his eagerness to be informed, and he added:

“You understand that I ask all these questions immediately so as to save my son unpleasant consequences which he might not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassing liabilities, what not! And a legatee finds himself in an inextricable thorn-bush. After all, I am not the heir — but I think first of the little ‘un.”

They were accustomed to speak of Jean among themselves as the “little one,” though he was much bigger than Pierre.

Suddenly Mme. Roland seemed to wake from a dream, to recall some remote fact, a thing almost forgotten that she had heard long ago, and of which she was not altogether sure. She inquired doubtingly:

“Were you not saying that our poor friend Marechal had left his fortune to my little Jean?”

“Yes, madame.”

And she went on simply:

“I am much pleased to hear it; it proves that he was attached to us.”

Roland had risen.

“And would you wish, my dear sir, that my son should at once sign his acceptance?”

“No — no, M. Roland. To-morrow, at my office to-morrow, at two o’clock, if that suits you.”

“Yes, to be sure — yes, indeed. I should think so.”

Then Mme. Roland, who had also risen and who was smiling after her tears, went up to the lawyer, and laying her hand on the back of his chair while she looked at him with the pathetic eyes of a grateful mother, she said:

“And now for that cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu?”

“Now I will accept it with pleasure, madame.”

The maid, on being summoned, brought in first some dry biscuits in deep tin boxes, those crisp, insipid English cakes which seem to have been made for a parrot’s beak, and soldered into metal cases for a voyage round the world. Next she fetched some little gray linen doilies, folded square, those tea-napkins which in thrifty families never get washed. A third time she came in with the sugar-basin and cups; then she departed to heat the water. They sat waiting.

No one could talk; they had too much to think about and nothing to say. Mme. Roland alone attempted a few commonplace remarks. She gave an account of the fishing excursion, and sang the praises of the Pearl and of Mme. Rosemilly.

"Charming, charming!" the lawyer said again and again.

Roland, leaning against the marble mantel-shelf as if it were winter and the fire burning, with his hands in his pockets and his lips puckered for a whistle, could not keep still, tortured by the invincible desire to give vent to his delight. The two brothers, in two arm-chairs that matched, one on each side of the centre-table, stared in front of them, in similar attitudes full of dissimilar expressions.

At last the tea appeared. The lawyer took a cup, sugared it, and drank it, after having crumbled into it a little cake which was too hard to crunch. Then he rose, shook hands, and departed.

"Then it is understood," repeated Roland. "To-morrow, at your place, at two?"

"Quite so. To-morrow, at two."

Jean had not spoken a word.

When their guest had gone, silence fell again till father Roland clapped his two hands on his younger son's shoulders, crying:

"Well, you devilish lucky dog! You don't embrace me!"

Then Jean smiled. He embraced his father, saying:

"It had not struck me as indispensable."

The old man was beside himself with glee. He walked about the room, strummed on the furniture with his clumsy nails, turned about on his heels, and kept saying:

"What luck! What luck! Now, that is really what I call luck!"

Pierre asked:

"Then you used to know this Marechal well?"

And his father replied:

"I believe! Why, he used to spend every evening at our house. Surely you remember he used to fetch you from school on half-holidays, and often took you back again after dinner. Why, the very day when Jean was born it was he who went for the doctor. He had been breakfasting with us when your mother was taken ill. Of course we knew at once what it meant, and he set off post-haste. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that because we had a good laugh over it afterward. It is very likely that he may have thought of that when he was dying, and as he had no heir he may have said to himself: ‘I remember helping to bring that youngster into the world, so I will leave him my savings.’”

Mme. Roland, sunk in a deep chair, seemed lost in reminiscences once more. She murmured, as though she were thinking aloud:

“Ah, he was a good friend, very devoted, very faithful, a rare soul in these days.”

Jean got up.

“I shall go out for a little walk,” he said.

His father was surprised and tried to keep him; they had much to talk about, plans to be made, decisions to be formed. But the young man insisted, declaring that he had an engagement. Besides, there would be time enough for settling everything before he came into possession of his inheritance. So he went away, for he wished to be alone to reflect. Pierre, on his part, said that he too was going out, and after a few minutes followed his brother.

As soon as he was alone with his wife, father Roland took her in his arms, kissed her a dozen times on each cheek, and, replying to a reproach she had often brought against him, said:

“You see, my dearest, that it would have been no good to stay any longer in Paris and work for the children till I dropped, instead of coming here to recruit my health, since fortune drops on us from the skies.”

She was quite serious.

“It drops from the skies on Jean,” she said. “But Pierre?”

“Pierre? But he is a doctor; he will make plenty of money; besides, his brother will surely do something for him.”

“No, he would not take it. Besides, this legacy is for Jean, only for Jean. Pierre will find himself at a great disadvantage.”

The old fellow seemed perplexed: “Well, then, we will leave him rather more in our will.”

“No; that again would not be quite just.”

“Drat it all!” he exclaimed. “What do you want me to do in the matter? You always hit on a whole heap of disagreeable ideas. You must spoil all my pleasures. Well, I am going to bed. Good-night. All the same, I call it good luck, jolly good luck!”

And he went off, delighted in spite of everything, and without a word of regret for the friend so generous in his death.

Mme. Roland sat thinking again in front of the lamp which was burning out.

CHAPTER II

As soon as he got out, Pierre made his way to the Rue de Paris, the high-street of Havre, brightly lighted up, lively and noisy. The rather sharp air of the seacoast kissed his face, and he walked slowly, his stick under his arm and his hands behind his back. He was ill at ease, oppressed, out of heart, as one is after hearing unpleasant tidings. He was not distressed by any definite thought, and he would have been puzzled to account, on the spur of the moment, for this dejection of spirit and heaviness of limb. He was hurt somewhere, without knowing where; somewhere within him there was a pin-point of pain — one of those almost imperceptible wounds which we cannot lay a finger on, but which incommode us, tire us, depress us, irritate us — a slight and occult pang, as it were a small seed of distress.

When he reached the square in front of the theatre, he was attracted by the lights in the Cafe Tortoni, and slowly bent his steps to the dazzling facade; but just as he was going in he reflected that he would meet friends there and acquaintances — people he would be obliged to talk to; and fierce repugnance surged up in him for this commonplace good-fellowship over coffee cups and liqueur glasses. So, retracing his steps, he went back to the high-street leading to the harbour.

“Where shall I go?” he asked himself, trying to think of a spot he liked which would agree with his frame of mind. He could not think of one, for being alone made him feel fractious, yet he could not bear to meet any one. As he came out on the Grand Quay he hesitated once more; then he turned towards the pier; he had chosen solitude.

Going close by a bench on the breakwater he sat down, tired already of walking and out of humour with his stroll before he had taken it.

He said to himself: “What is the matter with me this evening?” And he began to search in his memory for what vexation had crossed him, as we question a sick man to discover the cause of his fever.

His mind was at once irritable and sober; he got excited, then he reasoned, approving or blaming his impulses; but in time primitive nature at last proved the stronger; the sensitive man always had the upper hand over the intellectual man. So he tried to discover what had induced this irascible mood, this craving to be moving without wanting anything, this desire to meet some one for the sake of differing from him, and at the same time this aversion for the people he might see and the things they might say to him.

And then he put the question to himself, “Can it be Jean’s inheritance?”

Yes, it was certainly possible. When the lawyer had announced the news he had felt his heart beat a little faster. For, indeed, one is not always master of one’s self; there are sudden and pertinacious emotions against which a man struggles in vain.

He fell into meditation on the physiological problem of the impression produced on the instinctive element in man, and giving rise to a current of painful or pleasurable sensations diametrically opposed to those which the thinking man desires, aims at, and regards as right and wholesome, when he has risen superior to himself by the cultivation of his intellect. He tried to picture to himself the frame of mind of a son who had inherited a vast fortune, and who, thanks to that wealth, may now know many long-wished-for delights, which the avarice of his father had prohibited — a father, nevertheless, beloved and regretted.

He got up and walked on to the end of the pier. He felt better, and glad to have understood, to have detected himself, to have unmasked *the other* which lurks in us.

“Then I was jealous of Jean,” thought he. “That is really vilely mean. And I am sure of it now, for the first idea which came into my head was that he would marry Mme. Rosemilly. And yet I am not in love myself with that priggish little goose, who is just the woman to disgust a man with good sense and good conduct. So it is the most gratuitous jealousy, the very essence of jealousy, which is merely because it is! I must keep an eye on that!”

By this time he was in front of the flag-staff, whence the depth of water in the harbour is signalled, and he struck a match to read the list of vessels signalled in the roadstead and coming in with the next high tide. Ships were due from Brazil, from La Plata, from Chili and Japan, two Danish brigs, a Norwegian schooner, and a Turkish steamship — which startled Pierre as much as if it had read a Swiss steamship; and in a whimsical vision he pictured a great vessel crowded with men in turbans climbing the shrouds in loose trousers.

“How absurd!” thought he. “But the Turks are a maritime people, too.”

A few steps further on he stopped again, looking out at the roads. On the right, above Sainte-Adresse, the two electric lights of Cape la Heve, like monstrous twin Cyclops, shot their long and powerful beams across the sea. Starting from two neighbouring centres, the two parallel shafts of light, like the colossal tails of two comets, fell in a straight and endless slope from the top of the cliff to the uttermost horizon. Then, on the two piers, two more lights, the children of these giants, marked the entrance to the harbour; and far away on the other side of the Seine others were in sight, many others, steady or winking, flashing or revolving, opening and shutting like eyes — the eyes of the ports — yellow, red, and green, watching the night-wrapped sea covered with ships; the living eyes of the hospitable shore saying, merely by the mechanical and regular movement of their eye-lids: "I am here. I am Trouville; I am Honfleur; I am the Andemer River." And high above all the rest, so high that from this distance it might be taken for a planet, the airy lighthouse of Etouville showed the way to Rouen across the sand banks at the mouth of the great river.

Out on the deep water, the limitless water, darker than the sky, stars seemed to have fallen here and there. They twinkled in the night haze, small, close to shore or far away — white, red, and green, too. Most of them were motionless; some, however, seemed to be scudding onward. These were the lights of the ships at anchor or moving about in search of moorings.

Just at this moment the moon rose behind the town; and it, too, looked like some huge, divine pharos lighted up in the heavens to guide the countless fleet of stars in the sky. Pierre murmured, almost speaking aloud: "Look at that! And we let our bile rise for twopence!"

On a sudden, close to him, in the wide, dark ditch between the two piers, a shadow stole up, a large shadow of fantastic shape. Leaning over the granite parapet, he saw that a fishing-boat had glided in, without the sound of a voice or the splash of a ripple, or the plunge of an oar, softly borne in by its broad, tawny sail spread to the breeze from the open sea.

He thought to himself: "If one could but live on board that boat, what peace it would be — perhaps!"

And then again a few steps beyond, he saw a man sitting at the very end of the breakwater.

A dreamer, a lover, a sage — a happy or a desperate man? Who was it? He went forward, curious to see the face of this lonely individual, and he recognised his brother.

"What, is it you, Jean?"

“Pierre! You! What has brought you here?”

“I came out to get some fresh air. And you?”

Jean began to laugh.

“I too came out for fresh air.” And Pierre sat down by his brother’s side.

“Lovely — isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes, lovely.”

He understood from the tone of voice that Jean had not looked at anything. He went on:

“For my part, whenever I come here I am seized with a wild desire to be off with all those boats, to the north or the south. Only to think that all those little sparks out there have just come from the uttermost ends of the earth, from the lands of great flowers and beautiful olive or copper coloured girls, the lands of humming-birds, of elephants, of roaming lions, of negro kings, from all the lands which are like fairy-tales to us who no longer believe in the White Cat or the Sleeping Beauty. It would be awfully jolly to be able to treat one’s self to an excursion out there; but, then, it would cost a great deal of money, no end— “

He broke off abruptly, remembering that his brother had that money now; and released from care, released from labouring for his daily bread, free, unfettered, happy, and light-hearted, he might go whither he listed, to find the fair-haired Swedes or the brown damsels of Havana. And then one of those involuntary flashes which were common with him, so sudden and swift that he could neither anticipate them, nor stop them, nor qualify them, communicated, as it seemed to him, from some second, independent, and violent soul, shot through his brain.

“Bah! He is too great a simpleton; he will marry that little Rosemilly.” He was standing up now. “I will leave you to dream of the future. I want to be moving.” He grasped his brother’s hand and added in a heavy tone:

“Well, my dear old boy, you are a rich man. I am very glad to have come upon you this evening to tell you how pleased I am about it, how truly I congratulate you, and how much I care for you.”

Jean, tender and soft-hearted, was deeply touched.

“Thank you, my good brother — thank you!” he stammered.

And Pierre turned away with his slow step, his stick under his arm, and his hands behind his back.

Back in the town again, he once more wondered what he should do, being disappointed of his walk and deprived of the company of the sea by his brother’s presence. He had an inspiration. “I will go and take a glass of liqueur with old Marowsko,” and he went off towards the quarter of the town known as Ingouville.

He had known old Marowsko-*le pere Marowsko*, he called him — in the hospitals in Paris. He was a Pole, an old refugee, it was said, who had gone through terrible things out there, and who had come to ply his calling as a chemist and druggist in France after passing a fresh examination. Nothing was known of his early life, and all sorts of legends had been current among the indoor and outdoor patients and afterward among his neighbours. This reputation as a terrible conspirator, a nihilist, a regicide, a patriot ready for anything and everything, who had escaped death by a miracle, had bewitched Pierre Roland’s lively and bold imagination; he had made friends with the old Pole, without, however, having ever extracted from him any revelation as to his former career. It was owing to the young doctor that this worthy had come to settle at Havre, counting on the large custom which the rising practitioner would secure him. Meanwhile he lived very poorly in his little shop, selling medicines to the small tradesmen and workmen in his part of the town.

Pierre often went to see him and chat with him for an hour after dinner, for he liked Marowsko’s calm look and rare speech, and attributed great depth to his long spells of silence.

A simple gas-burner was alight over the counter crowded with phials. Those in the window were not lighted, from motives of economy. Behind the counter, sitting on a chair with his legs stretched out and crossed, an old man, quite bald, with a large beak of a nose which, as a prolongation of his hairless forehead, gave him a melancholy likeness to a parrot, was sleeping soundly, his chin resting on his breast. He woke at the sound of the shop-bell, and recognising the doctor, came forward to meet him, holding out both hands.

His black frock-coat, streaked with stains of acids and sirups, was much too wide for his lean little person, and looked like a shabby old cassock; and the man spoke with a strong Polish accent which gave the childlike character to his thin voice, the lisping note and intonations of a young thing learning to speak.

Pierre sat down, and Marowsko asked him: “What news, dear doctor?”

“None. Everything as usual, everywhere.”

“You do not look very gay this evening.”

“I am not often gay.”

“Come, come, you must shake that off. Will you try a glass of liqueur?”

“Yes, I do not mind.”

“Then I will give you something new to try. For these two months I have been trying to extract something from currants, of which only a sirup has been made hitherto — well, and I have done it. I have invented a very good liqueur — very good indeed; very good.”

And quite delighted, he went to a cupboard, opened it, and picked out a bottle which he brought forth. He moved and did everything in jerky gestures, always incomplete; he never quite stretched out his arm, nor quite put out his legs; nor made any broad and definite movements. His ideas seemed to be like his actions; he suggested them, promised them, sketched them, hinted at them, but never fully uttered them.

And, indeed, his great end in life seemed to be the concoction of sirups and liqueurs. “A good sirup or a good liqueur is enough to make a fortune,” he would often say.

He had compounded hundreds of these sweet mixtures without ever succeeding in floating one of them. Pierre declared that Marowsko always reminded him of Marat.

Two little glasses were fetched out of the back shop and placed on the mixing-board. Then the two men scrutinized the colour of the fluid by holding it up to the gas.

“A fine ruby,” Pierre declared.

“Isn’t it?” Marowsko’s old parrot-face beamed with satisfaction.

The doctor tasted, smacked his lips, meditated, tasted again, meditated again, and spoke:

“Very good — capital; and quite new in flavour. It is a find, my dear fellow.”

“Ah, really? Well, I am very glad.”

Then Marowsko took counsel as to baptizing the new liqueur. He wanted to call it “Extract of currants,” or else “*Fine Groseille*” or “*Groselia*,” or again “*Groseline*.” Pierre did not approve of either of these names.

Then the old man had an idea:

“What you said just now would be very good, very good: ‘Fine Ruby.’” But the doctor disputed the merit of this name, though it had originated with him. He recommended simply “Groseillette,” which Marowsko thought admirable.

Then they were silent, and sat for some minutes without a word under the solitary gas-lamp. At last Pierre began, almost in spite of himself:

“A queer thing has happened at home this evening. A friend of my father’s, who is lately dead, has left his fortune to my brother.”

The druggist did not at first seem to understand, but after thinking it over he hoped that the doctor had half the inheritance. When the matter was clearly explained to him he appeared surprised and vexed; and to express his dissatisfaction at finding that his young friend had been sacrificed, he said several times over:

“It will not look well.”

Pierre, who was relapsing into nervous irritation, wanted to know what Marowsko meant by this phrase.

Why would it not look well? What was there to look badly in the fact that his brother had come into the money of a friend of the family?

But the cautious old man would not explain further.

“In such a case the money is left equally to the two brothers, and I tell you, it will not look well.”

And the doctor, out of all patience, went away, returned to his father’s house, and went to bed. For some time afterward he heard Jean moving softly about the adjoining room, and then, after drinking two glasses of water, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

The doctor awoke next morning firmly resolved to make his fortune. Several times already he had come to the same determination without following up the reality. At the outset of all his trials of some new career the hopes of rapidly acquired riches kept up his efforts and confidence, till the first obstacle, the first check, threw him into a fresh path. Snug in bed between the warm sheets, he lay meditating. How many medical men had become wealthy in quite a short time! All that was needed was a little knowledge of the world; for in the course of his studies he had learned to estimate the most famous physicians, and he judged them all to be asses. He was certainly as good as they, if not better. If by any means he could secure a practice among the wealth and fashion of Havre, he could easily make a hundred thousand francs a year. And he calculated with great exactitude what his certain profits must be. He would go out in the morning to visit his patients; at the very moderate average of ten a day, at twenty francs each, that would mount up to seventy-two thousand francs a year at least, or even seventy-five thousand; for ten patients was certainly below the mark. In the afternoon he would be at home to, say, another ten patients, at ten francs each — thirty-six thousand francs. Here, then, in round numbers was an income of twenty thousand francs. Old patients, or friends whom he would charge only ten francs for a visit, or see at home for five, would perhaps make a slight reduction on this sum total, but consultations with other physicians and various incidental fees would make up for that.

Nothing could be easier than to achieve this by skilful advertising remarks in the Figaro to the effect that the scientific faculty of Paris had their eye on him, and were interested in the cures effected by the modest young practitioner of Havre! And he would be richer than his brother, richer and more famous; and satisfied with himself, for he would owe his fortune solely to his own exertions; and liberal to his old parents, who would be justly proud of his fame. He would not marry, would not burden his life with a wife who would be in his way, but he would choose his mistress from the most beautiful of his patients. He felt so sure of success that he sprang out of bed as though to grasp it on the spot, and he dressed to go and search through the town for rooms to suit him.

Then, as he wandered about the streets, he reflected how slight are the causes which determine our actions. Any time these three weeks he might and ought to have come to this decision, which, beyond a doubt, the news of his brother's inheritance had abruptly given rise to.

He stopped before every door where a placard proclaimed that "fine apartments" or "handsome rooms" were to be let; announcements without an adjective he turned from with scorn. Then he inspected them with a lofty air, measuring the height of the rooms, sketching the plan in his note-book, with the passages, the arrangement of the exits, explaining that he was a medical man and had many visitors. He must have a broad and well-kept stair-case; nor could he be any higher up than the first floor.

After having written down seven or eight addresses and scribbled two hundred notes, he got home to breakfast a quarter of an hour too late.

In the hall he heard the clatter of plates. Then they had begun without him! Why? They were never wont to be so punctual. He was nettled and put out, for he was somewhat thin-skinned. As he went in Roland said to him:

"Come, Pierre, make haste, devil take you! You know we have to be at the lawyer's at two o'clock. This is not the day to be dawdling."

Pierre sat down without replying, after kissing his mother and shaking hands with his father and brother; and he helped himself from the deep dish in the middle of the table to the cutlet which had been kept for him. It was cold and dry, probably the least tempting of them all. He thought that they might have left it on the hot plate till he came in, and not lose their heads so completely as to have forgotten their other son, their eldest.

The conversation, which his entrance had interrupted, was taken up again at the point where it had ceased.

"In your place," Mme. Roland was saying to Jean, "I will tell you what I should do at once. I should settle in handsome rooms so as to attract attention; I should ride on horseback and select one or two interesting cases to defend and make a mark in court. I would be a sort of amateur lawyer, and very select. Thank God you are out of all danger of want, and if you pursue a profession, it is, after all, only that you may not lose the benefit of your studies, and because a man ought never to sit idle."

Old Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed:

"Christi! In your place I should buy a nice yacht, a cutter on the build of our pilot-boats. I would sail as far as Senegal in such a boat as that."

Pierre, in his turn, spoke his views. After all, said he, it was not his wealth which made the moral worth, the intellectual worth of a man. To a man of inferior mind it was only a means of degradation, while in the hands of a strong man it was a powerful lever. They, to be sure, were rare. If Jean were a really superior man, now that he could never want he might prove it. But then he must work a hundred times harder than he would have done in other circumstances. His business now must be not to argue for or against the widow and the orphan, and pocket his fees for every case he gained, but to become a really eminent legal authority, a luminary of the law. And he added in conclusion:

"If I were rich wouldn't I dissect no end of bodies!"

Father Roland shrugged his shoulders.

"That is all very fine," he said. "But the wisest way of life is to take it easy. We are not beasts of burden, but men. If you are born poor you must work; well, so much the worse; and you do work. But where you have dividends! You must be a flat if you grind yourself to death."

Pierre replied haughtily:

"Our notions differ. For my part, I respect nothing on earth but learning and intellect; everything else is beneath contempt."

Mme. Roland always tried to deaden the constant shocks between father and son; she turned the conversation, and began talking of a murder committed the week before at Bolbec Nointot. Their minds were immediately full of the circumstances under which the crime had been committed, and absorbed by the interesting horror, the attractive mystery of crime, which, however commonplace, shameful, and disgusting, exercises a strange and universal fascination over the curiosity of mankind. Now and again, however, old Roland looked at his watch. "Come," said he, "it is time to be going."

Pierre sneered.

"It is not yet one o'clock," he said. "It really was hardly worth while to condemn me to eat a cold cutlet."

"Are you coming to the lawyer's?" his mother asked.

"I? No. What for?" he replied dryly. "My presence is quite unnecessary."

Jean sat silent, as though he had no concern in the matter. When they were discussing the murder at Bolbec he, as a legal authority, had put forward some opinions and uttered some reflections on crime and criminals.

Now he spoke no more; but the sparkle in his eye, the bright colour in his cheeks, the very gloss of his beard seemed to proclaim his happiness.

When the family had gone, Pierre, alone once more, resumed his investigations in the apartments to let. After two or three hours spent in going up and down stairs, he at last found, in the Boulevard Francois, a pretty set of rooms; a spacious entresol with two doors on two different streets, two drawing-rooms, a glass corridor, where his patients while they waited, might walk among flowers, and a delightful dining-room with a bow-window looking out over the sea.

When it came to taking it, the terms — three thousand francs — pulled him up; the first quarter must be paid in advance, and he had nothing, not a penny to call his own.

The little fortune his father had saved brought him in about eight thousand francs a year, and Pierre had often blamed himself for having placed his parents in difficulties by his long delay in deciding on a profession, by forfeiting his attempts and beginning fresh courses of study. So he went away, promising to send his answer within two days, and it occurred to him to ask Jean to lend him the amount of this quarter's rent, or even of a half-year, fifteen hundred francs, as soon as Jean should have come into possession.

"It will be a loan for a few months at most," he thought. "I shall repay him, very likely before the end of the year. It is a simple matter, and he will be glad to do so much for me."

As it was not yet four o'clock, and he had nothing to do, absolutely nothing, he went to sit in the public gardens; and he remained a long time on a bench, without an idea in his brain, his eyes fixed on the ground, crushed by weariness amounting to distress.

And yet this was how he had been living all these days since his return home, without suffering so acutely from the vacuity of his existence and from inaction. How had he spent his time from rising in the morning till bed-time?

He had loafed on the pier at high tide, loafed in the streets, loafed in the cafes, loafed at Marowsko's, loafed everywhere. And on a sudden this life, which he had endured till now, had become odious, intolerable. If he had had any pocket-money, he would have taken a carriage for a long drive in the country, along by the farm-ditches shaded by beech and elm trees; but he had to think twice of the cost of a glass of beer or a postage-stamp, and such an indulgence was out of his ken. It suddenly struck him how hard it was for a man of past thirty to be reduced to ask his mother, with a blush for a twenty-franc piece every now and then; and he muttered, as he scored the gravel with the ferule of his stick:

"Christi, if I only had money!"

And again the thought of his brother's legacy came into his head like the sting of a wasp; but he drove it out indignantly, not choosing to allow himself to slip down that descent to jealousy.

Some children were playing about in the dusty paths. They were fair little things with long hair, and they were making little mounds of sand with the greatest gravity and careful attention, to crush them at once by stamping on them.

It was one of those gloomy days with Pierre when we pry into every corner of our souls and shake out every crease.

"All our endeavours are like the labours of those babies," thought he. And then he wondered whether the wisest thing in life were not to beget two or three of these little creatures and watch them grow up with complacent curiosity. A longing for marriage breathed on his soul. A man is not so lost when he is not alone. At any rate, he has some one stirring at his side in hours of trouble or of uncertainty; and it is something only to be able to speak on equal terms to a woman when one is suffering.

Then he began thinking of women. He knew very little of them, never having had any but very transient connections as a medical student, broken off as soon as the month's allowance was spent, and renewed or replaced by another the following month. And yet there must be some very kind, gentle, and comforting creatures among them. Had not his mother been the good sense and saving grace of his own home? How glad he would be to know a woman, a true woman!

He started up with a sudden determination to go and call on Mme. Rosemilly. But he promptly sat down again. He did not like that woman. Why not? She had too much vulgar and sordid common sense; besides, did she not seem to prefer Jean? Without confessing it to himself too bluntly, this preference had a great deal to do with his low opinion of the widow's intellect; for, though he loved his brother, he could not help thinking him somewhat mediocre and believing himself the superior. However, he was not going to sit there till nightfall; and as he had done on the previous evening, he anxiously asked himself: "What am I going to do?"

At this moment he felt in his soul the need of a melting mood, of being embraced and comforted. Comforted — for what? He could not have put it into words; but he was in one of these hours of weakness and exhaustion when a woman's presence, a woman's kiss, the touch of a hand, the rustle of a petticoat, a soft look out of black or blue eyes, seem the one thing needful, there and then, to our heart. And the memory flashed upon him of a little barmaid at a beer-house, whom he had walked home with one evening, and seen again from time to time.

So once more he rose, to go and drink a bock with the girl. What should he say to her? What would she say to him? Nothing, probably. But what did that matter? He would hold her hand for a few seconds. She seemed to have a fancy for him. Why, then, did he not go to see her oftener?

He found her dozing on a chair in the beer-shop, which was almost deserted. Three men were drinking and smoking with their elbows on the oak tables; the book-keeper in her desk was reading a novel, while the master, in his shirt-sleeves, lay sound asleep on a bench.

As soon as she saw him the girl rose eagerly, and coming to meet him, said:

"Good-day, monsieur — how are you?"

"Pretty well; and you?"

"I — oh, very well. How scarce you make yourself!"

"Yes. I have very little time to myself. I am a doctor, you know."

"Indeed! You never told me. If I had known that — I was out of sorts last week and I would have sent for you. What will you take?"

"A bock. And you?"

"I will have a bock, too, since you are willing to treat me."

She had addressed him with the familiar *tu*, and continued to use it, as if the offer of a drink had tacitly conveyed permission. Then, sitting down opposite each other, they talked for a while. Every now and then she took his hand with the light familiarity of girls whose kisses are for sale, and looking at him with inviting eyes she said:

"Why don't you come here oftener? I like you very much, sweetheart."

He was already disgusted with her; he saw how stupid she was, and common, smacking of low life. A woman, he told himself, should appear to us in dreams, or such a glory as may poetize her vulgarity.

Next she asked him:

“You went by the other morning with a handsome fair man, wearing a big beard. Is he your brother?”

“Yes, he is my brother.”

“Awfully good-looking.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes, indeed; and he looks like a man who enjoys life, too.”

What strange craving impelled him on a sudden to tell this tavern-wench about Jean’s legacy? Why should this thing, which he kept at arm’s length when he was alone, which he drove from him for fear of the torment it brought upon his soul, rise to his lips at this moment? And why did he allow it to overflow them as if he needed once more to empty out his heart to some one, gorged as it was with bitterness?

He crossed his legs and said:

“He has wonderful luck, that brother of mine. He had just come into a legacy of twenty thousand francs a year.”

She opened those covetous blue eyes of hers very wide.

“Oh! and who left him that? His grandmother or his aunt?”

“No. An old friend of my parents’.”

“Only a friend! Impossible! And you — did he leave you nothing?”

“No. I knew him very slightly.”

She sat thinking some minutes; then, with an odd smile on her lips, she said:

“Well, he is a lucky dog, that brother of yours, to have friends of this pattern. My word! and no wonder he is so unlike you.”

He longed to slap her, without knowing why; and he asked with pinched lips: “And what do you mean by saying that?”

She had put on a stolid, innocent face.

“O — h, nothing. I mean he has better luck than you.”

He tossed a franc piece on the table and went out.

Now he kept repeating the phrase: “No wonder he is so unlike you.”

What had her thought been, what had been her meaning under those words? There was certainly some malice, some spite, something shameful in it. Yes, that hussy must have fancied, no doubt, that Jean was Marechal’s son. The agitation which came over him at the notion of this suspicion cast at his mother was so violent that he stood still, looking about him for some place where he might sit down. In front of him was another cafe. He went in, took a chair, and as the waiter came up, “A bock,” he said.

He felt his heart beating, his skin was gooseflesh. And then the recollection flashed upon him of what Marowsko had said the evening before. “It will not look well.” Had he had the same thought, the same suspicion as this baggage? Hanging his head over the glass, he watched the white froth as the bubbles rose and burst, asking himself: “Is it possible that such a thing should be believed?”

But the reasons which might give rise to this horrible doubt in other men’s minds now struck him, one after another, as plain, obvious, and exasperating. That a childless old bachelor should leave his fortune to a friend’s two sons was the most simple and natural thing in the world; but that he should leave the whole of it to one alone — of course people would wonder, and whisper, and end by smiling. How was it that he had not foreseen this, that his father had not felt it? How was it that his mother had not guessed it? No; they had been too delighted at this unhoped-for wealth for the idea to come near them. And besides, how should these worthy souls have ever dreamed of anything so ignominious?

But the public — their neighbours, the shopkeepers, their own tradesmen, all who knew them — would not they repeat the abominable thing, laugh at it, enjoy it, make game of his father and despise his mother?

And the barmaid’s remark that Jean was fair and he dark, that they were not in the least alike in face, manner, figure, or intelligence, would now strike every eye and every mind. When any one spoke of Roland’s son, the question would be: “Which, the real or the false?”

He rose, firmly resolved to warn Jean, and put him on his guard against the frightful danger which threatened their mother’s honour.

But what could Jean do? The simplest thing no doubt, would be to refuse the inheritance, which would then go to the poor, and to tell all friends or acquaintances who had heard of the bequest that the will contained clauses and conditions impossible to subscribe to, which would have made Jean not inheritor but merely a trustee.

As he made his way home he was thinking that he must see his brother alone, so as not to speak of such a matter in the presence of his parents. On reaching the door he heard a great noise of voices and laughter in the drawing-room, and when he went in he found Captain Beausire and Mme. Rosemilly, whom his father had brought home and engaged to dine with them in honour of the good news. Vermouth and absinthe had been served to whet their appetites, and every one had been at once put into good spirits.

Captain Beausire, a funny little man who had become quite round by dint of being rolled about at sea, and whose ideas also seemed to have been worn round, like the pebbles of a beach, while he laughed with his throat full of *r*'s, looked upon life as a capital thing, in which everything that might turn up was good to take. He clinked his glass against father Roland's, while Jean was offering two freshly filled glasses to the ladies. Mme. Rosemilly refused, till Captain Beausire, who had known her husband, cried:

"Come, come, madame, *bis repetita placent*, as we say in the lingo, which is as much as to say two glasses of vermouth never hurt any one. Look at me; since I have left the sea, in this way I give myself an artificial roll or two every day before dinner; I add a little pitching after my coffee, and that keeps things lively for the rest of the evening. I never rise to a hurricane, mind you, never, never. I am too much afraid of damage."

Roland, whose nautical mania was humoured by the old mariner, laughed heartily, his face flushed already and his eye watery from the absinthe. He had a burly shop-keeping stomach — nothing but stomach — in which the rest of his body seemed to have got stowed away; the flabby paunch of men who spend their lives sitting, and who have neither thighs, nor chest, nor arms, nor neck; the seat of their chairs having accumulated all their substance in one spot. Beausire, on the contrary, though short and stout, was as tight as an egg and as hard as a cannon-ball.

Mme. Roland had not emptied her glass and was gazing at her son Jean with sparkling eyes; happiness had brought a colour to her cheeks.

In him, too, the fulness of joy had now blazed out. It was a settled thing, signed and sealed; he had twenty thousand francs a year. In the sound of his laugh, in the fuller voice with which he spoke, in his way of looking at the others, his more positive manners, his greater confidence, the assurance given by money was at once perceptible.

Dinner was announced, and as the old man was about to offer his arm to Mme. Rosemilly, his wife exclaimed:

"No, no, father. Everything is for Jean to-day."

Unwonted luxury graced the table. In front of Jean, who sat in his father's place, an enormous bouquet of flowers — a bouquet for a really great occasion — stood up like a cupola dressed with flags, and was flanked by four high dishes, one containing a pyramid of splendid peaches; the second, a monumental cake gorged with whipped cream and covered with pinnacles of sugar — a cathedral in confectionery; the third, slices of pine-apple floating in clear sirup; and the fourth — unheard-of lavishness — black grapes brought from the warmer south.

“The devil!” exclaimed Pierre as he sat down. “We are celebrating the accession of Jean the rich.”

After the soup, Madeira was passed round, and already every one was talking at once. Beausire was giving the history of a dinner he had eaten at San Domingo at the table of a negro general. Old Roland was listening, and at the same time trying to get in, between the sentences, his account of another dinner, given by a friend of his at Mendon, after which every guest was ill for a fortnight. Mme. Rosemilly, Jean, and his mother were planning an excursion to breakfast at Saint Jouin, from which they promised themselves the greatest pleasure; and Pierre was only sorry that he had not dined alone in some pot-house by the sea, so as to escape all this noise and laughter and glee which fretted him. He was wondering how he could now set to work to confide his fears to his brother, and induce him to renounce the fortune he had already accepted and of which he was enjoying the intoxicating foretaste. It would be hard on him, no doubt; but it must be done; he could not hesitate; their mother’s reputation was at stake.

The appearance of an enormous shade-fish threw Roland back on fishing stories. Beausire told some wonderful tales of adventure on the Gaboon, at Sainte-Marie, in Madagascar, and above all, off the coasts of China and Japan, where the fish are as queer-looking as the natives. And he described the appearance of these fishes — their goggle gold eyes, their blue or red bellies, their fantastic fins like fans, their eccentric crescent-shaped tails — with such droll gesticulation that they all laughed till they cried as they listened.

Pierre alone seemed incredulous, muttering to himself: “True enough, the Normans are the Gascons of the north!”

After the fish came a vol-au-vent, then a roast fowl, a salad, French beans with a Pithiviers lark-pie. Mme. Rosemilly’s maid helped to wait on them, and the fun rose with the number of glasses of wine they drank. When the cork of the first champagne-bottle was drawn with a pop, father Roland, highly excited, imitated the noise with his tongue and then declared: “I like that noise better than a pistol-shot.”

Pierre, more and more fractious every moment, retorted with a sneer:

“And yet it is perhaps a greater danger for you.”

Roland, who was on the point of drinking, set his full glass down on the table again, and asked:

“Why?”

He had for some time been complaining of his health, of heaviness, giddiness, frequent and unaccountable discomfort. The doctor replied:

“Because the bullet might very possibly miss you, while the glass of wine is dead certain to hit you in the stomach.”

“And what then?”

“Then it scorches your inside, upsets your nervous system, makes the circulation sluggish, and leads the way to the apoplectic fit which always threatens a man of your build.”

The jeweller’s incipient intoxication had vanished like smoke before the wind. He looked at his son with fixed, uneasy eyes, trying to discover whether he was making game of him.

But Beausire exclaimed:

“Oh, these confounded doctors! They all sing the same tune — eat nothing, drink nothing, never make love or enjoy yourself; it all plays the devil with your precious health. Well, all I can say is, I have done all these things, sir, in every quarter of the globe, wherever and as often as I have had the chance, and I am none the worse.”

Pierre answered with some asperity:

“In the first place, captain, you are a stronger man than my father; and in the next, all free livers talk as you do till the day when — when they come back no more to say to the cautious doctor: ‘You were right.’ When I see my father doing what is worst and most dangerous for him, it is but natural that I should warn him. I should be a bad son if I did otherwise.”

Mme. Roland, much distressed, now put in her word: “Come, Pierre, what ails you? For once it cannot hurt him. Think of what an occasion it is for him, for all of us. You will spoil his pleasure and make us all unhappy. It is too bad of you to do such a thing.”

He muttered, as he shrugged his shoulders.

“He can do as he pleases. I have warned him.”

But father Roland did not drink. He sat looking at his glass full of the clear and luminous liquor while its light soul, its intoxicating soul, flew off in tiny bubbles mounting from its depths in hurried succession to die on the surface. He looked at it with the suspicious eye of a fox smelling at a dead hen and suspecting a trap. He asked doubtfully: “Do you think it will really do me much harm?” Pierre had a pang of remorse and blamed himself for letting his ill-humour punish the rest.

“No,” said he. “Just for once you may drink it; but do not take too much, or get into the habit of it.”

Then old Roland raised his glass, but still he could not make up his mind to put it to his lips. He contemplated it regretfully, with longing and with fear; then he smelt it, tasted it, drank it in sips, swallowing them slowly, his heart full of terrors, of weakness and greediness; and then, when he had drained the last drop, of regret.

Pierre’s eye suddenly met that of Mme. Rosemilly; it rested on him clear and blue, far-seeing and hard. And he read, he knew, the precise thought which lurked in that look, the indignant thought of this simple and right-minded little woman; for the look said: “You are jealous — that is what you are. Shameful!”

He bent his head and went on with his dinner.

He was not hungry and found nothing nice. A longing to be off harassed him, a craving to be away from these people, to hear no more of their talking, jests, and laughter.

Father Roland meanwhile, to whose head the fumes of the wine were rising once more, had already forgotten his son’s advice and was eyeing a champagne-bottle with a tender leer as it stood, still nearly full, by the side of his plate. He dared not touch it for fear of being lectured again, and he was wondering by what device or trick he could possess himself of it without exciting Pierre’s remark. A ruse occurred to him, the simplest possible. He took up the bottle with an air of indifference, and holding it by the neck, stretched his arm across the table to fill the doctor’s glass, which was empty; then he filled up all the other glasses, and when he came to his own he began talking very loud, so that if he poured anything into it they might have sworn it was done inadvertently. And in fact no one took any notice.

Pierre, without observing it, was drinking a good deal. Nervous and fretted, he every minute raised to his lips the tall crystal funnel where the bubbles were dancing in the living, translucent fluid. He let the wine slip very slowly over his tongue, that he might feel the little sugary sting of the fixed air as it evaporated.

Gradually a pleasant warmth glowed in his frame. Starting from the stomach as a centre, it spread to his chest, took possession of his limbs, and diffused itself throughout his flesh, like a warm and comforting tide, bringing pleasure with it. He felt better now, less impatient, less annoyed, and his determination to speak to his brother that very evening faded away; not that he thought for a moment of giving it up, but simply not to disturb the happy mood in which he found himself.

Beausire presently rose to propose a toast. Having bowed to the company, he began:

“Most gracious ladies and gentlemen, we have met to do honour to a happy event which has befallen one of our friends. It used to be said that Fortune was blind, but I believe that she is only short-sighted or tricksy, and that she has lately bought a good pair of glasses which enabled her to discover in the town of Havre the son of our worthy friend Roland, skipper of the Pearl.”

Every one cried bravo and clapped their hands, and the elder Roland rose to reply. After clearing his throat, for it felt thick and his tongue was heavy, he stammered out:

“Thank you, captain, thank you — for myself and my son. I shall never forget your behaviour on this occasion. Here’s good luck to you!”

His eyes and nose were full of tears, and he sat down, finding nothing more to say.

Jean, who was laughing, spoke in his turn:

“It is I,” said he, “who ought to thank my friends here, my excellent friends,” and he glanced at Mme. Rosemilly, “who have given me such a touching evidence of their affection. But it is not by words that I can prove my gratitude. I will prove it to-morrow, every hour of my life, always, for our friendship is not one of those which fade away.”

His mother, deeply moved, murmured: “Well said, my boy.”

But Beausire cried out:

“Come, Mme. Rosemilly, speak on behalf of the fair sex.”

She raised her glass, and in a pretty voice, slightly touched with sadness, she said: “I will pledge you to the memory of M. Marechal.”

There was a few moments’ lull, a pause for decent meditation, as after prayer. Beausire, who always had a flow of compliment, remarked:

“Only a woman ever thinks of these refinements.” Then turning to Father Roland: “And who was this Marechal, after all? You must have been very intimate with him.”

The old man, emotional with drink, began to whimper, and in a broken voice he said:

"Like a brother, you know. Such a friend as one does not make twice — we were always together — he dined with us every evening — and would treat us to the play — I need say no more — no more — no more. A true friend — a real true friend — wasn't he, Louise?"

His wife merely answered: "Yes; he was a faithful friend."

Pierre looked at his father and then at his mother, then, as the subject changed he drank some more wine. He scarcely remembered the remainder of the evening. They had coffee, then liqueurs, and they laughed and joked a great deal. At about midnight he went to bed, his mind confused and his head heavy; and he slept like a brute till nine next morning.

CHAPTER IV

These slumbers, lapped in Champagne and Chartreuse, had soothed and calmed him, no doubt, for he awoke in a very benevolent frame of mind. While he was dressing he appraised, weighed, and summed up the agitations of the past day, trying to bring out quite clearly and fully their real and occult causes, those personal to himself as well as those from outside.

It was, in fact, possible that the girl at the beer-shop had had an evil suspicion — a suspicion worthy of such a hussy — on hearing that only one of the Roland brothers had been made heir to a stranger; but have not such natures as she always similar notions, without a shadow of foundation, about every honest woman? Do they not, whenever they speak, vilify, calumniate, and abuse all whom they believe to be blameless? Whenever a woman who is above imputation is mentioned in their presence, they are as angry as if they were being insulted, and exclaim: “Ah, yes, I know your married women; a pretty sort they are! Why, they have more lovers than we have, only they conceal it because they are such hypocrites. Oh, yes, a pretty sort, indeed!”

Under any other circumstances he would certainly not have understood, not have imagined the possibility of such an insinuation against his poor mother, who was so kind, so simple, so excellent. But his spirit seethed with the leaven of jealousy that was fermenting within him. His own excited mind, on the scent, as it were, in spite of himself, for all that could damage his brother, had even perhaps attributed to the tavern barmaid an odious intention of which she was innocent. It was possible that his imagination had, unaided, invented this dreadful doubt — his imagination, which he never controlled, which constantly evaded his will and went off, unfettered, audacious, adventurous, and stealthy, into the infinite world of ideas, bringing back now and then some which were shameless and repulsive, and which it buried in him, in the depths of his soul, in its most fathomless recesses, like something stolen. His heart, most certainly, his own heart had secrets from him; and had not that wounded heart discerned in this atrocious doubt a means of depriving his brother of the inheritance of which he was jealous? He suspected himself now, cross-examining all the mysteries of his mind as bigots search their consciences.

Mme. Rosemilly, though her intelligence was limited, had certainly a woman's instinct, scent, and subtle intuitions. And this notion had never entered her head, since she had, with perfect simplicity, drunk to the blessed memory of the deceased Marechal. She was not the woman to have done this if she had had the faintest suspicion. Now he doubted no longer; his involuntary displeasure at his brother's windfall of fortune and his religious affection for his mother had magnified his scruples — very pious and respectable scruples, but exaggerated. As he put this conclusion into words in his own mind he felt happy, as at the doing of a good action; and he resolved to be nice to every one, beginning with his father, whose manias, and silly statements, and vulgar opinions, and too conspicuous mediocrity were a constant irritation to him.

He came in not late for breakfast, and amused all the family by his fun and good humour.

His mother, quite delighted, said to him:

"My little Pierre, you have no notion how humorous and clever you can be when you choose."

And he talked, putting things in a witty way, and making them laugh by ingenious hits at their friends. Beausire was his butt, and Mme. Rosemilly a little, but in a very judicious way, not too spiteful. And he thought as he looked at his brother: "Stand up for her, you muff. You may be as rich as you please, I can always eclipse you when I take the trouble."

As they drank their coffee he said to his father:

"Are you going out in the Pearl to-day?"

"No, my boy."

"May I have her with Jean Bart?"

"To be sure, as long as you like."

He bought a good cigar at the first tobacconist's and went down to the quay with a light step. He glanced up at the sky, which was clear and luminous, of a pale blue, freshly swept by the sea-breeze.

Papagris, the boatman, commonly called Jean Bart, was dozing in the bottom of the boat, which he was required to have in readiness every day at noon when they had not been out fishing in the morning.

"You and I together, mate," cried Pierre. He went down the iron ladder of the quay and leaped into the vessel.

“Which way is the wind?” he asked.

“Due east still, M’sieu Pierre. A fine breeze out at sea.”

“Well, then, old man, off we go!”

They hoisted the foresail and weighed anchor; and the boat, feeling herself free, glided slowly down towards the jetty on the still water of the harbour. The breath of wind that came down the streets caught the top of the sail so lightly as to be imperceptible, and the Pearl seemed endowed with life — the life of a vessel driven on by a mysterious latent power. Pierre took the tiller, and, holding his cigar between his teeth, he stretched his legs on the bunk, and with his eyes half-shut in the blinding sunshine, he watched the great tarred timbers of the breakwater as they glided past.

When they reached the open sea, round the nose of the north pier which had sheltered them, the fresher breeze puffed in the doctor’s face and on his hands, like a somewhat icy caress, filled his chest, which rose with a long sigh to drink it in, and swelling the tawny sail, tilted the Pearl on her beam and made her more lively. Jean Bart hastily hauled up the jib, and the triangle of canvas, full of wind, looked like a wing; then, with two strides to the stern, he let out the spinnaker, which was close-reefed against his mast.

Then, along the hull of the boat, which suddenly heeled over and was running at top speed, there was a soft, crisp sound of water hissing and rushing past. The prow ripped up the sea like the share of a plough gone mad, and the yielding water it turned up curled over and fell white with foam, as the ploughed soil, heavy and brown, rolls and falls in a ridge. At each wave they met — and there was a short, chopping sea — the Pearl shivered from the point of the bowsprit to the rudder, which trembled under Pierre’s hand; when the wind blew harder in gusts, the swell rose to the gunwale as if it would overflow into the boat. A coal brig from Liverpool was lying at anchor, waiting for the tide; they made a sweep round her stern and went to look at each of the vessels in the roads one after another; then they put further out to look at the unfolding line of coast.

For three hours Pierre, easy, calm, and happy, wandered to and fro over the dancing waters, guiding the thing of wood and canvas, which came and went at his will, under the pressure of his hand, as if it were a swift and docile winged creature.

He was lost in day-dreams, the dreams one has on horseback or on the deck of a boat; thinking of his future, which should be brilliant, and the joys of living intelligently. On the morrow he would ask his brother to lend him fifteen hundred francs for three months, that he might settle at once in the pretty rooms on the Boulevard Francois.

Suddenly the sailor said: “The fog is coming up, M’sieu Pierre. We must go in.”

He looked up and saw to the northward a gray shade, filmy but dense, blotting out the sky and covering the sea; it was sweeping down on them like a cloud fallen from above. He tacked for land and made for the pier, scudding before the wind and followed by the flying fog, which gained upon them. When it reached the Pearl, wrapping her in its intangible density, a cold shudder ran over Pierre’s limbs, and a smell of smoke and mould, the peculiar smell of a sea-fog, made him close his mouth that he might not taste the cold, wet vapour. By the time the boat was at her usual moorings in the harbour the whole town was buried in this fine mist, which did not fall but yet wetted everything like rain, and glided and rolled along the roofs and streets like the flow of a river. Pierre, with his hands and feet frozen, made haste home and threw himself on his bed to take a nap till dinner-time. When he made his appearance in the dining-room his mother was saying to Jean:

“The glass corridor will be lovely. We will fill it with flowers. You will see. I will undertake to care for them and renew them. When you give a party the effect will be quite fairy-like.”

“What in the world are you talking about?” the doctor asked.

“Of a delightful apartment I have just taken for your brother. It is quite a find; an entresol looking out on two streets. There are two drawing-rooms, a glass passage, and a little circular dining-room, perfectly charming for a bachelor’s quarters.”

Pierre turned pale. His anger seemed to press on his heart.

“Where is it?” he asked.

“Boulevard Francois.”

There was no possibility for doubt. He took his seat in such a state of exasperation that he longed to exclaim: “This is really too much! Is there nothing for any one but him?”

His mother, beaming, went on talking: “And only fancy, I got it for two thousand eight hundred francs a year. They asked three thousand, but I got a reduction of two hundred francs on taking for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be delightfully housed there. An elegant home is enough to make the fortune of a lawyer. It attracts clients, charms them, holds them fast, commands respect, and shows them that a man who lives in such good style expects a good price for his words.”

She was silent for a few seconds and then went on:

“We must look out for something suitable for you; much less pretentious, since you have nothing, but nice and pretty all the same. I assure you it will be to your advantage.”

Pierre replied contemptuously:

“For me! Oh, I shall make my way by hard work and learning.”

But his mother insisted: “Yes, but I assure you that to be well lodged will be of use to you nevertheless.”

About half-way through the meal he suddenly asked:

“How did you first come to know this man Marechal?”

Old Roland looked up and racked his memory:

“Wait a bit; I scarcely recollect. It is such an old story now. Ah, yes, I remember. It was your mother who made the acquaintance with him in the shop, was it not, Louise? He first came to order something, and then he called frequently. We knew him as a customer before we knew him as a friend.”

Pierre, who was eating beans, sticking his fork into them one by one as if he were spitting them, went on:

“And when was it that you made his acquaintance?”

Again Roland sat thinking, but he could remember no more and appealed to his wife’s better memory.

“In what year was it, Louise? You surely have not forgotten, you who remember everything. Let me see — it was in — in — in fifty-five or fifty-six? Try to remember. You ought to know better than I.”

She did in fact think it over for some minutes, and then replied in a steady voice and with calm decision:

“It was in fifty-eight, old man. Pierre was three years old. I am quite sure that I am not mistaken, for it was in that year that the child had scarlet fever, and Marechal, whom we knew then but very little, was of the greatest service to us.”

Roland exclaimed:

“To be sure — very true; he was really invaluable. When your mother was half-dead with fatigue and I had to attend to the shop, he would go to the chemist’s to fetch your medicine. He really had the kindest heart! And when you were well again, you cannot think how glad he was and how he petted you. It was from that time that we became such great friends.”

And this thought rushed into Pierre’s soul, as abrupt and violent as a cannon-ball rending and piercing it: “Since he knew me first, since he was so devoted to me, since he was so fond of me and petted me so much, since I — *I* was the cause of his great intimacy with my parents, why did he leave all his money to my brother and nothing to me?”

He asked no more questions and remained gloomy; absent-minded rather than thoughtful, feeling in his soul a new anxiety as yet undefined, the secret germ of a new pain.

He went out early, wandering about the streets once more. They were shrouded in the fog which made the night heavy, opaque, and nauseous. It was like a pestilential cloud dropped on the earth. It could be seen swirling past the gas-lights, which it seemed to put out at intervals. The pavement was as slippery as on a frosty night after rain, and all sorts of evil smells seemed to come up from the bowels of the houses — the stench of cellars, drains, sewers, squalid kitchens — to mingle with the horrible savour of this wandering fog.

Pierre, with his shoulders up and his hands in his pockets, not caring to remain out of doors in the cold, turned into Marowsko’s. The druggist was asleep as usual under the gas-light, which kept watch. On recognising Pierre for whom he had the affection of a faithful dog, he shook off his drowsiness, went for two glasses, and brought out the *Groseillette*.

“Well,” said the doctor, “how is the liqueur getting on?”

The Pole explained that four of the chief cafes in the town had agreed to have it on sale, and that two papers, the *Northcoast Pharos* and the *Havre Semaphore*, would advertise it, in return for certain chemical preparations to be supplied to the editors.

After a long silence Marowsko asked whether Jean had come definitely into possession of his fortune; and then he put two or three other questions vaguely referring to the same subject. His jealous devotion to Pierre rebelled against this preference. And Pierre felt as though he could hear him thinking; he guessed and understood, read in his averted eyes and in the hesitancy of his tone, the words which rose to his lips but were not spoken — which the druggist was too timid or too prudent and cautious to utter.

At this moment, he felt sure, the old man was thinking: “You ought not to have suffered him to accept this inheritance which will make people speak ill of your mother."

Perhaps, indeed, Marowsko believed that Jean was Marechal's son. Of course he believed it! How could he help believing it when the thing must seem so possible, so probable, self-evident? Why, he himself, Pierre, her son — had not he been for these three days past fighting with all the subtlety at his command to cheat his reason, fighting against this hideous suspicion?

And suddenly the need to be alone, to reflect, to discuss the matter with himself — to face boldly, without scruple or weakness, this possible but monstrous thing — came upon him anew, and so imperative that he rose without even drinking his glass of *Groseillette*, shook hands with the astounded druggist, and plunged out into the foggy streets again.

He asked himself: "What made this Marechal leave all his fortune to Jean?"

It was not jealousy now which made him dwell on this question, not the rather mean but natural envy which he knew lurked within him, and with which he had been struggling these three days, but the dread of an overpowering horror; the dread that he himself should believe that Jean, his brother, was that man's son.

No. He did not believe it, he could not even ask himself the question which was a crime! Meanwhile he must get rid of this faint suspicion, improbable as it was, utterly and forever. He craved for light, for certainty — he must win absolute security in his heart, for he loved no one in the world but his mother. And as he wandered alone through the darkness he would rack his memory and his reason with a minute search that should bring out the blazing truth. Then there would be an end to the matter; he would not think of it again — never. He would go and sleep.

He argued thus: "Let me see: first to examine the facts; then I will recall all I know about him, his behaviour to my brother and to me. I will seek out the causes which might have given rise to the preference. He knew Jean from his birth? Yes, but he had known me first. If he had loved my mother silently, unselfishly, he would surely have chosen me, since it was through me, through my scarlet fever, that he became so intimate with my parents. Logically, then, he ought to have preferred me, to have had a keener affection for me — unless it were that he felt an instinctive attraction and predilection for my brother as he watched him grow up."

Then, with desperate tension of brain and of all the powers of his intellect, he strove to reconstitute from memory the image of this Marechal, to see him, to know him, to penetrate the man whom he had seen pass by him, indifferent to his heart during all those years in Paris.

But he perceived that the slight exertion of walking somewhat disturbed his ideas, dislocated their continuity, weakened their precision, clouded his recollection. To enable him to look at the past and at unknown events with so keen an eye that nothing should escape it, he must be motionless in a vast and empty space. And he made up his mind to go and sit on the jetty as he had done that other night. As he approached the harbour he heard, out at sea, a lugubrious and sinister wail like the bellowing of a bull, but more long-drawn and steady. It was the roar of a fog-horn, the cry of a ship lost in the fog. A shiver ran through him, chilling his heart; so deeply did this cry of distress thrill his soul and nerves that he felt as if he had uttered it himself. Another and a similar voice answered with such another moan, but farther away; then, close by, the fog-horn on the pier gave out a fearful sound in answer. Pierre made for the jetty with long steps, thinking no more of anything, content to walk on into this ominous and bellowing darkness.

When he had seated himself at the end of the breakwater he closed his eyes, that he might not see the two electric lights, now blurred by the fog, which make the harbour accessible at night, and the red glare of the light on the south pier, which was, however, scarcely visible. Turning half-round, he rested his elbows on the granite and hid his face in his hands.

Though he did not pronounce the words with his lips, his mind kept repeating: “Marechal — Marechal,” as if to raise and challenge the shade. And on the black background of his closed eyelids, he suddenly saw him as he had known him: a man of about sixty, with a white beard cut in a point and very thick eyebrows, also white. He was neither tall nor short, his manner was pleasant, his eyes gray and soft, his movements gentle, his whole appearance that of a good fellow, simple and kindly. He called Pierre and Jean “my dear children,” and had never seemed to prefer either, asking them both together to dine with him. And then Pierre, with the pertinacity of a dog seeking a lost scent, tried to recall the words, gestures, tones, looks, of this man who had vanished from the world. By degrees he saw him quite clearly in his rooms in the Rue Tronchet, where he received his brother and himself at dinner.

He was waited on by two maids, both old women who had been in the habit — a very old one, no doubt — of saying “Monsieur Pierre” and “Monsieur Jean.” Marechal would hold out both hands, the right hand to one of the young men, the left to the other, as they happened to come in.

“How are you, my children?” he would say. “Have you any news of your parents? As for me, they never write to me.”

The talk was quiet and intimate, of commonplace matters. There was nothing remarkable in the man’s mind, but much that was winning, charming, and gracious. He had certainly been a good friend to them, one of those good friends of whom we think the less because we feel sure of them.

Now, reminiscences came readily to Pierre’s mind. Having seen him anxious from time to time, and suspecting his student’s impecuniousness, Marechal had of his own accord offered and lent him money, a few hundred francs perhaps, forgotten by both, and never repaid. Then this man must always have been fond of him, always have taken an interest in him, since he thought of his needs. Well then — well then — why leave his whole fortune to Jean? No, he had never shown more marked affection for the younger than for the elder, had never been more interested in one than in the other, or seemed to care more tenderly for this one or that one. Well then — well then — he must have had some strong secret reason for leaving everything to Jean — everything — and nothing to Pierre.

The more he thought, the more he recalled the past few years, the more extraordinary, the more incredible was it that he should have made such a difference between them. And an agonizing pang of unspeakable anguish piercing his bosom made his heart beat like a fluttering rag. Its springs seemed broken, and the blood rushed through in a flood, unchecked, tossing it with wild surges.

Then in an undertone, as a man speaks in a nightmare, he muttered: “I must know. My God! I must know.”

He looked further back now, to an earlier time, when his parents had lived in Paris. But the faces escaped him, and this confused his recollections. He struggled above all to see Marechal, with light, or brown, or black hair. But he could not; the later image, his face as an old man, blotted out all others. However, he remembered that he had been slighter, and had a soft hand, and that he often brought flowers. Very often — for his father would constantly say: “What, another bouquet! But this is madness, my dear fellow; you will ruin yourself in roses.” And Marechal would say: “No matter; I like it.”

And suddenly his mother’s voice and accent, his mother’s as she smiled and said: “Thank you, my kind friend,” flashed on his brain, so clearly that he could have believed he heard her. She must have spoken those words very often that they should remain thus graven on her son’s memory.

So Marechal brought flowers; he, the gentleman, the rich man, the customer, to the humble shop-keeper, the jeweller’s wife. Had he loved her? Why should he have made friends with these tradespeople if he had not been in love with the wife? He was a man of education and fairly refined tastes. How many a time had he discussed poets and poetry with Pierre. He did not appreciate these writers from an artistic point of view, but with sympathetic and responsive feeling. The doctor had often smiled at his emotions which had struck him as rather silly, now he plainly saw that this sentimental soul could never, never have been the friend of his father, who was so matter-of-fact, so narrow, so heavy, to whom the word “Poetry” meant idiocy.

This Marechal then, being young, free, rich, ready for any form of tenderness, went by chance into the shop one day, having perhaps observed its pretty mistress. He had bought something, had come again, had chatted, more intimately each time, paying by frequent purchases for the right of a seat in the family, of smiling at the young wife and shaking hands with the husband.

And what next — what next — good God — what next?

He had loved and petted the first child, the jeweller’s child, till the second was born; then, till death, he had remained impenetrable; and when his grave was closed, his flesh dust, his name erased from the list of the living, when he himself was quiet and forever gone, having nothing to scheme for, to dread or to hide, he had given his whole fortune to the second child! Why?

The man had all his wits; he must have understood and foreseen that he might, that he almost infallibly must, give grounds for the supposition that the child was his. He was casting obloquy on a woman. How could he have done this if Jean were not his son?

And suddenly a clear and fearful recollection shot through his brain. Marechal was fair — fair like Jean. He now remembered a little miniature portrait he had seen formerly in Paris, on the drawing-room chimney-shelf, and which had since disappeared. Where was it? Lost, or hidden away? Oh, if he could but have it in his hand for one minute! His mother kept it perhaps in the unconfessed drawer where love-tokens were treasured.

His misery in this thought was so intense that he uttered a groan, one of those brief moans wrung from the breast by a too intolerable pang. And immediately, as if it had heard him, as if it had understood and answered him, the fog-horn on the pier bellowed out close to him. Its voice, like that of a fiendish monster, more resonant than thunder — a savage and appalling roar contrived to drown the clamour of the wind and waves — spread through the darkness, across the sea, which was invisible under its shroud of fog. And again, through the mist, far and near, responsive cries went up to the night. They were terrifying, these calls given forth by the great blind steam-ships.

Then all was silent once more.

Pierre had opened his eyes and was looking about him, startled to find himself here, roused from his nightmare.

“I am mad,” thought he, “I suspect my mother.” And a surge of love and emotion, of repentance, and prayer, and grief, welled up in his heart. His mother! Knowing her as he knew her, how could he ever have suspected her? Was not the soul, was not the life of this simple-minded, chaste, and loyal woman clearer than water? Could any one who had seen and known her ever think of her but as above suspicion? And he, her son, had doubted her! Oh, if he could but have taken her in his arms at that moment, how he would have kissed and caressed her, and gone on his knees to crave pardon.

Would she have deceived his father — she?

His father! — A very worthy man, no doubt, upright and honest in business, but with a mind which had never gone beyond the horizon of his shop. How was it that this woman, who must have been very pretty — as he knew, and it could still be seen — gifted, too, with a delicate, tender emotional soul, could have accepted a man so unlike herself as a suitor and a husband? Why inquire? She had married, as young French girls do marry, the youth with a little fortune proposed to her by their relations. They had settled at once in their shop in the Rue Montmartre; and the young wife, ruling over the desk, inspired by the feeling of a new home, and the subtle and sacred sense of interests in common which fills the place of love, and even of regard, by the domestic hearth of most of the commercial houses of Paris, had set to work, with all her superior and active intelligence, to make the fortune they hoped for. And so her life had flowed on, uniform, peaceful and respectable, but loveless.

Loveless? — was it possible then that a woman should not love? That a young and pretty woman, living in Paris, reading books, applauding actresses for dying of passion on the stage, could live from youth to old age without once feeling her heart touched? He would not believe it of any one else; why should she be different from all others, though she was his mother?

She had been young, with all the poetic weaknesses which agitate the heart of a young creature. Shut up, imprisoned in the shop, by the side of a vulgar husband who always talked of trade, she had dreamed of moonlight nights, of voyages, of kisses exchanged in the shades of evening. And then, one day a man had come in, as lovers do in books, and had talked as they talk.

She had loved him. Why not? She was his mother. What then? Must a man be blind and stupid to the point of rejecting evidence because it concerns his mother? But did she give herself to him? Why yes, since this man had had no other love, since he had remained faithful to her when she was far away and growing old. Why yes, since he had left all his fortune to his son — their son!

And Pierre started to his feet, quivering with such rage that he longed to kill some one. With his arm outstretched, his hand wide open, he wanted to hit, to bruise, to smash, to strangle! Whom? Every one; his father, his brother, the dead man, his mother!

He hurried off homeward. What was he going to do?

As he passed a turret close to the signal mast the strident howl of the fog-horn went off in his very face. He was so startled that he nearly fell and shrank back as far as the granite parapet. He sat down half-stunned by the sudden shock. The steamer which was the first to reply seemed to be quite near and was already at the entrance, the tide having risen.

Pierre turned round and could discern its red eye dim through the fog. Then, in the broad light of the electric lanterns, a huge black shadow crept up between the piers. Behind him the voice of the look-out man, the hoarse voice of an old retired sea-captain, shouted:

“What ship?” And out of the fog the voice of the pilot standing on deck — not less hoarse — replied:

“The Santa Lucia.”

"Where from?"

"Italy."

"What port?"

"Naples."

And before Pierre's bewildered eyes rose, as he fancied, the fiery pennon of Vesuvius, while, at the foot of the volcano, fire-flies danced in the orange-groves of Sorrento or Castellamare. How often had he dreamed of these familiar names as if he knew the scenery. Oh, if he might but go away, now at once, never mind whither, and never come back, never write, never let any one know what had become of him! But no, he must go home — home to his father's house, and go to bed.

He would not. Come what might he would not go in; he would stay there till daybreak. He liked the roar of the fog-horns. He pulled himself together and began to walk up and down like an officer on watch.

Another vessel was coming in behind the other, huge and mysterious. An English India-man, homeward bound.

He saw several more come in, one after another, out of the impenetrable vapour. Then, as the damp became quite intolerable, Pierre set out towards the town. He was so cold that he went into a sailors' tavern to drink a glass of grog, and when the hot and pungent liquor had scorched his mouth and throat he felt a hope revive within him.

Perhaps he was mistaken. He knew his own vagabond unreason so well! No doubt he was mistaken. He had piled up the evidence as a charge is drawn up against an innocent person, whom it is always so easy to convict when we wish to think him guilty. When he should have slept he would think differently.

Then he went in and to bed, and by sheer force of will he at last dropped asleep.

CHAPTER V

But the doctor's frame lay scarcely more than an hour or two in the torpor of troubled slumbers. When he awoke in the darkness of his warm, closed room he was aware, even before thought was awake in him, of the painful oppression, the sickness of heart which the sorrow we have slept on leaves behind it. It is as though the disaster of which the shock merely jarred us at first, had, during sleep, stolen into our very flesh, bruising and exhausting it like a fever. Memory returned to him like a blow, and he sat up in bed. Then slowly, one by one, he again went through all the arguments which had wrung his heart on the jetty while the fog-horns were bellowing. The more he thought the less he doubted. He felt himself dragged along by his logic to the inevitable certainty, as by a clutching, strangling hand.

He was thirsty and hot, his heart beat wildly. He got up to open his window and breathe the fresh air, and as he stood there a low sound fell on his ear through the wall. Jean was sleeping peacefully, and gently snoring. He could sleep! He had no presentiment, no suspicions! A man who had known their mother had left him all his fortune; he took the money and thought it quite fair and natural! He was sleeping, rich and contented, not knowing that his brother was gasping with anguish and distress. And rage boiled up in him against this heedless and happy sleeper.

Only yesterday he would have knocked at his door, have gone in, and sitting by the bed, would have said to Jean, scared by the sudden waking:

"Jean you must not keep this legacy which by to-morrow may have brought suspicion and dishonour on our mother."

But to-day he could say nothing; he could not tell Jean that he did not believe him to be their father's son. Now he must guard, must bury the shame he had discovered, hide from every eye the stain which he had detected and which no one must perceive, not even his brother — especially not his brother.

He no longer thought about the vain respect of public opinion. He would have been glad that all the world should accuse his mother if only he, he alone, knew her to be innocent! How could he bear to live with her every day, believing as he looked at her that his brother was the child of a stranger's love?

And how calm and serene she was, nevertheless, how sure of herself she always seemed! Was it possible that such a woman as she, pure of soul and upright in heart, should fall, dragged astray by passion, and yet nothing ever appear afterward of her remorse and the stings of a troubled conscience? Ah, but remorse must have tortured her, long ago in the earlier days, and then have faded out, as everything fades. She had surely bewailed her sin, and then, little by little, had almost forgotten it. Have not all women, all, this fault of prodigious forgetfulness which enables them, after a few years, hardly to recognise the man to whose kisses they have given their lips? The kiss strikes like a thunderbolt, the love passes away like a storm, and then life, like the sky, is calm once more, and begins again as it was before. Do we ever remember a cloud?

Pierre could no longer endure to stay in the room! This house, his father's house, crushed him. He felt the roof weigh on his head, and the walls suffocate him. And as he was very thirsty he lighted his candle to go to drink a glass of fresh water from the filter in the kitchen.

He went down the two flights of stairs; then, as he was coming up again with the water-bottle filled, he sat down, in his night-shirt, on a step of the stairs where there was a draught, and drank, without a tumbler, in long pulls like a runner who is out of breath. When he ceased to move the silence of the house touched his feelings; then, one by one, he could distinguish the faintest sounds. First there was the ticking of the clock in the dining-room which seemed to grow louder every second. Then he heard another snore, an old man's snore, short, laboured, and hard, his father beyond doubt; and he writhed at the idea, as if it had but this moment sprung upon him, that these two men, sleeping under the same room — father and son — were nothing to each other! Not a tie, not the very slightest, bound them together, and they did not know it! They spoke to each other affectionately, they embraced each other, they rejoiced and lamented together over the same things, just as if the same blood flowed in their veins. And two men born at opposite ends of the earth could not be more alien to each other than this father and son. They believed they loved each other, because a lie had grown up between them. This paternal love, this filial love, were the outcome of a lie — a lie which could not be unmasked, and which no one would ever know but he, the true son.

But yet, but yet — if he were mistaken? How could he make sure? Oh, if only some likeness, however slight, could be traced between his father and

Jean, one of those mysterious resemblances which run from an ancestor to the great-great-grandson, showing that the whole race are the offspring of the same embrace. To him, a medical man, so little would suffice to enable him to discern this — the curve of a nostril, the space between the eyes, the character of the teeth or hair; nay less — a gesture, a trick, a habit, an inherited taste, any mark or token which a practised eye might recognise as characteristic.

He thought long, but could remember nothing; no, nothing. But he had looked carelessly, observed badly, having no reason for spying such imperceptible indications.

He got up to go back to his room and mounted the stairs with a slow step, still lost in thought. As he passed the door of his brother's room he stood stock still, his hand put out to open it. An imperative need had just come over him to see Jean at once, to look at him at his leisure, to surprise him in his sleep, while the calm countenance and relaxed features were at rest and all the grimace of life put off. Thus he might catch the dormant secret of his physiognomy, and if any appreciable likeness existed it would not escape him.

But supposing Jean were to wake, what could he say? How could he explain this intrusion?

He stood still, his fingers clinched on the door-handle, trying to devise a reason, an excuse. Then he remembered that a week ago he had lent his brother a phial of laudanum to relieve a fit of toothache. He might himself have been in pain this night and have come to find the drug. So he went in with a stealthy step, like a robber. Jean, his mouth open, was sunk in deep, animal slumbers. His beard and fair hair made a golden patch on the white linen; he did not wake, but he ceased snoring.

Pierre, leaning over him, gazed at him with hungry eagerness. No, this youngster was not in the least like Roland; and for the second time the recollection of the little portrait of Marechal, which had vanished, recurred to his mind. He must find it! When he should see it perhaps he should cease to doubt!

His brother stirred, conscious no doubt of a presence, or disturbed by the light of the taper on his eyelids. The doctor retired on tip-toe to the door which he noiselessly closed; then he went back to his room, but not to bed again.

Day was long in coming. The hours struck one after another on the dining-room clock, and its tone was a deep and solemn one, as though the little piece of clockwork had swallowed a cathedral-bell. The sound rose through the empty staircase, penetrating through walls and doors, and dying away in the rooms where it fell on the torpid ears of the sleeping household. Pierre had taken to walking to and fro between his bed and the window. What was he going to do? He was too much upset to spend this day at home. He wanted still to be alone, at any rate till the next day, to reflect, to compose himself, to strengthen himself for the common every-day life which he must take up again.

Well, he would go over to Trouville to see the swarming crowd on the sands. That would amuse him, change the air of his thoughts, and give him time to inure himself to the horrible thing he had discovered. As soon as morning dawned he made his toilet and dressed. The fog had vanished and it was fine, very fine. As the boat for Trouville did not start till nine, it struck the doctor that he must greet his mother before starting.

He waited till the hour at which she was accustomed to get up, and then went downstairs. His heart beat so violently as he touched her door that he paused for breath. His hand as it lay on the lock was limp and tremulous, almost incapable of the slight effort of turning the handle to open it. He knocked. His mother’s voice inquired:

“Who is there?”

“I — Pierre.”

“What do you want?”

“Only to say good-morning, because I am going to spend the day at Trouville with some friends.”

“But I am still in bed.”

“Very well, do not disturb yourself. I shall see you this evening, when I come in.”

He hoped to get off without seeing her, without pressing on her cheek the false kiss which it made his heart sick to think of. But she replied:

“No. Wait a moment. I will let you in. Wait till I get into bed again.”

He heard her bare feet on the floor and the sound of the bolt drawn back. Then she called out:

“Come in.”

He went in. She was sitting up in bed, while, by her side, Roland, with a silk handkerchief by way of night-cap and his face to the wall, still lay sleeping. Nothing ever woke him but a shaking hard enough to pull his arm off. On the days when he went fishing it was Josephine, rung up by Papagris at the hour fixed, who roused her master from his stubborn slumbers.

Pierre, as he went towards his mother, looked at her with a sudden sense of never having seen her before. She held up her face, he kissed each cheek, and then sat down in a low chair.

“It was last evening that you decided on this excursion?” she asked.

“Yes, last evening.”

“Will you return to dinner?”

“I do not know. At any rate do not wait for me.”

He looked at her with stupefied curiosity. This woman was his mother! All those features, seen daily from childhood, from the time when his eye could first distinguish things, that smile, that voice — so well known, so familiar — abruptly struck him as new, different from what they had always been to him hitherto. He understood now that, loving her, he had never looked at her. All the same it was very really she, and he knew every little detail of her face; still, it was the first time he clearly identified them all. His anxious attention, scrutinizing her face which he loved, recalled a difference, a physiognomy he had never before discerned.

He rose to go; then, suddenly yielding to the invincible longing to know which had been gnawing at him since yesterday, he said:

“By the way, I fancy I remember that you used to have, in Paris, a little portrait of Marechal, in the drawing-room.”

She hesitated for a second or two, or at least he fancied she hesitated; then she said:

“To be sure.”

“What has become of the portrait?”

She might have replied more readily:

“That portrait — stay; I don’t exactly know — perhaps it is in my desk.”

“It would be kind of you to find it.”

“Yes, I will look for it. What do you want it for?”

“Oh, it is not for myself. I thought it would be a natural thing to give it to Jean, and that he would be pleased to have it.”

“Yes, you are right; that is a good idea. I will look for it, as soon as I am up.”

And he went out.

It was a blue day without a breath of wind. The folks in the streets seemed in good spirits, the merchants going to business, the clerks going to their office, the girls going to their shop. Some sang as they went, exhilarated by the bright weather.

The passengers were already going on board the Trouville boat; Pierre took a seat aft on a wooden bench.

He asked himself:

"Now was she uneasy at my asking for the portrait or only surprised? Has she mislaid it, or has she hidden it? Does she know where it is, or does she not? If she had hidden it — why?"

And his mind, still following up the same line of thought from one deduction to another, came to this conclusion:

That portrait — of a friend, of a lover, had remained in the drawing-room in a conspicuous place, till one day when the wife and mother perceived, first of all and before any one else, that it bore a likeness to her son. Without doubt she had for a long time been on the watch for this resemblance; then, having detected it, having noticed its beginnings, and understanding that any one might, any day, observe it too, she had one evening removed the perilous little picture and had hidden it, not daring to destroy it.

Pierre recollected quite clearly now that it was long, long before they left Paris that the miniature had vanished. It had disappeared, he thought, about the time that Jean's beard was beginning to grow, which had made him suddenly and wonderfully like the fair young man who smiled from the picture-frame.

The motion of the boat as it put off disturbed and dissipated his meditations. He stood up and looked at the sea. The little steamer, once outside the piers, turned to the left, and puffing and snorting and quivering, made for a distant point visible through the morning haze. The red sail of a heavy fishing-bark, lying motionless on the level waters, looked like a large rock standing up out of the sea. And the Seine, rolling down from Rouen, seemed a wide inlet dividing two neighbouring lands. They reached the harbour of Trouville in less than an hour, and as it was the time of day when the world was bathing, Pierre went to the shore.

From a distance it looked like a garden full of gaudy flowers. All along the stretch of yellow sand, from the pier as far as the Roches Noires, sunshades of every hue, hats of every shape, dresses of every colour, in groups outside the bathing huts, in long rows by the margin of the waves, or scattered here and there, really looked like immense bouquets on a vast meadow. And the Babel of sounds — voices near and far ringing thin in the light atmosphere, shouts and cries of children being bathed, clear laughter of women — all made a pleasant, continuous din, mingling with the unheeding breeze, and breathed with the air itself.

Pierre walked among all this throng, more lost, more remote from them, more isolated, more drowned in his torturing thoughts, than if he had been flung overboard from the deck of a ship a hundred miles from shore. He passed by them and heard a few sentences without listening; and he saw, without looking, how the men spoke to the women, and the women smiled at the men. Then, suddenly, as if he had awoke, he perceived them all; and hatred of them all surged up in his soul, for they seemed happy and content.

Now, as he went, he studied the groups, wandering round them full of a fresh set of ideas. All these many-hued dresses which covered the sands like nosegays, these pretty stuffs, those showy parasols, the fictitious grace of tightened waists, all the ingenious devices of fashion from the smart little shoe to the extravagant hat, the seductive charm of gesture, voice, and smile, all the coquettish airs in short displayed on this seashore, suddenly struck him as stupendous efflorescences of female depravity. All these bedizened women aimed at pleasing, bewitching, and deluding some man. They had dressed themselves out for men — for all men — all excepting the husband whom they no longer needed to conquer. They had dressed themselves out for the lover of yesterday and the lover of to-morrow, for the stranger they might meet and notice or were perhaps on the lookout for.

And these men sitting close to them, eye to eye and mouth to mouth, invited them, desired them, hunted them like game, coy and elusive notwithstanding that it seemed so near and so easy to capture. This wide shore was, then, no more than a love-market where some sold, others gave themselves — some drove a hard bargain for their kisses while others promised them for love. All these women thought only of one thing, to make their bodies desirable — bodies already given, sold, or promised to other men. And he reflected that it was everywhere the same, all the world over.

His mother had done what others did — that was all. Others? These women he saw about him, rich, giddy, love-seeking, belonged on the whole to the class of fashionable and showy women of the world, some indeed to the less respectable sisterhood, for on these sands, trampled by the legion of idlers, the tribe of virtuous, home-keeping women were not to be seen.

The tide was rising, driving the foremost rank of visitors gradually landward. He saw the various groups jump up and fly, carrying their chairs with them, before the yellow waves as they rolled up edged with a lace-like frill of foam. The bathing-machines too were being pulled up by horses, and along the planked way which formed the promenade running along the shore from end to end, there was now an increasing flow, slow and dense, of well-dressed people in two opposite streams elbowing and mingling. Pierre, made nervous and exasperated by this bustle, made his escape into the town, and went to get his breakfast at a modest tavern on the skirts of the fields.

When he had finished with coffee, he stretched his legs on a couple of chairs under a lime-tree in front of the house, and as he had hardly slept the night before, he presently fell into a doze. After resting for some hours he shook himself, and finding that it was time to go on board again he set out, tormented by a sudden stiffness which had come upon him during his long nap. Now he was eager to be at home again; to know whether his mother had found the portrait of Marechal. Would she be the first to speak of it, or would he be obliged to ask for it again? If she waited to be questioned further it must be because she had some secret reason for not showing the miniature.

But when he was at home again, and in his room, he hesitated about going down to dinner. He was too wretched. His revolted soul had not yet time to calm down. However, he made up his mind to it, and appeared in the dining-room just as they were sitting down.

All their faces were beaming.

“Well,” said Roland, “are you getting on with your purchases? I do not want to see anything till it is all in its place.”

And his wife replied: “Oh, yes. We are getting on. But it takes much consideration to avoid buying things that do not match. The furniture question is an absorbing one.”

She had spent the day in going with Jean to cabinet-makers and upholsterers. Her fancy was for rich materials, rather splendid to strike the eye at once. Her son, on the contrary, wished for something simple and elegant. So in front of everything put before them they had each repeated their arguments. She declared that a client, a defendant, must be impressed;

that as soon as he is shown into his counsel's waiting-room he should have a sense of wealth.

Jean, on the other hand, wishing to attract only an elegant and opulent class, was anxious to captivate persons of refinement by his quiet and perfect taste.

And this discussion, which had gone on all day, began again with the soup.

Roland had no opinion. He repeated: "I do not want to hear anything about it. I will go and see it when it is all finished."

Mme. Roland appealed to the judgment of her elder son.

"And you, Pierre, what do you think of the matter?"

His nerves were in a state of such intense excitement that he would have liked to reply with an oath. However, he only answered in a dry tone quivering with annoyance.

"Oh, I am quite of Jean's mind. I like nothing so well as simplicity, which, in matters of taste, is equivalent to rectitude in matters of conduct."

His mother went on:

"You must remember that we live in a city of commercial men, where good taste is not to be met with at every turn."

Pierre replied:

"What does that matter? Is that a reason for living as fools do? If my fellow-townsmen are stupid and ill-bred, need I follow their example? A woman does not misconduct herself because her neighbour has a lover."

Jean began to laugh.

"You argue by comparisons which seem to have been borrowed from the maxims of a moralist."

Pierre made no reply. His mother and his brother reverted to the question of stuffs and arm-chairs.

He sat looking at them as he had looked at his mother in the morning before starting for Trouville; looking at them as a stranger who would study them, and he felt as though he had really suddenly come into a family of which he knew nothing.

His father, above all, amazed his eyes and his mind. That flabby, burly man, happy and besotted, was his own father! No, no; Jean was not in the least like him.

His family!

Within these two days an unknown and malignant hand, the hand of a dead man, had torn asunder and broken, one by one, all the ties which had held these four human beings together. It was all over, all ruined. He had now no mother — for he could no longer love her now that he could not revere her with that perfect, tender, and pious respect which a son's love demands; no brother — since his brother was the child of a stranger; nothing was left him but his father, that coarse man whom he could not love in spite of himself.

And he suddenly broke out:

"I say, mother, have you found that portrait?"

She opened her eyes in surprise.

"What portrait?"

"The portrait of Marechal."

"No — that is to say — yes — I have not found it, but I think I know where it is."

"What is that?" asked Roland. And Pierre answered:

"A little likeness of Marechal which used to be in the dining-room in Paris. I thought that Jean might be glad to have it."

Roland exclaimed:

"Why, yes, to be sure; I remember it perfectly. I saw it again last week. Your mother found it in her desk when she was tidying the papers. It was on Thursday or Friday. Do you remember, Louise? I was shaving myself when you took it out and laid in on a chair by your side with a pile of letters of which you burned half. Strange, isn't it, that you should have come across the portrait only two or three days before Jean heard of his legacy? If I believed in presentiments I should think that this was one."

Mme. Roland calmly replied:

"Yes, I know where it is. I will fetch it presently."

Then she had lied! When she had said that very morning to her son who had asked her what had become of the miniature: "I don't exactly know — perhaps it is in my desk" — it was a lie! She had seen it, touched it, handled it, gazed at it but a few days since; and then she had hidden it away again in the secret drawer with those letters — his letters.

Pierre looked at the mother who had lied to him; looked at her with the concentrated fury of a son who had been cheated, robbed of his most sacred affection, and with the jealous wrath of a man who, after long being blind, at last discovers a disgraceful betrayal. If he had been that woman's husband — and not her child — he would have gripped her by the wrists, seized her by the shoulders or the hair, have flung her on the ground, have hit her, hurt her, crushed her! And he might say nothing, do nothing, show nothing, reveal nothing. He was her son; he had no vengeance to take. And he had not been deceived.

Nay, but she had deceived his tenderness, his pious respect. She owed to him to be without reproach, as all mothers owe it to their children. If the fury that boiled within him verged on hatred it was that he felt her to be even more guilty towards him than toward his father.

The love of man and wife is a voluntary compact in which the one who proves weak is guilty only of perfidy; but when the wife is a mother her duty is a higher one, since nature has intrusted her with a race. If she fails, then she is cowardly, worthless, infamous.

"I do not care," said Roland suddenly, stretching out his legs under the table, as he did every evening while he sipped his glass of black-currant brandy. "You may do worse than live idle when you have a snug little income. I hope Jean will have us to dinner in style now. Hang it all! If I have indigestion now and then I cannot help it."

Then turning to his wife he added:

"Go and fetch that portrait, little woman, as you have done your dinner. I should like to see it again myself."

She rose, took a taper, and went. Then, after an absence which Pierre thought long, though she was not away more than three minutes, Mme. Roland returned smiling, and holding an old-fashioned gilt frame by the ring.

"Here it is," said she, "I found it at once."

The doctor was the first to put forth his hand; he took the picture, and holding it a little away from him, he examined it. Then, fully aware that his mother was looking at him, he slowly raised his eyes and fixed them on his brother to compare the faces. He could hardly refrain, in his violence, from saying: "Dear me! How like Jean!" And though he dared not utter the terrible words, he betrayed his thought by his manner of comparing the living face with the painted one.

They had, no doubt, details in common; the same beard, the same brow; but nothing sufficiently marked to justify the assertion: "This is the father and that the son." It was rather a family likeness, a relationship of physiognomies in which the same blood courses. But what to Pierre was far more decisive than the common aspect of the faces, was that his mother had risen, had turned her back, and was pretending, too deliberately, to be putting the sugar basin and the liqueur bottle away in a cupboard. She understood that he knew, or at any rate had his suspicions.

"Hand it on to me," said Roland.

Pierre held out the miniature and his father drew the candle towards him to see it better; then, he murmured in a pathetic tone:

"Poor fellow! To think that he was like that when we first knew him! Cristi! How time flies! He was a good-looking man, too, in those days, and with such a pleasant manner — was not he, Louise?"

As his wife made no answer he went on:

"And what an even temper! I never saw him put out. And now it is all at an end — nothing left of him — but what he bequeathed to Jean. Well, at any rate you may take your oath that that man was a good and faithful friend to the last. Even on his death-bed he did not forget us."

Jean, in his turn, held out his hand for the picture. He gazed at it for a few minutes and then said regretfully:

"I do not recognise it at all. I only remember him with white hair."

He returned the miniature to his mother. She cast a hasty glance at it, looking away as if she were frightened; then in her usual voice she said:

"It belongs to you now, my little Jean, as you are his heir. We will take it to your new rooms." And when they went into the drawing-room she placed the picture on the chimney-shelf by the clock, where it had formerly stood.

Roland filled his pipe; Pierre and Jean lighted cigarettes. They commonly smoked them, Pierre while he paced the room, Jean, sunk in a deep arm-chair, with his legs crossed. Their father always sat astride a chair and spat from afar into the fire-place.

Mme. Roland, on a low seat by a little table on which the lamp stood, embroidered, or knitted, or marked linen.

This evening she was beginning a piece of worsted work, intended for Jean's lodgings. It was a difficult and complicated pattern, and required all her attention. Still, now and again, her eye, which was counting the stitches, glanced up swiftly and furtively at the little portrait of the dead as it leaned against the clock. And the doctor, who was striding to and fro across the little room in four or five steps, met his mother's look at each turn.

It was as though they were spying on each other; and acute uneasiness, intolerable to be borne, clutched at Pierre's heart. He was saying to himself

— at once tortured and glad:

"She must be in misery at this moment if she knows that I guess!" And each time he reached the fire-place he stopped for a few seconds to look at Marechal's fair hair, and show quite plainly that he was haunted by a fixed idea. So that this little portrait, smaller than an opened palm, was like a living being, malignant and threatening, suddenly brought into this house and this family.

Presently the street-door bell rang. Mme. Roland, always so self-possessed, started violently, betraying to her doctor son the anguish of her nerves. Then she said: "It must be Mme. Rosemilly;" and her eye again anxiously turned to the mantel-shelf.

Pierre understood, or thought he understood, her fears and misery. A woman's eye is keen, a woman's wit is nimble, and her instincts suspicious. When this woman who was coming in should see the miniature of a man she did not know, she might perhaps at the first glance discover the likeness between this face and Jean. Then she would know and understand everything.

He was seized with dread, a sudden and horrible dread of this shame being unveiled, and, turning about just as the door opened, he took the little painting and slipped it under the clock without being seen by his father and brother.

When he met his mother's eyes again they seemed to him altered, dim, and haggard.

"Good evening," said Mme. Rosemilly. "I have come to ask you for a cup of tea."

But while they were bustling about her and asking after her health, Pierre made off, the door having been left open.

When his absence was perceived they were all surprised. Jean, annoyed for the young widow, who, he thought, would be hurt, muttered: "What a bear!"

Mme. Roland replied: "You must not be vexed with him; he is not very well to-day and tired with his excursion to Trouville."

"Never mind," said Roland, "that is no reason for taking himself off like a savage."

Mme. Rosemilly tried to smooth matters by saying: "Not at all, not at all. He has gone away in the English fashion; people always disappear in that way in fashionable circles if they want to leave early."

“Oh, in fashionable circles, I dare say,” replied Jean. “But a man does not treat his family *a l’Anglaise*, and my brother has done nothing else for some time past.”

CHAPTER VI

For a week or two nothing occurred. The father went fishing; Jean, with his mother's help, was furnishing and settling himself; Pierre, very gloomy, never was seen excepting at meal-times.

His father having asked him one evening: "Why the deuce do you always com in with a face as cheerful as a funeral? This is not the first time I have remarked it."

The doctor replied: "The fact is I am terribly conscious of the burden of life."

The old man did not have a notion what he meant, and with an aggrieved look he went on: "It really is too bad. Ever since we had the good luck to come into this legacy, every one seems unhappy. It is as though some accident had befallen us, as if we were in mourning for some one."

"I am in mourning for some one," said Pierre.

"You are? For whom?"

"For some one you never knew, and of whom I was too fond."

Roland imagined that his son alluded to some girl with whom he had had some love passages, and he said:

"A woman, I suppose."

"Yes, a woman."

"Dead?"

"No. Worse. Ruined!"

"Ah!"

Though he was startled by this unexpected confidence, in his wife's presence too, and by his son's strange tone about it, the old man made no further inquiries, for in his opinion such affairs did not concern a third person.

Mme. Roland affected not to hear; she seemed ill and was very pale. Several times already her husband, surprised to see her sit down as if she were dropping into her chair, and to hear her gasp as if she could not draw her breath, had said:

"Really, Louise, you look very ill; you tire yourself too much with helping Jean. Give yourself a little rest. Sacristi! The rascal is in no hurry, as he is a rich man."

She shook her head without a word.

But to-day her pallor was so great that Roland remarked on it again.

“Come, come,” said he, “this will not do at all, my dear old woman. You must take care of yourself.” Then, addressing his son, “You surely must see that your mother is ill. Have you questioned her, at any rate?”

Pierre replied: “No; I had not noticed that there was anything the matter with her.”

At this Roland was angry.

“But it stares you in the face, confound you! What on earth is the good of your being a doctor if you cannot even see that your mother is out of sorts? Why, look at her, just look at her. Really, a man might die under his very eyes and this doctor would never think there was anything the matter!”

Mme. Roland was panting for breath, and so white that her husband exclaimed:

“She is going to faint.”

“No, no, it is nothing — I shall get better directly — it is nothing.”

Pierre had gone up to her and was looking at her steadily.

“What ails you?” he said. And she repeated in an undertone:

“Nothing, nothing — I assure you, nothing.”

Roland had gone to fetch some vinegar; he now returned, and handing the bottle to his son he said:

“Here — do something to ease her. Have you felt her heart?”

As Pierre bent over her to feel her pulse she pulled away her hand so vehemently that she struck it against a chair which was standing by.

“Come,” said he in icy tones, “let me see what I can do for you, as you are ill.”

Then she raised her arm and held it out to him. Her skin was burning, the blood throbbing in short irregular leaps.

“You are certainly ill,” he murmured. “You must take something to quiet you. I will write you a prescription.” And as he wrote, stooping over the paper, a low sound of choked sighs, smothered, quick breathing and suppressed sobs made him suddenly look round at her. She was weeping, her hands covering her face.

Roland, quite distracted, asked her:

“Louise, Louise, what is the mater with you? What on earth ails you?”

She did not answer, but seemed racked by some deep and dreadful grief. Her husband tried to take her hands from her face, but she resisted him, repeating:

“No, no, no.”

He appealed to his son.

“But what is the matter with her? I never saw her like this.”

“It is nothing,” said Pierre, “she is a little hysterical.”

And he felt as if it were a comfort to him to see her suffering thus, as if this anguish mitigated his resentment and diminished his mother’s load of opprobrium. He looked at her as a judge satisfied with his day’s work.

Suddenly she rose, rushed to the door with such a swift impulse that it was impossible to forestall or to stop her, and ran off to lock herself into her room.

Roland and the doctor were left face to face.

“Can you make head or tail of it?” said the father.

“Oh, yes,” said the other. “It is a little nervous disturbance, not alarming or surprising; such attacks may very likely recur from time to time.”

They did in fact recur, almost every day; and Pierre seemed to bring them on with a word, as if he had the clew to her strange and new disorder. He would discern in her face a lucid interval of peace and with the willingness of a torturer would, with a word, revive the anguish that had been lulled for a moment.

But he, too, was suffering as cruelly as she. It was dreadful pain to him that he could no longer love her nor respect her, that he must put her on the rack. When he had laid bare the bleeding wound which he had opened in her woman’s, her mother’s heart, when he felt how wretched and desperate she was, he would go out alone, wander about the town, so torn by remorse, so broken by pity, so grieved to have thus hammered her with his scorn as her son, that he longed to fling himself into the sea and put an end to it all by drowning himself.

Ah! How gladly now would he have forgiven her. But he could not, for he was incapable of forgetting. If only he could have desisted from making her suffer; but this again he could not, suffering as he did himself. He went home to his meals, full of relenting resolutions; then, as soon as he saw her, as soon as he met her eye — formerly so clear and frank, now so evasive, frightened, and bewildered — he struck at her in spite of himself, unable to suppress the treacherous words which would rise to his lips.

This disgraceful secret, known to them alone, goaded him up against her. It was as a poison flowing in his veins and giving him an impulse to bite like a mad dog.

And there was no one in the way now to hinder his reading her; Jean lived almost entirely in his new apartments, and only came home to dinner and to sleep every night at his father's.

He frequently observed his brother's bitterness and violence, and attributed them to jealousy. He promised himself that some day he would teach him his place and give him a lesson, for life at home was becoming very painful as a result of these constant scenes. But as he now lived apart he suffered less from this brutal conduct, and his love of peace prompted him to patience. His good fortune, too, had turned his head, and he scarcely paused to think of anything which had no direct interest for himself. He would come in full of fresh little anxieties, full of the cut of a morning-coat, of the shape of a felt hat, of the proper size for his visiting-cards. And he talked incessantly of all the details of his house — the shelves fixed in his bed-room cupboard to keep linen on, the pegs to be put up in the entrance hall, the electric bells contrived to prevent illicit visitors to his lodgings.

It had been settled that on the day when he should take up his abode there they should make an excursion to Saint Jouin, and return after dining there, to drink tea in his rooms. Roland wanted to go by water, but the distance and the uncertainty of reaching it in a sailing boat if there should be a head-wind, made them reject his plan, and a break was hired for the day.

They set out at ten to get there to breakfast. The dusty high road lay across the plain of Normandy, which, by its gentle undulations, dotted with farms embowered in trees, wears the aspect of an endless park. In the vehicle, as it jogged on at the slow trot of a pair of heavy horses, sat the four Rolands, Mme. Rosemilly, and Captain Beausire, all silent, deafened by the rumble of the wheels, and with their eyes shut to keep out the clouds of dust.

It was harvest-time. Alternating with the dark hue of clover and the raw green of beet-root, the yellow corn lighted up the landscape with gleams of pale gold; the fields looked as if they had drunk in the sunshine which poured down on them. Here and there the reapers were at work, and in the plots where the scythe had been put in the men might be seen see-sawing as they swept the level soil with the broad, wing-shaped blade.

After a two-hours' drive the break turned off to the left, past a windmill at work — a melancholy, gray wreck, half rotten and doomed, the last survivor of its ancient race; then it went into a pretty inn yard, and drew up at the door of a smart little house, a hostelry famous in those parts.

The mistress, well known as “La belle Alphonsine,” came smiling to the threshold, and held out her hand to the two ladies who hesitated to take the high step.

Some strangers were already at breakfast under a tent by a grass-plot shaded by apple trees — Parisians, who had come from Etretat; and from the house came sounds of voices, laughter, and the clatter of plates and pans.

They were to eat in a room, as the outer dining-halls were all full. Roland suddenly caught sight of some shrimping nets hanging against the wall.

“Ah! ha!” cried he, “you catch prawns here?”

“Yes,” replied Beausire. “Indeed it is the place on all the coast where most are taken.”

“First-rate! Suppose we try to catch some after breakfast.”

As it happened it would be low tide at three o’clock, so it was settled that they should all spend the afternoon among the rocks, hunting prawns.

They made a light breakfast, as a precaution against the tendency of blood to the head when they should have their feet in the water. They also wished to reserve an appetite for dinner, which had been ordered on a grand scale and to be ready at six o’clock when they came in.

Roland could not sit still for impatience. He wanted to buy the nets specially constructed for fishing prawns, not unlike those used for catching butterflies in the country. Their name on the French coast is *lanets*; they are netted bags on a circular wooden frame, at the end of a long pole. Alphonsine, still smiling, was happy to lend them. Then she helped the two ladies to make an impromptu change of toilet, so as not to spoil their dresses. She offered them skirts, coarse worsted stockings and hemp shoes. The men took off their socks and went to the shoemaker’s to buy wooden shoes instead.

Then they set out, the nets over their shoulders and creels on their backs. Mme. Rosemilly was very sweet in this costume, with an unexpected charm of countrified audacity. The skirt which Alphonsine had lent her, coquettishly tucked up and firmly stitched so as to allow of her running and jumping fearlessly on the rocks, displayed her ankle and lower calf — the firm calf of a strong and agile little woman. Her dress was loose to give freedom to her movements, and to cover her head she had found an enormous garden hat of coarse yellow straw with an extravagantly broad brim; and to this, a bunch of tamarisk pinned in to cock it on one side, gave a very dashing and military effect.

Jean, since he had come into his fortune, had asked himself every day whether or no he should marry her. Each time he saw her he made up his mind to ask her to be his wife, and then, as soon as he was alone again, he considered that by waiting he would have time to reflect. She was now less rich than he, for she had but twelve thousand francs a year; but it was in real estate, in farms and lands near the docks in Havre; and this by-and-bye might be worth a great deal. Their fortunes were thus approximately equal, and certainly the young widow attracted him greatly.

As he watched her walking in front of him that day he said to himself:

“I must really decide; I cannot do better, I am sure.”

They went down a little ravine, sloping from the village to the cliff, and the cliff, at the end of this comb, rose about eighty metres above the sea. Framed between the green slopes to the right and left, a great triangle of silvery blue water could be seen in the distance, and a sail, scarcely visible, looked like an insect out there. The sky, pale with light, was so merged into one with the water that it was impossible to see where one ended and the other began; and the two women, walking in front of the men, stood out against the bright background, their shapes clearly defined in their closely-fitting dresses.

Jean, with a sparkle in his eye, watched the smart ankle, the neat leg, the supple waist, and the coquettish broad hat of Mme. Rosemilly as they fled away from him. And this flight fired his ardour, urging him on to the sudden determination which comes to hesitating and timid natures. The warm air, fragrant with sea-coast odours — gorse, clover, and thyme, mingling with the salt smell of the rocks at low tide — excited him still more, mounting to his brain; and every moment he felt a little more determined, at every step, at every glance he cast at the alert figure; he made up his mind to delay no longer, to tell her that he loved her and hoped to marry her. The prawn-fishing would favour him by affording him an opportunity; and it would be a pretty scene too, a pretty spot for love-making — their feet in a pool of limpid water while they watched the long feelers of the shrimps lurking under the wrack.

When they had reached the end of the comb and the edge of the cliff, they saw a little footpath slanting down the face of it; and below them, about half-way between the sea and the foot of the precipice, an amazing chaos of enormous boulders tumbled over and piled one above the other on a sort of grassy and undulating plain which extended as far as they could see to the southward, formed by an ancient landslip. On this long shelf of brushwood and grass, disrupted, as it seemed, by the shocks of a volcano, the fallen rocks seemed the wreck of a great ruined city which had once looked out on the ocean, sheltered by the long white wall of the overhanging cliff.

"That is fine!" exclaimed Mme. Rosemilly, standing still. Jean had come up with her, and with a beating heart offered his hand to help her down the narrow steps cut in the rock.

They went on in front, while Beausire, squaring himself on his little legs, gave his arm to Mme. Roland, who felt giddy at the gulf before her.

Roland and Pierre came last, and the doctor had to drag his father down, for his brain reeled so that he could only slip down sitting, from step to step.

The two young people who led the way went fast till on a sudden they saw, by the side of a wooden bench which afforded a resting-place about half-way down the slope, a thread of clear water, springing from a crevice in the cliff. It fell into a hollow as large as a washing basin which it had worn in the stone; then, falling in a cascade, hardly two feet high, it trickled across the footpath which it had carpeted with cresses, and was lost among the briers and grass on the raised shelf where the boulders were piled.

"Oh, I am so thirsty!" cried Mme. Rosemilly.

But how could she drink? She tried to catch the water in her hand, but it slipped away between her fingers. Jean had an idea; he placed a stone on the path and on this she knelt down to put her lips to the spring itself, which was thus on the same level.

When she raised her head, covered with myriads of tiny drops, sprinkled all over her face, her hair, her eye-lashes, and her dress, Jean bent over her and murmured: "How pretty you look!"

She answered in the tone in which she might have scolded a child:

"Will you be quiet?"

These were the first words of flirtation they had ever exchanged.

"Come," said Jean, much agitated. "Let us go on before they come up with us."

For in fact they could see quite near them now Captain Beausire as he came down, backward, so as to give both hands to Mme. Roland; and further up, further off, Roland still letting himself slip, lowering himself on his hams and clinging on with his hands and elbows at the speed of a tortoise, Pierre keeping in front of him to watch his movements.

The path, now less steep, was here almost a road, zigzagging between the huge rocks which had at some former time rolled from the hill-top. Mme. Rosemilly and Jean set off at a run and they were soon on the beach. They crossed it and reached the rocks, which stretched in a long and flat expanse covered with sea-weed, and broken by endless gleaming pools. The ebbed waters lay beyond, very far away, across this plain of slimy weed, of a black and shining olive green.

Jean rolled up his trousers above his calf, and his sleeves to his elbows, that he might get wet without caring; then saying: “Forward!” he leaped boldly into the first tide-pool they came to.

The lady, more cautious, though fully intending to go in too, presently, made her way round the little pond, stepping timidly, for she slipped on the grassy weed.

“Do you see anything?” she asked.

“Yes, I see your face reflected in the water.”

“If that is all you see, you will not have good fishing.”

He murmured tenderly in reply:

“Of all fishing it is that I should like best to succeed in.”

She laughed: “Try; you will see how it will slip through your net.”

“But yet — if you will?”

“I will see you catch prawns — and nothing else — for the moment.”

“You are cruel — let us go a little farther, there are none here.”

He gave her his hand to steady her on the slippery rocks. She leaned on him rather timidly, and he suddenly felt himself overpowered by love and insurgent with passion, as if the fever that had been incubating in him had waited till to-day to declare its presence.

They soon came to a deeper rift, in which long slender weeds, fantastically tinted, like floating green and rose-coloured hair, were swaying under the quivering water as it trickled off to the distant sea through some invisible crevice.

Mme. Rosemilly cried out: “Look, look, I see one, a big one. A very big one, just there!” He saw it too, and stepped boldly into the pool, though he got wet up to the waist. But the creature, waving its long whiskers, gently retired in front of the net. Jean drove it towards the sea-weed, making sure of his prey. When it found itself blockaded it rose with a dart over the net, shot across the mere, and was gone. The young woman, who was watching the chase in great excitement, could not help exclaiming: “Oh! Clumsy!”

He was vexed, and without a moment’s thought dragged his net over a hole full of weed. As he brought it to the surface again he saw in it three large transparent prawns, caught blindfold in their hiding-place.

He offered them in triumph to Mme. Rosemilly, who was afraid to touch them, for fear of the sharp, serrated crest which arms their heads. However, she made up her mind to it, and taking them up by the tip of their long whiskers she dropped them one by one into her creel, with a little seaweed to keep them alive. Then, having found a shallower pool of water, she stepped in with some hesitation, for the cold plunge of her feet took her breath away, and began to fish on her own account. She was dextrous and artful, with the light hand and the hunter’s instinct which are indispensable. At almost every dip she brought up some prawns, beguiled and surprised by her ingeniously gentle pursuit.

Jean now caught nothing; but he followed her, step by step, touched her now and again, bent over her, pretended great distress at his own awkwardness, and besought her to teach him.

“Show me,” he kept saying. “Show me how.”

And then, as their two faces were reflected side by side in water so clear that the black weeds at the bottom made a mirror, Jean smiled at the face which looked up at him from the depth, and now and then from his finger-tips blew it a kiss which seemed to light upon it.

“Oh! how tiresome you are!” she exclaimed. “My dear fellow, you should never do two things at once.”

He replied: “I am only doing one — loving you.”

She drew herself up and said gravely:

“What has come over you these ten minutes; have you lost your wits?”

“No, I have not lost my wits. I love you, and at last I dare to tell you so.”

They were at this moment both standing in the salt pool wet half-way up to their knees and with dripping hands, holding their nets. They looked into each other’s eyes.

She went on in a tone of amused annoyance.

“How very ill-advised to tell me here and now! Could you not wait till another day instead of spoiling my fishing?”

“Forgive me,” he murmured, “but I could not longer hold my peace. I have loved you a long time. To-day you have intoxicated me and I lost my reason.”

Then suddenly she seemed to have resigned herself to talk business and think no more of pleasure.

“Let us sit down on that stone,” said she, “we can talk more comfortably.” They scrambled up a rather high boulder, and when they had settled themselves side by side in the bright sunshine, she began again:

“My good friend, you are no longer a child, and I am not a young girl. we both know perfectly well what we are about and we can weigh the consequences of our actions. If you have made up your mind to make love to me to-day I must naturally infer that you wish to marry me.”

He was not prepared for this matter-of-fact statement of the case, and he answered blandly:

“Why, yes.”

“Have you mentioned it to your father and mother?”

“No, I wanted to know first whether you would accept me.”

She held out her hand, which was still wet, and as he eagerly clasped it:

“I am ready and willing,” she said. “I believe you to be kind and true-hearted. But remember, I should not like to displease your parents.”

“Oh, do you think that my mother has never foreseen it, or that she would not be as fond of you as she is if she did not hope that you and I should marry?”

“That is true. I am a little disturbed.”

They said no more. He, for his part, was amazed at her being so little disturbed, so rational. He had expected pretty little flirting ways, refusals which meant yes, a whole coquettish comedy of love chequered by prawn-fishing in the splashing water. And it was all over; he was pledged, married with twenty words. They had no more to say about it since they were agreed, and they now sat, both somewhat embarrassed by what had so swiftly passed between them; a little perplexed, indeed, not daring to speak, not daring to fish, not knowing what to do.

Roland’s voice rescued them.

“This way, this way, children. Come and watch Beausire. The fellow is positively clearing out the sea!”

The captain had, in fact, had a wonderful haul. Wet above his hips he waded from pool to pool, recognizing the likeliest spots at a glance, and searching all the hollows hidden under sea-weed, with a steady slow sweep of his net. And the beautiful transparent, sandy-gray prawns skipped in his palm as he picked them out of the net with a dry jerk and put them into his creel. Mme. Rosemilly, surprised and delighted, remained at his side, almost forgetful of her promise to Jean, who followed them in a dream, giving herself up entirely to the childish enjoyment of pulling the creatures out from among the waving sea-grasses.

Roland suddenly exclaimed:

“Ah, here comes Mme. Roland to join us.”

She had remained at first on the beach with Pierre, for they had neither of them any wish to play at running about among the rocks and paddling in the tide-pools; and yet they had felt doubtful about staying together. She was afraid of him, and her son was afraid of her and of himself; afraid of his own cruelty which he could not control. But they sat down side by side on the stones. And both of them, under the heat of the sun, mitigated by the sea-breeze, gazing at the wide, fair horizon of blue water streaked and shot with silver, thought as if in unison: “How delightful this would have been — once.”

She did not venture to speak to Pierre, knowing that he would return some hard answer; and he dared not address his mother, knowing that in spite of himself he should speak violently. He sat twitching the water-worn pebbles with the end of his cane, switching them and turning them over. She, with a vague look in her eyes, had picked up three or four little stones and was slowly and mechanically dropping them from one hand into the other. Then her unsettled gaze, wandering over the scene before her, discerned, among the weedy rocks, her son Jean fishing with Mme. Rosemilly. She looked at them, watching their movements, dimly understanding, with motherly instinct, that they were talking as they did not talk every day. She saw them leaning over side by side when they looked into the water, standing face to face when they questioned their hearts, then scrambled up the rock and seated themselves to come to an understanding. Their figures stood out very sharply, looking as if they were alone in the middle of the wide horizon, and assuming a sort of symbolic dignity in that vast expanse of sky and sea and cliff.

Pierre, too, was looking at them, and a harsh laugh suddenly broke form his lips. Without turning to him Mme. Roland said:

“What is it?”

He spoke with a sneer.

“I am learning. Learning how a man lays himself out to be cozened by his wife.”

She flushed with rage, exasperated by the insinuation she believed was intended.

“In whose name do you say that?”

“In Jean’s, by Heaven! It is immensely funny to see those two.”

She murmured in a low voice, tremulous with feeling: “O Pierre, how cruel you are! That woman is honesty itself. Your brother could not find a better.”

He laughed aloud, a hard, satirical laugh:

“Ha! hah! Hah! Honesty itself! All wives are honesty itself — and all husbands are — betrayed.” And he shouted with laughter.

She made no reply, but rose, hastily went down the sloping beach, and at the risk of tumbling into one of the rifts hidden by the sea-weed, of breaking a leg or an arm, she hastened, almost running, plunging through the pools without looking, straight to her other son.

Seeing her approach, Jean called out:

“Well, mother? So you have made the effort?”

Without a word she seized him by the arm, as if to say: “Save me, protect me!”

He saw her agitation, and greatly surprised he said:

“How pale you are! What is the matter?”

She stammered out:

“I was nearly falling; I was frightened at the rocks.”

So then Jean guided her, supported her, explained the sport to her that she might take an interest in it. But as she scarcely heeded him, and as he was bursting with the desire to confide in some one, he led her away and in a low voice said to her:

“Guess what I have done!”

“But — what — I don’t know.”

“Guess.”

“I cannot. I don’t know.”

“Well, I have told Mme. Rosemilly that I wish to marry her.”

She did not answer, for her brain was buzzing, her mind in such distress that she could scarcely take it in. She echoed: “Marry her?”

“Yes. Have I done well? She is charming, do not you think?”

“Yes, charming. You have done very well.”

“Then you approve?”

“Yes, I approve.”

“But how strangely you say so! I could fancy that — that you were not glad.”

“Yes, indeed, I am — very glad.”

“Really and truly?”

“Really and truly.”

And to prove it she threw her arms round him and kissed him heartily, with warm motherly kisses. Then, when she had wiped her eyes, which were full of tears, she observed upon the beach a man lying flat at full length like a dead body, his face hidden against the stones; it was the other one, Pierre, sunk in thought and desperation.

At this she led her little Jean farther away, quite to the edge of the waves, and there they talked for a long time of this marriage on which he had set his heart.

The rising tide drove them back to rejoin the fishers, and then they all made their way to the shore. They roused Pierre, who pretended to be sleeping; and then came a long dinner washed down with many kinds of wine.

CHAPTER VII

In the break, on their way home, all the men dozed excepting Jean. Beausire and Roland dropped every five minutes on to a neighbour's shoulder which repelled them with a shove. Then they sat up, ceased to snore, opened their eyes, muttered, "A lovely evening!" and almost immediately fell over on the other side.

By the time they reached Havre their drowsiness was so heavy that they had great difficulty in shaking it off, and Beausire even refused to go to Jean's rooms where tea was waiting for them. He had to be set down at his own door.

The young lawyer was to sleep in his new abode for the first time; and he was full of rather puerile glee which had suddenly come over him, at being able, that very evening, to show his betrothed the rooms she was so soon to inhabit.

The maid had gone to bed, Mme. Roland having declared that she herself would boil the water and make the tea, for she did not like the servants to be kept up for fear of fire.

No one had yet been into the lodgings but herself, Jean, and the workmen, that the surprise might be the greater at their being so pretty.

Jean begged them all to wait a moment in the ante-room. He wanted to light the lamps and candles, and he left Mme. Rosemilly in the dark with his father and brother; then he cried: "Come in!" opening the double door to its full width.

The glass gallery, lighted by a chandelier and little coloured lamps hidden among palms, india-rubber plants, and flowers, was first seen like a scene on the stage. There was a spasm of surprise. Roland, dazzled by such luxury, muttered an oath, and felt inclined to clap his hands as if it were a pantomime scene. They then went into the first drawing-room, a small room hung with dead gold and furnished to match. The larger drawing-room — the lawyer's consulting-room, very simple, hung with light salmon-colour — was dignified in style.

Jean sat down in his arm-chair in front of his writing-table loaded with books, and in a solemn, rather stilted tone, he began:

"Yes, madame, the letter of the law is explicit, and, assuming the consent I promised you, it affords me absolute certainty that the matter we discussed will come to a happy conclusion within three months."

He looked at Mme. Rosemilly, who began to smile and glanced at Mme. Roland. Mme. Roland took her hand and pressed it. Jean, in high spirits, cut a caper like a school-boy, exclaiming: "Hah! How well the voice carries in this room; it would be capital for speaking in."

And he declaimed:

"If humanity alone, if the instinct of natural benevolence which we feel towards all who suffer, were the motive of the acquittal we expect of you, I should appeal to your compassion, gentlemen of the jury, to your hearts as fathers and as men; but we have law on our side, and it is the point of law only which we shall submit to your judgment."

Pierre was looking at this home which might have been his, and he was restive under his brother's frolics, thinking him really too silly and witless.

Mme. Roland opened a door on the right.

"This is the bed-room," said she.

She had devoted herself to its decoration with all her mother's love. The hangings were of Rouen cretonne imitating old Normandy chintz, and the Louis XV. design — a shepherdess, in a medallion held in the beaks of a pair of doves — gave the walls, curtains, bed, and arm-chairs a festive, rustic style that was extremely pretty!

"Oh, how charming!" Mme. Rosemilly exclaimed, becoming a little serious as they entered the room.

"Do you like it?" asked Jean.

"Immensely."

"You cannot imagine how glad I am."

They looked at each other for a second, with confiding tenderness in the depths of their eyes.

She had felt a little awkward, however, a little abashed, in this room which was to be hers. She noticed as she went in that the bed was a large one, quite a family bed, chosen by Mme. Roland, who had no doubt foreseen and hoped that her son should soon marry; and this motherly foresight pleased her, for it seemed to tell her that she was expected in the family.

When they had returned to the drawing-room Jean abruptly threw open the door to the left, showing the circular dining-room with three windows, and decorated to imitate a Chinese lantern. Mother and son had here lavished all the fancy of which they were capable, and the room, with its bamboo furniture, its mandarins, jars, silk hangings glistening with gold, transparent blinds threaded with beads looking like drops of water, fans nailed to the wall to drape the hangings on, screens, swords, masks, cranes made of real feathers, and a myriad trifles in china, wood, paper, ivory, mother-of-pearl, and bronze, had the pretentious and extravagant aspect which unpractised hands and uneducated eyes inevitably stamp on things which need the utmost tact, taste, and artistic education. Nevertheless it was the most admired; only Pierre made some observations with rather bitter irony which hurt his brother's feelings.

Pyramids of fruit stood on the table and monuments of cakes. No one was hungry; they picked at the fruit and nibbled at the cakes rather than ate them. Then, at the end of about an hour, Mme. Rosemilly begged to take leave. It was decided that old Roland should accompany her home and set out with her forthwith; while Mme. Roland, in the maid's absence, should cast a maternal eye over the house and see that her son had all he needed.

"Shall I come back for you?" asked Roland.

She hesitated a moment and then said: "No, dear old man; go to bed. Pierre will see me home."

As soon as they were gone she blew out the candles, locked up the cakes, the sugar, and liqueurs in a cupboard of which she gave the key to Jean; then she went into the bed-room, turned down the bed, saw that there was fresh water in the water-bottle, and that the window was properly closed.

Pierre and Jean had remained in the little outer drawing-room; the younger still sore under the criticism passed on his taste, and the elder chafing more and more at seeing his brother in this abode. They both sat smoking without a word. Pierre suddenly started to his feet.

"Cristi!" he exclaimed. "The widow looked very jaded this evening. Long excursions do not improve her."

Jean felt his spirit rising with one of those sudden and furious rages which boil up in easy-going natures when they are wounded to the quick. He could hardly find breath to speak, so fierce was his excitement, and he stammered out:

"I forbid you ever again to say 'the widow' when you speak of Mme. Rosemilly."

Pierre turned on him haughtily:

"You are giving me an order, I believe. Are you gone mad by any chance?"

Jean had pulled himself up.

"I am not gone mad, but I have had enough of your manners to me."

Pierre sneered: "To you? And are you any part of Mme. Rosemilly?"

"You are to know that Mme. Rosemilly is about to become my wife."

Pierre laughed the louder.

"Ah! ha! very good. I understand now why I should no longer speak of her as 'the widow.' But you have taken a strange way of announcing your engagement."

"I forbid any jesting about it. Do you hear? I forbid it."

Jean had come close up to him, pale, and his voice quivering with exasperation at this irony levelled at the woman he loved and had chosen.

But on a sudden Pierre turned equally furious. All the accumulation of impotent rage, of suppressed malignity, of rebellion choked down for so long past, all his unspoken despair mounted to his brain, bewildering it like a fit.

"How dare you? How dare you? I order you to hold your tongue — do you hear? I order you."

Jean, startled by his violence, was silent for a few seconds, trying in the confusion of mind which comes of rage to hit on the thing, the phrase, the word, which might stab his brother to the heart. He went on, with an effort to control himself that he might aim true, and to speak slowly that the words might hit more keenly:

"I have known for a long time that you were jealous of me, ever since the day when you first began to talk of 'the widow' because you knew it annoyed me."

Pierre broke into one of those strident and scornful laughs which were common with him.

"Ah! ah! Good Heavens! Jealous of you! I? I? And of what? Good God! Of your person or your mind?"

But Jean knew full well that he had touched the wound in his soul.

"Yes, jealous of me — jealous from your childhood up. And it became fury when you saw that this woman liked me best and would have nothing to say to you."

Pierre, stung to the quick by this assumption, stuttered out:

"I? I? Jealous of you? And for the sake of that goose, that gaby, that simpleton?"

Jean, seeing that he was aiming true, went on:

"And how about the day when you tried to pull me round in the Pearl? And all you said in her presence to show off? Why, you are bursting with jealousy! And when this money was left to me you were maddened, you hated me, you showed it in every possible way, and made every one suffer for it; not an hour passes that you do not spit out the bile that is choking you."

Pierre clenched his fist in his fury with an almost irresistible impulse to fly at his brother and seize him by the throat.

"Hold your tongue," he cried. "At least say nothing about that money."

Jean went on:

"Why your jealousy oozes out at every pore. You never say a word to my father, my mother, or me that does not declare it plainly. You pretend to despise me because you are jealous. You try to pick a quarrel with every one because you are jealous. And now that I am rich you can no longer contain yourself; you have become venomous, you torture our poor mother as if she were to blame!"

Pierre had retired step by step as far as the fire-place, his mouth half open, his eyes glaring, a prey to one of those mad fits of passion in which a crime is committed.

He said again in a lower tone, gasping for breath: "Hold your tongue — for God's sake hold your tongue!"

"No! For a long time I have been wanting to give you my whole mind! You have given me an opening — so much the worse for you. I love the woman; you know it, and laugh her to scorn in my presence — so much the worse for you. But I will break your viper's fangs, I tell you. I will make you treat me with respect."

"With respect — you?"

"Yes — me."

"Respect you? You who have brought shame on us all by your greed."

"You say — ? Say it again — again."

"I say that it does not do to accept one man's fortune when another is reputed to be your father."

Jean stood rigid, not understanding, dazed by the insinuation he scented.

"What? Repeat that once more."

“I say — what everybody is muttering, what every gossip is blabbing — that you are the son of the man who left you his fortune. Well, then — a decent man does not take the money which brings dishonour on his mother.”

“Pierre! Pierre! Pierre! Think what you are saying. You? Is it you who give utterance to this infamous thing?”

“Yes, I. It is I. Have you not seen me crushed with woe this month past, spending my nights without sleep and my days in lurking out of sight like an animal? I hardly know what I am doing or what will become of me, so miserable am I, so crazed with shame and grief; for first I guessed — and now I know it.”

“Pierre! Be silent. Mother is in the next room. Remember she may hear — she must hear.”

But Pierre felt that he must unburden his heart. He told Jean all his suspicions, his arguments, his struggles, his assurance, and the history of the portrait — which had again disappeared. He spoke in short broken sentences almost without coherence — the language of a sleep-walker.

He seemed to have quite forgotten Jean, and his mother in the adjoining room. He talked as if no one were listening, because he must talk, because he had suffered too much and smothered and closed the wound too tightly. It had festered like an abscess and the abscess had burst, splashing every one. He was pacing the room in the way he almost always did, his eyes fixed on vacancy, gesticulating in a frenzy of despair, his voice choked with tearless sobs and revulsions of self-loathing; he spoke as if he were making a confession of his own misery and that of his nearest kin, as though he were casting his woes to the deaf, invisible winds which bore away his words.

Jean, distracted and almost convinced on a sudden by his brother’s blind vehemence, was leaning against the door behind which, as he guessed, their mother had heard them.

She could not get out, she must come through his room. She had not come; then it was because she dare not.

Suddenly Pierre stamped his foot.

“I am a brute,” he cried, “to have told you this.”

And he fled, bare-headed, down the stairs.

The noise of the front-door closing with a slam roused Jean from the deep stupor into which he had fallen. Some seconds had elapsed, longer than hours, and his spirit had sunk into the numb torpor of idiocy. He was conscious, indeed, that he must presently think and act, but he would wait, refusing to understand, to know, to remember, out of fear, weakness, cowardice. He was one of those procrastinators who put everything off till to-morrow; and when he was compelled to come to a decision then and there, still he instinctively tried to gain a few minutes.

But the perfect silence which now reigned, after Pierre's vociferations, the sudden stillness of walls and furniture, with the bright light of six wax candles and two lamps, terrified him so greatly that he suddenly longed to make his escape too.

Then he roused his brain, roused his heart, and tried to reflect.

Never in his life had he had to face a difficulty. There are men who let themselves glide onward like running water. He had been duteous over his tasks for fear of punishment, and had got through his legal studies with credit because his existence was tranquil. Everything in the world seemed to him quite natural and never aroused his particular attention. He loved order, steadiness, and peace, by temperament, his nature having no complications; and face to face with this catastrophe, he found himself like a man who has fallen into the water and cannot swim.

At first he tried to be incredulous. His brother had told a lie, out of hatred and jealousy. But yet, how could he have been so vile as to say such a thing of their mother if he had not himself been distraught by despair? Besides, stamped on Jean's ear, on his sight, on his nerves, on the inmost fibres of his flesh, were certain words, certain tones of anguish, certain gestures of Pierre's, so full of suffering that they were irresistibly convincing; as incontrovertible as certainty itself.

He was too much crushed to stir or even to will. His distress became unbearable; and he knew that behind the door was his mother who had heard everything and was waiting.

What was she doing? Not a movement, not a shudder, not a breath, not a sigh revealed the presence of a living creature behind that panel. Could she have run away? But how? If she had run away — she must have jumped out of the window into the street. A shock of terror roused him — so violent and imperious that he drove the door in rather than opened it, and flung himself into the bed-room.

It was apparently empty, lighted by a single candle standing on the chest of drawers.

Jean flew to the window; it was shut and the shutters bolted. He looked about him, peering into the dark corners with anxious eyes, and he then noticed that the bed-curtains were drawn. He ran forward and opened them. His mother was lying on the bed, her face buried in the pillow which she had pulled up over her ears that she might hear no more.

At first he thought she had smothered herself. Then, taking her by the shoulders, he turned her over without her leaving go of the pillow, which covered her face, and in which she had set her teeth to keep herself from crying out.

But the mere touch of this rigid form, of those arms so convulsively clinched, communicated to him the shock of her unspeakable torture. The strength and determination with which she clutched the linen case full of feathers with her hands and teeth, over her mouth and eyes and ears, that he might neither see her nor speak to her, gave him an idea, by the turmoil it roused in him, of the pitch suffering may rise to, and his heart, his simple heart, was torn with pity. He was no judge, not he; not even a merciful judge; he was a man full of weakness and a son full of love. He remembered nothing of what his brother had told him; he neither reasoned nor argued, he merely laid his two hands on his mother's inert body, and not being able to pull the pillow away, he exclaimed, kissing her dress:

"Mother, mother, my poor mother, look at me!"

She would have seemed to be dead but that an almost imperceptible shudder ran through all her limbs, the vibration of a strained cord. And he repeated:

"Mother, mother, listen to me. It is not true. I know that it is not true."

A spasm seemed to come over her, a fit of suffocation; then she suddenly began to sob into the pillow. Her sinews relaxed, her rigid muscles yielded, her fingers gave way and left go of the linen; and he uncovered her face.

She was pale, quite colourless; and from under her closed lids tears were stealing. He threw his arms round her neck and kissed her eyes, slowly, with long heart-broken kisses, wet with her tears; and he said again and again:

"Mother, my dear mother, I know it is not true. Do not cry; I know it. It is not true."

She raised herself, she sat up, looked in his face, and with an effort of courage such as it must cost in some cases to kill one's self, she said:

"No, my child; it is true."

And they remained speechless, each in the presence of the other. For some minutes she seemed again to be suffocating, craning her throat and throwing back her head to get breath; then she once more mastered herself and went on:

"It is true, my child. Why lie about it? It is true. You would not believe me if I denied it."

She looked like a crazy creature. Overcome by alarm, he fell on his knees by the bedside, murmuring:

"Hush, mother, be silent." She stood up with terrible determination and energy.

"I have nothing more to say, my child. Good-bye." And she went towards the door.

He threw his arms about her exclaiming:

"What are you doing, mother; where are you going?"

"I do not know. How should I know — There is nothing left for me to do, now that I am alone."

She struggled to be released. Holding her firmly, he could find only words to say again and again:

"Mother, mother, mother!" And through all her efforts to free herself she was saying:

"No, no. I am not your mother now, poor boy — good-bye."

It struck him clearly that if he let her go now he should never see her again; lifting her up in his arms he carried her to an arm-chair, forced her into it, and kneeling down in front of her barred her in with his arms.

"You shall not quit this spot, mother. I love you and I will keep you! I will keep you always — I love you and you are mine."

She murmured in a dejected tone:

"No, my poor boy, it is impossible. You weep to-night, but to-morrow you would turn me out of the house. You, even you, could not forgive me."

He replied: "I? I? How little you know me!" with such a burst of genuine affection that, with a cry, she seized his head by the hair with both hands, and dragging him violently to her kissed him distractedly all over his face.

Then she sat still, her cheek against his, feeling the warmth of his skin through his beard, and she whispered in his ear: "No, my little Jean, you would not forgive me to-morrow. You think so, but you deceive yourself. You have forgiven me this evening, and that forgiveness has saved my life; but you must never see me again."

And he repeated, clasping her in his arms:

“Mother, do not say that.”

“Yes, my child, I must go away. I do not know where, nor how I shall set about it, nor what I shall do; but it must be done. I could never look at you, nor kiss you, do you understand?”

Then he in his turn spoke into her ear:

“My little mother, you are to stay, because I insist, because I want you. And you must pledge your word to obey me, now, at once.”

“No, my child.”

“Yes, mother, you must; do you hear? You must.”

“No, my child, it is impossible. It would be condemning us all to the tortures of hell. I know what that torment is; I have known it this month past. Your feelings are touched now, but when that is over, when you look on me as Pierre does, when you remember what I have told you — oh, my Jean, think — think — I am your mother!”

“I will not let you leave me, mother. I have no one but you.”

“But think, my son, we can never see each other again without both of us blushing, without my feeling that I must die of shame, without my eyes falling before yours.”

“But it is not so, mother.”

“Yes, yes, yes, it is so! Oh, I have understood all your poor brother’s struggles, believe me! All — from the very first day. Now, when I hear his step in the house my heart beats as if it would burst, when I hear his voice I am ready to faint. I still had you; now I have you no longer. Oh, my little Jean! Do you think I could live between you two?”

“Yes, I should love you so much that you would cease to think of it.”

“As if that were possible!”

“But it is possible.”

“How do you suppose that I could cease to think of it, with your brother and you on each hand? Would you cease to think of it, I ask you?”

“I? I swear I should.”

“Why you would think of it at every hour of the day.”

“No, I swear it. Besides, listen, if you go away I will enlist and get killed.”

This boyish threat quite overcame her; she clasped Jean in a passionate and tender embrace. He went on:

"I love you more than you think — ah, much more, much more. Come, be reasonable. Try to stay for only one week. Will you promise me one week? You cannot refuse me that?"

She laid her two hands on Jean's shoulders, and holding him at arm's length she said:

"My child, let us try and be calm and not give way to emotions. First, listen to me. If I were ever to hear from your lips what I have heard for this month past from your brother, if I were once to see in your eyes what I read in his, if I could fancy from a word or a look that I was as odious to you as I am to him — within one hour, mark me — within one hour I should be gone forever."

"Mother, I swear to you— "

"Let me speak. For a month past I have suffered all that any creature can suffer. From the moment when I perceived that your brother, my other son, suspected me, that as the minutes went by, he guessed the truth, every moment of my life has been a martyrdom which no words could tell you."

Her voice was so full of woe that the contagion of her misery brought the tears to Jean's eyes.

He tried to kiss her, but she held him off.

"Leave me — listen; I still have so much to say to make you understand. But you never can understand. You see, if I stayed — I must — no, no. I cannot."

"Speak on, mother, speak."

"Yes, indeed, for at least I shall not have deceived you. You want me to stay with you? For what — for us to be able to see each other, speak to each other, meet at any hour of the day at home, for I no longer dare open a door for fear of finding your brother behind it. If we are to do that, you must not forgive me — nothing is so wounding as forgiveness — but you must owe me no grudge for what I have done. You must feel yourself strong enough, and so far unlike the rest of the world, as to be able to say to yourself that you are not Roland's son without blushing for the fact or despising me. I have suffered enough — I have suffered too much; I can bear no more, no indeed, no more! And it is not a thing of yesterday, mind you, but of long, long years. But you could never understand that; how should you! If you and I are to live together and kiss each other, my little Jean, you must believe that though I was your father's mistress I was yet more truly his wife, his real wife; that, at the bottom of my heart, I cannot be ashamed of it; that I have no regrets; that I love him still even in death; that I shall always love him and never loved any other man; that he was my life, my joy, my hope, my comfort, everything — everything in the world to me for so long! Listen, my boy, before God, who hears me, I should never have had a joy in my existence if I had not met him; never anything — not a touch of tenderness or kindness, not one of those hours which make us regret growing old — nothing. I owe everything to him! I had but him in the world, and you two boys, your brother and you. But for you, all would have been empty, dark, and void as the night. I should never have loved, or known, or cared for anything — I should not even have wept — for I have wept, my little Jean; oh, yes, and bitter tears, since we came to Havre. I was his wholly and forever; for ten years I was as much his wife as he was my husband before God who created us for each other. And then I began to see that he loved me less. He was always kind and courteous, but I was not what I had been to him. It was all over! Oh, how I have cried! How dreadful and delusive life is! Nothing lasts. Then we came here — I never saw him again; he never came. He promised it in every letter. I was always expecting him, and I never saw him again — and now he is dead! But he still cared for us since he remembered you. I shall love him to my latest breath, and I never will deny him, and I love you because you are his child, and I could never be ashamed of him before you. Do you understand? I could not. So if you wish me to remain you must accept the situation as his son, and we will talk of him sometimes; and you must love him a little and we must think of him when we look at each other. If you will not do this — if you cannot — then good-bye, my child; it is impossible that we should live together. Now, I will act by your decision."

Jean replied gently:

"Stay, mother."

She clasped him in her arms, and her tears flowed again; then, with her face against his, she went on:

"Well, but Pierre. What can we do about Pierre?"

Jean answered:

"We will find some plan! You cannot live with him any longer."

At the thought of her elder son she was convulsed with terror.

"No, I cannot; no, no!" And throwing herself on Jean's breast she cried in distress of mind:

“Save me from him, you, my little one. Save me; do something — I don’t know what. Think of something. Save me.”

“Yes, mother, I will think of something.”

“And at once. You must, this minute. Do not leave me. I am so afraid of him — so afraid.”

“Yes, yes; I will hit on some plan. I promise you I will.”

“But at once; quick, quick! You cannot imagine what I feel when I see him.”

Then she murmured softly in his ear: “Keep me here, with you.”

He paused, reflected, and with his blunt good-sense saw at once the dangers of such an arrangement. But he had to argue for a long time, combating her scared, terror-stricken insistence.

“Only for to-night,” she said. “Only for to-night. And to-morrow morning you can send word to Roland that I was taken ill.”

“That is out of the question, as Pierre left you here. Come, take courage. I will arrange everything, I promise you, to-morrow; I will be with you by nine o’clock. Come, put on your bonnet. I will take you home.”

“I will do just what you desire,” she said with a childlike impulse of timidity and gratitude.

She tried to rise, but the shock had been too much for her; she could not stand.

He made her drink some sugared water and smell at some salts, while he bathed her temples with vinegar. She let him do what he would, exhausted, but comforted, as after the pains of child-birth. At last she could walk and she took his arm. The town hall struck three as they went past.

Outside their own door Jean kissed her, saying:

“Good-night, mother, keep up your courage.”

She stealthily crept up the silent stairs, and into her room, undressed quickly, and slipped into bed with a reawakened sense of that long-forgotten sin. Roland was snoring. In all the house Pierre alone was awake, and had heard her come in.

CHAPTER VIII

When he got back to his lodgings Jean dropped on a sofa; for the sorrows and anxieties which made his brother long to be moving, and to flee like a hunted prey, acted differently on his torpid nature and broke the strength of his arms and legs. He felt too limp to stir a finger, even to get to bed; limp body and soul, crushed and heart-broken. He had not been hit, as Pierre had been, in the purity of filial love, in the secret dignity which is the refuge of a proud heart; he was overwhelmed by a stroke of fate which, at the same time, threatened his own nearest interests.

When at last his spirit was calmer, when his thoughts had settled like water that has been stirred and lashed, he could contemplate the situation which had come before him. If he had learned the secret of his birth through any other channel he would assuredly have been very wroth and very deeply pained, but after his quarrel with his brother, after the violent and brutal betrayal which had shaken his nerves, the agonizing emotion of his mother's confession had so bereft him of energy that he could not rebel. The shock to his feeling had been so great as to sweep away in an irresistible tide of pathos, all prejudice, and all the sacred delicacy of natural morality. Besides, he was not a man made for resistance. He did not like contending against any one, least of all against himself, so he resigned himself at once; and by instinctive tendency, a congenital love of peace, and of an easy and tranquil life, he began to anticipate the agitations which must surge up around him and at once be his ruin. He foresaw that they were inevitable, and to avert them he made up his mind to superhuman efforts of energy and activity. The knot must be cut immediately, this very day; for even he had fits of that imperious demand for a swift solution which is the only strength of weak natures, incapable of a prolonged effort of will. His lawyer's mind, accustomed as it was to disentangling and studying complicated situations and questions of domestic difficulties in families that had got out of gear, at once foresaw the more immediate consequences of his brother's state of mind. In spite of himself, he looked at the issue from an almost professional point of view, as though he had to legislate for the future relations of certain clients after a moral disaster. Constant friction against Pierre had certainly become unendurable. He could easily evade it, no doubt, by living in his own lodgings; but even then it was not possible that their mother should live under the same roof with her elder son. For a long time he sat meditating, motionless, on the cushions, devising and rejecting various possibilities, and finding nothing that satisfied him.

But suddenly an idea took him by storm. This fortune which had come to him. Would an honest man keep it?

"No," was the first immediate answer, and he made up his mind that it must go to the poor. It was hard, but it could not be helped. He would sell his furniture and work like any other man, like any other beginner. This manful and painful resolution spurred his courage; he rose and went to the window, leaning his forehead against the pane. He had been poor; he could become poor again. After all he should not die of it. His eyes were fixed on the gas lamp burning at the opposite side of the street. A woman, much belated, happened to pass; suddenly he thought of Mme. Rosemilly with a pang at his heart, the shock of deep feeling which comes of a cruel suggestion. All the dire results of his decision rose up before him together. He would have to renounce his marriage, renounce happiness, renounce everything. Could he do such a thing after having pledged himself to her? She had accepted him knowing him to be rich. She would take him still if he were poor; but had he any right to demand such a sacrifice? Would it not be better to keep this money in trust, to be restored to the poor at some future date.

And in his soul, where selfishness put on a guise of honesty, all these specious interests were struggling and contending. His first scruples yielded to ingenious reasoning, then came to the top again, and again disappeared.

He sat down again, seeking some decisive motive, some all-sufficient pretext to solve his hesitancy and convince his natural rectitude. Twenty times over had he asked himself this question: "Since I am this man's son, since I know and acknowledge it, is it not natural that I should also accept the inheritance?"

But even this argument could not suppress the "No" murmured by his inmost conscience.

Then came the thought: "Since I am not the son of the man I always believed to be my father, I can take nothing from him, neither during his lifetime nor after his death. It would be neither dignified nor equitable. It would be robbing my brother."

This new view of the matter having relieved him and quieted his conscience, he went to the window again.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I must give up my share of the family inheritance. I must let Pierre have the whole of it, since I am not his father's son. That is but just. Then is it not just that I should keep my father's money?"

Having discerned that he could take nothing of Roland's savings, having decided on giving up the whole of this money, he agreed; he resigned himself to keeping Marechal's; for if he rejected both he would find himself reduced to beggary.

This delicate question being thus disposed of he came back to that of Pierre's presence in the family. How was he to be got rid of? He was giving up his search for any practical solution when the whistle of a steam-vessel coming into port seemed to blow him an answer by suggesting a scheme.

Then he threw himself on his bed without undressing, and dozed and dreamed till daybreak.

At a little before nine he went out to ascertain whether his plans were feasible. Then, after making sundry inquiries and calls, he went to his old home. His mother was waiting for him in her room.

"If you had not come," she said, "I should never have dared to go down."

In a minute Roland's voice was heard on the stairs: "Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all?"

There was no answer, and he roared out, with a thundering oath this time: "Josephine, what the devil are you about?"

The girl's voice came up from the depths of the basement.

"Yes, M'sieu — what is it?"

"Where is your Miss'es?"

"Madame is upstairs with M'sieu Jean."

Then he shouted, looking up at the higher floor: "Louise!"

Mme. Roland half opened her door and answered:

"What is it, my dear?"

"Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all?"

"Yes, my dear, I am coming."

And she went down, followed by Jean.

Roland, as soon as he saw him, exclaimed:

"Hallo! There you are! Sick of your home already?"

"No, father, but I had something to talk over with mother this morning."

Jean went forward holding out his hand, and when he felt his fingers in the old man’s fatherly clasp, a strange, unforeseen emotion thrilled through him, and a sense as of parting and farewell without return.

Mme. Roland asked:

“Pierre is not come down?”

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

“No, but never mind him; he is always behind-hand. We will begin without him.”

She turned to Jean:

“You had better go to call him, my child; it hurts his feelings if we do not wait for him.”

“Yes, mother. I will go.”

And the young man went. He mounted the stairs with the fevered determination of a man who is about to fight a duel and who is in a fright. When he knocked at the door Pierre said:

“Come in.”

He went in. The elder was writing, leaning over his table.

“Good-morning,” said Jean.

Pierre rose.

“Good-morning!” and they shook hands as if nothing had occurred.

“Are you not coming down to breakfast?”

“Well — you see — I have a good deal to do.” The elder brother’s voice was tremulous, and his anxious eye asked his younger brother what he meant to do.

“They are waiting for you.”

“Oh! There is — is my mother down?”

“Yes, it was she who sent me to fetch you.”

“Ah, very well; then I will come.”

At the door of the dining-room he paused, doubtful about going in first; then he abruptly opened the door and saw his father and mother seated at the table opposite each other.

He went straight up to her without looking at her or saying a word, and bending over her, offered his forehead for her to kiss, as he had done for some time past, instead of kissing her on both cheeks as of old. He supposed that she put her lips near but he did not feel them on his brow, and he straightened himself with a throbbing heart after this feint of a caress. And he wondered:

"What did they say to each other after I had left?"

Jean constantly addressed her tenderly as "mother," or "dear mother," took care of her, waited on her, and poured out her wine.

Then Pierre understood that they had wept together, but he could not read their minds. Did Jean believe in his mother's guilt, or think his brother a base wretch?

And all his self-reproach for having uttered the horrible thing came upon him again, choking his throat and his tongue, and preventing his either eating or speaking.

He was now a prey to an intolerable desire to fly, to leave the house which was his home no longer, and these persons who were bound to him by such imperceptible ties. He would gladly have been off that moment, no matter whither, feeling that everything was over, that he could not endure to stay with them, that his presence was torture to them, and that they would bring on him incessant suffering too great to endure. Jean was talking, chatting with Roland. Pierre, as he did not listen, did not hear. But he presently was aware of a pointed tone in his brother's voice and paid more attention to his words. Jean was saying:

"She will be the finest ship in their fleet. They say she is of 6,500 tons. She is to make her first trip next month."

Roland was amazed.

"So soon? I thought she was not to be ready for sea this summer."

"Yes. The work has been pushed forward very vigorously, to get her through her first voyage before the autumn. I looked in at the Company's office this morning, and was talking to one of the directors."

"Indeed! Which of them?"

"M. Marchand, who is a great friend of the Chairman of the Board."

"Oh! Do you know him?"

"Yes. And I wanted to ask him a favour."

"Then you will get me leave to go over every part of the Lorraine as soon as she comes into port?"

"To be sure; nothing could be easier."

Then Jean seemed to hesitate, to be weighing his words, and to want to lead up to a difficult subject. He went on:

"On the whole, life is very endurable on board those great Transatlantic liners. More than half the time is spent on shore in two splendid cities — New York and Havre; and the remainder at sea with delightful company. In fact, very pleasant acquaintances are sometimes made among the passengers, and very useful in after-life — yes, really very useful. Only think, the captain, with his perquisites on coal, can make as much as twenty-five thousand francs a year or more."

Roland muttered an oath followed by a whistle, which testified to his deep respect for the sum and the captain.

Jean went on:

"The purser makes as much as ten thousand, and the doctor has a fixed salary of five thousand, with lodgings, keep, light, firing, service, and everything, which makes it up to ten thousand at least. That is very good pay."

Pierre raising his eyes met his brother's and understood.

Then, after some hesitation, he asked:

"Is it very hard to get a place as medical man on board a Transatlantic liner?"

"Yes — and no. It all depends on circumstances and recommendation."

There was a long pause; then the doctor began again.

"Next month, you say, the Lorraine is to sail?"

"Yes. On the 7th."

And they said nothing more.

Pierre was considering. It certainly would be a way out of many difficulties if he could embark as medical officer on board the steamship. By-and-by he could see; he might perhaps give it up. Meanwhile he would be gaining a living, and asking for nothing from his parents. Only two days since he had been forced to sell his watch, for he would no longer hold out his hand to beg of his mother. So he had no other resource left, no opening to enable him to eat the bread of any house but this which had become uninhabitable, or sleep in any other bed, or under any other roof. He presently said, with some little hesitation:

"If I could, I would very gladly sail in her."

Jean asked:

"What should hinder you?"

"I know no one in the Transatlantic Shipping Company."

Roland was astounded.

"And what has become of all your fine schemes for getting on?"

Pierre replied in a low voice:

"There are times when we must bring ourselves to sacrifice everything and renounce our fondest hopes. And after all it is only to make a beginning, a way of saving a few thousand francs to start fair with afterward."

His father was promptly convinced.

"That is very true. In a couple of years you can put by six or seven thousand francs, and that well laid out, will go a long way. What do you think of the matter, Louise?"

She replied in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible:

"I think Pierre is right."

Roland exclaimed:

"I will go and talk it over with M. Poulin: I know him very well. He is assessor of the Chamber of Commerce and takes an interest in the affairs of the Company. There is M. Lenient, too, the ship-owner, who is intimate with one of the vice-chairmen."

Jean asked his brother:

"Would you like me to feel my way with M. Marchand at once?"

"Yes, I should be very glad."

After thinking a few minutes Pierre added:

"The best thing I can do, perhaps, will be to write to my professors at the college of Medicine, who had a great regard for me. Very inferior men are sometimes shipped on board those vessels. Letters of strong recommendation from such professors as Mas-Roussel, Remusot, Flanche, and Borriquel would do more for me in an hour than all the doubtful introductions in the world. It would be enough if your friend M. Marchand would lay them before the board."

Jean approved heartily.

"Your idea is really capital." And he smiled, quite reassured, almost happy, sure of success and incapable of allowing himself to be unhappy for long.

"You will write to-day?" he said.

"Directly. Now; at once. I will go and do so. I do not care for any coffee this morning; I am too nervous."

He rose and left the room.

Then Jean turned to his mother:

"And you, mother, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. I do not know."

"Will you come with me to call on Mme. Rosemilly?"

"Why, yes — yes."

"You know I must positively go to see her to-day."

"Yes, yes. To be sure."

"Why must you positively?" asked Roland, whose habit it was never to understand what was said in his presence.

"Because I promised her I would."

"Oh, very well. That alters the case." And he began to fill his pipe, while the mother and son went upstairs to make ready.

When they were in the street Jean said:

"Will you take my arm, mother?"

He was never accustomed to offer it, for they were in the habit of walking side by side. She accepted and leaned on him.

For some time they did not speak; then he said:

"You see that Pierre is quite ready and willing to go away."

She murmured:

"Poor boy!"

"But why 'poor boy'? He will not be in the least unhappy on board the Lorraine."

"No — I know. But I was thinking of so many things."

And she thought for a long time, her head bent, accommodating her step to her son's; then, in the peculiar voice in which we sometimes give utterance to the conclusion of long and secret meditations, she exclaimed:

"How horrible life is! If by any chance we come across any sweetness in it, we sin in letting ourselves be happy, and pay dearly for it afterward."

He said in a whisper:

"Do not speak of that any more, mother."

"Is that possible? I think of nothing else."

"You will forget it."

Again she was silent; then with deep regret she said:

"How happy I might have been, married to another man!"

She was visiting it on Roland now, throwing all the responsibility of her sin on his ugliness, his stupidity, his clumsiness, the heaviness of his intellect, and the vulgarity of his person. It was to this that it was owing that she had betrayed him, had driven one son to desperation, and had been forced to utter to the other the most agonizing confession that can make a mother's heart bleed. She muttered: "It is so frightful for a young girl to have to marry such a husband as mine."

Jean made no reply. He was thinking of the man he had hitherto believed to be his father; and possibly the vague notion he had long since conceived, of that father's inferiority, with his brother's constant irony, the scornful indifference of others, and the very maid-servant's contempt for Roland, had somewhat prepared his mind for his mother's terrible avowal. It had all made it less dreadful to him to find that he was another man's son; and if, after the great shock and agitation of the previous evening, he had not suffered the reaction of rage, indignation, and rebellion which Mme. Roland had feared, it was because he had long been unconsciously chafing under the sense of being the child of this well-meaning lout.

They had now reached the dwelling of Mme. Rosemilly.

She lived on the road to Sainte-Adresse, on the second floor of a large tenement which she owned. The windows commanded a view of the whole roadstead.

On seeing Mme. Roland, who entered first, instead of merely holding out her hands as usual, she put her arms round her and kissed her, for she divined the purpose of her visit.

The furniture of this drawing-room, all in stamped velvet, was always shrouded in chair-covers. The walls, hung with flowered paper, were graced by four engravings, the purchase of her late husband, the captain. They represented sentimental scenes of seafaring life. In the first a fisherman's wife was seen, waving a handkerchief on shore, while the vessel which bore away her husband vanished on the horizon. In the second the same woman, on her knees on the same shore, under a sky shot with lightning, wrung her arms as she gazed into the distance at her husband's boat which was going to the bottom amid impossible waves.

The others represented similar scenes in a higher rank of society. A young lady with fair hair, resting her elbows on the ledge of a large steamship quitting the shore, gazed at the already distant coast with eyes full of tears and regret. Whom is she leaving behind?

Then the same young lady sitting by an open widow with a view of the sea, had fainted in an arm-chair; a letter she had dropped lay at her feet. So he is dead! What despair!

Visitors were generally much moved and charmed by the commonplace pathos of these obvious and sentimental works. They were at once intelligible without question or explanation, and the poor women were to be pitied, though the nature of the grief of the more elegant of the two was not precisely known. But this very doubt contributed to the sentiment. She had, no doubt, lost her lover. On entering the room the eye was immediately attracted to these four pictures, and riveted as if fascinated. If it wandered it was only to return and contemplate the four expressions on the faces of the two women, who were as like each other as two sisters. And the very style of these works, in their shining frames, crisp, sharp, and highly finished, with the elegance of a fashion plate, suggested a sense of cleanliness and propriety which was confirmed by the rest of the fittings. The seats were always in precisely the same order, some against the wall and some round the circular centre-table. The immaculately white curtains hung in such straight and regular pleats that one longed to crumple them a little; and never did a grain of dust rest on the shade under which the gilt clock, in the taste of the first empire — a terrestrial globe supported by Atlas on his knees — looked like a melon left there to ripen.

The two women as they sat down somewhat altered the normal position of their chairs.

"You have not been out this morning?" asked Mme. Roland.

"No. I must own to being rather tired."

And she spoke as if in gratitude to Jean and his mother, of all the pleasure she had derived from the expedition and the prawn-fishing.

"I ate my prawns this morning," she added, "and they were excellent. If you felt inclined we might go again one of these days."

The young man interrupted her:

"Before we start on a second fishing excursion, suppose we complete the first?"

"Complete it? It seems to me quite finished."

"Nay, madame, I, for my part, caught something on the rocks of Saint Jouain which I am anxious to carry home with me."

She put on an innocent and knowing look.

"You? What can it be? What can you have found?"

"A wife. And my mother and I have come to ask you whether she had changed her mind this morning."

She smiled: "No, monsieur. I never change my mind."

And then he held out his hand, wide open, and she put hers into it with a quick, determined movement. Then he said: "As soon as possible, I hope."

"As soon as you like."

"In six weeks?"

"I have no opinion. What does my future mother-in-law say?"

Mme. Roland replied with a rather melancholy smile:

"I? Oh, I can say nothing. I can only thank you for having accepted Jean, for you will make him very happy."

"We will do our best, mamma."

Somewhat overcome, for the first time, Mme. Rosemilly rose, and throwing her arms round Mme. Roland, kissed her a long time as a child of her own might have done; and under this new embrace the poor woman's sick heart swelled with deep emotion. She could not have expressed the feeling; it was at once sad and sweet. She had lost her son, her big boy, but in return she had found a daughter, a grown-up daughter.

When they faced each other again, and were seated, they took hands and remained so, looking at each and smiling, while they seemed to have forgotten Jean.

Then they discussed a number of things which had to be thought of in view of an early marriage, and when everything was settled and decided Mme. Rosemilly seemed suddenly to remember a further detail and asked: "You have consulted M. Roland, I suppose?"

A flush of colour mounted at the same instant on the face of both mother and son. It was the mother who replied:

"Oh, no, it is quite unnecessary!" Then she hesitated, feeling that some explanation was needed, and added: "We do everything without saying anything to him. It is enough to tell him what we have decided on."

Mme. Rosemilly, not in the least surprised, only smiled, taking it as a matter of course, for the good man counted for so little.

When Mme. Roland was in the street again with her son she said:

"Suppose we go to your rooms for a little while. I should be glad to rest."

She felt herself homeless, shelterless, her own house being a terror to her.

They went into Jean's apartments.

As soon as the door was closed upon her she heaved a deep sigh, as if that bolt had placed her in safety, but then, instead of resting as she had said, she began to open the cupboards, to count the piles of linen, the pocket-handkerchiefs, and socks. She changed the arrangement to place them in more harmonious order, more pleasing to her housekeeper's eye; and when she had put everything to her mind, laying out the towels, the shirts, and the drawers on their several shelves and dividing all the linen into three principal classes, body-linen, household-linen, and table-linen, she drew back and contemplated the results, and called out:

“Come here, Jean, and see how nice it looks.”

He went and admired it to please her.

On a sudden, when he had sat down again, she came softly up behind his arm-chair, and putting her right arm round his neck she kissed him, while she laid on the chimney-shelf a small packet wrapped in white paper which she held in the other hand.

“What is that?” he asked. Then, as she made no reply, he understood, recognising the shape of the frame.

“Give it me!” he said.

She pretended not to hear him, and went back to the linen cupboards. He got up hastily, took the melancholy relic, and going across the room, put it in the drawer of his writing-table, which he locked and double locked. She wiped away a tear with the tip of her finger, and said in a rather quavering voice: “Now I am going to see whether your new servant keeps the kitchen in good order. As she is out I can look into everything and make sure.”

CHAPTER IX

Letters of recommendation from Professors Mas-Roussel, Remusot, Flache, and Borriquel, written in the most flattering terms with regard to Dr. Pierre Roland, their pupil, had been submitted by M. Marchand to the directors of the Transatlantic Shipping Co., seconded by M. Poulin, judge of the Chamber of Commerce, M. Lenient, a great ship-owner, and Mr. Marival, deputy to the Mayor of Havre, and a particular friend of Captain Beausires's. It proved that no medical officer had yet been appointed to the Lorraine, and Pierre was lucky enough to be nominated within a few days.

The letter announcing it was handed to him one morning by Josephine, just as he was dressed. His first feeling was that of a man condemned to death who is told that his sentence is commuted; he had an immediate sense of relief at the thought of his early departure and of the peaceful life on board, cradled by the rolling waves, always wandering, always moving. His life under his father's roof was now that of a stranger, silent and reserved. Ever since the evening when he allowed the shameful secret he had discovered to escape him in his brother's presence, he had felt that the last ties to his kindred were broken. He was harassed by remorse for having told this thing to Jean. He felt that it was odious, indecent, and brutal, and yet it was a relief to him to have uttered it.

He never met the eyes either of his mother or his brother; to avoid his gaze theirs had become surprisingly alert, with the cunning of foes who fear to cross each other. He was always wondering: "What can she have said to Jean? Did she confess or deny it? What does my brother believe? What does he think of her — what does he think of me?" He could not guess, and it drove him to frenzy. And he scarcely ever spoke to them, excepting when Roland was by, to avoid his questioning.

As soon as he received the letter announcing his appointment he showed it at once to his family. His father, who was prone to rejoicing over everything, clapped his hands. Jean spoke seriously, though his heart was full of gladness: "I congratulate you with all my heart, for I know there were several other candidates. You certainly owe it to your professors' letters."

His mother bent her head and murmured:

“I am very glad you have been successful.”

After breakfast he went to the Company’s offices to obtain information on various particulars, and he asked the name of the doctor on board the Picardie, which was to sail next day, to inquire of him as to the details of his new life and any details he might think useful.

Dr. Pirette having gone on board, Pierre went to the ship, where he was received in a little state-room by a young man with a fair beard, not unlike his brother. They talked together a long time.

In the hollow depths of the huge ship they could hear a confused and continuous commotion; the noise of bales and cases pitched down into the hold mingling with footsteps, voices, the creaking of the machinery lowering the freight, the boatswain’s whistle, and the clatter of chains dragged or wound on to capstans by the snorting and panting engine which sent a slight vibration from end to end of the great vessel.

But when Pierre had left his colleague and found himself in the street once more, a new form of melancholy came down on him, enveloping him like the fogs which roll over the sea, coming up from the ends of the world and holding in their intangible density something mysteriously impure, as it were the pestilential breath of a far-away, unhealthy land.

In his hours of greatest suffering he had never felt himself so sunk in a foul pit of misery. It was as though he had given the last wrench; there was no fibre of attachment left. In tearing up the roots of every affection he had not hitherto had the distressful feeling which now came over him, like that of a lost dog. It was no longer a torturing mortal pain, but the frenzy of a forlorn and homeless animal, the physical anguish of a vagabond creature without a roof for shelter, lashed by the rain, the wind, the storm, all the brutal forces of the universe. As he set foot on the vessel, as he went into the cabin rocked by the waves, the very flesh of the man, who had always slept in a motionless and steady bed, had risen up against the insecurity henceforth of all his morrows. Till now that flesh had been protected by a solid wall built into the earth which held it, by the certainty of resting in the same spot, under a roof which could resist the gale. Now all that, which it was a pleasure to defy in the warmth of home, must become a peril and a constant discomfort. No earth under foot, only the greedy, heaving, complaining sea; no space around for walking, running, losing the way, only a few yards of planks to pace like a convict among other prisoners; no trees, no gardens, no streets, no houses; nothing but water and clouds. And the ceaseless motion of the ship beneath his feet. On stormy days he must lean against the wainscot, hold on to the doors, cling to the edge of the narrow berth to save himself from rolling out. On calm days he would hear the snorting throb of the screw, and feel the swift flight of the ship, bearing him on in its unpausing, regular, exasperating race.

And he was condemned to this vagabond convict's life solely because his mother had yielded to a man's caresses.

He walked on, his heart sinking with the despairing sorrow of those who are doomed to exile. He no longer felt a haughty disdain and scornful hatred of the strangers he met, but a woeful impulse to speak to them, to tell them all that he had to quit France, to be listened to and comforted. There was in the very depths of his heart the shame-faced need of a beggar who would fain hold out his hand — a timid but urgent need to feel that some one would grieve at his departing.

He thought of Marowsko. The old Pole was the only person who loved him well enough to feel true and keen emotion, and the doctor at once determined to go and see him.

When he entered the shop, the druggist, who was pounding powders in a marble mortar, started and left his work.

"You are never to be seen nowadays," said he.

Pierre explained that he had had a great many serious matters to attend to, but without giving the reason, and he took a seat, asking:

"Well, and how is business doing?"

Business was not doing at all. Competition was fearful, and rich folks rare in that workmen's quarter. Nothing would sell but cheap drugs, and the doctors did not prescribe the costlier and more complicated remedies on which a profit is made of five hundred per cent. The old fellow ended by saying: "If this goes on for three months I shall shut up shop. If I did not count on you, dear good doctor, I should have turned shoe-black by this time."

Pierre felt a pang, and made up his mind to deal the blow at once, since it must be done.

"I — oh, I cannot be of any use to you. I am leaving Havre early next month."

Marowsko took off his spectacles, so great was his agitation.

"You! You! What are you saying?"

"I say that I am going away, my poor friend."

The old man was stricken, feeling his last hope slipping from under him, and he suddenly turned against this man, whom he had followed, whom he loved, whom he had so implicitly trusted, and who forsook him thus.

He stammered out:

“You are surely not going to play me false — you?”

Pierre was so deeply touched that he felt inclined to embrace the old fellow.

“I am not playing you false. I have not found anything to do here, and I am going as medical officer on board a Transatlantic passenger boat.”

“O Monsieur Pierre! And you always promised you would help me to make a living!”

“What can I do? I must make my own living. I have not a farthing in the world.”

Marowsko said: “It is wrong; what you are doing is very wrong. There is nothing for me but to die of hunger. At my age this is the end of all things. It is wrong. You are forsaking a poor old man who came here to be with you. It is wrong.”

Pierre tried to explain, to protest, to give reasons, to prove that he could not have done otherwise; the Pole, enraged by his desertion, would not listen to him, and he ended by saying, with an allusion no doubt to political events:

“You French — you never keep your word!”

At this Pierre rose, offended on his part, and taking rather a high tone he said:

“You are unjust, pere Marowsko; a man must have very strong motives to act as I have done and you ought to understand that. Au revoir — I hope I may find you more reasonable.” And he went away.

“Well, well,” he thought, “not a soul will feel a sincere regret for me.”

His mind sought through all the people he knew or had known, and among the faces which crossed his memory he saw that of the girl at the tavern who had led him to doubt his mother.

He hesitated, having still an instinctive grudge against her, then suddenly reflected on the other hand: “After all, she was right.” And he looked about him to find the turning.

The beer-shop, as it happened, was full of people, and also full of smoke. The customers, tradesmen, and labourers, for it was a holiday, were shouting, calling, laughing, and the master himself was waiting on them, running from table to table, carrying away empty glasses and returning them crowned with froth.

When Pierre had found a seat not far from the desk he waited, hoping that the girl would see him and recognise him. But she passed him again and again as she went to and fro, pattering her feet under her skirts with a smart little strut. At last he rapped a coin on the table, and she hurried up.

"What will you take, sir?"

She did not look at him; her mind was absorbed in calculations of the liquor she had served.

"Well," said he, "this is a pretty way of greeting a friend."

She fixed her eyes on his face. "Ah!" said she hurriedly. "Is it you? You are pretty well? But I have not a minute to-day. A bock did you wish for?"

"Yes, a bock!"

When she brought it he said:

"I have come to say good-bye. I am going away."

And she replied indifferently:

"Indeed. Where are you going?"

"To America."

"A very find country, they say."

And that was all!

Really, he was very ill-advised to address her on such a busy day; there were too many people in the cafe.

Pierre went down to the sea. As he reached the jetty he descried the Pearl; his father and Beausire were coming in. Papagris was pulling, and the two men, seated in the stern, smoked their pipes with a look of perfect happiness. As they went past the doctor said to himself: "Blessed are the simple-minded!" And he sat down on one of the benches on the breakwater, to try to lull himself in animal drowsiness.

When he went home in the evening his mother said, without daring to lift her eyes to his face:

"You will want a heap of things to take with you. I have ordered your under-linen, and I went into the tailor's shop about cloth clothes; but is there nothing else you need — things which I, perhaps, know nothing about?"

His lips parted to say, "No, nothing." But he reflected that he must accept the means of getting a decent outfit, and he replied in a very calm voice: "I hardly know myself, yet. I will make inquiries at the office."

He inquired, and they gave him a list of indispensable necessaries. His mother, as she took it from his hand, looked up at him for the first time for very long, and in the depths of her eyes there was the humble expression, gentle, sad, and beseeching, of a dog that has been beaten and begs forgiveness.

On the 1st of October the Lorraine from Saint-Nazaire, came into the harbour of Havre to sail on the 7th, bound for New York, and Pierre Roland was to take possession of the little floating cabin in which henceforth his life was to be confined.

Next day as he was going out, he met his mother on the stairs waiting for him, to murmur in an almost inaudible voice:

"You would not like me to help you to put things to rights on board?"

"No, thank you. Everything is done."

Then she said:

"I should have liked to see your cabin."

"There is nothing to see. It is very small and very ugly."

And he went downstairs, leaving her stricken, leaning against the wall with a wan face.

Now Roland, who had gone over the Lorraine that very day, could talk of nothing all dinnertime but this splendid vessel, and wondered that his wife should not care to see it as their son was to sail on board.

Pierre had scarcely any intercourse with his family during the days which followed. He was nervous, irritable, hard, and his rough speech seemed to lash every one indiscriminately. But the day before he left he was suddenly quite changed, and much softened. As he embraced his parents before going to sleep on board for the first time he said:

"You will come to say good-bye to me on board, will you not?"

Roland exclaimed:

"Why, yes, of course — of course, Louise?"

"Certainly, certainly," she said in a low voice.

Pierre went on: "We sail at eleven precisely. You must be there by half-past nine at the latest."

"Hah!" cried his father. "A good idea! As soon as we have bid you good-bye, we will make haste on board the Pearl, and look out for you beyond the jetty, so as to see you once more. What do you say, Louise?"

"Certainly."

Roland went on: “And in that way you will not lose sight of us among the crowd which throngs the breakwater when the great liners sail. It is impossible to distinguish your own friends in the mob. Does that meet your views?”

“Yes, to be sure; that is settled.”

An hour later he was lying in his berth — a little crib as long and narrow as a coffin. There he remained with his eyes wide open for a long time, thinking over all that had happened during the last two months of his life, especially in his own soul. By dint of suffering and making others suffer, his aggressive and revengeful anguish had lost its edge, like a blunted sword. He scarcely had the heart left in him to owe any one or anything a grudge; he let his rebellious wrath float away down stream, as his life must. He was so weary of wrestling, weary of fighting, weary of hating, weary of everything, that he was quite worn out, and tried to stupefy his heart with forgetfulness as he dropped asleep. He heard vaguely, all about him, the unwonted noises of the ship, slight noises, and scarcely audible on this calm night in port; and he felt no more of the dreadful wound which had tortured him hitherto, but the discomfort and strain of its healing.

He had been sleeping soundly when the stir of the crew roused him. It was day; the tidal train had come down to the pier bringing the passengers from Paris. Then he wandered about the vessel among all these busy, bustling folks inquiring for their cabins, questioning and answering each other at random, in the scare and fuss of a voyage already begun. After greeting the Captain and shaking hands with his comrade the purser, he went into the saloon where some Englishmen were already asleep in the corners. The large low room, with its white marble panels framed in gilt beading, was furnished with looking-glasses, which prolonged, in endless perspective, the long tables, flanked by pivot-seats covered with red velvet. It was fit, indeed, to be the vast floating cosmopolitan dining-hall, where the rich natives of two continents might eat in common. Its magnificent luxury was that of great hotels, and theatres, and public rooms; the imposing and commonplace luxury which appeals to the eye of the millionaire.

The doctor was on the point of turning into the second-class saloon, when he remembered that a large cargo of emigrants had come on board the night before, and he went down to the lower deck. He was met by a sickening smell of dirty, poverty-stricken humanity, an atmosphere of naked flesh (far more revolting than the odour of fur or the skin of wild beasts). There, in a sort of basement, low and dark, like a gallery in a mine, Pierre could discern some hundreds of men, women, and children, stretched on shelves fixed one above another, or lying on the floor in heaps. He could not see their faces, but could dimly make out this squalid, ragged crowd of wretches, beaten in the struggle for life, worn out and crushed, setting forth, each with a starving wife and weakly children, for an unknown land where they hoped, perhaps, not to die of hunger. And as he thought of their past labour — wasted labour, and barren effort — of the mortal struggle taken up afresh and in vain each day, of the energy expended by this tattered crew who were going to begin again, not knowing where, this life of hideous misery, he longed to cry out to them:

"Tumble yourselves overboard, rather, with your women and your little ones." And his heart ached so with pity that he went away unable to endure the sight.

He found his father, his mother, Jean, and Mme. Rosemilly waiting for him in his cabin.

"So early!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mme. Roland in a trembling voice. "We wanted to have a little time to see you."

He looked at her. She was dressed all in black as if she were in mourning, and he noticed that her hair, which only a month ago had been gray, was now almost white. It was very difficult to find space for four persons to sit down in the little room, and he himself got on to his bed. The door was left open, and they could see a great crowd hurrying by, as if it were a street on a holiday, for all the friends of the passengers and a host of inquisitive visitors had invaded the huge vessel. They pervaded the passages, the saloons, every corner of the ship; and heads peered in at the doorway while a voice murmured outside: "That is the doctor's cabin."

Then Pierre shut the door; but no sooner was he shut in with his own party than he longed to open it again, for the bustle outside covered their agitation and want of words.

Mme. Rosemilly at last felt she must speak.

"Very little air comes in through those little windows."

"Port-holes," said Pierre. He showed her how thick the glass was, to enable it to resist the most violent shocks, and took a long time explaining the fastening. Roland presently asked: “And you have your doctor’s shop here?”

The doctor opened a cupboard and displayed an array of phials ticketed with Latin names on white paper labels. He took one out and enumerated the properties of its contents; then a second and a third, a perfect lecture on therapeutics, to which they all listened with great attention. Roland, shaking his head, said again and again: “How very interesting!” There was a tap at the door.

“Come in,” said Pierre, and Captain Beausire appeared.

“I am late,” he said as he shook hands, “I did not want to be in the way.” He, too, sat down on the bed and silence fell once more.

Suddenly the Captain pricked his ears. He could hear the orders being given, and he said:

“It is time for us to be off if we mean to get on board the Pearl to see you once more outside, and bid you good-bye out on the open sea.”

Old Roland was very eager about this, to impress the voyagers on board the Lorraine, no doubt, and he rose in haste.

“Good-bye, my boy.” He kissed Pierre on the whiskers and then opened the door.

Mme. Roland had not stirred, but sat with downcast eyes, very pale. Her husband touched her arm.

“Come,” he said, “we must make haste, we have not a minute to spare.”

She pulled herself up, went to her son and offered him first one and then another cheek of white wax which he kissed without saying a word. Then he shook hands with Mme. Rosemilly and his brother, asking:

“And when is the wedding to be?”

“I do not know yet exactly. We will make it fit in with one of your return voyages.”

At last they were all out of the cabin, and up on deck among the crowd of visitors, porters, and sailors. The steam was snorting in the huge belly of the vessel, which seemed to quiver with impatience.

“Good-bye,” said Roland in a great bustle.

“Good-bye,” replied Pierre, standing on one of the landing-planks lying between the deck of the Lorraine and the quay. He shook hands all round once more, and they were gone.

“Make haste, jump into the carriage,” cried the father.

A fly was waiting for them and took them to the outer harbour, where Papagris had the Pearl in readiness to put out to sea.

There was not a breath of air; it was one of those crisp, still autumn days, when the sheeny sea looks as cold and hard as polished steel.

Jean took one oar, the sailor seized the other and they pulled off. On the breakwater, on the piers, even on the granite parapets, a crowd stood packed, hustling, and noisy, to see the Lorraine come out. The Pearl glided down between these two waves of humanity and was soon outside the mole.

Captain Beausire, seated between the two women, held the tiller, and he said:

“You will see, we shall be close in her way — close.”

And the two oarsmen pulled with all their might to get out as far as possible. Suddenly Roland cried out:

“Here she comes! I see her masts and her two funnels! She is coming out of the inner harbour.”

“Cheerily, lads!” cried Beausire.

Mme. Roland took out her handkerchief and held it to her eyes.

Roland stood up, clinging to the mast, and answered:

“At this moment she is working round in the outer harbour. She is standing still — now she moves again! She is taking the tow-rope on board no doubt. There she goes. Bravo! She is between the piers! Do you hear the crowd shouting? Bravo! The Neptune has her in tow. Now I see her bows — here she comes — here she is! Gracious Heavens, what a ship! Look! Look!”

Mme. Rosemilly and Beausire looked behind them, the oarsmen ceased pulling; only Mme. Roland did not stir.

The immense steamship, towed by a powerful tug, which, in front of her, looked like a caterpillar, came slowly and majestically out of the harbour. And the good people of Havre, who crowded the piers, the beach, and the windows, carried away by a burst of patriotic enthusiasm, cried: “*Vive la Lorraine!*” with acclamations and applause for this magnificent beginning, this birth of the beautiful daughter given to the sea by the great maritime town.

She, as soon as she had passed beyond the narrow channel between the two granite walls, feeling herself free at last, cast off the tow-ropes and went off alone, like a monstrous creature walking on the waters.

“Here she is — here she comes, straight down on us!” Roland kept shouting; and Beausire, beaming, exclaimed: “What did I promise you! Heh! Do I know the way?”

Jean in a low tone said to his mother: “Look, mother, she is close upon us!” And Mme. Roland uncovered her eyes, blinded with tears.

The Lorraine came on, still under the impetus of her swift exit from the harbour, in the brilliant, calm weather. Beausire, with his glass to his eye, called out:

“Look out! M. Pierre is at the stern, all alone, plainly to be seen! Look out!”

The ship was almost touching the Pearl now, as tall as a mountain and as swift as a train. Mme. Roland, distraught and desperate, held out her arms towards it; and she saw her son, her Pierre, with his officer’s cap on, throwing kisses to her with both hands.

But he was going away, flying, vanishing, a tiny speck already, no more than an imperceptible spot on the enormous vessel. She tried still to distinguish him, but she could not.

Jean took her hand.

“You saw?” he said.

“Yes, I saw. How good he is!”

And they turned to go home.

“Cristi! How fast she goes!” exclaimed Roland with enthusiastic conviction.

The steamer, in fact, was shrinking every second, as though she were melting away in the ocean. Mme. Roland, turning back to look at her, watched her disappearing on the horizon, on her way to an unknown land at the other side of the world.

In that vessel which nothing could stay, that vessel which she soon would see no more, was her son, her poor son. And she felt as though half her heart had gone with him; she felt, too, as if her life were ended; yes, and she felt as though she would never see the child again.

“Why are you crying?” asked her husband, “when you know he will be back again within a month.”

She stammered out: “I don’t know; I cry because I am hurt.”

When they had landed, Beausire at once took leave of them to go to breakfast with a friend. Then Jean led the way with Mme. Rosemilly, and Roland said to his wife:

“A very fine fellow, all the same, is our Jean.”

“Yes,” replied the mother.

And her mind being too much bewildered to think of what she was saying, she went on:

“I am very glad that he is to marry Mme. Rosemilly.”

The worthy man was astounded.

“Heh? What? He is to marry Mme. Rosemilly?”

“Yes, we meant to ask your opinion about it this very day.”

“Bless me! And has this engagement been long in the wind?”

“Oh, no, only a very few days. Jean wished to make sure that she would accept him before consulting you.”

Roland rubbed his hands.

“Very good. Very good. It is capital. I entirely approve.”

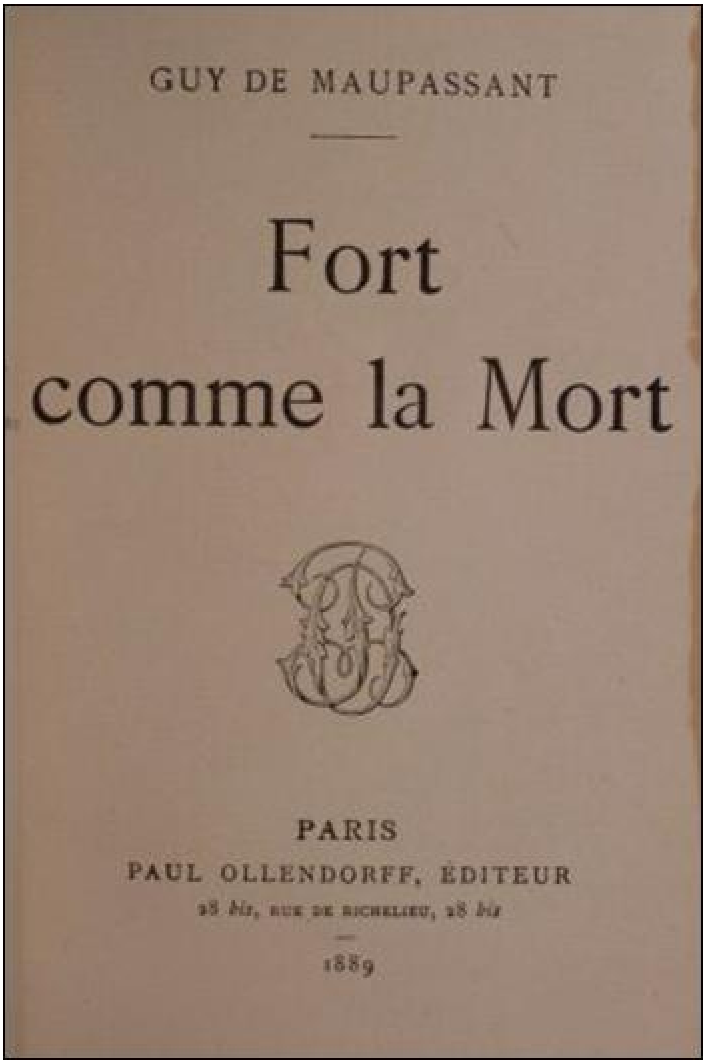
As they were about to turn off from the quay down the Boulevard Francois, his wife once more looked back to cast a last look at the high seas, but she could see nothing now but a puff of gray smoke, so far away, so faint that it looked like a film of haze.

STRONG AS DEATH

Translated by Frederick Caesar de Sumichrast

Maupassant began work on his fifth novel in March 1888, taking the title from the Old Testament's *Song of Songs*: "Love is strong as death, jealousy is as hard as the grave." The novel was first published as a book in May 1889 in Ollendorff.

Fort comme la mort tells the story of Olivier Bertin, a famous painter and socialite, who often meets in his studio in Paris the most beautiful women of high society. He falls in love with one of his patrons, Anne Guilleroy, and is seduced by her grace and elegance. Daughter of a wealthy merchant, but married to a rich member of the Norman gentry and mother of a six year old girl, she becomes his mistress, though their relationship is doomed to lead to tragic consequences.



GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Fort
comme la Mort

PARIS
PAUL OLLENDORFF, ÉDITEUR
28 *bis*, RUE DE RICHELIEU, 28 *bis*

1889

The original title page

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PART I

CHAPTER I. A DUEL OF HEARTS

Broad daylight streamed down into the vast studio through a skylight in the ceiling, which showed a large square of dazzling blue, a bright vista of limitless heights of azure, across which passed flocks of birds in rapid flight. But the glad light of heaven hardly entered this severe room, with high ceilings and draped walls, before it began to grow soft and dim, to slumber among the hangings and die in the portieres, hardly penetrating to the dark corners where the gilded frames of portraits gleamed like flame. Peace and sleep seemed imprisoned there, the peace characteristic of an artist's dwelling, where the human soul has toiled. Within these walls, where thought abides, struggles, and becomes exhausted in its violent efforts, everything appears weary and overcome as soon as the energy of action is abated; all seems dead after the great crises of life, and the furniture, the hangings, and the portraits of great personages still unfinished on the canvases, all seem to rest as if the whole place had suffered the master's fatigue and had toiled with him, taking part in the daily renewal of his struggle. A vague, heavy odor of paint, turpentine, and tobacco was in the air, clinging to the rugs and chairs; and no sound broke the deep silence save the sharp short cries of the swallows that flitted above the open skylight, and the dull, ceaseless roar of Paris, hardly heard above the roofs. Nothing moved except a little cloud of smoke that rose intermittently toward the ceiling with every puff that Olivier Bertin, lying upon his divan, blew slowly from a cigarette between his lips.

With gaze lost in the distant sky, he tried to think of a new subject for a painting. What should he do? As yet he did not know. He was by no means resolute and sure of himself as an artist, but was of an uncertain, uneasy spirit, whose undecided inspiration ever hesitated among all the manifestations of art. Rich, illustrious, the gainer of all honors, he nevertheless remained, in these his later years, a man who did not know exactly toward what ideal he had been aiming. He had won the *Prix* of Rome, had been the defender of traditions, and had evoked, like so many others, the great scenes of history; then, modernizing his tendencies, he had painted living men, but in a way that showed the influence of classic memories. Intelligent, enthusiastic, a worker that clung to his changing dreams, in love with his art, which he knew to perfection, he had acquired, by reason of the delicacy of his mind, remarkable executive ability and great versatility, due in some degree to his hesitations and his experiments in all styles of his art. Perhaps, too, the sudden admiration of the world for his works, elegant, correct, and full of distinctions, influenced his nature and prevented him from becoming what he naturally might have been. Since the triumph of his first success, the desire to please always made him anxious, without his being conscious of it; it influenced his actions and weakened his convictions. This desire to please was apparent in him in many ways, and had contributed much to his glory.

His grace of manner, all his habits of life, the care he devoted to his person, his long-standing reputation for strength and agility as a swordsman and an equestrian, had added further attractions to his steadily growing fame. After his *Cleopatra*, the first picture that had made him illustrious, Paris suddenly became enamored of him, adopted him, made a pet of him; and all at once he became one of those brilliant, fashionable artists one meets in the Bois, for whose presence hostesses maneuver, and whom the Institute welcomes thenceforth. He had entered it as a conqueror, with the approval of all Paris.

Thus Fortune had led him to the beginning of old age, coddling and caressing him.

Under the influence of the beautiful day, which he knew was glowing without, Bertin sought a poetic subject. He felt somewhat dreamy, however, after his breakfast and his cigarette; he pondered awhile, gazing into space, in fancy sketching rapidly against the blue sky the figures of graceful women in the Bois or on the sidewalk of a street, lovers by the water — all the pleasing fancies in which his thoughts reveled. The changing images stood out against the bright sky, vague and fleeting in the hallucination of his eye, while the swallows, darting through space in ceaseless flight, seemed trying to efface them as if with strokes of a pen.

He found nothing. All these half-seen visions resembled things that he had already done; all the women appeared to be the daughters or the sisters of those that had already been born of his artistic fancy; and the vague fear, that had haunted him for a year, that he had lost the power to create, had made the round of all subjects and exhausted his inspiration, outlined itself distinctly before this review of his work — this lack of power to dream anew, to discover the unknown.

He arose quietly to look among his unfinished sketches, hoping to find something that would inspire him with a new idea.

Still puffing at his cigarette, he proceeded to turn over the sketches, drawings, and rough drafts that he kept in a large old closet; but, soon becoming disgusted with this vain quest, and feeling depressed by the lassitude of his spirits, he tossed away his cigarette, whistled a popular street-song, bent down and picked up a heavy dumb-bell that lay under a chair. Having raised with the other hand a curtain that draped a mirror, which served him in judging the accuracy of a pose, in verifying his perspectives and testing the truth, he placed himself in front of it and began to swing the dumb-bell, meanwhile looking intently at himself.

He had been celebrated in the studios for his strength; then, in the gay world, for his good looks. But now the weight of years was making him heavy. Tall, with broad shoulders and full chest, he had acquired the protruding stomach of an old wrestler, although he kept up his fencing every day and rode his horse with assiduity. His head was still remarkable and as handsome as ever, although in a style different from that of his earlier days. His thick and short white hair set off the black eyes beneath heavy gray eyebrows, while his luxuriant moustache — the moustache of an old soldier — had remained quite dark, and it gave to his countenance a rare characteristic of energy and pride.

Standing before the mirror, with heels together and body erect, he went through the usual movements with the two iron balls, which he held out at the end of his muscular arm, watching with a complacent expression its evidence of quiet power.

But suddenly, in the glass, which reflected the whole studio, he saw one of the portieres move; then appeared a woman’s head — only a head, peeping in. A voice behind him asked:

“Anyone here?”

“Present!” he responded promptly, turning around. Then, throwing his dumb-bell on the floor, he hastened toward the door with an appearance of youthful agility that was slightly affected.

A woman entered attired in a light summer costume. They shook hands.

“You were exercising, I see,” said the lady.

“Yes,” he replied; “I was playing peacock, and allowed myself to be surprised.”

The lady laughed, and continued:

"Your concierge's lodge was vacant, and as I know you are always alone at this hour I came up without being announced."

He looked at her.

"Heavens, how beautiful you are! What chic!"

"Yes, I have a new frock. Do you think it pretty?"

"Charming, and perfectly harmonious. We can certainly say that nowadays it is possible to give expression to the lightest textiles."

He walked around her, gently touching the material of the gown, adjusting its folds with the tips of his fingers, like a man that knows a woman's toilet as the modiste knows it, having all his life employed his artist's taste and his athlete's muscles in depicting with slender brush changing and delicate fashions, in revealing feminine grace enclosed within a prison of velvet and silk, or hidden by snowy laces. He finished his scrutiny by declaring: "It is a great success, and it becomes you perfectly!"

The lady allowed herself to be admired, quite content to be pretty and to please him.

No longer in her first youth, but still beautiful, not very tall, somewhat plump, but with that freshness which lends to a woman of forty an appearance of having only just reached full maturity, she seemed like one of those roses that flourish for an indefinite time up to the moment when, in too full a bloom, they fall in an hour.

Beneath her blonde hair she possessed the shrewdness to preserve all the alert and youthful grace of those Parisian women who never grow old; who carry within themselves a surprising vital force, an indomitable power of resistance, and who remain for twenty years triumphant and indestructible, careful above all things of their bodies and ever watchful of their health.

She raised her veil and murmured:

"Well, you do not kiss me!"

"I have been smoking."

"Pooh!" said the lady. Then, holding up her face, she added, "So much the worse!"

Their lips met.

He took her parasol and divested her of her spring jacket with the prompt, swift movement indicating familiarity with this service. As she seated herself on the divan, he asked with an air of interest:

"Is all going well with your husband?"

"Very well; he must be making a speech in the House at this very moment."

"Ah! On what, pray?"

"Oh — no doubt on beets or on rape-seed oil, as usual!"

Her husband, the Comte de Guilleroy, deputy from the Eure, made a special study of all questions of agricultural interest.

Perceiving in one corner a sketch that she did not recognize, the lady walked across the studio, asking, "What is that?"

"A pastel that I have just begun — the portrait of the Princesse de Ponteve."

"You know," said the lady gravely, "that if you go back to painting portraits of women I shall close your studio. I know only too well to what that sort of thing leads!"

"Oh, but I do not make twice a portrait of Any!" was the answer.

"I hope not, indeed!"

She examined the newly begun pastel sketch with the air of a woman that understands the technic of art. She stepped back, advanced, made a shade of her hand, sought the place where the best light fell on the sketch, and finally expressed her satisfaction.

"It is very good. You succeed admirably with pastel work."

"Do you think so?" murmured the flattered artist.

"Yes; it is a most delicate art, needing great distinction of style. It cannot be handled by masons in the art of painting."

For twelve years the Countess had encouraged the painter's leaning toward the distinguished in art, opposing his occasional return to the simplicity of realism; and, in consideration of the demands of fashionable modern elegance, she had tenderly urged him toward an ideal of grace that was slightly affected and artificial.

"What is the Princess like?" she asked.

He was compelled to give her all sorts of details — those minute details in which the jealous and subtle curiosity of women delights, passing from remarks upon her toilet to criticisms of her intelligence.

Suddenly she inquired: "Does she flirt with you?"

He laughed, and declared that she did not.

Then, putting both hands on the shoulders of the painter, the Countess gazed fixedly at him. The ardor of her questioning look caused a quiver in the pupils of her blue eyes, flecked with almost imperceptible black points, like tiny ink-spots.

Again she murmured: “Truly, now, she is not a flirt?”

“No, indeed, I assure you!”

“Well, I am quite reassured on another account,” said the Countess. “You never will love anyone but me now. It is all over for the others. It is too late, my poor dear!”

The painter experienced that slight painful emotion which touches the heart of middle-aged men when some one mentions their age; and he murmured: “To-day and to-morrow, as yesterday, there never has been in my life, and never will be, anyone but you, Any.”

She took him by the arm, and turning again toward the divan made him sit beside her.

“Of what were you thinking?” she asked.

“I am looking for a subject to paint.”

“What, pray?”

“I don’t know, you see, since I am still seeking it.”

“What have you been doing lately?”

He was obliged to tell her of all the visits he had received, about all the dinners and soirees he had attended, and to repeat all the conversations and chit-chat. Both were really interested in all these futile and familiar details of fashionable life. The little rivalries, the flirtations, either well known or suspected, the judgments, a thousand times heard and repeated, upon the same persons, the same events and opinions, were bearing away and drowning both their minds in that troubled and agitated stream called Parisian life. Knowing everyone in all classes of society, he as an artist to whom all doors were open, she as the elegant wife of a Conservative deputy, they were experts in that sport of brilliant French chatter, amiably satirical, banal, brilliant but futile, with a certain shibboleth which gives a particular and greatly envied reputation to those whose tongues have become supple in this sort of malicious small talk.

“When are you coming to dine?” she asked suddenly.

“Whenever you wish. Name your day.”

“Friday. I shall have the Duchesse de Mortemain, the Corbelles, and Musadieu, in honor of my daughter’s return — she is coming this evening. But do not speak of it, my friend. It is a secret.”

“Oh, yes, I accept. I shall be charmed to see Annette again. I have not seen her in three years.”

“Yes, that is true. Three years!”

Though Annette, in her earliest years, had been brought up in Paris in her parents’ home, she had become the object of the last and passionate affection of her grandmother, Madame Paradin, who, almost blind, lived all the year round on her son-in-law’s estate at the castle of Roncieres, on the Eure. Little by little, the old lady had kept the child with her more and more, and as the De Guilleroys passed almost half their time in this domain, to which a variety of interests, agricultural and political, called them frequently, it ended in taking the little girl to Paris on occasional visits, for she herself preferred the free and active life of the country to the cloistered life of the city.

For three years she had not visited Paris even once, the Countess having preferred to keep her entirely away from it, in order that a new taste for its gaieties should not be awakened in her before the day fixed for her debut in society. Madame de Guilleroy had given her in the country two governesses, with unexceptionable diplomas, and had visited her mother and her daughter more frequently than before. Moreover, Annette’s sojourn at the castle was rendered almost necessary by the presence of the old lady.

Formerly, Olivier Bertin had passed six weeks or two months at Roncieres every year; but in the past three years rheumatism had sent him to watering-places at some distance, which had so much revived his love for Paris that after his return he could not bring himself to leave it.

As a matter of custom, the young girl should not have returned home until autumn, but her father had suddenly conceived a plan for her marriage, and sent for her that she might meet immediately the Marquis de Farandal, to whom he wished her to be betrothed. But this plan was kept quite secret, and Madame de Guilleroy had told only Olivier Bertin of it, in strict confidence.

“Then your husband’s idea is quite decided upon?” said he at last.

“Yes; I even think it a very happy idea.”

Then they talked of other things.

She returned to the subject of painting, and wished to make him decide to paint a Christ. He opposed the suggestion, thinking that there was already enough of them in the world; but she persisted, and grew impatient in her argument.

"Oh, if I knew how to draw I would show you my thought: it should be very new, very bold. They are taking him down from the cross, and the man who has detached the hands has let drop the whole upper part of the body. It has fallen upon the crowd below, and they lift up their arms to receive and sustain it. Do you understand?"

Yes, he understood; he even thought the conception quite original; but he held himself as belonging to the modern style, and as his fair friend reclined upon the divan, with one daintily-shod foot peeping out, giving to the eye the sensation of flesh gleaming through the almost transparent stocking, he said: "Ah, that is what I should paint! That is life — a woman's foot at the edge of her skirt! Into that subject one may put everything — truth, desire, poetry. Nothing is more graceful or more charming than a woman's foot; and what mystery it suggests: the hidden limb, lost yet imagined beneath its veiling folds of drapery!"

Sitting on the floor, *a la Turque*, he seized her shoe and drew it off, and the foot, coming out of its leather sheath, moved about quickly, like a little animal surprised at being set free.

"Isn't that elegant, distinguished, and material — more material than the hand? Show me your hand, Any!"

She wore long gloves reaching to the elbow. In order to remove one she took it by the upper edge and slipped it down quickly, turning it inside out, as one would skin a snake. The arm appeared, white, plump, round, so suddenly bared as to produce an idea of complete and bold nudity.

She gave him her hand, which drooped from her wrist. The rings sparkled on her white fingers, and the narrow pink nails seemed like amorous claws protruding at the tips of that little feminine paw.

Olivier Bertin handled it tenderly and admiringly. He played with the fingers as if they were live toys, while saying:

"What a strange thing! What a strange thing! What a pretty little member, intelligent and adroit, which executes whatever one wills — books, laces, houses, pyramids, locomotives, pastry, or caresses, which last is its pleasantest function."

He drew off the rings one by one, and as the wedding-ring fell in its turn, he murmured smilingly:

"The law! Let us salute it!"

"Nonsense!" said the Countess, slightly wounded.

Bertin had always been inclined to satirical banter, that tendency of the French to mingle irony with the most serious sentiments, and he had often unintentionally made her sad, without knowing how to understand the subtle distinctions of women, or to discern the border of sacred ground, as he himself said. Above all things it vexed her whenever he alluded with a touch of familiar lightness to their attachment, which was an affair of such long standing that he declared it the most beautiful example of love in the nineteenth century. After a silence, she inquired:

"Will you take Annette and me to the varnishing-day reception?"

"Certainly."

Then she asked him about the best pictures to be shown in the next exposition, which was to open in a fortnight.

Suddenly, however, she appeared to recollect something she had forgotten.

"Come, give me my shoe," she said. "I am going now."

He was playing dreamily with the light shoe, turning it over abstractedly in his hands. He leaned over, kissed the foot, which appeared to float between the skirt and the rug, and which, a little chilled by the air, no longer moved restlessly about; then he slipped on the shoe, and Madame de Guilleroy, rising, approached the table, on which were scattered papers, open letters, old and recent, beside a painter's inkstand, in which the ink had dried. She looked at it all with curiosity, touched the papers, and lifted them to look underneath.

Bertin approached her, saying:

"You will disarrange my disorder."

Without replying to this, she inquired:

"Who is the gentleman that wishes to buy your *Baigneuses*?"

"An American whom I do not know."

"Have you come to an agreement about the *Chanteuse des rues*?"

"Yes. Ten thousand."

"You did well. It was pretty, but not exceptional. Good-by, dear."

She presented her cheek, which he brushed with a calm kiss; then she disappeared through the portieres, saying in an undertone:

"Friday — eight o'clock. I do not wish you to go with me to the door — you know that very well. Good-by!"

When she had gone he first lighted another cigarette, then he began to pace slowly to and fro in his studio. All the past of this liaison unrolled itself before him. He recalled all its details, now long remote, sought them and put them together, interested in this solitary pursuit of reminiscences.

It was at the moment when he had just risen like a star on the horizon of artistic Paris, when the painters were monopolizing the favor of the public, and had built up a quarter with magnificent dwellings, earned by a few strokes of the brush.

After his return from Rome, in 1864, he had lived for some years without success or renown; then suddenly, in 1868, he exhibited his *Cleopatra*, and in a few days was being praised to the skies by both critics and public.

In 1872, after the war, and after the death of Henri Regnault had made for all his brethren, a sort of pedestal of glory, a *Jocaste* a bold subject, classed Bertin among the daring, although his wisely original execution made him acceptable even to the Academicians. In 1873 his first medal placed him beyond competition with his *Juive d'Alger*, which he exhibited on his return from a trip to Africa, and a portrait of the Princesse de Salia, in 1874, made him considered by the fashionable world the first portrait painter of his day. From that time he became the favorite painter of Parisian women of that class, the most skilful and ingenious interpreter of their grace, their bearing, and their nature. In a few months all the distinguished women in Paris solicited the favor of being reproduced by his brush. He was hard to please, and made them pay well for that favor.

After he had become the rage, and was received everywhere as a man of the world he saw one day, at the Duchesse de Mortemain's house, a young woman in deep mourning, who was just leaving as he entered, and who, in this chance meeting in a doorway, dazzled him with a charming vision of grace and elegance.

On inquiring her name, he learned that she was the Comtesse de Guilleroy, wife of a Normandy country squire, agriculturist and deputy; that she was in mourning for her husband's father; and that she was very intellectual, greatly admired, and much sought after.

Struck by the apparition that had delighted his artist's eye, he said:

"Ah, there is some one whose portrait I should paint willingly!"

This remark was repeated to the young Countess the next day; and that evening Bertin received a little blue-tinted note, delicately perfumed, in a small, regular handwriting, slanting a little from left to right, which said:

"MONSIEUR:

“The Duchesse de Mortemain, who has just left my house, has assured me that you would be disposed to make, from my poor face, one of your masterpieces. I would entrust it to you willingly if I were certain that you did not speak idly, and that you really see in me something that you could reproduce and idealize.

“Accept, Monsieur, my sincere regards.

“ANNE DE GUILLEROY.”

He answered this note, asking when he might present himself at the Countess’s house, and was very simply invited to breakfast on the following Monday.

It was on the first floor of a large and luxurious modern house in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Traversing a large salon with blue silk walls, framed in white and gold, the painter was shown into a sort of boudoir hung with tapestries of the last century, light and coquettish, those tapestries *a la Watteau*, with their dainty coloring and graceful figures, which seem to have been designed and executed by workmen dreaming of love.

He had just seated himself when the Countess appeared. She walked so lightly that he had not heard her coming through the next room, and was surprised when he saw her. She extended her hand in graceful welcome.

“And so it is true,” said she, “that you really wish to paint my portrait?”

“I shall be very happy to do so, Madame.”

Her close-fitting black gown made her look very slender and gave her a youthful appearance though a grave air, which was belied, however, by her smiling face, lighted up by her bright golden hair. The Count entered, leading by the hand a little six-year-old girl.

Madame de Guilleroy presented him, saying, “My husband.”

The Count was rather short, and wore no moustache; his cheeks were hollow, darkened under the skin by his close-shaven beard. He had somewhat the appearance of a priest or an actor; his hair was long and was tossed back carelessly; his manner was polished, and around the mouth two large circular lines extended from the cheeks to the chin, seeming to have been acquired from the habit of speaking in public.

He thanked the painter with a flourish of phrases that betrayed the orator. He had wished for a long time to have a portrait of his wife, and certainly he would have chosen M. Olivier Bertin, had he not feared a refusal, for he well knew that the painter was overwhelmed with orders.

It was arranged, then, with much ceremony on both sides, that the Count should accompany the Countess to the studio the next day. He asked, however, whether it would not be better to wait, because of the Countess's deep mourning; but the painter declared that he wished to translate the first impression she had made upon him, and the striking contrast of her animated, delicate head, luminous under the golden hair, with the austere black of her garments.

She came, then, the following day, with her husband, and afterward with her daughter, whom the artist seated before a table covered with picture-books.

Olivier Bertin, following his usual custom, showed himself very reserved. Fashionable women made him a little uneasy, for he hardly knew them. He supposed them to be at once immoral and shallow, hypocritical and dangerous, futile and embarrassing. Among the women of the demi-monde he had had some passing adventures due to his renown, his lively wit, his elegant and athletic figure, and his dark and animated face. He preferred them, too; he liked their free ways and frank speech, accustomed as he was to the gay and easy manners of the studios and green-rooms he frequented. He went into the fashionable world for the glory of it, but his heart was not in it; he enjoyed it through his vanity, received congratulations and commissions, and played the gallant before charming ladies who flattered him, but never paid court to any. As he did not allow himself to indulge in daring pleasantries and spicy jests in their society, he thought them all prudes, and himself was considered as having good taste. Whenever one of them came to pose at his studio, he felt, in spite of any advances she might make to please him, that disparity of rank which prevents any real unity between artists and fashionable people, no matter how much they may be thrown together. Behind the smiles and the admiration which among women are always a little artificial, he felt the indefinable mental reserve of the being that judges itself of superior essence. This brought about in him an abnormal feeling of pride, which showed itself in a bearing of haughty respect, dissembling the vanity of the parvenu who is treated as an equal by princes and princesses, who owes to his talent the honor accorded to others by their birth. It was said of him with slight surprise: “He is really very well bred!” This surprise, although it flattered him, also wounded him, for it indicated a certain social barrier.

The admirable and ceremonious gravity of the painter a little annoyed Madame de Guilleroy, who could find nothing to say to this man, so cold, yet with a reputation for cleverness.

After settling her little daughter, she would come and sit in an armchair near the newly begun sketch, and tried, according to the artist's recommendation, to give some expression to her physiognomy.

In the midst of the fourth sitting, he suddenly ceased painting and inquired:

"What amuses you more than anything else in life?"

She appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Why, I hardly know. Why this question?"

"I need a happy thought in those eyes, and I have not seen it yet."

"Well, try to make me talk; I like very much to chat."

"Are you gay?"

"Very gay."

"Well, then, let us chat, Madame."

He had said "Let us chat, Madame," in a very grave tone; then, resuming his painting, he touched upon a variety of subjects, seeking something on which their minds could meet. They began by exchanging observations on the people that both knew; then they talked of themselves — always the most agreeable and fascinating subject for a chat.

When they met again the next day they felt more at ease, and Bertin, noting that he pleased and amused her, began to relate some of the details of his artist life, allowing himself to give free scope to his reminiscences, in a fanciful way that was peculiar to him.

Accustomed to the dignified presence of the literary lights of the salons, the Countess was surprised by this almost wild gaiety, which said unusual things quite frankly, enlivening them with irony; and presently she began to answer in the same way, with a grace at once daring and delicate.

In a week's time she had conquered and charmed him by her good humor, frankness, and simplicity. He had entirely forgotten his prejudices against fashionable women, and would willingly have declared that they alone had charm and fascination. As he painted, standing before his canvas, advancing and retreating, with the movements of a man fighting, he allowed his fancy to flow freely, as if he had known for a long time this pretty woman, blond and black, made of sunlight and mourning, seated before him, laughing and listening, answering him gaily with so much animation that she lost her pose every moment.

Sometimes he would move far away from her, closing one eye, leaning over for a searching study of his model's pose; then he would draw very near to her to note the slightest shadows of her face, to catch the most fleeting expression, to seize and reproduce that which is in a woman's face beyond its more outward appearance; that emanation of ideal beauty, that reflection of something indescribable, that personal and intimate charm peculiar to each, which causes her to be loved to distraction by one and not by another.

One afternoon the little girl advanced, and, planting herself before the canvas, inquired with childish gravity:

"That is mamma, isn't it?"

The artist took her in his arms to kiss her, flattered by that naïve homage to the resemblance of his work.

Another day, when she had been very quiet, they suddenly heard her say, in a sad little voice:

"Mamma, I am so tired of this!"

The painter was so touched by this first complaint that he ordered a shopful of toys to be brought to the studio the following day.

Little Annette, astonished, pleased, and always thoughtful, put them in order with great care, that she might play with them one after another, according to the desire of the moment. From the date of this gift, she loved the painter as little children love, with that caressing, animal-like affection which makes them so sweet and captivating.

Madame de Guilleroy began to take pleasure in the sittings. She was almost without amusement or occupation that winter, as she was in mourning; so that, for lack of society and entertainments, her chief interest was within the walls of Bertin's studio.

She was the daughter of a rich and hospitable Parisian merchant, who had died several years earlier, and of his ailing wife, whose lack of health kept her in bed six months out of the twelve, and while still very young she had become a perfect hostess, knowing how to receive, to smile, to chat, to estimate character, and how to adapt herself to everyone; thus she early became quite at her ease in society, and was always far-seeing and compliant. When the Count de Guilleroy was presented to her as her betrothed, she understood at once the advantages to be gained by such a marriage, and, like a sensible girl, admitted them without constraint, knowing well that one cannot have everything and that in every situation we must strike a balance between good and bad.

Launched in the world, much sought because of her beauty and brilliance, she was admired and courted by many men without ever feeling the least quickening of her heart, which was as reasonable as her mind.

She possessed a touch of coquetry, however, which was nevertheless prudent and aggressive enough never to allow an affair to go too far. Compliments pleased her, awakened desires, fed her vanity, provided she might seem to ignore them; and when she had received for a whole evening the incense of this sort of homage, she slept quietly, as a woman who has accomplished her mission on earth. This existence, which lasted seven years, did not weary her nor seem monotonous, for she adored the incessant excitement of society, but sometimes she felt that she desired something different. The men of her world, political advocates, financiers, or wealthy idlers, amused her as actors might; she did not take them too seriously, although she appreciated their functions, their stations, and their titles.

The painter pleased her at first because such a man was entirely a novelty to her. She found the studio a very amusing place, laughed gaily, felt that she, too, was clever, and felt grateful to him for the pleasure she took in the sittings. He pleased her, too, because he was handsome, strong, and famous, no woman, whatever she may pretend, being indifferent to physical beauty and glory. Flattered at having been admired by this expert, and disposed, on her side, to think well of him, she had discovered in him an alert and cultivated mind, delicacy, fancy, the true charm of intelligence, and an eloquence of expression that seemed to illumine whatever he said.

A rapid friendship sprang up between them, and the hand-clasp exchanged every day as she entered seemed more and more to express something of the feeling in their hearts.

Then, without deliberate design, with no definite determination, she felt within her heart a growing desire to fascinate him, and yielded to it. She had foreseen nothing, planned nothing; she was only coquettish with added grace, as a woman always is toward a man who pleases her more than all others; and in her manner with him, in her glances and smiles, was that seductive charm that diffuses itself around a woman in whose breast has awakened a need of being loved.

She said flattering things to him which meant “I find you very agreeable, Monsieur;” and she made him talk at length in order to show him, by her attention, how much he aroused her interest. He would cease to paint and sit beside her; and in that mental exaltation due to an intense desire to please, he had crises of poetry, of gaiety or of philosophy, according to his state of mind that day.

She was merry when he was gay; when he became profound she tried to follow his discourse, though she did not always succeed; and when her mind wandered to other things, she appeared to listen with so perfect an air of comprehension and such apparent enjoyment of this initiation, that he felt his spirit exalted in noting her attention to his words, and was touched to have discovered a soul so delicate, open, and docile, into which thought fell like a seed.

The portrait progressed, and was likely to be good, for the painter had reached the state of emotion that is necessary in order to discover all the qualities of the model, and to express them with that convincing ardor which is the inspiration of true artists.

Leaning toward her, watching every movement of her face, all the tints of her flesh, every shadow of her skin, all the expression and the translucence of her eyes, every secret of her physiognomy, he had become saturated with her personality as a sponge absorbs water; and, in transferring to canvas that emanation of disturbing charm which his eye seized, and which flowed like a wave from his thought to his brush, he was overcome and intoxicated by it, as if he had drunk deep of the beauty of woman.

She felt that he was drawn toward her, and was amused by this game, this victory that was becoming more and more certain, animating even her own heart.

A new feeling gave fresh piquancy to her existence, awaking in her a mysterious joy. When she heard him spoken of her heart throbbed faster, and she longed to say — a longing that never passed her lips— “He is in love with me!” She was glad when people praised his talent, and perhaps was even more pleased when she heard him called handsome. When she was alone, thinking of him, with no indiscreet babble to annoy her, she really imagined that in him she had found merely a good friend, one that would always remain content with a cordial hand-clasp.

Often, in the midst of a sitting, he would suddenly put down his palette on the stool and take little Annette in his arms, kissing her tenderly on her hair, and his eyes, while gazing at the mother, said, “It is you, not the child, that I kiss in this way.”

Occasionally Madame de Guilleroy did not bring her daughter, but came alone. On these days he worked very little, and the time was spent in talking.

One afternoon she was late. It was a cold day toward the end of February. Olivier had come in early, as was now his habit whenever she had an appointment with him, for he always hoped she would arrive before the usual hour. While waiting he paced to and fro, smoking, and asking himself the question that he was surprised to find himself asking for the hundredth time that week: “Am I in love?” He did not know, never having been really in love. He had had his caprices, certainly, some of which had lasted a long time, but never had he mistaken them for love. To-day he was astonished at the emotion that possessed him.

Did he love her? He hardly desired her, certainly, never having dreamed of the possibility of possessing her. Heretofore, as soon as a woman attracted him he had desired to make a conquest of her, and had held out his hand toward her as if to gather fruit, but without feeling his heart affected profoundly by either her presence or her absence.

Desire for Madame de Guilleroy hardly occurred to him; it seemed to be hidden, crouching behind another and more powerful feeling, which was still uncertain and hardly awakened. Olivier had believed that love began with reveries and with poetic exaltations. But his feeling, on the contrary, seemed to come from an indefinable emotion, more physical than mental. He was nervous and restless, as if under the shadow of threatening illness, though nothing painful entered into this fever of the blood which by contagion stirred his mind also. He was quite aware that Madame de Guilleroy was the cause of his agitation; that it was due to the memories she left him and to the expectation of her return. He did not feel drawn to her by an impulse of his whole being, but he felt her always near him, as if she never had left him; she left to him something of herself when she departed — something subtle and inexpressible. What was it? Was it love? He probed deep in his heart in order to see, to understand. He thought her charming, but she was not at all the type of ideal woman that his blind hope had created. Whoever calls upon love has foreseen the moral traits and physical charms of her who will enslave him; and Madame de Guilleroy, although she pleased him infinitely, did not appear to him to be that woman.

But why did she thus occupy his thought, above all others, in a way so different, so unceasing? Had he simply fallen into the trap set by her coquetry, which he had long before understood, and, circumvented by his own methods, was he now under the influence of that special fascination which gives to women the desire to please?

He paced here and there, sat down, sprang up, lighted cigarettes and threw them away, and his eyes every instant looked at the clock, whose hands moved toward the usual hour in slow, unhurried fashion.

Several times already he had almost raised the convex glass over the two golden arrows turning so slowly, in order to push the larger one on toward the figure it was approaching so lazily. It seemed to him that this would suffice to make the door open, and that the expected one would appear, deceived and brought to him by this ruse. Then he smiled at this childish, persistent, and unreasonable desire.

At last he asked himself this question: “Could I become her lover?” This idea seemed strange to him, indeed hardly to be realized or even pursued, because of the complications it might bring into his life. Yet she pleased him very much, and he concluded: “Decidedly I am in a very strange state of mind.”

The clock struck, and this reminder of the hour made him start, striking on his nerves rather than his soul. He awaited her with that impatience which delay increases from second to second. She was always prompt, so that before ten minutes should pass he would see her enter. When the ten minutes had elapsed, he felt anxious, as at the approach of some grief, then irritated because she had made him lose time; finally, he realized that if she failed to come it would cause him actual suffering. What should he do? Should he wait for her? No; he would go out, so that if, by chance, she should arrive very late, she would find the studio empty.

He would go out, but when? What latitude should he allow her? Would it not be better to remain and to make her comprehend, by a few coldly polite words, that he was not one to be kept waiting. And suppose she did not come? Then he would receive a despatch, a card, a servant or a messenger. If she did not come, what should he do? It would be a day lost; he could not work. Then? Well, then he would go to seek news of her, for see her he must!

It was quite true; he felt a profound, tormenting, harassing necessity for seeing her. What did it mean? Was it love? But he felt no mental exaltation, no intoxication of the senses; it awakened no reverie of the soul, when he realized that if she did not come that day he should suffer keenly.

The door-bell rang on the stairway of the little hotel, and Olivier Bertin suddenly found himself somewhat breathless, then so joyous that he executed a pirouette and flung his cigarette high in the air.

She entered; she was alone! Immediately he was seized with a great audacity.

“Do you know what I asked myself while waiting for you?”

“No, indeed, I do not.”

“I asked myself whether I were not in love with you?”

“In love with me? You must be mad!”

But she smiled, and her smile said: That is very pretty; I am glad to hear it! However, she said: “You are not serious, of course; why do you make such a jest?”

“On the contrary, I am absolutely serious,” he replied. “I do not declare that I am in love with you; but I ask myself whether I am not well on the way to become so.”

“What has made you think so?”

“My emotion when you are not here; my happiness when you arrive.”

She seated herself.

“Oh, don’t disturb yourself over anything so trifling! As long as you sleep well and have an appetite for dinner, there will be no danger!”

He began to laugh.

“And if I lose my sleep and no longer eat?”

“Let me know of it.”

“And then?”

“I will allow you to recover yourself in peace.”

“A thousand thanks!”

And on the theme of this uncertain love they spun theories and fancies all the afternoon. The same thing occurred on several successive days. Accepting his statement as a sort of jest, of no real importance, she would say gaily on entering: “Well, how goes your love to-day?”

He would reply lightly, yet with perfect seriousness, telling her of the progress of his malady, in all its intimate details, and of the depth of the tenderness that had been born and was daily increasing. He analyzed himself minutely before her, hour by hour, since their separation the evening before, with the air of a professor giving a lecture; and she listened with interest, a little moved, and somewhat disturbed by this story which seemed that in a book of which she was the heroine. When he had enumerated, in his gallant and easy manner, all the anxieties of which he had become the prey, his voice sometimes trembled in expressing by a word, or only by an intonation, the tender aching of his heart.

And she persisted in questioning him, vibrating with curiosity, her eyes fixed upon him, her ear eager for those things that are disturbing to know but charming to hear.

Sometimes when he approached her to alter a pose he would seize her hand and try to kiss it. With a swift movement she would draw away her fingers from his lips, saying, with a slight frown:

“Come, come — work!”

He would begin his work again, but within five minutes she would ask some adroit question that led him back to the sole topic that interested them.

By this time she began to feel some fear deep in her heart. She longed to be loved — but not too much! Sure of not being led away, she yet feared to allow him to venture too far, thereby losing him, since then she would be compelled to drive him to despair after seeming to encourage him. Yet, should it become necessary to renounce this tender and delicate friendship, this stream of pleasant converse which rippled along bearing nuggets of love like a river whose sand is full of gold, it would cause her great sorrow — a grief that would be heart-breaking.

When she set out from her own home to go to the painter’s studio, a wave of joy, warm and penetrating, overflowed her spirit, making it light and happy. As she laid her hand on Olivier’s bell, her breast throbbed with impatience, and the stair-carpet seemed the softest her feet ever had pressed. But Bertin became gloomy, a little nervous, often irritable. He had his moments of impatience, soon repressed, but frequently recurring.

One day, when she had just entered, he sat down beside her instead of beginning to paint, saying:

“Madame, you can no longer ignore the fact that what I have said is not a jest, and that I love you madly.”

Troubled by this beginning and seeing that the dreaded crisis had arrived, she tried to stop him, but he listened to her no longer. Emotion overflowed his heart, and she must hear him, pale, trembling, and anxious as she listened. He spoke a long time, demanding nothing, tenderly, sadly, with despairing resignation; and she allowed him to take her hands, which he kept in his. He was kneeling before her without her taking any notice of his attitude, and with a far-away look upon his face he begged her not to work him any harm. What harm? She did not understand nor try to understand, overcome by the cruel grief of seeing him suffer, yet that grief was almost happiness. Suddenly she saw tears in his eyes and was so deeply moved that she exclaimed: “Oh!” — ready to embrace him as one embraces a crying child. He repeated in a very soft tone: “There, there! I suffer too much;” then, suddenly, won by his sorrow, by the contagion of tears, she sobbed, her nerves quivering, her arms trembling, ready to open.

When she felt herself suddenly clasped in his embrace and kissed passionately on the lips, she wished to cry out, to struggle, to repulse him; but she judged herself lost, for she consented while resisting, she yielded even while she struggled, pressing him to her as she cried: “No, no, I will not!”

Then she was overcome with the emotion of that moment; she hid her face in her hands, then she suddenly sprang to her feet, caught up her hat which had fallen to the floor, put it on her head and rushed away, in spite of the supplications of Olivier, who held a fold of her skirt.

As soon as she was in the street, she had a desire to sit down on the curbstone, her limbs were so exhausted and powerless. A cab was passing; she called to it and said to the driver: “Drive slowly, and take me wherever you like.” She threw herself into the carriage, closed the door, sank back in one corner, feeling herself alone behind the raised windows — alone to think.

For some minutes she heard only the sound of the wheels and the jarring of the cab. She looked at the houses, the pedestrians, people in cabs and omnibuses, with a blank gaze that saw nothing; she thought of nothing, as if she were giving herself time, granting herself a respite before daring to reflect upon what had happened.

Then, as she had a practical mind and was not lacking in courage, she said to herself: “I am a lost woman!” For some time she remained under that feeling of certainty that irreparable misfortune had befallen her, horror-struck, like a man fallen from a roof, knowing that his legs are broken but dreading to prove it to himself.

But, instead of feeling overwhelmed by the anticipation of suffering, her heart remained calm and peaceful after this catastrophe; it beat slowly, softly, after the fall that had terrified her soul, and seemed to take no part in the perturbation of her mind.

She repeated aloud, as if to understand and convince herself: “Yes, I am a lost woman.” No echo of suffering responded from her heart to this cry of her conscience.

She allowed herself to be soothed for some time by the movement of the carriage, putting off a little longer the necessity of facing this cruel situation. No, she did not suffer. She was afraid to think, that was all; she feared to know, to comprehend, and to reflect; on the contrary, in that mysterious and impenetrable being created within us by the incessant struggle between our desires and our will, she felt an indescribable peace.

After perhaps half an hour of this strange repose, understanding at last that the despair she had invoked would not come, she shook off her torpor and murmured: “It is strange: I am hardly sorry even!”

Then she began to reproach herself. Anger awakened within her against her own blindness and her weakness. How had she not foreseen this, not comprehended that the hour for that struggle must come; that this man was so dear to her as to render her cowardly, and that sometimes in the purest hearts desire arises like a gust of wind, carrying the will before it?

But, after she had judged and reprimanded herself severely, she asked herself what would happen next?

Her first resolve was to break with the painter and never to see him again. Hardly had she formed this resolution before a thousand reasons sprang up as quickly to combat it. How could she explain such a break? What should she say to her husband? Would not the suspected truth be whispered, then spread abroad?

Would it not be better, for the sake of appearances, to act, with Olivier Bertin himself, the hypocritical comedy of indifference and forgetfulness, to show him that she had effaced that moment from her memory and from her life?

But could she do it? Would she have the audacity to appear to recollect nothing, to assume a look of indignant astonishment in saying: “What would you with me?” to the man with whom she had actually shared that swift and ardent emotion?

She reflected a long time, and decided that any other solution was impossible.

She would go to him courageously the next day, and make him understand as soon as she could what she desired him to do. She must not use a word, an allusion, a look, that could recall to him that moment of shame.

After he had suffered — for assuredly he would have his share of suffering, as a loyal and upright man — he would remain in future that which he had been up to the present.

As soon as this new resolution was formed, she gave her address to the coachman and returned home, profoundly depressed, with a desire to take to her bed, to see no one, to sleep and forget. Having shut herself up in her room, she remained there until the dinner hour, lying on a couch, benumbed, not wishing to agitate herself longer with that thought so full of danger.

She descended at the exact hour, astonished to find herself so calm, and awaited her husband with her ordinary demeanor. He appeared, carrying their little one in his arms; she pressed his hand and kissed the child, and felt no pang of anguish.

Monsieur de Guilleroy inquired what she had been doing. She replied indifferently that she had been posing, as usual.

"And the portrait — is it good?" he asked.

"It is coming on very well."

He spoke of his own affairs, in his turn; he enjoyed talking, while dining, of the sitting of the Chamber, and of the discussion of the proposed law on the adulteration of food-stuffs.

This rather tiresome talk, which she usually endured amiably, now irritated her, and made her look with closer attention at the man who was vulgarly loquacious in his interest in such things; but she smiled as she listened, and replied pleasantly, more gracious even than usual, more indulgent toward these banalities. As she looked at him she thought: "I have deceived him! He is my husband, and I have deceived him! How strange it is! Nothing can change that fact, nothing can obliterate it! I closed my eyes. I submitted for a few seconds, a few seconds only, to a man's kisses, and I am no longer a virtuous woman. A few seconds in my life — seconds that never can be effaced — have brought into it that little irreparable fact, so grave, so short, a crime, the most shameful one for a woman — and yet I feel no despair! If anyone had told me that yesterday, I should not have believed it. If anyone had convinced me that it would indeed come to pass, I should have thought instantly of the terrible remorse that would fill my heart to-day.”

Monsieur de Guilleroy went out after dinner, as he did almost every evening. Then the Countess took her little daughter on her lap, weeping over her and kissing her; the tears she shed were sincere, coming from her conscience, not from her heart.

But she slept very little. Amid the darkness of her room, she tormented herself afresh as to the dangers of the attitude toward the painter that she purposed to assume; she dreaded the interview that must take place the following day, and the things that he must say to her, looking her in the face meanwhile.

She arose early, but remained lying on her couch all the morning, forcing herself to foresee what it was she had to fear and what she must say in reply, in order to be ready for any surprise.

She went out early, that she might yet think while walking.

He hardly expected her, and had been asking himself, since the evening before, what he should do when he met her.

After her hasty departure — that flight which he had not dared to oppose — he had remained alone, still listening, although she was already far away, for the sound of her step, the rustle of her skirt, and the closing of the door, touched by the timid hand of his goddess.

He remained standing, full of deep, ardent, intoxicating joy. He had won her, *her*! That had passed between them! Was it possible? After the surprise of this triumph, he gloated over it, and, to realize it more keenly, he sat down and almost lay at full length on the divan where he had made her yield to him.

He remained there a long time, full of the thought that she was his mistress, and that between them, between the woman he had so much desired and himself, had been tied in a few moments that mysterious bond which secretly links two beings to each other. He retained in his still quivering body the piercingly sweet remembrance of that wild, fleeting moment when their lips had met, when their beings had united and mingled, thrilling together with the deepest emotion of life.

He did not go out that evening, in order to live over again that rapturous moment; he retired early, his heart vibrating with happiness. He had hardly awakened the next morning before he asked himself what he should do. To a *cocotte* or an actress he would have sent flowers or even a jewel; but he was tortured with perplexity before this new situation.

He wished to express, in delicate and charming terms, the gratitude of his soul, his ecstasy of mad tenderness, his offer of a devotion that should be eternal; but in order to intimate all these passionate and high-souled thoughts he could find only set phrases, commonplace expressions, vulgar and puerile.

Assuredly, he must write — but what? He scribbled, erased, tore up and began anew twenty letters, all of which seemed to him insulting, odious, ridiculous.

He gave up the idea of writing, therefore, and decided to go to see her, as soon as the hour for the sitting had passed, for he felt very sure that she would not come.

Shutting himself up in his studio, he stood in mental exaltation before the portrait, his lips longing to press themselves on the painting, whereon something of herself was fixed; and again and again he looked out of the window into the street. Every gown he saw in the distance made his heart throb quickly. Twenty times he believed that he saw her; then when the approaching woman had passed he sat down again, as if overcome by a deception.

Suddenly he saw her, doubted, then took his opera-glass, recognized her, and, dizzy with violent emotion, sat down once more to await her.

When she entered he threw himself on his knees and tried to take her hands, but she drew them away abruptly, and, as he remained at her feet, filled with anguish, his eyes raised to hers, she said haughtily:

“What are you doing, Monsieur? I do not understand that attitude.”

“Oh, Madame, I entreat you— “

She interrupted him harshly:

“Rise! You are ridiculous!”

He rose, dazed, and murmured:

“What is the matter? Do not treat me in this way — I love you!”

Then, in a few short, dry phrases, she signified her wishes, and decreed the situation.

“I do not understand what you wish to say. Never speak to me of your love, or I shall leave this studio never to return. If you forget for a single moment this condition of my presence here, you never will see me again.”

He looked at her, crushed by this unexpected harshness; then he understood, and murmured:

"I shall obey, Madame."

"Very well," she rejoined; "I expected that of you! Now work, for you are long in finishing that portrait."

He took up his palette and began to paint, but his hand trembled, his troubled eyes looked without seeing; he felt a desire to weep, so deeply wounded was his heart.

He tried to talk to her; she barely answered him. When he attempted to pay her some little compliment on her color, she cut him short in a tone so brusque that he felt suddenly one of those furies of a lover that change tenderness to hatred. Through soul and body he felt a nervous shock, and in a moment he detested her. Yes, yes, that was, indeed, woman! She, too, was like all the others! Why not? She, too, was false, changeable, and weak, like all of them. She had attracted him, seduced him with girlish ruses, trying to overcome him without intending to give him anything in return, enticing him only to refuse him, employing toward him all the tricks of cowardly coquettes who seem always on the point of yielding so long as the man who cringes like a dog before them dares not carry out his desire.

But the situation was the worse for her, after all; he had taken her, he had overcome her. She might try to wash away that fact and answer him insolently; she could efface nothing, and he — he would forget it! Indeed, it would have been a fine bit of folly to embarrass himself with this sort of mistress, who would eat into his artist life with the capricious teeth of a pretty woman.

He felt a desire to whistle, as he did in the presence of his models, but realized that his nerve was giving way and feared to commit some stupidity. He cut short the sitting under pretense of having an appointment. When they bowed at parting they felt themselves farther apart than the day they first met at the Duchesse de Mortemain's.

As soon as she had gone, he took his hat and topcoat and went out. A cold sun, in a misty blue sky, threw over the city a pale, depressing, unreal light.

After he had walked a long time, with rapid and irritated step, elbowing the passers-by that he need not deviate from a straight line, his great fury against her began to change into sadness and regret. After he had repeated to himself all the reproaches he had poured upon her, he remembered, as he looked at the women that passed him, how pretty and charming she was.

Like many others who do not admit it, he had always been waiting to meet the “impossible she,” to find the rare, unique, poetic and passionate being, the dream of whom hovers over our hearts. Had he not almost found it? Was it not she who might have given him this almost impossible happiness? Why, then, is it true that nothing is realized? Why can one seize nothing of that which he pursues, or can succeed only in grasping a phantom, which renders still more grievous this pursuit of illusions?

He was no longer resentful toward her; it was life itself that made him bitter. Now that he was able to reason, he asked himself what cause for anger he had against her? With what could he reproach her, after all? — with being amiable, kind, and gracious toward him, while she herself might well reproach him for having behaved like a villain!

He returned home full of sadness. He would have liked to ask her pardon, to devote himself to her, to make her forget; and he pondered as to how he might enable her to comprehend that henceforth, until death, he would be obedient to all her wishes.

The next day she arrived, accompanied by her daughter, with a smile so sad, an expression so pathetic, that the painter fancied he could see in those poor blue eyes, that had always been so merry, all the pain, all the remorse, all the desolation of that womanly heart. He was moved to pity, and, in order that she might forget, he showed toward her with delicate reserve the most thoughtful attentions. She acknowledged them with gentleness and kindness, with the weary and languid manner of a woman who suffers.

And he, looking at her, seized again with a mad dream of loving and of being loved, asked himself why she was not more indignant at his conduct, how she could still come to his studio, listen to him and answer him, with that memory between them.

Since she could bear to see him again, however, could endure to hear his voice, having always in her mind the one thought which she could not escape, it must be that this thought had not become intolerable to her. When a woman hates the man who has conquered her thus, she cannot remain in his presence without showing her hatred, but that man never can remain wholly indifferent to her. She must either detest him or pardon him. And when she pardons that transgression, she is not far from love!

While he painted slowly, he arrived at this conclusion by small arguments, precise, clear, and sure; he now felt himself strong, steady, and master of the situation. He had only to be prudent, patient, devoted, and one day or another she would again be his.

He knew how to wait. In order to reassure her and to conquer her once more, he practised ruses in his turn; he assumed a tenderness restrained by apparent remorse, hesitating attentions, and indifferent attitudes. Tranquil in the certainty of approaching happiness, what did it matter whether it arrived a little sooner, a little later? He even experienced a strange, subtle pleasure in delay, in watching her, and saying to himself, “She is afraid!” as he saw her coming always with her child.

He felt that between them a slow work of reconciliation was going on, and thought that in the Countess’s eyes was something strange: constraint, a sweet sadness, that appeal of a struggling soul, of a faltering will, which seems to say: “But — conquer me, then!”

After a while she came alone once more, reassured by his reserve. Then he treated her as a friend, a comrade; he talked to her of his life, his plans, his art, as to a brother.

Deluded by this attitude, she assumed joyfully the part of counselor, flattered that he distinguished her thus above other women, and convinced that his talent would gain in delicacy through this intellectual intimacy. But, from consulting her and showing deference to her, he caused her to pass naturally from the functions of a counselor to the sacred office of inspirer. She found it charming to use her influence thus over the great man, and almost consented that he should love her as an artist, since it was she that gave him inspiration for his work!

It was one evening, after a long talk about the loves of illustrious painters, that she let herself glide into his arms. She rested there this time, without trying to escape, and gave him back his kisses.

She felt no remorse now, only the vague consciousness of a fall; and to stifle the reproaches of her reason she attributed it to fatality.

Drawn toward him by her virgin heart and her empty soul, the flesh overcome by the slow domination of caresses, little by little she attached herself to him, as do all tender women who love for the first time.

With Olivier it was a crisis of acute love, sensuous and poetic. It seemed to him sometimes that one day he had taken flight, with hands extended, and that he had been able to clasp in full embrace that winged and magnificent dream which is always hovering over our hopes.

He had finished the Countess's portrait, the best, certainly, that he ever had painted, for he had discovered and crystallized that inexpressible something which a painter seldom succeeds in unveiling — that reflection, that mystery, that physiognomy of the soul, which passes intangibly across a face.

Months rolled by, then years, which hardly loosened the tie that united the Comtesse de Guilleroy and the painter, Olivier Bertin. With him it was no longer the exaltation of the beginning, but a calm, deep affection, a sort of loving friendship that had become a habit.

With her, on the contrary, the passionate, persistent attachment of certain women who give themselves to a man wholly and forever was always growing. Honest and straight in adulterous love as they might have been in marriage, they devote themselves to a single object with a tenderness from which nothing can turn them. Not only do they love the lover, but they wish to love him, and, with eyes on him alone, they so fill their hearts with thoughts of him that nothing strange can thenceforth enter there. They have bound their lives resolutely, as one who knows how to swim, yet wishes to die, ties his hands together before leaping from a high bridge into the water.

But from the moment when the Countess had yielded, she was assailed by fears for Bertin's constancy. Nothing held him but his masculine will, his caprice, his passing fancy for a woman he had met one day just as he had already met so many others! She realized that he was so free, so susceptible to temptation — he who lived without duties, habits, or scruples, like all men! He was handsome, celebrated, much sought after, having, to respond to his easily awakened desires, fashionable women, whose modesty is so fragile, women of the demi-monde of the theater, prodigal of their favors with such men as he. One of them, some evening after supper, might follow him and please him, take him and keep him.

Thus she lived in terror of losing him, watching his manner, his attitudes, startled by a word, full of anguish when he admired another woman, praised the charm of her countenance or her grace of bearing. All of which she was ignorant in his life made her tremble, and all of which she was cognizant alarmed her. At each of their meetings she questioned him ingeniously, without his perceiving it, in order to make him express his opinion on the people he had seen, the houses where he had dined, in short, the lightest expression of his mind. As soon as she fancied she detected the influence of some other person, she combated it with prodigious astuteness and innumerable resources.

Oh, how often did she suspect those brief intrigues, without depth, lasting perhaps a week or two, from time to time, which come into the life of every prominent artist!

She had, as it were, an intuition of danger, even before she detected the awakening of a new desire in Olivier, by the look of triumph in his eyes, the expression of a man when swayed by a gallant fancy.

Then she would suffer; her sleep would be tortured by doubts. In order to surprise him, she would appear suddenly in his studio, without giving him notice of her coming, put questions that seemed naïve, tested his tenderness while listening to his thoughts, as we test while listening to detect hidden illness in the body. She would weep as soon as she found herself sure that some one would take him from her this time, robbing her of that love to which she clung so passionately because she had staked upon it all her will, her strength of affection, all her hopes and dreams.

Then, when she saw that he came back to her, after these brief diversions, she experienced, as she drew close to him again, took possession of him as of something lost and found, a deep, silent happiness which sometimes, when she passed a church, urged her go in and thank God.

Her preoccupation in ever making herself pleasing to him above all others, and of guarding him against all others, had made her whole life become a combat interrupted by coquetry. She had ceaselessly struggled for him, and before him, with her grace, her beauty and elegance. She wished that wherever he went he should hear her praised for her charm, her taste, her wit, and her toilets. She wished to please others for his sake, and to attract them so that he should be both proud and jealous of her. And every time that she succeeded in arousing his jealousy, after making him suffer a little, she allowed him the triumph of winning her back, which revived his love in exciting his vanity. Then, realizing that it was always possible for a man to meet in society a woman whose physical charm would be greater than her own, being a novelty, she resorted to other means: she flattered and spoiled him. Discreetly but continuously she heaped praises upon him; she soothed him with admiration and enveloped him in flattery, so that he might find all other friendship, all other love, even, a little cold and incomplete, and that if others also loved him he would perceive at last that she alone of them all understood him.

She made the two drawing-rooms in her house, which he entered so often, a place as attractive to the pride of the artist as to the heart of the man, the place in all Paris where he liked best to come, because there all his cravings were satisfied at the same time.

Not only did she learn to discover all his tastes, in order that, while gratifying them in her own house, she might give him a feeling of well-being that nothing could replace, but she knew how to create new tastes, to arouse appetites of all kinds, material and intellectual, habits of little attentions, of affections, of adoration and flattery! She tried to charm his eye with elegance, his sense of smell with perfumes, and his taste with delicate food.

But when she had planted in the soul and in the senses of a selfish bachelor a multitude of petty, tyrannical needs, when she had become quite certain that no mistress would trouble herself as she did to watch over and maintain them, in order to surround him with all the little pleasures of life, she suddenly feared, as she saw him disgusted with his own home, always complaining of his solitary life, and, being unable to come into her home except under all the restraints imposed by society, going to the club, seeking every means to soften his lonely lot — she feared lest he thought of marriage.

On some days she suffered so much from all these anxieties that she longed for old age, to have an end of this anguish and rest in a cooler and calmer affection.

Years passed, however, without disuniting them. The chain wherewith she had attached him to her was heavy, and she made new links as the old ones wore away. But, always solicitous, she watched over the painter’s heart as one guards a child crossing a street full of vehicles, and day by day she lived in expectation of the unknown danger, the dread of which always hung over her.

The Count, without suspicion or jealousy, found this intimacy of his wife with a famous and popular artist a perfectly natural thing. Through continually meeting, the two men, becoming accustomed to each other, finally became excellent friends.

CHAPTER II. TWIN ROSES FROM A SINGLE STEM

When Bertin entered, on Friday evening, the house of his friend, where he was to dine in honor of the return of Antoinette de Guilleroy, he found in the little Louis XV salon only Monsieur de Musadieu, who had just arrived.

He was a clever old man, who perhaps might have become of some importance, and who now could not console himself for not having attained to something worth while.

He had once been a commissioner of the imperial museums, and had found means to get himself reappointed Inspector of Fine Arts under the Republic, which did not prevent him from being, above all else, the friend of princes, of all the princes, princesses, and duchesses of European aristocracy, and the sworn protector of artists of all sorts. He was endowed with an alert mind and quick perceptions, with great facility of speech that enabled him to say agreeably the most ordinary things, with a suppleness of thought that put him at ease in any society, and a subtle diplomatic scent that gave him the power to judge men at first sight; and he strolled from salon to salon, morning and evening, with his enlightened, useless, and gossiping activity.

Apt at everything, as he appeared, he would talk on any subject with an air of convincing competence and familiarity that made him greatly appreciated by fashionable women, whom he served as a sort of traveling bazaar of erudition. As a matter of fact, he knew many things without ever having read any but the most indispensable books; but he stood very well with the five Academies, with all the savants, writers, and learned specialists, to whom he listened with clever discernment. He knew how to forget at once explanations that were too technical or were useless to him, remembered the others very well, and lent to the information thus gleaned an easy, clear, and good-natured rendering that made them as readily comprehensible as the popular presentation of scientific facts. He gave the impression of being a veritable storehouse of ideas, one of those vast places wherein one never finds rare objects but discovers a multiplicity of cheap productions of all kinds and from all sources, from household utensils to the popular instruments for physical culture or for domestic surgery.

The painters, with whom his official functions brought him in continual contact, made sport of him but feared him. He rendered them some services, however, helped them to sell pictures, brought them in contact with fashionable persons, and enjoyed presenting them, protecting them, launching them. He seemed to devote himself to a mysterious function of fusing the fashionable and the artistic worlds, pluming himself on his intimate acquaintance with these, and of his familiar footing with those, on breakfasting with the Prince of Wales, on his way through Paris, or dining, the same evening, with Paul Adelmant, Olivier Bertin, and Amaury Maldant.

Bertin, who liked him well enough, found him amusing, and said of him: "He is the encyclopedia of Jules Verne, bound in ass's skin!"

The two men shook hands and began to talk of the political situation and the rumors of war, which Musadieu thought alarming, for evident reasons which he explained very well, Germany having every interest in crushing us and in hastening that moment for which M. de Bismarck had been waiting eighteen years; while Olivier Bertin proved by irrefutable argument that these fears were chimerical, it being impossible for Germany to be foolish enough to risk her conquest in an always doubtful venture, or for the Chancelor to be imprudent enough to risk, in the latter years of his life, his achievements and his glory at a single blow.

M. de Musadieu, however, seemed to know something of which he did not wish to speak. Furthermore, he had seen a Minister that morning and had met the Grand Duke Vladimir, returning from Cannes, the evening before.

The artist was unconvinced by this, and with quiet irony expressed doubt of the knowledge of even the best informed. Behind all these rumors was the influence of the Bourse! Bismarck alone might have a settled opinion on the subject.

M. de Guilleroy entered, shook hands warmly, excusing himself in unctuous words for having left them alone.

"And you, my dear Deputy," asked the painter, "what do you think of these rumors of war?"

M. de Guilleroy launched into a discourse. As a member of the Chamber, he knew more of the subject than anyone else, though he held an opinion differing from that of most of his colleagues. No, he did not believe in the probability of an approaching conflict, unless it should be provoked by French turbulence and by the rodomontades of the self-styled patriots of the League. And he painted Bismarck's portrait in striking colors, a portrait a la Saint-Simon. The man Bismarck was one that no one wished to understand, because one always lends to others his own ways of thinking, and credits them with a readiness to do that which he would do were he placed in their situation. M. de Bismarck was not a false and lying diplomatist, but frank and brutal, always loudly proclaiming the truth and announcing his intentions. "I want peace!" said he. That was true; he wanted peace, nothing but peace, and everything had proved it in a blinding fashion for eighteen years; everything — his arguments, his alliances, that union of peoples banded together against our impetuosity. M. de Guilleroy concluded in a tone of profound conviction: "He is a great man, a very great man, who desires peace, but who has faith only in menaces and violent means as the way to obtain it. In short, gentlemen, a great barbarian."

"He that wishes the end must take the means," M. de Musadieu replied. "I will grant you willingly that he adores peace if you will concede to me that he always wishes to make war in order to obtain it. But that is an indisputable and phenomenal truth: In this world war is made only to obtain peace!"

A servant announced: "Madame la Duchesse de Mortemain."

Between the folding-doors appeared a tall, large woman, who entered with an air of authority.

Guilleroy hastened to meet her, and kissed her hand, saying:

"How do you do, Duchess?"

The other two men saluted her with a certain distinguished familiarity, for the Duchess's manner was both cordial and abrupt.

She was the widow of General the Duc de Mortemain, mother of an only daughter married to the Prince de Salia; daughter of the Marquis de Farandal, of high family and royally rich, and received at her mansion in the Rue de Varenne all the celebrities of the world, who met and complimented one another there. No Highness passed through Paris without dining at her table; no man could attract public attention that she did not immediately wish to know him. She must see him, make him talk to her, form her own judgment of him. This amused her greatly, lent interest to life, and fed the flame of imperious yet kindly curiosity that burned within her.

She had hardly seated herself when the same servant announced:

“Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Corbelle.”

They were young; the Baron was bald and fat, the Baroness was slender, elegant, and very dark.

This couple occupied a peculiar situation in the French aristocracy due solely to a scrupulous choice of connections. Belonging to the polite world, but without value or talent, moved in all their actions by an immoderate love of that which is select, correct, and distinguished; by dint of visiting only the most princely houses, of professing their royalist sentiments, pious and correct to a supreme degree; by respecting all that should be respected, by condemning all that should be condemned, by never being mistaken on a point of worldly dogma or hesitating over a detail of etiquette, they had succeeded in passing in the eyes of many for the finest flower of high life. Their opinion formed a sort of code of correct form and their presence in a house gave it a true title of distinction.

The Corbelles were relatives of the Comte de Guilleroy.

“Well,” said the Duchess in astonishment, “and your wife?”

“One instant, one little instant,” pleaded the Count. “There is a surprise: she is just about to come.”

When Madame de Guilleroy, as the bride of a month, had entered society, she was presented to the Duchesse de Mortemain, who loved her immediately, adopted her, and patronized her.

For twenty years this friendship never had diminished, and when the Duchess said, “*Ma petite*,” one still heard in her voice the tenderness of that sudden and persistent affection. It was at her house that the painter and the Countess had happened to meet.

Musadieu approached the group. “Has the Duchess been to see the exposition of the Intemperates?” he inquired.

“No; what is that?”

“A group of new artists, impressionists in a state of intoxication. Two of them are very fine.”

The great lady murmured, with disdain: “I do not like the jests of those gentlemen.”

Authoritative, brusque, barely tolerating any other opinion than her own, and founding hers solely on the consciousness of her social station, considering, without being able to give a good reason for it, that artists and learned men were merely intelligent mercenaries charged by God to amuse society or to render service to it, she had no other basis for her judgments than the degree of astonishment or of pleasure she experienced at the sight of a thing, the reading of a book, or the recital of a discovery.

Tall, stout, heavy, red, with a loud voice, she passed as having the air of a great lady because nothing embarrassed her; she dared to say anything and patronized the whole world, including dethroned princes, with her receptions in their honor, and even the Almighty by her generosity to the clergy and her gifts to the churches.

“Does the Duchess know,” Musadieu continued, “that they say the assassin of Marie Lambourg has been arrested?”

Her interest was awakened at once.

“No, tell me about it,” she replied.

He narrated the details. Musadieu was tall and very thin; he wore a white waistcoat and little diamond shirt-studs; he spoke without gestures, with a correct air which allowed him to say the daring things which he took delight in uttering. He was very near-sighted, and appeared, notwithstanding his eye-glass, never to see anyone; and when he sat down his whole frame seemed to accommodate itself to the shape of the chair. His figure seemed to shrink into folds, as if his spinal column were made of rubber; his legs, crossed one over the other, looked like two rolled ribbons, and his long arms, resting on the arms of the chair, allowed to droop his pale hands with interminable fingers. His hair and moustache, artistically dyed, with a few white locks cleverly forgotten, were a subject of frequent jests.

While he was explaining to the Duchess that the jewels of the murdered prostitute had been given as a present by the suspected murderer to another girl of the same stamp, the door of the large drawing-room opened wide once more, and two blond women in white lace, a creamy Mechlin, resembling each other like two sisters of different ages, the one a little too mature, the other a little too young, one a trifle too plump, the other a shade too slender, advanced, clasping each other round the waist and smiling.

The guests exclaimed and applauded. No one, except Olivier Bertin, knew of Annette de Guilleroy’s return, and the appearance of the young girl beside her mother, who at a little distance seemed almost as fresh and even more beautiful — for, like a flower in full bloom, she had not ceased to be brilliant, while the child, hardly budding, was only beginning to be pretty — made both appear charming.

The Duchess, delighted, clapped her hands, exclaiming: “Heavens! How charming and amusing they are, standing beside each other! Look, Monsieur de Musadieu, how much they resemble each other!”

The two were compared, and two opinions were formed. According to Musadieu, the Corbelles, and the Comte de Guilleroy, the Countess and her daughter resembled each other only in coloring, in the hair, and above all in the eyes, which were exactly alike, both showing tiny black points, like minute drops of ink, on the blue iris. But it was their opinion that when the young girl should have become a woman they would no longer resemble each other.

According to the Duchess, on the contrary, and also Olivier Bertin, they were similar in all respects, and only the difference in age made them appear unlike.

“How much she has changed in three years!” said the painter. “I should not have recognized her, and I don’t dare to *tutoyer* the young lady!”

The Countess laughed. “The idea! I should like to hear you say ‘you’ to Annette!”

The young girl, whose future gay audacity was already apparent under an air of timid playfulness, replied: “It is I who shall not dare to say ‘thou’ to Monsieur Bertin.”

Her mother smiled.

“Yes, continue the old habit — I will allow you to do so,” she said. “You will soon renew your acquaintance with him.”

But Annette shook her head.

“No, no, it would embarrass me,” she said.

The Duchess embraced her, and examined her with all the interest of a connoisseur.

“Look me in the face, my child,” she said. “Yes, you have exactly the same expression as your mother; you won’t be so bad by-and-by, when you have acquired more polish. And you must grow a little plumper — not very much, but a little. You are very thin.”

“Oh, don’t say that!” exclaimed the Countess.

“Why not?”

“It is so nice to be slender. I intend to reduce myself at once.”

But Madame de Mortemain took offense, forgetting in her anger the presence of a young girl.

"Oh, of course, you are all in favor of bones, because you can dress them better than flesh. For my part, I belong to the generation of fat women! To-day is the day of thin ones. They make me think of the lean kine of Egypt. I cannot understand how men can admire your skeletons. In my time they demanded more!"

She subsided amid the smiles of the company, but added, turning to Annette:

"Look at your mamma, little one; she does very well; she has attained the happy medium — imitate her."

They passed into the dining-room. After they were seated, Musadieu resumed the discussion.

"For my part, I say that men should be thin, because they are formed for exercises that require address and agility, incompatible with corpulency. But the women's case is a little different. Don't you think so, Corbelle?"

Corbelle was perplexed, the Duchess being stout and his own wife more than slender. But the Baroness came to the rescue of her husband, and resolutely declared herself in favor of slimness. The year before that, she declared, she had been obliged to struggle with the beginning of *embonpoint*, over which she soon triumphed.

"Tell us how you did it," demanded Madame de Guilleroy.

The Baroness explained the method employed by all the fashionable women of the day. One must never drink while eating; but an hour after the repast a cup of tea may be taken, boiling hot. This method succeeded with everyone. She cited astonishing cases of fat women who in three months had become more slender than the blade of a knife. The Duchess exclaimed in exasperation:

"Good gracious, how stupid to torture oneself like that! You like nothing any more — nothing — not even champagne. Bertin, as an artist, what do you think of this folly?"

"*Mon Dieu*, Madame, I am a painter and I simply arrange the drapery, so it is all the same to me. If I were a sculptor I might complain."

"But as a man, which do you prefer?"

"I? Oh, a certain rounded slimness — what my cook calls a nice little corn-fed chicken. It is not fat, but plump and delicate."

The comparison caused a laugh; but the incredulous Countess looked at her daughter and murmured:

"No, it is very much better to be thin; slender women never grow old."

This point also was discussed by the company; and all agreed that a very fat person should not grow thin too rapidly.

This observation gave place to a review of women known in society and to new discussions on their grace, their chic and beauty. Musadieu pronounced the blonde Marquise de Lochrist incomparably charming, while Bertin esteemed as a beauty Madame Mandeliere, with her brunette complexion, low brow, her dusky eyes and somewhat large mouth, in which her teeth seemed to sparkle.

He was seated beside the young girl, and said suddenly, turning to her:

"Listen to me, Nanette. Everything that we have just been saying you will hear repeated at least once a week until you are old. In a week you will know all that society thinks about politics, women, plays, and all the rest of it. Only an occasional change of names will be necessary — names of persons and titles of works. When you have heard us all express and defend our opinions, you will quietly choose your own among those that one must have, and then you need never trouble yourself to think of anything more, never. You will only have to rest in that opinion."

The young girl, without replying, turned upon him her mischievous eyes, wherein sparkled youthful intelligence, restrained, but ready to escape.

But the Duchess and Musadieu, who played with ideas as one tosses a ball, without perceiving that they continually exchanged the same ones, protested in the name of thought and of human activity.

Then Bertin attempted to show how the intelligence of fashionable people, even the brightest of them, is without value, foundation, or weight; how slight is the basis of their beliefs, how feeble and indifferent is their interest in intellectual things, how fickle and questionable are their tastes.

Warmed by one of those spasms of indignation, half real, half assumed, aroused at first by a desire to be eloquent, and urged on by the sudden prompting of a clear judgment, ordinarily obscured by an easy-going nature, he showed how those persons whose sole occupation in life is to pay visits and dine in town find themselves becoming, by an irresistible fatality, light and graceful but utterly trivial beings, vaguely agitated by superficial cares, beliefs, and appetites.

He showed that none of that class has either depth, ardor, or sincerity; that, their intellectual culture being slight and their erudition a simple varnish, they must remain, in short, manikins who produce the effect and make the gesture of the enlightened beings that they are not. He proved that, the frail roots of their instincts having been nourished on conventionalities instead of realities, they love nothing sincerely, that even the luxury of their existence is a satisfaction of vanity and not the gratification of a refined bodily necessity, for usually their table is indifferent, their wines are bad and very dear.

They live, as he said, beside everything, but see nothing and study nothing; they are near science, of which they are ignorant; nature, at which they do not know how to look; outside of true happiness, for they are powerless to enjoy it; outside of the beauty of the world and the beauty of art, of which they chatter without having really discovered it, or even believing in it, for they are ignorant of the intoxication of tasting the joys of life and of intelligence. They are incapable of attaching themselves in anything to that degree that existence is illumined by the happiness of comprehending it.

The Baron de Corbelle thought that it was his duty to come to the defense of society. This he did with inconsistent and irrefutable arguments, which melt before reason as snow before the fire, yet which cannot be disproved — the absurd and triumphant arguments of a country curate who would demonstrate the existence of God. In concluding, he compared fashionable people to race-horses, which, in truth, are good for nothing, but which are the glory of the equine race.

Bertin, irritated by this adversary, preserved a politely disdainful silence. But suddenly the Baron's imbecilities exasperated him, and, interrupting him adroitly, he recounted the life of a man of fashion from his rising to his going to rest, without omitting anything. All the details, cleverly described, made up an irresistibly amusing silhouette. Once could see the fine gentleman dressed by his valet, first expressing a few general ideas to the hairdresser that came to shave him; then, when taking his morning stroll, inquiring of the grooms about the health of the horses; then trotting through the avenues of the Bois, caring only about saluting and being saluted; then breakfasting opposite his wife, who in her turn had been out in her coupe, speaking to her only to enumerate the names of the persons he had met that morning; then passing from drawing-room to drawing-room until evening, refreshing his intelligence by contact with others of his circle, dining with a prince, where the affairs of Europe were discussed, and finishing the evening behind the scenes at the Opera, where his timid pretensions at being a gay dog were innocently satisfied by the appearance of being surrounded by naughtiness.

The picture was so true, although its satire wounded no one present, that laughter ran around the table.

The Duchess, shaken by the suppressed merriment of fat persons, relieved herself by discreet chuckles.

“Really, you are too funny!” she said at last; “you will make me die of laughter.”

Bertin replied, with some excitement:

“Oh, Madame, in the polite world one does not die of laughter! One hardly laughs, even. We have sufficient amiability, as a matter of good taste, to pretend to be amused and appear to laugh. The grimace is imitated well enough, but the real thing is never done. Go to the theaters of the common people — there you will see laughter. Go among the *bourgeoisie*, when they are amusing themselves; you will see them laugh to suffocation. Go to the soldiers’ quarters, you will see men choking, their eyes full of tears, doubled up on their beds over the jokes of some funny fellow. But in our drawing-rooms we never laugh. I tell you that we simulate everything, even laughter.”

Musadieu interrupted him:

“Permit me to say that you are very severe. It seems to me that you yourself, my dear fellow, do not wholly despise this society at which you rail so bitterly.”

Bertin smiled.

“I? I love it!” he declared.

“But then — — “

“I despise myself a little, as a mongrel of doubtful race.”

“All that sort of talk is nothing but a pose,” said the Duchess.

And, as he denied having any intention of posing, she cut short the discussion by declaring that all artists try to make people believe that chalk is cheese.

The conversation then became general, touching upon everything, ordinary and pleasant, friendly and critical, and, as the dinner was drawing toward its end, the Countess suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the full glasses of wine that were ranged before her plate:

“Well, you see that I have drunk nothing, nothing, not a drop! We shall see whether I shall not grow thin!”

The Duchess, furious, tried to make her swallow some mineral water, but in vain; then she exclaimed:

"Oh, the little simpleton! That daughter of hers will turn her head. I beg of you, Guilleroy, prevent your wife from committing this folly."

The Count, who was explaining to Musadieu the system of a threshing-machine invented in America, had not been listening.

"What folly, Duchess?"

"The folly of wishing to grow thin."

The Count looked at his wife with an expression of kindly indifference.

"I never have formed the habit of opposing her," he replied.

The Countess had risen, taking the arm of her neighbor; the Count offered his to the Duchess, and they passed into the large drawing-room, the boudoir at the end being reserved for use in the daytime.

It was a vast and well lighted room. On the four walls the large and beautiful panels of pale blue silk, of antique pattern, framed in white and gold, took on under the light of the lamps and the chandelier a moonlight softness and brightness. In the center of the principal one, the portrait of the Countess by Olivier Bertin seemed to inhabit, to animate the apartment. It had a look of being at home there, mingling with the air of the salon its youthful smile, the grace of its pose, the bright charm of its golden hair. It had become almost a custom, a sort of polite ceremony, like making the sign of the cross on entering a church, to compliment the model on the work of the painter whenever anyone stood before it.

Musadieu never failed to do this. His opinion as a connoisseur commissioned by the State having the value of that of an official expert, he regarded it as his duty to affirm often, with conviction, the superiority of that painting.

"Indeed," said he, "that is the most beautiful modern portrait I know. There is prodigious life in it."

The Comte de Guilleroy, who, through hearing this portrait continually praised, had acquired a rooted conviction that he possessed a masterpiece, approached to join him, and for a minute or two they lavished upon the portrait all the art technicalities of the day in praise of the apparent qualities of the work, and also of those that were suggested.

All eyes were lifted toward the portrait, apparently in a rapture of admiration, and Olivier Bertin, accustomed to these eulogies, to which he paid hardly more attention than to questions about his health when meeting some one in the street, nevertheless adjusted the reflector lamp placed before the portrait in order to illumine it, the servant having carelessly set it a little on one side.

Then they seated themselves, and as the Count approached the Duchess, she said to him:

"I believe that my nephew is coming here for me, and to ask you for a cup of tea."

Their wishes, for some time, had been mutually understood and agreed, without either side ever having exchanged confidences or even hints.

The Marquis de Farandal, who was the brother of the Duchesse de Mortemain, after almost ruining himself at the gaming table, had died of the effects of a fall from his horse, leaving a widow and a son. This young man, now nearly twenty-eight years of age, was one of the most popular leaders of the cotillion in Europe, for he was sometimes requested to go to Vienna or to London to crown in the waltz some princely ball. Although possessing very small means, he remained, through his social station, his family, his name, and his almost royal connections, one of the most popular and envied men in Paris.

It was necessary to give a solid foundation to this glory of his youth, and after a rich, a very rich marriage, to replace social triumphs by political success. As soon as the Marquis should become a deputy, he would become also, by that attainment alone, one of the props of the future throne, one of the counselors of the King, one of the leaders of the party.

The Duchess, who was well informed, knew the amount of the enormous fortune of the Comte de Guilleroy, a prudent hoarder of money, who lived in a simple apartment when he was quite able to live like a great lord in one of the handsomest mansions of Paris. She knew about his always successful speculations, his subtle scent as a financier, his share in the most fruitful schemes of the past ten years, and she had cherished the idea of marrying her nephew to the daughter of the Norman deputy, to whom this marriage would give an immense influence in the aristocratic society of the princely circle. Guilleroy, who had made a rich marriage, and had thereby increased a large personal fortune, now nursed other ambitions.

He had faith in the return of the King, and wished, when that event should come, to be so situated as to derive from it the largest personal profit.

As a simple deputy, he did not cut a prominent figure. As a father-in-law of the Marquis of Farandal, whose ancestors had been the faithful and chosen familiars of the royal house of France, he might rise to the first rank.

The friendship of the Duchess for his wife lent to this union an element of intimacy that was very precious; and, for fear some other young girl might appear who would please the Marquis, he had brought about the return of his own daughter in order to hasten events.

Madame de Mortemain, foreseeing and divining his plans, lent him her silent complicity; and on that very day, although she had not been informed of the sudden return of the young girl, she had made an appointment with her nephew to meet her at the Guilleroys, so that he might gradually become accustomed to visit that house frequently.

For the first time, the Count and the Duchess spoke of their mutual desires in veiled terms; and when they parted, a treaty of alliance had been concluded.

At the other end of the room everyone was laughing at a story M. de Musadieu was telling to the Baroness de Corbelle about the presentation of a negro ambassador to the President of the Republic, when the Marquis de Farandal was announced.

He appeared in the doorway and paused. With a quick and familiar gesture, he placed a monocle on his right eye and left it there, as if to reconnoiter the room he was about to enter, but perhaps to give those that were already there the time to see him and to observe his entrance. Then by an imperceptible movement of cheek and eyebrow, he allowed to drop the bit of glass at the end of a black silk hair, and advanced quickly toward Madame de Guilleroy, whose extended hand he kissed, bowing very low. He saluted his aunt likewise, then shook hands with the rest of the company, going from one to another with easy elegance of manner.

He was a tall fellow, with a red moustache, and was already slightly bald, with the figure of an officer and the gait of an English sportsman. It was evident, at first sight of him, that all his limbs were better exercised than his head, and that he cared only for such occupations as developed strength and physical activity. He had some education, however, for he had learned, and was learning every day, by much mental effort, a great deal that would be useful to him to know later: history, studying dates unweariedly, but mistaking the lesson to be learned from facts and the elementary notions of political economy necessary to a deputy, the A B C of sociology for the use of the ruling classes.

Musadieu esteemed him, saying: “He will be a valuable man.” Bertin appreciated his skill and his vigor. They went to the same fencing-hall, often hunted together, and met while riding in the avenues of the Bois. Between them, therefore, had been formed a sympathy of similar tastes, that instinctive free-masonry which creates between two men a subject of conversation, as agreeable to one as to the other.

When the Marquis was presented to Annette de Guilleroy, he immediately had a suspicion of his aunt’s designs, and after saluting her he ran his eyes over her, with the rapid glance of a connoisseur.

He decided that she was graceful, and above all full of promise, for he had led so many cotillions that he knew young girls well, and could predict almost to a certainty the future of their beauty, as an expert who tastes a wine as yet too new.

He exchanged only a few unimportant words with her, then seated himself near the Baroness de Corbelle, so that he could chat with her in an undertone.

Everyone took leave at an early hour, and when all had gone, when the child was in her bed, the lamps were extinguished, the servants gone to their own quarters, the Comte de Guilleroy, walking across the drawing-room, lighted now by only two candles, detained for a long time the Countess, who was half asleep in an armchair, to tell her of his hopes, to suggest the attitude for themselves to assume, to forecast all combinations, the chances and the precautions to be taken.

It was late when he retired, charmed, however, with this evening, and murmuring, “I believe that that affair is a certainty.”

CHAPTER III. A FLAME REKINDLED

"*When will you come, my friend? I have not seen you for three days, and that seems a long time to me. My daughter occupies much of my time, but you know that I can no longer do without you.*"

The painter, who was drawing sketches, ever seeking a new subject re-read the Countess's note, then, opening the drawer of a writing-desk, he deposited it on a heap of other letters, which had been accumulating there since the beginning of their love-affair.

Thanks to the opportunities given them by the customs of fashionable society, they had grown used to seeing each other almost every day. Now and then she visited him, and sat for an hour or two in the armchair in which she had posed, while he worked. But, as she had some fear of the criticisms of the servants, she preferred to receive him at her own house, or to meet him elsewhere, for that daily interview, that small change of love.

These meetings would be agreed upon beforehand, and always seemed perfectly natural to M. de Guilleroy.

Twice a week at least the painter dined at the Countess's house, with a few friends; on Monday nights he visited her in her box at the Opera; then they would agree upon a meeting at such or such a house, to which chance led them at the same hour. He knew the evenings that she did not go out, and would call then to have a cup of tea with her, feeling himself very much at home even near the folds of her robe, so tenderly and so surely settled in that ripe affection, so fixed in the habit of finding her somewhere, of passing some time by her side, or exchanging a few words with her and of mingling a few thoughts, that he felt, although the glow of his passion had long since faded, an incessant need of seeing her.

The desire for family life, for a full and animated household, for the family table, for those evenings when one talks without fatigue with old friends, that desire for contact, for familiarity, for human intercourse, which dwells dormant in every human heart, and which every old bachelor carries from door to door to his friends, where he installs something of himself, added a strain of egoism to his sentiments of affection. In that house, where he was loved and spoiled, where he found everything, he could still rest and nurse his solitude.

For three days he had not seen his friends, who must be very much occupied by the return of the daughter of the house; and he was already feeling bored, and even a little offended because they had not sent for him sooner, but not wishing, as a matter of discretion, to be the first to make an approach.

The Countess's letter aroused him like the stroke of a whip. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. He decided to go immediately to her house, that he might find her before she went out.

The valet appeared, summoned by the sound of Olivier's bell.

"What sort of weather is it, Joseph?"

"Very fine, Monsieur."

"Warm?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"White waistcoat, blue jacket, gray hat."

He always dressed with elegance, but although his tailor turned him out in correct styles, the very way in which he wore his clothes, his manner of walking, his comfortable proportions encased in a white waistcoat, his high gray felt hat, tilted a little toward the back of his head, seemed to reveal at once that he was both an artist and a bachelor.

When he reached the Countess's house, he was told that she was dressing for a drive in the Bois. He was a little vexed at this, and waited.

According to his habit, he began to pace to and fro in the drawing-room, going from one seat to another, or from the windows to the wall, in the large drawing-room darkened by the curtains. On the light tables with gilded feet, trifles of various kinds, useless, pretty, and costly, lay scattered about in studied disorder. There were little antique boxes of chased gold, miniature snuff-boxes, ivory statuettes, objects in dull silver, quite modern, of an exaggerated severity, in which English taste appeared: a diminutive kitchen stove, and upon it a cat drinking from a pan, a cigarette-case simulating a loaf of bread, a coffee-pot to hold matches, and in a casket a complete set of doll's jewelry — necklaces, bracelets, rings, brooches, ear-rings set with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, a microscopic fantasy that seemed to have been executed by Lilliputian jewelers.

From time to time he touched some object, given by himself on some anniversary; he lifted it, handled it, examining it with dreamy indifference, then put it back in its place.

In one corner some books that were luxuriously bound but seldom opened lay within easy reach on a round table with a single leg for a foundation, which stood before a little curved sofa. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* lay there also, somewhat worn, with turned-down pages, as if it had been read and re-read many times; other publications lay near it, some of them uncut: the *Arts modernes*, which is bought only because of its cost, the subscription price being four hundred francs a year; and the *Feuille libre*, a thin volume between blue covers, in which appear the more recent poets, called "*les enerves*."

Between the windows stood the Countess's writing-desk, a coquettish piece of furniture of the last century, on which she wrote replies to those hurried questions handed to her during her receptions. A few books were on that, also, familiar books, index to the heart and mind of a woman: Musset, Manon Lescaut, Werther; and, to show that she was not a stranger to the complicated sensations and mysteries of psychology, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *La Femme au XVIII Siecle*, *Adolphe*.

Beside the books lay a charming hand-mirror, a masterpiece of the silversmith's art, the glass being turned down upon a square of embroidered velvet, in order to allow one to admire the curious gold and silver workmanship on the back. Bertin took it up and looked at his own reflection. For some years he had been growing terribly old in appearance, and although he thought that his face showed more originality than when he was younger, the sight of his heavy cheeks and increasing wrinkles saddened him.

A door opened behind him.

"Good morning, Monsieur Bertin," said Annette.

"Good morning, little one; are you well?"

"Very well; and you?"

"What, are you not saying 'thou' to me, then, after all?"

"No, indeed! It would really embarrass me."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, it would. You make me feel timid."

"And why, pray?"

"Because — because you are neither young enough nor old enough— "

The painter laughed.

"After such a reason as that I will insist no more."

She blushed suddenly, up to the white brow, where the waves of hair began to ripple, and resumed, with an air of slight confusion:

"Mamma told me to say to you that she will be down immediately, and to ask you whether you will go to the Bois de Boulogne with us."

"Yes, certainly. You are alone?"

"No; with the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Very well; I will go."

"Then will you allow me to go and put on my hat?"

"Yes, go, my child."

As Annette left the room the Countess entered, veiled, ready to set forth. She extended her hands cordially.

"We never see you any more. What are you doing?" she inquired.

"I did not wish to trouble you just at this time," said Bertin.

In the tone with which she spoke the word "Olivier!" she expressed all her reproaches and all her attachment.

"You are the best woman in the world," he said, touched by the tender intonation of his name.

This little love-quarrel being finished and settled, the Countess resumed her light, society tone.

"We shall pick up the Duchess at her hotel and then make a tour of the Bois. We must show all that sort of thing to Nanette, you know."

The landau awaited them under the porte-cochere.

Bertin seated himself facing the two ladies, and the carriage departed, the pawing of the horses making a resonant sound against the over-arching roof of the porte-cochere.

Along the grand boulevard descending toward the Madeleine all the gaiety of the springtime seemed to have fallen upon the tide of humanity.

The soft air and the sunshine lent to the men a festive air, to the women a suggestion of love; the bakers' boys deposited their baskets on the benches to run and play with their brethren, the street urchins; the dogs appeared in a great hurry to go somewhere; the canaries hanging in the boxes of the concierges trilled loudly; only the ancient cab-horses kept their usual sedate pace.

"Oh, what a beautiful day! How good it is to live!" murmured the Countess.

The painter contemplated both mother and daughter in the dazzling light. Certainly, they were different, but at the same time so much alike that the latter was veritably a continuation of the former, made of the same blood, the same flesh, animated by the same life. Their eyes, above all, those blue eyes flecked with tiny black drops, of such a brilliant blue in the daughter, a little faded in the mother, fixed upon him a look so similar that he expected to hear them make the same replies. And he was surprised to discover, as he made them laugh and talk, that before him were two very distinct women, one who had lived and one who was about to live. No, he did not foresee what would become of that child when her young mind, influenced by tastes and instincts that were as yet dormant, should have expanded and developed amid the life of the world. This was a pretty little new person, ready for chances and for love, ignored and ignorant, who was sailing out of port like a vessel, while her mother was returning, having traversed life and having loved!

He was touched at the thought that she had chosen himself, and that she preferred him still, this woman who had remained so pretty, rocked in that landau, in the warm air of springtime.

As he expressed his gratitude to her in a glance, she divined it, and he thought he could feel her thanks in the rustle of her robe.

In his turn he murmured: “Oh, yes, what a beautiful day!”

When they had taken up the Duchess, in the Rue de Varenne, they spun along at a swift pace toward the Invalides, crossed the Seine, and reached the Avenue des Champs-Elysees, going up toward the Arc de triomphe de l’Etoile in the midst of a sea of carriages.

The young girl was seated beside Olivier, riding backward, and she opened upon this stream of equipages wide and wondering eager eyes. Occasionally, when the Duchess and the Countess acknowledged a salutation with a short movement of the head, she would ask “Who is that?” Bertin answered: “The Pontaiglin,” “the Puicelci,” “the Comtesse de Lochrist,” or “the beautiful Madame Mandeliere.”

Now they were following the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, amid the noise and the rattling of wheels. The carriages, a little less crowded than below the Arc de Triomphe, seemed to struggle in an endless race. The cabs, the heavy landaus, the solemn eight-spring vehicles, passed one another over and over again, distanced suddenly by a rapid victoria, drawn by a single trotter, bearing along at a reckless pace, through all that rolling throng, *bourgeois* and aristocratic, through all societies, all classes, all hierarchies, an indolent young woman, whose bright and striking toilette diffused among the carriages it touched in passing a strange perfume of some unknown flower.

“Who is that lady?” Annette inquired.

“I don’t know,” said Bertin, at which reply the Duchess and the Countess exchanged a smile.

The leaves were opening, the familiar nightingales of that Parisian garden were singing already among the tender verdure, and when, as the carriage approached the lake, it joined the long file of other vehicles at a walk, there was an incessant exchange of salutations, smiles, and friendly words, as the wheels touched. The procession seemed now like the gliding of a flotilla in which were seated very well-bred ladies and gentlemen. The Duchess, who was bowing every moment before raised hats or inclined heads, appeared to be passing them in review, calling to mind what she knew, thought, or supposed of these people, as they defiled before her.

“Look, dearest, there is the lovely Madame Mandeliere again — the beauty of the Republic.”

In a light and dashing carriage, the beauty of the Republic allowed to be admired, under an apparent indifference to this indisputable glory, her large dark eyes, her low brow beneath a veil of dusky hair, and her mouth, which was a shade too obstinate in its lines.

“Very beautiful, all the same,” said Bertin.

The Countess did not like to hear him praise other women. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, but said nothing.

But the young girl, in whom the instinct of rivalry suddenly awoke, ventured to say: “I do not find her beautiful at all.”

“What! You do not think her beautiful?” said the painter.

“No; she looks as if she had been dipped in ink.”

The Duchess, delighted, burst into laughter.

“Bravo, little one!” she cried. “For the last six years half the men in Paris have been swooning at the feet of that negress! I believe that they sneer at us. Look at the Comtesse de Lochrist instead.”

Alone, in a landau with a white poodle, the Countess, delicate as a miniature, a blond with brown eyes, whose grace and beauty had served for five or six years as the theme for the admiration of her partisans, bowed to the ladies, with a fixed smile on her lips.

But Nanette exhibited no greater enthusiasm than before.

“Oh,” she said, “she is no longer young!”

Bertin, who usually did not at all agree with the Countess in the daily discussions of these two rivals, felt a sudden irritation at the stupid intolerance of this little simpleton.

“Nonsense!” he said. “Whether one likes her or not, she is charming; and I only hope that you may become as pretty as she.”

“Pooh! pooh!” said the Duchess. “You notice women only after they have passed the thirtieth year. The child is right. You admire only *passee* beauty.”

“Pardon me!” he exclaimed; “a woman is really beautiful only after maturing, when the expression of her face and eyes has become fully developed!”

He enlarged upon this idea that the first youthful freshness is only the gloss of riper beauty; he demonstrated that men of the world were wise in paying but little attention to young girls in their first season, and that they were right in proclaiming them beautiful only when they passed into their later period of bloom.

The Countess, flattered, murmured: “He is right; he speaks as an artist. The youthful countenance is very charming, but it is always a trifle commonplace.”

The painter continued to urge his point, indicating at what moment a face that was losing, little by little, the undecided grace of youth, really assumed its definite form, its true character and physiognomy.

At each word the Countess said “Yes,” with a little nod of conviction; and the more he affirmed, with all the heat of a lawyer making a plea, with the animation of the accused pleading his own cause, the more she approved, by glance and gesture, as if they two were allied against some danger, and must defend themselves against some false and menacing opinion. Annette hardly heard them, she was so engrossed in looking about her. Her usually smiling face had become grave, and she said no more, carried away by the pleasure of the rapid driving. The sunlight, the trees, the carriage, this delightful life, so rich and gay — all this was for her!

Every day she might come here, recognized in her turn, saluted and envied; and perhaps the men, in pointing her out to one another, would say that she was beautiful. She noticed all those that appeared to her distinguished among the throng and inquired their names, without thinking of anything beyond the mere sound of the syllables, though sometimes they awoke in her an echo of respect and admiration, when she realized that she had seen them often in the newspapers or heard stories concerning them.

She could not become accustomed to this long procession of celebrities; it seemed unreal to her, as if she were a part of some stage spectacle. The cabs filled her with disdain mingled with disgust; they annoyed and irritated her, and suddenly she said:

“I think they should not allow anything but private carriages to come here.”

“Indeed, Mademoiselle!” said Bertin; “and then what becomes of our equality, liberty and fraternity?”

Annette made a moue that signified “Don’t talk about that!” and continued:

“They should have a separate drive for cabs — that of Vincennes, for instance.”

“You are behind the times, little one, and evidently do not know that we are swimming in the full tide of democracy. But, if you wish to see this place free from any mingling of the middle class, come in the morning, and then you will find only the fine flower of society.”

He proceeded to describe graphically, as he knew well how to do, the Bois in the morning hours with its gay cavaliers and fair Amazons, that club where everyone knows everyone else by their Christian names, their pet names, their family connections, titles, qualities, and vices, as if they all lived in the same neighborhood or in the same small town.

“Do you come here often at that hour?” Annette inquired.

“Very often; there is no more charming place in Paris.”

“Do you come on horseback in the mornings?”

“Yes.”

“And in the afternoon you pay visits?”

“Yes.”

“Then, when do you work?”

“Oh, I work — sometimes; and besides, you see, I have chosen a special entertainment suited to my tastes. As I paint the portraits of beautiful women, it is necessary that I should see them and follow them everywhere.”

“On foot and on horseback!” murmured Annette, with a perfectly serious face.

He threw her a sidelong glance of appreciation, which seemed to say: “Ah! you are witty, even now! You will do very well.”

A breath of cold air from far away, from the country that was hardly awake as yet, swept over the park, and the whole Bois, coquettish, frivolous, and fashionable, shivered under its chill. For some seconds it caused the tender leaves to tremble on the trees, and garments on shoulders. All the women, with a movement almost simultaneous, drew up over their arms and chests their wraps lying behind them; and the horses began to trot, from one end of the avenue to the other, as if the keen wind had flicked them like a whip.

The Countess's party returned quickly, to the silvery jingle of the harness, under the slanting red rays of the setting sun.

"Shall you go home?" inquired the Countess of Bertin, with whose habits she was familiar.

"No, I am going to the club."

"Then, shall we set you down there in passing?"

"Thank you, that will be very convenient."

"And when shall you invite us to breakfast with the Duchess?"

"Name your day."

This painter in ordinary to the fair Parisians, whom his admirers christened "a Watteau realist" and his detractors a "photographer of gowns and mantles," often received at breakfast or at dinner the beautiful persons whose feature he had reproduced, as well as the celebrated and the well known, who found very amusing these little entertainments in a bachelor's establishment.

"The day after to-morrow, then. Will the day after to-morrow suit you, my dear Duchess?" asked Madame de Guilleroy.

"Yes, indeed; you are charming! Monsieur Bertin never thinks of me when he has his little parties. It is quite evident that I am no longer young."

The Countess, accustomed to consider the artist's home almost the same as her own, replied:

"Only we four, the four of the landau — the Duchess, Annette, you and I, eh, great artist?"

"Only ourselves," said he, alighting from the carriage, "and I will have prepared for you some crabs *a l'alsacienne*."

"Oh, you will awaken a desire for luxury in the little one!"

He bowed to them, standing beside the carriage door, then entered quickly the vestibule of the main entrance to the club, threw his topcoat and cane to a group of footmen, who had risen like soldiers at the passing of an officer; mounted the broad stairway, meeting another brigade of servants in knee-breeches, pushed open a door, feeling himself suddenly as alert as a young man, as he heard at the end of the corridor a continuous clash of foils, the sound of stamping feet, and loud exclamations: *"Touche!" "A moi." "Passe!" "J'en ai!" "Touche!" "A vous!"*

In the fencing-hall the swordsmen, dressed in gray linen, with leather vests, their trousers tight around the ankles, a sort of apron falling over the front of the body, one arm in the air, with the hand thrown backward, and in the other hand, enormous in a large fencing-glove, the thin, flexible foil, extended and recovered with the agile swiftness of mechanical jumping-jacks.

Others rested and chatted, still out of breath, red and perspiring, with handkerchief in hand to wipe off faces and necks; others, seated on a square divan that ran along the four sides of the hall, watched the fencing — Liverdy against Landa, and the master of the club, Taillade, against the tall Rocdiane.

Bertin, smiling, quite at home, shook hands with several men.

"I choose you!" cried the Baron de Baverie.

"I am with you, my dear fellow," said Bertin, passing into the dressing-room to prepare himself.

He had not felt so agile and vigorous for a long time, and, guessing that he should fence well that day, he hurried as impatiently as a schoolboy ready for play. As soon as he stood before his adversary he attacked him with great ardor, and in ten minutes he had touched him eleven times and had so fatigued him that the Baron cried for quarter. Then he fenced with Punisimont, and with his colleague, Amaury Maldant.

The cold douche that followed, freezing his palpitating flesh, reminded him of the baths of his twentieth year, when he used to plunge head first into the Seine from the bridges in the suburbs, in order to amaze the bourgeois passers-by.

"Shall you dine here?" inquired Maldant.

"Yes."

"We have a table with Liverdy, Rocdiane, and Landa; make haste; it is a quarter past seven."

The dining-room was full, and there was a continuous hum of men's voices.

There were all the nocturnal vagabonds of Paris, idlers and workers, all those who from seven o'clock in the evening know not what to do and dine at the club, ready to catch at anything or anybody that chance may offer to amuse them.

When the five friends were seated the banker Liverdy, a vigorous and hearty man of forty, said to Bertin:

“You were in fine form this evening.”

“Yes, I could have done surprising things to-day,” Bertin replied.

The others smiled, and the landscape painter, Amaury Maldant, a thin little bald-headed man with a gray beard, said, with a sly expression:

“I, too, always feel the rising of the sap in April; it makes me bring forth a few leaves — half a dozen at most — then it runs into sentiment; there never is any fruit.”

The Marquis de Rocdiane and the Comte Landa sympathized with him. Both were older than he, though even a keen eye could not guess their age; clubmen, horsemen, swordsmen, whose incessant exercise had given them bodies of steel, they boasted of being younger in every way than the enervated good-for-nothings of the new generation.

Rocdiane, of good family, with the entree to all salons, though suspected of financial intrigues of many kinds (which, according to Bertin, was not surprising, since he had lived so much in the gaming-houses), married, but separated from his wife, who paid him an annuity, a director of Belgian and Portuguese banks, carried boldly upon his energetic, Don Quixote-like face the somewhat tarnished honor of a gentleman, which was occasionally brightened by the blood from a thrust in a duel.

The Comte de Landa, a good-natured colossus, proud of his figure and his shoulders, although married and the father of two children, found it difficult to dine at home three times a week; he remained at the club on the other days, with his friends, after the session in the fencing-hall.

“The club is a family,” he said, “the family of those who as yet have none, of those who never will have one, and of those who are bored by their own.”

The conversation branched off on the subject of women, glided from anecdotes to reminiscences, from reminiscences to boasts, and then to indiscreet confidences.

The Marquis de Rocdiane allowed the names of his inamoratas to be guessed by unmistakable hints — society women whose names he did not utter, so that their identity might be the better surmised. The banker Liverdy indicated his flames by their first names. He would say: “I was at that time the best of friends with the wife of a diplomat. Now, one evening when I was leaving her, I said to her, ‘My little Marguerite’” — then he checked himself, amid the smiles of his fellows, adding “Ha! I let something slip. One should form a habit of calling all women Sophie.”

Olivier Bertin, very reserved, was accustomed to declare, when questioned:

“For my part, I content myself with my models.”

They pretended to believe him, and Landa, who was frankly a libertine, grew quite excited at the idea of all the pretty creatures that walked the streets and all the young persons who posed undraped before the painter at ten francs an hour.

As the bottle became empty, all these gray-beards, as the younger members of the club called them, acquired red faces, and their kindling ardor awakened new desires.

Rocdiane, after the coffee, became still more indiscreet, and forgot the society women to celebrate the charms of simple cocottes.

“Paris!” said he, a glass of kummel in his hand, “The only city where a man never grows old, the only one where, at fifty, if he is sound and well preserved, he will always find a young girl, as pretty as an angel, to love him.”

Landa, finding again his Rocdiane after the liqueurs, applauded him enthusiastically, and mentioned the young girls who still adored him every day.

But Liverdy, more skeptical, and pretending to know exactly what women were worth, murmured: “Yes, they tell you that they adore you!”

“They prove it to me, my dear fellow,” exclaimed Landa.

“Such proofs don’t count.”

“They suffice me!”

“But, *sacrebleu!* they do mean it,” cried Rocdiane. “Do you believe that a pretty little creature of twenty, who has been going the rounds in Paris for five or six years already, where all our moustaches have taught her kisses and spoiled her taste for them, still knows how to distinguish a man of thirty from a man of sixty? Pshaw! what nonsense! She has seen and known too many of them. Now, I’ll wager that, down in the bottom of her heart, she actually prefers an old banker to a young stripling. Does she know or reflect upon that? Have men any age here? Oh, my dear fellow, we grow young as we grow gray, and the whiter our hair becomes the more they tell us they love us, the more they show it, and the more they believe it."

They rose from the table, their blood warmed and lashed by alcohol, ready to make any conquest; and they began to deliberate how to spend the evening, Bertin mentioning the Cirque, Rocdiane the Hippodrome, Maldant the Eden, and Landa the Folies-Bergere, when a light and distant sound of the tuning of violins reached their ears.

"Ah, there is music at the club to-day, it seems," said Rocdiane.

"Yes," Bertin replied. "Shall we listen for ten minutes before going out?"

"Agreed."

They crossed a salon, a billiard-room, a card-room, and finally reached a sort of box over the gallery of the musicians. Four gentlemen, ensconced in armchairs, were waiting there already, in easy attitudes, while below, among rows of empty seats, a dozen others were chatting, sitting or standing.

The conductor tapped his desk with his bow; the music began.

Olivier adored music as an opium-eater adores opium. It made him dream.

As soon as the sonorous wave from the instruments reached him he felt himself borne away in a sort of nervous intoxication, which thrilled body and mind indescribably. His imagination ran riot, made drunk by melody, and carried him along through sweet dreams and charming reveries. With closed eyes, legs crossed, and folded arms, he listened to the strains, and gave himself up to the visions that passed before his eyes and into his mind.

The orchestra was playing one of Haydn's symphonies, and when Bertin's eyelids drooped over his eyes, he saw again the Bois, the crowd of carriages around him, and facing him in the landau the Countess and her daughter. He heard their voices, followed their words, felt the movement of the carriage, inhaled the air, filled with the odor of young leaves.

Three times, his neighbor, speaking to him, interrupted this vision, which three times he began again, as the rolling of the vessel seems to continue when, after crossing the ocean, one lies motionless in bed.

Then it extended itself to a long voyage, with the two women always seated before him, sometimes on the railway, again at the table of strange hotels. During the whole execution of the symphony they accompanied him, as if, while driving with him in the sunshine, they had left the image of their two faces imprinted on his vision.

Silence followed; then came a noise of seats being moved and chattering of voices, which dispelled this vapor of a dream, and he perceived, dozing around him, his four friends, relaxed from a listening attitude to the comfortable posture of sleep.

“Well, what shall we do now?” he asked, after he had roused them.

“I should like to sleep here a little longer,” replied Rocdiane frankly.

“And I, too,” said Landa.

Bertin rose.

“Well, I shall go home,” he said. “I am rather tired.”

He felt very animated, on the contrary, but he wished to go, fearing the end of the evening around the baccarat-table of the club, which unfortunately he knew so well.

He went home, therefore, and the following day, after a nervous night, one of those nights that put artists in that condition of cerebral activity called inspiration, he decided not to go out, but to work until evening.

It was an excellent day, one of those days of facile production, when ideas seem to descend into the hands and fix themselves upon the canvas.

With doors shut, far from the world, in the quiet of his own dwelling, closed to everyone, in the friendly peace of his studio, with clear eye, lucid mind, enthusiastic, alert, he tasted that happiness given only to artists, the happiness of bringing forth their work in joy. Nothing existed any more for him in such hours of work except the piece of canvas on which was born an image under the caress of his brush; and he experienced, in these crises of productiveness, a strange and delicious sensation of abounding life which intoxicated him. When evening came he was exhausted as by healthful fatigue, and went to sleep with agreeable anticipation of his breakfast the next morning.

The table was covered with flowers, the menu was carefully chosen, for Madame de Guilleroy’s sake, as she was a refined epicure; and in spite of strong but brief resistance, the painter compelled his guests to drink champagne.

“The little one will get intoxicated,” protested the Countess.

“Dear me! there must be a first time,” replied the indulgent Duchess.

Everyone, as the party returned to the studio, felt stirred by that light gaiety which lifts one as if the feet had wings.

The Duchess and the Countess, having an engagement at a meeting of the Committee of French Mothers, were to take Annette home before going to the meeting; but Bertin offered to take her for a walk, and then to the Boulevard Malesherbes; so both ladies left them.

“Let us take the longest way,” said Annette.

“Would you like to stroll about the Monceau Park?” asked Bertin. “It is a very pretty place; we will look at the babies and nurses.”

“Yes, I should like that.”

They passed through the Avenue Velasquez and entered the gilded and monumental gate that serves as a sign and an entrance to that exquisite jewel of a park, displaying in the heart of Paris its verdant and artificial beauty, surrounded by a belt of princely mansions.

Along the wide walks, which unroll their massive and artistic curves through grassy lawns, throngs of people, sitting on iron chairs, watch the passers; while in the little paths, deep in shade and winding like streams, groups of children crawl in the sand, run about, or jump the rope under the indolent eyes of nurses or the anxious watchfulness of mothers. Two enormous trees, rounded into domes, like monuments of leaves, the gigantic horse-chestnuts, whose heavy verdure is lighted up by red and white clusters, the showy sycamores, the graceful plane-trees with their trunks designedly polished, set off in a charming perspective the tall, undulating grass.

The weather was warm, the turtle-doves were cooing among the branches, and flying to meet one another from the tree-tops, while the sparrows bathed in the rainbow formed by the sunshine and the spray thrown over the smooth turf. White statues on their pedestals seemed happy in the midst of the green freshness. A little marble boy was drawing from his foot an invisible thorn, as if he had just pricked himself in running after the Diana fleeing toward the little lake, imprisoned by the woods that screened the ruins of a temple.

Other statues, amorous and cold, embraced one another on the borders of the groves, or dreamed there, holding one knee in the hand. A cascade foamed and rolled over the pretty rocks; a tree, truncated like a column, supported an ivy; a tombstone bore an inscription. The stone shafts erected on the lawns hardly suggest better the Acropolis than this elegant little park recalled wild forests. It is the charming and artificial place where city people go to look at flowers grown in hot-houses, and to admire, as one admires the spectacle of life at the theater, that agreeable representation of the beauties of nature given in the heart of Paris.

Olivier Bertin had come almost every day for years to this favorite spot to look at the fair Parisians moving in their appropriate setting. “It is a park made for toilettes,” he would say; “Badly dressed people are horrible in it.” He would rove about there for hours, knowing all the plants and all the habitual visitors.

He now strolled beside Annette along the avenues, his eye distracted by the motley and animated crowd in the gardens.

“Oh, the little love!” exclaimed Annette. She was gazing at a tiny boy with blond curls, who was looking at her with his blue eyes full of surprise and delight.

Then she passed all the children in review, and the pleasure she felt in seeing those living dolls, decked out in their dainty ribbons, made her talkative and communicative.

She walked slowly, chatting to Bertin, giving him her reflections on the children, the nurses, and the mothers. The larger children drew from her little exclamations of joy, while the little pale ones touched her sympathy.

Bertin listened, more amused by her than by the little ones, and, always remembering his work, he murmured, “That is delicious!” thinking that he must make an exquisite picture, with one corner of this park and a bouquet of nurses, mothers and children. Why had he never thought of it before?

“You like those little ones?” he inquired.

“I adore them!”

He felt, from her manner of looking at them, that she longed to take them in her arms, to hug and kiss them — the natural and tender longing of a future mother; and he was surprised at this secret instinct hidden in this little woman.

As she appeared ready to talk, he questioned her about her tastes. She admitted, with pretty naivete, that she had hopes of social success and glory, and that she desired to have fine horses, which she knew almost as well as a horse-dealer, for a part of the farm at Roncieres was devoted to breeding; but she appeared to trouble her head no more about a fiance than one is concerned about an apartment, which is always to be found among the multitude of houses to rent.

They approached the lake, where two swans and six ducks were quietly floating, as clean and calm as porcelain birds, and they passed before a young woman sitting in a chair, with an open book lying on her knees, her eyes gazing upward, her soul having apparently taken flight in a dream.

She was as motionless as a wax figure. Plain, humble, dressed as a modest girl who has no thought of pleasing, she had gone to the land of Dreams, carried away by a phrase or a word that had bewitched her heart. Undoubtedly she was continuing, according to the impulse of her hopes, the adventure begun in the book.

Bertin paused, surprised. “How beautiful to dream like that!” said he.

They had passed before her; now they turned and passed her again without her perceiving them, so attentively did she follow the distant flight of her thought.

“Tell me, little one,” said the painter to Annette, “would it bore you very much to pose for me once or twice?”

“No, indeed! Quite the contrary.”

“Look well at that young lady who is roaming in the world of fancy.”

“The lady there, in that chair?”

“Yes. Well, you, too, will sit on a chair, you will have an open book on your knee, and you will try to do as she does. Have you ever had daydreams?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Of what?”

He tried to confess her as to her aerial flights, but she would make no reply, evaded his questions, looked at the ducks swimming after some bread thrown to them by a lady, and seemed embarrassed, as if he had touched upon a subject that was a sensitive point with her.

Then, to change the conversation, she talked about her life at Roncieres, spoke of her grandmother, to whom she read aloud a long time every day, and who must now feel very lonely and sad.

As he listened, the painter felt as gay as a bird, gay as he never had been. All that she had said, all the doings, the trifling everyday details of the simple life of a young girl, amused and interested him.

“Let us sit down,” he said.

They seated themselves near the water, and the two swans came floating toward them, expecting some fresh dainty.

Bertin felt recollections awakening within him — those faded remembrances that are drowned in forgetfulness, and which suddenly return, one knows not why. They surged up rapidly, of all sorts, and so numerous at the same time that it seemed to him a hand was stirring the miry depths of his memory.

He tried to guess the reasons of this rising up of his former life which several times already, though never so insistently as to-day, he had felt and remarked. A cause always existed for these sudden evocations — a natural and simple cause, an odor, perhaps, often a perfume. How many times a woman's draperies had thrown to him in passing, with the evaporating breath of some essence, a host of forgotten events. At the bottom of old perfume-bottles he had often found bits of his former existence; and all wandering odors — of streets, fields, houses, furniture, sweet or unsavory, the warm odors of summer evenings, the cold breath of winter nights, revived within him far-off reminiscences, as if odors kept embalmed within him these dead-and-gone memories, as aromatics preserve mummies.

Was it the damp grass or the chestnut blossoms that thus reanimated the past? No. What, then?

Was it his eye to which he owed this alertness? What had he seen? Nothing. Among the persons he had met, perhaps one might have resembled some one he had known, and, although he had not recognized it, it might have rung in his heart all the chords of the past.

Was it not a sound, rather? Very often he had heard by chance a piano, an unknown voice, even a hand-organ in the street playing some old air, which had suddenly made him feel twenty years younger, filling his breast with tender recollections, long buried.

But this appeal, continued, incessant, intangible, almost irritating! What was there near him to revive thus his extinct emotions?

"It is growing a little cool; we must go home," he said.

They rose, and resumed their walk.

He looked at the poor people sitting on benches, for whom a chair was too great an expense.

Annette also observed them, and felt disturbed at the thought of their lives, their occupations, surprised that they should come to lounge in this beautiful public garden, when their own appearance was so forlorn.

More than ever was Olivier now dreaming over past years. It seemed to him that a fly was humming in his ear, filling it with a buzzing song of bygone days.

The young girl, observing his dreamy air, asked:

"What is the matter? You seem sad."

His heart thrilled within him. Who had said that? She or her mother? Not her mother with her present voice but with her voice of long ago, so changed that he had only just recognized it.

"Nothing," he replied, smiling. "You entertain me very much; you are very charming, and you remind me of your mother."

How was it that he had not sooner remarked this strange echo of a voice once so familiar, now coming from these fresh lips?

"Go on talking," he said.

"Of what?"

"Tell me what your teachers have taught you. Did you like them?"

She began again to chat pleasantly. He listened, stirred by a growing anxiety; he watched and waited to detect, among the phrases of this young girl, almost a stranger to his heart, a word, a sound, a laugh, that seemed to have been imprisoned in her throat since her mother's youth. Certain intonations made him tremble with astonishment. Of course there were differences in their tones, the resemblance of which he had not remarked immediately, and which were in some ways so dissimilar that he had not confounded them at all; but these differences rendered all the more striking this sudden reproduction of the maternal speech. He had noted their facial resemblance with a friendly and curious eye, but now the mystery of this resuscitated voice mingled them in such a way that, turning away his head that he might no longer see the young girl, he asked himself whether it were not the Countess who was speaking thus to him, twelve years earlier.

Then when he had woven this hallucination, he turned toward her again, and found, as their eyes met, a little of the shy hesitation with which the mother's gaze had met his in the first days of their love.

They had already walked three times around the park, passing always before the same persons, the same nurses and children.

Annette was now inspecting the buildings surrounding the garden, inquiring the names of their owners. She wished to know all about them, asked questions with eager curiosity, seeming to fill her feminine mind with these details, and, with interested face, listening with her eyes as much as with her ears.

But when they arrived at the pavilion that separates the two gates of the outer boulevard, Bertin perceived that it was almost four o'clock.

"Oh," he said, "we must go home."

They walked slowly toward the Boulevard Malesherbes.

After the painter had left Annette at her home he proceeded toward the Place de la Concorde.

He sang to himself softly, longed to run, and would have been glad to jump over the benches, so agile did he feel. Paris seemed radiant to him, more beautiful than ever. “Decidedly the springtime revarnishes the whole world,” was his reflection.

He was in one of those periods of mental excitement when one understands everything with more pleasure, when the vision is clearer and more comprehensive, when one feels a keener joy in seeing and feeling, as if an all-powerful hand had brightened all the colors of earth, reanimated all living creatures, and had wound up in us, as in a watch that has stopped, the activity of sensation.

He thought, as his glance took in a thousand amusing things: “And I said that there were moments when I could no longer find subjects to paint!”

He felt such a sensation of freedom and clear-sightedness that all his artistic work seemed commonplace to him, and he conceived a new way of expressing life, truer and more original; and suddenly he was seized with a desire to return home and work, so he retraced his steps and shut himself up in his studio.

But as soon as he was alone, before a newly begun picture, the ardor that had burned in his blood began to cool. He felt tired, sat down on his divan, and again gave himself up to dreaming.

The sort of happy indifference in which he lived, that carelessness of the satisfied man whose almost every need is gratified, was leaving his heart by degrees, as if something were still lacking. He realized that his house was empty and his studio deserted. Then, looking around him, he fancied he saw pass by him the shadow of a woman whose presence was sweet. For a long time he had forgotten the sensation of impatience that a lover feels when awaiting the coming of his mistress, and now he suddenly felt that she was far away, and he longed, with the ardor of a young man, to have her near him.

He was moved in thinking how much they had loved each other; and in that vast apartment he found once more, where she had come so often, innumerable reminders of her, her gestures, words, and kisses. He recalled certain days, certain hours, certain moments, and he felt around him the sweetness of her early caresses.

He got up, unable to sit quietly any longer, and began to walk, thinking again that, in spite of this intimacy that had so filled his life, he still remained alone, always alone. After the long hours of work, when he looked around him, dazed by the reawakening of the man who returns to life, he saw and felt only walls within reach of his hand and voice. Not having any woman in his home, and not being able to meet the one he loved except with the precautions of a thief, he had been compelled to spend his leisure time in public places where one finds or purchases the means of killing time. He was accustomed to going to the club, to the Cirque and the Hippodrome, on fixed days, to the Opera, and to all sorts of places, so that he should not be compelled to go home, where no doubt he would have lived in perfect happiness had he only had her beside him.

Long before, in certain hours of tender abandon, he had suffered cruelly because he could not take her and keep her with him; then, as his ardor cooled, he had accepted quietly their separation and his own liberty; now he regretted them once more, as if he were again beginning to love her. And this return of tenderness invaded his heart so suddenly, almost without reason, because the weather was fine, and possibly because a little while ago he had recognized the rejuvenated voice of that woman! How slight a thing it takes to move a man's heart, a man who is growing old, with whom remembrance turns into regret!

As in former days, the need of seeing her again came to him, entering body and mind, like a fever; and he began to think after the fashion of a young lover, exalting her in his heart, and feeling himself exalted in his desire for her; then he decided, although he had seen her only that morning, to go and ask for a cup of tea that same evening.

The hours seemed long to him, and as he set out for the Boulevard Malesherbes he was seized with a fear of not finding her, which would force him still to pass the evening alone, as he had passed so many others.

To his query: "Is the Countess at home?" the servant's answer, "Yes, Monsieur," filled him with joy.

He said, with a radiant air: "It is I again!" as he appeared at the threshold of the smaller drawing-room where the two ladies were working, under the pink shade of a double lamp of English metal, on a high and slender standard.

"What, is it you? How fortunate!" exclaimed the Countess.

"Well, yes. I feel very lonely, so I came."

"How nice of you!"

"You are expecting someone?"

"No — perhaps — I never know."

He had seated himself and now looked scornfully at the gray knitting-work that mother and daughter were swiftly making from heavy wool, working at it with long needles.

“What is that?” he asked.

“Coverlets.”

“For the poor?”

“Yes, of course.”

“It is very ugly.”

“It is very warm.”

“Possibly, but it is very ugly, especially in a Louis Fifteenth apartment, where everything else charms the eye. If not for your poor, you really ought to make your charities more elegant, for the sake of your friends.”

“Oh, heavens, these men!” said the Countess, with a shrug of her shoulders. “Why, everyone is making this kind of coverlets just now.”

“I know that; I know it only too well! Once cannot make an evening call now without seeing that frightful gray stuff dragged over the prettiest gowns and the most elegant furniture. Bad taste seems to be the fashion this spring.”

To judge whether he spoke the truth, the Countess spread out her knitting on a silk-covered chair beside her; then she assented indifferently:

“Yes, you are right — it is ugly.”

Then she resumed her work. Upon the two bent heads fell a stream of light; a rosy radiance from the lamp illumined their hair and complexions, extending to their skirts and their moving fingers. They watched their work with that attention, light but continuous, given by women to this labor of the fingers which the eye follows without a thought.

At the four corners of the room four other lamps of Chinese porcelain, borne by ancient columns of gilded wood, shed upon the hangings a soft, even light, modified by lace shades thrown over the globes.

Bertin took a very low seat, a dwarf armchair, in which he could barely seat himself, but which he had always preferred when talking with the Countess because it brought him almost at her feet.

“You took a long walk with Nane this afternoon in the park,” said the Countess.

“Yes. We chatted like old friends. I like your daughter very much. She resembles you very strongly. When she pronounces certain phrases, one would believe that you had left your voice in her mouth.”

“My husband has already said that very often.”

He watched the two women work, bathed in the lamplight, and the thought that had often made him suffer, which had given him suffering that day, even — the recollection of his desolate home, still, silent, and cold, whatever the weather, whatever fire might be lighted in chimney or furnace — saddened him as if he now understood his bachelor’s isolation for the first time.

Oh, how deeply he longed to be the husband of this woman, and not her lover! Once he had desired to carry her away, to take her from that man, to steal her altogether. To-day he was jealous of him, that deceived husband who was installed beside her forever, in the habits of her household and under the sweet influence of her presence. In looking at her he felt his heart full of old things revived, of which he wished to speak. Certainly, he still loved her very much, even a little more to-day than he had for some time; and the desire to tell her of this return of youthful feeling, which would be sure to delight her, made him wish that she would send the young girl to bed as soon as possible.

Obsessed by this strong desire to be alone with her, to sit near her and lay his head on her knee, to take the hands from which would slip the quilt for the poor, the needles, and the ball of wool, which would roll under a sofa at the end of a long, unwound thread, he looked at the time, relapsed into almost complete silence, and thought that it was a great mistake to allow young girls to pass the evening with grown-up persons.

Presently a sound of footsteps was heard in the next room, and a servant appeared at the door announcing:

“Monsieur de Musadieu.”

Olivier Bertin felt a spasm of anger, and when he shook hands with the Inspector of Fine Arts he had a great desire to take him by the shoulders and throw him into the street.

Musadieu was full of news; the ministry was about to fall, and there was a whisper of scandal about the Marquis de Rocdiane. He looked at the young girl, adding: “I will tell you about that a little later.”

The Countess raised her eyes to the clock and saw that it was about to strike ten.

“It is time to go to bed, my child,” she said to her daughter.

Without replying, Annette folded her knitting-work, rolled up her ball of wool, kissed her mother on the cheeks, gave her hand to the two gentlemen, and departed quickly, as if she glided away without disturbing the air as she went.

"Well, what is your scandal?" her mother demanded, as soon as she had gone.

It appeared that rumor said that the Marquis de Rocdiane, amicably separated from his wife, who paid to him an allowance that he considered insufficient, had discovered a sure if singular means to double it. The Marquise, whom he had had watched, had been surprised *in flagrante delictu*, and was compelled to buy off, with an increased allowance, the legal proceedings instituted by the police commissioner.

The Countess listened with curious gaze, her idle hands holding the interrupted needle-work on her knee.

Bertin, who was still more exasperated by Musadieu's presence since Annette had gone, was incensed at this recital, and declared, with the indignation of one who had known of the scandal but did not wish to speak of it to anyone, that the story was an odious falsehood, one of those shameful lies which people of their world ought neither to listen to nor repeat. He appeared greatly wrought up over the matter, as he stood leaning against the mantelpiece and speaking with the excited manner of a man disposed to make a personal question of the subject under discussion.

Rocdiane was his friend, he said; and, though he might be criticised for frivolity in certain respects, no one could justly accuse him or even suspect him of any really unworthy action. Musadieu, surprised and embarrassed, defended himself, tried to explain and to excuse himself.

"Allow me to say," he remarked at last, "that I heard this story just before I came here, in the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Who told it to you? A woman, no doubt," said Bertin.

"No, not at all; it was the Marquis de Farandal."

The painter, irritated still further, retorted: "That does not astonish me — from him!"

There was a brief silence. The Countess took up her work again. Presently Olivier said in a calmer voice: "I know for a fact that that story is false."

In reality, he knew nothing whatever about it, having heard it mentioned then for the first time.

Musadieu thought it wise to prepare the way for his retreat, feeling the situation rather dangerous; and he was just beginning to say that he must pay a visit at the Corbelles' that evening when the Comte de Guilleroy appeared, returning from dining in the city.

Bertin sat down again, overcome, and despairing now of getting rid of the husband.

"You haven't heard, have you, of the great scandal that is running all over town this evening?" inquired the Count pleasantly.

As no one answered, he continued: "It seems that Rocdiane surprised his wife in a criminal situation, and has made her pay dearly for her indiscretion."

Then Bertin, with his melancholy air, with grief in voice and gesture, placing one hand on Guilleroy's shoulder, repeated in a gentle and amicable manner all that he had just said so roughly to Musadieu.

The Count, half convinced, annoyed to have allowed himself to repeat so lightly a doubtful and possibly compromising thing, pleaded his ignorance and his innocence. The gossips said so many false and wicked things!

Suddenly, all agreed upon this statement: the world certainly accused, suspected, and calumniated with deplorable facility! All four appeared to be convinced, during the next five minutes, that all the whispered scandals were lies; that the women did not have the lovers ascribed to them; that the men never committed the sins they were accused of; and, in short, that the outward appearance of things was usually much worse than the real situation.

Bertin, who no longer felt vexed with Musadieu since De Guilleroy's arrival, was now very pleasant to him, led him to talk on his favorite subjects, and opened the sluices of his eloquence. The Count wore the contented air of a man who carries everywhere with him an atmosphere of peace and cordiality.

Two servants noiselessly entered the drawing-room, bearing the tea-table, on which the boiling water steamed in a pretty, shining kettle over the blue flame of an alcohol lamp.

The Countess rose, prepared the hot beverage with the care and precaution we have learned from the Russians, then offered a cup to Musadieu, another to Bertin, following this with plates containing sandwiches of *pate de foies gras* and little English and Austrian cakes.

The Count approached the portable table, where was also an assortment of syrups, liqueurs, and glasses; he mixed himself a drink, then discreetly disappeared into the next room.

Bertin found himself again facing Musadieu, and felt once more the sudden desire to thrust outside this bore, who, now put on his mettle, talked at great length, told stories, repeated jests, and made some himself. The painter glanced continually at the clock, the hands of which approached midnight. The Countess noticed his glances, understood that he wished to speak to her alone, and, with that ability of a clever woman of the world to change by indescribable shades of tone the whole atmosphere of a drawing-room, to make it understood, without saying anything, whether one is to remain or to go, she diffused about her, by her attitude alone, by the bored expression of her face and eyes, a chill as if she had just opened a window.

Musadieu felt this chilly current freezing his flow of ideas; and, without asking himself the reason, he felt a sudden desire to rise and depart.

Bertin, as a matter of discretion, followed his example. The two men passed through both drawing-rooms together, followed by the Countess, who talked to the painter all the while. She detained him at the threshold of the ante-chamber to make some trifling explanation, while Musadieu, assisted by a footman, put on his topcoat. As Madame de Guilleroy continued to talk to Bertin, the Inspector of Fine Arts, having waited some seconds before the front door, held open by another servant, decided to depart himself rather than stand there facing the footman any longer.

The door was closed softly behind him, and the Countess said to the artist in a perfectly easy tone:

"Why do you go so soon? It is not yet midnight. Stay a little longer."

They reentered the smaller drawing-room together and seated themselves.

"My God! how that animal set my teeth on edge!" said Bertin.

"Why, pray?"

"He took you away from me a little."

"Oh, not very much."

"Perhaps not, but he irritated me."

"Are you jealous?"

"It is not being jealous to find a man a bore."

He had taken his accustomed armchair, and seated close beside her now he smoothed the folds of her robe with his fingers as he told her of the warm breath of tenderness that had passed through his heart that day.

The Countess listened, surprised, charmed, and gently laid her hand on his white locks, which she caressed tenderly, as if to thank him.

"I should like so much to live always near you!" he sighed.

He was thinking of her husband, who had retired to rest, asleep, no doubt, in some neighboring chamber, and he continued:

"It is undoubtedly true that marriage is the only thing that really unites two lives."

"My poor friend!" she murmured, full of pity for him and also for herself.

He had laid his cheek against the Countess's knees, and he looked up at her with a tenderness touched with sadness, less ardently than a short time before, when he had been separated from her by her daughter, her husband, and Musadieu.

"Heavens! how white your hair has grown!" said the Countess with a smile, running her fingers lightly over Olivier's head. "Your last black hairs have disappeared."

"Alas! I know it. Everything goes so soon!"

She was concerned lest she had made him sad.

"Oh, but your hair turned gray very early, you know," she said. "I have always known you with pepper-and-salt locks."

"Yes, that is true."

In order to dispel altogether the slight cloud of regret she had evoked, she leaned over him and, taking his head between her hands, kissed him slowly and tenderly on the forehead, with long kisses that seemed as if they never would end. Then they gazed into each other's eyes, seeking therein the reflection of their mutual fondness.

"I should like so much to pass a whole day with you," Bertin continued. He felt himself tormented obscurely by an inexpressible necessity for close intimacy. He had believed, only a short time ago, that the departure of those who had been present would suffice to realize the desire that had possessed him since morning; and now that he was alone with his mistress, now that he felt on his brow the touch of her hands, and, against his cheek, through the folds of her skirt, the warmth of her body, he felt the same agitation reawakened, the same longing for a love hitherto unknown and ever fleeing him. He now fancied that, away from that house — perhaps in the woods where they would be absolutely alone — this deep yearning of his heart would be calmed and satisfied.

"What a boy you are!" said the Countess. "Why, we see each other almost every day."

He begged her to devise a plan whereby she might breakfast with him, in some suburb of Paris, as she had already done four or five times.

The Countess was astonished at his caprice, so difficult to realize now that her daughter had returned. She assured him that she would try to do it as soon as her husband should go to Ronces; but that it would be impossible before the varnishing-day reception, which would take place the following Saturday.

“And until then when shall I see you?” he asked.

“To-morrow evening at the Corbelles’. Come over here Thursday, at three o’clock, if you are free; and I believe that we are to dine together with the Duchess on Friday.”

“Yes, exactly.”

He arose.

“Good-by!”

“Good-by, my friend.”

He remained standing, unable to decide to go, for he had said almost nothing of all that he had come to say, and his mind was still full of unsaid things, his heart still swelled with vague desires which he could not express.

“Good-bye!” he repeated, taking her hands.

“Good-by, my friend!”

“I love you!”

She gave him one of those smiles with which a woman shows a man, in a single instant, all that she has given him.

With a throbbing heart he repeated for the third time, “Good-by!” and departed.

CHAPTER IV. A DOUBLE JEALOUSY

One would have said that all the carriages in Paris were making a pilgrimage to the Palais de l'Industrie that day. As early as nine o'clock in the morning they began to drive, by way of all streets, avenues, and bridges, toward that hall of the fine arts where all artistic Paris invites all fashionable Paris to be present at the pretended varnishing of three thousand four hundred pictures.

A long procession of visitors pressed through the doors, and, disdaining the exhibition of sculpture, hastened upstairs to the picture gallery. Even while mounting the steps they raised their eyes to the canvases displayed on the walls of the staircase, where they hang the special category of decorative painters who have sent canvases of unusual proportions or works that the committee dare not refuse.

In the square salon a great crowd surged and rustled. The artists, who were in evidence until evening, were easily recognized by their activity, the sonorousness of their voices, and the authority of their gestures. They drew their friends by the sleeve toward the pictures, which they pointed out with exclamations and mimicry of a connoisseur's energy. All types of artists were to be seen — tall men with long hair, wearing hats of mouse-gray or black and of indescribable shapes, large and round like roofs, with their turned-down brims shadowing the wearer's whole chest. Others were short, active, slight or stocky, wearing foulard cravats and round jackets, or the sack-like garment of the singular costume peculiar to this class of painters.

There was the clan of the fashionables, of the curious, and of artists of the boulevard; the clan of Academicians, correct, and decorated with red rosettes, enormous or microscopic, according to individual conception of elegance and good form; the clan of bourgeois painters, assisted by the family surrounding the father like a triumphal chorus.

On the four great walls the canvases admitted to the honor of the square salon dazzled one at the very entrance by their brilliant tones, glittering frames, the crudity of new color, vivified by fresh varnish, blinding under the pitiless light poured from above.

The portrait of the President of the Republic faced the entrance; while on another wall a general bedizened with gold lace, sporting a hat decorated with ostrich plumes, and wearing red cloth breeches, hung in pleasant proximity to some naked nymphs under a willow-tree, and near by was a vessel in distress almost engulfed by a great wave. A bishop of the early Church excommunicating a barbarian king, an Oriental street full of dead victims of the plague, and the Shade of Dante in Hell, seized and captivated the eye with irresistible fascination.

Other paintings in the immense room were a charge of cavalry; sharpshooters in a wood; cows in a pasture; two noblemen of the eighteenth century fighting a duel on a street corner; a madwoman sitting on a wall; a priest administering the last rites to a dying man; harvesters, rivers, a sunset, a moonlight effect — in short, samples of everything that artists paint, have painted, and will paint until the end of the world.

Olivier, in the midst of a group of celebrated brother painters, members of the Institute and of the jury, exchanged opinions with them. He was oppressed by a certain uneasiness, a dissatisfaction with his own exhibited work, of the success of which he was very doubtful, in spite of the warm congratulations he had received.

Suddenly he sprang forward; the Duchesse de Mortemain had appeared at the main entrance.

“Hasn’t the Countess arrived yet?” she inquired of Bertin.

“I have not seen her.”

“And Monsieur de Musadieu?”

“I have not seen him either.”

“He promised me to be here at ten o’clock, at the top of the stairs, to show me around the principal galleries.”

“Will you permit me to take his place, Duchess?”

“No, no. Your friends need you. We shall see each other again very soon, for I shall expect you to lunch with us.”

Musadieu hastened toward them. He had been detained for some minutes in the hall of sculpture, and excused himself, breathless already.

“This way, Duchess, this way,” said he. “Let us begin at the right.”

They were just disappearing among the throng when the Comtesse de Guilleroy, leaning on her daughter’s arm, entered and looked around in search of Olivier Bertin.

He saw them and hastened to meet them. As he greeted the two ladies, he said:

"How charming you look to-day. Really, Nanette has improved very much. She has actually changed in a week."

He regarded her with the eye of a close observer, adding: "The lines of her face are softer, yet more expressive; her complexion is clearer. She is already something less of a little girl and somewhat more of a Parisian."

Suddenly he bethought himself of the grand affair of the day.

"Let us begin at the right," said he, "and we shall soon overtake the Duchess."

The Countess, well informed on all matters connected with painting, and as preoccupied as if she were herself on exhibition, inquired: "What do they say of the exposition?"

"A fine one," Bertin replied. "There is a remarkable Bonnat, two excellent things by Carolus Duran, an admirable Puvis de Chavannes, a very new and astonishing Roll, an exquisite Gervex, and many others, by Beraud, Cazin, Duez — in short, a heap of good things."

"And you?" said the Countess.

"Oh, they compliment me, but I am not satisfied."

"You never are satisfied."

"Yes, sometimes. But to-day I really feel that I am right."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"Let us go to see it."

When they arrived before Bertin's picture — two little peasant-girls taking a bath in a brook — they found a group admiring it. The Countess was delighted, and whispered: "It is simply a delicious bit — a jewel! You never have done anything better."

Bertin pressed close to her, loving her and thanking her for every word that calmed his suffering and healed his aching heart. Through his mind ran arguments to convince him that she was right, that she must judge accurately with the intelligent observation of an experienced Parisian. He forgot, so desirous was he to reassure himself, that for at least twelve years he had justly reproached her for too much admiring the dainty trifles, the elegant nothings, the sentimentalities and nameless trivialities of the passing fancy of the day, and never art, art alone, art detached from the popular ideas, tendencies, and prejudices.

"Let us go on," said he, drawing them away from his picture. He led them for a long time from gallery to gallery, showing them notable canvases and explaining their subjects, happy to be with them.

"What time is it?" the Countess asked suddenly.

"Half after twelve."

"Oh, let us hasten to luncheon then. The Duchess must be waiting for us at Ledoyen's, where she charged me to bring you, in case we should not meet her in the galleries."

The restaurant, in the midst of a little island of trees and shrubs, seemed like an overflowing hive. A confused hum of voices, calls, the rattling of plates and glasses came from the open windows and large doors. The tables, set close together and filled with people eating, extended in long rows right and left of a narrow passage, up and down which ran the distracted waiters, holding along their arms dishes filled with meats, fish, or fruit.

Under the circular gallery there was such a throng of men and women as to suggest a living pate. Everyone there laughed, called out, drank and ate, enlivened by the wines and inundated by one of those waves of joy that sweep over Paris, on certain days, with the sunshine.

An attendant showed the Countess, Annette, and Bertin upstairs into a reserved room, where the Duchess awaited them. As they entered, the painter observed, beside his aunt, the Marquis de Farandal, attentive and smiling, and extending his hand to receive the parasols and wraps of the Countess and her daughter. He felt again so much displeasure that he suddenly desired to say rude and irritating things.

The Duchess explained the meeting of her nephew and the departure of Musadieu, who had been carried off by the Minister of the Fine Arts, and Bertin, at the thought that this insipidly good-looking Marquis might marry Annette, that he had come there only to see her, and that he regarded her already as destined to share his bed, unnerved and revolted him, as if some one had ignored his own rights — sacred and mysterious rights.

As soon as they were at table, the Marquis, who sat beside the young girl, occupied himself in talking to her with the devoted air of a man authorized to pay his addresses.

He assumed a curious manner, which seemed to the painter bold and searching; his smiles were satisfied and almost tender, his gallantry was familiar and officious. In manner and word appeared already something of decision, as if he were about to announce that he had won the prize.

The Duchess and the Countess seemed to protect and approve this attitude of a pretender, and exchanged glances of complicity.

As soon as the luncheon was finished the party returned to the Exposition. There was such a dense crowd in the galleries, it seemed impossible to penetrate it. An odor of perspiring humanity, a stale smell of old gowns and coats, made an atmosphere at once heavy and sickening. No one looked at the pictures any more, but at faces and toilets, seeking out well-known persons; and at times came a great jostling of the crowd as it was forced to give way before the high double ladder of the varnishers, who cried: “Make way, Messieurs! Make way, Mesdames!”

At the end of ten minutes, the Countess and Olivier found themselves separated from the others. He wished to find them immediately, but, leaning upon him, the Countess said: “Are we not very well off as it is? Let them go, since it is quite natural that we should lose sight of them; we will meet them again in the buffet at four o’clock.”

“That is true,” he replied.

But he was absorbed by the idea that the Marquis was accompanying Annette and continuing his attempts to please her by his fatuous and affected gallantry.

“You love me always, then?” murmured the Countess.

“Yes, certainly,” he replied, with a preoccupied air, trying to catch a glimpse of the Marquis’s gray hat over the heads of the crowd.

Feeling that he was abstracted, and wishing to lead him back to her own train of thought, the Countess continued:

“If you only knew how I adore your picture of this year! It is certainly your *chef-d’oeuvre*.”

He smiled, suddenly, forgetting the young people in remembering his anxiety of the morning.

“Do you really think so?” he asked.

“Yes, I prefer it above all others.”

With artful wheedling, she crowned him anew, having known well for a long time that nothing has a stronger effect on an artist than tender and continuous flattery. Captivated, reanimated, cheered by her sweet words, he began again to chat gaily, seeing and hearing only her in that tumultuous throng.

By way of expressing his thanks, he murmured in her ear: “I have a mad desire to embrace you!”

A warm wave of emotion swept over her, and, raising her shining eyes to his, she repeated her question: “You love me always, then?”

He replied, with the intonation she wished to hear, and which she had not heard before:

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

"Come often to see me in the evenings," she said. "Now that I have my daughter I shall not go out very much."

Since she had recognized in him this unexpected reawakening of tenderness, her heart was stirred with great happiness. In view of Olivier's silvery hair, and the calming touch of time, she had not suspected that he was fascinated by another woman, but she was terribly afraid that, from pure dread of loneliness, he might marry. This fear, which was of long standing, increased constantly, and set her wits to contriving plans whereby she might have him near her as much as possible, and to see that he should not pass long evenings alone in the chill silence of his empty rooms. Not being always able to hold and keep him, she would suggest amusements for him, sent him to the theater, forced him to go into society, being better pleased to know that he was mingling with many other women than alone in his gloomy house.

She resumed, answering his secret thought: "Ah, if I could only have you always with me, how I should spoil you! Promise me to come often, since I hardly go out at all now."

"I promise it."

At that moment a voice murmured "Mamma!" in her ear.

The Countess started and turned. Annette, the Duchess, and the Marquis had just rejoined them.

"It is four o'clock," said the Duchess. "I am very tired and I wish to go now."

"I will go, too; I have had enough of it," said the Countess.

They reached the interior stairway which divides the galleries where the drawings and water-colors are hung, overlooking the immense garden inclosed in glass, where the works of sculpture are exhibited.

From the platform of this stairway they could see from one end to the other of this great conservatory, filled with statues set up along the pathway around large green shrubs, and below was the crowd which covered the paths like a moving black wave. The marbles rose from this mass of dark hats and shoulders, piercing it in a thousand places, and seeming almost luminous in their dazzling whiteness.

As Bertin took leave of the ladies at the door of exit, Madame de Guilleroy whispered:

“Then — will you come this evening?”

“Yes, certainly.”

Bertin reentered the Exposition, to talk with the artists over the impressions of the day.

Painters and sculptors stood talking in groups around the statues and in front of the buffet, upholding or attacking the same ideas that were discussed every year, using the same arguments over works almost exactly similar. Olivier, who usually took a lively share in these disputes, being quick in repartee and clever in disconcerting attacks, besides having a reputation as an ingenious theorist of which he was proud, tried to urge himself to take an active part in the debates, but the things he said interested him no more than those he heard, and he longed to go away, to listen no more, to understand no more, knowing beforehand as he did all that anyone could say on those ancient questions of art, of which he knew all sides.

He loved these things, however, and had loved them until now in an almost exclusive way; but to-day he was distracted by one of those slight but persistent preoccupations, one of those petty anxieties which are so small we ought not to allow ourselves to be troubled by them, but which, in spite of all we do or say, prick through our thoughts like an invisible thorn buried in the flesh.

He had even forgotten his anxiety over his little peasant bathers in the remembrance of the displeasing idea of the Marquis approaching Annette. What did it matter to him, after all? Had he any right? Why should he wish to prevent this precious marriage, already arranged, and suitable from every point of view? But no reasoning could efface that impression of uneasiness and discontent which had seized him when he had beheld Farandal talking and smiling like an accepted suitor, caressing with his glances the fair face of the young girl.

When he entered the Countess’s drawing-room that evening, and found her alone with her daughter, continuing by the lamplight their knitting for the poor, he had great difficulty in preventing himself from saying sneering things about the Marquis, and from revealing to Annette his real banality, veiled by a mask of elegance and good form.

For a long time, during these after-dinner evening visits, he had often allowed himself to lapse into occasional silence that was slightly somnolent, and was accustomed to fall into the easy attitudes of an old friend who does not stand on ceremony. But now he seemed suddenly to rouse himself and to show the alertness of men who do their best to be agreeable, who take thought as to what they wish to say, and who, before certain persons, seek for the best phrases in which to express their ideas and render them attractive. No longer did he allow the conversation to lag, but did his best to keep it bright and interesting; and when he had made the Countess and her daughter laugh gaily, when he felt that he had touched their emotions, or when they ceased to work in order to listen to him, he felt a thrill of pleasure, an assurance of success, which rewarded him for his efforts.

He came now every time that he knew they were alone, and never, perhaps, had he passed such delightful evenings.

Madame de Guilleroy, whose continual fears were soothed by this assiduity, made fresh efforts to attract him and to keep him near her. She refused invitations to dinners in the city, she did not go to balls, nor to the theaters, in order to have the joy of throwing into the telegraph-box, on going out at three o'clock, a little blue despatch which said: "Come to-night." At first, wishing to give him earlier the tete-a-tete that he desired, she had sent her daughter to bed as soon as it was ten o'clock. Then after one occasion when he had appeared surprised at this and had begged laughingly that Annette should not be treated any longer like a naughty little girl, she had allowed her daughter a quarter of an hour's grace, then half an hour, and finally a whole hour. Bertin never remained long after the young girl had retired; it was as if half the charm that held him there had departed with her. He would soon take the little low seat that he preferred beside the Countess and lay his cheek against her knee with a caressing movement. She would give him one of her hands, which he clasped in his, and the fever of his spirit would suddenly be abated; he ceased to talk, and appeared to find repose in tender silence from the effort he had made.

Little by little the Countess, with the keenness of feminine instinct, comprehended that Annette attracted him almost as much as she herself. This did not anger her; she was glad that between them he could find something of that domestic happiness which he lacked; and she imprisoned him between them, as it were, playing the part of tender mother in such a way that he might almost believe himself the young girl's father; and a new bond of tenderness was added to that which had always held him to this household.

Her personal vanity, always alert, but disturbed since she had felt in several ways, like almost invisible pin-pricks, the innumerable attacks of advancing age, took on a new allurement. In order to become as slender as Annette, she continued to drink nothing, and the real slimness of her figure gave her the appearance of a young girl. When her back was turned one could hardly distinguish her from Annette; but her face showed the effect of this regime. The plump flesh began to be wrinkled and took on a yellowish tint which rendered more dazzling by contrast the superb freshness of the young girl's complexion. Then the Countess began to make up her face with theatrical art, and, though in broad daylight she produced an effect that was slightly artificial, in the evening her complexion had that charmingly soft tint obtained by women who know how to make up well.

The realization of her fading beauty, and the employment of artificial aid to restore it, somewhat changed her habits. As much as possible, she avoided comparison with her daughter in the full light of day, but rather sought it by lamplight, which, if anything, showed herself to greater advantage. When she was fatigued, pale, and felt that she looked older than usual, she had convenient headaches by reason of which she excused herself from going to balls and theaters; but on days when she knew she looked well she triumphed again and played the elder sister with the grave modesty of a little mother. In order always to wear gowns like those of her daughter, she made Annette wear toilettes suitable for a fully-grown young woman, a trifle too old for her; and Annette who showed more and more plainly her joyous and laughing disposition, wore them with sparkling vivacity that rendered her still more attractive. She lent herself with all her heart to the coquettish arts of her mother, acting with her, as if by instinct, graceful little domestic scenes; she knew when to embrace her at the effective moment, how to clasp her tenderly round the waist, and to show by a movement, a caress, or some ingenious pose, how pretty both were and how much they resembled each other.

From seeing the two so much together, and from continually comparing them, Olivier Bertin sometimes actually confused them in his own mind. Sometimes, when Annette spoke, and he happened to be looking elsewhere, he was compelled to ask: "Which of you said that?" He often amused himself by playing this game of confusion when all three were alone in the drawing-room with the Louis XV tapestries. He would close his eyes and beg them to ask him the same question, the one after the other, and then change the order of the interrogations, so that he might recognize their voices. They did this with so much cleverness in imitating each other's intonations, in saying the same phrases with the same accents, that often he could not tell which spoke. In fact, they had come to speak so much alike that the servants answered "Yes, Madame" to the daughter and "Yes, Mademoiselle" to the mother.

From imitating each other's voices and movements for amusement, they acquired such a similarity of gait and gesture that Monsieur de Guilleroy himself, when he saw one or the other pass through the shadowy end of the drawing-room, confounded them for an instant and asked: "Is that you, Annette, or is it your mamma?"

From this resemblance, natural and assumed, was engendered in the mind and heart of the painter a strange impression of a double entity, old and young, wise yet ignorant, two bodies made, the one after the other, with the same flesh; in fact, the same woman continued, but rejuvenated, having become once more what she was formerly. Thus he lived near them, shared between them, uneasy, troubled, feeling for the mother his old ardor awakened, and for the daughter an indefinable tenderness.

PART II

CHAPTER I. A WILLING ENVOY

“Paris, July 20, 11 P. M.

“MY FRIEND: My mother has just died at Roncieres. We shall leave here at midnight. Do not come, for we have told no one. But pity me and think of me. YOUR ANY.”

“July 21, 12 M.

“MY POOR FRIEND: I should have gone, notwithstanding what you wrote, if I had not become used to regarding all your wishes as commands. I have thought of you with poignant grief ever since last night. I think of that silent journey you made, sitting opposite your daughter and your husband, in that dimly-lighted carriage, which bore you toward your dead. I could see all three of you under the oil lamp, you weeping and Annette sobbing. I saw your arrival at the station, the entrance of the castle in the midst of a group of servants, your rush up the stairs toward that room, toward that bed where she lies, your first look at her, and your kiss on her thin, motionless face. And I thought of your heart, your poor heart — that poor heart, of which half belongs to me and which is breaking, which suffers so much, which stifles you, making me suffer also at this moment.

“With profound pity, I kiss your eyes filled with tears.

“OLIVIER.”

“Roncieres, July 24.

“Your letter would have done me good, my friend, if anything could do me good in the horrible situation into which I have fallen. We buried her yesterday, and since her poor lifeless body has gone out of this house it seems to me that I am alone in the world. We love our mothers almost without knowing or feeling it, for such love is as natural as it is to live, and we do not realize how deep-rooted is that love until the moment of final separation. No other affection is comparable to that, for all others come by chance, while this begins at birth; all the others are brought to us later by the accidents of life, while this has lived in our very blood since our first day on earth. And then, and there, we have lost not only a mother but our childhood itself, which half disappears, for our little life of girlhood belonged to her as much as to ourselves. She alone knew it as we knew it; she knew about innumerable things, remote, insignificant and dear, which are and which were the first sweet emotions of our heart. To her alone I could still say: 'Do you remember, mother, the day when — ? Do you remember, mother, the china doll that grandmother gave me?' Both of us murmured to each other a long, sweet chapter of trifling childish memories, which no one on earth now knows of but me. So it is a part of myself that is dead — the older, the better. I have lost the poor heart wherein the little girl I was once still lived. Now no one knows her any more; no one remembers the little Anne, her short skirts, her laughter and her faces.

"And a day will come — and perhaps it is not far away — when in my turn I too shall go, leaving my dear Annette alone in the world, as mamma has left me to-day. How sad all this is, how hard, and cruel! Yet one never thinks about it; we never look about us to see death take someone every instant, as it will soon take us. If we should look at it, if we should think of it, if we were not distracted, rejoiced, or blinded by all that passes before us, we could no longer live, for the sight of this endless massacre would drive us mad.

"I am so crushed, so despairing, that I have no longer strength to do anything. Day and night I think of my poor mamma, nailed in that box, buried beneath that earth, in that field, under the rain, whose old face, which I used to kiss with so much happiness, is now only a mass of frightful decay! Oh, what horror!

"When I lost papa, I was just married, and I did not feel all these things as I do to-day. Yes, pity me, think of me, write to me. I need you so much just now.

"ANNE."

"Paris, July 25.

"MY POOR FRIEND: Your grief gives me horrible pain, and life no longer seems rosy to me. Since your departure I am lost, abandoned, without ties or refuge. Everything fatigues me, bores me and irritates me. I am ceaselessly thinking of you and Annette; I feel that you are both far, far away when I need you near me so much.

"It is extraordinary how far away from me you seem to be, and how I miss you. Never, even in my younger days, have you been my *all*, as you are at this moment. I have foreseen for some time that I should reach this crisis, which must be a sun-stroke in Indian summer. What I feel is so very strange that I wish to tell you about it. Just fancy that since your absence I cannot take walks any more! Formerly, and even during the last few months, I liked very much to set out alone and stroll along the street, amusing myself by looking at people and things, and enjoying the mere sight of everything and the exercise of walking. I used to walk along without knowing where I was going, simply to walk, to breathe, to dream. Now, I can no longer do this. As soon as I reach the street I am oppressed by anguish, like the fear of a blind man that has lost his dog. I become uneasy, exactly like a traveler that has lost his way in the wood, and I am compelled to return home. Paris seems empty, frightful, alarming. I ask myself: 'Where am I going?' I answer myself: 'Nowhere, since I am still walking.' Well, I cannot, for I can no longer walk without some aim. The bare thought of walking straight before me wearies and bores me inexpressibly. Then I drag my melancholy to the club.

"And do you know why? Only because you are no longer here. I am certain of this. When I know that you are in Paris, my walks are no longer useless, for it is possible that I may meet you in the first street I turn into. I can go anywhere because you may go anywhere. If I do not see you, I may at least find Annette, who is an emanation of yourself. You and she fill the streets full of hope for me — the hope of recognizing you, whether you approach me from a distance, or whether I divine your identity in following you. And then the city becomes charming to me, and the women whose figures resemble yours stir my heart with all the liveliness of the streets, hold my attention, occupy my eyes, and give me a sort of hunger to see you.

"You will consider me very selfish, my poor friend, to speak to you in this way of the solitude of an old cooing pigeon when you are shedding such bitter tears. Pardon me! I am so used to being spoiled by you that I cry 'Help! Help!' when I have you no longer.

"I kiss your feet so that you may have pity on me.

"OLIVIER."

"Roncieres, July 30.

"MY FRIEND: Thanks for your letter. I need so much to know that you love me! I have just passed some frightful days. Indeed, I believed that grief would kill me in my turn.

"It was like a block of suffering in my breast, growing larger and larger, stifling me, strangling me. The physician that was called to treat me for the nervous crisis I was enduring, which recurred four or five times a day, injected morphine, which made me almost wild, and the great heat we have had aggravated my condition and threw me into a state of over-excitement that was almost delirium. I am a little more calm since the great storm of Friday. I must tell you that since the day of the funeral I could weep no more, but during the storm, the approach of which upset me, I suddenly felt the tears beginning to flow from my eyes, slow, small, burning. Oh, those first tears, how they hurt me! They seemed to tear me, as if they had claws, and my throat was so choked that I could hardly breathe. Then the tears came faster, larger, cooler. They ran from my eyes as from a spring, and came so fast that my handkerchief was saturated and I had to take another. The great block of grief seemed to soften and to flow away through my eyes.

"From that moment I have been weeping from morning till night, and that is saving me. One would really end by going mad or dying, if one could not weep. I am all alone, too. My husband is making some little trips around the country, and I insisted that he should take Annette with him, to distract and console her a little. They go in the carriage or on horseback as far as eight or ten leagues from Roncieres, and she returns to me rosy with youth, in spite of her sadness, her eyes shining with life, animated by the country air and the excursion she has had. How beautiful it is to be at that age! I think that we shall remain here a fortnight or three weeks longer; then, although it will be August, we shall return to Paris for the reason you know.

"I send to you all that remains to me of my heart.

"ANY."

"Paris, August 4th.

"I can bear this no longer, my dear friend; you must come back, for something is certainly going to happen to me. I ask myself whether I am not already ill, so great a dislike have I for everything I used to take pleasure in doing, or did with indifferent resignation. For one thing, it is so warm in Paris that every night means a Turkish bath of eight or nine hours. I get up overcome by the fatigue of this sleep in a hot bath, and for an hour or two I walk about before a white canvas, with the intention to draw something. But mind, eye, and hand are all empty. I am no longer a painter! This futile effort to work is exasperating. I summon my models; I place them, and they give me poses, movements, and expressions that I have painted to satiety. I make them dress again and let them go. Indeed, I can no longer see anything new, and I suffer from this as if I were blind. What is it? Is it fatigue of the eye or of the brain, exhaustion of the artistic faculty or of the optic nerve? Who knows? It seems to me that I have ceased to discover anything in the unexplored corner that I have been permitted to visit. I no longer perceive anything but that which all the world knows; I do the things that all poor painters have done; I have only one subject now, and only the observation of a vulgar pedant. Once upon a time, and not so very long ago, either, the number of new subjects seemed to me unlimited, and in order to express them I had such a variety of means the difficulty of making a choice made me hesitate. But now, alas! Suddenly the world of half-seen subjects has become depopulated, my study has become powerless and useless. The people that pass have no more sense for me. I no longer find in every human being the character and savor which once I liked so much to discern and reveal. I believe, however, that I could make a very pretty portrait of your daughter. Is it because she resembles you so much that I confound you both in my mind? Yes, perhaps.

"Well, then, after forcing myself to sketch a man or a woman who does not resemble any of the familiar models, I decide to go and breakfast somewhere, for I no longer have the courage to sit down alone in my own dining-room. The Boulevard Malesherbes seems like a forest path imprisoned in a dead city. All the houses smell empty. On the street the sprinklers throw showers of white rain, splashing the wooden pavement whence rises the vapor of damp tar and stable refuse; and from one end to the other of the long descent from the Parc Monceau to Saint Augustin, one sees five or six black forms, unimportant passers, tradesmen or domestics. The shade of the plane-trees spreads over the burning sidewalks, making a curious spot, looking almost like liquid, as if water spilled there were drying. The stillness of the leaves on the branches, and of their gray silhouettes on the asphalt, expresses the fatigue of the roasted city, slumbering and perspiring like a workman asleep on a bench in the sun. Yes, she perspires, the beggar, and she smells frightfully through her sewer mouths, the vent-holes of sinks and kitchens, the streams through which the filth of her streets is running. Then I think of those summer mornings in your orchard full of little wild-flowers that flavor the air with a suggestion of honey. Then I enter, sickened already, the restaurant where bald, fat, tired-looking men are eating, with half-opened waistcoats and moist, shining foreheads. The food shows the effect of heat — the melon growing soft under the ice, the soft bread, the flabby filet, the warmed-over vegetables, the purulent cheese, the fruits ripened on the premises. I go out, nauseated, and go home to try to sleep a little until the hour for dinner, which I take at the club.

"There I always find Adelmans, Maldant, Rocdiane, Landa, and many others, who bore and weary me as much as hand-organs. Each one has his own little tune, or tunes, which I have heard for fifteen years, and they play them all together every evening in that club, which is apparently a place where one goes to be entertained. Someone should change my own generation for my benefit, for my eyes, my ears, and my mind have had enough of it. They still make conquests, however, they boast of them and congratulate one another on them!

"After yawning as many times as there are minutes between eight o'clock and midnight, I go home and go to bed, and while I undress I think that the same thing will begin over again the next day.

"Yes, my dear friend, I am at the age when a bachelor's life becomes intolerable, because there is nothing new for me under the sun. An unmarried man should be young, curious, eager. When one is no longer all that, it becomes dangerous to remain free. Heavens! how I loved my liberty, long ago, before I loved you more! How burdensome it is to me to-day! For an old bachelor like me, liberty is an empty thing, empty everywhere; it is the path to death, with nothing in himself to prevent him from seeing the end; it is the ceaseless query: 'What shall I do? Whom can I go to see, so that I shall not be alone?' And I go from one friend to another, from one handshake to the next, begging for a little friendship. I gather up my crumbs, but they do not make a loaf. You, I have You, my friend, but you do not belong to me. Perhaps it is because of you that I suffer this anguish, for it is the desire for contact with you, for your presence, for the same roof over our heads, for the same walls inclosing our lives, the same interests binding our hearts together, the need of that community of hopes, griefs, pleasures, joys, sadness, and also of material things, that fills me with so much yearning. You do belong to me — that is to say, I steal a little of you from time to time. But I long to breathe forever the same air that you breathe, to share everything with you, to possess nothing that does not belong to both of us, to feel that all which makes up my own life belongs to you as much as to me — the glass from which I drink, the chair on which I sit, the bread I eat and the fire that warms me.

"Adieu! Return soon. I suffer too much when you are far away.

"OLIVIER."

“Roncieres, August 8th.

“MY FRIEND: I am ill, and so fatigued that you would not recognize me at all. I believe that I have wept too much. I must rest a little before I return, for I do not wish you to see me as I am. My husband sets out for Paris the day after to-morrow, and will give you news of us. He expects to take you to dinner somewhere, and charges me to ask you to wait for him at your house about seven o’clock.

“As for me, as soon as I feel a little better, as soon as I have no more this corpse-like face which frightens me, I will return to be near you. In all the world, I have only Annette and you, and I wish to offer to each of you all that I can give without robbing the other.

“I hold out my eyes, which have wept so much, so that you may kiss them.

“ANY.”

When he received this letter announcing the still delayed return, Olivier was seized with an immoderate desire to take a carriage for the railway station to catch a train for Roncieres; then, thinking that M. de Guilleroy must return the next day, he resigned himself, and even began to wish for the arrival of the husband with almost as much impatience as if it were that of the wife herself.

Never had he liked Guilleroy as during those twenty-four hours of waiting. When he saw him enter, he rushed toward him, with hands extended, exclaiming:

“Ah, dear friend! how happy I am to see you!”

The other also seemed very glad, delighted above all things to return to Paris, for life was not gay in Normandy during the three weeks he had passed there.

The two men sat down on a little two-seated sofa in a corner of the studio, under a canopy of Oriental stuffs, and again shook hands with mutual sympathy.

“And the Countess?” asked Bertin, “how is she?”

“Not very well. She has been very much affected, and is recovering too slowly. I must confess that I am a little anxious about her.”

“But why does she not return?”

“I know nothing about it. It was impossible for me to induce her to return here.”

“What does she do all day?”

"Oh, heavens! She weeps, and thinks of her mother. That is not good for her. I should like very much to have her decide to have a change of air, to leave the place where that happened, you understand?"

"And Annette?"

"Oh, she is a blooming flower."

Olivier smiled with joy.

"Was she very much grieved?" he asked again.

"Yes, very much, very much, but you know that the grief of eighteen years does not last long."

After a silence Guilleroy resumed:

"Where shall we dine, my dear fellow? I need to be cheered up, to hear some noise and see some movement."

"Well, at this season, it seems to me that the Cafe des Ambassadeurs is the right place."

So they set out, arm in arm, toward the Champs-Elysees. Guilleroy, filled with the gaiety of Parisians when they return, to whom the city, after every absence, seems rejuvenated and full of possible surprises, questioned the painter about a thousand details of what people had been doing and saying; and Olivier, after indifferent replies which betrayed all the boredom of his solitude, spoke of Roncieres, tried to capture from this man, in order to gather round him that almost tangible something left with us by persons with whom we have recently been associated, that subtle emanation of being one carries away when leaving them, which remains with us a few hours and evaporates amid new surroundings.

The heavy sky of a summer evening hung over the city and over the great avenue where, under the trees, the gay refrains of open-air concerts were beginning to sound. The two men, seated on the balcony of the Cafe des Ambassadeurs, looked down upon the still empty benches and chairs of the inclosure up to the little stage, where the singers, in the mingled light of electric globes and fading day, displayed their striking costumes and their rosy complexions. Odors of frying, of sauces, of hot food, floated in the slight breezes from the chestnut-trees, and when a woman passed, seeing her reserved chair, followed by a man in a black coat, she diffused on her way the fresh perfume of her dress and her person.

Guilleroy, who was radiant, murmured:

"Oh, I like to be here much better than in the country!"

"And I," Bertin replied, "should like it much better to be there than here."

"Nonsense!"

"Heavens, yes! I find Paris tainted this summer."

"Oh, well, my dear fellow, it is always Paris, after all."

The Deputy seemed to be enjoying his day, one of those rare days of effervescence and gaiety in which grave men do foolish things. He looked at two cocottes dining at a neighboring table with three thin young men, superlatively correct, and he slyly questioned Olivier about all the well-known girls, whose names were heard every day. Then he murmured in a tone of deep regret:

"You were lucky to have remained a bachelor. You can do and see many things."

But the painter did not agree with him, and, as a man will do when haunted by a persistent idea, he took Guilleroy into his confidence on the subject of his sadness and isolation. When he had said everything, had recited to the end of his litany of melancholy, and, urged by the longing to relieve his heart, had confessed naively how much he would have enjoyed the love and companionship of a woman installed in his home, the Count, in his turn, admitted that marriage had its advantages. Recovering his parliamentary eloquence in order to sing the praises of his domestic happiness, he eulogized the Countess in the highest terms, to which Olivier listened gravely with frequent nods of approval.

Happy to hear her spoken of, but jealous of that intimate happiness which Guilleroy praised as a matter of duty, the painter finally murmured, with sincere conviction:

"Yes, indeed, you were the lucky one!"

The Deputy, flattered, assented to this; then he resumed:

"I should like very much to see her return; indeed, I am a little anxious about her just now. Wait — since you are bored in Paris, you might go to Roncieres and bring her back. She will listen to you, for you are her best friend; while a husband — you know — — "

Delighted, Olivier replied: "I ask nothing better. But do you think it would not annoy her to see me arriving in that abrupt way?"

"No, not at all. Go, by all means, my dear fellow."

"Well, then, I will. I will leave to-morrow by the one o'clock train. Shall I send her a telegram?"

"No, I will attend to that. I will telegraph, so that you will find a carriage at the station."

As they had finished dinner, they strolled again up the Boulevard, but in half an hour the Count suddenly left the painter, under the pretext of an urgent affair that he had quite forgotten.

CHAPTER II. SPRINGTIME AND AUTUMN

The Countess and her daughter, dressed in black crape, had just seated themselves opposite each other, for breakfast, in the large dining-room at Roncieres. The portraits of many ancestors, crudely painted, one in a cuirass, another in a tight-fitting coat, this a powdered officer of the French Guards, that a colonel of the Restoration, hung in line on the walls, a collection of deceased Guilleroys, in old frames from which the gilding was peeling. Two servants, stepping softly, began to serve the two silent women, and the flies made a little cloud of black specks, dancing and buzzing around the crystal chandelier that hung over the center of the table.

"Open the windows," said the Countess, "It is a little cool here."

The three long windows, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and large as bay-windows, were opened wide. A breath of soft air, bearing the odor of warm grass and the distant sounds of the country, swept in immediately through these openings, mingling with the slightly damp air of the room, inclosed by the thick walls of the castle.

"Ah, that is good!" said Annette, taking a full breath.

The eyes of the two women had turned toward the outside and now gazed, beneath the blue sky, lightly veiled by the midday haze which was reflected on the meadows impregnated with sunshine, at the long and verdant lawns of the park, with its groups of trees here and there, and its perspective opening to the yellow fields, illuminated as far as the eye could see by the golden gleam of ripe grain.

"We will take a long walk after breakfast," said the Countess. "We might walk as far as Berville, following the river, for it will be too warm on the plain."

"Yes, mamma, and let us take Julio to scare up some partridges."

"You know that your father forbids it."

"Oh, but since papa is in Paris! — it is so amusing to see Julio pointing after them. There he is now, worrying the cows! Oh, how funny he is, the dear fellow!"

Pushing back her chair, she jumped up and ran to the window, calling out: "Go on, Julio! After them!"

Upon the lawn three heavy cows, gorged with grass and overcome with heat, lay on their sides, their bellies protruding from the pressure of the earth. Rushing from one to another, barking and bounding wildly, in a sort of mad abandon, partly real, partly feigned, a hunting spaniel, slender, white and red, whose curly ears flapped at every bound, was trying to rouse the three big beasts, which did not wish to get up. It was evidently the dog's favorite sport, with which he amused himself whenever he saw the cows lying down. Irritated, but not frightened, they gazed at him with their large, moist eyes, turning their heads to watch him.

Annette, from her window, cried:

"Fetch them, Julio, fetch them!"

The excited spaniel, growing bolder, barked louder and ventured as far as their cruppers, feigning to be about to bite them. They began to grow uneasy, and the nervous twitching of their skin, to get rid of the flies, became more frequent and protracted.

Suddenly the dog, carried along by the impetus of a rush that he could not check in time, bounced so close to one cow that, in order not to fall against her, he was obliged to jump over her. Startled by the bound, the heavy animal took fright, and first raising her head she finally raised herself slowly on her four legs, sniffing loudly. Seeing her erect, the other two immediately got up also, and Julio began to prance around them in a dance of triumph, while Annette praised him.

"Bravo, Julio, bravo!"

"Come," said the Countess, "come to breakfast, my child."

But the young girl, shading her eyes with one hand, announced:

"There comes a telegraph messenger!"

Along the invisible path among the wheat and the oats a blue blouse appeared to be gliding along the top of the grain, and it came toward the castle with the firm step of a man.

"Oh, heavens!" murmured the Countess; "I hope he does not bring bad news!"

She was still shaken with that terror which remains with us a long time after the death of some loved one has been announced by a telegram. Now she could not remove the gummed band to open the little blue paper without feeling her fingers tremble and her soul agitated, believing that from those folds which it took so long to open would come a grief that would cause her tears to flow afresh.

Annette, on the contrary, full of girlish curiosity, was delighted to meet with the unknown mystery that comes to all of us at times. Her heart, which life had just saddened for the first time, could anticipate only something joyful from that black and ominous bag hanging from the side of the mail-carrier, who saw so many emotions through the city streets and the country lanes.

The Countess ceased to eat, concentrating her thoughts on the man who was approaching, bearer of a few written words that might wound her as if a knife had been thrust in her throat. The anguish of having known that experience made her breathless, and she tried to guess what this hurried message might be. About what? From whom? The thought of Olivier flashed through her mind. Was he ill? Dead, perhaps, too!

The ten minutes she had to wait seemed interminable to her; then, when she had torn open the despatch and recognized the name of her husband, she read: “I telegraph to tell you that our friend Bertin leaves for Roncieres on the one o’clock train. Send Phaeton station. Love.”

“Well, mamma?” said Annette.

“Monsieur Olivier Bertin is coming to see us.”

“Ah, how lucky! When?”

“Very soon.”

“At four o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, how kind he is!”

But the Countess had turned pale, for a new anxiety had lately troubled her, and the sudden arrival of the painter seemed to her as painful a menace as anything she might have been able to foresee.

“You will go to meet him with the carriage,” she said to her daughter.

“And will you not come, too, mamma?”

“No, I will wait for you here.”

“Why? That will hurt him.”

“I do not feel very well.”

“You wished to walk as far as Berville just now.”

“Yes, but my breakfast has made me feel ill.”

“You will feel better between now and the time to go.”

“No, I am going up to my room. Let me know as soon as you arrive.”

“Yes, mamma.”

After giving orders that the phaeton should be ready at the proper hour, and that a room be prepared, the Countess returned to her own room, and shut herself in.

Up to this time her life had passed almost without suffering, affected only by Olivier's love and concerned only by her anxiety to retain it. She had succeeded, always victorious in that struggle. Her heart, soothed by success and by flattery, had become the exacting heart of a beautiful worldly woman to whom are due all the good things of earth, and, after consenting to a brilliant marriage, with which affection had nothing to do, after accepting love later as the complement of a happy existence, after taking her part in a guilty intimacy, largely from inclination, a little from a leaning toward sentiment itself as a compensation for the prosaic hum-drum of daily life, had barricaded itself in the happiness that chance had offered her, with no other desire than to defend it against the surprises of each day. She had therefore accepted with the complacency of a pretty woman the agreeable events that occurred; and, though she ventured little, and was troubled little by new necessities and desires for the unknown; though she was tender, tenacious, and farseeing, content with the present, but naturally anxious about the morrow, she had known how to enjoy the elements that Destiny had furnished her with wise and economical prudence.

Now, little by little, without daring to acknowledge it even to herself, the vague preoccupation of passing time, of advancing age, had glided into her soul. In her consciousness it had the effect of a gnawing trouble that never ceased. But, knowing well that this descent of life was without an end, that once begun it never could be stopped, and yielding to the instinct of danger, she closed her eyes in letting herself glide along, that she might retain her dream, that she might not be seized with dizziness at sight of the abyss or be made desperate by her impotence.

She lived, then, smiling, with a sort of factitious pride in remaining beautiful so long, and when Annette appeared at her side with the freshness of her eighteen years, instead of suffering from this contrast, she was proud, on the contrary, of being able to command preference, in the ripe grace of her womanhood, over that blooming young girl in the radiant beauty of first youth.

She had even believed that she had entered upon the beginning of a happy, tranquil period when the death of her mother struck a blow at her heart. During the first few days she was filled with that profound despair that leaves no room for any other thought. She remained from morning until night buried in grief, trying to recall a thousand things of the dead, her familiar words, her face in earlier days, the gowns she used to wear, as if she had stored her memory with relics; and from the now buried past she gathered all the intimate and trivial recollections with which to feed her cruel reveries. Then, when she had arrived at such paroxysms of despair that she fell into hysterics and swooned, all her accumulated grief broke forth in tears, flowing from her eyes by day and by night.

One morning, when her maid entered, and opened the shutters after raising the shades, asking: “How does Madame feel to-day?” she answered, feeling exhausted from having wept so much: “Oh, not at all well! Indeed, I can bear no more.”

The servant, who was holding a tea-tray, looked at her mistress, and, touched to see her lying so pale amide the whiteness of the bed, she stammered, in a tone of genuine sadness: “Madame really looks very ill. Madame would do well to take care of herself.”

The tone in which this was said pierced the Countess’s heart like a sharp needle, and as soon as the maid had gone she rose to go and look at her face in her large dressing-mirror.

She was stupefied at the sight of herself, frightened by her hollow cheeks, her red eyes, the ravages produced in her by these days of suffering. Her face, which she knew so well, which she had often looked at in so many different mirrors, of which she knew all the expressions, all the smiles, the pallor which she had already corrected so many times, smoothing away the marks of fatigue, and the tiny wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, visible in too strong a light — her face suddenly seemed to her that of another woman, a new face that was distorted and irreparably ill.

In order to see herself better, to be surer with regard to this unexpected misfortune, she approached near enough to the mirror to touch it with her forehead, so that her breath, spreading a light mist over the glass, almost obscured the pale image she was contemplating. She was compelled to take a handkerchief to wipe away this mist, and, trembling with a strange emotion, she made a long and patient examination of the alterations in her face. With a light finger she stretched the skin of her cheeks, smoothed her forehead, pushed back her hair, and turned the eyelids to look at the whites of her eyes. Then she opened her mouth and examined her teeth which were a little tarnished where the gold fillings shone, and she was disturbed to note the livid gums and the yellow tint of the flesh above the cheeks and at the temples.

She was so lost in this examination of her fading beauty that she did not hear the door open, and was startled when her maid, standing behind her, said:

“Madame has forgotten to take her tea.”

The Countess turned, confused, surprised, ashamed, and the servant, guessing her thoughts continued:

“Madame has wept too much; there is nothing worse to spoil the skin. One’s blood turns to water.”

And as the Countess added sadly: “There is age also,” the maid exclaimed: “Oh, but Madame has not reached that time yet! With a few days of rest not a trace will be left. But Madame must go to walk, and take great care not to weep.”

As soon as she was dressed the Countess descended to the park, and for the first time since her mother’s death she visited the little orchard where long ago she had liked to cultivate and gather flowers; then she went to the river and strolled beside the stream until the hour for breakfast.

She sat down at the table opposite her husband, and beside her daughter, and remarked, that she might know what they thought: “I feel better today. I must be less pale.”

“Oh, you still look very ill,” said the Count.

Her heart contracted and she felt like weeping, for she had fallen into the habit of it.

Until evening, and the next day, and all the following days, whether she thought of her mother or of herself, every moment she felt her throat swelling with sobs and her eyes filling with tears, but to prevent them from overflowing and furrowing her cheeks she repressed them, and by a superhuman effort of will turned her thoughts in other directions, mastered them, ruled them, separated them from her sorrow, forced herself to feel consoled, tried to amuse herself and to think of sad things no more, in order to regain the hue of health.

Above all, she did not wish to return to Paris and to receive Olivier Bertin until she had become more like her former self. Realizing that she had grown too thin, that the flesh of women of her age needs to be full in order to keep fresh, she sought to create appetite by walking in the woods and along the roads; and though she returned weary and not hungry she forced herself to eat a great deal.

The Count, who wished to go away, could not understand her obstinacy. Finally, as her resistance seemed invincible, he declared that he would go alone, leaving the Countess free to return when she might feel so disposed.

The next day she received the telegram announcing Olivier's arrival.

A desire to flee seized her, so much did she fear his first look. She would have preferred to wait another week or two. In a week, with care one may change the face completely, since women, even when young and in good health, under the least change of influence become unrecognizable from one day to another. But the idea of appearing in broad daylight before Olivier, in the open fields, in the heat of August, beside Annette, so fresh and blooming, disturbed her so much that she decided immediately not to go to the station, but to await him in the half-darkened drawing-room.

She went up to her room and fell into a dream. Breaths of warm air stirred the curtains from time to time; the song of the crickets filled the air. Never before had she felt so sad. It was no more the great grief that had shattered her heart, overwhelming her before the soulless body of her beloved old mother. That grief, which she had believed incurable, had in a few days become softened, and was now but a sorrow of the memory; but now she felt herself swept away on a deep wave of melancholy into which she had entered gradually, and from which she never would emerge.

She had an almost irresistible desire to weep — and would not. Every time she felt her eyelids grow moist she wiped them away quickly, rose, paced about the room, looked out into the park and gazed at the tall trees, watched the slow, black flight of the crows against the background of blue sky. Then she passed before her mirror, judged her appearance with one glance, effaced the trace of a tear by touching the corner of her eye with rice powder, and looked at the clock, trying to guess at what point of the route he must have reached.

Like all women who are carried away by a distress of soul, whether real or unreasonable, she clung to her lover with a sort of frenzy. Was he not her all — all, everything, more than life, all that anyone must be who has come to be the sole affection of one who feels the approach of age?

Suddenly she heard in the distance the crack of a whip; she ran to the window and saw the phaeton as it made the turn round the lawn, drawn by two horses. Seated beside Annette, in the back seat of the carriage, Olivier waved his handkerchief as he saw the Countess, to which she responded by waving him a salutation from the window. Then she went down stairs with a heart throbbing fast but happy now, thrilled with joy at knowing him so near, of speaking to him and seeing him.

They met in the antechamber, before the drawing-room door.

He opened his arms to her with an irresistible impulse, and in a voice warmed by real emotion, exclaimed: “Ah, my poor Countess, let me embrace you!”

She closed her eyes, leaned toward him and pressed against him, lifted her cheek to him, and as he pressed his lips upon it, she murmured in his ear: “I love thee!”

Then Olivier, without dropping the hands he clasped in his own, looked at her, saying: “Let us see that sad face.”

She felt ready to faint.

“Yes, a little pale,” said he, “but that is nothing.”

To thank him for saying that, she said brokenly,

“Ah, dear friend, dear friend!” finding nothing else to say.

But he turned, looking behind her in search of Annette, who had disappeared.

“Is it not strange,” he said abruptly, “to see your daughter in mourning?”

“Why?” inquired the Countess.

“What? You ask why?” he exclaimed, with extraordinary animation. “Why, it is your own portrait painted by me — it is my portrait. It is yourself, such as you were when I met you long ago when I entered the Duchess’s house! Ah, do you remember that door where you passed under my gaze, as a frigate passes under a cannon of a fort? Good heavens! when I saw the little one, just now, at the railway station, standing on the platform, all in black, with the sun shining on her hair massed around her face, the blood rushed to my head. I thought I should weep. I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad, when one has known you as I have, who has studied you as no one else has, and reproduced you in painting, Madame. Ah, I thought that you had sent her alone to meet me at the station in order to give me that surprise. My God! but I was surprised, indeed! I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad.”

He called: “Annette! Nane!”

The young girl’s voice replied from outside, where she was giving sugar to the horses:

"Yes, yes, I am here!"

"Come in here!"

She entered quickly.

"Here, stand close beside your mother."

She obeyed, and he compared the two, but repeated mechanically, "Yes, it is astonishing, astonishing!" for they resembled each other less when side by side than they did before leaving Paris, the young girl having acquired a new expression of luminous youth in her black attire, while the mother had for a long time lost that radiance of hair and complexion that had dazzled and entranced the painter when they met for the first time.

Then the Countess and Olivier entered the drawing-room. He seemed in high spirits.

"Ah, what a good plan it was to come here!" he said. "But it was your husband's idea that I should come, you know. He charged me to take you back with me. And I — do you know what I propose? You have no idea, have you? Well, I propose, on the contrary, to remain here! Paris is odious in this heat, while the country is delicious. Heavens! how sweet it is here!"

The dews of evening impregnated the park with freshness, the soft breeze made the trees tremble, and the earth exhaled imperceptible vapors which threw a light, transparent veil over the horizon. The three cows, standing with drooping heads, cropped the grass with avidity, and four peacocks, with a loud rustling of wings, flew up into their accustomed perch in a cedar-tree under the windows of the castle. The barking of dogs in the distance came to the ear, and in the quiet air of the close of day the calls of human voices were heard, in phrases shouted across the fields, from one meadow to another, and in those short, guttural cries used in driving animals.

The painter, with bared head and shining eyes, breathed deeply, and, as he met the Countess's look, he said:

"This is happiness!"

"It never lasts," she answered, approaching nearer.

"Let us take it when it comes," said he.

"You never used to like the country until now," the Countess replied, smiling.

"I like it to-day because I find you here. I do not know how to live any more where you are not. When one is young, he may be in love though far away, through letters, thoughts, or dreams, perhaps because he feels that life is all before him, perhaps too because passion is stronger than pure affection; at my age, on the contrary, love has become like the habit of an invalid; it is a binding up of the soul, which flies now with only one wing, and mounts less frequently into the ideal. The heart knows no more ecstasy, only selfish wants. And then I know quite well that I have no time to lose to enjoy what remains for me."

"Oh, old!" she remonstrated, taking his hand tenderly.

"Yes, yes, I am old," he repeated. "Everything shows it, my hair, my changing character, the coming sadness. Alas! that is something I never have known till now — sadness. If someone had told me when I was thirty that a time would come when I should be sad without cause, uneasy, discontented with everything, I should not have believed it. That proves that my heart also has grown old."

The Countess replied with an air of profound certainty:

"Oh, as for me, my heart is still young. It never has changed. Yes, it has grown younger, perhaps. Once it was twenty; now it is only sixteen!"

They remained a long while thus, talking in the open window, mingled with the spirit of evening, very near each other, nearer than they ever had been, in this hour of tenderness, this twilight of love, like that of the day.

A servant entered, announcing:

"Madame la Comtesse is served."

"Have you called my daughter?" the Countess asked.

"Mademoiselle is in the dining-room."

All three sat down at the table. The shutters were closed, and two large candelabra with six candles each illumined Annette's face and seemed to powder her hair with gold dust. Bertin, smiling, looked at her continually.

"Heavens, now pretty she is in black!" he said.

And he turned toward the Countess while admiring the daughter, as if to thank the mother for having given him this pleasure.

When they returned to the drawing-room the moon had risen above the trees in the park. Their somber mass appeared like a great island, and the country round about like a sea hidden under the light mist that floated over the plains.

"Oh, mamma, let us take a walk," said Annette.

The Countess consented.

"I will take Julio."

"Very well, if you wish."

They set out. The young girl walked in front, amusing herself with the dog. When they crossed the lawn they heard the breathing of the cows, which, awake and scenting their enemy, raised their heads to look. Under the trees, farther away, the moon was pouring among the branches a shower of fine rays that fell to earth, seeming to wet the leaves that were spread out on the path in little patches of yellow light. Annette and Julio ran along, each seeming to have on this serene night, the same joyful and unburdened hearts, the gaiety of which expressed itself in graceful gambols.

In the little openings, where the wave of moonlight descended as into a well, the young girl looked like a spirit, and the painter called her back, marveling at this dark vision with its clear and brilliant face. Then when she darted away again, he took the Countess's hand and pressed it, often seeking her lips as they traversed the deeper shadows, as if the sight of Annette had revived the impatience of his heart.

At last they reached the edge of the plain, where they could just discern, afar, here and there, the groups of trees belonging to the farms. Through the milky mist that bathed the fields the horizon appeared illimitable, and the soft silence, the living silence of that vast space, so warm and luminous, was full of inexpressible hope, of that indefinable expectancy which makes summer nights so sweet. Far up in the heavens a few long slender clouds looked like silver shells. Standing still for a few seconds, one could hear in that nocturnal peace a confused, continuous murmur of life, a thousand slight sounds, the harmony of which seemed like silence.

A quail in a neighboring field uttered her double cry, and Julio, his ears erect, glided furtively toward the two flute-like notes of the bird, Annette following, as softly as he, holding her breath and crouching low.

"Ah," said the Countess, standing alone with the painter, "why do moments like this pass so quickly? We can hold nothing, keep nothing. We have not even time to taste what is good. It is over already."

Olivier kissed her hand, and replied, smiling:

"Oh, I cannot philosophize this evening! I belong to the present hour entirely."

"You do not love me as I love you," she murmured.

"Ah, do not— "

"No," she interrupted, "in me you love, as you said very truly before dinner, a woman who satisfies the needs of your heart, a woman who never has caused you a pain, and who has put a little happiness into your life. I know that; I feel it. Yes, I have the good consciousness, the ardent joy of having been good, useful, and helpful to you. You have loved, you still love all that you find agreeable in me, my attentions to you, my admiration, my wish to please you, my passion, the complete gift I made to you of my whole being. But it is not I you really love, do you know? Oh, I feel that as one feels a cold current of air. You love a thousand things about me — my beauty, which is fast leaving me, my devotion, the wit they say I possess, the opinion the world has of me, and that which I have of you in my heart; but it is not *I* — I, nothing but myself — do you understand?"

He laughed in a soft and friendly way.

"No, I do not understand you very well. You make a reproachful attack which is quite unexpected."

"Oh, my God! I wish I could make you understand how I love you! I am always seeking, but cannot find a means. When I think of you — and I am always thinking of you — I feel in the depths of my being an unspeakable intoxication of longing to be yours, an irresistible need of giving myself to you even more completely. I should like to sacrifice myself in some absolute way, for there is nothing better, when one loves, than to give, to give always, all, all, life, thought, body, all that one has, to feel that one is giving, to be ready to risk anything to give still more. I love you so much that I love to suffer for you, I love even my anxieties, my torments, my jealousies, the pain I feel when I realize that you are not longer tender toward me. I love in you a someone that only I have discovered, a you which is not the you of the world that is admired and known, a you which is mine, which cannot change nor grow old, which I cannot cease to love, for I have, to look at it, eyes that see it alone. But one cannot say these things. There are no words to express them."

He repeated softly, over and over:

"Dear, dear, dear Any!"

Julio came back, bounding toward them, without having found the quail, which had kept still at his approach; Annette followed him, breathless from running.

"I can't run any more," said she. "I will prop myself up with you, Monsieur painter!"

She leaned on Olivier's free arm, and they returned, walking thus, he between them, under the shadow of the trees. They spoke no more. He walked on, possessed by them, penetrated by a sort of feminine essence with which their contact filled him. He did not try to see them, since he had them near him; he even closed his eyes that he might feel their proximity the better. They guided him, conducted him, and he walked straight before him, fascinated by them, with the one on the left as well as the one on the right, without knowing, indeed, which was on the left or which on the right, which was mother, which was daughter. He abandoned himself willingly to the pleasure of unpremeditated and exquisite sensuous delight. He even tried to mingle them in his heart, not to distinguish them in his thought, and quieted desire with the charm of this confusion. Was it not only one woman beside him, composed of this mother and daughter, so much alike? And did not the daughter seem to have come to earth only for the purpose of reanimating his former love for the mother?

When he opened his eyes on entering the castle, it seemed to him that he had just passed through the most delicious moments of his life; that he had experienced the strangest, the most puzzling, yet complete emotion a man might feel, intoxicated with the same love by the seductiveness emanating from two women.

"Ah, what an exquisite evening!" said he, as soon as he found himself between them in the lamplight.

"I am not at all sleepy," said Annette; "I could pass the whole night walking when the weather is fine."

The Countess looked at the clock.

"Oh, it is half after eleven. You must go to bed, my child."

They separated, and went to their own apartments. The young girl who did not wish to go to bed was the only one that went to sleep at once.

The next morning, at the usual hour, when the maid, after opening the curtains and the shutters, brought the tea and looked at her mistress, who was still drowsy, she said:

"Madame looks better to-day, already."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes. Madame's face looks more rested."

Though she had not yet looked at herself, the Countess knew that this was true. Her heart was light, she did not feel it throb, and she felt once more as if she lived. The blood flowing in her veins was no longer coursing so rapidly as on the day before, hot and feverish, sending nervousness and restlessness through all her body, but gave her a sense of well-being and happy confidence.

When the maid had gone she went to look at herself in the mirror. She was a little surprised, for she felt so much better that she expected to find herself rejuvenated by several years in a single night. Then she realized the childishness of such a hope, and, after another glance, resigned herself to the knowledge that her complexion was only clearer, her eyes less fatigued, her lips a little redder than on the day before. As her soul was content, she could not feel sad, and she smiled, thinking: “Yes, in a few days I shall be quite myself again. I have gone through too much to recover so quickly.”

But she remained seated a very long time before her toilet-table, upon which were laid out in graceful order on a muslin scarf bordered with lace, before a beautiful mirror of cut crystal, all her little ivory-handled instruments of coquetry, bearing her arms surmounted by a coronet. There they were, innumerable, pretty, all different, destined for delicate and secret use, some of steel, fine and sharp, of strange shapes, like surgical instruments for operations on children, others round and soft, of feathers, of down, of the skins of unknown animals, made to lay upon the tender skin the caresses of fragrant powders or of powerful liquid perfumes.

She handled them a long time with practised fingers, carrying them from her lips to her temples with touches softer than a kiss, correcting imperfections, underlining the eyes, beautifying the eyelashes. At last, when she went down stairs, she felt almost sure that the first glance cast upon her would not be too unfavorable.

“Where is Monsieur Bertin?” she inquired of a servant she met in the vestibule.

“Monsieur Bertin is in the orchard, playing tennis with Mademoiselle,” the man replied.

She heard them from a distance counting the points. One after the other, the deep voice of the painter and the light one of the young girl, called: “Fifteen, thirty, forty, vantage, deuce, vantage, game!”

The orchard, where a space had been leveled for a tennis-court, was a great, square grass-plot, planted with apple-trees, inclosed by the park, the vegetable-garden, and the farms belonging to the castle. Along the slope that formed a boundary on three sides, like the defenses of an intrenched camp, grew borders of various kinds of flowers, wild and cultivated, roses in masses, pinks, heliotrope, fuchsias, mignonnette, and many more, which as Bertin said gave the air a taste of honey. Besides this, the bees, whose hives, thatched with straw, lined the wall of the vegetable-garden, covered the flowery field in their yellow, buzzing flight.

In the exact center of this orchard a few apple-trees had been cut down, in order to make a good court for tennis, and a tarry net, stretched across this space, separated it into two camps.

Annette, on one side, with bare head, her black skirt caught up, showing her ankles and half way up to her knee when she ran to catch a ball, dashed to and fro, with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, tired, out of breath with the sure and practised play of her adversary.

He, in white flannels, fitting tightly over the hips, a white shirt, and a white tennis cap, his abdomen somewhat prominent in that costume, awaited the ball coolly, judged its fall with precision, received and returned it without haste, without running, with the elegant pose, the passionate attention, and professional skill which he displayed in all athletic sports.

It was Annette that spied her mother first.

“Good morning, mamma!” she cried, “wait till we have finished this play.”

That second’s distraction lost her the game. The ball passed against her, almost rolling, touched the ground and went out of the game.

Bertin shouted “Won!” and the young girl, surprised, accused him of having profited by her inattention. Julio, trained to seek and find the lost balls, as if they were partridges fallen among the bushes, sprang behind her to get the ball rolling in the grass, seized it in his jaws, and brought it back, wagging his tail.

The painter now saluted the Countess, but, urged to resume the game, animated by the contest, pleased to find himself so agile, he threw only a short, preoccupied glance at the face prepared so carefully for him, asking:

“Will you allow me, dear Countess? I am afraid of taking cold and having neuralgia.”

“Oh, yes,” the Countess replied.

She sat down on a hay-stack, mowed that morning in order to give a clear field to the players, and, her heart suddenly touched with sadness, looked on at the game.

Her daughter, irritated at losing continually, grew more animated, excited, uttered cries of vexation or of triumph, and flew impetuously from one end of the court to the other. Often, in her swift movements, little locks of hair were loosened, rolled down and fell upon her shoulders. She seized them with impatient movements, and, holding the racket between her knees, fastened them up in place, thrusting hairpins into the golden mass.

And Bertin, from his position, cried to the Countess:

“Isn’t she pretty like that, and fresh as the day?”

Yes, she was young, she could run, grow warm, become red, let her hair fly, brave anything, dare everything, for all that only made her more beautiful.

Then, when they resumed their play with ardor, the Countess, more and more melancholy, felt that Olivier preferred that game, that childish sport, like the play of kittens jumping after paper balls, to the sweetness of sitting beside her that warm morning, and feeling her loving pressure against him.

When the bell, far away, rang the first signal for breakfast, it seemed to her that someone had freed her, that a weight had been lifted from her heart. But as she returned, leaning on his arm, he said to her:

“I have been amusing myself like a boy. It is a great thing to be, or to feel oneself, young. Ah, yes, there is nothing like that. When we do not like to run any more, it is all over with us.”

When they left the table the Countess, who on the preceding day had for the first time omitted her daily visit to the cemetery, proposed that they should go there together; so all three set out for the village.

They were obliged to go through some woods, through which ran a stream called “La Rainette,” no doubt because of the frogs that peopled it; then they had to cross the end of a plain before arriving at the church, situated in the midst of a group of houses that sheltered the grocer, the baker, the butcher, the wine-merchant, and several other modest tradesmen who supplied the needs of the peasants.

The walk was made in thoughtful silence, the recollection of the dead weighing on their spirits. Arrived at the grave, the women knelt and prayed a long time. The Countess, motionless, bent low, her handkerchief at her eyes, for she feared to weep lest her tears run down her cheeks. She prayed, but not as she had prayed before this day, in a sort of invocation to her mother, a despairing appeal penetrating under the marble of the tomb until she seemed to feel by the poignancy of her own anguish that the dead must hear her, listen to her, but a simple, hesitating, and earnest utterance of the consecrated words of the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*. She would not have had that day sufficient strength and steadiness of nerve necessary for that cruel communion that brought no response with what remained of that being who had disappeared in the tomb where all that was left of her was concealed. Other anxieties had penetrated her woman's heart, had agitated, wounded, and distracted her; and her fervent prayer rose to Heaven, full of vague supplications. She offered her adoration to God, the inexorable God who has made all poor creatures on the earth, and begged Him to take pity on her as well as on the one He had recalled to Himself.

She could not have told what she had asked of God, so vague and confused were her fears still; but she felt the need of Divine aid, of a superhuman support against approaching dangers and inevitable sorrows.

Annette, with closed eyes, having also murmured the formulas, sank into a reverie, for she did not wish to rise before her mother.

Olivier Bertin looked at them, thinking that he never had seen a more ravishing picture, and somewhat regretful that it was out of the question for him to be permitted to make a sketch of the scene.

On their way back they talked of human life, softly stirring those bitter and poetic ideas of a tender but pessimistic philosophy, which is a frequent subject of conversation between men and women whom life has wounded a little, and whose hearts mingle as they sympathize with each other's grief.

Annette, who was not ripe for such thoughts, left them frequently to gather wild flowers beside the road.

But Olivier, desiring to keep her near him, nervous at seeing her continually darting away, never removed his eyes from her. He was irritated that she should show more interest in the colors of the plants than in the words he spoke. He experienced an inexpressible dissatisfaction at not being able to charm her, to dominate her, as he had captivated her mother; and he felt a desire to hold out his hand and seize her, hold her, forbid her to go away. He felt that she was too alert, too young, too indifferent, too free — free as a bird, or like a little dog that will not come back, will not obey, which has independence in its veins, that sweet instinct of liberty which neither voice nor whip has yet vanquished.

In order to attract her he talked of gayer things, and at times he questioned her, trying to awaken her feminine curiosity so that she would listen; but one would think that the capricious wind of heaven was blowing through Annette's head that day, as it blew across the undulating grain, carrying away and dispersing her attention into space, for she hardly uttered even the commonplace replies expected of her, between her short digressions, and made them with an absent air, then returned to her flowers.

Finally he became exasperated, filled with a childish impatience, and as she ran up to beg her mother to carry her first bouquet so that she could gather another, he caught her by the elbow and pressed her arm, so that she could not escape again. She struggled, laughing, pulling with all her strength to get away from him; then, moved by masculine instinct, he tried gentler means, and, not being able to win her attention he tried to purchase it by tempting her coquetry.

"Tell me," said he, "what flower you prefer, and I will have a brooch made of it for you."

She hesitated, surprised.

"What, a brooch?"

"In stones of the same color; in rubies if it is the poppy; in sapphires if it is the cornflower, with a little leaf in emeralds."

Annette's face lighted up with that affectionate joy with which promises and presents animate a woman's countenance.

"The cornflower," said she, "it is so pretty."

"The cornflower it shall be. We will go to order it as soon as we return to Paris."

She no longer tried to leave him, attracted by the thought of the jewel she already tried to see, to imagine.

"Does it take very long to make a thing like that?" she asked.

He laughed, feeling that he had caught her.

"I don't know; it depends upon the difficulties. We will make the jeweler do it quickly."

A dismal thought suddenly crossed her mind.

"But I cannot wear it since I am in deep mourning!"

He had passed his arm under that of the young girl, and pressed it against him.

"Well, you will keep the brooch until you cease to wear mourning," said he; "that will not prevent you from looking at it."

As on the preceding evening, he was walking between them, held captive between their shoulders, and in order to see their eyes, of a similar blue dotted with tiny black spots, raised to his, he spoke to them in turn, moving his head first toward the one, then toward the other. As the bright sunlight now shone on them, he did not so fully confound the Countess with Annette, but he did more and more associate the daughter with the new-born remembrances of what the mother had been. He had a strong desire to embrace both, the one to find again upon cheek and neck a little of that pink and white freshness which he had already tasted, and which he saw now reproduced as by a miracle; the other because he loved her as he always had, and felt that from her came the powerful appeal of long habit. He even realized at that moment that his desire and affection for her, which for some time had been waning, had revived at the sight of her resuscitated youth.

Annette went away again to gather more flowers. This time Olivier did not call her back; it was as if the contact of her arm and the satisfaction of knowing that he had given her pleasure had quieted him; but he followed all her movements with the pleasure one feels in seeing the persons or things that captivate and intoxicate our eyes. When she returned, with a large cluster of flowers, he drew a deep breath, seeking unconsciously to inhale something of her, a little of her breath or the warmth of her skin in the air stirred by her running. He looked at her, enraptured, as one watches the dawn, or listens to music, with thrills of delight when she bent, rose again, or raised her arms to arrange her hair. And then, more and more, hour by hour, she evoked in him the memory of the past! Her laughter, her pretty ways, her motions, brought back to his lips the savor of former kisses given and returned; she made of the far-off past, of which he had forgotten the precise sensation, something like a dream in the present; she confused epochs, dates, the ages of his heart, and rekindling the embers of cooled emotions, she mingled, without his realizing it, yesterday with to-morrow, recollection with hope.

He asked himself as he questioned his memory whether the Countess in her brightest bloom had had that fawn-like, supple grace, that bold, capricious, irresistible charm, like the grace of a running, leaping animal. No. She had had a riper bloom but was less untamed. First, a child of the city, then a woman, never having imbibed the air of the fields and lived in the grass, she had grown pretty under the shade of the walls and not in the sunlight of heaven.

When they reentered the castle the Countess began to write letters at her little low table in the bay-window; Annette went up to her own room, and the painter went out again to walk slowly, cigar in mouth, hands clasped behind him, through the winding paths of the park. But he did not go away so far that he lost sight of the white facade or the pointed roof of the castle. As soon as it disappeared behind groups of trees or clusters of shrubbery, a shadow seemed to fall over his heart, as when a cloud hides the sun; and when it reappeared through the apertures in the foliage he paused a few seconds to contemplate the two rows of tall windows. Then he resumed his walk. He felt agitated, but content. Content with what? With everything.

The air seemed pure to him, life was good that day. His body felt once more the liveliness of a small boy, a desire to run, to catch the yellow butterflies fluttering over the lawn, as if they were suspended at the end of elastic threads. He sang little airs from the opera. Several times he repeated the celebrated phrase by Gounod: "*Laisse-moi contempler ton visage*," discovering in it a profoundly tender expression which never before he had felt in the same way.

Suddenly he asked himself how it was that he had so soon become different from his usual self. Yesterday, in Paris, dissatisfied with everything, disgusted, irritated; to-day calm, satisfied with everything — one would say that some benevolent god had changed his soul. "That same kind god," he thought, "might well have changed my body at the same time, and rejuvenated me a little." Suddenly he saw Julio hunting among the bushes. He called him, and when the dog ran up to put his finely formed head, with its curly ears, under his hand, he sat down on the grass to pet him more comfortably, spoke gentle words to him, laid him on his knees, and growing tender as he caressed the animal, he kissed it, after the fashion of women whose hearts are easily moved to demonstration.

After dinner, instead of going out as on the evening before, they spent the hours in the drawing-room.

Suddenly the Countess said: "We must leave here soon."

"Oh, don't speak of that yet!" Olivier exclaimed. "You would not leave Roncieres when I was not here; now what I have come, you think only of going away."

"But, my dear friend," said she, "we three cannot remain here indefinitely."

"It does not necessarily follow that we need stay indefinitely, but just a few days. How many times have I stayed at your house for whole weeks?"

"Yes, but in different circumstances, when the house was open to everyone."

"Oh, mamma," said Annette, coaxingly, "let us stay a few days more, just two or three. He teaches me so well how to play tennis. It annoys me to lose, but afterward I am glad to have made such progress."

Only that morning the Countess had been planning to make this mysterious visit of her friend's last until Sunday, and now she wished to go away, without knowing why. That day which she had hoped would be such a happy one had left in her soul an inexpressible but poignant sadness, a causeless apprehension, as tenacious and confused as a presentiment.

When she was once more alone in her room she even sought to define this new access of melancholy.

Had she experienced one of those imperceptible emotions whose touch has been so slight that reason does not remember it, but whose vibrations still stir the most sensitive chords of the heart? Perhaps? Which? She recalled, certainly, some little annoyances, in the thousand degrees of sentiment through which she had passed, each minute having its own. But they were too petty to have thus disheartened her. "I am exacting," she thought. "I have no right to torment myself in this way."

She opened her window, to breathe the night air, and leaned on the window-sill, gazing at the moon.

A slight noise made her look down. Olivier was pacing before the castle. "Why did he say that he was going to his room?" she thought; "why did he not tell me he was going out again? Why did he not ask me to come with him? He knows very well that it would have made me so happy. What is he thinking of now?"

This idea that he had not wished to have her with him on his walk, that he had preferred to go out alone this beautiful night, alone, with a cigar in his mouth, for she could see its fiery-red point — alone, when he might have given her the joy of taking her with him; this idea that he had not continual need of her, that he did not desire her always, created within her soul a new fermentation of bitterness.

She was about to close the window, that she might not see him or be tempted to call to him, when he raised his eyes and saw her.

"Well, are you star-gazing, Countess?"

"Yes," she answered. "You also, as it appears."

"Oh, I am simply smoking."

She could not resist the desire to ask: "Why did you not tell me you were going out?"

"I only wanted to smoke a cigar. I am coming in now."

"Then good-night, my friend."

"Good-night, Countess."

She retired as far as her low chair, sat down in it and wept; and her maid, who was called to assist her to bed, seeing her red eyes said with compassion:

"Ah, Madame is going to make a sad face for herself again to-morrow."

The Countess slept badly; she was feverish and had nightmare. As soon as she awoke she opened her window and her curtains to look at herself in the mirror. Her features were drawn, her eyelids swollen, her skin looked yellow; and she felt such violent grief because of this that she wished to say she was ill and to keep her bed, so that she need not appear until evening.

Then, suddenly, the necessity to go away entered her mind, to depart immediately, by the first train, to quit the country, where one could see too clearly by the broad light of the fields the ineffaceable marks of sorrow and of life itself. In Paris one lives in the half shadow of apartments, where heavy curtains, even at noontime, admit only a softened light. She would herself become beautiful again there, with the pallor one should have in that discreetly softened light. Then Annette's face rose before her eyes — so fresh and pink, with slightly disheveled hair, as when she was playing tennis. She understood then the unknown anxiety from which her soul had suffered. She was not jealous of her daughter's beauty! No, certainly not; but she felt, she acknowledged for the first time that she must never again show herself by Annette's side in the bright sunlight.

She rang, and before drinking her tea she gave orders for departure, wrote some telegrams, even ordering her dinner for that evening by telegraph, settled her bills in the country, gave her final instructions, arranged everything in less than an hour, a prey to feverish and increasing impatience.

When she went down stairs, Annette and Olivier, who had been told of her decision, questioned her with surprise. Then, seeing that she would not give any precise reason for this sudden departure, they grumbled a little and expressed their dissatisfaction until they separated at the station in Paris.

The Countess, holding out her hand to the painter, said: "Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Certainly, I will come," he replied, rather sulkily. "All the same, what you have done was not nice. We were so happy down there, all three of us."

CHAPTER III. A DANGEROUS WARNING

As soon as the Countess was alone with her daughter in her carriage, which was taking her back to her home, she suddenly felt tranquil and quieted, as if she had just passed through a serious crisis. She breathed easier, smiled at the houses, recognized with joy the look of the city, whose details all true Parisians seem to carry in their eyes and hearts. Each shop she passed suggested the ones beyond, on a line along the Boulevard, and the tradesman's face so often seen behind his show-case. She felt saved. From what? Reassured. Why? Confident. Of what?

When the carriage stopped under the arch of the porte-cochere, she alighted quickly and entered, as if flying, the shadow of the stairway; then passed to the shadow of her drawing-room, then to that of her bedroom. There she remained standing a few moments, glad to be at home, in security, in the dim and misty daylight of Paris, which, hardly brightening, compels one to guess as well as to see, where one may show what he pleases and hide what he will; and the unreasoning memory of the dazzling glare that bathed the country remained in her like an impression of past suffering.

When she went down to dinner, her husband, who had just arrived at home, embraced her affectionately, and said, smiling: "Ah, ha! I knew very well that our friend Bertin would bring you back. It was very clever of me to send him after you."

Annette responded gravely, in the peculiar tone she affected when she said something in jest without smiling:

"Oh, he had a great deal of trouble. Mamma could not decide for herself."

The Countess said nothing, but felt a little confused.

The doors being closed to visitors, no one called that evening. Madame de Guilleroy passed the whole of the following day in different shops, choosing or ordering what she needed. She had loved, from her youth, almost from her infancy, those long sittings before the mirrors of the great shops. From the moment of entering one, she took delight in thinking of all the details of that minute rehearsal in the green-room of Parisian life. She adored the rustle of the dresses worn by the salesgirls, who hastened forward to meet her, all smiles, with their offers, their queries; and Madame the dressmaker, the milliner, or corset-maker, was to her a person of consequence, whom she treated as an artist when she expressed an opinion in asking advice. She enjoyed even more to feel herself in the skilful hands of the young girls who undressed her and dressed her again, causing her to turn gently around before her own gracious reflection. The little shiver that the touch of their fingers produced on her skin, her neck, or in her hair, was one of the best and sweetest little pleasures that belonged to her life of an elegant woman.

This day, however, she passed before those candid mirrors, without her veil or hat, feeling a certain anxiety. Her first visit, at the milliner's, reassured her. The three hats which she chose were wonderfully becoming; she could not doubt it, and when the milliner said, with an air of conviction, "Oh, Madame la Comtesse, blondes should never leave off mourning" she went away much pleased, and entered other shops with a heart full of confidence.

Then she found at home a note from the Duchess, who had come to see her, saying that she would return in the evening; then she wrote some letters; then she fell into dreamy reverie for some time, surprised that this simple change of place had caused to recede into a past that already seemed far away the great misfortune that had overwhelmed her. She could not even convince herself that her return from Roncieres dated only from the day before, so much was the condition of her soul modified since her return to Paris, as if that little change had healed her wounds.

Bertin, arriving at dinner-time, exclaimed on seeing her:

"You are dazzling this evening!"

And this exclamation sent a warm wave of happiness through her being.

When they were leaving the table, the Count, who had a passion for billiards, offered to play a game with Bertin, and the two ladies accompanied them to the billiard-room, where the coffee was served.

The men were still playing when the Duchess was announced, and they all returned to the drawing-room. Madame de Corbelle and her husband presented themselves at the same time, their voices full of tears. For some minutes it seemed, from the doleful tones, that everyone was about to weep; but little by little, after a few tender words and inquiries, another current of thought set in; the voices took on a more cheerful tone, and everyone began to talk naturally, as if the shadow of the misfortune that had saddened them had suddenly been dissipated.

Then Bertin rose, took Annette by the hand, led her under the portrait of her mother, in the ray of light from the reflector, and said:

"Isn't this stupefying?"

The Duchess was so greatly surprised that she seemed dazed; she repeated many times: "Heavens! is it possible? Heavens! is it possible? It is like someone raised from the dead. To think that I did not see that when I came in! Oh, my little Any, I find you again, I, who knew you so well then in your first mourning as a woman — no, in your second, for you had already lost your father. Oh, that Annette, in black like that — why, it is her mother come back to earth! What a miracle! Without that portrait we never should have perceived it. Your daughter resembles you very much, but she resembles that portrait much more."

Musadieu now appeared, having heard of Madame de Guilleroy's return, as he wished to be one of the first to offer her the "homage of his sorrowful sympathy."

He interrupted his first speech on perceiving the young girl standing against the frame, illumined by the same ray of light, appearing like the living sister of the painting.

"Ah, that is certainly one of the most astonishing things I ever have seen," he exclaimed.

The Corbelles, whose convictions always followed established opinions, marveled in their turn with a little less exuberant ardor.

The Countess's heart seemed to contract, little by little, as if all these exclamations of astonishment had hurt it. Without speaking, she looked at her daughter standing by the image of herself, and a sudden feeling of weakness came over her. She longed to cry out: "Say no more! I know very well that she resembles me!"

Until the end of the evening she remained in a melancholy mood, having lost once more the confidence she had felt the day before.

Bertin was chatting with her when the Marquis de Farandal was announced. As soon as the painter saw him enter and approach the hostess he rose and glided behind her armchair, murmuring: "This is delightful! There comes that great animal now." Then, making a detour of the apartment, he reached the door and departed.

After receiving the salutations of the newcomer, the Countess looked around to find Olivier, to resume with him the talk in which she had been interested. Not seeing him, she asked:

“What, has the great man gone?”

“I believe so, my dear,” her husband answered; “I just saw him going away in the English fashion.”

She was surprised, reflected a few moments, and then began to talk to the Marquis.

Her intimate friends, however, discreetly took their leave early, for, so soon after her affliction, she had only half-opened her door, as it were.

When she found herself again lying on her bed, all the griefs that had assailed her in the country reappeared. They took a more distinct form; she felt them more keenly. She realized that she was growing old!

That evening, for the first time, she had understood that, in her own drawing-room, where until now she alone had been admired, complimented, flattered, loved, another, her daughter, was taking her place. She had comprehended this suddenly, when feeling that everyone’s homage was paid to Annette. In that kingdom, the house of a pretty woman, where she will permit no one to overshadow her, where she eliminated with discreet and unceasing care all disadvantageous comparisons, where she allows the entrance of her equals only to attempt to make them her vassals, she saw plainly that her daughter was about to become the sovereign. How strange had been that contraction of her heart when all eyes were turned upon Annette as Bertin held her by the hand standing before the portrait! She herself felt as if she had suddenly disappeared, dispossessed, dethroned. Everyone looked at Annette; no one had a glance for her any more! She was so accustomed to hear compliments and flattery, whenever her portrait was admired, she was so sure of eulogistic phrases, which she had little regarded but which pleased her nevertheless, that this desertion of herself, this unexpected defection, this admiration intended wholly for her daughter, had moved, astonished, and hurt her more than if it had been a question of no matter what rivalry under any kind of conditions.

But, as she had one of those natures which, in all crises, after the first blow, react, struggle, and find arguments for consolation, she reasoned that, once her dear little daughter should be married, when they should no longer live under the same roof, she herself would no longer be compelled to endure that incessant comparison which was beginning to be too painful for her under the eyes of her friend Olivier.

But the shock had been too much for her that evening. She was feverish and hardly slept at all. In the morning she awoke weary and overcome by extreme lassitude, and then within her surged up an irresistible longing to be comforted again, to be succored, to ask help from someone who could cure all her ills, all her moral and physical ailments.

Indeed, she felt so ill at ease and weak that she had an idea of consulting her physician. Perhaps she was about to be seriously affected, for it was not natural that in a few hours she should pass through those successive phases of suffering and relief. So she sent him a telegram, and awaited his coming.

He arrived about eleven o'clock. He was one of those dignified, fashionable physicians whose decorations and titles guarantee their ability, whose tact at least equals mere skill, and who have, above all, when treating women, an adroitness that is surer than medicines.

He entered, bowed, looked at his patient, and said with a smile: "Come, this is not a very grave case. With eyes like yours one is never very ill."

She felt immediate gratitude to him for this beginning, and told him of her troubles, her weakness, her nervousness and melancholy; then she mentioned, without laying too much stress on the matter, her alarmingly ill appearance. After listening to her with an attentive air, though asking no questions except as to her appetite, as if he knew well the secret nature of this feminine ailment, he sounded her, examined her, felt of her shoulders with the tips of his fingers, lifted her arms, having undoubtedly met her thought and understood with the shrewdness of a practitioner who lifts all veils that she was consulting him more for her beauty than for her health. Then he said:

"Yes, we are a little anemic, and have some nervous troubles. That is not surprising, since you have experienced such a great affliction. I will write you a little prescription that will set you right again. But above all, you must eat strengthening food, take beef-tea, no water, but drink beer. I will indicate an excellent brand. Do not tire yourself by late hours, but walk as much as you can. Sleep a good deal and grow a little plumper. This is all that I can advise you, my fair patient."

She had listened to him with deep interest, trying to guess at what his words implied. She caught at the last word.

"Yes, I am too thin," said she. "I was a little too stout at one time, and perhaps I weakened myself by dieting."

"Without any doubt. There is no harm in remaining thin when one has always been so; but when one grows thin on principle it is always at the expense of something else. Happily, that can be soon remedied. Good-bye, Madame."

She felt better already, more alert; and she wished to send for the prescribed beer for her breakfast, at its headquarters, in order to obtain it quite fresh.

She was just leaving the table when Bertin was announced.

"It is I, again," said he, "always I. I have come to ask you something. Have you anything particular to do this afternoon?"

"No, nothing. Why?"

"And Annette?"

"Nothing, also."

"Then, can you come to the studio about four o'clock?"

"Yes, but for what purpose?"

"I am sketching the face of my *Reverie*, of which I spoke to you when I asked you whether Annette might pose for me a few moments. It would render me a great service if I could have her for only an hour to-day. Will you?"

The Countess hesitated, annoyed, without knowing the reason why. But she replied:

"Very well, my friend; we shall be with you at four o'clock."

"Thank you! You are goodness itself!"

He went away to prepare his canvas and study his subject, so that he need not tire his model too much.

Then the Countess went out alone, on foot, to finish her shopping. She went down to the great central streets, then walked slowly up the Boulevard Malesherbes, for she felt as if her limbs were breaking. As she passed Saint Augustin's, she was seized with a desire to enter the church and rest. She pushed open the door, sighed with satisfaction in breathing the cool air of the vast nave, took a chair and sat down.

She was religious as very many Parisians are religious. She believed in God without a doubt, not being able to admit the existence of the universe without the existence of a creator. But associating, as does everyone, the attributes of divinity with the nature of the created matter that she beheld with her own eyes, she almost personified the Eternal God with what she knew of His work, without having a very clear idea as to what this mysterious Maker might really be.

She believed in Him firmly, adored Him theoretically, feared Him very vaguely, for she did not profess to understand His intentions or His will, having a very limited confidence in the priests, whom she regarded merely as the sons of peasants revolting from military service. Her father, a middle-class Parisian, never had imposed upon her any particular principles of devotion, and she had lived on thinking little about religious matters until her marriage. Then, her new station in life indicating more strictly her apparent duties toward the Church, she had conformed punctiliously to this light servitude, as do so many of her station.

She was lady patroness to numerous and very well known infant asylums, never failed to attend mass at one o'clock on Sundays, gave alms for herself directly, and for the world by means of an abbe, the vicar of her parish.

She had often prayed, from a sense of duty, as a soldier mounts guard at a general's door. Sometimes she had prayed because her heart was sad, especially when she suspected Olivier of infidelity to her. At such times, without confiding to Heaven the cause for her appeal, treating God with the same naïve hypocrisy that is shown to a husband, she asked Him to succor her. When her father died, long before, and again quite recently, at her mother's death, she had had violent crises of religious fervor, and had passionately implored Him who watches over us and consoles us.

And, now behold! to-day, in that church where she had entered by chance, she suddenly felt a profound need to pray, not for some one nor for some thing, but for herself, for herself alone, as she had already prayed the other day at her mother's grave. She must have help from some source, and she called on God now as she had summoned the physician that very morning.

She remained a long time on her knees, in the deep silence of the church, broken only by the sound of footsteps. Then suddenly, as if a clock had struck in her heart, she awoke from her memories, drew out her watch and started to see that it was already four o'clock. She hastened away to take her daughter to the studio, where Olivier must already be expecting them.

They found the artist in his studio, studying upon the canvas the pose of his *Reverie*. He wished to reproduce exactly what he had seen in the Parc Monceau while walking with Annette: a young girl, dreaming, with an open book upon her knees. He had hesitated as to whether he should make her plain or pretty. If she were ugly she would have more character, would arouse more thought and emotion, would contain more philosophy. If pretty, she would be more seductive, would diffuse more charm, and would please better.

The desire to make a study after his little friend decided him. The *Reveuse* should be pretty, and therefore might realize her poetic vision one day or other; whereas if ugly she would remain condemned to a dream without hope and without end.

As soon as the two ladies entered Olivier said, rubbing his hands:

"Well, Mademoiselle Nane, we are going to work together, it seems!"

The Countess seemed anxious. She sat in an armchair, and watched Olivier as he placed an iron garden-chair in the right light. He opened his bookcase to get a book, then asked, hesitating:

"What does your daughter read?"

"Dear me! anything you like! Give her a volume of Victor Hugo."

"'*La Legende des Siecles*?'"

"That will do."

"Little one, sit down here," he continued, "and take this volume of verse. Look for page — page 336, where you will find a poem entitled 'Les Pauvres Gens.' Absorb it, as one drinks the best wines, slowly, word by word, and let it intoxicate you and move you. Then close the book, raise your eyes, think and dream. Now I will go and prepare my brushes."

He went into a corner to put the colors on his palette, but while emptying on the thin board the leaden tubes whence issued slender, twisting snakes of color, he turned from time to time to look at the young girl absorbed in her reading.

His heart was oppressed, his fingers trembled; he no longer knew what he was doing, and he mingled the tones as he mixed the little piles of paste, so strongly did he feel once more before this apparition, before that resurrection, in that same place, after twelve years, an irresistible flood of emotion overwhelming his heart.

Now Annette had finished her reading and was looking straight before her. Approaching her, Olivier saw in her eyes two bright drops which, breaking forth, ran down her cheeks. He was startled by one of those shocks that make a man forget himself, and turning toward the Countess he murmured:

“God! how beautiful she is!”

But he remained stupefied before the livid and convulsed face of Madame de Guilleroy. Her large eyes, full of a sort of terror, gazed at her daughter and the painter. He approached her, suddenly touched with anxiety.

“What is the matter?” he asked.

“I wish to speak to you.”

Rising, she said quickly to Annette; “Wait a moment, my child; I have a word to say to Monsieur Bertin.”

She passed swiftly into the little drawing-room near by, where he often made his visitors wait. He followed her, his head confused, understanding nothing. As soon as they were alone, she seized his hands and stammered:

“Olivier! Olivier, I beg you not to make her pose for you!”

“But why?” he murmured, disturbed.

“Why? Why?” she said precipitately. “He asks it! You do not feel it, then yourself? Why? Oh, I should have guessed it sooner myself, but I only discovered it this moment. I cannot tell you anything now. Go and find my daughter. Tell her that I am ill; fetch a cab, and come to see me in an hour. I will receive you alone.”

“But, really, what is the matter with you?”

She seemed on the verge of hysterics.

“Leave me! I cannot speak here. Get my daughter and call a cab.”

He had to obey and reentered the studio. Annette, unsuspicious, had resumed her reading, her heart overflowing with sadness by the poetic and lamentable story.

“Your mother is indisposed,” said Olivier. “She became very ill when she went into the other room. I will take some ether to her.”

He went out, ran to get a flask from his room and returned.

He found them weeping in each other’s arms. Annette, moved by “Les Pauvres Gens,” allowed her feelings full sway, and the Countess was somewhat solaced by blending her grief with that sweet sorrow, in mingling her tears with those of her daughter.

He waited for some time, not daring to speak; he looked at them, his own heart oppressed with an incomprehensible melancholy.

“Well,” said he at last. “Are you better?”

“Yes, a little,” the Countess replied. “It was nothing. Have you ordered a carriage?”

“Yes, it will come directly.”

“Thank you, my friend — it is nothing. I have had too much grief for a long time.”

“The carriage is here,” a servant announced.

And Bertin, full of secret anguish, escorted his friend, pale and almost swooning, to the door, feeling her heart throb against his arm.

When he was alone he asked himself what was the matter with her, and why had she made this scene. And he began to seek a reason, wandering around the truth without deciding to discover it. Finally, he began to suspect. “Well,” he said to himself, “is it possible she believes that I am making love to her daughter? No, that would be too much!” And, combating with ingenious and loyal arguments that supposititious conviction, he felt indignant that she had lent for an instant to this healthy and almost paternal affection any suspicion of gallantry. He became more and more irritated against the Countess, utterly unwilling to concede that she had dared suspect him of such villainy, of an infamy so unqualifiable; and he resolved, when the time should come for him to answer her, that he would not soften the expression of his resentment.

He soon left his studio to go to her house, impatient for an explanation. All along the way he prepared, with a growing irritation, the arguments and phrases that must justify him and avenge him for such a suspicion.

He found her on her lounge, her face changed by suffering.

“Well,” said he, drily, “explain to me, my dear friend, the strange scene that has just occurred.”

“What, you have not yet understood it?” she said, in a broken voice.

“No, I confess I have not.”

“Come, Olivier, search your own heart well.”

“My heart?”

“Yes, at the bottom of your heart.”

“I don’t understand. Explain yourself better.”

“Look well into the depths of your heart, and see whether you find nothing there that is dangerous for you and for me.”

“I repeat that I do not comprehend you. I guess that there is something in your imagination, but in my own conscience I see nothing.”

“I am not speaking of your conscience, but of your heart.”

“I cannot guess enigmas. I entreat you to be more clear.”

Then, slowing raising her hands, she took the hands of the painter and held them; then, as if each word broke her heart, she said:

“Take care, my friend, or you will fall in love with my daughter!”

He withdrew his hands abruptly, and with the vivacity of innocence which combats a shameful accusation, with animated gesture and increasing excitement, he defended himself, accusing her in her turn of having suspected him unjustly.

She let him talk for some time, obstinately incredulous, sure of what she had said. Then she resumed:

“But I do not suspect you, my friend. You were ignorant of what was passing within you, as I was ignorant of it until this morning. You treat me as if I had accused you of wishing to seduce Annette. Oh, no, no! I know how loyal you are, worthy of all esteem and of every confidence. I only beg you, I entreat you to look into the depths of your heart and see whether the affection which, in spite of yourself, you are beginning to have for my daughter, has not a characteristic a little different from simple friendship.”

Now he was offended, and, growing still more excited, he began once more to plead his loyalty, just as he argued all alone in the street.

She waited until he had finished his defense; then, without anger, but without being shaken in her conviction, though frightfully pale, she murmured:

“Olivier, I know very well all that you have just said to me, and I think as you do. But I am sure that I do not deceive myself. Listen, reflect, understand. My daughter resembles me too much, she is too much what I was once when you began to love me, that you should not begin to love her, too.”

“Then,” he exclaimed, “you dare to throw in my face such a thing as that on this simple supposition and ridiculous reasoning: ‘He loves me; my daughter resembles me; therefore he will love her’!”

But seeing the Countess’s face changing more and more, he continued in a softer tone:

“Now, my dear Any, it is precisely because I do find you once more in her that this young girl pleases me so much. It is you, you alone, that I love when I look at her.”

“Yes, and it is just that from which I begin to suffer, and which makes me so anxious. You are not yet aware of what you feel, but by and by you will no longer be able to deceive yourself regarding it.”

"Any, I assure you that you are mad."

"Do you wish proofs?"

"Yes."

"You had not come to Roncieres for three years, in spite of my desire to have you come. But you rushed down there when it was proposed that you should come to fetch us."

"Oh, indeed! You reproach me for not leaving you alone down there, knowing that you were ill, after your mother's death!"

"So be it! I do not insist. But look: the desire to see Annette again is so imperious with you that you could not pass this day without asking me to take her to your studio, under the pretext of posing her."

"And do you not suppose it was you I wished to see?"

"At this moment you are arguing against yourself, trying to convince yourself — but you do not deceive me. Listen again: Why did you leave abruptly, the night before last, when the Marquis de Farandal entered? Do you know why?"

He hesitated, very much surprised, disturbed, disarmed by this observation. Then he said slowly:

"But — I hardly know — I was tired, and then, to be candid, that imbecile makes me nervous."

"Since when?"

"Always."

"Pardon me, I have heard you sing his praises. You liked him once. Be quite sincere, Olivier."

He reflected a few moments; then, choosing his words, he said:

"Yes, it is possible that the great love I have for you makes me love so much everything that belongs to you as to modify my opinion of that bore, whom I might meet occasionally with indifference, but whom I should not like to see in your house almost every day."

"My daughter's house will not be mine. But this is sufficient. I know the uprightness of your heart. I know that you will reflect deeply on what I have just said to you. When you have reflected you will understand that I have pointed out a great danger to you, while yet there is time to escape it. And you will beware. Now let us talk of something else, will you?"

He did not insist, but he was much disturbed; he no longer knew what to think, though indeed he had need for reflection. He went away after a quarter of an hour of unimportant conversation.

CHAPTER IV. SWEET POISON

With slow steps, Olivier returned to his own house, troubled as if he had just learned some shameful family secret. He tried to sound his heart, to see clearly within himself, to read those intimate pages of the inner book which seemed glued together, and which sometimes only a strange hand can turn over by separating them. Certainly he did not believe himself in love with Annette. The Countess, whose watchful jealousy never slept, had foreseen this danger from afar, and had signaled it before it even existed. But might that peril exist to-morrow, the day after, in a month? It was the frank question that he tried to answer sincerely. It was true that the child stirred his instincts of tenderness, but these instincts in men are so numerous that the dangerous ones should not be confounded with the inoffensive. Thus he adored animals, especially cats, and could not see their silky fur without being seized with an irresistible sensuous desire to caress their soft, undulating backs and kiss their electric fur.

The attraction that impelled him toward this girl a little resembled those obscure yet innocent desires that go to make up part of all the ceaseless and unappeasable vibrations of human nerves. His eye of the artist, as well as that of the man, was captivated by her freshness, by that springing of beautiful clear life, by that essence of youth that glowed in her; and his heart, full of memories of his long intimacy with the Countess, finding in the extraordinary resemblance of Annette to her mother a reawakening of old feelings, of emotions sleeping since the beginning of his love, had been startled perhaps by the sensation of an awakening. An awakening? Yes. Was it that? This idea illumined his mind. He felt that he had awakened after years of sleep. If he had loved the young girl without being aware of it, he should have experienced near her that rejuvenation of his whole being which creates a different man as soon as the flame of a new desire is kindled within him. No, the child had only breathed upon the former fire. It had always been the mother that he loved, but now a little more than recently, no doubt, because of her daughter, this reincarnation of herself. And he formulated this decision with the reassuring sophism: “One loves but once! The heart may often be affected at meeting some other being, for everyone exercises on others either attractions or repulsions. All these influences create friendship, caprices, desire for possession, quick and fleeting ardors, but not real love. That this love may exist it is necessary that two beings should be so truly born for each other, should be linked together in so many different ways, by so many similar tastes, by so many affinities of body, of mind, and of character, and so many ties of all kinds that the whole shall form a union of bonds. That which we love, in short, is not so much Madame X. or Monsieur Z.; it is a women or a man, a creature without a name, something sprung from Nature, that great female, with organs, a form, a heart, a mind, a combination of attributes which like a magnet attract our organs, our eyes, our lips, our hearts, our thoughts, all our appetites, sensual as well as intellectual. We love a type, that is, the reunion in one single person of all the human qualities that may separately attract us in others."

For him, the Comtesse de Guilleroy had been this type, and their long-standing liaison, of which he had not wearied, proved it to him beyond doubt. Now, Annette so much resembled physically what her mother had been as to deceive the eye; so there was nothing astonishing in the fact that this man's heart had been surprised, if even it had not been wholly captured. He had adored one woman! Another woman was born of her, almost her counterpart. He could not prevent himself from bestowing on the latter a little tender remnant of the passionate attachment he had had for the former. There was no harm nor danger in that. Only his eyes and his memory allowed themselves to be deluded by this appearance of resurrection; but his instinct never had been affected, for never had he felt the least stirring of desire for the young girl.

However, the Countess had reproached him with being jealous of the Marquis! Was it true? Again he examined his conscience severely, and decided that as a matter of fact he was indeed a little jealous. What was there astonishing in that, after all? Are we not always being jealous of men who pay court to no matter what woman? Does not one experience in the street, at a restaurant, or a theater, a little feeling of enmity toward the gentleman who is passing or who enters with a lovely girl on his arm? Every possessor of a woman is a rival, a triumphant male, a conqueror envied by all the other males. And then, without considering these physiological reasons, if it was natural that he should have for Annette a sympathy a little excessive because of his love for her mother, was it not natural also that he should feel in his heart a little masculine hatred of the future husband? He could conquer this unworthy feeling without much trouble.

But in the depths of his heart he still felt a sort of bitter discontent with himself and with the Countess. Would not their daily intercourse be made disagreeable by the suspicion that he would be aware of in her? Should he not be compelled to watch with tiresome and scrupulous attention all that he said and did, his very looks, his slightest approach toward the young girl? for all that he might do or say would appear suspicious to the mother. He reached his home in a gloomy mood and began to smoke cigarettes, with the vehemence of an irritated man who uses ten matches to light his tobacco. He tried in vain to work. His hand, his eye, and his brain seemed to have lost the knack of painting, as if they had forgotten it, or never had known and practised the art. He had taken up to finish a little sketch on canvas — a street corner, at which a blind man stood singing — and he looked at it with unconquerable indifference, with such a lack of power to continue it that he sat down before it, palette in hand, and forgot it, though continuing to gaze at it with attention and abstracted fixity.

Then, suddenly, impatience at the slowness of time, at the interminable minutes, began to gnaw him with its intolerable fever. What should he do until he could go to the club for dinner, since he could not work at home? The thought of the streets tired him only to think of, filled him with disgust for the sidewalks, the pedestrians, the carriages and shops; and the idea of paying visits that day, to no matter whom, aroused in him an instantaneous hatred for everyone he knew.

Then, what should he do? Should he pace to and fro in his studio, looking at the clock at every turn, watching the displacement of the long hand every few seconds? Ah, he well knew those walks from the door to the cabinet, covered with ornaments. In his hours of excitement, impulse, ambition, of fruitful and facile execution, these pacings had been delicious recreation — these goings and comings across the large room, brightened, animated, and warmed by work; but now, in his hours of powerlessness and nausea, the miserable hours, when nothing seemed worth the trouble of an effort or a movement, it was like the terrible tramping of a prisoner in his cell. If only he could have slept, even for an hour, on his divan! But no, he should not sleep; he should only agitate himself until he trembled with exasperation. Whence came this sudden attack of bad temper? He thought: “I am becoming excessively nervous to have worked myself into such a state for so insignificant a cause.”

Then he thought he would take a book. The volume of *La Legende des Siecles* had remained on the iron chair where Annette had laid it. He opened it and read two pages of verse without understanding them. He understood them no more than if they had been written in a foreign tongue. He was determined, however, and began again, only to find that what he read had not really penetrated to his mind. “Well,” said he to himself, “it appears that I am becoming imbecile!” But a sudden inspiration reassured him as to how he should fill the two hours that must elapse before dinner-time. He had a hot bath prepared, and there he remained stretched out, relaxed and soothed by the warm water, until his valet, bringing his clothes, roused him from a doze. Then he went to the club, where he found the usual companions. He was received with open arms and exclamations, for they had not seen him for several days.

“I have just returned from the country,” he explained.

All those men, except Musadieu, the landscape painter, professed a profound contempt for the fields. Rocdiane and Landa, to be sure, went hunting there, but among plains or woods they only enjoyed the pleasure of seeing pheasants, quail, or partridges falling like handfuls of feathers under their bullets, or little rabbits riddled with shot, turning somersaults like clowns, going heels over head four or five times, showing their white bellies and tails at every bound. Except for these sports of autumn and winter, they thought the country a bore. As Rocdiane would say: “I prefer little women to little peas!”

The dinner was lively and jovial as usual, animated by discussions wherein nothing unforeseen occurs. Bertin, to arouse himself, talked a great deal. They found him amusing, but as soon as he had had coffee, and a sixty-point game of billiards with the banker Liverdy, he went out, rambling from the Madeleine to the Rue Taitbout; after passing three times before the Vaudeville, he asked himself whether he should enter; almost called a cab to take him to the Hippodrome; changed his mind and turned toward the Nouveau Cirque, then made an abrupt half turn, without motive, design, or pretext, went up the Boulevard Malesherbes, and walked more slowly as he approached the dwelling of the Comtesse de Guilleroy. “Perhaps she will think it strange to see me again this evening,” he thought. But he reassured himself in reflecting that there was nothing astonishing in his coming a second time to inquire how she felt.

She was alone with Annette, in the little back drawing-room, and was still working on her coverlets for the poor.

She said simply, on seeing him enter: “Ah, is it you, my friend?”

“Yes, I felt anxious; I wished to see you. How are you?”

“Thank you, very well.”

She paused a moment, then added, significantly:

“And you?”

He began to laugh unconcernedly, as he replied: “Oh. I am very well, very well. Your fears were entirely without foundation.”

She raised her eyes, pausing in her work, and fixed her gaze upon him, a gaze full of doubt and entreaty.

“It is true,” said he.

“So much the better,” she replied, with a smile that was slightly forced.

He sat down, and for the first time in that house he was seized with irresistible uneasiness, a sort of paralysis of ideas, still greater than that which had seized him that day as he sat before his canvas.

“You may go on, my child; it will not annoy him,” said the Countess to her daughter.

“What was she doing?”

“She was studying a *fantaisie*.”

Annette rose to go to the piano. He followed her with his eyes, unconsciously, as he always did, finding her pretty. Then he felt the mother’s eye upon him, and turned his head abruptly, as if he were seeking something in the shadowy corner of the drawing-room.

The Countess took from her work-table a little gold case that he had given her, opened it, and offered him some cigarettes.

“Pray smoke, my friend,” said she; “you know I like it when we are alone here.”

He obeyed, and the music began. It was the music of the distant past, graceful and light, one of those compositions that seem to have inspired the artist on a soft moonlight evening in springtime.

“Who is the composer of that?” asked Bertin.

“Schumann,” the Countess replied. “It is little known and charming.”

A desire to look at Annette grew stronger within him, but he did not dare. He would have to make only a slight movement, merely a turn of the neck, for he could see out of the corner of his eye the two candles lighting the score; but he guessed so well, read so clearly, the watchful gaze of the Countess that he remained motionless, his eyes looking straight before him, interested apparently in the gray thread of smoke from his cigarette.

"Was that all you had to say to me?" Madame de Guilleroy murmured to him.

He smiled.

"Don't be vexed with me. You know that music hypnotizes me; it drinks my thoughts. I will talk soon."

"I must tell you," said the Countess, "that I had studied something for you before mamma's death. I never had you hear it, but I will play it for you immediately, as soon as the little one has finished; you shall see how odd it is."

She had real talent, and a subtle comprehension of the emotion that flows through sounds. It was indeed one of her surest powers over the painter's sensibility.

As soon as Annette had finished the pastoral symphony by Mehul, the Countess rose, took her place, and awakened a strange melody with her fingers, a melody of which all the phrases seemed complaints, divers complaints, changing, numerous, interrupted by a single note, beginning again, falling into the midst of the strains, cutting them short, scanning them, crashing into them, like a monotonous, incessant, persecuting cry, an unappeasable call of obsession.

But Olivier was looking at Annette, who had sat down facing him, and he heard nothing, comprehended nothing.

He looked at her, without thinking, indulging himself with the sight of her, as a good and habitual possession of which he had been deprived, drinking her youthful beauty wholesomely, as we drink water when thirsty.

"Well," said the Countess, "was not that beautiful?"

"Admirable! Superb!" he said, aroused. "By whom?"

"You do not know it?"

"No."

"What, really, you do not know it?"

"No, indeed."

"By Schubert."

"That does not astonish me at all," he said, with an air of profound conviction. "It is superb! You would be delightful if you would play it over again.”

She began once more, and he, turning his head, began again to contemplate Annette, but listened also to the music, that he might taste two pleasures at the same time.

When Madame de Guilleroy had returned to her chair, in simple obedience to the natural duplicity of man he did not allow his gaze to rest longer on the fair profile of the young girl, who knitted opposite her mother, on the other side of the lamp.

But, though he did not see her, he tasted the sweetness of her presence, as one feels the proximity of a fire on the hearth; and the desire to cast upon her swift glances only to transfer them immediately to the Countess, tormented him — the desire of the schoolboy who climbs up to the window looking into the street as soon as the master’s back is turned.

He went away early, for his power of speech was as paralyzed as his mind, and his persistent silence might be interpreted.

As soon as he found himself in the street a desire to wander took possession of him, for whenever he heard music it remained in his brain a long time, threw him into reveries that seemed the music itself in a dream, but in a clearer sequel. The sound of the notes returned, intermittent and fugitive, bringing separate measures, weakened, and far off as an echo; then, sinking into silence, appeared to leave it to the mind to give a meaning to the themes, and to seek a sort of tender and harmonious ideal. He turned to the left on reaching the outer Boulevard, perceiving the fairylike illumination of the Parc Monceau, and entered its central avenue, curving under the electric moons. A policeman was slowly strolling along; now and then a belated cab passed; a man, sitting on a bench in a bluish bath of electric light, was reading a newspaper, at the foot of a bronze mast that bore the dazzling globe. Other lights on the broad lawns, scattered among the trees, shed their cold and powerful rays into the foliage and on the grass, animating this great city garden with a pale life.

Bertin, with hands behind his back, paced the sidewalk, thinking of his walk with Annette in this same park when he had recognized in her the voice of her mother.

He let himself fall upon a bench, and, breathing in the cool freshness of the dewy lawns, he felt himself assailed by all the passionate expectancy that transforms the soul of youth into the incoherent canvas of an unfinished romance of love. Long ago he had known such evenings, those evenings of errant fancy, when he had allowed his caprice to roam through imaginary adventures, and he was astonished to feel a return of sensations that did not now belong to his age.

But, like the persistent note in the Schubert melody, the thought of Annette, the vision of her face bent beside the lamp, and the strange suspicion of the Countess, recurred to him at every instant. He continued, in spite of himself, to occupy his heart with this question, to sound the impenetrable depths where human feelings germinate before being born. This obstinate research agitated him; this constant preoccupation regarding the young girl seemed to open to his soul the way to tender reveries. He could not drive her from his mind; he bore within himself a sort of evocation of her image, as once he had borne the image of the Countess after she had left him; he often had the strange sensation of her presence in the studio.

Suddenly, impatient at being dominated by a memory, he arose, muttering: “Any was stupid to say that to me. Now she will make me think of the little one!”

He went home, disturbed about himself. After he had gone to bed he felt that sleep would not come to him, for a fever coursed in his veins, and a desire for reverie fermented in his heart. Dreading a wakeful night, one of those enervating attacks of insomnia brought about by agitation of the spirit, he thought he would try to read. How many times had a short reading served him as a narcotic! So he got up and went into his library to choose a good and soporific work; but his mind, aroused in spite of himself, eager for any emotion it could find, sought among the shelves for the name of some author that would respond to his state of exaltation and expectancy. Balzac, whom he loved, said nothing to him; he disdained Hugo, scorned Lamartine, who usually touched his emotions, and fell eagerly upon Musset, the poet of youth. He took the volume and carried it to bed, to read whatever he might chance to find.

When he had settled himself in bed, he began to drink, as with the thirst of a drunkard, those flowing verses of an inspired being who sang, like a bird, of the dawn of existence, and having breath only for the morning, was silent in the arid light of day; those verses of a poet who above all mankind was intoxicated with life, expressing his intoxication in fanfares of frank and triumphant love, the echo of all young hearts bewildered with desires.

Never had Bertin so perfectly comprehended the physical charm of those poems, which move the senses but hardly touch the intelligence. With his eyes on those vibrating stanzas, he felt that his soul was but twenty years old, radiant with hopes, and he read the volume through in a state of youthful intoxication. Three o'clock struck, and he was astonished to find that he had not yet grown sleepy. He rose to shut his window and to carry his book to a table in the middle of the room; but at the contact of the cold air a pain, of which several seasons at Aix had not cured him, ran through his loins, like a warning or a recall; and he threw aside the poet with an impatient movement, muttering: "Old fool!" Then he returned to bed and blew out his light.

He did not go to see the Countess the next day, and he even made the energetic resolution not to return there for two days. But whatever he did, whether he tried to paint or to walk, whether he bore his melancholy mood with him from house to house, his mind was everywhere harassed by the preoccupation of those two women, who would not be banished.

Having forbidden himself to go to see them, he solaced himself by thinking of them, and he allowed both mind and heart to give themselves up to memories of both. It happened often that in that species of hallucination in which he lulled his isolation the two faces approached each other, different, such as he knew them; then, passing one before the other, mingled, blended together, forming only one face, a little confused, a face that was no longer the mother's, not altogether that of the daughter, but the face of a woman loved madly, long ago, in the present, and forever.

Then he felt remorse at having abandoned himself to the influence of these emotions, which he knew were powerful and dangerous. To escape them, to drive them away, to deliver his soul from this sweet and captivating dream, he directed his mind toward all imaginable ideas, all possible subjects of reflection and meditation. Vain efforts! All the paths of distraction that he took led him back to the same point, where he met a fair young face that seemed to be lying in wait for him. It was a vague and inevitable obsession that floated round him, recalling him, stopping him, no matter what detour he might make in order to fly from it.

The confusion of these two beings, which had so troubled him on the evening of their walk at Roncieres, rose again in his memory as soon as he evoked them, after ceasing to reflect and reason, and he attempted to comprehend what strange emotion was this that stirred his being. He said to himself: “Now, have I for Annette a more tender feeling than I should have?” Then, probing his heart, he felt it burning with affection for a woman who was certainly young, who had Annette’s features, but who was not she. And he reassured himself in a cowardly way by thinking: “No, I do not love the little one; I am the victim of a resemblance.”

However, those two days at Roncieres remained in his soul like a source of heat, of happiness, of intoxication; and the least details of those days returned to him, one by one, with precision, sweeter even than at the time they occurred. Suddenly, while reviewing the course of these memories, he saw once more the road they had followed on leaving the cemetery, the young girl plucking flowers, and he recollected that he had promised her a cornflower in sapphires as soon as they returned to Paris.

All his resolutions took flight, and without struggling longer he took his hat and went out, rejoiced at the thought of the pleasure he was about to give her.

The footman answered him, when he presented himself:

“Madame is out, but Mademoiselle is at home.”

Again he felt a thrill of joy.

“Tell her that I should like to speak to her.”

Annette appeared very soon.

“Good-day, dear master,” said she gravely.

He began to laugh, shook hands with her, and sitting near her, said:

“Guess why I have come.”

She thought a few seconds.

“I don’t know.”

“To take you and your mother to the jeweler’s to choose the sapphire cornflower I promised you at Roncieres.”

The young girl’s face was illumined with delight.

“Oh, and mamma has gone out,” said she. “But she will return soon. You will wait for her, won’t you?”

“Yes, if she is not too long.”

“Oh, how insolent! Too long, with me! You treat me like a child.”

“No, not so much as you think,” he replied.

He felt in his heart a longing to please her, to be gallant and witty, as in the most successful days of his youth, one of those instinctive desires that excite all the faculties of charming, that make the peacock spread its tail and the poet write verses. Quick and vivacious phrases rose to his lips, and he talked as he knew how to talk when he was at his best. The young girl, animated by his vivacity, answered him with all the mischief and playful shrewdness that were in her.

Suddenly, while he was discussing an opinion, he exclaimed: “But you have already said that to me often, and I answered you— “

She interrupted him with a burst of laughter.

“Ah, you don’t say ‘*tu*’ to me any more! You take me for mamma!”

He blushed and was silent, then he stammered:

“Your mother has already sustained that opinion with me a hundred times.”

His eloquence was extinguished; he knew no more what to say, and he now felt afraid, incomprehensibly afraid, of this little girl.

“Here is mamma,” said she.

She had heard the door open in the outer drawing-room, and Olivier, disturbed as if some one had caught him in a fault, explained how he had suddenly bethought him of his promise, and had come for them to take them to the jeweler’s.

“I have a coupe,” said he. “I will take the bracket seat.”

They set out, and a little later they entered Montara’s.

Having passed all his life in the intimacy, observation, study, and affection of women, having always occupied his mind with them, having been obliged to sound and discover their tastes, to know the details of dress and fashion as they knew them, being familiar with the minute details of their private life, he had arrived at a point that enabled him often to share certain of their sensations, and he always experienced, when entering one of the great shops where the charming and delicate accessories of their beauty are to be found, an emotion of pleasure that almost equaled that which stirred their hearts. He interested himself as they did in those coquettish trifles with which they set forth their beauty; the stuffs pleased his eyes; the laces attracted his hands; the most insignificant furbelows held his attention. In jewelers’ shops he felt for the showcases a sort of religious respect, as if before a sanctuary of opulent seduction; and the counter, covered with dark cloth, upon which the supple fingers of the goldsmith make the jewels roll, displaying their precious reflections, filled him with a certain esteem.

When he had seated the Countess and her daughter before this severe piece of furniture, on which each, with a natural movement, placed one hand, he indicated what he wanted, and they showed him models of little flowers.

Then they spread sapphires before him, from which it was necessary to choose four. This took a long time. The two women turned them over on the cloth with the tips of their fingers, then lifted them carefully, looked through them at the light, studying them with knowing and passionate attention. When they had laid aside those they had chosen, three emeralds had to be selected to make the leaves, then a tiny diamond that would tremble in the center like a drop of dew.

Then Olivier, intoxicated with the joy of giving, said to the Countess:

“Will you do me the favor to choose two rings?”

“I?”

“Yes. One for you, one for Annette. Let me make you these little presents in memory of the two days I passed at Roncieres.”

She refused. He insisted. A long discussion followed, a struggle of words and arguments, which ended, not without difficulty, in his triumph.

Rings were brought, some, the rarest, alone in special cases; others arranged in similar groups in large square boxes, wherein all the fancifulness of their settings were displayed in alignment on the velvet. The painter was seated between the two women, and began, with the same ardent curiosity, to take up the gold rings, one by one, from the narrow slits that held them. He deposited them before him on the cloth-covered counter where they were massed in two groups, those that had been rejected at first sight and those from which a choice would be made.

Time was passing, insensibly and sweetly, in this pretty work of selection, more captivating than all the pleasures of the world, distracting and varied as a play, stirring also an exquisite and almost sensuous pleasure in a woman’s heart.

Then they compared, grew animated, and, after some hesitation, the choice of the three judges settled upon a little golden serpent holding a beautiful ruby between his thin jaws and his twisted tail.

Olivier, radiant, now arose.

“I will leave you my carriage,” said he; “I have something to look after, and I must go.”

But Annette begged her mother to walk home, since the weather was so fine. The Countess consented, and, having thanked Bertin, went out into the street with her daughter.

They walked for some time in silence, enjoying the sweet realization of presents received; then they began to talk of all the jewels they had seen and handled. Within their minds still lingered a sort of glittering and jingling, an echo of gaiety. They walked quickly through the crowd which fills the street about five o'clock on a summer evening. Men turned to look at Annette, and murmured in distinct words of admiration as they passed. It was the first time since her mourning, since black attire had added brilliancy to her daughter's beauty, that the Countess had gone out with her in the streets of Paris; and the sensation of that street success, that awakened attention, those whispered compliments, that little wake of flattering emotion which the passing of a pretty woman leaves in a crowd of men, contracted her heart little by little with the same painful feeling she had had the other evening in her drawing-room, when her guests had compared the little one with her own portrait. In spite of herself, she watched for those glances that Annette attracted; she felt them coming from a distance, pass over her own face without stopping and suddenly settle upon the fair face beside her own. She guessed, she saw in the eyes the rapid and silent homage to this blooming youth, to the powerful charm of that radiant freshness, and she thought: "I was as pretty as she, if not prettier." Suddenly the thought of Olivier flashed across her mind, and she was seized, as at Roncieres, with a longing to flee.

She did not wish to feel herself any longer in this bright light, amid this stream of people, seen by all those men who yet did not look at her. Those days seemed far away, though in reality quite recent, when she had sought and provoked comparison with her daughter. Who, to-day, among the passers, thought of comparing them? Only one person had thought of it, perhaps, a little while ago, in the jeweler's shop. He? Oh, what suffering! Could it be that he was thinking continually of that comparison? Certainly he could not see them together without thinking of it, and without remembering the time when she herself had entered his house, so fresh, so pretty, so sure of being loved!

"I feel ill," said she. "We will take a cab, my child."

Annette was uneasy.

"What is the matter, mamma?" she asked.

"It is nothing; you know that since your grandmother's death I often have these moments of weakness."

CHAPTER V. A WANING MOON

Fixed ideas have the tenacity of incurable maladies. Once entered in the soul they devour it, leaving it no longer free to think of anything, or to have a taste for the least thing. Whatever she did, or wherever she was, alone or surrounded by friends, she could no longer rid herself of the thought that had seized her in coming home side by side with her daughter. Could it be that Olivier, seeing them together almost every day, thought continually of the comparison between them?

Surely he must do it in spite of himself, incessantly, himself haunted by that unforgettable resemblance, accentuated still further by the imitation of tone and gesture they had tried to produce. Every time he entered she thought of that comparison; she read it in his eyes, guessed it and pondered over it in her heart and in her mind. Then she was tortured by a desire to hide herself, to disappear, never to show herself again beside her daughter.

She suffered, too, in all ways, not feeling at home any more in her own house. That pained feeling of dispossession which she had had one evening, when all eyes were fixed on Annette under her portrait, continued, stronger and more exasperating than before. She reproached herself unceasingly for feeling that yearning need for deliverance, that unspeakable desire to send her daughter away from her, like a troublesome and tenacious guest; and she labored against it with unconscious skill, convinced of the necessity of struggling to retain, in spite of everything, the man she loved.

Unable to hasten Annette’s marriage too urgently, because of their recent mourning, she feared, with a confused yet dominating fear, anything that might defeat that plan; and she sought, almost in spite of herself, to awaken in her daughter’s heart some feeling of tenderness for the Marquis.

All the resourceful diplomacy she had employed so long to hold Olivier now took with her a new form, shrewder, more secret, exerting itself to kindle affection between the young people, and to keep the two men from meeting.

As the painter, who kept regular hours of work, never breakfasted away from home, and usually gave only his evenings to his friends, she often invited the Marquis to breakfast. He would arrive, spreading around him the animation of his ride, a sort of breath of morning air. And he talked gaily of all those worldly things that seem to float every day upon the autumnal awakening of brilliant and horse-loving Paris in the avenues of the Bois. Annette was amused in listening to him, acquired some taste for those topics of the days that he recounted to her, fresh and piquant as they were. An intimacy of youth sprang up between them, a pleasant companionship which a common and passionate love for horses naturally fostered. When he had gone the Countess and the Count would artfully praise him, saying everything necessary to let the young girl know that it depended only upon herself to marry him if he pleased her.

She had understood very quickly, however, and reasoning frankly with herself, judged it a very simple thing to take for a husband this handsome fellow, who would give her, besides other satisfactions, that which she preferred above all others, the pleasure of galloping beside him every morning on a thoroughbred.

They found themselves betrothed one day, quite naturally, after a clasp of the hand and a smile, and the marriage was spoken of as something long decided. Then the Marquis began to bring gifts, and the Duchess treated Annette like her own daughter. The whole affair, then, had been fostered by common accord, warmed over the fire of a little intimacy, during the quiet hours of the day; and the Marquis, having many other occupations, relatives, obligations and duties, rarely came in the evening.

That was Olivier’s time. He dined regularly every week with his friends, and also continued to appear without appointment to ask for a cup of tea between ten o’clock and midnight.

As soon as he entered the Countess watched him, devoured by a desire to know what was passing in his heart. He gave no glance, made no gesture that she did not immediately interpret, and she was tortured by this thought: “It is impossible that he is not in love with her, seeing us so close together.”

He, too, brought gifts. Not a week passed that he did not appear bearing two little packages in his hands, offering one to the mother, the other to the daughter; and the Countess, opening the boxes, which often held valuable objects, felt again that contraction of the heart. She knew so well that desire to give which, as a woman, she never had been able to satisfy — that desire to bring something that would give pleasure, to purchase for someone, to find in the shops some trifle that would please.

The painter had already been through this phase, and she had seen him come in many times with that same smile, that same gesture, a little packet in his hand. That habit had ceased after awhile, and now it had begun again. For whom? She had no matter of doubt. It was not for her!

He appeared fatigued and thin. She concluded that he was suffering. She compared his entrances, his manner, his bearing with the attitude of the Marquis, who was also beginning to be attracted by Annette’s grace. It was not at all the same thing: Monsieur de Farandal admired her, Olivier Bertin loved! She believed this at least during her hours of torture; then, in quieter moments she still hoped that she had deceived herself.

Oh, often she could hardly restrain herself from questioning him when she was alone with him, praying, entreating him to speak, to confess all, to hide nothing! She preferred to know and to weep under certainty than to suffer thus under doubt, not able to read that closed heart, wherein she felt another love was growing.

That heart, which she prized more highly than her life, over which she had watched, and which she had warmed and animated with her love for twelve years, of which she had believed herself sure, which she had hoped was definitely hers, conquered, submissive, passionately devoted for the rest of their lives, behold! now that heart was escaping her by an inconceivable, horrible, and monstrous fatality! Yes, it had suddenly closed itself, upon a secret. She could no longer penetrate it by a familiar word, or hide therein her own affection as in a faithful retreat open for herself alone. What is the use of loving, of giving oneself without reserve, if suddenly he to whom one has offered her whole being, her entire existence, all, everything she had in the world, is to escape thus because another face has pleased him, transforming him in a few days almost into a stranger?

A stranger! He, Olivier? He spoke to her, as always, with the same words, the same voice, the same tone. And yet there was something between them, something inexplicable, intangible, invincible, almost nothing — that almost nothing that causes a sail to float away when the wind turns.

He was drifting, in fact, drifting away from her a little more each day, by all the glances he cast upon Annette. He himself did not attempt to see clearly into the depths of his heart. He felt, indeed, that fermentation of love, that irresistible attraction; but he would not understand, he trusted to events, to the unforeseen chances of life.

He had no longer any other interest than that of his dinners and his evenings between those two women, separated from the gay world by their mourning. Meeting only indifferent faces at their house — those of the

Corbelles, and Musadieu oftener — he fancied himself almost alone in the world with them; and as he now seldom saw the Duchess and the Marquis, for whom the morning and noontimes were reserved, he wished to forget them, suspecting that the marriage had been indefinitely postponed.

Besides, Annette never spoke of Monsieur de Farandal before him. Was this because of a sort of instinctive modesty, or was it perhaps from one of those secret intuitions of the feminine heart which enable them to foretell that of which they are ignorant?

Weeks followed weeks, without changing this manner of life, and autumn came, bringing the reopening of the Chamber, earlier than usual because of certain political dangers.

On the day of the reopening, the Comte de Guilleroy was to take to the meeting of Parliament Madame de Mortemain, the Marquis, and Annette, after a breakfast at his own house. The Countess alone, isolated in her sorrow, which was steadily increasing, had declared that she would remain at home.

They had left the table and were drinking coffee in the large drawing-room, in a merry mood. The Count, happy to resume parliamentary work, his only pleasure, talked very well concerning the existing situation and of the embarrassments of the Republic; the Marquis, unmistakably in love, answered him brightly, while gazing at Annette; and the Duchess was almost equally pleased with the emotion of her nephew and the distress of the government. The air of the drawing-room was warm with that first concentrated heat of newly-lighted furnaces, the heat of draperies, carpets, and walls, in which the perfumes of asphyxiated flowers was evaporating. There was in this closely shut room, filled with the aroma of coffee, an air of comfort, intimate, familiar, and satisfied, when the door was opened before Olivier Bertin.

He paused at the threshold, so surprised that he hesitated to enter, surprised as a deceived husband who beholds his wife's crime. A confusion of anger and mingled emotion suffocated him, revealing to him the fact that his heart was worm-eaten with love! All that they had hidden from him, and all that he had concealed from himself appeared before him as he perceived the Marquis installed in the house, as a betrothed lover!

He understood, in a transport of exasperation, all that which he would rather not have known and all that the Countess had not dared to tell him. He did not ask himself why all those preparations for marriage had been concealed from him. He guessed it, and his eyes, growing hard, met those of the Countess, who blushed. They understood each other.

When he was seated, everyone was silent for a few seconds, his unexpected entrance having paralyzed their flow of spirits; then the Duchess began to speak to him, and he replied in a brief manner, his voice suddenly changed.

He looked around at these people who were now chatting again, and said to himself: “They are making game of me. They shall pay for it.” He was especially vexed with the Countess and Annette, whose innocent dissimulation he suddenly understood.

“Oh, oh! it is time to go,” exclaimed the Count, looking at the clock. Turning to the painter, he added: “We are going to the opening of Parliament. My wife will remain here, however. Will you accompany us? It would give me great pleasure.”

“No, thanks,” replied Olivier drily. “Your Chamber does not tempt me.”

Annette approached in a playful way, saying: “Oh, do come, dear master! I am sure that you would amuse us much more than the deputies.”

“No, indeed. You will amuse yourself very well without me.”

Seeing him discontented and chagrined, she insisted, to show that she felt kindly toward him.

“Yes, come, sir painter! I assure you that as for myself I cannot do without you.”

His next words escaped him so quickly that he could nether check them as he spoke nor soften their tone:

“Bah! You do well enough without me, just as everyone else does!”

A little surprised at his tone, she exclaimed: “Come, now! Here he is beginning again to leave off his ‘tu’ to me!”

His lips were curled in one of those smiles that reveal the suffering of a soul, and he said with a slight bow: “It will be necessary for me to accustom myself to it one day or another.”

“Why, pray?”

“Because you will marry, and your husband, whoever he may be, would have the right to find that word rather out of place coming from me.”

“It will be time enough then to think about that,” the Countess hastened to say. “But I trust that Annette will not marry a man so susceptible as to object to such familiarity from so old a friend.”

“Come, come!” cried the Count; “let us go. We shall be late.”

Those who were to accompany him, having risen, went out after him, after the usual handshakes and kisses which the Duchess, the Countess, and her daughter exchanged at every meeting as at every parting.

They remained alone, She and He, standing, behind the draperies over the closed door.

"Sit down, my friend," said she softly.

But he answered, almost violently: "No, thanks! I am going, too."

"Oh, why?" she murmured, entreatingly.

"Because this is not my hour, it appears. I ask pardon for having come without warning."

"Olivier, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I only regret having disturbed an organized pleasure party."

She seized his hand.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "They were just about to set out, since they were going to be present at the opening of the session. I intended to stay at home. Contrary to what you said just now, you were really inspired in coming to-day when I am alone."

He sneered.

"Inspired? Yes, I was inspired!"

She seized his wrists, and looking deep into his eyes she murmured very low:

"Confess to me that you love her!"

He withdrew his hands, unable to control his impatience any longer.

"But you are simply insane with that idea!"

She seized him again by the arm and, tightening her hold on his sleeve, she implored:

"Olivier! Confess, confess! I would rather know. I am certain of it, but I would rather know. I would rather — Oh, you do not comprehend what my life has become!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have me do? Is it my fault if you lose your head?"

She held him, drawing him toward the other salon at the back, where they could not be heard. She drew him by his coat, clinging to him and panting. When she had led him as far as the little circular divan, she made him let himself fall upon it; then she sat down beside him.

"Olivier, my friend, my only friend, I pray you to tell me that you love her. I know it, I feel it from all that you do. I cannot doubt it. I am dying of it, but I wish to know it from your own lips."

As he still resisted, she fell on her knees at his feet. Her voice shook.

"Oh, my friend, my only friend! Is it true that you love her?"

"No, no, no!" he exclaimed, as he tried to make her rise. "I swear to you that I do not."

She reached up her hand to his mouth and pressed it there tight, stammering: "Oh, do not lie! I suffer too much!"

Then, letting her head fall on this man's knees, she sobbed.

He could see only the back of her neck, a mass of blond hair, mingled with many white threads, and he was filled with immense pity, immense grief.

Seizing that heavy hair in both hands he raised her head violently, turning toward himself two bewildered eyes, from which tears were flowing. And then on those tearful eyes he pressed his lips many times, repeating:

"Any! Any! My dear, my dear Any!"

Then she, attempting to smile, and speaking in that hesitating voice of children when choking with grief, said:

"Oh, my friend, only tell me that you still love me a little."

He embraced her again, even more tenderly than before.

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

She arose, sat down beside him again, seized his hands, looked at him, and said tenderly:

"It is such a long time that we have loved each other. It should not end like this."

He pressed her close to him, asking:

"Why should it end?"

"Because I am old, and because Annette resembles too much what I was when you first knew me."

Now it was his turn to close her sad lips with his fingers, saying:

"Again! I beg that you will speak no more of that. I swear to you that you deceive yourself."

"Oh, if you will only love me a little," she repeated.

"Yes, I love you," he said again.

They remained a long time without speaking, hands clasped in hands, deeply moved and very sad. At last she broke the silence, murmuring:

"Oh, the hours that remain for me to live will not be gay!"

"I will try to make them sweet to you."

The shadow of the clouded sky that precedes the twilight by two hours was darkening the drawing-room, burying them little by little in the gray dimness of an autumn evening.

The clock struck.

“It is a long time since we came in here,” said she. “You must go, for someone might come, and we are not calm.”

He arose, clasped her close, kissing her half-open lips, as he used to do; then they crossed the two drawing-rooms, arm in arm, like a newly-married pair.

“Good-by, my friend.”

“Good-by, my friend.”

And the portiere fell behind him.

He went downstairs, turned toward the Madeleine, and began to walk without knowing what he was doing, dazed as if from a blow, his legs weak, his heart hot and palpitating as if something burning shook within his breast. For two or three hours, perhaps four, he walked straight before him, in a sort of moral stupor and physical prostration which left him only just strength enough to put one foot before the other. Then he went home to reflect.

He loved this little girl, then. He comprehended now all that he had felt near her since that walk in the Parc Monceau, when he found in her mouth the call from a voice hardly recognized, the voice that long ago had awakened his heart; then all that slow, irresistible renewal of a love not yet extinct, not yet frozen, which he persisted in not acknowledging to himself.

What should he do? But what could he do? When she was married he would avoid seeing her often, that was all. Meantime, he would continue to return to the house, so that no one should suspect anything, and he would hide his secret from everyone.

He dined at home, which he very seldom did. Then he had a fire made in the large stove in his studio, for the night promised to be very cold. He even ordered the chandeliers to be lighted, as if he disliked the dark corners, and then he shut himself in. What strange emotion, profound, physical, frightfully sad, had seized him! He felt it in his throat, in his breast, in all his relaxed muscles as well as in his fainting soul. The walls of the apartment oppressed him; all his life was inclosed therein — his life as an artist, his life as a man. Every painted study hanging there recalled a success, each piece of furniture spoke of some memory. But successes and memories were things of the past. His life? How short, how empty it seemed to him, yet full. He had made pictures, and more pictures, and always pictures, and had loved one woman. He recalled the evenings of exaltation, after their meetings, in this same studio. He had walked whole nights with his being on fire with fever. The joy of happy love, the joy of worldly success, the unique intoxication of glory, had caused him to taste unforgettable hours of inward triumph.

He had loved a woman, and that woman had loved him. Through her he had received that baptism which reveals to man the mysterious world of emotions and of love. She had opened his heart almost by force, and now he could no longer close it. Another love had entered, in spite of him, through this opening — another, or rather the same relighted by a new face; the same, stronger by all the force which this need to adore takes on in old age. So he loved this little girl! He need no longer struggle, resist, or deny; he loved her with the despairing knowledge that he should not even gain a little pity from her, that she would always be ignorant of his terrible torment, and that another would marry her! At this thought constantly recurring, impossible to drive away, he was seized with an animal-like desire to howl like chained dogs, for like them he felt powerless, enslaved, imprisoned. Becoming more and more nervous, the longer he thought, he walked with long strides through the vast room, lighted up as if for a celebration. At last, unable to tolerate longer the pain of that reopened wound, he wished to try to calm it with the recollection of his early love, to drown it in evoking his first and great passion. From the closet where he kept it he took the copy of the Countess's portrait that he had made formerly for himself, then he put it on his easel, and sitting down in front of it, gazed at it. He tried to see her again, to find her living again, such as he had loved her before. But it was always Annette that rose upon the canvas. The mother had disappeared, vanished, leaving in her place that other face which resembled hers so strangely. It was the little one, with her hair a little lighter, her smile a little more mischievous, her air a little more mocking; and he felt that he belonged body and soul to that young being, as he never had belonged to the other, as a sinking vessel belongs to the waves!

Then he arose, and in order to see this apparition no more he turned the painting around; then, as he felt his heart full of sadness, he went to his chamber to bring into the studio the drawer of his desk, wherein were sleeping all the letters of the mistress of his heart. There they lay, as if in a bed, one upon the other, forming a thick layer of little thin papers. He thrust his hands among the mass, among all that which spoke of both of them, deep into that bath of their long intimacy. He looked at that narrow board coffin in which lay the mass of piled-up envelopes, on which his name, his name alone, was always written. He reflected that the love, the tender attachment of two beings, one for the other, were recounted therein, among that yellowish wave of papers spotted by red seals, and he inhaled, in bending over it, the old melancholy odor of letters that have been packed away.

He wished to re-read them, and feeling in the bottom of the drawer, he drew out a handful of the earlier ones. As soon as he opened them vivid memories emerged from them, which stirred his soul. He recognized many that he had carried about on his person for whole weeks, and found again, throughout the delicate handwriting that said such sweet things to him, the forgotten emotions of early days. Suddenly he found under his fingers a fine embroidered handkerchief. What was that? He pondered a few minutes, then he remembered! One day, at his house, she had wept because she was a little jealous, and he had stolen and kept her handkerchief, moist with her tears!

Ah, what sad things! What sad things! The poor woman!

From the depths of that drawer, from the depths of his past, all these reminiscences rose like a vapor, but it was only the impalpable vapor of a reality now dead. Nevertheless, he suffered and wept over the letters, as one weeps over the dead because they are no more.

But the remembrance of all his early love awakened in him a new and youthful ardor, a wave of irresistible tenderness which called up in his mind the radiant face of Annette. He had loved the mother, through a passionate impulse of voluntary servitude; he was beginning to love this little girl like a slave, a trembling old slave on whom fetters are riveted that he never can break. He felt this in the depths of his being, and was terrified. He tried to understand how and why she possessed him thus. He knew her so little! She was hardly a woman as yet; her heart and soul still slept with the sleep of youth.

He, on the other hand, was now almost at the end of his life. How, then, had this child been able to capture him with a few smiles and locks of her hair? Ah, the smiles, the hair of that little blonde maiden made him long to fall on his knees and strike the dust with his head!

Does one know, does one ever know why a woman's face has suddenly the power of poison upon us? It seems as if one had been drinking her with the eyes, that she had become one's mind and body. We are intoxicated with her, mad over her; we live of that absorbed image and would die of it!

How one suffers sometimes from this ferocious and incomprehensible power of a certain face on a man's heart!

Olivier Bertin began to pace his room again; night was advancing, his fire had gone out. Through the window-panes the cold air penetrated from outside. Then he went back to bed, where he continued to think and suffer until daylight.

He rose early, without knowing why, nor what he was going to do, agitated by his nervousness, irresolute as a whirling weather-vane.

In seeking some distraction for his mind, some occupation for his body, he recollected that on that particular day of the week certain members of his club had the habit of meeting regularly at the Moorish Baths, where they breakfasted after the massage. So he dressed quickly, hoping that the hot room and the shower would calm him, and he went out.

As soon as he found himself in the street, he felt the cold air, that first crisp cold of the early frost, which destroys in a single night the last trances of summer.

All along the Boulevards fell a thick shower of large yellow leaves which rustled down with a dry sound. As far as could be seen, they fell from one end of the broad avenue to the other, between the facades of the houses, as if all their stems had just been cut from the branches by a thin blade of ice. The road and the sidewalks were already covered with them, resembling for a few hours the paths in the woods at the beginning of winter. All that dead foliage crackled under the feet, and massed itself, from time to time, in light waves under the gusts of wind.

This was one of those days of transition which mark the end of one season and the beginning of another, which have a savor or a special sadness — the sadness of the death-struggle or the savor of rising sap.

In crossing the threshold of the Moorish Baths, the thought of the heat that would soon penetrate his flesh after his walk in the cold air gave a feeling of satisfaction to Olivier's sad heart.

He undressed quickly, wrapping around his body the light scarf the attendant handed to him, and disappeared behind the padded door open before him.

A warm, oppressive breath, which seemed to come from a distant furnace, made him pant as if he needed air while traversing a Moorish gallery lighted by two Oriental lanterns. Then a negro with woolly head, attired only in a girdle, with shining body and muscular limbs, ran before him to raise a curtain at the other end; and Bertin entered the large hot-air room, round, high-studded, silent, almost as mystic as a temple. Daylight fell from above through a cupola and through trefoils of colored glass into the immense circular room, with paved floor and walls covered with pottery decorated after the Arab fashion.

Men of all ages, almost naked, walked slowly about, grave and silent; others were seated on marble benches, with arms crossed; others still chatted in low tones.

The burning air made one pant at the very entrance. There was, within that stifling and decorated circular room, where human flesh was heated, where black and yellow attendants with copper-colored legs moved about, something antique and mysterious.

The first face the painter saw was that of the Comte de Landa. He was promenading around like a Roman wrestler, proud of his enormous chest and of his great arms crossed over it. A frequenter of the hot baths, he felt when there like an admired actor on the stage, and he criticised like an expert the muscles of all the strong men in Paris.

“Good-morning, Bertin,” said he.

They shook hands; then Landa continued: “Splendid weather for sweating!”

“Yes, magnificent.”

“Have you seen Rocdiane? He is down there. I was at his house just as he was getting out of bed. Oh, look at that anatomy!”

A little gentleman was passing, bow-legged, with thin arms and flanks, the sight of whom caused the two old models of human vigor to smile disdainfully.

Rocdiane approached them, having perceived the painter. They sat down on a long marble table and began to chat quite as if they were in a drawing-room. The attendants moved about, offering drinks. One could hear the clapping of the masseurs’ hands on bare flesh and the sudden flow of the shower-baths. A continuous pattering of water, coming from all corners of the great amphitheater, filled it also with a sound like rain.

At every instant some newcomer saluted the three friends, or approached them to shake hands. Among them were the big Duke of Harrison, the little Prince Epilati, Baron Flach, and others.

Suddenly Rocdiane said: “How are you, Farandal?”

The Marquis entered, his hands on his hips, with the easy air of well-made men, who never feel embarrassed at anything.

“He is a gladiator, that chap!” Landa murmured.

Rocdiane resumed, turning toward Bertin: “Is it true that he is to marry the daughter of your friend?”

“I think so,” said the painter.

But the question, before that man, in that place, gave to Olivier’s heart a frightful shock of despair and revolt. The horror of all the realities he had foreseen appeared to him for a second with such acuteness that he struggled an instant or so against an animal-like desire to fling himself on Farandal.

He arose.

“I am tired,” said he. “I am going to the massage now.”

An Arab was passing.

“Ahmed, are you at liberty?”

“Yes, Monsieur Bertin.”

And he went away quickly in order to avoid shaking hands with Farandal, who was approaching slowly in making the rounds of the Hammam.

He remained barely a quarter of an hour in the large quiet resting-room, in the center of a row of cells containing the beds, with a *parterre* of African plants and a little fountain in the center. He had a feeling of being pursued, menaced, that the Marquis would join him, and that he should be compelled, with extended hand, to treat him as a friend, when he longed to kill him.

He soon found himself again on the Boulevard, covered with dead leaves. They fell no more, the last ones having been detached by a long blast of wind. Their red and yellow carpet shivered, stirred, undulated from one sidewalk to another, blown by puffs of the rising wind.

Suddenly a sort of roaring noise glided over the roofs, the animal-like sound of a passing tempest, and at the same time a furious gust of wind that seemed to come from the Madeleine swept through the Boulevard.

All the fallen leaves, which appeared to have been waiting for it, rose at its approach. They ran before it, massing themselves, whirling, and rising in spirals up to the tops of the buildings. The wind chased them like a flock, a mad flock that fled before it, flying toward the gates of Paris and the free sky of the suburbs. And when the great cloud of leaves and dust had disappeared on the heights of the Quartier Malesherbes, the sidewalks and roads remained bare, strangely clean and swept.

Bertin was thinking: “What will become of me? What shall I do? Where shall I go?” And he returned home, unable to think of anything.

A news-stand attracted his eye. He bought seven or eight newspapers, hoping that he might find in them something to read for an hour or two.

“I will breakfast here,” said he, as he entered, and went up to his studio.

But as he sat down he felt that he could not stay there, for throughout his body surged the excitement of an angry beast.

The newspapers, which he glanced through, could not distract his mind for a minute, and the news he read met his eye without reaching his brain. In the midst of an article which he was not trying to comprehend, the name of Guilleroy made him start. It was about the session of the Chamber, where the Count had spoken a few words.

His attention, aroused by that call, was now arrested by the name of the celebrated tenor Montrose, who was to give, about the end of December, a single performance at the Opera. This would be, the newspaper stated, a magnificent musical solemnity, for the tenor Montrose, who had been absent six years from Paris, had just won, throughout Europe and America, a success without precedent; moreover, he would be supported by the illustrious Swedish singer, Helsson, who had not been heard in Paris for five years.

Suddenly Olivier had an idea, which seemed to spring from the depths of his heart — he would give Annette the pleasure of seeing this performance. Then he remembered that the Countess’s mourning might be an obstacle to this scheme, and he sought some way to realize it in spite of the difficulty. Only one method presented itself. He must take a stage-box where one may be almost invisible, and if the Countess should still not wish to go, he would have Annette accompanied by her father and the Duchess. In that case, he would have to offer his box to the Duchess. But then he would be obliged to invite the Marquis!

He hesitated and reflected a long time.

Certainly, the marriage was decided upon; no doubt the date was settled. He guessed the reason for his friend’s haste in having it finished soon; he understood that in the shortest time possible she would give her daughter to

Farandal. He could not help it. He could neither prevent, nor modify, nor delay this frightful thing. Since he must bear it, would it not be better for him to try to master his soul, to hide his suffering, to appear content, and no longer allow himself to be carried away by his rage, as he had done?

Yes, he would invite the Marquis, and so allay the Countess's suspicions, and keep for himself a friendly door in the new establishment.

As soon as he had breakfasted, he went down to the Opera to engage one of the boxes hidden by the curtain. It was promised to him. Then he hastened to the Guilleroys'.

The Countess appeared almost immediately, apparently still a little moved by their tender interview of the day before.

"How kind of you to come again to-day!" said she.

"I am bringing you something," he faltered.

"What is it?"

"A stage-box at the Opera for the single performance of Helsson and Montrose."

"Oh, my friend, what a pity! And my mourning?"

"Your mourning has lasted for almost four months."

"I assure you that I cannot."

"And Annette? Remember that she may never have such an opportunity again."

"With whom could she go?"

"With her father and the Duchess, whom I am about to invite. I intend also to offer a seat to the Marquis."

She gazed deep into his eyes, and a wild desire to kiss him rose to her lips. Hardly believing her ears, she repeated: "To the Marquis?"

"Why, yes."

She consented at once to this arrangement.

He continued, in an indifferent tone: "Have you fixed the date of their marriage?"

"Oh, yes, almost. We have reasons for hastening it very much, especially as it was decided upon before my mother's death. You remember that?"

"Yes, perfectly. And when will it take place?"

"About the beginning of January. I ask your pardon for not having told you of it sooner."

Annette entered. He felt his heart leap within him as if on springs, and all the tenderness that drew him toward her suddenly became bitter, arousing in his heart that strange, passionate animosity into which love changes when lashed by jealousy.

"I have brought you something," he said.

"So we have decided to say 'you'?" she replied.

He assumed a paternal tone.

"Listen, my child, I know all about the event that is soon to occur. I assure you that then it will be indispensable. Better say 'you' now than later."

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of discontent, while the Countess remained silent, looking afar off, her thoughts preoccupied.

"Well, what have you brought me?" inquired Annette.

He told her about the performance, and the invitations he intended to give. She was delighted, and, throwing her arms around his neck with the manner of a little girl, she kissed him on both cheeks.

He felt ready to sink, and understood, when he felt the light caresses of that little mouth with its sweet breath, that he never should be cured of his passion.

The Countess, annoyed, said to her daughter: "You know that your father is waiting for you."

"Yes, mamma, I am going."

She ran away, still throwing kisses from the tips of her fingers.

As soon as she had gone, Olivier asked: "Will they travel?"

"Yes, for three months."

"So much the better," he murmured in spite of himself.

"We will resume our former life," said the Countess.

"Yes, I hope so," said he, hesitatingly.

"But do not neglect me meanwhile."

"No, my friend."

The impulse he had shown the evening before, when seeing her weep, and the intention which he had just expressed of inviting the Marquis to the performance at the Opera, had given new hope to the Countess.

But it was short. A week had not passed ere she was again following the expression of this man's face with tortured and jealous attention, watching every stage of his suffering. She could ignore nothing, herself enduring all the pain that she guessed at in him; and Annette's constant presence reminded her at every moment of the day of the hopelessness of her efforts.

Everything oppressed her at the same time — her age and her mourning. Her active, intelligent, and ingenious coquetry, which all her life had given her triumph, found itself paralyzed by that black uniform which marked her pallor and the change in her features, while it rendered the adolescence of her daughter absolutely dazzling. The time seemed far away, though it was quite recent, when, on Annette's return to Paris, she had proudly sought similar toilets which at that time were favorable to her. Now she had a furious longing to tear from her body those vestments of death which made her ugly and tortured her.

If she had felt that all the resources of elegance were at her service, if she had been able to choose and use delicately shaded stuffs, in harmony with her coloring, which would have lent a studied power to her fading charms, as captivating as the inert grace of her daughter, she would no doubt have known how to remain still the more charming.

She knew so well the influences of the fever-giving costume of evening, and the soft sensuousness of morning attire, of the disturbing *deshabille* worn at breakfast with intimate friends, which lend to a woman until noontime a sort of reminiscence of her rising, the material and warm impression of the bed and of her perfumed room!

But what could she attempt under that sepulchral robe, that convict's dress, which must cover her for a whole year? A year! She must remain a year imprisoned in that black attire, inactive and vanquished. For a whole year she would feel herself growing old, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, under that sheath of crape! What would she be in a year if her poor ailing body continued to alter thus under the anguish of her soul?

These thoughts never left her, and spoiled for her everything she might have enjoyed, turned into sadness things that would have given her joy, leaving her not a pleasure, a contentment, or a gaiety intact. She was agitated incessantly by an exasperating need to shake off this weight of misery that crushed her, for without this tormenting obsession she would still have been so happy, alert, and healthy! She felt that her soul was still fresh and bright, her heart still young, the ardor of a being that is beginning to live, an insatiable appetite for happiness, more voracious even than before, and a devouring desire to love.

And now, all good things, all things sweet, delicious and poetic, which embellish life and make it enjoyable, were withdrawing from her, because she was growing old! It was all finished! Yet she still found within her the tenderness of the young girl and the passionate impulses of the young woman. Nothing had grown old but her body, that miserable skin, that stuff over the bones, fading little by little like the covering of a piece of furniture. The curse of this decay had attached itself to her, and had become almost a physical suffering. This fixed idea had created a sensation of the epidermis, the sensation of growing old, continuous and imperceptible, like that of cold or of heat. She really believed that she felt an indescribable sort of itching, the slow march of wrinkles upon her forehead, the weakening of the tissues of the cheeks and throat, and the multiplication of those innumerable little marks that wear out the tired skin. Like some one afflicted with a consuming disease, whom a continual prurience induces to scratch himself, the perception and terror of that abominable, swift and secret work of time filled her soul with an irresistible need of verifying it in her mirrors. They called her, drew her, forced her to come, with fixed eyes, to see, to look again, to recognize incessantly, to touch with her finger, as if to assure herself, the indelible mark of the years. At first this was an intermittent thought, returning whenever she saw the polished surface of the dreaded crystal, at home or abroad. She paused in the street to gaze at herself in the shop-windows, hanging as if by one hand to all the glass plates with which merchants ornament their facades. It became a disease, an obsession. She carried in her pocket a dainty little ivory powder-box, as large as a nut, the interior of which contained a tiny mirror; and often, while walking, she held it open in her hand and raised it to her eyes.

When she sat down to read or write in the tapestried drawing-room, her mind, distracted for the time by a new occupation, would soon return to its obsession. She struggled, tried to amuse herself, to have other ideas, to continue her work. It was in vain; the prick of desire tormented her, and soon dropping her book or her pen, her hand would steal out, by an irresistible impulse, toward the little hand-glass mounted in antique silver that lay upon her desk. In this oval, chiseled frame her whole face was inclosed, like a face of days gone by, a portrait of the last century, or a once fresh pastel now tarnished by the sun. Then after gazing at herself a long time, she laid, with a weary movement, the little glass upon the desk and tried to resume her work; but ere she had read two pages or written twenty lines, she was again seized with the invincible and torturing need of looking at herself, and once more would extend her hand to take up the mirror.

She now handled it like an irritating and familiar toy that the hand cannot let alone, used it continually even when receiving her friends, and made herself nervous enough to cry out, hating it as if it were a sentient thing while turning it in her fingers.

One day, exasperated by this struggle between herself and this bit of glass, she threw it against the wall, where it was broken to pieces.

But after a time her husband, who had it repaired, brought it back to her, clearer than ever; and she was compelled to take it, to thank him, and resign herself to keep it.

Every evening, too, and every morning, shut up in her own room, she resumed, in spite of herself, that minute and patient examination of the quiet, odious havoc.

When she was in bed she could not sleep; she would light a candle again and lie, wide-eyed, thinking how insomnia and grief hasten irremediably the horrible work of fleeting time. She listened in the silence of the night to the ticking of the clock, which seemed to murmur, in its monotonous and regular tic-tac: “It goes, it goes, it goes!” and her heart shrank with such suffering that, with the sheet gripped between her teeth, she groaned in despair.

Once, like everyone else, she had some notion of the passing years and of the changes they bring. Like everyone else, she had said to herself every winter, every spring, and every summer, “I have changed very much since last year.” But, always beautiful, with a changing beauty, she was never uneasy about it. Now, however, suddenly, instead of admitting peacefully the slow march of the seasons, she had just discovered and understood the formidable flight of the minutes. She had had a sudden revelation of the gliding of the hour, of that imperceptible race, maddening when we think of it — of that infinite defile of little hurrying seconds, which nibble at the body and the life of men.

After these miserable nights, she had long periods of somnolence that made her more tranquil, in the warmth of her bed, when her maid had opened the curtains and lighted the morning fire. She lay there tired, drowsy, neither awake nor asleep, in the torpor of thought which brings about the revival of that instinctive and providential hope which gives light and life to the hearts of men up to their last days.

Every morning now, as soon as she had risen from her bed, she felt moved by a powerful desire to pray to God, to obtain from Him a little relief and consolation.

She would kneel, then, before a large figure of Christ carved in oak, a gift from Olivier, a rare work he had discovered; and, with lips closed, but imploring with that voice of the soul with which we speak to ourselves, she lifted toward the Divine martyr a sorrowful supplication. Distracted by the need of being heard and succored, naïve in her distress, as are all faithful ones on their knees, she could not doubt that He heard her, that He was attentive to her request, and was perhaps touched at her grief. She did not ask Him to do for her that which He never had done for anyone — to leave her until death all her charm, her freshness and grace; she begged only a little repose, a little respite. She must grow old, of course, just as she must die. But why so soon? Some women remain beautiful so long! Could He not grant that she should be one of these? How good He would be, He who had also suffered so much, if only He would let her keep for two or three years still the little charm she needed in order to be pleasing.

She did not say these things to Him, of course, but she sighed them forth, in the confused plaint of her being.

Then, having risen, she would sit before her toilet-table, and with a tension of thought as ardent as in her prayer, she would handle the powders, the pastes, the pencils, the puffs and brushes, which gave her once more a plaster-like beauty, fragile, lasting only for a day.

CHAPTER VI. THE ASHES OF LOVE

On the Boulevard two names were heard from all lips: “Emma Helsson” and “Montrose.” The nearer one approached the Opera, the oftener he heard those names repeated. Immense posters, too, affixed to the Morris columns, announced them in the eyes of passers, and in the evening air could be felt the excitement of an approaching event.

That heavy monument called the National Academy of Music, squatted under the black sky, exhibited to the crowd before its doors the pompous, whitish facade and marble colonnade of its balcony, illuminated like a stage setting by invisible electric lights.

In the square the mounted Republican guards directed the movement of the crowds, and the innumerable carriages coming from all parts of Paris allowed glimpses of creamy light stuff and fair faces behind their lowered windows.

The coupes and landaus formed in line under the reserved arcades, and stopped for a moment, and from them alighted fashionable and other women, in their opera-cloaks, trimmed with fur, feathers, and rare laces — precious bodies, divinely set forth!

All the way along the celebrated stairway was a sort of fairy flight, an uninterrupted mounting of ladies dressed like queens, whose throats and ears scattered flashing rays from their diamonds, and whose long trains swept the stairs.

The theater was filling early, for no one wished to lose a note of the two illustrious artists; and throughout the vast amphitheater, under the dazzling electric light from the great chandelier, a throng of people were seating themselves amid an uproar of voices.

From the stage-box, already occupied by the Duchess, Annette, the Count, the Marquis, Bertin and Musadieu, one could see nothing but the wings, where men were talking, running about, and shouting, machinists in blouses, gentlemen in evening dress, actors in costume. But behind the great curtain one heard the deep sound of the crowd, one felt the presence of a mass of moving, over-excited beings, whose agitation seemed to penetrate the curtain, and to extend even to the decorations.

They were about to present *Faust*.

Musadieu was relating anecdotes about the first representatives of this work at the Theatre Lyrique, of its half success in the beginning followed by brilliant triumph, of the original cast, and their manner of singing each aria. Annette, half turned toward him, listened with that eager, youthful curiosity with which she regarded the whole world; and at times she cast a tender glance at her fiance, who in a few days would be her husband. She loved him, now, as innocent hearts love; that is to say she loved in him all the hopes she had for the future. The intoxication of the first feasts of life, and the ardent longing to be happy, made her tremble with joy and expectation.

And Olivier, who saw all, and knew all, who had sounded all the depths of secret, helpless, and jealous love, down in the furnace of human suffering, where the heart seems to crackle like flesh over hot coals, stood in the back of the box looking at them with eyes that betrayed his torture.

The three blows were struck, and suddenly the sharp little tap of a bow on the leader’s desk stopped short all movement, all coughing and whispering; then, after a brief and profound silence, the first measure of the introduction arose, filling the house with the invisible and irresistible mystery of the music that penetrates our bodies, thrills our nerves and souls with a poetic and sensuous fever, mingling with the limpid air we breathe a wave of sound to which we listen.

Olivier took a seat at the back of the box, painfully affected, as if his heart’s wounds had been touched by those accents. But when the curtain rose he stood up again, and saw Doctor Faust, lost in sorrowful meditation, seated in his alchemist’s laboratory.

He had already heard the opera twenty times, and almost knew it by heart, and his attention soon wandered from the stage to the audience. He could see only a small part of it behind the frame of the stage which concealed their box, but the angle that was visible, extending from the orchestra to the top gallery, showed him a portion of the audience in which he recognized many faces. In the orchestra rows, the men in white cravats, sitting side by side, seemed a museum of familiar countenances, society men, artists, journalists, the whole category of those that never fail to go where everyone else goes. In the balcony and in the boxes he noted and named to himself the women he recognized. The Comtesse de Lochrist, in a proscenium box, was absolutely ravishing, while a little farther on a bride, the Marquise d’Ebelin, was already looking through her lorgnette. “That is a pretty debut,” said Bertin to himself.

The audience listened with deep attention and evident sympathy to the tenor Montrose, who was lamenting over his waning life.

Olivier thought: “What a farce! There is Faust, the mysterious and sublime Faust who sings the horrible disgust and nothingness of everything; and this crowd are asking themselves anxiously whether Montrose’s voice has not changed!” Then he listened, like the others, and behind the trivial words of the libretto, through that music which awakens profound perception in the soul, he had a sort of revelation as to how Goethe had been able to conceive the heart of Faust.

He had read the poem some time before, and thought it very beautiful without being moved by it, but now he suddenly realized its unfathomable depth, for it seemed to him that on that evening he himself had become a Faust.

Leaning lightly upon the railing of the box, Annette was listening with all her ears; and murmurs of satisfaction were beginning to be heard from the audience, for Montrose’s voice was better and richer than ever!

Bertin had closed his eyes. For a whole month, all that he had seen, all that he had felt, everything that he had encountered in life he had immediately transformed into a sort of accessory to his passion. He threw the world and himself as nourishment to this fixed idea. All that he saw that was beautiful or rare, all that he imagined that was charming, he mentally offered to his little friend; and he had no longer an idea that he did not in some way connect with his love.

Now he listened from the depths of his soul to the echo of Faust’s lamentations, and the desire to die surged up within him, the desire to have done with all his grief, with all the misery of his hopeless love. He looked at Annette’s delicate profile, and saw the Marquis de Farandal, seated behind her, also looking at it. He felt old, lost, despairing. Ah, never to await anything more, never to hope for anything more, no longer to have even the right to desire, to feel himself outside of everything, in the evening of life, like a superannuated functionary whose career is ended — what intolerable torture!

Applause burst forth; Montrose had triumphed already. And Labarriere as Mephistopheles sprang up from the earth.

Olivier, who never had heard him in this role, listened with renewed attention. The remembrance of Aubin, so dramatic with his bass voice, then of Faure, so seductive with his baritone, distracted him a short time.

But suddenly a phrase sung by Montrose with irresistible power stirred him to the heart. Faust was saying to Satan:

“Je veux un tresor qui les contient tous —
Je veux la jeunesse.”

And the tenor appeared in silken doublet, a sword by his side, a plumed cap on his head, elegant, young, and handsome, with the affectations of a handsome singer.

A murmur arose. He was very attractive and the women were pleased with him. But Olivier felt some disappointment, for the poignant evocation of Goethe’s dramatic poem disappeared in this metamorphosis. Thenceforth he saw before him only a fairy spectacle, filled with pretty little songs, and actors of talent whose voices were all he listened to. That man in a doublet, that pretty youth with his roulades, who showed his thighs and displayed his voice, displeased him. This was not the real, irresistible, and sinister Chevalier Faust, who was about to seduce the fair Marguerite.

He sat down again, and the phrase he had just heard returned to his mind:

“I would have a treasure that embraces all — Youth!”

He murmured it between his teeth, sang it sadly in the depths of his soul, and, with eyes fixed always upon Annette’s blonde head, which rose in the square opening of the box, he felt all the bitterness of that desire that never could be realized.

But Montrose had just finished the first act with such perfection that enthusiasm broke forth. For several minutes, the noise of clapping, stamping, and bravos swept like a storm through the theater. In all the boxes the women clapped their gloved hands, while the men standing behind them shouted as they applauded.

The curtain fell, but it was raised twice before the applause subsided. Then, when the curtain had fallen for the third time, separating the stage and the interior boxes from the audience, the Duchess and Annette continued their applause a few moments, and were specially thanked by a discreet bow from the tenor.

“Oh, he looked at us!” said Annette.

“What an admirable artist!” said the Duchess.

And Bertin, who had been leaning over, looked with a mingled feeling of irritation and disdain at the admired actor as he disappeared between two wings, waddling a little, his legs stiff, one hand on his hip, in the affected pose of a theatrical hero.

They began to talk of him. His social successes had made him as famous as his talent. He had visited every capital, in the midst of feminine ecstasies of those who, hearing before he appeared that he was irresistible, had felt their hearts throb as he appeared upon the stage. But it was said that he appeared to care very little for all this sentimental delirium, and contented himself with his musical triumphs. Musadieu related, in veiled language because of Annette's presence, details of the life of this handsome singer, and the Duchess, quite carried away, understood and approved all the follies that he was able to create, so seductive, elegant, and distinguished did she consider this exceptional musician! She concluded, laughing: "And how can anyone resist that voice!"

Olivier felt angry and bitter. He did not understand how anyone could really care for a mere actor, for that perpetual representation of human types which never resembled himself in the least; that illusory personification of imaginary men, that nocturnal and painted manikin who plays all his characters at so much a night.

"You are jealous of them!" said the Duchess. "You men of the world and artists all have a grudge against actors because they are more successful than you." Turning to Annette, she added: "Come, little one, you who are entering life and look at it with healthy eyes, what do you think of this tenor?"

"I think he is very good indeed," Annette replied, with an air of conviction.

The three strokes sounded for the second act, and the curtain rose on the Kermesse.

Helsson's passage was superb. She seemed to have more voice than formerly, and to have acquired more certainty of method. She had, indeed, become the great, excellent, exquisite singer, whose worldly fame equaled that of Bismarck or De Lesseps.

When Faust rushed toward her, when he sang in his bewitching voice phrases so full of charm and when the pretty blonde Marguerite replied so touchingly the whole house was moved with a thrill of pleasure.

When the curtain fell, the applause was tremendous, and Annette applauded so long that Bertin wished to seize her hands to make her stop. His heart was stung by a new torment. He did not speak between the acts, for he was pursuing into the wings, his fixed thought now become absolute hatred, following to his box, where he saw, putting more white powder on his cheeks, the odious singer who was thus over-exciting this child!

Then the curtain rose on the garden scene. Immediately a sort of fever of love seemed to spread through the house, for never had that music, which seems like the breath of kisses, been rendered by two such interpreters. It was no longer two illustrious actors, Montrose and Helsson; they became two beings from the ideal world, hardly two beings, indeed, but two voices: the eternal voice of the man that loves, the eternal voice of the woman that yields; and together they sighed forth all the poetry of human tenderness.

When Faust sang:

“Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage,”

in the notes that soared from his mouth there was such an accent of adoration, of transport and supplication that for a moment a desire to love filled every heart.

Olivier remembered that he had murmured that phrase himself in the park at Roncieres, under the castle windows.

Until then he had thought it rather ordinary; but now it rose to his lips like a last cry of passion, a last prayer, the last hope and the last favor he might expect in this life.

Then he listened no more, heard nothing more. A sharp pang of jealousy tore his heart, for he had just seen Annette carry her handkerchief to her eyes.

She wept! Then her heart was awakening, becoming animated and moved, her little woman’s heart which as yet knew nothing! There, very near him, without giving a thought to him, she had a revelation of the way in which love may overwhelm a human being; and this revelation, this initiation had come to her from that miserable strolling singer!

Ah, he felt very little anger now toward the Marquis de Farandal, that stupid creature who saw nothing, who did not know, did not understand! But how he execrated that man in tights, who was illuminating the soul of that young girl!

He longed to throw himself upon her, as one throws himself upon a person in danger of being run over by a fractious horse, to seize her by the arm and drag her away, and say to her: “Let us go! let us go! I entreat you!”

How she listened, how she palpitated! And how he suffered. He had suffered thus before, but less cruelly. He remembered it, for the stings of jealousy smart afresh like reopened wounds. He had first felt it at

Roncieres, in returning from the cemetery, when he felt for the first time that she was escaping from him, that he could not control her, that young girl as independent as a young animal. But down there, when she had irritated him by leaving him to pluck flowers, he had experienced chiefly a brutal desire to check her playful flights, to compel her person to remain beside him; to-day it was her fleeting, intangible soul that was escaping. Ah, that gnawing irritation which he had just recognized, how often he had experienced it by the indescribable little wounds which seem to be always bruising a loving heart. He recalled all the painful impressions of petty jealousy that he had endured, in little stings, day after day. Every time that she had remarked, admired, liked, desired something, he had been jealous of it; jealous in an imperceptible but continuous fashion, jealous of all that absorbed the time, the looks, the attention, the gaiety, the astonishment or affection of Annette, for all that took a little of her away from him. He had been jealous of all that she did without him, of all that he did not know, of her going about, her reading, of everything that seemed to please her, jealous even of a heroic officer wounded in Africa, of whom Paris talked for a week, of the author of a much praised romance, of a young unknown poet she never had seen, but whose verses Musadieu had recited; in short, of all men that anyone praised before her, even carelessly, for when one loves a woman one cannot tolerate without anguish that she should even think of another with an appearance of interest. In one’s heart is felt the imperious need of being for her the only being in the world. One wishes her to see, to know, to appreciate no one else. So soon as she shows an indication of turning to look at or recognize some person, one throws himself before her, and if one cannot turn aside or absorb her interest he suffers to the bottom of his heart.

Olivier suffered thus in the presence of this singer, who seemed to scatter and to gather love in that opera-house, and he felt vexed with everyone because of the tenor’s triumph, with the women whom he saw applauding him from their boxes, with the men, those idiots who were giving a sort of apotheosis to that coxcomb!

An artist! They called him a artist, a great artist! And he had successes, this paid actor, interpreter of another’s thought, such as no creator had ever known! Ah, that was like the justice and the intelligence of the fashionable world, those ignorant and pretentious amateurs for whom the masters of human art work until death. He looked at them, applauding, shouting, going into ecstasies; and the ancient hostility that had always seethed at the bottom of his proud heart of a parvenu became a furious anger against those imbeciles, all-powerful only by right of birth and wealth.

Until the end of the performance he remained silent, a prey to thought; then when the storm of enthusiasm had at last subsided he offered his arm to the Duchess, while the Marquis took Annette's. They descended the grand stairway again, in the midst of a stream of men and women, in a sort of slow and magnificent cascade of bare shoulders, sumptuous gowns, and black coats. Then the Duchess, the young girl, her father, and the Marquis entered the same landau, and Olivier Bertin remained alone with Musadieu in the Place de l'Opera.

Suddenly he felt a sort of affection for this man, or rather that natural attraction one feels for a fellow-countryman met in a distant land, for he now felt lost in that strange, indifferent crowd, whereas with Musadieu he might still speak of her.

So he took his arm.

"You are not going home now?" said he. "It is a fine night; let us take a walk."

"Willingly."

They went toward the Madeleine, in the mist of the nocturnal crowd possessed by that short and violent midnight excitement which stirs the Boulevards when the theaters are being emptied.

Musadieu had a thousand things in his mind, all his subjects for conversation from the moment when Bertin should name his preference; and he let his eloquence loose upon the two or three topics that interested him most. The painter allowed him to run on without listening to him, and holding him by the arm, sure of being able soon to lead him to talk of Annette, he walked along without noticing his surroundings, imprisoned within his love. He walked, exhausted by that fit of jealousy which had bruised him like a fall, overcome by the conviction that he had nothing more to do in the world.

He should go on suffering thus, more and more, without expecting anything. He should pass empty days, one after another, seeing her from afar, living, happy, loved and loving, without doubt. A lover! Perhaps she would have a lover, as her mother had had one! He felt within him sources of suffering so numerous, diverse, and complicated, such an afflux of miseries, such inevitable tortures, he felt so lost, so far overwhelmed, from this moment, by a wave of unimaginable agony that he could not suppose anyone ever had suffered as he did. And he suddenly thought of the puerility of poets who have invented the useless labor of Sisyphus, the material thirst of Tantalus, the devoured heart of Prometheus! Oh, if they had foreseen, if they had experienced the mad love of an elderly man for a young girl, how would they had expressed the painful and secret effort of a being who can no longer inspire love, the tortures of fruitless desire, and, more terrible than a vulture's beak, a little blonde face rending a heart!

Musadieu talked without stopping, and Bertin interrupted him, murmuring almost in spite of himself, under the impulse of his fixed idea:

"Annette was charming this evening."

"Yes, delicious!"

The painter added, to prevent Musadieu from taking up the broken thread of his ideas: "She is prettier than her mother ever was."

To this the other agreed absent-mindedly, repeating "Yes, yes, yes!" several times in succession, without his mind having yet settled itself on this new idea.

Olivier endeavored to continue the subject, and in order to attract his attention by one of Musadieu's own favorite fads, he continued:

"She will have one of the first salons in Paris after her marriage."

That was enough, and, the man of fashion being convinced, as well as the Inspector of Fine Arts, he began to talk wisely of the social footing on which the Marquise de Farandal would stand in French society.

Bertin listened to him, and fancied Annette in a large salon full of light, surrounded by men and women. This vision, too, made him jealous.

They were now going up the Boulevard Malesherbes. As they passed the Guilleroys' house the painter looked up. Lights seemed to be shining through the windows, among the openings in the curtains. He suspected that the Duchess and the Marquis had been invited to come and have a cup of tea. And a burning rage made him suffer terribly.

He still held Musadieu by the arm, and once or twice attempted to continue, by contradicting Musadieu's opinions, the talk about the future Marquise. Even that commonplace voice in speaking of her caused her charming image to flit beside them in the night.

When they arrived at the painter's door, in the Avenue de Villiers, Bertin asked: "Will you come in?"

"No, thank you. It is late, and I am going to bed."

"Oh, come up for half an hour, and we'll have a little more talk."

"No, really. It is too late."

The thought of staying there alone, after the anguish he had just endured, filled Olivier's soul with horror. He had someone with him; he would keep him.

"Do come up; I want you to choose a study that I have intended for a long time to offer you."

The other, knowing that painters are not always in a giving mood, and that the remembrance of promises is short, seized the opportunity. In his capacity as Inspector of Fine Arts, he possessed a gallery that had been furnished with skill.

"I am with you," said he.

They entered.

The valet was aroused and soon brought some grog; and the talk was for some time all about painting. Bertin showed some studies, and begged Musadieu to take the one that pleased him best; Musadieu hesitated, disturbed by the gaslight, which deceived him as to tones. At last he chose a group of little girls jumping the rope on a sidewalk; and almost at once he wished to depart, and to take his present with him.

"I will have it taken to your house," said the painter.

"No; I should like better to have it this very evening, so that I may admire it while I am going to bed," said Musadieu.

Nothing could keep him, and Olivier Bertin found himself again alone in his house, that prison of his memories and his painful agitation.

When the servant entered the next morning, bringing tea and the newspapers, he found his master sitting up in bed, so pale and shaken that he was alarmed.

"Is Monsieur indisposed?" he inquired.

"It is nothing — only a little headache."

"Does not Monsieur wish me to bring him something?"

"No. What sort of weather is it?"

"It rains, Monsieur."

"Very well. That is all."

The man withdrew, having placed on the little table the tea-tray and the newspapers.

Olivier took up the *Figaro* and opened it. The leading article was entitled "Modern Painting." It was a dithyrambic eulogy on four or five young painters who, gifted with real ability as colorists, and exaggerating them for effect, now pretended to be revolutionists and renovators of genius.

As did all the older painters, Bertin sneered at these newcomers, was irritated at their assumption of exclusiveness, and disputed their doctrines. He began to read the article, then, with the rising anger so quickly felt by a nervous person; at last, glancing a little further down, he saw his own name, and these words at the end of a sentence struck him like a blow of the fist full in the chest: “The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin.”

He had always been sensitive to either criticism or praise, but, at the bottom of his heart, in spite of his legitimate vanity, he suffered more from being criticised than he enjoyed being praised, because of the uneasiness concerning himself which his hesitations had always encouraged. Formerly, however, at the time of his triumphs, the incense offered was so frequent that it made him forget the pin-pricks. To-day, before the ceaseless influx of new artists and new admirers, congratulations were more rare and criticism was more marked. He felt that he had been enrolled in the battalion of old painters of talent, whom the younger ones do not treat as masters; and as he was as intelligent as he was perspicacious he suffered now from the least insinuations as much as from direct attacks.

But never had any wound to his pride as an artist hurt him like this. He remained gasping, and reread the article in order to grasp its every meaning. He and his equals were thrown aside with outrageous disrespect; and he arose murmuring those words, which remained on his lips: “The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin.”

Never had such sadness, such discouragement, such a sensation of having reached the end of everything, the end of his mental and physical being, thrown him into such desperate distress of soul. He sat until two o’clock in his armchair, before the fireplace, his legs extended toward the fire, not having strength to move, or to do anything. Then the need of being consoled rose within him, the need to clasp devoted hands, to see faithful eyes, to be pitied, succored, caressed with friendly words. So he went, as usual, to the Countess.

When he entered Annette was alone in the drawing-room, standing with her back toward him, hastily writing the address on a letter. On a table beside her lay a copy of *Figaro*. Bertin saw the journal at the moment that he saw the young girl and was bewildered, not daring to advance! Oh, if she had read it! She turned, and in a preoccupied, hurried way, her mind haunted with feminine cares, she said to him:

"Ah, good-morning, sir painter! You will excuse me if I leave you? I have a dressmaker upstairs who claims me. You understand that a dressmaker, at the time of a wedding, is very important. I will lend you mamma, who is talking and arguing with my artist. If I need her I will call her for a few minutes."

And she hastened away, running a little, to show how much she was hurried.

This abrupt departure, without a word of affection, without a tender look for him who loved her so much — so much! — quite upset him. His eyes rested again on the *Figaro*, and he thought: "She has read it! They laugh at me, they deny me. She no longer believes in me. I am nothing to her any more."

He took two steps toward the journal, as one walks toward a man to strike him. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps she has not read it, after all. She is so preoccupied to-day. But someone will undoubtedly speak of it before her, perhaps this evening, at dinner, and that will make her curious to read it."

With a spontaneous, almost unthinking, movement he took the copy, closed it, folded it, and slipped it into his pocket with the swiftness of a thief.

The Countess entered. As soon as she saw Olivier's convulsed and livid face, she guessed that he had reached the limit of suffering.

She hastened toward him, with an impulse from all her poor soul, so agonized also, and from her poor body, that was itself so wounded. Throwing her hands upon his shoulders, and plunging her glance into the depths of his eyes, she said:

"Oh, how unhappy you are!"

This time he did not deny it; his throat swelled with a spasm of pain, and he stammered:

"Yes — yes — yes!"

She felt that he was near weeping, and led him into the darkest corner of the drawing-room, toward two armchairs hidden by a small screen of antique silk. They sat down behind this slight embroidered wall, veiled also by the gray shadow of a rainy day.

She resumed, pitying him, deeply moved by his grief:

"My poor Olivier, how you suffer!"

He leaned his white head on the shoulder of his friend.

"More than you believe!" he said.

"Oh, I knew it! I have felt it all. I saw it from the beginning and watched it grow."

He answered as if she had accused him: "It is not my faulty, Any."

"I know it well; I do not reproach you for it."

And softly, turning a little, she laid her lips on one of Olivier's eyes, where she found a bitter tear.

She started, as if she had just tasted a drop of despair, and repeated several times:

"Ah, poor friend — poor friend — poor friend!"

Then after a moment of silence she added: "It is the fault of our hearts, which never have grown old. I feel that my own is full of life!"

He tried to speak but could not, for now his sobs choked him. She listened, as he leaned against her, to the struggle in his breast. Then, seized by the selfish anguish of love, which had gnawed at her heart so long, she said in the agonized tone in which one realizes a horrible misfortune:

"God! how you love her!"

Again he confessed: "Ah, yes! I love her!"

She reflected a few moments, then continued: "You never have loved me thus?"

He did not deny it, for he was passing through one of those periods in which one speaks with absolute truth, and he murmured:

"No, I was too young then."

She was surprised.

"Too young? Why?"

"Because life was too sweet. It is only at our age that one loves despairingly."

"Does the love you feel for her resemble that which you felt for me?" the Countess asked.

"Yes and no — and yet it is almost the same thing. I have loved you as much as anyone can love a woman. As for her, I love her just as I loved you, since she is yourself; but this love has become something irresistible, destroying, stronger than death. I belong to it as a burning house belongs to the fire."

She felt her sympathy wither up under a breath of jealousy; but, assuming a consoling tone, she said:

"My poor friend! In a few days she will be married and gone. When you see her no more no doubt you will be cured of this fancy."

He shook his head.

"Oh, I am lost, lost, lost!"

"No, no, I say! It will be three months before you see her again. That will be sufficient. Three months were quite enough for you to love her more than you love me, whom you have known for twelve years!"

Then, in his infinite distress, he implored: "Any, do not abandon me!"

"What can I do, my friend?"

"Do not leave me alone."

"I will go to see you as often as you wish."

"No. Keep me here as much as possible."

"But then you would be near her."

"And near you!"

"You must not see her any more before her marriage."

"Oh, Any!"

"Well, at least, not often."

"May I stay here this evening?"

"No, not in your present condition. You must divert your mind; go to the club, or the theater — no matter where, but do not stay here."

"I entreat you— "

"No, Olivier, it is impossible. And, besides, I have guests coming to dinner whose presence would agitate you still more."

"The Duchess and — he!"

"Yes."

"But I spent last evening with them."

"And you speak of it! You are in a fine state to-day."

"I promise you to be calm."

"No, it is impossible."

"Then I am going away."

"Why do you hurry now?"

"I must walk."

"That is right! Walk a great deal, walk until evening, kill yourself with fatigue and then go to bed."

He had risen.

"Good-by, Any!"

"Good-by, dear friend. I will come to see you to-morrow morning. Would you like me to do something very imprudent, as I used to do — pretend to breakfast here at noon, and then go and have breakfast with you at a quarter past one?"

"Yes, I should like it very much. You are so good!"

"It is because I love you."

"And I love you, too."

"Oh, don't speak of that any more!"

"Good-by, Any."

"Good-by, dear friend, till to-morrow."

"Good-by!"

He kissed her hands many times, then he kissed her brow, then the corner of her lips. His eyes were dry now, his bearing resolute. Just as he was about to go, he seized her, clasped her close in both arms, and pressing his lips to her forehead, he seemed to drink in, to inhale from her all the love she had for him.

Then he departed quickly, without turning toward her again.

When she was alone she let herself sink, sobbing, upon a chair. She would have remained there till night if Annette had not suddenly appeared in search of her. In order to gain time to dry her red eyelids, the Countess answered: "I have a little note to write, my child. Go up-stairs, and I will join you in a few seconds."

She was compelled to occupy herself with the great affair of the trousseau until evening.

The Duchess and her nephew dined with the Guilleroys, as a family party. They had just seated themselves at table, and were speaking of the opera of the night before, when the butler appeared, carrying three enormous bouquets.

Madame de Mortemain was surprised.

"Good gracious! What is that?"

"Oh, how lovely they are!" exclaimed Annette; "who can have sent them?"

"Olivier Bertin, no doubt," replied her mother.

She had been thinking of him since his departure. He had seemed so gloomy, so tragic, she understood so clearly his hopeless sorrow, she felt so keenly the counter-stroke of that grief, she loved him so much, so entirely, so tenderly, that her heart was weighed down by sad presentiments.

In the three bouquets were found three of the painter’s cards. He had written on them in pencil, respectively, the names of the Countess, the Duchess, and Annette.

“Is he ill, your friend Bertin?” the Duchess inquired. “I thought he looked rather bad last night.”

“Yes, I am a little anxious about him, although he does not complain,” Madame de Guilleroy answered.

“Oh, he is growing old, like all the rest of us,” her husband interposed. “He is growing old quite fast, indeed. I believe, however, that bachelors usually go to pieces suddenly. Their breaking-up comes more abruptly than ours. He really is very much changed.”

“Ah, yes!” sighed the Countess.

Farandal suddenly stopped his whispering to Annette to say: “The *Figaro* has a very disagreeable article about him this morning.”

Any attack, any criticism or allusion unfavorable to her friend’s talent always threw the Countess into a passion.

“Oh,” said she, “men of Bertin’s importance need not mind such rudeness.”

Guilleroy was astonished.

“What!” he exclaimed, “a disagreeable article about Olivier! But I have not read it. On what page?”

The Marquis informed him: “The first page, at the top, with the title, ‘Modern Painting.’”

And the deputy ceased to be astonished. “Oh, exactly! I did not read it because it was about painting.”

Everyone smiled, knowing that apart from politics and agriculture M. de Guilleroy was interested in very few things.

The conversation turned upon other subjects until they entered the drawing-room to take coffee. The Countess was not listening and hardly answered, being pursued by anxiety as to what Olivier might be doing. Where was he? Where had he dined? Where had he taken his hopeless heart at that moment? She now felt a burning regret at having let him go, not to have kept him; and she fancied him roving the streets, so sad and lonely, fleeing under his burden of woe.

Up to the time of the departure of the Duchess and her nephew she had hardly spoken, lashed by vague and superstitious fears; then she went to bed and lay there long, her eyes wide open in the darkness, thinking of him!

A very long time had passed when she thought she heard the bell of her apartment ring. She started, sat up and listened. A second time the vibrating tinkle broke the stillness of the night.

She leaped out of bed, and with all her strength pressed the electric button that summoned her maid. Then, candle in hand, she ran to the vestibule.

Through the door she asked: “Who is there?”

“It is a letter,” an unknown voice replied.

“A letter! From whom?”

“From a physician.”

“What physician?”

“I do not know; it is about some accident.”

Hesitating no more, she opened the door, and found herself facing a cab-driver in an oilskin cap. He held a paper in his hand, which he presented to her. She read: “Very urgent — Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy.”

The writing was unknown.

“Enter, my good man,” said she; “sit down, and wait for me.”

When she reached her husband’s door her heart was beating so violently that she could not call him. She pounded on the wood with her metal candlestick. The Count was asleep and did not hear.

Then, impatient, nervous, she kicked the door, and heard a sleepy voice asking: “Who is there? What time is it?”

“It is I,” she called. “I have an urgent letter for you, brought by a cabman. There has been some accident.”

“Wait! I am getting up. I’ll be there,” he stammered from behind his bed-curtains.

In another minute he appeared in his dressing-gown. At the same time two servants came running, aroused by the ringing of the bell. They were alarmed and bewildered, having seen a stranger sitting on a chair in the dining-room.

The Count had taken the letter and was turning it over in his fingers, murmuring: “What is that? I cannot imagine.”

“Well, read it, then!” said the Countess, in a fever.

He tore off the envelope, unfolded the paper, uttered an exclamation of amazement, then looked at his wife with frightened eyes.

“My God! what is it?” said she.

He stammered, hardly able to speak, so great was his emotion: “Oh, a great misfortune — a great misfortune! Bertin has fallen under a carriage!”

“Dead?” she cried.

“No, no!” said he; “read for yourself.”

She snatched from his hand the letter he held out and read:

“MONSIEUR: A great misfortune has just happened. Your friend, the eminent artist, M. Olivier Bertin, has been run over by an omnibus, the wheel of which passed over his body. I cannot as yet say anything decisive as to the probable result of this accident, which may not be serious, although it may have an immediate and fatal result. M. Bertin begs you earnestly and entreats Madame la Comtesse de Guilleroy to come to him at once. I hope, Monsieur, that Madame la Comtesse and yourself will grant the desire of our friend in common, who before daylight may have ceased to live.

“DR. DE RIVIL.”

The Countess stared at her husband with great, fixed eyes, full of terror. Then suddenly she experienced, like an electric shock, an awakening of that courage which comes to women at times, which makes them in moments of terror the most valiant of creatures.

Turning to her maid she said: “Quick! I am going to dress.”

“What will Madame wear?” asked the servant.

“Never mind that. Anything you like. James,” she added, “be ready in five minutes.”

Returning toward her room, her soul overwhelmed, she noticed the cabman, still waiting, and said to him: “You have your carriage?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“That is well; we will take that.”

Wildly, with precipitate haste, she threw on her clothes, hooking, clasping, tying, and fastening at hap-hazard; then, before the mirror, she lifted and twisted her hair without a semblance of order, gazing without thinking of what she was doing at the reflection of her pale face and haggard eyes.

When her cloak was over her shoulders, she rushed to her husband’s room, but he was not yet ready. She dragged him along.

“Come, come!” said she; “remember, he may die!”

The Count, dazed, followed her stumblingly, feeling his way with his feet on the dark stairs, trying to distinguish the steps, so that he should not fall.

The drive was short and silent. The Countess trembled so violently that her teeth rattled, and through the window she saw the flying gas-jets, veiled by the falling rain. The sidewalks gleamed, the Boulevard was deserted, the night was sinister. On arriving, they found that the painter's door was open, and that the concierge's lodge was lighted but empty.

At the top of the stairs the physician, Dr. de Rivil, a little gray man, short, round, very well dressed, extremely polite, came to meet them. He bowed low to the Countess and held out his hand to the Count.

She asked him, breathing rapidly as if climbing the stairs had exhausted her and put her out of breath:

"Well, doctor?"

"Well, Madame, I hope that it will be less serious than I thought at first."

"He will not die?" she exclaimed.

"No. At least, I do not believe so."

"Will you answer for that?"

"No. I only say that I hope to find only a simple abdominal contusion without internal lesions."

"What do you call lesions?"

"Lacerations."

"How do you know that there are none?"

"I suppose it."

"And if there are?"

"Oh, then it would be serious."

"He might die of them?"

"Yes."

"Very soon?"

"Very soon. In a few minutes or even seconds. But reassure yourself, Madame; I am convinced that he will be quite well again in two weeks."

She had listened, with profound attention, to know all and understand all.

"What laceration might he have?"

"A laceration of the liver, for instance."

"That would be very dangerous?"

"Yes — but I should be surprised to find any complication now. Let us go to him. It will do him good, for he awaits you with great impatience."

On entering the room she saw first a pale face on a white pillow. Some candles and the firelight illumined it, defined the profile, deepened the shadows; and in that pale face the Countess saw two eyes that watched her coming.

All her courage, energy, and resolution fell, so much did those hollow and altered features resemble those of a dying man. He, whom she had seen only a little while ago, had become this thing, this specter! “Oh, my God!” she murmured between her teeth, and she approached him, palpitating with horror.

He tried to smile, to reassure her, and the grimace of that attempt was frightful.

When she was beside the bed, she put both hands gently on one of Olivier’s, which lay along his body, and stammered: “Oh, my poor friend!”

“It is nothing,” said he, in a low tone, without moving his head.

She now looked at him closely, frightened at the change in him. He was so pale that he seemed no longer to have a drop of blood under his skin. His hollow cheeks seemed to have been sucked in from the interior of his face, and his eyes were sunken as if drawn by a string from within.

He saw the terror of his friend, and sighed: “Here I am in a fine state!”

“How did it happen?” she asked, looking at him with fixed gaze.

He was making a great effort to speak, and his whole face twitched with pain.

“I was not looking about me — I was thinking of something else — something very different — oh, yes! — and an omnibus knocked me down and ran over my abdomen.”

As she listened she saw the accident, and shaking with terror, she asked: “Did you bleed?”

“No. I am only a little bruised — a little crushed.”

“Where did it happen?” she inquired.

“I do not know exactly,” he answered in a very low voice; “it was far away from here.”

The physician rolled up an armchair, and the Countess sank into it. The Count remained standing at the foot of the bed, repeating between his teeth: “Oh, my poor friend! my poor friend! What a frightful misfortune!”

And he was indeed deeply grieved, for he loved Olivier very much.

“But where did it happen?” the Countess repeated.

“I know hardly anything about it myself, or rather I do not understand it at all,” the physician replied. “It was at the Gobelins, almost outside of Paris! At least, the cabman that brought him home declared to me that he took him in at a pharmacy of that quarter, to which someone had carried him, at nine o'clock in the evening!" Then, leaning toward Olivier, he asked: "Did the accident really happen near the Gobelins?"

Bertin closed his eyes, as if to recollect; then murmured: "I do not know."

"But where were you going?"

"I do not remember now. I was walking straight before me."

A groan that she could not stifle came from the Countess's lips; then oppressed with a choking that stopped her breathing a few seconds, she drew out her handkerchief, covered her eyes, and wept bitterly.

She knew — she guessed! Something intolerable, overwhelming had just fallen on her heart — remorse for not keeping Olivier near her, for driving him away, for throwing him into the street, where, stupefied with grief, he had fallen under the omnibus.

He said in that colorless voice he now had: "Do not weep. It distresses me."

By a tremendous effort of will, she ceased to sob, uncovered her eyes and fixed them, wide open, upon him, without a quiver of her face, whereon the tears continued slowly to roll down.

They looked at each other, both motionless, their hands clasped under the coverlet. They gazed at each other, no longer knowing that any other person was in the room; and that gaze carried a superhuman emotion from one heart to the other.

They gazed upon each other, and the need of talking, unheard, of hearing the thousand intimate things, so sad, which they had still to say, rose irresistibly to their lips. She felt that she must at any price send away the two men that stood behind her; she must find a way, some ruse, some inspiration, she, the woman, fruitful in resources! She began to reflect, her eyes always fixed on Olivier.

Her husband and the doctor were talking in undertones, discussing the care to be given. Turning her head the Countess said to the doctor: "Have you brought a nurse?"

"No, I prefer to send a hospital surgeon, who will keep a better watch over the case."

"Send both. One never can be too careful. Can you still get them to-night, for I do not suppose you will stay here till morning?"

"Indeed, I was just about to go home. I have been here four hours already."

"But on your way back you will send us the nurse and the surgeon?"

"It will be difficult in the middle of the night. But I shall try."

"You must!"

"They may promise, but will they come?"

"My husband will accompany you and will bring them back either willingly or by force."

"You cannot remain here alone, Madame!"

"I?" she exclaimed with a sort of cry of defiance, of indignant protest against any resistance to her will. Then she pointed out, in that authoritative tone to which no one ventures a reply, the necessities of the situation. It was necessary that the nurse and the surgeon should be there within an hour, to forestall all accident. To insure this, someone must get out of bed and bring them. Her husband alone could do that. During this time she would remain near the injured man, she, for whom it was a duty and a right. She would thereby simply fulfil her role of friend, her role of woman. Besides, this was her will, and no one should dissuade her from it.

Her reasoning was sensible. They could only agree upon that, and they decided to obey her.

She had risen, full of the thought of their departure, impatient to know that they were off and that she was left alone. Now, in order that she should commit no error during their absence, she listened, trying to understand perfectly, to remember everything, to forget nothing of the physician's directions. The painter's valet, standing near her, listened also, and behind him his wife, the cook, who had helped in the first binding of the patient, indicated by nods of the head that she too understood. When the Countess had recited all the instructions like a lesson, she urged the two men to go, repeating to her husband:

"Return soon, above all things, return soon!"

"I will take you in my coupe," said the doctor to the Count. "It will bring you back quicker. You will be here again in an hour."

Before leaving, the doctor again carefully examined the wounded man, to assure himself that his condition remained satisfactory.

Guilleroy still hesitated.

"You do not think that we are doing anything imprudent?" he asked.

"No," said the doctor. "He needs only rest and quiet. Madame de Guilleroy will see that he does not talk, and will speak to him as little as possible."

The Countess was startled, and said:

“Then I must not talk to him?”

“Oh, no, Madame! Take an armchair and sit beside him. He will not feel that he is alone and will be quite content; but no fatigue of words, or even of thoughts. I will call about nine o’clock to-morrow morning. Good-bye, Madame. I salute you!”

He left the room with a low bow, followed by the Count who repeated:

“Do not worry yourself, my dear. Within an hour I shall return, and then you can go home.”

When they were gone, she listened for the sound of the door below being closed, then to the rolling wheels of the coupe in the street.

The valet and the cook still stood there, awaiting orders. The Countess dismissed them.

“You may go now,” said she; “I will ring if I need anything.”

They too withdrew, and she remained alone with him.

She had drawn quite near to the bed, and putting her hands on the two edges of the pillow, on both sides of that dear face, she leaned over to look upon it. Then, with her face so close to his that she seemed to breathe her words upon it, she whispered:

“Did you throw yourself under that carriage?”

He tried to smile still, saying: “No, it was *that* which threw itself upon me.”

“That is not true; it was you.”

“No, I swear to you it was *it*!”

After a few moments of silence, those instants when souls seem mingled in glances, she murmured: “Oh, my dear, dear Olivier, to think that I let you go, that I did not keep you with me!”

“It would have happened just the same, some day or another,” he replied with conviction.

They still gazed at each other, seeking to read each other’s inmost thoughts.

“I do not believe that I shall recover,” he said at last. “I suffer too much.”

“Do you suffer very much?” she murmured.

“Oh, yes!”

Bending a little lower, she brushed his forehead, then his eyes, then his cheeks with slow kisses, light, delicate as her care for him. She barely touched him with her lips, with that soft little breath that children give when they kiss. This lasted a long time, a very long time. He let that sweet rain of caresses fall on him, and they seemed to soothe and refresh him, for his drawn face twitched less than before.

"Any!" he said finally.

She ceased her kissing to listen to him.

"What, my friend?"

"You must make me a promise."

"I will promise anything you wish."

"If I am not dead before morning, swear to me that you will bring Annette to me, just once, only once! I cannot bear to die without seeing her again. . . . Think that . . . to-morrow . . . at this time perhaps I shall have . . . shall surely have closed my eyes forever and that I never shall see you again. I . . . nor you . . . nor her!"

She stopped him; her heart was breaking.

"Oh, hush . . . hush! Yes, I promise you to bring her!"

"You swear it?"

"I swear it, my friend. But hush, do not talk any more. You hurt me frightfully — hush!"

A quick convulsion passed over his face; when it had passed he said:

"Since we have only a few minutes more to remain together, do not let us lose them; let us seize them to bid each other good-by. I have loved you so much — — "

"And I," she sighed, "how I still love you!"

He spoke again:

"I never have had real happiness except through you. Only these last days have been hard. . . . It was not your fault. . . . Ah, my poor Any, how sad life is! . . . and how hard it is to die!"

"Hush, Olivier, I implore you!"

He continued, without listening to her: "I should have been a happy man if you had not had your daughter. . . ."

"Hush! My God! Hush! . . ."

He seemed to dream rather than speak.

"Ah, he that invented this existence and made men was either blind or very wicked. . . ."

"Olivier, I entreat you . . . if you ever have loved me, be quiet, do not talk like that any more!"

He looked at her, leaning over him, she herself so pale that she looked as if she were dying, too; and he was silent.

Then she seated herself in the armchair, close to the bed, and again took the hand on the coverlet.

"Now I forbid you to speak," said she. "Do not stir, and think of me as I think of you."

Again they looked at each other, motionless, joined together by the burning contact of their hands. She pressed, with gentle movement, the feverish hand she clasped, and he answered these calls by tightening his fingers a little. Each pressure said something to them, evoked some period of their finished past, revived in their memory the stagnant recollections of their love. Each was a secret question, each was a mysterious reply, sad questions and sad replies, those "do you remembers?" of a bygone love.

Their minds, in this agonizing meeting, which might be the last, traveled back through the years, through the whole history of their passion; and nothing was audible in the room save the crackling of the fire.

Suddenly, as if awakening from a dream, he said, with a start of terror:

"Your letters!"

"What? My letters?" she queried.

"I might have died without destroying them!"

"Oh, what does that matter to me? That is of no consequence now. Let them find them and read them — I don't care!"

"I will not have that," he said. "Get up, Any; open the lowest drawer of my desk, the large one; they are all there, all. You must take them and throw them into the fire."

She did not move at all, but remained crouching, as if he had counseled her to do something cowardly.

"Any, I entreat you!" he continued; "if you do not do this, you will torture me, unnerve me, drive me mad. Think — they may fall into anyone's hands, a notary, a servant, or even your husband. . . . I do not wish. . . ."

She rose, still hesitating, and repeating:

"No, that is too hard, too cruel! I feel as if you were compelling me to burn both our hearts!"

He supplicated her, his face drawn with pain.

Seeing him suffer thus, she resigned herself and walked toward the desk. On opening the drawer, she found it filled to the edge with a thick packet of letters, piled one on top of another, and she recognized on all the envelopes the two lines of the address she had written so often. She knew them — those two lines — a man's name, the name of a street — as well as she knew her own name, as well as one can know the few words that have represented to us in life all hope and all happiness. She looked at them, those little square things that contained all she had known how to express of her love, all that she could take of herself to give to him, with a little ink on a bit of white paper.

He had tried to turn his head on the pillow that he might watch her, and again he said: "Burn them, quick!"

Then she took two handfuls, holding them a few seconds in her grasp. They seemed heavy to her, painful, living, at the same time dead, so many different things were in them, so many things that were now over — so sweet to feel, to dream! It was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, the essence of her loving self that she was holding there; and she remembered with what delirium she had scribbled some of them, with what exaltation, what intoxication of living and of adoring some one, and of expressing it.

"Burn them! Burn them, Any!" Olivier repeated.

With the same movement of both hands, she cast into the fireplace the two packets of papers, which became scattered as they fell upon the wood. Then she seized those that remained in the desk and threw them on top of the others, then another handful, with swift movements, stooping and rising again quickly, to finish as soon as might be this terrible task.

When the fireplace was full and the drawer empty, she remained standing, waiting, watching the almost smothered flames as they crept up from all sides on that mountain of envelopes. They attacked them first at the edges, gnawed at the corners, ran along the edge of the paper, went out, sprang up again, and went creeping on and on. Soon, all around that white pyramid glowed a vivid girdle of clear fire which filled the room with light; and this light, illuminating the woman standing and the man dying, was their burning love, their love turned to ashes.

The Countess turned, and in the dazzling light of that fire she beheld her friend leaning with a haggard face on the edge of the bed.

"Are they all there?" he demanded.

"Yes, all."

But before returning to him she cast a last look upon that destruction, and on that mass of papers, already half consumed, twisting and turning black, and she saw something red flowing. It looked like drops of blood, and seemed to come out of the very heart of the letters, as from a wound; it ran slowly toward the flames, leaving a purple train.

The Countess received in her soul the shock of supernatural terror, and recoiled as if she had seen the assassination of a human being; then she suddenly understood that she had seen simply the melting of the wax seals.

She returned to the wounded man, and lifting his head tenderly laid it back in the center of the pillow. But he had moved, and his pain increased. He was panting now, his face drawn by fearful suffering, and he no longer seemed to know that she was there.

She waited for him to become a little calmer, to open his eyes, which remained closed, to be able to say one word more to her.

Presently she asked: “Do you suffer much?”

He did not reply.

She bent over him and laid a finger on his forehead to make him look at her. He opened his eyes then, but they were wild and dazed.

Terrified, she repeated: “Do you suffer? Olivier! Answer me! Shall I call? Make an effort! Say something to me!”

She thought she heard him murmur: “Bring her . . . you swore to me.”

Then he writhed under the bedclothes, his body grew rigid, his face convulsed with awful grimaces.

“Olivier! My God! Olivier!” she cried. “What is the matter? Shall I call?”

This time he heard her, for he replied, “No . . . it is nothing.”

He appeared to grow easier, in fact, to suffer less, to fall suddenly into a sort of drowsy stupor. Hoping that he would sleep, she sat down again beside the bed, took his hand, and waited. He moved no more, his chin had dropped to his breast, his mouth was half opened by his short breath, which seemed to rasp his throat in passing. Only his fingers moved involuntarily now and then, with slight tremors which the Countess felt to the roots of her hair, making her long to cry out. They were no more the tender little meaning pressures which, in place of the weary lips, told of all the sadness of their hearts; they were spasms of pain which spoke only of the torture of the body.

Now she was frightened, terribly frightened, and had a wild desire to run away, to ring, to call, but she dared not move, lest she might disturb his repose.

The far-off sound of vehicles in the streets penetrated the walls; and she listened to hear whether that rolling of wheels did not stop before the door, whether her husband were not coming to deliver her, to tear her away at last from this sad tete-a-tete.

As she tried to draw her hand from Olivier's, he pressed it, uttering a deep sigh! Then she resigned herself to wait, so that she should not trouble him.

The fire was dying out on the hearth, under the black ashes of the letters; two candles went out; some pieces of furniture cracked.

All was silent in the house; everything seemed dead except a tall Flemish clock on the stairs, which regularly chimed the hour, the half hour, and the quarter, singing the march of time in the night, modulating it in divers tones.

The Countess, motionless, felt an intolerable terror rising in her soul. Nightmare assailed her; fearful thoughts filled her mind; and she thought she could feel that Olivier's fingers were growing cold within her own. Was that true? No, certainly not. But whence had come that sensation of inexpressible, frozen contact? She roused herself, wild with terror, to look at his face. It was relaxed, impassive, inanimate, indifferent to all misery, suddenly soothed by the Eternal Oblivion.

THE END

NOTRE COEUR

OR, A WOMAN'S PASTIME

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

Maupassant's sixth and final novel was published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in May 1890 and again in June in book form by Ollendorff. A tale of high society, the narrative concerns Michèle de Burne, a young widow and Parisian, who is cold and devoid of tenderness. The novel is primarily a psychological study of Michèle's seductive character, offering a satire of the society in which the character performs her various intrigues and in which the author himself lived and knew well.

The author close to the time of publishing his last novel

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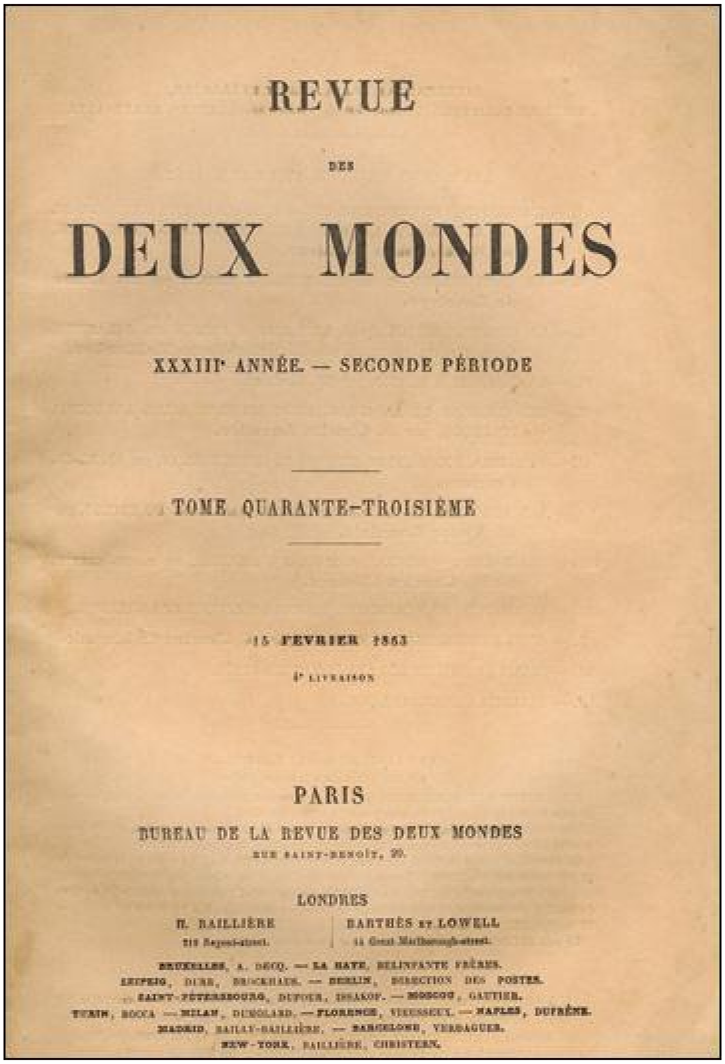

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XXXIIIe ANNÉE. — SECONDE PÉRIODE

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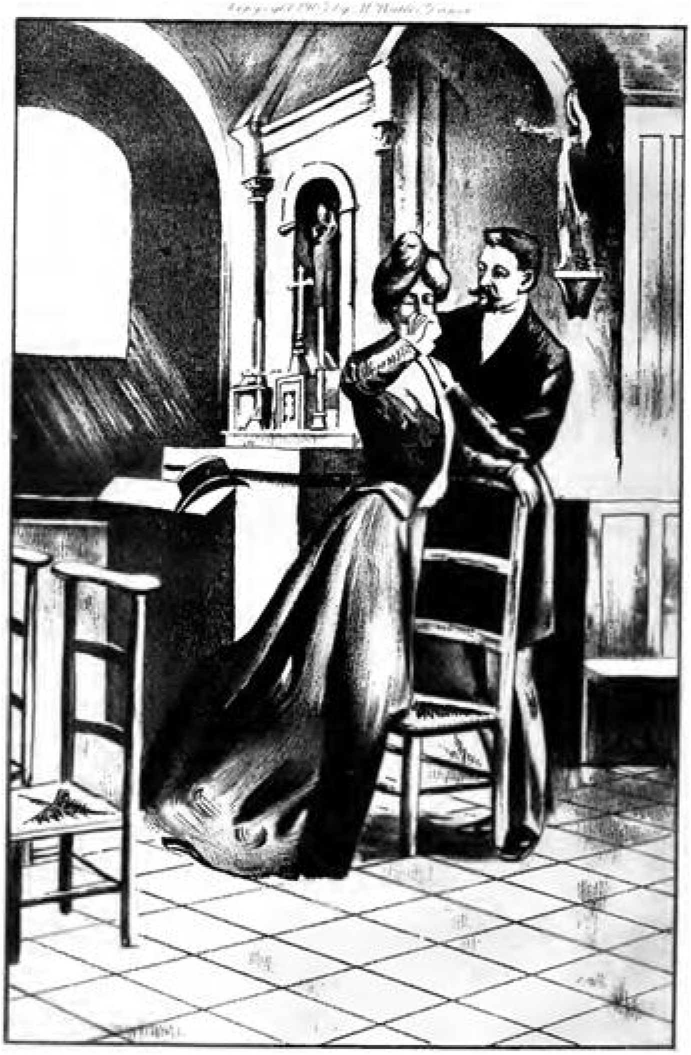
The magazine in which the novel was first serialised



An original illustration

CHAPTER I. THE INTRODUCTION

ONE day Massival, the celebrated composer of "Rebecca," who for fifteen years, now, had been known as "the young and illustrious master," said to his friend André Mariolle:

"Why is it that you have never secured a presentation to Mme. Michèle de Burne? Take my word for it, she is one of the most interesting women in new Paris."

"Because I do not feel myself at all adapted to her surroundings."

"You are wrong, my dear fellow. It is a house where there is a great deal of novelty and originality; it is wide-awake and very artistic. There is excellent music, and the conversation is as good as in the best salons of the last century. You would be highly appreciated — in the first place because you play so well on the violin, then because you have been very favorably spoken of in the house, and finally because you have the reputation of being select in your choice of friends."

Flattered, but still maintaining his attitude of resistance, supposing, moreover, that this urgent invitation was not given without the young woman being aware of it, Mariolle ejaculated a "Bah! I shall not bother my head at all about it," in which, through the disdain that he intended to express, was evident his foregone acceptance.

Massival continued: "Would you like to have me present you some of these days? You are already known to her through all of us who are on terms of intimacy with her, for we talk about you often enough. She is a very pretty woman of twenty-eight abounding in intelligence, who will never take a second husband, for her first venture was a very unfortunate one. She has made her abode a rendezvous for agreeable men. There are not too many club-men or society-men found there — just enough of them to give the proper effect. She will be delighted to have me introduce you."

Mariolle was vanquished; he replied: "Very well, then; one of these days."

At the beginning of the following week the musician came to his house and asked him: "Are you disengaged to-morrow?"

"Why, yes."

“Very well. I will take you to dine with Mme de Burne; she requested me to invite you. Besides, here is a line from her.”

After a few seconds’ reflection, for form’s sake, Mariolle answered: “That is settled!”

André Mariolle was about thirty-seven years old, a bachelor without a profession, wealthy enough to live in accordance with his likings, to travel, and even to indulge himself in collecting modern paintings and ancient knickknacks. He had the reputation of being a man of intelligence, rather odd and unsociable, a little capricious and disdainful, who affected the hermit through pride rather than through timidity. Very talented and acute, but indolent, quick to grasp the meaning of things, and capable, perhaps, of accomplishing something great, he had contented himself with enjoying life as a spectator, or rather as a *dilettante.* Had he been poor, he would doubtless have turned out to be a remarkable or celebrated man; born with a good income, he was eternally reproaching himself that he could never be anything better than a nobody.

It is true that he had made more than one attempt in the direction of the arts, but they had lacked vigor. One had been in the direction of literature, by publishing a pleasing book of travels, abounding in incident and correct in style; one toward music by his violin-playing, in which he had gained, even among professional musicians, a respectable reputation; and, finally, one at sculpture, that art in which native aptitude and the faculty of rough-hewing striking and deceptive figures atone in the eyes of the ignorant for deficiencies in study and knowledge. His statuette in terra-cotta, “Masseur Tunisien,” had even been moderately successful at the Salon of the preceding year. He was a remarkable horseman, and was also, it was said, an excellent fencer, although he never used the foils in public, owing, perhaps, to the same self-distrustful feeling which impelled him to absent himself from society resorts where serious rivalries were to be apprehended.

His friends appreciated him, however, and were unanimous in extolling his merits, perhaps for the reason that they had little to fear from him in the way of competition. It was said of him that in every case he was reliable, a devoted friend, extremely agreeable in manner, and very sympathetic in his personality.

Tall of stature, wearing his black beard short upon the cheeks and trained down to a fine point upon the chin, with hair that was beginning to turn gray but curled very prettily, he looked one straight in the face with a pair of clear, brown, piercing eyes in which lurked a shade of distrust and hardness.

Among his intimates he had an especial predilection for artists of every kind — among them Gaston de Lamarthe the novelist, Massival the musician, and the painters Jobin, Rivollet, De Mandol — who seemed to set a high value on his reason, his friendship, his intelligence, and even his judgment, although at bottom, with the vanity that is inseparable from success achieved, they set him down as a very agreeable and very intelligent man who had failed to score a success.

Mariolle's haughty reserve seemed to say: "I am nothing because I have not chosen to be anything." He lived within a narrow circle, therefore, disdaining gallantry and the great frequented salons, where others might have shone more brilliantly than he, and might have obliged him to take his place among the lay-figures of society. He visited only those houses where appreciation was extended to the solid qualities that he was unwilling to display; and though he had consented so readily to allow himself to be introduced to Mme. Michèle de Burne, the reason was that his best friends, those who everywhere proclaimed his hidden merits, were the intimates of this young woman.

She lived in a pretty *entresol* in the Rue du Général-Foy, behind the church of Saint Augustin. There were two rooms with an outlook on the street — the dining-room and a salon, the one in which she received her company indiscriminately — and two others that opened on a handsome garden of which the owner of the property had the enjoyment. Of the latter the first was a second salon of large dimensions, of greater length than width, with three windows opening on the trees, the leaves of which brushed against the awnings, a room which was embellished with furniture and ornaments exceptionally rare and simple, in the purest and soberest taste and of great value. The tables, the chairs, the little cupboards or *étagères*, the pictures, the fans and the porcelain figures beneath glass covers, the vases, the statuettes, the great clock fixed in the middle of a panel, the entire decoration of this young woman's apartment attracted and held attention by its shape, its age, or its elegance. To create for herself this home, of which she was almost as proud as she was of her own person, she had laid under contribution the knowledge, the friendship, the good nature, and the rummaging instinct of every artist of her acquaintance. She was rich and willing to pay well, and her friends had discovered for her many things, distinguished by originality, which the mere vulgar amateur would have passed by with contempt. Thus, with their assistance, she had furnished this dwelling, to which access was obtained with difficulty, and where she imagined that her friends received more pleasure and returned more gladly than elsewhere.

If was even a favorite hobby of hers to assert that the colors of the curtains and hangings, the comfort of the seats, the beauty of form, and the gracefulness of general effect are of as much avail to charm, captivate, and acclimatize the eye as are pretty smiles. Sympathetic or antipathetic rooms, she would say, whether rich or poor, attract, hold, or repel, just like the people who live in them. They awake the feelings or stifle them, warm or chill the mind, compel one to talk or be silent, make one sad or cheerful; in a word, they give every visitor an unaccountable desire to remain or to go away.

About the middle of this dimly lighted gallery a grand piano, standing between two *jardinières* filled with flowers, occupied the place of honor and dominated the room. Beyond this a lofty door with two leaves opened gave access to the bedroom, which in turn communicated with a dressing-room, also very large and elegant, hung with chintz like a drawingroom in summer, where Mme de Burne generally kept herself when she had no company.

Married to a well-mannered good-for-nothing, one of those domestic tyrants before whom everything must bend and yield, she had at first been very unhappy. For five years she had had to endure the unreasonable exactions, the harshness, the jealousy, even the violence of this intolerable master, and terrified, beside herself with astonishment, she had submitted without revolt to this revelation of married life, crushed as she was beneath the despotic and torturing will of the brutal man whose victim she had become.

He died one night, from an aneurism, as he was coming home, and when she saw the body of her husband brought in, covered with a sheet, unable to believe in the reality of this deliverance, she looked at his corpse with a deep feeling of repressed joy and a frightful dread lest she might show it.

Cheerful, independent, even exuberant by nature, very flexible and attractive, with bright flashes of wit such as are shown in some incomprehensible way in the intellects of certain little girls of Paris, who seem to have breathed from their earliest childhood the stimulating air of the boulevards — where every evening, through the open doors of the theaters, the applause or the hisses that greet the plays come forth, borne on the air — she nevertheless retained from her five years of servitude a strange timidity grafted upon her old-time audacity, a great fear lest she might say too much, do too much, together with a burning desire for emancipation and a stern resolve never again to do anything to imperil her liberty.

Her husband, a man of the world, had trained her to receive like a mute slave, elegant, polite, and well dressed. The despot had numbered among his friends many artists, whom she had received with curiosity and listened to with delight, without ever daring to allow them to see how she understood and appreciated them.

When her period of mourning was ended she invited a few of them to dinner one evening. Two of them sent excuses; three accepted and were astonished to find a young woman of admirable intelligence and charming manners, who immediately put them at their ease and gracefully told them of the pleasure that they had afforded her in former days by coming to her house. From among her old acquaintances who had ignored her or failed to recognize her qualities she thus gradually made a selection according to her inclinations, and as a widow, an enfranchised woman, but one determined to maintain her good name, she began to receive all the most distinguished men of Paris whom she could bring together, with only a few women. The first to be admitted became her intimates, formed a nucleus, attracted others, and gave to the house the air of a small court, to which every *habitué* contributed either personal merit or a great name, for a few well-selected titles were mingled with the intelligence of the commonalty.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment over hers, served as her chaperon and “sheep-dog.” An old beau, very elegant and witty, and extremely attentive to his daughter, whom he treated rather as a lady acquaintance than as a daughter, he presided at the Thursday dinners that were quickly known and talked of in Paris, and to which invitations were much sought after. The requests for introductions and invitations came in shoals, were discussed, and very frequently rejected by a sort of vote of the inner council. Witty sayings that had their origin in this circle were quoted and obtained currency in the city. Actors, artists, and young poets made their *débuts* there, and received, as it were, the baptism of their future greatness. Longhaired geniuses, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, seated themselves at the piano and replaced the Hungarian violinists that Massival had presented, and foreign ballet-dancers gave the company a glimpse of their graceful steps before appearing at the Eden or the Folies-Bergères.

Mme de Burne, over whom her friends kept jealous watch and ward and to whom the recollection of her commerce with the world under the auspices of marital authority was loathsome, was sufficiently wise not to enlarge the circle of her acquaintance to too great an extent. Satisfied and at the same time terrified as to what might be said and thought of her, she abandoned herself to her somewhat Bohemian inclinations with consummate prudence. She valued her good name, and was fearful of any rashness that might jeopardize it; she never allowed her fancies to carry her beyond the bounds of propriety, was moderate in her audacity and careful that no *liaison* or small love affair should ever be imputed to her.

All her friends had made love to her, more or less; none of them had been successful. They confessed it, admitted it to each other with surprise, for men never acknowledge, and perhaps they are right, the power of resistance of a woman who is her own mistress. There was a story current about her. It was said that at the beginning of their married life her husband had exhibited such revolting brutality toward her that she had been forever cured of the love of men. Her friends would often discuss the case at length. They inevitably arrived at the conclusion that a young girl who has been brought up in the dream of future tenderness and the expectation of an awe-inspiring mystery must have all her ideas completely upset when her initiation into the new life is committed to a clown. That worldly philosopher, George de Maltry, would give a gentle sneer and add: “Her hour will strike; it always does for women like her, and the longer it is in coming the louder it strikes. With our friend’s artistic tastes, she will wind up by falling in love with a singer or a pianist.”

Gaston de Lamarthe’s ideas upon the subject were quite different. As a novelist, observer, and psychologist, devoted to the study of the inhabitants of the world of fashion, of whom he drew ironical and lifelike portraits, he claimed to analyze and know women with infallible and unique penetration. He put Mme de Burne down among those flighty creatures of the time, the type of whom he had given in his interesting novel, “Une d’Elles.” He had been the first to diagnose this new race of women, distracted by the nerves of reasoning, hysterical patients, drawn this way and that by a thousand contradictory whims which never ripen into desires, disillusioned of everything, without having enjoyed anything, thanks to the times, to the way of living, and to the modern novel, and who, destitute of all ardor and enthusiasm, seem to combine in their persons the capricious, spoiled child and the old, withered sceptic. But he, like the rest of them, had failed in his love-making.

For all the faithful of the group had in turn been lovers of Mme de Burne, and after the crisis had retained their tenderness and their emotion in different degrees. They had gradually come to form a sort of little church; she was its Madonna, of whom they conversed constantly among themselves, subject to her charm even when she was not present. They praised, extolled, criticised, or disparaged her, according as she had manifested irritation or gentleness, aversion or preference. They were continually displaying their jealousy of each other, played the spy on each other a little, and above all kept their ranks well closed up, so that no rival might get near her who could give them any cause for alarm.

These assiduous ones were few in number: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, big Fresnel, George de Maltry, a fashionable young philosopher, celebrated for his paradoxes, for his eloquent and involved erudition that was always up to date though incomprehensible even to the most impassioned of his female admirers, and for his clothes, which were selected with as much care as his theories. To this tried band she had added a few more men of the world who had a reputation for wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil, and two or three others.

The two privileged characters of this chosen battalion seemed to be Massival and Lamarthe, who, it appears, had the gift of being always able to divert the young woman by their artistic unceremoniousness, their chaff, and the way they had of making fun of everybody, even of herself, a little, when she was in humor to tolerate it. The care, whether natural or assumed, however, that she took never to manifest a marked and prolonged predilection for any one of her admirers, the unconstrained air with which she practiced her coquetry and the real impartiality with which she dispensed her favors maintained between them a friendship seasoned with hostility and an alertness of wit that made them entertaining.

One of them would sometimes play a trick on the others by presenting a friend; but as this friend was never a very celebrated or very interesting man, the rest would form a league against him and quickly send him away.

It was in this way that Massival brought his comrade André Mariolle to the house. A servant in black announced these names: “Monsieur Massival! Monsieur Mariolle!”

Beneath a great rumpled cloud of pink silk, a huge shade that was casting down upon a square table with a top of ancient marble the brilliant light of a lamp supported by a lofty column of gilded bronze, one woman’s head and three men’s heads were bent over an album that Lamarthe had brought in with him. Standing between them, the novelist was turning the leaves and explaining the pictures.

As they entered the room, one of the heads was turned toward them, and Mariolle, as he stepped forward, became conscious of a bright, blond face, rather tending to ruddiness, upon the temples of which the soft, fluffy locks of hair seemed to blaze with the flame of burning brushwood. The delicate *retroussé* nose imparted a smiling expression to this countenance, and the clean-cut mouth, the deep dimples in the cheeks, and the rather prominent cleft chin, gave it a mocking air, while the eyes, by a strange contrast, veiled it in melancholy. They were blue, of a dull, dead blue as if they had been washed out, scoured, used up, and in the center the black pupils shone, round and dilated. The strange and brilliant glances that they emitted seemed to tell of dreams of morphine, or perhaps, more simply, of the coquettish artifice of belladonna.

Mme de Burne arose, gave her hand, thanked and welcomed them.

“For a long time I have been begging my friends to bring you to my house,” she said to Mariolle, “but I always have to tell these things over and over again in order to get them done.”

She was tall, elegantly shaped, rather deliberate in her movements, modestly *décolletée,* scarcely showing \he tips of her handsome shoulders, the shoulders of a red-headed woman, that shone out marvelously under the light. And yet her hair was not red, but of the inexpressible color of certain dead leaves that have been burned by the frosts of autumn.

She presented M. Mariolle to her father, who bowed and shook hands.

The men were conversing familiarly together in three groups; they seemed to be at home, in a kind of club that they were accustomed to frequent, to which the presence of a woman imparted a note of refinement.

Big Fresnel was chatting with the Comte de Marantin. Fresnel’s frequent visits to this house and the preference that Mme de Burne evinced for him shocked and often provoked her friends. Still young, but with the proportions of a drayman, always puffing and blowing, almost beardless, his head lost in a vague cloud of light, soft hair, commonplace, tiresome, ridiculous, he certainly could have but one merit in the young woman's eyes, a merit that was displeasing to the others but indispensable to her, — that of loving her blindly. He had received the nickname of "The Seal." He was married, but never said anything about bringing his wife to the house. It was said that she was very jealous in her seclusion.

Lamarthe and Massival especially evinced their indignation at the evident sympathy of their friend for this windy person, and when they could no longer refrain from reproaching her with this reprehensible inclination, this selfish and vulgar liking, she would smile and answer:

"I love him as I would love a great, big, faithful dog."

George de Maltry was entertaining Gaston de Lamarthe with the most recent discovery, not yet fully developed, of the micro-biologists. M. de Maltry was expatiating on his theme with many subtle and far-reaching theories, and the novelist accepted them enthusiastically, with the facility with which men of letters receive and do not dispute everything that appears to them original and new.

The philosopher of "high life," fair, of the fairness of linen, slender and tall, was incased in a coat that fitted very closely about the hips. Above, his pale, intelligent face emerged from his white collar and was surmounted by smooth, blond hair, which had the appearance of being glued on.

As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe, to whom the particle that divided his name had imparted some of the pretensions of a gentleman and man of the world, he was first, last, and all the time a man of letters, a terrible and pitiless man of letters. Provided with an eye that gathered in images, attitudes, and gestures with the rapidity and accuracy of the photographer's camera, and endowed with penetration and the novelist's instinct, which were as innate in him as the faculty of scent is in a hound, he was busy from morning till night storing away impressions to be used afterward in his profession. With these two very simple senses, a distinct idea of form and an intuitive one of substance, he gave to his books, in which there appeared none of the ordinary aims of psychological writers, the color, the tone, the appearance, the movement of life itself.

Each one of his novels as it appeared excited in society curiosity, conjecture, merriment, or wrath, for there always seemed to be prominent persons to be recognized in them, only faintly disguised under a torn mask;

and whenever he made his way through a crowded salon he left a wake of uneasiness behind him. Moreover, he had published a volume of personal recollections, in which he had given the portraits of many men and women of his acquaintance, without any clearly defined intention of unkindness, but with such precision and severity that they felt sore over it. Some one had applied to him the *sobriquet,* "Beware of your friends." He kept his secrets close-locked within his breast and was a puzzle to his intimates. He was reputed to have once passionately loved a woman who caused him much suffering, and it was said that after that he wreaked his vengeance upon others of her sex.

Massival and he understood each other very well, although the musician was of a very different disposition, more frank, more expansive, less harassed, perhaps, but manifestly more impressible. After two great successes — a piece performed at Brussels and afterward brought to Paris, where it was loudly applauded at the Opéra-Comique; then a second work that was received and interpreted at the Grand Opéra as soon as offered — he had yielded to that species of cessation of impulse that seems to smite the greater part of our contemporary artists like premature paralysis. They do not grow old, as their fathers did, in the midst of their renown and success, but seem threatened with impotence even when in the very prime of life. Lamarthe was accustomed to say: "At the present day there are in France only great men who have gone wrong."

Just at this time Massival seemed very much smitten with Mme de Burne, so that every eye was turned upon him when he kissed her hand with an air of adoration. He inquired:

"Are we late?"

She replied:

"No, I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"Ah, the Marquise! What good luck! We shall have some music this evening, then."

"I hope so."

The two laggards made their appearance. The Marquise, a woman perhaps a little too diminutive, Italian by birth, of a lively disposition, with very black eyes and eyelashes, black eyebrows, and black hair to match, which grew so thick and so low down that she had no forehead to speak of, her eyes even being threatened with invasion, had the reputation of possessing the most remarkable voice of all the women in society.

The Baron, a very gentlemanly man, hollowchested and with a large head, was never really himself unless he had his violoncello in his hands. He was a passionate melomaniac, and only frequented those houses where music received its due share of honor.

Dinner was announced, and Mme de Burne, taking André Mariolle's arm, allowed her guests to precede her to the dining-room; then, as they were left together, the last ones in the drawing-room, just as she was about to follow the procession she cast upon him an oblique, swift glance from her pale eyes with their dusky pupils, in which he thought that he could perceive more complexity of thought and more curiosity of interest than pretty women generally bestow upon a strange gentleman when receiving him at dinner for the first time.

The dinner was monotonous and rather dull. Lamarthe was nervous, and seemed ill disposed toward everyone, not openly hostile, for he made a point of his good-breeding, but displaying that almost imperceptible bad humor that takes the life out of conversation. Massival, abstracted and preoccupied, ate little, and from time to time cast furtive glances at the mistress of the house, who seemed to be in any place rather than at her own table. Inattentive, responding to remarks with a smile and then allowing her face to settle back to its former intent expression, she appeared to be reflecting upon something that seemed greatly to preoccupy her, and to interest her that evening more than did her friends. Still she contributed her share to the conversation — very amply as regarded the Marquise and Mariolle, — but she did it from habit, from a sense of duty, visibly absent from herself and from her abode Fresnel and M. de Maltry disputed over contemporary poetry. Fresnel held the opinions upon poetry that are current among men of the world, and M. de Maltry the perceptions of the spinners of most complicated verse — verse that is incomprehensible to the general public.

Several times during the dinner Mariolle had again encountered the young woman's inquiring look, but more vague, less intent, less curious. The Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin, and the Baron de Gravil were the only ones who kept up an uninterrupted conversation, and they had quantities of things to say.

After dinner, during the course of the evening, Massival, who had kept growing more and more melancholy, seated himself at the piano and struck a few notes, whereupon Mme de Burne appeared to awake and quickly organized a little concert, the numbers of which comprised the pieces that she was most fond of.

The Marquise was in voice, and, animated by Massival's presence, she sang like a real artist. The master accompanied her, with that dreamy look that he always assumed when he sat down to play. His long hair fell over the collar of his coat and mingled with his full, fine, shining, curling beard. Many women had been in love with him, and they still pursued him with their attentions, so it was said. Mme de Burne, sitting by the piano and listening with all her soul, seemed to be contemplating him and at the same time not to see him and Mariolle was a little jealous. He was not particularly jealous because of any relation that there was between her and him, but in presence of that look of a woman fixed so intently upon one of the Illustrious he felt himself humiliated in his masculine vanity by the consciousness of the rank that *They* bestow on us in proportion to the renown that we have gained. Often before this he had secretly suffered from contact with famous men whom he was accustomed to meet in the presence of those beings whose favor is by far the dearest reward of success.

About ten o'clock the Comtesse de Frémines and two Jewesses of the financial community arrived, one after the other. The talk was of a marriage that was on the carpet and a threatened divorce suit. Mariolle looked at Madame de Burne, who was now seated beneath a column that sustained a huge lamp. Her well-formed, tip-tilted nose, the dimples in her cheeks, and the little indentation that parted her chin gave her face the frolicsome expression of a child, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and something in her glance that reminded one of a withering flower cast a shade of melancholy over her countenance. Beneath the light that streamed upon it her skin took on tones of blond velvet, while her hair actually seemed colored by the autumnal sun which dyes and scorches the dead leaves.

She was conscious of the masculine glance that was traveling toward her from the other end of the room, and presently she arose and went to him, smiling, as if in response to a summons from him.

"I am afraid you are somewhat bored," she said. "A person who has not got the run of a house is always bored."

He protested the contrary. She took a chair and seated herself by him, and at once the conversation began to be animated. It was instantaneous with both of them, like a fire that blazes up brightly as soon as a match is applied to it. It seemed as if they had imparted their sensations and their opinions to each other beforehand, as if a similarity of disposition and education, of tastes and inclinations, had predisposed them to a mutual understanding and fated them to meet.

Perhaps there may have been a little artfulness on the part of the young woman, but the delight that one feels in encountering one who is capable of listening, who can understand you and reply to you and whose answers give scope for your repartees, put Mariolle into a fine glow of spirits. Flattered, moreover, by the reception which she had accorded him, subjugated by the alluring favor that she displayed and by the charm which she knew how to use so adroitly in captivating men, he did his best to exhibit to her that shade of subdued but personal and delicate wit which, when people came to know him well, had gained for him so many and such warm friendships.

She suddenly said to him:

“Really, it is very pleasant to converse with you, Monsieur. I had been told that such was the case, however.”

He was conscious that he was blushing, and replied at a venture:

“And I had been told, Madame, that you were— “

She interrupted him:

“Say a coquette. I am a good deal of a coquette with people whom I like. Everyone knows it, and I do not attempt to conceal it from myself, but you will see that I am very impartial in my coquetry, and this allows me to keep or to recall my friends without ever losing them, and to retain them all about me.”

She said this with a sly air which was meant to say: “Be easy and don’t be too presumptuous. Don’t deceive yourself, for you will get nothing more, than the others.”

He replied:

“That is what you might call warning your guests of the perils that await them here. Thank you, Madame: I greatly admire your mode of procedure.”

She had opened the way for him to speak of herself, and he availed himself of it. He began by paying her compliments and found that she was fond of them; then he aroused her woman’s curiosity by telling her what was said of her in the different houses that he frequented. She was rather uneasy and could not conceal her desire for further information, although she affected much indifference as to what might be thought of herself and her tastes. He drew for her a charming portrait of a superior, independent, intelligent, and attractive woman, who had surrounded herself with a court of eminent men and still retained her position as an accomplished member of society. She disclaimed his compliments with smiles, with little disclaimers of gratified egotism, all the while taking much pleasure in the details that he gave her, and in a playful tone kept constantly asking him for more, questioning him artfully, with a sensual appetite for flattery.

As he looked at her, he said to himself, “She is nothing but a child at heart, just like all the rest of them”; and he went on to finish a pretty speech in which he was commending her love for art, so rarely found among women. Then she assumed an air of mockery that he had not before suspected in her, that playfully tantalizing manner that seems inherent in the French. Mariolle had overdone his eulogy; she let him know that she was not a fool.

“Mon Dieu!” she said, “I will confess to you that I am not quite certain whether it is art or artists that I love.”

He replied: “How could one love artists without being in love with art?”

“Because they are sometimes more comical than men of the world.”

“Yes, but they have more unpleasant failings.”

“That is true.”

“Then you do not love music?”

She suddenly dropped her bantering tone. “Excuse me! I adore music; I think that I am more fond of it than of anything else. And yet Massival is convinced that I know nothing at all about it.”

“Did he tell you so?”

“No, but he thinks so.”

“How do you know?”

“Oh! we women guess at almost everything that we don’t know.”

“So Massival thinks that you know nothing of music?”

“I am sure of it. I can see it only by the way that he has of explaining things to me, by the way in which he underscores little niceties of expression, all the while saying to himself: ‘That won’t be of any use, but I do it because you are so nice.’”

“Still he has told me that you have the best music in your house of any in Paris, no matter whose the other may be.”

"Yes, thanks to him."

"And literature, are you not fond of that?"

' "I am very fond of it; and I am even so audacious as to claim to have a very good perception of it, notwithstanding Lamarthe's opinion."

"Who also decides that you know nothing at all about it?"

"Of course."

"But who has not told you so in words, any more than the other."

"Pardon me; he is more outspoken. He asserts that certain women are capable of showing a very just and delicate perception of the sentiments that are expressed, of the truthfulness of the characters, of psychology in general, but that they are totally incapable of discerning the superiority that resides in his profession, its art. When he has once uttered this word, Art, all that is left one to do is to show him the door."

Mariolle smiled and asked:

"And you, Madame, what do you think of it?" She reflected for a few seconds, then looked him straight in the face to see if he was in a frame of mind to listen and to understand her.

"I believe that sentiment, you understand — sentiment — can make a woman's mind receptive of everything; only it is frequently the case that what enters does not remain there. Do you follow me?"

"No, not fully, Madame."

"Very well! To make us comprehensive to the same degree as you, our woman's nature must be appealed to before addressing our intelligence. We take no interest in what a man has not first made sympathetic to us, for we look at all things through the medium of sentiment. I do not say through the medium of love; no, — but of sentiment, which has shades, forms, and manifestations of every sort. Sentiment is something that belongs exclusively to our domain, which you men have no conception of, for it befogs you while it enlightens us. Oh! I know that all this is incomprehensible to you, the more the pity! In a word, if a man loves us and is agreeable to us, for it is indispensable that we should feel that we are loved in order to become capable of the effort — and if this man is a superior being, by taking a little pains he can make us feel, know, and possess everything, everything, I say, and at odd moments and by bits impart to us the whole of his intelligence. That is all often blotted out afterward; it disappears, dies out, for we are forgetful. Oh! we forget as the wind forgets the words that are spoken to it. We are intuitive and capable of enlightenment, but changeable, impressionable, readily swayed by our surroundings. If I could only tell you how many states of mind I pass through that make of me entirely different women, according to the weather, my health, what I may have been reading, what may have been said to me! Actually there are days when I have the feelings of an excellent mother without children, and others when I almost have those of a *cocotte* without lovers.”

Greatly pleased, he asked: “Is it your opinion that intelligent women generally are gifted with this activity of thought?”

“Yes,” she said. “Only they allow it to slumber, and then they have a life shaped for them which draws them in one direction or the other.”

Again he questioned: “Then in your heart of hearts it is music that you prefer above all other distractions?”

“Yes! But what I was telling you just now is so true! I should certainly never have enjoyed it as I do enjoy it, adored it as I do adore it, had it not been for that angelic Massival. He seems to have given me the soul of the great masters by teaching me to play their works, of which I was passionately fond before. What a pity that he is married!”

She said these last words with a sprightly air, but so regretfully that they threw everything else into shadow, her theories upon women and her admiration for art.

Massival was, in fact, married. Before the days of his success he had contracted one of those unions that artists make and afterward trail after them through their renown until the day of their death. He never mentioned his wife’s name, never presented her in society, which he frequented a great deal; and although he had three children the fact was scarcely known.

Mariolle laughed. She was decidedly nice, was this unconventional woman, pretty, and of a type not often met with. Without ever tiring, with a persistency that seemed in no wise embarrassing to her, he kept gazing upon that face, grave and gay and a little self-willed, with its audacious nose and its sensual coloring of a soft, warm blonde, warmed by the midsummer of a maturity so tender, so full, so sweet that she seemed to have reached the very year, the month, the minute of her perfect flowering. He wondered: “Is her complexion false?” And he looked for the faint telltale line, lighter or darker, at the roots of her hair, without being able to discover it.

Soft footsteps on the carpet behind him made him start and turn his head. It was two servants bringing in the tea-table. Over the blue flame of the little lamp the water bubbled gently in a great silver receptacle, as shining and complicated as a chemist's apparatus.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" she asked.

Upon his acceptance she arose, and with a firm step in which there was no undulation, but which was rather marked by stiffness, proceeded to the table where the water was simmering in the depths of the machine, surrounded by a little garden of cakes, pastry, candied fruits, and bonbons. Then, as her profile was presented in clear relief against the hangings of the salon, Mariolle observed the delicacy of her form and the thinness of her hips beneath the broad shoulders and the full chest that he had been admiring a moment before. As the train of her light dress unrolled and dragged behind her, seemingly prolonging upon the carpet a body that had no end, this blunt thought arose to his mind: "Behold, a siren! She is altogether promising." She was now going from one to another, offering her refreshments with gestures of exquisite grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes; but Lamarthe, who was walking about with his cup in his hand, came up to him and said:

"Shall we go, you and I?"

"Yes, I think so."

"We will go at once, shall we not? I am tired."

"At once. Come."

They left the house. When they were in the street, the novelist asked:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I think that I will go and spend an hour at the club."

"At the Tambourins?"

"Yes."

"I will go as far as the door with you. Those places are tiresome to me; I never put my foot in them. I join them only because they enable me to economize in hack-hire."

They locked arms and went down the street toward Saint Augustin. They walked a little way in silence; then Mariolle said:

"What a singular woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe began to laugh outright. "It is the commencement of the crisis," he said. "You will have to pass through it, just as we have all done. I have had the malady, but I am cured of it now. My dear friend, the crisis consists of her friends talking of nothing but of her when they are together, whenever they chance to meet, wherever they may happen to be."

"At all events, it is the first time in my case, and it is very natural for me to ask for information, since I scarcely know her."

"Let it be so, then; we will talk of her. Well, you are bound to fall in love with her. It is your fate, the lot that is shared by all."

"She is so very seductive, then?"

"Yes and no. Those who love the women of other days, women who have a heart and a soul, women of sensibility, the women of the old-fashioned novel, cannot endure her and execrate her to such a degree as to speak of her with ignominy. We, on the other hand, who are disposed to look favorably upon what is modern and fresh, are compelled to confess that she is delicious, provided always that we don't fall in love with her. And that is just exactly what everybody does. No one dies of the complaint, however; they do not even suffer very acutely, but they fume because she is not other than she is. You will have to go through it all if she takes the fancy; besides, she is already preparing to snap you up." Mariolle exclaimed, in response to his secret thought:

"Oh! I am only a chance acquaintance for her, and I imagine that she values acquaintances of all sorts and conditions."

"Yes, she values them, *parbleu!* and at the same time she laughs at them. The most celebrated, even the most distinguished, man will not darken her door ten times if he is not congenial to her, and she has formed a stupid attachment for that idiotic Fresnel, and that tiresome De Maltry. She inexcusably suffers herself to be carried away by those idiots, no one knows why; perhaps because she gets more amusement out of them than she does out of us, perhaps because their love for her is deeper; and there is nothing in the world that pleases a woman so much as to be loved like that."

And Lamarthe went on talking of her, analyzing her, pulling her to pieces, correcting himself only to contradict himself again, replying with unmistakable warmth and sincerity to Mariolle's questions, like a man who is deeply interested in his subject and carried away by it; a little at sea also, having his mind stored with observations that were true and deductions that were false. He said:

"She is not the only one, moreover; at this minute there are fifty women, if not more, who are like her. There is the little Frémines who was in her drawing-room just now; she is Mme de Burne's exact counterpart, save that she is more forward in her manners and married to an outlandish kind of fellow, the consequence of which is that her house is one of the most entertaining lunatic asylums in Paris. I go there a great deal."

Without noticing it, they had traversed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and had reached the Arc de Triomphe, when Lamarthe suddenly pulled out his watch.

"My dear fellow," he said, "we have spent an hour and ten minutes in talking of her; that is sufficient for to-day. I will take some other occasion of seeing you to your club. Go home and go to bed; it is what I am going to do."

CHAPTER II. “WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?”

THE room was large and well lighted, the walls and ceiling hung with admirable hangings of chintz that a friend of hers in the diplomatic service had brought home and presented to her. The ground was yellow, as if it had been dipped in golden cream, and the designs of all colors, in which Persian green was predominant, represented fantastic buildings with curving roofs, about which monstrosities in the shape of beasts and birds were running and flying: lions wearing wigs, antelopes with extravagant horns, and birds of paradise.

The furniture was scanty. Upon three long tables with tops of green marble were arranged all the implements requisite for a pretty woman’s toilette. Upon one of them, the central one, were the great basins of thick crystal; the second presented an array of bottles, boxes, and vases of all sizes, surmounted by silver caps bearing her arms and monogram; while on the third were displayed all the tools and appliances of modern coquetry, countless in number, designed to serve various complex and mysterious purposes. The room contained only two reclining chairs and a few low, soft, and luxurious seats, calculated to afford rest to weary limbs and to bodies relieved of the restraint of clothing.

Covering one entire side of the apartment was an immense mirror, composed of three panels. The two wings, playing on hinges, allowed the young woman to view herself at the same time in front, rear, and profile, to envelop herself in her own image. To the right, in a recess that was generally concealed by hanging draperies, was the bath, or rather a deep pool, reached by a descent of two steps. A bronze Love, a charming conception of the sculptor Prédolé, poured hot and cold water into it through the seashells with which he was playing. At the back of this alcove a Venetian mirror, composed of smaller mirrors inclined to each other at varying angles, ascended in a curved dome, shutting in and protecting the bath and its occupant, and reflecting them in each one of its many component parts. A little beyond the bath was her writing-desk, a plain and handsome piece of furniture of modern English manufacture, covered with a litter of papers, folded letters, little torn envelopes on which glittered gilt initials, for it was in this room that she passed her time and attended to her correspondence when she was alone.

Stretched at full length upon her reclining-chair, enveloped in a dressing-gown of Chinese silk, her bare arms — and beautiful, firm, supple arms they were — issuing forth fearlessly from out the wide folds of silk, her hair turned up and burdening the head with its masses of blond coils, Mme de Burne was indulging herself with a gentle reverie after the bath. The chambermaid knocked, then entered, bringing a letter. She took it, looked at the writing, tore it open, and read the first lines; then calmly said to the servant: "I will ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with the delight of victory. The first words had sufficed to let her understand that at last she had received a declaration of love from Mariolle. He had held out much longer than she had thought he was capable of doing, for during the last three months she had been besieging him with such attentions, such display of grace and efforts to charm, as she had never hitherto employed for anyone. He had seemed to be distrustful and on his guard against her, against the bait of insatiable coquetry that she was continually dangling before his eyes.

It had required many a confidential conversation, into which she had thrown all the physical seduction of her being and all the captivating efforts of her mind, many an evening of music as well, when, seated before the piano that was ringing still, before the leaves of the scores that were full of the soul of the tuneful masters, they had both thrilled with the same emotion, before she at last beheld in his eyes that avowal of the vanquished man, the mendicant supplication of a love that can no longer be concealed. She knew all this so well, the *rouée!* Many and many a time, with feline cunning and inexhaustible curiosity, she had made this secret, torturing plea rise to the eyes of the men whom she had succeeded in beguiling. It afforded her so much amusement to feel that she was gaining them, little by little, that they were conquered, subjugated by her invincible woman's might, that she was for them the Only One, the sovereign Idol whose caprices must be obeyed.

It had all grown up within her almost imperceptibly, like the development of a hidden instinct, the instinct of war and conquest. Perhaps it was that a desire of retaliation had germinated in her heart during her years of married life, a dim longing to repay to men generally that measure of ill which she had received from one of them, to be in turn the strongest, to make stubborn wills bend before her, to crush resistance and to make others, as well as she, feel the keen edge of suffering. Above all else, however, she was a born coquette, and as soon as her way in life was clear before her she applied herself to pursuing and subjugating lovers, just as the hunter pursues the game, with no other end in view than the pleasure of seeing them fall before her.

And yet her heart was not eager for emotion, like that of a tender and sentimental woman; she did not seek a man's undivided love, nor did she look for happiness in passion. All that she needed was universal admiration, homage, prostrations, an incense-offering of tenderness. Whoever frequented her house had also to become the slave of her beauty, and no consideration of mere intellect could attach her for any length of time to those who would not yield to her coquetry, disdainful of the anxieties of love, their affections, perhaps, being placed elsewhere.

In order to retain her friendship it was indispensable to love her, but that point once reached she was infinitely nice, with unimaginable kindnesses and delightful attentions, designed to retain at her side those whom she had captivated. Those who were once enlisted in her regiment of adorers seemed to become her property by right of conquest. She ruled them with great skill and wisdom, according to their qualities and their defects and the nature of their jealousy. Those who sought to obtain too much she expelled forthwith, taking them back again afterward when they had become wiser, but imposing severe conditions. And to such an extent did this game of bewitchment amuse her, perverse woman that she was, that she found it as pleasurable to befool steady old gentlemen as to turn the heads of the young.

It might even have been said that she regulated her affection by the fervency of the ardor that she had inspired, and that big Fresnel, a dull, heavy companion who was of no imaginable benefit to her, retained her favor thanks to the mad passion by which she felt that he was possessed. She was not entirely indifferent to men's merits, either, and more than once had been conscious of the commencement of a liking that no one divined except herself, and which she quickly ended the moment it became dangerous.

Everyone who had approached her for the first time and warbled in her ear the fresh notes of his hymn of gallantry, disclosing to her the unknown quantity of his nature — artists more especially, who seemed to her to possess more subtile and more delicate shades of refined emotion — had for a time disquieted her, had awakened in her the intermittent dream of a grand passion and a long *liaison.* But swayed by prudent fears, irresolute, driven this way and that by her distrustful nature, she had always kept a strict watch upon herself until the moment she ceased to feel the influence of the latest lover.

And then she had the sceptical vision of the girl of the period, who would strip the greatest man of his prestige in the course of a few weeks. As soon as they were fully in her toils, and in the disorder of their heart had thrown aside their theatrical posturings and their parade manners, they were all alike in her eyes, poor creatures whom she could tyrannize over with her seductive powers. Finally, for a woman like her, perfect as she was, to attach herself to a man, what inestimable merits he would have had to possess!

She suffered much from *ennui*, however, and was without fondness for society, which she frequented for the sake of appearances, and the long, tedious evenings of which she endured with heavy eyelids and many a stifled yawn. She was amused only by its refined trivialities, by her own caprices and by her quickly changing curiosity for certain persons and certain things, attaching herself to it in such degree as to realize that she had been appreciated or admired and not enough to receive real pleasure from an affection or a liking — suffering from her nerves and not from her desires. She was without the absorbing preoccupations of ardent or simple souls, and passed her days in an *ennui* of gaieties, destitute of the simple faith that attends on happiness, constantly on the lookout for something to make the slow hours pass more quickly, and sinking with lassitude, while deeming herself contented.

She thought that she was contented because she was the most seductive and the most sought after of women. Proud of her attractiveness, the power of which she often made trial, in love with her own irregular, odd, and captivating beauty, convinced of the delicacy of her perceptions, which allowed her to divine and understand a thousand things that others were incapable of seeing, rejoicing in the wit that had been appreciated by so many superior men, and totally ignoring the limitations that bounded her intelligence, she looked upon herself as an almost unique being, a rare pearl set in the midst of this common, workaday world, which seemed to her slightly empty and monotonous because she was too good for it.

Not for an instant would she have suspected that in her unconscious self lay the cause of the melancholy from which she suffered so continuously. She laid the blame upon others and held them responsible for her *ennui.* If they were unable sufficiently to entertain and amuse or even impassion her, the reason was that they were deficient in agreeableness and possessed no real merit in her eyes. “Everyone,” she would say with a little laugh, “is tiresome. The only endurable people are those who afford me pleasure, and that solely because they do afford me pleasure.”

And the surest way of pleasing her was to tell her that there was no one like her. She was well aware that no success is attained without labor, and so she gave herself up, heart and soul, to her work of enticement, and found nothing that gave her greater enjoyment than to note the homage of the softening glance and of the heart, that unruly organ which she could cause to beat violently by the utterance of a word.

She had been greatly surprised by the trouble that she had had in subjugating André Mariolle, for she had been well aware, from the very first day, that she had found favor in his eyes. Then, little by little, she had fathomed his suspicious, secretly envious, extremely subtile, and concentrated disposition, and attacking him on his weak side, she had shown him so many attentions, had manifested such preference and natural sympathy for him, that he had finally surrendered.

Especially in the last month had she felt that he was her captive; he was agitated in her presence, now taciturn, now feverishly animated, but would make no avowal. Oh, avowals! She really did not care very much for them, for when they were too direct, too expressive, she found herself obliged to resort to severe measures. Twice she had even had to make a show of being angry and close her door to the offender. What she adored were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, discreet allusions, a sort of moral getting-down-on-the-marrow-bones; and she really showed exceptional tact and address in extorting from her admirers this moderation in their expressions.

For a month past she had been watching and waiting to hear fall from Mariolle’s lips the words, distinct or veiled, according to the nature of the man, which afford relief to the overburdened heart.

He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter: four pages! A thrill of satisfaction crept over her as she held it in her hands. She stretched herself at length upon her lounge so as to be more comfortable and kicked the little slippers from off her feet upon the carpet; then she proceeded to read. She met with a surprise. In serious terms he told her that he did not desire to suffer at her hands, and that he already knew her too well to consent to be her victim. With many compliments, in very polite words, which everywhere gave evidence of his repressed love, he let her know that he was apprised of her manner of treating men — that he, too, was in the toils, but that he would release himself from the servitude by taking himself off. He would just simply begin his vagabond life of other days over again. He would leave the country. It was a farewell, an eloquent and firm farewell.

Certainly it was a surprise as she read, re-read, and commenced to read again these four pages of prose that were so full of tender irritation and passion. She arose, put on her slippers, and began to walk up and down the room, her bare arms out of her turned-back sleeves, her hands thrust halfway into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them holding the crumpled letter.

Taken all aback by this unforeseen declaration, she said to herself: “He writes very well, very well indeed; he is sincere, feeling, touching. He writes better than Lamarthe; there is nothing of the novel sticking out of his letter.”

She felt like smoking, went to the table where the perfumes were and took a cigarette from a box of Dresden china; then, having lighted it, she approached the great mirror in which she saw three young women coming toward her in the three diversely inclined panels. When she was quite near she halted, made herself a little bow with a little smile, a friendly little nod of the head, as if to say: “Very pretty, very pretty.” She inspected her eyes, looked at her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips and turned her profile so as to behold her entire person in the three mirrors, bending her head slightly forward. She stood there amorously facing herself surrounded by the threefold reflection of her own being, which she thought was charming, filled with delight at sight of herself, engrossed by an egotistical and physical pleasure in presence of her own beauty, and enjoying it with a keen satisfaction that was almost as sensual as a man’s.

Every day she surveyed herself in this manner, and her maid, who had often caught her at it, used to say, spitefully:

“Madame looks at herself so much that she will end up by wearing out all the looking-glasses in the house.”

In this love of herself, however, lay all the secret of her charm and the influence that she exerted over men. Through admiring herself and tenderly loving the delicacy of her features and the elegance of her form, by constantly seeking for and finding means of showing them to the greatest advantage, through discovering imperceptible ways of rendering her gracefulness more graceful and her eyes more fascinating, through pursuing all the artifices that embellished her to her own vision, she had as a matter of course hit upon that which would most please others. Had she been more beautiful and careless of her beauty, she would not have possessed that attractiveness which drew to her everyone who had not from the beginning shown himself unassailable.

Wearying soon a little of standing thus, she spoke to her image that was smiling to her still, and her image in the threefold mirror moved its lips as if to echo: “We will see about it.” Then she crossed the room and seated herself at her desk. Here is what she wrote:

“Dear Monsieur Mariolle: Come to see me to-morrow at four o’clock. I shall be alone, and hope to be able to reassure you as to the imaginary danger that alarms you.

“I subscribe myself your friend, and will prove to you that I am —— Michèle de Burne.”

How plainly she dressed next day to receive André Mariolle’s visit! A little gray dress, of a light gray bordering on lilac, melancholy as the dying day and quite unornamented, with a collar fitting closely to the neck, sleeves fitting closely to the arms, corsage fitting closely to the waist and bust, and skirt fitting closely to the hips and legs.

When he made his appearance, wearing rather a solemn face, she came forward to meet him, extending both her hands. He kissed them, then they seated themselves, and she allowed the silence to last a few moments in order to assure herself of his embarrassment.

He did not know what to say, and was waiting for her to speak. She made up her mind to do so.

“Well! let us come at once to the main question. What is the matter? Are you aware that you wrote me a very insolent letter?”

“I am very well aware of it, and I render my most sincere apology. I am, I have always been with everyone, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without the unnecessary and insulting explanations that I addressed to you. I considered it more loyal to act in accordance with my nature and trust to your understanding, with which I am acquainted."

She resumed with an expression of pitying satisfaction:

"Come, come! What does all this folly mean?" He interrupted her: "I would prefer not to speak of it."

She answered warmly, without allowing him to proceed further:

"I invited you here to discuss it, and we will discuss it until you are quite convinced that you are not exposing yourself to any danger." She laughed like a little girl, and her dress, so closely resembling that of a boarding-school miss, gave her laughter a character of childish youth.

He hesitatingly said: "What I wrote you was the truth, the sincere truth, the terrifying truth." Resuming her seriousness, she rejoined: "I do not doubt you: all my friends travel that road. You also wrote that I am a fearful coquette. I admit it, but then no one ever dies of it; I do not even believe that they suffer a great deal. There is, indeed, what Lamarthe calls the crisis. You are in that stage now, but that passes over and subsides into — what shall I call it? — into the state of chronic love, which does no harm to a body, and which I keep simmering over a slow fire in all my friends, so that they may be very much attached, very devoted, very faithful to me. Am not I, also, sincere and frank and nice with you? Eh? Have you known many women who would dare to talk as I have talked to you?"

She had an air of such drollness, coupled with such decision, she was so unaffected and at the same time so alluring, that he could not help smiling in turn. "All your friends," he said, "are men who have often had their fingers burned in that fire, even before it was done at your hearth. Toasted and roasted already, it is easy for them to endure the oven in which you keep them; but for my part, I, Madame, have never passed through that experience, and I have felt for some time past that it would be a dreadful thing for me to give way to the sentiment that is growing and waxing in my heart."

Suddenly she became familiar, and bending a little toward him, her hands clasped over her knees: "Lister to me," she said, "I am in earnest. I hate to lose; friend for the sake of a fear that I regard as chimerical. You will be in love with me, perhaps, but the men of this generation do not love the women of to-day so violently as to do themselves any actual injury. You may believe me; I know them both." She was silent; then with the singular smile of a woman who utters a truth while she thinks she is telling a fib, she added: “Besides, I have not the necessary qualifications to make men love me madly; I am too modern. Come, I will be a friend to you, a real nice friend, for whom you will have affection, but nothing more, for I will see to it.” She went on in a more serious tone: “In any case I give you fair warning that I am incapable of feeling a real passion for anyone, let him be who he may; you shall receive the same treatment as the others, you shall stand on an equal footing with the most favored, but never on any better; I abominate despotism and jealousy. I have had to endure everything from a husband, but from a friend, a simple friend, I do not choose to accept affectionate tyrannizings, which are the bane of all cordial relations. You see that I am just as nice as nice can be, that I talk to you like a comrade, that I conceal nothing from you. Are you willing loyally to accept the trial that I propose? If it does not work well, there will still be time enough for you to go away if the gravity of the situation demands it. A lover absent is a lover cured.”

He looked at her, already vanquished by her voice, her gestures, all the intoxication of her person; and quite resigned to his fate, and thrilling through every fiber at the consciousness that she was sitting there beside him, he murmured:

“I accept, Madame, and if harm comes to me, so much the worse! I can afford to endure a little suffering for your sake.”

She stopped him.

“Now let us say nothing more about it,” she said; “let us never speak of it again.” And she diverted the conversation to topics that might calm his agitation.

In an hour’s time he took his leave; in torments, for he loved her; delighted, for she had asked and he had promised that he would not go away.

CHAPTER III. THE THORNS OF THE ROSE

HE WAS in torments, for he loved her. Differing in this from the common run of lovers, in whose eyes the woman chosen of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, his attachment for her had grown within him while studying her with the clairvoyant eyes of a suspicious and distrustful man who had never been entirely enslaved. His timid and sluggish but penetrating disposition, always standing on the defensive in life, had saved him from his passions. A few intrigues, two brief *liaisons* that had perished of *ennui*, and some mercenary loves that had been broken off from disgust, comprised the history of his heart. He regarded women as an object of utility for those who desire a well-kept house and a family, as an object of comparative pleasure to those who are in quest of the pastime of love.

Before he entered Mme de Burne's house his friends had confidentially warned him against her.

What he had learned of her interested, puzzled, and pleased him, but it was also rather distasteful to him. As a matter of principle he did not like those gamblers who never pay when they lose. After their first few meetings he had decided that she was very amusing, and that she possessed a special charm that had a contagion in it. The natural and artificial beauties of this charming, slender, blond person, who was neither fat nor lean, who was furnished with beautiful arms that seemed formed to attract and embrace, and with legs that one might imagine long and tapering, calculated for flight, like those of a gazelle, with feet so small that they would leave no trace, seemed to him to be a symbol of hopes that could never be realized.

He had experienced, moreover, in his conversation with her a pleasure that he had never thought of meeting with in the intercourse of fashionable society. Gifted with a wit that was full of familiar animation, unforeseen and mocking and of a caressing irony, she would, notwithstanding this, sometimes allow herself to be carried away by sentimental or intellectual influences, as if beneath her derisive gaiety there still lingered the secular shade of poetic tenderness drawn from some remote ancestress. These things combined to render her exquisite.

She petted him and made much of him, desirous of conquering him as she had conquered the others, and he visited her house as often as he could, drawn thither by his increasing need of seeing more of her. It was like a force emanating from her and taking possession of him, a force that lay in her charm, her look, her smile, her speech, a force that there was no resisting, although he frequently left her house provoked at something that she had said or done.

The more he felt working on him that indescribable influence with which a woman penetrates and subjugates us, the more clearly did he see through her, the more did he understand and suffer from her nature, which he devoutly wished was different. It was certainly true, however, that the very qualities which he disapproved of in her were the qualities that had drawn him toward her and captivated him, in spite of himself, in spite of his reason, and more, perhaps, than her real merits.

Her coquetry, with which she toyed, making no attempt at concealing it, as with a fan, opening and folding it in presence of everybody according as the men to whom she was talking were pleasing to her or the reverse; her way of taking nothing in earnest, which had seemed droll to him upon their first acquaintance, but now seemed threatening; her constant desire for distraction, for novelty, which rested insatiable in her heart, always weary — all these things would so exasperate him that sometimes upon returning to his house he would resolve to make his visits to her more infrequent until such time as he might do away with them altogether. The very next day he would invent some pretext for going to see her. What he thought to impress upon himself, as he became more and more enamored, was the insecurity of this love and the certainty that he would have to suffer for it.

He was not blind; little by little he yielded to this sentiment, as a man drowns because his vessel has gone down under him and he is too far from the shore. He knew her as well as it was possible to know her, for his passion had served to make his mental vision abnormally clairvoyant, and he could not prevent his thoughts from going into indefinite speculations concerning her. With indefatigable perseverance, he was continually seeking to analyze and understand the obscure depths of this feminine soul, this incomprehensible mixture of bright intelligence and disenchantment, of sober reason and childish triviality, of apparent affection and fickleness, of all those ill-assorted inclinations that can be brought together and co-ordinated to form an unnatural, perplexing, and seductive being.

But why was it that she attracted him thus? He constantly asked himself this question, and was unable to find a satisfactory answer to it, for, with his reflective, observing, and proudly retiring nature, his logical course would have been to look in a woman for those old-fashioned and soothing attributes of tenderness and constancy which seem to offer the most reliable assurance of happiness to a man. In her, however, he had encountered something that he had not expected to find, a sort of early vegetable of the human race, as it were, one of those creatures who are the beginning of a new generation, exciting one by their strange novelty, unlike anything that one has ever known before, and even in their imperfections awakening the dormant senses by a formidable power of attraction.

To the romantic and dreamily passionate women of the Restoration had succeeded the gay triflers of the imperial epoch, convinced that pleasure is a reality; and now, here there was afforded him a new development of this everlasting femininity, a woman of refinement, of indeterminate sensibility, restless, without fixed resolves, her feelings in constant turmoil, who seemed to have made it part of her experience to employ every narcotic that quiets the aching nerves: chloroform that stupefies, ether and morphine that excite to abnormal reverie, kill the senses, and deaden the emotions.

He relished in her that flavor of an artificial nature, the sole object of whose existence was to charm and allure. She was a rare and attractive bauble, exquisite and delicate, drawing men’s eyes to her, causing the heart to throb, and desire to awake, as one’s appetite is excited when he looks through the glass of the shop-window and beholds the dainty viands that have been prepared and arranged for the purpose of making him hunger for them.

When he was quite assured that he had started on his perilous descent toward the bottom of the gulf, he began to reflect with consternation upon the dangers of his infatuation. What would happen him? What would she do with him? Most assuredly she would do with him what she had done with everyone else: she would bring him to the point where a man follows a woman’s capricious fancies as a dog follows his master’s steps, and she would classify him among her collection of more or less illustrious favorites. Had she really played this game with all the others? Was there not one, not a single one, whom she had loved, if only for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those effusions of feeling that she had the faculty of repressing so readily? He talked with them interminably about her as they came forth, from her dinners, warmed by contact with her. He felt that they were all uneasy, dissatisfied, unstrung, like men whose dreams have failed of realization.

No, she had loved no one among these paraders before public curiosity. But he, who was a nullity in comparison with them, he, to whom it was not granted that heads should turn and wondering eyes be fixed on him when his name was mentioned in a crowd or in a salon, — what would he be for her? Nothing, nothing; a mere supernumerary upon her scene, a Monsieur, the sort of man that becomes a familiar, commonplace attendant upon a distinguished woman, useful to hold her bouquet, a man comparable to the common grade of wine that one drinks with water. Had he been a famous man he might have been willing to accept this rôle, which his celebrity would have made less humiliating; but unknown as he was, he would have none of it. So he wrote to bid her farewell.

When he received her brief answer he was moved by it as by the intelligence of some unexpected piece of good fortune, and when she had made him promise that he would not go away he was as delighted as a schoolboy released for a holiday.

Several days elapsed without bringing any fresh development to their relations, but when the calm that succeeds the storm had passed, he felt his longing for her increasing within him and burning him. He had promised that he would never again speak to her on the forbidden topic, but he had not promised that he would not write, and one night when he could not sleep, when she had taken possession of all his faculties in the restless vigil of his insomnia of love, he seated himself at his table, almost against his will, and set himself to put down his feelings and his sufferings upon fair, white paper. It was not a letter; it was an aggregation of notes, phrases, thoughts, throbs of moral anguish, transmuting themselves into words. It soothed him; it seemed to him to give him a little comfort in his suffering, and lying down upon his bed, he was at last able to obtain some sleep.

Upon awaking the next morning he read over these few pages and decided that they were sufficiently harrowing; then he inclosed and addressed them, kept them by him until evening, and mailed them very late so that she might receive them when she arose. He thought that she would not be alarmed by these innocent sheets of paper. The most timorous of women have an infinite kindness for a letter that speaks to them of a sincere love, and when these letters are written by a trembling hand, with tearful eyes and melancholy face, the power that they exercise over the female heart is unbounded.

He went to her house late that afternoon to see how she would receive him and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and conversing with his daughter. He would often pass whole hours with her in this way, for his manner toward her was rather that of a gentleman visitor than of a father. She had brought into their relations and their affection a tinge of that homage of love which she bestowed upon herself and exacted from everyone else.

When she beheld Mariolle her face brightened with delight; she shook hands with him warmly and her smile, told him: “You have afforded me much pleasure.”

Mariolle was in hopes that the father would go away soon, but M. de Pradon did not budge. Although he knew his daughter thoroughly, and for a long time past had placed the most implicit confidence in her as regarded her relations with men, he always kept an eye on her with a kind of curious, uneasy, somewhat marital attention. He wanted to know what chance of success there might be for this newly discovered friend, who he was, what he amounted to. Would he be a mere bird of passage, like so many others, or a permanent member of their usual circle?

He intrenched himself, therefore, and Mariolle immediately perceived that he was not to be dislodged. The visitor made up his mind accordingly, and even resolved to gain him over if it were possible, considering that his good-will, or at any rate his neutrality, would be better than his hostility. He exerted himself and was brilliant and amusing, without any of the airs of a sighing lover. She said to herself contentedly: “He is not stupid; he acts his part in the comedy extremely well”; and M. de Pradon thought: “This is a very agreeable man, whose head my daughter does not seem to have turned.”

When Mariolle decided that it was time for him to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he left that house with sorrow in his soul. In the presence of that woman he felt deeply the bondage in which she held him, realizing that it would be vain to knock at that heart, as a man imprisoned fruitlessly beats the iron door with his fist. He was well assured that he was entirely in her power, and he did not try to free himself. Such being the case, and as he could not avoid this fatality, he resolved that he would be patient, tenacious, cunning, dissembling, that he would conquer by address, by the homage that she was so greedy of, by the adoration that intoxicated her, by the voluntary servitude to which he would suffer himself to be reduced.

His letter had pleased her; he would write. He wrote. Almost every night, when he came home, at that hour when the mind, fresh from the influence of the day's occurrences, regards whatever interests or moves it with a sort of abnormally developed hallucination, he would seat himself at his table by his lamp and exalt his imagination by thoughts of her. The poetic germ, that so many indolent men suffer to perish within them from mere slothfulness, grew and throve under this regimen. He infused a feverish ardor into this task of literary tenderness by means of constantly writing the same thing, the same idea, that is, his love, in expressions that were ever renewed by the constantly fresh-springing, daily renewal of his desire. All through the long day he would seek for and find those irresistible words that stream from the brain like fiery sparks, compelled by the overexcited emotions. Thus he would breathe upon the fire of his own heart and kindle it into raging flames, for often love-letters contain more danger for him who writes than for her who receives them.

By keeping himself in this continuous state of effervescence, by heating his blood with words and peopling his brain with one solitary thought, his ideas gradually became confused as to the reality of this woman. He had ceased to entertain the opinion of her that he had first held, and now beheld her only through the medium of his own lyrical phrases, and all that he wrote of her night by night became to his heart so many gospel truths. This daily labor of idealization displayed her to him as in a dream. His former resistance melted away, moreover, in presence of the affection that Mme de Burne undeniably evinced for him. Although no word had passed between them at this time, she certainly showed a preference for him beyond others, and took no pains to conceal it from him. He therefore thought, with a kind of mad hope, that she might finally come to love him.

The fact was that the charm of those letters afforded her a complicated and naïve delight. No one had ever flattered and caressed her in that manner, with such mute reserve. No one had ever had the delicious idea of sending to her bedside, every morning, that feast of sentiment in paper wrapping that her maid presented to her on the little silver salver. And what made it all the dearer in her eyes was that he never mentioned it, that he seemed to be quite unaware of it himself, that when he visited her salon he was the most undemonstrative of her friends, that he never by word or look alluded to those showers of tenderness that he was secretly raining down upon her.

Of course she had had love-letters before that, but they had been pitched in a different key, had been less reserved, more pressing, more like a summons to surrender. For the three months that his "crisis" had lasted Lamarthe had dedicated to her a very nice correspondence from a much-smitten novelist who maunders in a literary way. She kept in her secretary, in a drawer specially allotted to them, these delicate and seductive epistles from a writer who had shown much feeling, who had caressed her with his pen up to the very day when he saw that he had no hope of success.

Mariolle's letters were quite different; they were so strong in their concentrated desire, so deep in the expression of their sincerity, so humble in their submissiveness, breathing a devotion that promised to be lasting, that she received and read them with a delight that no other writings could have afforded her.

It was natural that her friendly feeling for the man should increase under such conditions. She invited him to her house the more frequently because he displayed such entire reserve in his relations toward her, seeming not to have the slightest recollection in conversation with her that he had ever taken up a sheet of paper to tell her of his adoration. Moreover she looked upon the situation as an original one, worthy of being celebrated in a book; and in the depths of her satisfaction in having at her side a being who loved her thus, she experienced a sort of active fermentation of sympathy which caused her to measure him by a standard other than her usual one.

Up to the present time, notwithstanding the vanity of her coquetry she had been conscious of preoccupations that antagonized her in all the hearts that she had laid waste. She had not held undisputed sovereignty over them, she had found in them powerful interests that were entirely dissociated from her. Jealous of music in Massival's case, of literature in Lamarthe's, always jealous of something, discontented that she only obtained partial successes, powerless to drive all before her in the minds of these ambitious men, men of celebrity, or artists to whom their profession was a mistress from whom nobody could part them, she had now for the first time fallen in with one to whom she was all in all. Certainly big Fresnel, and he alone, loved her to the same degree. But then he was big Fresnel. She felt that it had never been granted her to exercise such complete dominion over anyone, and her selfish gratitude for the man who had afforded her this triumph displayed itself in manifestations of tenderness. She had need of him now; she had need of his presence, of his glance, of his subjection, of all this domesticity of love. If he flattered her vanity less than the others did, he flattered more those supreme exactions that sway coquettes body and soul — her pride and her instinct of domination, her strong instinct of feminine repose.

Like an invader she gradually assumed possession of his life by a series of small incursions that every day became more numerous. She got up *fetes,* theater-parties, and dinners at the restaurant, so that he might be of the party. She dragged him after her with the satisfaction of a conqueror; she could not dispense with his presence, or rather with the state of slavery to which he was reduced. He followed in her train, happy to feel himself thus petted, caressed by her eyes, her voice, by her every caprice, and he lived only in a continuous transport of love and longing that desolated and burned like a wasting fever.

CHAPTER IV. THE BENEFIT OF CHANGE OF SCENE

ONE day Mariolle had gone to her house. He was awaiting her, for she had not come in, although she had sent him a telegram to tell him that she wanted to see him that morning. Whenever he was alone in this drawingroom which it gave him such pleasure to enter and where everything was so charming to him, he nevertheless was conscious of an oppression of the heart, a slight feeling of affright and breathlessness that would not allow him to remain seated as long as she was not there. He walked about the room in joyful expectation, dashed by the fear that some unforeseen obstacle might intervene to detain her and cause their interview to go over until next day. His heart gave a hopeful bound when he heard a carriage draw up before the street door, and when the bell of the apartment rang he ceased to doubt.

She came in with her hat on, a thing which she was not accustomed to do, wearing a busy and satisfied look. “I have some news for you,” she said.

“What is it, Madame?”

She looked at him and laughed. “Well! I am going to the country for a while.”

Her words produced in him a quick, sharp shock of sorrow that was reflected upon his face. “Oh! and you tell me that as if you were glad of it!”

“Yes. Sit down and I will tell you all about it.

I don’t know whether you are aware that M. Valsaci, my poor mother’s brother, the engineer and bridge-builder, has a country-place at Avranches where he spends a portion of his time with his wife and children, for his business lies mostly in that neighborhood. We pay them a visit every summer. This year I said that I did not care to go, but he was greatly disappointed and made quite a time over it with papa. Speaking of scenes, I will tell you confidentially that papa is jealous of you and makes scenes with me, too; he says that I am entangling myself with you. You will have to come to see me less frequently. But don’t let that trouble you; I will arrange matters. So papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to

Avranches for a visit of ten days, perhaps twelve. We are to start Tuesday morning. What have you got to say about it?"

"I say that it breaks my heart."

"Is that all?"

"What more can I say? There is no way of preventing you from going."

"And nothing presents itself to you?"

"Why, no; I can't say that there does. And you?"

"I have an idea; it is this: Avranches is quite near Mont Saint-Michel. Have you ever been at Mont Saint-Michel?"

"No, Madame."

"Well, something will tell you next Friday that you want to go and see this wonder. You will leave the train at Avranches; on Friday evening at sunset, if you please, you will take a walk in the public garden that overlooks the bay. We will happen to meet there. Papa will grumble, but I don't care for that. I will make up a party to go and see the abbey next day, including all the family. You must be enthusiastic over it, and very charming, as you can be when you choose; be attentive to my aunt and gain her over, and invite us all to dine at the inn where we alight. We will sleep there, and will have all the next day to be together. You will return by way of Saint Malo, and a week later I shall be back in Paris. Isn't that an ingenious scheme? Am I not nice?"

With an outburst of grateful feeling, he murmured: "You are dearer to me than all the world."

"Hush!" said she.

They looked each other for a moment in the face. She smiled, conveying to him in that smile — very sincere and earnest it was, almost tender — all her gratitude, her thanks for his love, and her sympathy as well. He gazed upon her with eyes that seemed to devour her. He had an insane desire to throw himself down and grovel at her feet, to kiss the hem of her robe, to cry aloud and make her see what he knew not how to tell in words, what existed in all his form from head to feet, in every fiber of his body as well as in his heart, paining him inexpressibly because he could not display it — his love, his terrible and delicious love.

There was no need of words, however; she understood him, as the marksman instinctively feels that his ball has penetrated the bull's-eye of the target. Nothing any longer subsisted within this man, nothing, nothing but her image. He was hers more than she herself was her own. She was satisfied, and she thought he was charming.

She said to him, in high good-humor: “Then *that* is settled; the excursion is agreed on.”

He answered in a voice that trembled with emotion: “Why, yes, Madame, it is agreed on.”

There was another interval of silence. “I cannot let you stay any longer to-day,” she said without further apology. “I only ran in to tell you what I have told you, since I am to start day after tomorrow. All my time will be occupied to-morrow, and I have still half-a-dozen things to attend to before dinner-time.”

He arose at once, deeply troubled, for the sole desire of his heart was to be with her always; and having kissed her hands, went his way, sore at heart, but hopeful nevertheless.

The four intervening days were horribly long ones to him. He got through them somehow in Paris without seeing a soul, preferring silence to conversation, and solitude to the company of friends.

On Friday morning, therefore, he boarded the eight-o’clock express. The anticipation of the journey had made him feverish, and he had not slept a wink. The darkness of his room and its silence, broken only by the occasional rattling of some belated cab that served to remind him of his longing to be off, had weighed upon him all night long like a prison.

At the earliest ray of light that showed itself between his drawn curtains, the gray, sad light of early morning, he jumped from his bed, opened the window, and looked at the sky. He had been haunted by the fear that the weather might be unfavorable. It was clear. There was a light floating mist, presaging a warm day. He dressed more quickly than was needful, and in his consuming impatience to get out of doors and at last begin his journey he was ready two hours too soon, and nothing would do but his valet must go out and get a cab lest they should all be gone from the stand. As the vehicle jolted over the stones, its movements were so many shocks of happiness to him, but when he reached the Mont Parnasse station and found that he had fifty minutes to wait before the departure of the train, his spirits fell again.

There was a compartment disengaged; he took it so that he might be alone and give free course to his reveries. When at last he felt himself moving, hurrying along toward her, soothed by the gentle and rapid motion of the train, his eagerness, instead of being appeased, was still further excited, and he felt a desire, the unreasoning desire of a child, to push with all his strength against the partition in front of him, so as to accelerate their speed. For a long time, until midday, he remained in this condition of Waiting expectancy, but when they were past Argentan his eyes were gradually attracted to the window by the fresh verdure of the Norman landscape.

The train was passing through a wide, undulating region, intersected by valleys, where the peasant holdings, mostly in grass and apple-orchards, were shut in by great trees, the thick-leaved tops of which seemed to glow in the sunlight. It was late in July, that lusty season when this land, an abundant nurse, gives generously of its sap and life. In all the inclosures, separated from each other by these leafy walls, great light-colored oxen, cows whose flanks were striped with undefined figures of odd design, huge, red, wide-fronted bulls of proud and quarrelsome aspect, with their hanging dewlaps of hairy flesh, standing by the fences or lying down among the pasturage that stuffed their paunches, succeeded each other, until there seemed to be no end to them in this fresh, fertile land, the soil of which appeared to exude cider and fat sirloins. In every direction little streams were gliding in and out among the poplars, partially concealed by a thin screen of willows; brooks glittered for an instant among the herbage, disappearing only to show themselves again farther on, bathing all the scene in their vivifying coolness. Mariolle was charmed at the sight, and almost forgot his love for a moment in his rapid flight through this far-reaching park of apple-trees and flocks and herds.

When he had changed cars at Folligny station, however, he was again seized with an impatient longing to be at his destination, and during the last forty minutes he took out his watch twenty times. His head was constantly turned toward the window of the car, and at last, situated upon a hill of moderate height, he beheld the city where she was waiting for his coming. The train had been delayed, and now only an hour separated him from the moment when he was to come upon her, by chance, on the public promenade.

He was the only passenger that climbed into the hotel omnibus, which the horses began to drag up the steep road of Avranches with slow and reluctant steps. The houses crowning the heights gave to the place from a distance the appearance of a fortification. Seen close at hand it was an ancient and pretty

Norman city, with small dwellings of regular and almost similar appearance built closely adjoining one another, giving an aspect of ancient pride and modern comfort, a feudal yet peasant-like air.

As soon as Mariolle had secured a room and thrown his valise into it, he inquired for the street that led to the Botanical Garden and started off in the direction indicated with rapid strides, although he was ahead of time. But he was in hopes that perhaps she also would be on hand early. When he reached the iron railings, he saw at a glance that the place was empty or nearly so. Only three old men were walking about in it, *bourgeois* to the manner born, who probably were in the habit of coming there daily to cheer their leisure by conversation, and a family of English children, lean-legged boys and girls, were playing about a fair-haired governess whose wandering looks showed that her thoughts were far away.

Mariolle walked straight ahead with beating heart, looking scrutinizingly up and down the intersecting paths. He came to a great alley of dark green elms which cut the garden in two portions crosswise and stretched away in its center, a dense vault of foliage; he passed through this, and all at once, coming to a terrace that commanded a view of the horizon, his thoughts suddenly ceased to dwell upon her whose influence had brought him hither.

From the foot of the elevation upon which he was standing spread an illimitable sandy plain that stretched away in the distance and blended with sea and sky. Through it rolled a stream, and beneath the azure, aflame with sunlight, pools of water dotted it with luminous sheets that seemed like orifices opening upon another sky beneath. In the midst of this yellow desert, still wet and glistening with the receding tide, at twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore rose a pointed rock of monumental profile, like some fantastic pyramid, surmounted by a cathedral. Its only neighbor in these immense wastes was a low, round backed reef that the tide had left uncovered, squatting among the shifting ooze: the reef of Tombelaine. Farther still away, other submerged rocks showed their brown heads above the bluish line of the waves, and the eye, continuing to follow the horizon to the right, finally rested upon the vast green expanse of the Norman country lying beside this sandy waste, so densely covered with trees that it had the aspect of a limitless forest. It was all Nature offering herself to his vision at a single glance, in a single spot, in all her might and grandeur, in all her grace and freshness, and the eye turned from those woodland glimpses to the stern apparition of the granite mount, the hermit of the sands, rearing its strange Gothic form upon the far-reaching strand.

The strange pleasure which in other days had often made Mariolle thrill, in the presence of the surprises that unknown lands preserve to delight the eyes of travelers, now took such sudden possession of him that he remained motionless, his feelings softened and deeply moved, oblivious of his tortured heart. At the sound of a striking bell, however, he turned, suddenly repossessed by the eager hope that they were about to meet. The garden was still almost untenanted. The English children had gone; the three old men alone kept up their monotonous promenade. He came down and began to walk about like them.

Immediately — in a moment — she would be there. He would see her at the end of one of those roads that centered in this wondrous terrace. He would recognize her form, her step, then her face and her smile; he would soon be listening to her voice. What happiness! What delight! He felt that she was near him, somewhere, invisible as yet, but thinking of him, knowing that she was soon to see him again.

With difficulty he restrained himself from uttering a little cry. For there, down below, a blue sunshade, just the dome of a sunshade, was visible, gliding along beneath a clump of trees. It must be she; there could be no doubt of it. A little boy came in sight, driving a hoop before him; then two ladies, — he recognized her, — then two men: her father and another gentleman. She was all in blue, like the heavens in springtime. Yes, indeed! he recognized her, while as yet he could not distinguish her features; but he did not dare to go toward her, feeling that he would blush and stammer, that he would be unable to account for this chance meeting beneath M. de Pradon’s suspicious glances.

He went forward to meet them, however, keeping his field-glass to his eye, apparently quite intent on scanning the horizon. She it was who addressed him first, not even taking the trouble to affect astonishment.

“Good day, M. Mariolle,” she said. “Isn’t it splendid?”

He was struck speechless by this reception, and knew not what tone to adopt in reply. Finally he stammered: “Ah, it is you, Madame; how glad I am to meet you! I wanted to see something of this delightful country.”

She smiled as she replied: “And you selected the very time when I chanced to be here. That was extremely kind of you.” Then she proceeded to make the necessary introductions. “This is M. Mariolle, one of my dearest friends; my aunt, Mme. Valsaci; my uncle, who builds bridges.”

When salutations had been exchanged, M. de Pradon and the young man shook hands rather stiffly and the walk was continued.

She had made room for him between herself and her aunt, casting upon him a very rapid glance, one of those glances which seem to indicate a weakening determination.

“How do you like the country?” she asked.

“I think that I have never beheld anything more beautiful,” he replied.

“Ah! if you had passed some days here, as I have just been doing, you would feel how it penetrates one. The impression that it leaves is beyond the power of expression. The advance and retreat of the sea upon the sands, that grand movement that is going on unceasingly, that twice a day floods all that you behold before you, and so swiftly that a horse galloping at top speed would scarce have time to escape before it — this wondrous spectacle that Heaven gratuitously displays before us, I declare to you that it makes me forgetful of myself. I no longer know myself. Am I not speaking the truth, aunt?”

Mme. Valsaci, an old, gray-haired woman, a lady of distinction in her province and the respected wife of an eminent engineer, a supercilious functionary who could not divest himself of the arrogance of the school, confessed that she had never seen her niece in such a state of enthusiasm. Then she added reflectively: “It is not surprising, however, when, like her, one has never seen any but theatrical scenery.”

“But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year.”

The old lady began to laugh. “People only go to Dieppe and Trouville to see their friends. The sea is only there to serve as a cloak for their rendezvous.” It was very simply said, perhaps without any concealed meaning.

People were streaming along toward the terrace, which seemed to draw them to it with an irresistible attraction. They came from every quarter of the garden, in spite of themselves, like round bodies rolling down a slope. The sinking sun seemed to be drawing a golden tissue of finest texture, transparent and ethereally light, behind the lofty silhouette of the abbey, which was growing darker and darker, like a gigantic shrine relieved against a veil of brightness. Mariolle, however, had eyes for nothing but the adored blond form walking at his side, wrapped in its cloud of blue. Never had he beheld her so seductive. She seemed to him to have changed, without his being able to specify in what the change consisted; she was bright with a brightness he had never seen before, which shone in her eyes and upon her flesh, her hair, and seemed to have penetrated her soul as well, a brightness emanating from this country, this sky, this sunlight, this verdure. Never had he known or loved her thus.

He walked at her side and could find no word to say to her. The rustle of her dress, the occasional touch of her arm, the meeting, so mutely eloquent, of their glances, completely overcame him. He felt as if they had annihilated his personality as a man — felt himself suddenly obliterated by contact with this woman, absorbed by her to such an extent as to be nothing; nothing but desire, nothing but appeal, nothing but adoration. She had consumed his being, as one burns a letter.

She saw it all very clearly, understood the full extent of her victory, and thrilled and deeply moved, feeling life throb within her, too, more keenly among these odors of the country and the sea, full of sunlight and of sap, she said to him: “I am so glad to see you!” Close upon this, she asked: “How long do you remain here?”

He replied: “Two days, if to-day counts for a day.” Then, turning to the aunt: “Would Mme.

Valsaci do me the honor to come and spend the day to-morrow at Mont Saint-Michel with her husband?”

Mme de Burne made answer for her relative: “I will not allow her to refuse, since we have been so fortunate as to meet you here.”

The engineer’s wife replied: “Yes, Monsieur, I accept very gladly, upon the condition that you come and dine with me this evening.”

He bowed in assent. All at once there arose within him a feeling of delirious delight, such a joy as seizes you when news is brought that the desire of your life is attained. What had come to him? What new occurrence was there in his life? Nothing; and yet he felt himself carried away by the intoxication of an indefinable presentiment.

They walked upon the terrace for a long time, waiting for the sun to set, so as to witness until the very end the spectacle of the black and battlemented mount drawn in outline upon a horizon of flame. Their conversation now was upon ordinary topics, such as might be discussed in presence of a stranger, and from time to time Mme de Burne and Mariolle glanced at each other. Then they all returned to the villa, which stood just outside Avranches in a fine garden, overlooking the bay.

Wishing to be prudent, and a little disturbed, moreover, by M. de Pradon's cold and almost hostile attitude toward him, Mariolle withdrew at an early hour. When he took Mme de Burne's hand to raise it to his lips, she said to him twice in succession, with a peculiar accent: "Till to-morrow! Till tomorrow!"

As soon as he was gone M. and Mme. Valsaci, who had long since habituated themselves to country ways, proposed that they should go to bed.

"Go," said Mme de Burne. "I am going to take a walk in the garden."

"So am I," her father added.

She wrapped herself in a shawl and went out, and they began to walk side by side upon the white-sanded alleys which the full moon, streaming over lawn and shrubbery, illuminated as if they had been little winding rivers of silver.

After a silence that had lasted for quite a while, M. de Pradon said in a low voice: "My dear child, you will do me the justice to admit that I have never troubled you with my counsels?"

She felt what was coming, and was prepared to meet his attack. "Pardon me, papa," she said 'but you did give me one, at least."

"I did?"

"Yes, yes."

"A counsel relating to your way of life?"

"Yes; and a very bad one it was, too. And so, if you give me any more, I have made up my mind not to follow them."

"What was the advice that I gave you?"

"You advised me to marry M. de Burne. That goes to show that you are lacking in judgment, in clearness of insight, in acquaintance with mankind in general and with your daughter in particular."

"Yes I made a mistake on that occasion; but I am sure that I am right in the very paternal advice that I feel called upon to give you at the present juncture."

"Let me hear what it is. I will accept as much of it as the circumstances call for."

"You are on the point of entangling yourself." She laughed with a laugh that was rather too hearty, and completing the expression of his idea, said: "With M. Mariolle, doubtless?"

“With M. Mariolle.”

“You forget,” she rejoined, “the entanglements that I have already had with M. de Maltry, with M. Massival, with M. Gaston de Lamarthe, and a dozen others, of all of whom you have been jealous; for I never fall in with a man who is nice and willing to show a little devotion for me but all my flock flies into a rage, and you first of all, you whom nature has assigned to me as my noble father and general manager.”

‘No, no, that is not it,” he replied with warmth; “you have never compromised your liberty with anyone. On the contrary you show a great deal of tact in your relations with your friends.”

“My dear papa, I am no longer a child, and I promise you not to involve myself with M. Mariolle any more than I have done with the rest of them; you need have no fears. I admit, however, that it was at my invitation that he came here. I think that he is delightful, just as intelligent as his predecessors and less egotistical; and you thought so too, up to the time when you imagined that you had discovered that I was showing some small preference for him. Oh, you are not so sharp as you think you are! I know you, and I could say a great deal more on this head if I chose. As M. Mariolle was agreeable to me, then, I thought it would be very nice to make a pleasant excursion in his company, quite by chance, of course. It is a piece of stupidity to deprive ourselves of everything that can amuse us when there is no danger attending it. And I incur no danger of involving myself, since you are here.”

She laughed openly as she finished, knowing well that every one of her words had told, that she had tied his tongue by the adroit imputation of a jealousy of Mariolle that she had suspected, that she had instinctively scented in him for a long time past, and she rejoiced over this discovery with a secret, audacious, unutterable coquetry. He maintained an embarrassed and irritated silence, feeling that she had divined some inexplicable spite underlying his paternal solicitude, the origin of which he himself did not care to investigate.

“There is no cause for alarm,” she added. “It is quite natural to make an excursion to Mont Saint-Michel at this time of the year in company with you, my father, my uncle and aunt, and a friend. Besides no one will know it; and even if they do, what can they say against it? When we are back in Paris I will reduce this friend to the ranks again, to keep company with the others.”

"Very well," he replied. "Let it be as if I had said nothing."

They took a few steps more; then M. de Pradon asked:

"Shall we return to the house? I am tired; I am going to bed."

"No; the night is so fine. I am going to walk awhile yet."

He murmured meaningly: "Do not go far away. One never knows what people may be around."

"Oh, I will be right here under the windows."

"Good night, then, my dear child."

He gave her a hasty kiss upon the forehead and went in. She took a seat a little way off upon a rustic bench that was set in the ground at the foot of a great oak. The night was warm, filled with odors from the fields and exhalations from the sea and misty light, for beneath the full moon shining brightly in the cloudless sky a fog had come up and covered the waters of the bay. Onward it slowly crept, like white smoke-wreaths, hiding from sight the beach that would soon be covered by the incoming tide.

Michèle de Burne, her hands clasped over her knees and her dreamy eyes gazing into space, sought to look into her heart through a mist that was as impenetrable and pale as that which lay upon the sands. How many times before this, seated before her mirror in her dressing-room at Paris, had she questioned herself:

"What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? What am I?"

Apart from the pleasure of being beautiful, and the imperious necessity which she felt of pleasing, which really afforded her much delight, she had never been conscious of any appeal to her heart beyond some passing fancy that she had quickly put her foot upon. She was not ignorant of herself, for she had devoted too much of her time and attention to watching and studying her face and all her person not to have been observant of her feelings as well. Up to the present time she had contented herself with a vague interest in that which is the subject of emotion in others, but was powerless to impassion her, or capable at best of affording her a momentary distraction.

And yet, whenever she had felt a little warmer liking for anyone arising within her, whenever a rival had tried to take away from her a man whom she valued, and by arousing her feminine instincts had caused an innocuous fever of attachment to simmer gently in her veins, she had discovered that these false starts of love had caused her an emotion that was much deeper than the mere gratification of success. But it never lasted. Why? Perhaps because she was too clear-sighted; because she allowed herself to become wearied, disgusted. Everything that at first had pleased her in a man, everything that had animated, moved, and attracted her, soon appeared in her eyes commonplace and divested of its charm. They all resembled one another too closely, without ever being exactly similar, and none of them had yet presented himself to her endowed with the nature and the merits that were required to hold her liking sufficiently long to guide her heart into the path of love.

Why was this so? Was it their fault or was it hers? Were they wanting in the qualities which she was looking for, or was it she who was deficient in the attribute that makes one loved? Is love the result of meeting with a person whom one believes to have been created expressly for himself, or is it simply the result of having been born with the faculty of loving? At times it seemed to her that everyone's heart must be provided with arms, like the body, loving, outstretching arms to attract, embrace, and enfold, and that her heart had only eyes and nothing more.

Men, superior men, were often known to become madly infatuated with women who were unworthy of them, women without intelligence, without character, often without beauty. Why was this? Wherein lay the mystery? Was such a crisis in the existence of two beings not to be attributed solely to a providential meeting, but to a kind of seed that everyone carries about within him, and that puts forth its buds when least expected? She had been intrusted with confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even beheld with her own eyes the swift transfiguration that results from the breaking forth of this intoxication of the feelings, and she had reflected deeply upon it.

In society, in the unintermitting whirl of visiting and amusement, in all the small tomfooleries of fashionable existence by which the wealthy beguile their idle hours, a feeling of envious, jealous, and almost incredulous astonishment had sometimes been excited in her at the sight of men and women in whom some extraordinary change had incontestably taken place. The change might not be conspicuously manifest, but her watchful instinct felt it and divined it as the hound holds the scent of his game. Their faces, their smiles, their eyes especially would betray something that was beyond expression in words, an ecstasy, a delicious, serene delight, a joy of the soul made manifest in the body, illuming look and flesh.

Without being able to account for it she was displeased with them for this. Lovers had always been disagreeable objects to her, and she imagined that the deep and secret feeling of irritation inspired in her by the sight of people whose hearts were swayed by passion was simply disdain. She believed that she could recognize them with a readiness and an accuracy that were exceptional, and it was a fact that she had often divined and unraveled *liaisons* before society had even suspected their existence.

When she reflected upon all this, upon the fond folly that may be induced in woman by the contact of some neighboring existence, his aspect, his speech, his thought, the inexpressible something in the loved being that robs the heart of tranquillity, she decided that she was incapable of it. And yet, weary of everything, oppressed by ineffable yearnings, tormented by a haunting longing after change and some unknown state, feelings which were, perhaps, only the undeveloped movements of an undefined groping after affection, how often had she desired, with a secret shame that had its origin in her pride, to meet with a man, who, for a time, were it only for a few months, might by his sorceries raise her to an abnormally excited condition of mind and body — for it seemed to her that life must assume strange and attractive forms of ecstasy and delight during these emotional periods. Not only had she desired such an encounter, but she had even sought it a little — only a very little, however — with an indolent activity that never devoted itself for any length of time to one pursuit.

In all her inchoate attachments for the men called “superior,” who had dazzled her for a few weeks, the short-lived effervescence of her heart had always died away in irremediable disappointment. She looked for too much from their dispositions, their characters, their delicacy, their renown, their merits. In the case of everyone of them she had been compelled to open her eyes to the fact that the defects of great men are often more prominent than their merits; that talent is a special gift, like a good digestion or good eyesight, an isolated gift to be exercised, and unconnected with the aggregate of personal charm that makes one’s relations cordial and attractive.

Since she had known Mariolle, however, she was otherwise attached to him. But did she love him, did she love him with the love of woman for man? Without fame or prestige, he had conquered her affections by his devotedness, his tenderness, his intelligence, by all the real and unassuming attractions of his personality. He had conquered, for he was constantly present in her thoughts; unremittingly she longed for his society; in all the world there was no one more agreeable, more sympathetic, more indispensable to her. Could this be love?

She was not conscious of carrying in her soul that divine flame that everyone speaks of, but for the first time she was conscious of the existence there of a sincere wish to be something more to this man than merely a charming friend. Did she love him? Does love demand that a man appear endowed with exceptional attractions, that he be different from all the world and tower above it in the aureole that the heart places about its elect, or does it suffice that he find favor in your eyes, that he please you to that extent that you scarce know how to do without him?

In the latter event she loved him, or at any rate she was very near loving him. After having pondered deeply on the matter with concentrated attention, she at length answered herself: "Yes, I love him, but I am lacking in warmth; that is the defect of my nature."

Still, she had felt some warmth a little while before when she saw him coming toward her upon the terrace in the garden of Avranches. For the first time she had felt that inexpressible something that bears us, impels us, hurries us toward some one; she had experienced great pleasure in walking at his side, in having him near her, burning with love for her, as they watched the sun sinking behind the shadow of Mont Saint-Michel, like a vision in a legend. Was not love itself a kind of legend of the soul, in which some believe through instinct, and in which others sometimes also come to believe through stress of pondering over it? Would she end by believing in it? She had felt a strange, half-formed desire to recline her head upon the shoulder of this man, to be nearer to him, to seek that closer union that is never found, to give him what one offers vainly and always retains: the close intimacy with one's inner self.

Yes, she had experienced a feeling of warmth toward him, and she still felt it there at the bottom of her heart, at that very moment. Perhaps it would change to passion should she give way to it. She opposed too much resistance to men's powers of attraction; she reasoned on them, combated them too much. How sweet it would be to walk with him on an evening like this along the river-bank beneath the willows, and allow him to taste her lips from time to time in recompense of all the love he had given her!

A window in the villa was flung open. She turned her head. It was her father, who was doubtless looking to see if she were there. She called to him: “You are not asleep yet?”

He replied: “If you don’t come in you will take cold.”

She arose thereupon and went toward the house. When she was in her room she raised her curtains for another look at the mist over the bay, which was becoming whiter and whiter in the moonlight, and it seemed to her that the vapors in her heart were also clearing under the influence of her dawning tenderness.

For all that she slept soundly, and her maid had to awake her in the morning, for they were to make an early start, so as to have breakfast at the Mount.

A roomy wagonette drew up before the door. When she heard the rolling of the wheels upon the sand she went to her window and looked out, and the first thing that her eyes encountered was the face of André Mariolle who was looking for her. Her heart began to beat a little more rapidly. She was astonished and dejected as she reflected upon the strange and novel impression produced by this muscle, which palpitates and hurries the blood through the veins merely at the sight of some one. Again she asked herself, as she had done the previous night before going to sleep: “Can it be that I am about to love him?” Then when she was seated face to face with him her instinct told her how deeply he was smitten, how he was suffering with his love, and she felt as if she could open her arms to him and put up her mouth. They only exchanged a look, however, but it made him turn pale with delight.

The carriage rolled away. It was a bright summer morning; the air was filled with the melody of birds and everything seemed permeated by the spirit of youth. They descended the hill, crossed the river, and drove along a narrow, rough, stony road that set the travelers bumping upon their seats. Mme de Burne began to banter her uncle upon the condition of this road; that was enough to break the ice, and the brightness that pervaded the air seemed to be infused into the spirit of them all.

As they emerged from a little hamlet the bay suddenly presented itself again before them, not yellow as they had seen it the evening before, but sparkling with clear water which covered everything, sands, salt-meadows, and, as the coachman said, even the very road itself a little way further on. Then, for the space of an hour they allowed the horses to proceed at a walk, so as to give this inundation time to return to the deep.

The belts of elms and oaks that inclosed the farms among which they were now passing momentarily hid from their vision the profile of the abbey standing high upon its rock, now entirely surrounded by the sea; then all at once it was visible again between two farmyards, nearer, more huge, more astounding than ever. The sun cast ruddy tones upon the old crenelated granite church, perched on its rocky pedestal. Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle contemplated it, both mingling with the newborn or acutely sensitive disturbances of their hearts the poetry of the vision that greeted their eyes upon this rosy July morning.

The talk went on with easy friendliness. Mme. Valsaci told tragic tales of the coast, nocturnal dramas of the yielding sands devouring human life. M. Valsaci took up arms for the dike, so much abused by artists, and extolled it for the uninterrupted communication that it afforded with the Mount and for the reclaimed sand-hills, available at first for pasturage and afterward for cultivation.

Suddenly the wagonette came to a halt; the sea had invaded the road. It did not amount to much, only a film of water upon the stony way, but they knew that there might be sink-holes beneath, openings from which they might never emerge, so they had to wait. “It will go down very quickly,” M. Valsaci declared, and he pointed with his finger to the road from which the thin sheet of water was already receding, seemingly absorbed by the earth or drawn away to some distant place by a powerful and mysterious force.

They got down from the carriage for a nearer look at this strange, swift, silent flight of tne sea, and followed it step by step. Now spots of green began to appear among the submerged vegetation, lightly stirred by the waves here and there, and these spots broadened, rounded themselves out and became islands. Quickly these islands assumed the appearance of continents, separated from each other by miniature oceans, and finally over the whole expanse of the bay it was a headlong flight of the waters retreating to their distant abode. It resembled nothing so much as a long silvery veil withdrawn from the surface of the earth, a great, torn, slashed veil, full of rents, which left exposed the wide meadows of short grass as it was pulled aside, but did not yet disclose the yellow sands that lay beyond.

They had climbed into the carriage again, and everyone was standing in order to obtain a better view. The road in front of them was drying and the horses were sent forward, but still at a walk, and as the rough places sometimes caused them to lose their equilibrium, André Mariolle suddenly felt Michèle de Burne’s shoulder resting against his. At first he attributed this contact to the movement of the vehicle, but she did not stir from her position, and at every jolt of the wheels’ a trembling started from the spot where she had placed herself and shook all his frame and laid waste his heart. He did not venture to look at the young woman, paralyzed as he was by this unhoped-for familiarity, and with a confusion in his brain such as arises from drunkenness, he said to himself: “Is this real? Can it be possible? Can it be that we are both losing our senses?”

The horses began to trot and they had to resume their seats. Then Mariolle felt some sudden, mysterious imperious necessity of showing himself attentive to M. de Pradon, and he began to devote himself to him with flattering courtesy. Almost as sensible to compliments as his daughter, the father allowed himself to be won over and soon his face was all smiles.

At last they had reached the causeway and were advancing rapidly toward the Mount, which reared its head among the sands at the point where the long, straight road ended. Pontorson river washed its left-hand slope, while, to the right, the pastures covered with short grass, which the coachman wrongly called “samphire,” had given way to sand-hills that were still trickling with the water of the sea. The lofty monument now assumed more imposing dimensions upon the blue heavens, against which, very clear and distinct now in every slightest detail, its summit stood out in bold relief, with all its towers and belfries, bristling with grimacing gargoyles, heads of monstrous beings with which the faith and the terrors of our ancestors crowned their Gothic sanctuaries.

It was nearly one o’clock when they reached the inn, where breakfast had been ordered. The hostess had delayed the meal for prudential reasons; it was not ready. It was late, therefore, when they sat down at table and everyone was very hungry. Soon, however, the champagne restored their spirits. Everyone was in good humor, and there were two hearts that felt that they were on the verge of great happiness. At dessert, when the cheering effect of the wine that they had drunk and the pleasures of conversation had developed in their frames the feeling of well-being and contentment that sometimes warms us after a good meal, and inclines us to take a rosy view of everything, Mariolle suggested: “What do you say to staying over here until to-morrow? It would be so nice to look upon this scene by moonlight, and so pleasant to dine here together this evening!”

Mme de Burne gave her assent at once, and the two men also concurred. Mme. Valsaci alone hesitated, on account of the little boy that she had left at home, but her husband reassured her and reminded her that she had frequently remained away before; he at once sat down and dispatched a telegram to the governess. André Mariolle had flattered him by giving his approval to the causeway, expressing his judgment that it detracted far less than was generally reported from the picturesque effect of the Mount, thereby making himself *persona grata* to the engineer.

Upon rising from table they went to visit the monument, taking the road of the ramparts. The city, a collection of old houses dating back to the Middle Ages and rising in tiers one above the other upon the enormous mass of granite that is crowned by the abbey, is separated from the sands by a lofty crenelated wall. This wall winds about the city in its ascent with many a twist and turn, with abrupt angles and elbows and platforms and watchtowers, all forming so many surprises for the eye, which, at every turn, rests upon some new expanse of the far-reaching horizon. They were silent, for whether they had seen this marvelous edifice before or not, they were equally impressed by it, and the substantial breakfast that they had eaten, moreover, had made them short-winded. There it rose above them in the sky, a wondrous tangle of granite ornamentation, spires, belfries, arches thrown from one tower to another, a huge, light, fairy-like lace-work in stone, embroidered upon the azure of the heavens, from which the fantastic and bestial-faced array of gargoyles seemed to be preparing to detach themselves and wing their flight away. Upon the northern flank of the Mount, between the abbey and the sea, a wild and almost perpendicular descent that is called the Forest, because it is covered with ancient trees, began where the houses ended and formed a speck of dark green coloring upon the limitless expanse of yellow sands. Mme de Burne and Mariolle, who headed the little procession, stopped to enjoy the view. She leaned upon his arm, her senses steeped in a rapture such as she had never known before. With light steps she pursued her upward way, willing to keep on climbing forever in his company toward this fabric of a vision, or indeed toward any other end. She would have been glad that the steep way should never have an ending, for almost for the first time in her life she knew what it was to experience a plenitude of satisfaction.

“Heavens! how beautiful it is!” she murmured. Looking upon her, he answered: “I can think only of you.”

She continued, with a smile: “I am not inclined to be very poetical, as a general thing, but this seems to me so beautiful that I am really moved.”

He stammered: “I — I love you to distraction.” He was conscious of a slight pressure of her arm, and they resumed the ascent.

They found a keeper awaiting them at the door of the abbey, and they entered by that superb staircase, between two massive towers, which leads to the Hall of the Guards. Then they went from hall to hall, from court to court, from dungeon to dungeon, listening, wondering, charmed with everything, admiring everything, the crypt, with its huge pillars, so beautiful in their massiveness, which sustains upon its sturdy arches all the weight of the choir of the church above, and all of the *Wonder,* an awe-inspiring edifice of three stories of Gothic monuments rising one above the other, the most extraordinary masterpiece of the monastic and military architecture of the Middle Ages.

Then they came to the cloisters. Their surprise was so great that they involuntarily came to a halt at sight of this square court inclosing the lightest, most graceful, most charming of colonnades to be seen in any cloisters in the world. For the entire length of the four galleries the slender shafts in double rows, surmounted by exquisite capitals, sustain a continuous garland of flowers and Gothic ornamentation of infinite variety and constantly changing design, the elegant and unaffected fancies of the simple-minded old artists who thus worked out their dreams in stone beneath the hammer.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle walked completely around the inclosure, very slowly, arm in arm, while the others, somewhat fatigued, stood near the door and admired from a distance.

“Heavens! what pleasure this affords me!” she said, coming to a stop.

“For my part, I neither know where I am nor what my eyes behold. I am conscious that you are at my side, and that is all.”

Then smiling, she looked him in the face and murmured: ‘‘André!”

He saw that she was yielding. No further word was spoken, and they resumed their walk. The inspection of the edifice was continued, but they hardly had eyes to see anything.

Nevertheless their attention was attracted for the space of a moment by the airy bridge, seemingly of lace, inclosed within an arch thrown across space between two belfries, as if to afford a way to scale the clouds, and their amazement was still greater when they came to the “Madman’s Path,” a dizzy track, devoid of parapet, that encircles the farthest tower nearly at its summit.

"May we go up there?" she asked.

"It is forbidden," the guide replied.

She showed him a twenty-franc piece. All the members of the party, giddy at sight of the yawning gulf and the immensity of surrounding space, tried to dissuade her from the imprudent freak.

She asked Mariolle: "Will you go?"

He laughed: "I have been in more dangerous places than that." And paying no further attention to the others, they set out.

He went first along the narrow cornice that overhung the gulf, and she followed him, gliding along close to the wall with eyes downcast that she might not see the yawning void beneath, terrified now and almost ready to sink with fear, clinging to the hand that he held out to her; but she felt that he was strong, that there was no sign of weakening there, that he was sure of head and foot; and enraptured for all her fears, she said to herself: "Truly, this is a man." They were alone in space, at the height where the sea-birds soar; they were contemplating the same horizon that the white-winged creatures are ceaselessly scouring in their flight as they explore it with their little yellow eyes.

Mariolle felt that she was trembling; he asked: "Do you feel dizzy?"

"A little," she replied in a low voice; "but in your company I fear nothing."

At this he drew near and sustained her by putting his arm about her, and this simple assistance inspired her with such courage that she ventured to raise her head and take a look at the distance. He was almost carrying her and she offered no resistance, enjoying the protection of those strong arms which thus enabled her to traverse the heavens, and she was grateful to him with a romantic, womanly gratitude that he did not mar their sea-gull flight by kisses.

When they had rejoined the others of the party, who were awaiting them with the greatest anxiety, M. de Pradon angrily said to his daughter: "*Dieu!* what a silly thing to do!"

She replied with conviction: "No, it was not, papa, since it was successfully accomplished. Nothing that succeeds is ever stupid."

He merely gave a shrug of the shoulders, and they descended the stairs. At the porter's lodge there was another stoppage to purchase photographs, and when they reached the inn it was nearly dinner-time. The hostess recommended a short walk upon the sands, so as to obtain a view of the Mount toward the open sea, in which direction, she said, it presented its most imposing aspect. Although they were all much fatigued, the band started out again and made the tour of the ramparts, picking their way among the treacherous downs, solid to the eye but yielding to the step, where the foot that was placed upon the pretty yellow carpet that was stretched beneath it and seemed solid would suddenly sink up to the calf in the deceitful golden ooze.

Seen from this point the abbey, all at once losing the cathedral-like appearance with which it astounded the beholder on the mainland, assumed, as if in menace of old Ocean, the martial appearance of a feudal manor, with its huge battlemented wall picturesquely pierced with loop-holes and supported by gigantic buttresses that sank their Cyclopean stone foundations in the bosom of the fantastic mountain. Mme de Burne and André Mariolle, however, were now heedless of all that. They were thinking only of themselves, caught in the meshes of the net that they had set for each other, shut up within the walls of that prison to which no sound comes from the outer world, where the eye beholds only one being.

When they found themselves again seated before their well-filled plates, however, beneath the cheerful light of the lamps, they seemed to awake, and discovered that they were hungry, just like other mortals.

They remained a long time at table, and when the dinner was ended the moonlight was quite forgotten in the pleasure of conversation. There was no one, moreover, who had any desire to go out, and no one suggested it. The broad moon might shed her waves of poetic light down upon the little thin sheet of rising tide that was already creeping up the sands with the noise of a trickling stream, scarcely perceptible to the ear, but sinister and alarming; she might light up the ramparts that crept in spirals up the flanks of the Mount and illumine the romantic shadows of all the belfries of the old abbey, standing in its wondrous setting of a boundless bay, in the bosom of which were quiveringly reflected the lights that crawled along the downs — no one cared to see more.

It was not yet ten o’clock when Mme. Valsaci, overcome with sleep, spoke of going to bed, and her proposition was received without a dissenting voice. Bidding one another a cordial good night, each withdrew to his chamber.

André Mariolle knew well that he would not sleep; he therefore lighted his two candles and placed them on the mantelpiece, threw open his window, and looked out into the night.

All the strength of his body was giving way beneath the torture of an unavailing hope. He knew that she was there, close at hand, that there were only two doors between them, and yet it was almost as impossible to go to her as it would be to dam the tide that was coming in and submerging all the land. There was a cry in his throat that strove to liberate itself, and in his nerves such an unquenchable and futile torment of expectation that he asked himself what he was to do, unable as he was longer to endure the solitude of this evening of sterile happiness.

Gradually all the sounds had died away in the inn and in the single little winding street of the town. Mariolle still remained leaning upon his window-sill, conscious only that time was passing, contemplating the silvery sheet of the still rising tide and rejecting the idea of going to bed as if he had felt the undefined presentiment of some approaching, providential good fortune.

All at once it seemed to him that a hand was fumbling with the fastening of his door. He turned with a start: the door slowly opened and a woman entered the room, her head veiled in a cloud of white lace and her form enveloped in one of those great dressing-gowns that seem made of silk, cashmere, and snow. She closed the door carefully behind her; then, as if she had not seen him where he stood motionless — as if smitten with joy — in the bright square of moonlight of the window, she went straight to the mantelpiece and blew out the two candles.

CHAPTER V. CONSPIRACY

THEY were to meet next morning in front of the inn to say good-bye to one another. André, the first one down, awaited her coming with a poignant feeling of mixed uneasiness and delight. What would she do? What would she be to him? What would become of her and of him? In what thrice-happy or terrible adventure had he engaged himself? She had it in her power to make of him what she would, a visionary, like an opium-eater, or a martyr, at her will. He paced to and fro beside the two carriages, for they were to separate, he, to continue the deception, ending his trip by way of Saint Malo, they returning to Avranches.

When would he see her again? Would she cut short her visit to her family, or would she delay her return? He was horribly afraid of what she would first say to him, how she would first look at him, for he had not seen her and they had scarcely spoken during their brief interview of the night before. There remained to Mariolle from that strange, fleeting interview the faint feeling of disappointment of the man who has been unable to reap all that harvest of love which he thought was ready for the sickle, and at the same time the intoxication of triumph and, resulting from that, the almost assured hope of finally making himself complete master of her affections.

He heard her voice and started; she was talking loudly, evidently irritated at some wish that her father had expressed, and when he beheld her standing at the foot of the staircase there was a little angry curl upon her lips that bespoke her impatience.

Mariolle took a couple of steps toward her; she saw him and smiled. Her eyes suddenly recovered their serenity and assumed an expression of kindliness which diffused itself over the other features, and she quickly and cordially extended to him her hand, as if in ratification of their new relations.

“So then, we are to separate?” she said to him.

“Alas! Madame, the thought makes me suffer more than I can tell.”

“It will not be for long,” she murmured. She saw M. de Pradon coming toward them, and added in a whisper: “Say that you are going to take a ten days’ trip through Brittany, but do not take it.”

Mme de Valsaci came running up in great excitement. “What is this that your father has been telling me — that you are going to leave us day after to-morrow? You were to stay until next Monday, at least.”

Mme de Burne replied, with a suspicion of ill humor: “Papa is nothing but a bungler, who never knows enough to hold his tongue. The sea-air has given me, as it does every year, a very unpleasant neuralgia, and I did say something or other about going away so as not to have to be ill for a month. But this is no time for bothering over that.”

Mariolle’s coachman urged him to get into the carriage and be off, so that they might not miss the Pontorson train.

Mme de Burne asked: “And you, when do you expect to be back in Paris?”

He assumed an air of hesitancy: “Well, I can’t say exactly; I want to see Saint Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, the Bay des Trépassés, Cape Raz, Audierne, Penmarch, Morbihan, all this celebrated portion of the Breton country, in a word. That will take me say— “after a silence devoted to feigned calculation, he exceeded her estimate— “fifteen or twenty days.”

“That will be quite a trip,” she laughingly said. “For my part, if my nerves trouble me as they did last night, I shall be at home before I am two days older.”

His emotion was so great that he felt like exclaiming: “Thanks!” He contented himself with kissing, with a lover’s kiss, the hand that she extended to him for the last time, and after a profuse exchange of thanks and compliments with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, who seemed to be somewhat’ reassured by the announcement of his projected trip, he climbed into his vehicle and drove off, turning his head for a parting look at her.

He made no stop on his journey back to Paris and was conscious of seeing nothing on the way. All night long he lay back in the corner of his compartment with eyes half closed and folded arms, his mind reverting to the occurrences of the last few hours, and all his thoughts concentrated upon the realization of his dream.

Immediately upon his arrival at his own abode, upon the cessation of the noise and bustle of travel, in the silence of the library where he generally passed his time, where he worked and wrote, and where he almost always felt himself possessed by a restful tranquillity in the friendly companionship of his books, his piano, and his violin, there now commenced in him that unending torment of impatient waiting which devours, as with a fever, insatiable hearts like his. He was surprised that he could apply himself to nothing, that nothing served to occupy his mind, that reading and music, the occupations that he generally employed to while away the idle moments of his life, were unavailing, not only to afford distraction to his thoughts, but even to give rest and quiet to his physical being, and he asked himself what he was to do to appease this new disturbance. An inexplicable physical need of motion seemed to have taken possession of him — of going forth and walking the streets, of constant movement, the crisis of that agitation that is imparted by the mind to the body and which is nothing more than an instinctive and unappeasable longing to seek and find some other being.

He put on his hat and overcoat, and as he was descending the stairs he asked himself: “In which direction shall I go?” Thereupon an idea occurred to him that he had not yet thought of: he must procure a pretty and secluded retreat to serve them as a trysting place.

He pursued his investigations in every quarter, ransacking streets, avenues, and boulevards, distrustfully examining *concierges* with their servile smiles, lodging-house keepers of suspicious appearance and apartments with doubtful furnishings, and at evening he returned to his house in a state of discouragement. At nine o’clock the next day he started out again, and at nightfall he finally succeeded in discovering at Auteuil, buried in a garden that had three exits, a lonely pavilion which an upholsterer in the neighborhood promised to render habitable in two days. He ordered what was necessary, selecting very plain furniture of varnished pine and thick carpets. A baker who lived near one of the garden gates had charge of the property, and an arrangement was completed with his wife whereby she was to care for the rooms, while a gardener of the quarter also took a contract for filling the beds with flowers.

All these arrangements kept him busy until it was eight o’clock, and when at last he got home, worn out with fatigue, he beheld with a beating heart a telegram lying on his desk. He opened it and read:

“I will be home to-morrow. Await instructions.

“MICHE.”

He had not written to her yet, fearing that as she was soon to leave Avranches his letter might go astray, and as soon as he had dined he seated himself at his desk to lay before her what was passing in his mind. The task was a long and difficult one, for all the words and phrases that he could muster, and even his ideas, seemed to him weak, mediocre, and ridiculous vehicles in which to convey to her the delicacy and passionateness of his thanks.

The letter that he received from her upon waking next morning confirmed the statement that she would reach home that evening, and begged him not to make his presence known to anyone for a few days, in order that full belief might be accorded to the report that he was traveling. She also requested him to walk upon the terrace of the Tuileries garden that overlooks the Seine the following day at ten o'clock.

He was there an hour before the time appointed, and to kill time wandered about in the immense garden that was peopled only by a few early pedestrians, belated officeholders on their way to the public buildings on the left bank, clerks and toilers of every condition. It was a pleasure to him to watch the hurrying crowds driven by the necessity of earning their daily bread to brutalizing labors, and to compare his lot with theirs, on this spot, at the minute when he was awaiting his mistress — a queen among the queens of the earth. He felt himself so fortunate a being, so privileged, raised to such a height beyond their petty struggles, that he felt like giving thanks to the blue sky, for to him Providence was but a series of alternations of sunshine and of rain due to Chance, mysterious ruler over weather and over men.

When it wanted a few minutes of ten he ascended to the terrace and watched for her coming. "She will be late!" he thought. He had scarcely more than heard the clock in an adjacent building strike ten when he thought he saw her at a distance, coming through the garden with hurrying steps, like a working-woman in haste to reach her shop. "Can it indeed be she?" He recognized her step but was astonished by her changed appearance, so unassuming in a neat little toilette of dark colors. She was coming toward the stairs that led up to the terrace, however, in a bee-line, as if she had traveled that road many times before.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "she must be fond of this place and come to walk here sometimes." He watched her as she raised her dress to put her foot on the first step and then nimbly flew up the remaining ones, and as he eagerly stepped forward to meet her she said to him as he came near with a pleasant smile, in which there was a trace of uneasiness: "You are very imprudent! You must not show yourself like that; I saw you almost from the Rue de Rivoli. Come, we will go and take a seat on a bench yonder. There is where you must wait for me next time."

He could not help asking her: “So you come here often?”

“Yes, I have a great liking for this place, and as I am an early walker I come here for exercise and to look at the scenery, which is very pretty. And then one never meets anybody here, while the Bois is out of the question on just that account. But you must be careful not to give away my secret.”

He laughed: “I shall not be very likely to do that.” Discreetly taking her hand, a little hand that was hanging at her side conveniently concealed in the folds of her dress, he sighed: “How I love you! My heart was sick with waiting for you. Did you receive my letter?”

“Yes; I thank you for it. It was very touching.”

“Then you have not become angry with me yet?”

“Why no! Why should I? You are just as nice as you can be.”

He sought for ardent words, words that would vibrate with his emotion and his gratitude. As none came to him, and as he was too deeply moved to permit of the free expression of the thought that was within him, he simply said again: “How I love you!”

She said to him: “I brought you here because there are water and boats in this place as well as down yonder. It is not at all like what we saw down there; still it is not disagreeable.”

They were sitting on a bench near the stone balustrade that runs along the river, almost alone, invisible from every quarter. The only living beings to be seen on the long terrace at that hour were two gardeners and three nursemaids. Carriages were rolling along the quay at their feet, but they could not see them; footsteps were resounding upon the adjacent sidewalk, over against the wall that sustained the promenade; and still unable to find words in which to express their thoughts, they let their gaze wander over the beautiful Parisian landscape that stretches from the île Saint-Louis and the towers of Notre-Dame to the heights of Meudon. She repeated her thought: “None the less, it is very pretty, isn’t it?” But he was suddenly seized by the thrilling remembrance of their journey through space up on the summit of the abbey tower, and with a regretful feeling for the emotion that was past and gone, he said: “Oh, Madame, do you remember our escapade of the ‘Madman’s Path?’”

“Yes; but I am a little afraid now that I come to think of it when it is all over. *Dieu!* how my head would spin around if I had it to do over again! I was just drunk with the fresh air, the sunlight, and the sea. Look, my friend, what a magnificent view we have before us. How I do love Paris!”

He was surprised, having a confused feeling of missing something that had appeared in her down there in the country. He murmured: “It matters not to me where I am, so that I am only near you!”

Her only answer was a pressure of the hand. Inspired with greater happiness, perhaps, by this little signal than he would have been by a tender word, his heart relieved of the care that had oppressed it until now, he could at last find words to express his feelings. He told her, slowly, in words that were almost solemn, that he had given her his life forever that she might do with it what she would.

She was grateful; but like the child of modern scepticism that she was and willing captive of her iconoclastic irony, she smiled as she replied: “I would not make such a long engagement as that if I were you!”

He turned and faced her, and, looking her straight in the eyes with that penetrating look which is like a touch, repeated what he had just said at greater length, in a more ardent, more poetical form of expression. All that he had written in so many burning letters he now expressed with such a fervor of conviction that it seemed to her as she listened that she was sitting in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed in every fiber of her feminine nature by his adoring words more deeply than ever before.

When he had ended she simply said: “And I, too, love you dearly!”

They were still holding each other’s hand, like young folks walking along a country road, and watching with vague eyes the little steamboats plying on the river. They were alone by themselves in Paris, in the great confused uproar, whether remote or near at hand, that surrounded them in this city full of all the life of all the world, more alone than they had been on the summit of their aerial tower, and for some seconds they were quite oblivious that there existed on earth any other beings but their two selves.

She was the first to recover the sensation of reality and of the flight of time. “Shall we see each other again to-morrow?” she said.

He reflected for an instant, and abashed by what he had in mind to ask of her: “Yes — yes — certainly,” he replied. “But — shall we never meet in any other place? This place is unfrequented. Still — people may come here.”

She hesitated. “You are right. Still it is necessary also that you should not show yourself for at least two weeks yet, so that people may think that you are away traveling. It will be very nice and mysterious for us to meet and no one know that you are in Paris. Meanwhile, however, I cannot receive you at my house, so — I don't see— "

He felt that he was blushing, and continued: "Neither can I ask you to come to my house. Is there nothing else — is there no other place?"

Being a woman of practical sense, logical and without false modesty, she was neither surprised nor shocked.

"Why, yes," she said, "only we must have time to think it over."

"I have thought it over."

"What! so soon?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Well?"

"Are you acquainted with the Rue des Vieux-Champs at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It runs into the Rue Tournemine and the Rue Jean-de-Saulge."

"Well?"

"In this street, or rather lane, there is a garden, and in this garden a pavilion that also communicates with the two streets that I mentioned."

"What next?"

"That pavilion awaits you."

She reflected, still with no appearance of embarrassment, and then asked two or three questions that were dictated by feminine prudence. His explanations seemed to be satisfactory, for she murmured as she arose:

"Well, I will go to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three o'clock."

"Seven is the number; I will be waiting for you behind the door. Do not forget. Give a knock as you pass."

"Yes, my friend. Adieu, till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, adieu. Thanks; I adore you." They had risen to their feet. "Do not come with me," she said. "Stay here for ten minutes, and when you leave go by the way of the quay."

"Adieu!"

"Adieu!"

She started off very rapidly, with such a modest, unassuming air, so hurriedly, that actually she might have been mistaken for one of Paris' pretty working-girls, who trot along the streets in the morning on the way to their honest labors.

He took a cab to Auteuil, tormented by the fear that the house might not be ready against the following day. He found it full of workmen, however; the hangings were all in place upon the walls, the carpets laid upon the floors. Everywhere there was a sound of pounding, hammering, beating, washing. In the garden, which was quite large and rather pretty, the remains of an ancient park, containing a few large old trees, a thick clump of shrubbery that stood for a forest, two green tables, two grass-plots, and paths twisting about among the beds, the gardener of the vicinity had set out rose-trees, geraniums, pinks, reseda, and twenty other species of those plants, the growth of which is advanced or retarded by careful attention, so that a naked field may be transformed in a day into a blooming flower garden.

Mariolle was as delighted as if he had scored another success with his Michèle, and having exacted an oath from the upholsterer that all the furniture should be in place the next day before noon, he went off to various shops to buy some bric-à-brac and pictures for the adornment of the interior of this retreat. For the walls he selected some of those admirable photographs of celebrated pictures that are produced nowadays, for the tables and mantelshelves some rare pottery and a few of those familiar objects that women always like to have about them. In the course of the day he expended the income of three months, and he did it with great pleasure, reflecting that for the last ten years he had been living very economically, not from penuriousness, but because of the absence of expensive tastes, and this circumstance now allowed him to do things somewhat magnificently.

He returned to the pavilion early in the morning of the following day, presided over the arrival and placing of the furniture, climbed ladders and hung the pictures, burned perfumes and vaporized them upon the hangings and poured them over the carpets. In his feverish joy, in the excited rapture of all his being, it seemed to him that he had never in his life been engaged in such an engrossing, such a delightful labor. At every moment he looked to see what time it was, and calculated how long it would be before she would be there; he urged on the workmen, and stimulated his invention so to arrange the different objects that they might be displayed in their best light.

In his prudence he dismissed everyone before it was two o'clock, and then, as the minute-hand of the clock tardily made its last revolution around the dial, in the silence of that house where he was awaiting the greatest happiness that ever he could have wished for, alone with his reverie, going and coming from room to room, he passed the minutes until she should be there.

Finally he went out into the garden. The sunlight was streaming through the foliage upon the grass and falling with especially charming brilliancy upon a bed of roses. The very heavens were contributing their aid to embellish this trysting-place. Then he went and stood by the gate, partially opening it to look out from time to time for fear she might mistake the house.

Three o'clock rang out from some belfry, and forthwith the sounds were echoed from a dozen schools and factories. He stood waiting now with watch in hand, and gave a start of surprise when two little, light knocks were given against the door, to which his ear was closely applied, for he had heard no sound of footsteps in the street.

He opened: it was she. She looked about her with astonishment. First of all she examined with a distrustful glance the neighboring houses, but her inspection reassured her, for certainly she could have no acquaintances among the humble *bourgeois* who inhabited the quarter. Then she examined the garden with pleased curiosity, and finally placed the backs of her two hands, from which she had drawn her gloves, against her lover's mouth; then she took his arm. At every step she kept repeating: "My! how pretty it is! how unexpected! how attractive!" Catching sight of the rose-bed that the sun was shining upon through the branches of the trees, she exclaimed: "Why, this is fairyland, my friend!"

She plucked a rose, kissed it, and placed it in her corsage. Then they entered the pavilion, and she seemed so pleased with everything that he felt like going down on his knees to her, although he may have felt at the bottom of his heart that perhaps she might as well have shown more attention to him and less to the surroundings. She looked about her with the pleasure of a child who has received a new plaything, and admired and appreciated the elegance of the place with the satisfaction of a connoisseur whose tastes have been gratified. She had feared that she was coming to some vulgar, commonplace resort, where the furniture and hangings had been contaminated by other rendezvous, whereas all this, on the contrary, was new, unforeseen, and alluring, prepared expressly for her, and must have cost a lot of money. Really he was perfect, this man. She turned to him and extended her arms, and their lips met in one of those long kisses that have the strange, twofold sensation of self-effacement and unadulterated bliss.

When, at the end of three hours, they were about to separate, they walked through the garden and seated themselves in a leafy arbor where no eye could reach them. André addressed her with an exuberance of feeling, as if she had been an idol that had come down for his sake from her sacred pedestal, and she listened to him with that fatigued languor which he had often seen reflected in her eyes after people had tired her by too long a visit. She continued affectionate, however, her face lighted up by a tender, slightly constrained smile, and she clasped the hand that she held in hers with a continuous pressure that perhaps was more studied than spontaneous.

She could not have been listening to him, for she interrupted one of his sentences to say: "Really, I must be going. I was to be at the Marquise de Bratiane's at six o'clock, and I shall be very late."

He conducted her to the gate by which she had obtained admission. They gave each other a parting kiss, and after a furtive glance up and down the street, she hurried away, keeping close to the walls.

When he was alone he felt within him that sudden void that is ever left by the disappearance of the woman whose kiss is still warm upon your lips, the queer little laceration of the heart that is caused by the sound of her retreating footsteps. It seemed to him that he was abandoned and alone, that he was never to see her again, and he betook himself to pacing the gravel-walks, reflecting upon this never-ceasing contrast between anticipation and realization. He remained there until it was dark, gradually becoming more tranquil and yielding himself more entirely to her influence, now that she was away, than if she had been there in his arms. Then he went home and dined without being conscious of what he was eating, and sat down to write to her.

The next day was a long one to him, and the evening seemed interminable. Why had she not answered his letter, why had she sent him no word? The morning of the second day he received a short telegram appointing another rendezvous at the same hour. The little blue envelope speedily cured him of the heart-sickness of hope deferred from which he was beginning to suffer.

She came, as she had done before, punctual, smiling, and affectionate, and their second interview in the little house was in all respects similar to the first. André Mariolle, surprised at first and vaguely troubled that the ecstatic passion he had dreamed of had not made itself felt between them, but more and more overmastered by his senses, gradually forgot his visions of anticipation in the somewhat different happiness of possession. He was becoming attached to her by reason of her caresses, an invincible tie, the strongest tie of all, from which there is no deliverance when once it has fully possessed you and has penetrated through your flesh into your veins.

Twenty days rolled by, such sweet, fleeting days. It seemed to him that there was to be no end to it, that he was to live forever thus, nonexistent for all and living for her alone, and to his mental vision there presented itself the seductive dream of an unlimited continuance of this blissful, secret way of living.

She continued to make her visits at intervals of three days, offering no objections, attracted, it would seem, as much by the amusement she derived from their clandestine meetings — by the charm of the little house that had now been transformed into a conservatory of rare exotics and by the novelty of the situation, which could scarcely be called dangerous, since she was her own mistress, but still was full of mystery — as by the abject and constantly increasing tenderness of her lover.

At last there came a day when she said to him: “ Now, my dear friend, you must show yourself in society again. You will come and pass the afternoon with me to-morrow. I have given out that you are at home again.”

He was heartbroken. “Oh, why so soon?” he said.

“Because if it should leak out by any chance that you are in Paris your absence would be too inexplicable not to give rise to gossip.”

He saw that she was right and promised that he would come to her house the next day. Then he asked her: “Do you receive to-morrow?”

“Yes,” she replied. “It will be quite a little solemnity.”

He did not like this intelligence. “Of what description is your solemnity?”

She laughed gleefully. “I have prevailed upon Massival, by means of the grossest sycophancy, to give a performance of his ‘Dido,’ which no one has heard yet. It is the poetry of antique love. Mme de Bratiane, who considered herself Massival’s sole proprietor, is furious. She will be there, for she is to sing. Am I not a sly one?”

“Will there be many there?”

“Oh, no, only a few intimate friends. You know them nearly all.”

“Won’t you let me off? I am so happy in my solitude.”

“Oh! no, my friend. You know that I count on you more than all the rest.”

His heart gave a great thump. “Thank you,” he said; “I will come.”

CHAPTER VI. QUESTIONINGS

GOOD day, M. Mariolle."

Mariolle noticed that it was no longer the "dear friend" of Auteuil, and the clasp of the hand was a hurried one, the hasty pressure of a busy woman wholly engrossed in her social functions. As he entered the salon Mme de Burne was advancing to speak to the beautiful Mme le Prieur, whose sculpturesque form, and the audacious way that she had of dressing to display it, had caused her to be nicknamed, somewhat ironically, "The Goddess." She was the wife of a member of the Institute, of the section of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres.

"Ah, Mariolle!" exclaimed Lamarthe, "where do you come from? We thought that you were dead."

"I have been making a trip through Finistère."

He was going on to relate his impressions when the novelist interrupted him: "Are you acquainted with the Baronne de Frémines?"

"Only by sight; but I have heard a good deal of her. They say that she is queer."

"The very queen of crazy women, but with an exquisite perfume of modernness. Come and let me present you to her." Taking him by the arm he led him toward a young woman who was always compared to a doll, a pale and charming little blond doll, invented and created by the devil himself for the damnation of those larger children who wear beards on their faces. She had long, narrow eyes, slightly turned up toward the temples, apparently like the eyes of the Chinese; their soft blue glances stole out between lids that were seldom opened to their full extent, heavy, slowly-moving lids, designed to veil and hide this creature's mysterious nature.

Her hair, very light in color, shone with silky, silvery reflections, and her delicate mouth, with its thin lips, seemed to have been cut by the light hand of a sculptor from the design of a miniature-painter. The voice that issued from it had bell-like intonations, and the audacity of her ideas, of a biting quality that was peculiar to herself, smacking of wickedness and drollery, their destructive charm, their cold, corrupting seductiveness, all the complicated nature of this full-grown, mentally diseased child acted upon those who were brought in contact with her in such a way as to produce in them violent passions and disturbances.

She was known all over Paris as being the most extravagant of the *mondaines* of the real *monde,* and also the wittiest, but no one could say exactly what she was, what were her ideas, what she did. She exercised an irresistible sway over mankind in general. Her husband, also, was quite as much of an enigma as she. Courteous and affable and a great nobleman, he seemed quite unconscious of what was going on. Was he indifferent, or complaisant, or was he simply blind? Perhaps, after all, there was nothing in it more than those little eccentricities which doubtless amused him as much as they did her. All sorts of opinions, however, were prevalent in regard to him, and some very ugly reports were circulated. Rumor even went so far as to insinuate that his wife's secret vices were not unprofitable to him.

Between her and Mme de Burne there were natural attractions and fierce jealousies, spells of friendship succeeded by crises of furious enmity. They liked and feared each other and mutually sought each other's society, like professional duelists, who appreciate at the same time that they would be glad to kill each other.

It was the Baronne de Frémines who was having the upper hand at this moment. She had just scored a victory, an important victory: she had conquered Lamarthe, had taken him from her rival and borne him away ostentatiously to domesticate him in her flock of acknowledged followers. The novelist seemed to be all at once smitten, puzzled, charmed, and stupefied by the discoveries he had made in this creature *sui generis*, and he could not help talking about her to everybody that he met, a fact which had already given rise to much gossip.

Just as he was presenting Mariolle he encountered Mme de Burne's look from the other end of the room; he smiled and whispered in his friend's ear: "See, the mistress of the house is angry."

André raised his eyes, but Madame had turned to meet Massival, who just then made his appearance beneath the raised portière. He was followed almost immediately by the Marquise de Bratiane, which elicited from Lamarthe: "Ah! we shall only have a second rendition of 'Dido'; the first has just been given in the Marquise's *coupé."*

Mme de Frémines added: "Really, our friend De Burne's collection is losing some of its finest jewels."

Mariolle felt a sudden impulse of anger rising in his heart, a kind of hatred against this woman, and a brusque sensation of irritation against these people, their way of life, their ideas, their tastes, their aimless inclinations, their childish amusements. Then, as Lamarthe bent over the young woman to whisper something in her ear, he profited by the opportunity to slip away.

Handsome Mme le Prieur was sitting by herself only a few steps away; he went up to her to make his bow. According to Lamarthe she stood for the old guard among all this irruption of modernism. Young, tall, handsome, with very regular features and chestnut hair through which ran threads of gold, extremely affable, captivating by reason of her tranquil, kindly charm of manner, by reason also of a calm, well-studied coquetry and a great desire to please that lay concealed beneath an outward appearance of simple and sincere affection, she had many firm partisans, whom she took good care should never be exposed to dangerous rivalries. Her house had the reputation of being a little gathering of intimate friends, where all the *habitués,* moreover, concurred in extolling the merits of the husband.

She and Mariolle now entered into conversation. She held in high esteem this intelligent and reserved man, who gave people so little cause to talk about him and who was perhaps of more account than all the rest.

The remaining guests came dropping in: big Fresnel, puffing and giving a last wipe with his handkerchief to his shining and perspiring forehead, the philosophic George de Maltry, finally the Baron de Gravil accompanied by the Comte de Marantin. M. de Pradon assisted his daughter in doing the honors of the house; he was extremely attractive to Mariolle.

But Mariolle, with a heavy heart, saw *her* going and coming and bestowing her attentions on everyone there more than on him.

Twice, it is true, she had thrown him a swift look from a distance which seemed to say, “I am not forgetting you,” but they were so fleeting that perhaps he had failed to catch their meaning. And then he could not be unconscious to the fact that Lamarthe’s aggressive assiduities to Mme de Frémines were displeasing to Mme de Burne. “That is only her coquettish feeling of spite,” he said to himself, “a woman’s irritation from whose salon some valuable trinket has been spirited away.” Still it made him suffer, and his suffering was the greater since he saw that she was constantly watching them in a furtive, concealed kind of way, while she did not seem to trouble herself a bit at seeing *him* sitting beside Mme le Prieur.

The reason was that she had him in her power, she was sure of him, while the other was escaping her. What, then, could be to her that love of theirs, that love which was born but yesterday, and which in him had banished and killed every other idea?

M. de Pradon had called for silence, and Massival was opening the piano, which Mme de Bratiane was approaching, removing her gloves meanwhile, for she was to sing the woes of "Dido," when the door again opened and a young man appeared upon whom every eye was immediately fixed. He was tall and slender, with curling side-whiskers, short, blond, curly hair, and an air that was altogether aristocratic. Even Mme le Prieur seemed to feel his influence.

"Who is it?" Mariolle asked her.

"What! is it possible that you do not know him?"

"No, I do not."

"It is Comte Rudolph de Bernhaus."

"Ah! the man who fought a duel with Sigismond Fabre."

"Yes."

The story had made a great noise at the time. The Comte de Bernhaus, attached to the Austrian embassy and a diplomat of the highest promise, an elegant Bismarck, so it was said, having heard some words spoken in derogation of his sovereign at an official reception, had fought the next day with the man who uttered them, a celebrated fencer, and killed him. After this duel, in respect to which public opinion had been divided, the Comte acquired between one day and the next a notoriety after the manner of Sarah Bernhardt, but with this difference, that his name appeared in an aureole of poetic chivalry. He was in addition a man of great charm, an agreeable conversationalist, a man of distinction in every respect. Lamarthe used to say of him: "He is the one to tame our pretty wild beasts."

He took his seat beside Mme de Burne with a very gallant air, and Massival sat down before the keyboard and allowed his fingers to run over the keys for a few moments.

Nearly all the audience changed their places and drew their chairs nearer so as to hear better and at the same time have a better view of the singer. Thus Mariolle and Lamarthe found themselves side by side.

There was a great silence of expectation and respectful attention; then the musician began with a slow, a very slow succession of notes, something like a musical recitative. There were pauses, then the air would be lightly caught up in a series of little phrases, now languishing and dying away, now breaking out in nervous strength, indicative, it would seem, of distressful emotion, but always characterized by originality of invention. Mariolle gave way to reverie. He beheld a woman, a woman in the fullness of her mature youth and ripened beauty, walking slowly upon a shore that was bathed by the waves of the sea. He knew that she was suffering, that she bore a great sorrow in her soul, and he looked at Mme de Bratiane.

Motionless, pale beneath her wealth of thick black hair that seemed to have been dipped in the shades of night, the Italian stood waiting, her glance directed straight before her. On her strongly marked, rather stern features, against which her eyes and eyebrows stood out like spots of ink, in all her dark, powerful, and passionate beauty, there was something that struck one, something like the threat of the coming storm that we read in the blackening sky.

Massival, slightly nodding his head with its long hair in cadence with the rhythm, kept on relating the affecting tale that he was drawing from the resonant keys of ivory.

A shiver all at once ran through the singer; she partially opened her mouth, and from it there proceeded a long-drawn, heartrending wail of agony. It was not one of those outbursts of tragic despair that divas give utterance to upon the stage, with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those pitiful laments for love betrayed that bring a storm of bravos from an audience; it was a cry of supreme passion, coming from the body and not from the soul, wrung from her like the roar of a wounded animal, the cry of the feminine animal betrayed. Then she was silent, and Massival again began to relate, more animatedly, more stormily, the moving story of the miserable queen who was abandoned by the man she loved. Then the woman's voice made itself heard again. She used articulate language now; she told of the intolerable torture of solitude, of her unquenchable thirst for the caresses that were hers no more, and of the grief of knowing that he was gone from her forever.

Her warm, ringing voice made the hearts of her audience beat beneath the spell. This somber Italian, with hair like the darkness of the night, seemed to be suffering all the sorrows that she was telling, she seemed to love, or to have the capacity of loving, with furious ardor. When she ceased her eyes were full of tears, and she slowly wiped them away. Lamarthe leaned over toward Mariolle and said to him in a quiver of artistic enthusiasm: "Good heavens! how beautiful she is just now! She is a woman, the only one in the room." Then he added, after a moment of reflection: "After all, who can tell? Perhaps there is nothing there but the mirage of the music, for nothing has real existence except our illusions. But what an art to produce illusions is that of hers!"

There was a short intermission between the first and the second parts of the musical poem, and warm congratulations were extended to the composer and his interpreter. Lamarthe in particular was very earnest in his felicitations, and he was really sincere, for he was endowed with the capacity to feel and comprehend, and beauty of all kinds appealed strongly to his nature, under whatever form expressed. The manner in which he told Mme de Bratiane what his feelings had been while listening to her was so flattering that it brought a slight blush to her face and excited a little spiteful feeling among the other women who heard it. Perhaps he was not altogether unaware of the feeling that he had produced.

When he turned around to resume his chair, he perceived Comte de Bernhaus just in the act of seating himself beside Mme de Frémines. She seemed at once to be on confidential terms with him, and they smiled at each other as if this close conversation was particularly agreeable to them both. Mariolle, whose gloom was momentarily increasing, stood leaning against a door; the novelist came and stationed himself at his side. Big Fresnel, George de Maltry, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin formed a circle about Mme de Burne, who was going about offering tea. She seemed imprisoned in a crown of adorers. Lamarthe ironically called his friend's attention to it and added: "A crown without jewels, however, and I am sure that she would be glad to give all those rhinestones for the brilliant that she would like to see there."

"What brilliant do you mean?" inquired Mariolle. "Why, Bernhaus, handsome, irresistible, incomparable Bernhaus, he in whose honor this *fête* is given, for whom the miracle was performed of inducing Massival to bring out his 'Dido' here."

André, though incredulous, was conscious of a pang of regret as he heard these words. "Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no; ten days at most. But she put her best foot foremost during this brief campaign, and her tactics have been those of a conqueror. If you had been here you would have had a good laugh."

"How so?"

“She met him for the first time at Mme de Frémines’s; I happened to be dining there that evening. Bernhaus stands very well in the good graces of the lady of that house, as you may see for yourself; all that you have to do is to look at them at the present moment; and behold, in the very minute that succeeded the first salutation that they ever made each other, there is our pretty friend De Burne taking the field to effect the conquest of the Austrian phoenix. And she is succeeding, and will succeed, although the little Frémines is more than a match for her in coquetry, real indifference, and perhaps perversity. But our friend De Burne uses her weapons more scientifically, she is more of a woman, by which I mean a modern woman, that is to say, irresistible by reason of that artificial seductiveness which takes the place in the modern woman of the old-fashioned natural charm of manner. And it is not her artificiality alone that is to be taken into account, but her æstheticism, her profound comprehension of feminine aesthetics; all her strength lies therein. She knows herself thoroughly, because she takes more delight in herself than in anything else, and she is never at fault as to the best means of subjugating a man and making the best use of her gifts in order to captivate men.”

Mariolle took exception to this. “I think that you put it too strongly,” he said. “She has always been very simple with me.”

“Because simplicity is the right thing to meet the requirements of your case. I do not wish to speak ill of her, however. I think that she is better than most of her set. But they are not women.”

Massival, striking a few chords on the piano, here reduced them to silence, and Mme de Bratiane proceeded to sing the second part of the poem, in which her delineation of the title-role was a magnificent study of physical passion and sensual regret.

Lamarthe, however, never once took his eyes from Mme de Frémines and the Comte de Bernhaus, where they were enjoying their *tête-à-tête,* and as soon as the last vibrations of the piano were lost in the murmurs of applause, he again took up his theme as if in continuation of an argument, or as if he were replying to an adversary: “No, they are not women. The most honest of them are coquettes without being aware of it. The more I know them the less do I find in them that sensation of mild exhilaration that it is the part of a true woman to inspire in us. They intoxicate, it is true, but the process wears upon our nerves, for they are too sophisticated. Oh, it is very good as a liqueur to sip now and then, but it is a poor substitute for the good wine that we used to have. You see, my dear fellow, woman was created and sent to dwell on earth for two objects only, and it is these two objects alone that can avail to bring out her true, great, and noble qualities — love and the family. I am talking like M. Prudhomme. Now the women of to-day are incapable of loving, and they will not bear children. When they are so inexpert as to have them, it is a misfortune in their eyes; then a burden. Truly, they are not women; they are monsters."

Astonished by the writer's violent manner and by the angry look that glistened in his eye, Mariolle asked him: "Why, then, do you spend half your time hanging to their skirts?"

Lamarthe hotly replied: "Why? Why? Because it interests me — *parbleu!* And then — and then — Would you prevent a physician from going to the hospitals to watch the cases? Those women constitute my clinic."

This reflection seemed to quiet him a little: he proceeded: "Then, too, I adore them for the very reason that they are so modern. At bottom I am really no more a man than they are women. When I am at the point of becoming attached to one of them, I amuse myself by investigating and analyzing all the resulting sensations and emotions, just like a chemist who experiments upon himself with a poison in order to ascertain its properties." After an interval of silence, he continued: "In this way they will never succeed in getting me into their clutches. can play their game as well as they play it themselves, perhaps even better, and that is of use to me for my books, while their proceedings are not of the slightest bit of use to them. What fools they are! Failures, every one of them — charming failures, who will be ready to die of spite as they grow older and see the mistake that they have made."

Mariolle, as he listened, felt himself sinking into one of those fits of depression that are like the humid gloom with which a long-continued rain darkens everything about us. He was well aware that the man of letters, as a general thing, was not apt to be very far out of the way, but he could not bring himself to admit that he was altogether right in the present case. With a slight appearance of irritation, he argued, not so much in defense of women as to show the causes of the position that they occupy in contemporary literature. "In the days when poets and novelists exalted them, and endowed them with poetic attributes," he said, "they looked for in life, and seemed to find, that which their heart had discovered in their reading. Nowadays you persist in suppressing everything that has any savor of sentiment and poetry, and in its stead give them only naked, undeceiving realities. Now, my dear sir, the more love there is in books, the more love there is in life. When you invented the ideal and laid it before them, they believed in the truth of your inventions. Now that you give them nothing but stern, unadorned realism, they follow in your footsteps and have come to measure everything by that standard of vulgarity."

Lamarthe, who was always ready for a literary discussion, was about to commence a dissertation when Mme de Burne came up to them. It was one of the days when she looked at her best, with a toilette that delighted the eye and with that aggressive and alluring air that denoted that she was ready to try conclusions with anyone. She took a chair. "That is what I like," she said; "to come upon two men and find that they are not talking about me. And then you are the only men here that one can listen to with any interest. What was the subject that you were discussing?"

Lamarthe, quite without embarrassment and in terms of elegant raillery, placed before her the question that had arisen between himself and Mariolle. Then he resumed his reasoning with a spirit that was inflamed by that desire of applause which, in the presence of women, always excites men who like to intoxicate themselves with glory.

She at once interested herself in the discussion, and, warming to the subject, took part in it in defense of the women of our day with a good deal of wit and ingenuity. Some remarks upon the faithfulness and the attachment that even those who were looked on with most suspicion might be capable of, incomprehensible to the novelist, made Mariolle's heart beat more rapidly, and when she left them to take a seat beside Mme de Frémines, who had persistently kept the Comte de Bernhaus near her, Lamarthe and Mariolle, completely vanquished by her display of feminine tact and grace, were united in declaring that, beyond all question, she was exquisite.

"And just look at them!" said the writer.

The grand duel was on. What were they talking about now, the Austrian and those two women?

Mme de Burne had come up just at the right moment to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* which, however agreeable the two persons engaged in it might be to each other, was becoming monotonous from being too long protracted, and she broke it up by relating with an indignant air the expressions that she had heard from Lamarthe's lips. To be sure, it was all applicable to Mme de

Frémines, it all resulted from her most recent conquest, and it was all related in the hearing of an intelligent man who was capable of understanding it in all its bearings. The match was applied, and again the everlasting question of love blazed up, and the mistress of the house beckoned to Mariolle and Lamarthe to come to them; then, as their voices grew loud in debate, she summoned the remainder of the company.

A general discussion ensued, bright and animated, in which everyone had something to say. Mme de Burne was witty and entertaining beyond all the rest, shifting her ground from sentiment, which might have been factitious, to droll paradox. The day was a triumphant one for her, and she was prettier, brighter, and more animated than she had ever been.

CHAPTER VII. DEPRESSION

WHEN André Mariolle had parted from Mme de Burne and the penetrating charm of her presence had faded away, he felt within him and all about him, in his flesh, in his heart, in the air, and in all the surrounding world a sensation as if the delight of life which had been his support and animating principle for some time past had been taken from him.

What had happened? Nothing, or almost nothing. Toward the close of the reception she had been very charming in her manner toward him, saying to him more than once: “I am not conscious of anyone’s presence here but yours.” And yet he felt that she had revealed something to him of which he would have preferred always to remain ignorant. That, too, was nothing, or almost nothing; still he was stupefied, as a man might be upon hearing of some unworthy action of his father or his mother, to learn that during those twenty days which he had believed were absolutely and entirely devoted by her as well as by him, every minute of them, to the sentiment of their newborn love, so recent and so intense, she had resumed her former mode of life, had made many visits, formed many plans, recommenced those odious flirtations, had run after men and disputed them with her rivals, received compliments, and showed off all her graces.

So soon! All this she had done so soon! Had it happened later he would not have been surprised. He knew the world, he knew women and their ways of looking at things, he was sufficiently intelligent to understand it all, and would never have been unduly exacting or offensively jealous. She was beautiful; she was born — it was her allotted destiny — to receive the homage of men and listen to their soft nothings. She had selected him from among them all, and had bestowed herself upon him courageously, royally. It was his part to remain, he would remain in any event, a grateful slave to her caprices and a resigned spectator of her triumphs as a pretty woman. But it was hard on him; something suffered within him, in that obscure cavern down at the bottom of the heart where the delicate sensibilities have their dwelling.

No doubt he had been in the wrong; he had always been in the wrong since he first came to know himself. He carried too much sentimental prudence into his commerce with the world; his feelings were too thin-skinned. This was the cause of the isolated life that he had always led, through his dread of contact with the world and of wounded susceptibilities. He had been wrong, for this supersensitiveness is almost always the result of our not admitting the existence of a nature essentially different from our own, or else not tolerating it. He knew this, having often observed it in himself, but it was too late to modify the constitution of his being.

He certainly had no right to reproach Mme de Burne, for if she had forbidden him her salon and kept him in hiding during those days of happiness that she had afforded him, she had done it to blind prying eyes and be more fully his in the end. Why, then, this trouble that had settled in his heart? Ah! why? It was because he had believed her to be wholly his, and now it had been made clear to him that he could never expect to seize and hold this woman of a many-sided nature who belonged to all the world.

He was well aware, moreover, that all our life is made up of successes relative in degree to the "almost," and up to the present time he had borne this with philosophic resignation, dissembling his dissatisfaction and his unsatisfied yearnings under the mask of an assumed unsociability. This time he had thought that he was about to obtain an absolute success — the "entirely" that he had been waiting and hoping for all his life. The "entirely" is not to be attained in this world.

His evening was a dismal one, spent in analyzing the painful impression that he had received. When he was in bed this impression, instead of growing weaker, took stronger hold of him, and as he desired to leave nothing unexplored, he ransacked his mind to ascertain the remotest causes of his new troubles — they went, and came, and returned again like little breaths of frosty air, exciting in his love a suffering that was as yet weak and indistinct, like those vague neuralgic pains that we get by sitting in a draft, presages of the horrible agonies that are to come.

He understood in the first place that he was jealous, no longer as the ardent lover only but as one who had the right to call her his own. As long as he had not seen her surrounded by men, her men, he had not allowed himself to dwell upon this sensation, at the same time having a faint prevision of it, but supposing that it would be different, very different, from what it actually was. To find the mistress whom he believed had cared for none but him during those days of secret and frequent meetings — during that early period that should have been entirely devoted to isolation and tender emotion — to find her as much, and even more, interested and wrapped up in her former and frivolous flirtations than she was before she yielded herself to him, always ready to fritter away her time and attention on any chance comer, thus leaving but little of herself to him whom she had designated as the man of her choice, caused him a jealousy that was more of the flesh than of the feelings, not an undefined jealousy, like a fever that lies latent in the system, but a jealousy precise and well defined, for he was doubtful of her.

At first his doubts were instinctive, arising in a sensation of distrust that had intruded itself into his veins rather than into his thoughts, in that sense of dissatisfaction, almost physical, of the man who is not sure of his mate. Then, having doubted, he began to suspect.

What was his position toward her after all? Was he her first lover, or was he the tenth? Was he the successor of M. de Burne, or was he the successor of Lamarthe, Massival, George de Maltry, and the predecessor as well, perhaps, of the Comte de Bernhaus? What did he know of her? That she was surprisingly beautiful, stylish beyond all others, intelligent, discriminating, witty, but at the same time fickle, quick to weary, readily fatigued and disgusted with anyone or anything, and, above all else, in love with herself and an insatiable coquette. Had she had a lover — or lovers — before him? If not, would she have offered herself to him as she did? Where could she have got the audacity that made her come and open his bedroom door, at night, in a public inn? And then after that, would she have shown such readiness to visit the house at Auteuil? Before going there she had merely asked him a few questions, such questions as an experienced and prudent woman would naturally ask. He had answered like a man of circumspection, not unaccustomed to such interviews, and immediately she had confidingly said “Yes,” entirely reassured, probably benefiting by her previous experiences.

And then her knock at that little door, behind which he was waiting, with a beating heart, almost ready to faint, how discreetly authoritative it had been! And how she had entered without any visible display of emotion, careful only to observe whether she might be recognized from the adjacent houses! And the way that she had made herself at home at once in that doubtful lodging that he had hired and furnished for her! Would a woman who was a novice, how daring soever she might be, how superior to considerations of morality and regardless of social prejudices, have penetrated thus calmly the mystery of a first rendezvous? There is a trouble of the mind, a hesitation of the body, an instinctive fear in the very feet, which know not whither they are tending; would she not have felt all that unless she had had some experience in these excursions of love and unless the practice of these things had dulled her native sense of modesty?

Burning with this persistent, irritating fever, which the warmth of his bed seemed to render still more unendurable, Mariolle tossed beneath the coverings, constantly drawn on by his chain of doubts and suppositions; like a man that feels himself irrecoverably sliding down the steep descent of a precipice. At times he tried to call a halt and break the current of his thoughts; he sought and found, and was glad to find, reflections that were more just to her and reassuring to him, but the seeds of distrust had been sown in him and he could not help their growing.

And yet, with what had he to reproach her? Nothing, except that her nature was not entirely similar to his own, that she did not look upon life in the same way that he did and that she had not in her heart an instrument of sensibility attuned to the same key as his.

Immediately upon awaking next morning the longing to see her and to re-enforce his confidence in her developed itself within him like a ravening hunger, and he awaited the proper moment to go and pay her the visit demanded by custom. The instant that she saw him at the door of the little drawing-room devoted to her special intimates, where she was sitting alone occupied with her correspondence, she came to him with her two hands outstretched.

“Ah! Good day, dear friend!” she said, with so pleased and frank an air that all his odious suspicions, which were still floating indeterminately in his brain, melted away beneath the warmth of her reception.

He seated himself at her side and at once began to tell her of the manner in which he loved her, for their love was now no longer what it had been. He gently gave her to understand that there are two species of the race of lovers upon earth: those whose desire is that of madmen and whose ardor disappears when once they have achieved a triumph, and those whom possession serves to subjugate and capture, in whom the love of the senses, blending with the inarticulate and ineffable appeals that the heart of man at times sends forth toward a woman, gives rise to the servitude of a complete and torturing love.

Torturing it is, certainly, and forever so, however happy it may be, for nothing, even in the moments of closest communion, ever sates the need of her that rules our being.

Mme de Burne was charmed and gratified as she listened, carried away, as one is carried away at the theater when an actor gives a powerful interpretation of his rôle and moves us by awaking some slumbering echo in our own life. It was indeed an echo, the disturbing echo of a real passion; but it was not from her bosom that this passion sent forth its cry. Still, she felt such satisfaction that she was the object of so keen a sentiment, she was so pleased that it existed in a man who was capable of expressing it in such terms, in a man of whom she was really very fond, for whom she was really beginning to feel an attachment and whose presence was becoming more and more a necessity to her — not for her physical being but for that mysterious feminine nature which is so greedy of tenderness, devotion, and subjection — that she felt like embracing him, like offering him her mouth, her whole being, only that he might keep on worshiping her in this way.

She answered him frankly and without prudery, with that profound artfulness that certain women are endowed with, making it clear to him that he too had made great progress in her affections, and they remained *tête-à-tête* in the little drawing-room, where it so happened that no one came that day until twilight, talking always upon the same theme and caressing each other with words that to them did not have the common significance.

The servants had just brought in the lamps, when Mme de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle withdrew, and as Mme de Burne was accompanying him to the door through the main drawing-room, he asked her: “When shall I see you down yonder?”

“Will Friday suit you?”

“Certainly. At what hour?”

“The same, three o’clock.”

“Until Friday, then. Adieu. I adore you!” During the two days that passed before this interview, he experienced a sensation of loneliness that he had never felt before in the same way. A woman was wanting in his life — she was the only existent object for him in the world, and as this woman was not far away and he was prevented by social conventions alone from going to her, and from passing a lifetime with her, he chafed in his solitude, in the interminable lapse of the moments that seemed at times to pass so slowly, at the absolute impossibility of a thing that was so easy.

He arrived at the rendezvous on Friday three hours before the time, but it was pleasing to him — it comforted his anxiety — to wait there where she was soon to come, after having already suffered so much in awaiting her mentally in places where she was not to come.

He stationed himself near the door long before the clock had struck the three strokes that he was expecting so eagerly, and when at last he heard them he began to tremble with impatience. The quarter struck. He looked out into the street, cautiously protruding his head between the door and the casing; it was deserted from one end to the other. The minutes seemed to stretch out in aggravating slowness. He was constantly drawing his watch from his pocket, and at last when the hand marked the halfhour it appeared to him that he had been standing there for an incalculable length of time. Suddenly he heard a faint sound upon the pavement outside, and the summons upon the door of the little gloved hand quickly made him forget his disappointment and inspired in him a feeling of gratitude toward her.

She seemed a little out of breath as she asked: “I am very late, am I not?”

“No, not very.”

“Just imagine, I was near not being able to come at all. I had a houseful, and I was at my wits’ end to know what to do to get rid of all those people. Tell me, do you go under your own name here?”

“No. Why do you ask?”

“So that I may send you a telegram if I should ever be prevented from coming.”

“I am known as M. Nicolle.”

“Very well; I won’t forget. My! how nice it is here in this garden!”

There were five great splashes of perfumed, many-hued brightness upon the grassplots of the flowers, which were carefully tended and constantly renewed, for the gardener had a customer who paid liberally.

Halting at a bench in front of a bed of heliotrope: “Let us sit here for a while,” she said; “I have something funny to tell you.”

She proceeded to relate a bit of scandal that was quite fresh, and from the effect of which she had not yet recovered. The story was that Mme. Massival, the ex-mistress whom the artist had married, had come to Mme de Bratiane’s, furious with jealousy, right in the midst of an entertainment in which the Marquise was singing to the composer’s accompaniment, and had made a frightful scene: results, rage of the fair Italian, astonishment and laughter of the guests. Massival, quite beside himself, tried to take away his wife, who kept striking him in the face, pulling his hair and beard, biting him and tearing his clothes, but she clung to him with all her strength and held him so that he could not stir, while Lamarthe and two servants, who had hurried to them at the noise, did what they could to release him from the teeth and claws of this fury.

Tranquillity was not restored until after the pair had taken their departure. Since then the musician had remained invisible, and the novelist, witness of the scene, had been repeating it everywhere in a very witty and amusing manner. The affair had produced a deep impression upon Mme de Burne; it preoccupied her thoughts to such an extent that she hardly knew what she was doing. The constant recurrence of the names of Massival and Lamarthe upon her lips annoyed Mariolle.

“You just heard of this?” he said.

“Yes, hardly an hour ago.”

“And that is the reason why she was late,” he said to himself with bitterness. Then he asked aloud, “Shall we go in?”

“Yes,” she absently murmured.

When, an hour later, she had left him, for she was greatly hurried that day, he returned alone to the quiet little house and seated himself on a low chair in their apartment. The feeling that she had been no more his than if she had not come there left a sort of black cavern in his heart, in all his being, that he tried to probe to the bottom. He could see nothing there, he could not understand; he was no longer capable of understanding. If she had not abstracted herself from his kisses, she had at all events escaped from the immaterial embraces of his tenderness by a mysterious absence of the will of being his. She had not refused herself to him, but it seemed as if she had not brought her heart there with her; it had remained somewhere else, very far away, idly occupied, distracted by some trifle.

Then he saw that he already loved her with his senses as much as with his feelings, even more perhaps. The deprivation of her soulless caresses inspired him with a mad desire to run after her and bring her back, to again possess himself of her. But why? What was the use — since the thoughts of that fickle mind were occupied elsewhere that day? So he must await the days and the hours when, to this elusive mistress of his, there should come the caprice, like her other caprices, of being in love with him.

He returned wearily to his house, with heavy footsteps, his eyes fixed on the sidewalk, tired of life, and it occurred to him that he had made no appointment with her for the future, either at her house or elsewhere.

CHAPTER VIII. NEW HOPES

UNTIL the setting in of winter she was pretty faithful to their appointments; faithful, but not punctual. During the first three months her tardiness on these occasions ranged between three-quarters of an hour and two hours. As the autumnal rains compelled Mariolle to await her behind the garden gate with an umbrella over his head, shivering, with his feet in the mud, he caused a sort of little summer-house to be built, a covered and inclosed vestibule behind the gate, so that he might not take cold every time they met.

The trees had lost their verdure, and in the place of the roses and other flowers the beds were now filled with great masses of white, pink, violet, purple, and yellow chrysanthemums, exhaling their penetrating, balsamic perfume — the saddening perfume by which these noble flowers remind us of the dying year — upon the moist atmosphere, heavy with the odor of the rain upon the decaying leaves. In front of the door of the little house the inventive genius of the gardener had devised a great Maltese cross, composed of rarer plants arranged in delicate combinations of color, and Mariolle could never pass this bed, bright with new and constantly changing varieties, without the melancholy reflection that this flowery cross was very like a grave.

He was well acquainted now with those long watches in the little summer-house behind the gate. The rain would fall sullenly upon the thatch with which he had had it roofed and trickle down the board siding, and while waiting in this receiving-vault he would give way to the same unvarying reflections, go through the same process of reasoning, be swayed in turn by the same hopes, the same fears, the same discouragements. It was an incessant battle that he had to fight; a fierce, exhausting mental struggle with an elusive force, a force that perhaps had no real existence: the tenderness of that woman’s heart.

What strange things they were, those interviews of theirs! Sometimes she would come in with a smile upon her face, full to overflowing with the desire of conversation, and would take a seat without removing her hat and gloves, without raising her veil, often without so much as giving him a kiss. It never occurred to her to kiss him on such occasions; her head was full of a host of captivating little preoccupations, each of them more captivating to her than the idea of putting up her lips to the kiss of her despairing lover. He would take a seat beside her, heart and mouth overrunning with burning words which could find no way of utterance; he would listen to her and answer, and while apparently deeply interested in what she was saying would furtively take her hand, which she would yield to him calmly, amicably, without an extra pulsation in her veins.

At other times she would appear more tender, more wholly his; but he, who was watching her with anxious and clear-sighted eyes, with the eyes of a lover powerless to achieve her entire conquest, could see and divine that this relative degree of affection was owing to the fact that nothing had occurred on such occasions of sufficient importance to divert her thoughts from him.

Her persistent unpunctuality, moreover, proved to Mariolle with how little eagerness she looked forward to these interviews. When we love, when anything pleases and attracts us, we hasten to the anticipated meeting, but once the charm has ceased to work, the appointed time seems to come too quickly and everything serves as a pretext to delay our loitering steps and put off the moment that has become indefinably distasteful to us. An odd comparison with a habit of his own kept incessantly returning to his mind. In summer-time the anticipation of his morning bath always made him hasten his toilette and his visit to the bathing establishment, while in the frosty days of winter he always found so many little things to attend to at home before going out that he was invariably an hour behind his usual time. The meetings at Auteuil were to her like so many winter shower-baths.

For some time past, moreover, she had been making these interviews more infrequent, sending telegrams at the last hour, putting them off until the following day and apparently seeking for excuses for dispensing with them. She always succeeded in discovering excuses of a nature to satisfy herself, but they caused him mental and physical worries and anxieties that were intolerable. If she had manifested any coolness, if she had shown that she was tiring of this passion of his that she felt and knew was constantly increasing in violence, he might at first have been irritated and then in turn offended, discouraged, and resigned, but on the contrary she manifested more affection for him than ever, she seemed more flattered by his love, more desirous of retaining it, while not responding to it otherwise than by friendly marks of preference which were beginning to make all her other admirers jealous.

She could never see enough of him in her own house, and the same telegram that would announce to André that she could not come to Auteuil would convey to him her urgent request to dine with her or come and spend an hour in the evening. At first he had taken these invitations as her way of making amends to him, but afterward he came to understand that she liked to have him near her and that she really experienced the need of him, more so than of the others. She had need of him as an idol needs prayers and faith in order to make it a god; standing in the empty shrine it is but a bit of carved wood, but let a believer enter the sanctuary, and kneel and prostrate himself and worship with fervent prayers, drunk with religion, it becomes the equal of Brahma or of Allah, for every loved being is a kind of god. Mme de Burne felt that she was adapted beyond all others to play this rôle of fetich, to fill woman's mission, bestowed on her by nature, of being sought after and adored, and of vanquishing men by the arms of her beauty, grace, and coquetry.

In the meantime she took no pains to conceal her affection and her strong liking for Mariolle, careless of what folks might say about it, possibly with the secret desire of irritating and inflaming the others. They could hardly ever come to her house without finding him there, generally installed in the great easy-chair that Lamarthe had come to call the "pulpit of the officiating priest," and it afforded her sincere pleasure to remain alone in his company for an entire evening, talking and listening to him. She had taken a liking to this kind of family life that he had revealed to her, to this constant contact with an agreeable, well-stored mind, which was hers and at her command just as much as were the little trinkets that littered her dressing-table. In like manner she gradually came to yield to him much of herself, of her thoughts, of her deeper mental personality, in the course of those affectionate confidences that are as pleasant in the giving as in the receiving. She felt herself more at ease, more frank and familiar with him than with the others, and she loved him the more for it. She also experienced the sensation, dear to womankind, that she was really bestowing something, that she was confiding to some one all that she had to give, a thing that she had never done before.

In her eyes this was much, in his it was very little. He was still waiting and hoping for the great final breaking up of her being which should give him her soul beneath his caresses.

Caresses she seemed to regard as useless, annoying, rather a nuisance than otherwise. She submitted to them, not without returning them, but tired of them quickly, and this feeling doubtless engendered in her a shade of dislike to them. The slightest and most insignificant of them seemed to be irksome to her. When in the course of conversation he would take her hand and carry it to his lips and hold it there a little, she always seemed desirous of withdrawing it, and he could feel the movement of the muscles in her arm preparatory to taking it away.

He felt these things like so many thrusts of a knife, and he carried away from her presence wounds that bled unintermittently in the solitude of his love. How was it that she had not that period of unreasoning attraction toward him that almost every woman has when once she has made the entire surrender of her being? It may be of short duration, frequently it is followed quickly by weariness and disgust, but it is seldom that it is not there at all, for a day, for an hour! This mistress of his had made of him, not a lover, but a sort of intelligent companion of her life.

Of what was he complaining? Those who yield themselves entirely perhaps have less to give than she!

He was not complaining; he was afraid. He was afraid of that other one, the man who would spring up unexpectedly whenever she might chance to fall in with him, to-morrow, may be, or the day after, whoever he might be, artist, actor, soldier, or man of the world, it mattered not what, born to find favor in her woman’s eyes and securing her favor for no other reason, because he was *the man,* the one destined to implant in her for the first time the imperious desire of opening her arms to him.

He was now jealous of the future as before he had at times been jealous of her unknown past, and all the young woman’s intimates were beginning to be jealous of him. He was the subject of much conversation among them; they even made dark and mysterious allusions to the subject in her presence. Some said that he was her lover, while others, guided by Lamarthe’s opinion, decided that she was only making a fool of him in order to irritate and exasperate them, as it was her habit to do, and that this was all there was to it. Her father took the matter up and made some remarks to her which she did not receive with good grace, and the more conscious she became of the reports that were circulating among her acquaintance, the more, by an odd contradiction to the prudence that had ruled her life, did she persist in making an open display of the preference that she felt for Mariolle.

He, however, was somewhat disturbed by these suspicious mutterings. He spoke to her of it.

“What do I care?” she said.

“If you only loved me, as a lover!”

“Do I not love you, my friend?”

“Yes and no; you love me well enough in your own house, but very badly elsewhere. I should prefer it to be just the opposite, for my sake, and even, indeed, for your own.”

She laughed and murmured: “We can’t do more than we can.”

“If you only knew the mental trouble that I experience in trying to animate your love. At times I seem to be trying to grasp the intangible, to be clasping an iceberg in my arms that chills me and melts away within my embrace.”

She made no answer, not fancying the subject, and assumed the absent manner that she often wore at Auteuil. He did not venture to press the matter further. He looked upon her a good deal as amateurs look upon the precious objects in a museum that tempt them so strongly and that they know they cannot carry away with them.

His days and nights were made up of hours of suffering, for he was living in the fixed idea, and still more in the sentiment than in the idea, that she was his and yet not his, that she was conquered and still at liberty, captured and yet impregnable. He was living at her side, as near her as could be, without ever reaching her, and he loved her with all the unsatiated longings of his body and his soul. He began to write to her again, as he had done at the commencement of their *liaison.* Once before with ink he had vanquished her early scruples; once again with ink he might be victorious over this later and obstinate resistance. Putting longer intervals between his visits to her, he told her in almost daily letters of the fruitlessness of his love. Now and then, when he had been very eloquent and impassioned and had evinced great sorrow, she answered him. Her letters, dated for effect midnight, or one, two, or three o’clock in the morning, were clear and precise, well considered, encouraging, and afflicting. She reasoned well, and they were not destitute of wit and even fancy, but it was in vain that he read them and reread them, it was in vain that he admitted that they were to the point, well turned, intelligent, graceful, and satisfactory to his masculine vanity; they had in them nothing of her heart, they satisfied him no more than did the kisses that she gave him in the house at Auteuil.

He asked himself why this was so, and when he had learned them by heart he came to know them so well that he discovered the reason, for a person's writings always afford the surest clue to his nature. Spoken words dazzle and deceive, for lips are pleasing and eyes seductive, but black characters set down upon white paper expose the soul in all its nakedness.

Man, thanks to the artifices of rhetoric, to his professional address and his habit of using the pen to discuss all the affairs of life, often succeeds in disguising his own nature by his impersonal prose style, literary or business, but woman never writes unless it is of herself and something of her being goes into her every word. She knows nothing of the subtilities of style and surrenders herself unreservedly in her ignorance of the scope and value of words. Mariolle called to mind the memoirs and correspondence of celebrated women that he had read; how distinctly their characters were all set forth there, the *précieuses,* the witty, and the sensible! What struck him most in Mme de Burne's letters was that no trace of sensibility was to be discovered in them. This woman had the faculty of thought but not of feeling. He called to mind letters that he had received from other persons; he had had many of them. A little *bourgeoise* that he had met while traveling and who had loved him for the space of three months had written delicious, thrilling notes, abounding in fresh and unexpected terms of sentiment; he had been surprised by the flexibility, the elegant coloring, and the variety of her style. Whence had she obtained this gift? From the fact that she was a woman of sensibility; there could be no other answer. A woman does not elaborate her phrases; they come to her intelligence straight from her emotions; she does not rummage the dictionary for fine words. What she feels strongly she expresses justly, without long and labored consideration, in the adaptive sincerity of her nature.

He tried to test the sincerity of his mistress's nature by means of the lines which she wrote him. They were well written and full of amiability, but how was it that she could find nothing better for him? Ah! for her *he* had found words that burned as living coals!

When his valet brought in his mail he would look for an envelope bearing the longed-for handwriting, and when he recognized it an involuntary emotion would arise in him, succeeded by a beating of the heart. He would extend his hand and grasp the bit of paper; again he would scrutinize the address, then tear it open. What had she to say to him? Would he find the word “love” there? She had never written or uttered this word without qualifying it by the adverb “well”: “I love you well”; “I love you much”; “Do I not love you?” He knew all these formulas, which are inexpressive by reason of what is tacked on to them. Can there be such a thing as a comparison between the degrees of love when one is in its toils? Can one decide whether he loves well or ill? “To love much,” what a dearth of love that expression manifests! One loves, nothing more, nothing less; nothing can be said, nothing expressed, nothing imagined that means more than that one simple sentence. It is brief, it is everything. It becomes body, soul, life, the whole of our being. We feel it as we feel the warm blood in our veins, we inhale it as we do the air, we carry it within us as we carry our thoughts, for it becomes the atmosphere of the mind. Nothing has existence beside it. It is not a word, it is an inexpressible state of being, represented by a few letters. All the conditions of life are changed by it; whatever we do, there is nothing done or seen or tasted or enjoyed or suffered just as it was before. Mariolle had become the victim of this small verb, and his eye would run rapidly over the lines, seeking there a tenderness answering to his own. He did in fact find there sufficient to warrant him in saying to himself: “She loves me very well,” but never to make him exclaim: “She loves me!” She was continuing in her correspondence the pretty, poetical romance that had had its inception at Mont Saint-Michel. It was the literature of love, not of *the* love.

When he had finished reading and re-reading them, he would lock the precious and disappointing sheets in a drawer and seat himself in his easy-chair. He had passed many a bitter hour in it before this.

After a while her answers to his letters became less frequent; doubtless she was somewhat weary of manufacturing phrases and ringing the changes on the same stale theme. And then, besides, she was passing through a period of unwonted fashionable excitement, of which André had presaged the approach with that increment of suffering that such insignificant, disagreeable incidents can bring to troubled hearts.

It was a winter of great gaiety. A mad intoxication had taken possession of Paris and shaken the city to its depths; all night long cabs and *coupés* were rolling through the streets and through the windows were visible white apparitions of women in evening toilette. Everyone was having a good time; all the conversation was on plays and balls, matinées and soirées. The contagion, an epidemic of pleasure, as it were, had quickly extended to all classes of society, and Mme de Burne also was attacked by it.

It had all been brought about by the effect that her beauty had produced at a dance at the Austrian embassy. The Comte de Bernhaus had made her acquainted with the ambassadress, the Princess de Malten, who had been immediately and entirely delighted with Mme de Burne. Within a very short time she became the Princess’s very intimate friend and thereby extended with great rapidity her relations among the most select diplomatic and aristocratic circles. Her grace, her elegance, her charming manners, her intelligence and wit quickly achieved a triumph for her and made her *la mode,* and many of the highest titles among the women of France sought to be presented to her. Every Monday would witness a long line of *coupés* with arms on their panels drawn up along the curb of the Rue du Général-Foy, and the footmen would lose their heads and make sad havoc with the high-sounding names that they bellowed into the drawing-room, confounding duchesses with marquises, countesses with baronnes.

She was entirely carried off her feet. The incense of compliments and invitations, the feeling that she was become one of the elect to whom Paris bends the knee in worship as long as the fancy lasts, the delight of being thus admired, made much of, and run after, were too much for her and gave rise within her soul to an acute attack of snobbishness.

Her artistic following did not submit to this condition of affairs without a struggle, and the revolution produced a close alliance among her old friends. Fresnel, even, was accepted by them, enrolled on the regimental muster and became a power in the league, while Mariolle was its acknowledged head, for they were all aware of the ascendency that he had over her and her friendship for him. He, however, watched her as she was whirled away in this flattering popularity as a child watches the vanishing of his red balloon when he has let go the string. It seemed to him that she was eluding him in the midst of this elegant, motley, dancing throng and flying far, far away from that secret happiness that he had so ardently desired for both of them, and he was jealous of everybody and everything, men, women, and inanimate objects alike. He conceived a fierce detestation for the life that she was leading, for all the people that she associated with, all the *fêtes* that she frequented, balls, theaters, music, for they were all in a league to take her from him by bits and absorb her days and nights, and only a few scant hours were now accorded to their intimacy. His indulgence of this unreasoning spite came near causing him a fit of sickness, and when he visited her he brought with him such a wan face that she said to him:

"What ails you? You have changed of late, and are very thin."

"I have been loving you too much," he replied. She gave him a grateful look: "No one ever loves too much, my friend."

"Can you say such a thing as that?"

"Why, yes."

"And you do not see that I am dying of my vain love for you."

"In the first place it is not true that you love in vain; then no one ever dies of that complaint, and finally all our friends are jealous of you, which proves pretty conclusively that 1 am not treating you badly, all things considered."

He took her hand: "You do not understand me!"

"Yes, I understand very well."

"You hear the despairing appeal that I am incessantly making to your heart?"

"Yes, I have heard it."

"And— "

"And it gives me much pain, for I love you enormously."

"And then?"

"Then you say to me: 'Be like me; think, feel, express yourself as I do.' But, my poor friend, I can't. I am what I am. You must take me as God made me, since I gave myself thus to you, since I have no regrets for having done so and no desire to withdraw from the bargain, since there is no one among all my acquaintance that is dearer to me than you are."

"You do not love me!"

"I love you with all the power of loving that exists in me. If it is not different or greater, is that mv fault?"

"If I was certain of that I might content myself with it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I believe you capable of loving otherwise, but that I do not believe that it lies in me to inspire you with a genuine passion."

"My friend, you are mistaken. You are more to me than anyone has ever been hitherto, more than anyone will ever be in the future; at least that is my honest conviction. I may lay claim to this great merit: that I do not wear two faces with you, I do not feign to be what you so ardently desire me to be, when many women would act quite differently. Be a little grateful to me for this, and do not allow yourself to be agitated and unstrung; trust in my affection, which is yours, sincerely and unreservedly."

He saw how wide the difference was that parted them. "Ah!" he murmured, "how strangely you look at love and speak of it! To you, I am some one that you like to see now and then, whom you like to have beside you, but to me, you fill the universe: in it I know but you, feel but you, need but you."

She smiled with satisfaction and replied: "I know that; I understand. I am delighted to have it so, and I say to you: Love me always like that if you can, for it gives me great happiness, but do not force me to act a part before you that would be distressing to me and unworthy of us both. I have been aware for some time of the approach of this crisis; it is the cause of much suffering to me, for I am deeply attached to you, but I cannot bend my nature or shape it in conformity with yours. Take me as I am."

Suddenly he asked her: "Have you ever thought, have you ever believed, if only for a day, only for an hour, either before or after, that you might be able to love me otherwise?"

She was at a loss for an answer and reflected for a few seconds. He waited anxiously for her to speak, and continued: "You see, don't you, that you have had other dreams as well?"

"I may have been momentarily deceived in myself," she murmured, thoughtfully.

"Oh! how ingenious you are!" he exclaimed; "how psychological! No one ever reasons thus from the impulse of the heart."

She was reflecting still, interested in her thoughts, in this self-investigation; finally she said: "Before I came to love you as I love you now, I may indeed have thought that I might come to be more — more — more captivated with you, but then I certainly should not have been so frank and simple with you. Perhaps later on I should have been less sincere."

"Why less sincere later on?"

"Because all of love, according to your idea, lies in this formula: 'Everything or nothing,' and this 'everything or nothing' as far as I can see means: 'Everything at first, nothing afterward.' It is when the reign of nothing commences that women begin to be deceitful." —

He replied in great distress: "But you do not see how wretched I am — how I am tortured by the thought that you might have loved me otherwise.

You have felt that thought: therefore it is some other one that you will love in that manner."

She unhesitatingly replied: "I do not believe it."

"And why? Yes, why, I ask you? Since you have had the foreknowledge of love, since you have felt in anticipation the fleeting and torturing hope of confounding soul and body with the soul and body of another, of losing your being in his and taking his being to be portion of your own, since you have perceived the possibility of this ineffable emotion, the day will come, sooner or later, when you will experience it."

"No; my imagination deceived me, and deceived itself. I am giving you all that I have to give you. I have reflected deeply on this subject since I have been your mistress. Observe that I do not mince matters, not even my words. Really and truly, I am convinced that I cannot love you more or better than I do at this moment. You see that I talk to you just as I talk to myself. I do that because you are very intelligent, because you understand and can read me like a book, and the best way is to conceal nothing from you; it is the only way to keep us long and closely united. And that is what I hope for, my friend."

He listened to her as a man drinks when he is thirsty, then kneeled before her and laid his head in her lap. He took her little hands and pressed them to his lips, murmuring: "Thanks! thanks!" When he raised his eyes to look at her, he saw that there were tears standing in hers; then placing her arms in turn about André's neck, she gently drew him toward her, bent over and kissed him upon the eyelids.

"Take a chair," she said; "it is not prudent to be kneeling before me here."

He seated himself, and when they had contemplated each other in silence for a few moments, she asked him if he would take her some day to visit the exhibition that the sculptor Prédolé, of whom everyone was talking enthusiastically, was then giving of his works. She had in her dressing-room a bronze Love of his, a charming figure pouring water into her bath-tub, and she had a great desire to see the complete collection of the eminent artist's works which had been delighting all Paris for a week past at the Varin gallery. They fixed upon a date and then Mariolle arose to take leave.

"Will you be at Auteuil to-morrow?" she asked him in a whisper.

"Oh! Yes!"

He was very joyful on his way homeward, intoxicated by that "Perhaps?" which never dies in the heart of a lover.

CHAPTER IX. DISILLUSION

Mme de Burne’s *coupé* was proceeding at a quick trot along the Rue de Grenelle. It was early April, and the hailstones of a belated storm beat noisily against the glasses of the carriage and rattled off upon the roadway which was already whitened by the falling particles. Men on foot were hurrying along the sidewalk beneath their umbrellas, with coat-collars turned up to protect their necks and ears. After two weeks of fine weather a detestable cold spell had set in, the farewell of winter, freezing up everything and bringing chapped hands and chilblains.

With her feet resting upon a vessel filled with hot water and her form enveloped in soft furs that warmed her through her dress with a velvety caress that was so deliciously agreeable to her sensitive skin, the young woman was sadly reflecting that in an hour at farthest she would have to take a cab to go and meet Mariolle at Auteuil. She was seized by a strong desire to send him a telegram, but she had promised herself more than two months ago that she would not again have recourse to this expedient unless compelled to, for she had been making a great effort to love him in the same manner that he loved her. She had seen how he suffered, and had commiserated him, and after that conversation when she had kissed him upon the eyes in an outburst of genuine tenderness, her sincere affection for him had, in fact, assumed a warmer and more expansive character. In her surprise at her involuntary coldness she had asked herself why, after all, she could not love him as other women love their lovers, since she knew that she was deeply attached to him and that he was more pleasing to her than any other man. This indifference of her love could only proceed from a sluggish action of the heart, which could be cured like any other sluggishness.

She tried it. She endeavored to arouse her feelings by thoughts of him, to be more demonstrative in his presence. She was successful now and then, just as one excites his fears at night by thinking of ghosts or robbers. Fired a little herself by this pretense of passion, she even forced herself to be more caressing; she succeeded very well at first, and delighted him to the point of intoxication.

She thought that this was the beginning in her of a fever somewhat similar to that with which she knew that he was consuming. Her old intermittent hopes of love, that she had dimly seen the possibility of realizing the night that she had dreamed her dreams among the white mists of Saint-Michel’s Bay, took form and shape again, not so seductive as then, less wrapped in clouds of poetry and idealism, but more clearly defined, more human, stripped of illusion after the experience of her *liaison.* Then she had summoned up and watched for that irresistible impulse of all the being toward another being that arises, she had heard, when the emotions of the soul act upon two physical natures. She had watched in vain; it had never come.

She persisted, however, in feigning ardor, in making their interviews more frequent, in saying to him: “I feel that I am coming to love you more and more.” But she became weary of it at last, and was powerless longer to impose upon herself or deceive him. She was astonished to find that the kisses that he gave her were becoming distasteful to her after a while, although she was not by any means entirely insensible to them.

This was made manifest to her by the vague lassitude that took possession of her from the early morning of those days when she had an appointment with him. Why was it that on those mornings she did not feel, as other women feel, all her nature troubled by the desire and anticipation of his embraces? She endured them, indeed she accepted them, with tender resignation, but as a woman conquered, brutally subjugated, responding contrary to her own will, never voluntarily and with pleasure. Could it be that her nature, so delicate, so exceptionally aristocratic and refined, had in it depths of modesty, the modesty of a superior and sacred animality, that were as yet unfathomed by modern perceptions?

Mariolle gradually came to understand this; he saw her factitious ardor growing less and less. He divined the nature of her love-inspired attempt, and a mortal, inconsolable sorrow took possession of his soul.

She knew now, as he knew, that the attempt had been made and that all hope was gone. The proof of this was that this very day, wrapped as she was in her warm furs and with her feet on her hot-water bottle, glowing with a feeling of physical comfort as she watched the hail beating against the windows of her *coupé*, she could not find in her the courage to leave this luxurious warmth to get into an ice-cold cab to go and meet the poor fellow.

The idea of breaking with him, of avoiding his caresses, certainly never occurred to her for a moment. She was well aware that to completely captivate a man who is in love and keep him as one's own peculiar private property in the midst of feminine rivalries, a woman must surrender herself to him body and soul. That she knew, for it is logical, fated, indisputable. It is even the loyal course to pursue, and she wanted to be loyal to him in all the uprightness of her nature as his mistress. She would go to him then, she would go to him always; but why so often? Would not their interviews even assume a greater charm for him, an attraction of novelty, if they were granted more charily, like rare and inestimable gifts presented to him by her and not to be used too prodigally?

Whenever she had gone to Auteuil she had had the impression that she was bearing to him a priceless gift, the most precious of offerings. In giving in this way, the pleasure of giving is inseparable from a certain sensation of sacrifice; it is the pride that one feels in being generous, the satisfaction of conferring happiness, not the transports of a mutual passion.

She even calculated that Andre's love would be more likely to be enduring if she abated somewhat of her familiarity with him, for hunger always increases by fasting, and desire is but an appetite. Immediately that this resolution was formed she made up her mind that she would go to Auteuil that day, but would feign indisposition. The journey, which a minute ago had seemed to her so difficult through the inclement weather, now appeared to her quite easy, and she understood, with a smile at her own expense and at this sudden revelation, why she made such a difficulty about a thing that was quite natural. But a moment ago she would not, now she would. The reason why she would not a moment ago was that she was anticipating the thousand petty disagreeable details of the rendezvous! She would prick her fingers with pins that she handled very awkwardly, she would be unable to find the articles that she had thrown at random upon the bedroom floor as she disrobed in haste, already looking forward to the hateful task of having to dress without an attendant.

She paused at this reflection, dwelling upon it and weighing it carefully for the first time. After all, was it not rather repugnant, rather vulgarizing, this idea of a rendezvous for a stated time, settled upon a day or two days in advance, just like a business appointment or a consultation with your doctor? There is nothing more natural, after a long and charming *tête-à-tête,* than that the lips which have been uttering warm, seductive words should meet in a passionate kiss; but how different that was from the premeditated kiss that she went there to receive, watch in hand, once a week. There was so much truth in this that on those days when she was not to see André she had frequently felt a vague desire of being with him, while this desire was scarcely perceptible at all when she had to go to him in foul cabs, through squalid streets, with the cunning of a hunted thief, all her feelings toward him quenched and deadened by these considerations.

Ah! that appointment at Auteuil! She had calculated the time on all the clocks of all her friends; she had watched the minutes that brought her nearer to it slip away at Mme de Frémines's, at Mme de Bratiane's, at pretty Mme le Prieur's, on those afternoons when she killed time by roaming about Paris so as not to remain in her own house, where she might be detained by an inopportune visit or some other unforeseen obstacle.

She suddenly said to herself: "I will make today a day of rest; I will go there very late." Then she opened a little cupboard in the front of the carriage, concealed among the folds of black silk that lined the *coupé,* which was fitted up as luxuriously as a pretty woman's boudoir. The first thing that presented itself when she had thrown open the doors of this secret receptacle was a mirror playing on hinges that she moved so that it was on a level with her face. Behind the mirror, in their satin-lined niches, were various small objects in silver: a box for her rice-powder, a pencil for her lips, two crystal scent-bottles, an inkstand and penholder, scissors, a pretty paper-cutter to tear the leaves of the last novel with which she amused herself as she rolled along the streets. The exquisite clock, of the size and shape of a walnut, told her that it was four o'clock. Mme de Burne reflected: "I have an hour yet, at all events," and she touched a spring that had the effect of making the footman who was seated beside the coachman stoop and take up the speaking-tube to receive her order. She pulled out the other end from where it was concealed in the lining of the carriage, and applying her lips to the mouthpiece of rock-crystal: "To the Austrian embassy!" she said.

Then she inspected herself in the mirror. The look that she gave herself expressed, as it always did, the delight that one feels in looking upon one's best beloved; then she threw back her furs to judge of the effect of her corsage. It was a toilette adapted to the chill days of the end of winter. The neck was trimmed with a bordering of very fine white down that shaded off into a delicate gray as it fell over the shoulders, like the wing of a bird.

Upon her hat — it was a kind of toque — there towered an aigret of more brightly colored feathers, and the general effect that her costume inspired was to make one think that she had got herself up in this manner in preparation for a flight through the hail and the gray sky in company with Mother Carey's chickens.

She was still complacently contemplating herself when the carriage suddenly wheeled into the great court of the embassy.

Thereupon she arranged her wrap, lowered the mirror to its place, closed the doors of the little cupboard, and when the *coupé* had come to a halt said to her coachman: "You may go home; I shall not need you any more." Then she asked the footman who came forward from the entrance of the hotel: "Is the Princess at home?"

"Yes, Madame."

She entered and ascended the stairs and came to a small drawing-room where the Princess de Malten was writing letters.

The ambassadress arose with an appearance of much satisfaction when she perceived her friend, and they kissed each other twice in succession upon the cheek, close to the corner of the lips. Then they seated themselves side by side upon two low chairs in front of the fire. They were very fond of each other, took great delight in each other's society and understood each other thoroughly, for they were almost counterparts in nature and disposition, belonging to the same race of femininity, brought up in the same atmosphere and endowed with the same sensations, although Mme de Malten was a Swede and had married an Austrian. They had a strange and mysterious attraction for each other, from which resulted a profound feeling of unmixed well-being and contentment whenever they were together. Their babble would run on for half a day on end, without once stopping, trivial, futile talk, interesting to them both by reason of their similarity of tastes.

"You see how I love you!" said Mme de Burne. "You are to dine with me this evening, and still I could not help coming to see you. It is a real passion, my dear."

"A passion that I share," the Swede replied with a smile.

Following the habit of their profession, they put each her best foot foremost for the benefit of the other; coquettish as if they had been dealing with a man, but with a different style of coquetry, for the strife was different, and they had not before them the adversary, but the rival.

Madame de Burne had kept looking at the clock during the conversation. It was on the point of striking five. He had been waiting there an hour. “That is long enough,” she said to herself as she arose.

“So soon?” said the Princess.

“Yes,” the other unblushingly replied. “I am in a hurry; there is some one waiting for me. I would a great deal rather stay here with you.”

They exchanged kisses again, and Mme de Burne, having requested the footman to call a cab for her, drove away.

The horse was lame and dragged the cab after him wearily, and the animal’s halting and fatigue seemed to have infected the young woman. Like the broken-winded beast, she found the journey long and difficult. At one moment she was comforted by the pleasure of seeing André, at the next she was in despair at the thought of the discomforts of the interview.

She found him waiting for her behind the gate, shivering. The biting blasts roared through the branches of the trees, the hailstones rattled on their umbrella as they made their way to the house, their feet sank deep into the mud. The garden was dead, dismal, miry, melancholy, and André was very pale. He was enduring terrible suffering.

When they were in the house: “Gracious, how cold it is!” she exclaimed.

And yet a great fire was blazing in each of the two rooms, but they had not been lighted until past noon and had not had time to dry the damp walls, and shivers ran through her frame. “I think that I will not take off my furs just yet,” she added. She only unbuttoned her outer garment and threw it open, disclosing her warm costume and her plume-decked corsage, like a bird of passage that never remains long in one place.

He seated himself beside her.

“There is to be a delightful dinner at my house to-night,” she said, “and I am enjoying it in anticipation.”

“Who are to be there?”

“Why, you, in the first place; then Prédolé, whom I have so long wanted to know.”

“Ah! Prédolé is to be there?”

“Yes; Lamarthe is to bring him.”

“But Prédolé is not the kind of a man to suit you, not a bit! Sculptors in general are not so constituted as to please pretty women, and Prédolé less so than any of them.”

“Oh, my friend, that cannot be. I have such an admiration for him!”

The sculptor Prédolé had gained a great success and had captivated all Paris some two months before by his exhibition at the Varin gallery. Even before that he had been highly appreciated; people had said of him, “His *figurines* are delicious”; but when the world of artists and connoisseurs had assembled to pass judgment upon his collected works in the rooms of the Rue Varin, the outburst of enthusiasm had been explosive. They seemed to afford the revelation of such an unlooked-for charm, they displayed such a peculiar gift in the translation of elegance and grace, that it seemed as if a new manner of expressing the beauty of form had been born to the world. His specialty was statuettes in extremely abbreviated costumes, in which his genius displayed an unimaginable delicacy of form and airy lightness. His dancing girls, especially, of which he had made many studies, displayed in the highest perfection, in their pose and the harmony of their attitude and motion, the ideal of female beauty and suppleness.

For a month past Mme de Burne had been unceasing in her efforts to attract him to her house, but the artist was unsociable, even something of a bear, so the report ran. At last she had succeeded, thanks to the intervention of Lamarthe, who had made a touching, almost frantic appeal to the gratefui sculptor.

“Whom have you besides?” Mariolle inquired. “The Princess de Malten.”

He was displeased; he did not fancy that woman. “ Who else?”

“Massival, Bernhaus, and George de Maltry. That is all: only my select circle. You are acquainted with Prédolé, are you not?”

“Yes, slightly.”

“How do you like him?”

“He is delightful; I never met a man so enamored of his art and so interesting when he holds forth on it.” She was delighted and again said: ‘It will be charming.”

He had taken her hand under her fur cloak; he gave it a little squeeze, then kissed it. Then all at once it came to her mind that she had forgotten to tell him that she was ill, and casting about on the spur of the moment for another reason, she murmured: “Gracious! how cold it is!”

“Do you think so?”

“I am chilled to my very marrow.”

He arose to take a look at the thermometer, which was, in fact, pretty low; then he resumed his seat at her side.

She had said: "Gracious! how cold it is!" and he believed that he understood her. For three weeks, now, at every one of their interviews, he had noticed that her attempt to feign tenderness was gradually becoming fainter and fainter. He saw that she was weary of wearing this mask, so weary that she could continue it no longer, and he himself was so exasperated by the little power that he had over her, so stung by his vain and unreasoning desire of this woman, that he was beginning to say to himself in his despairing moments of solitude: "It will be better to break with her than to continue to live like this."

He asked her, by way of fathoming her intentions: "Won't you take off your cloak now?"

"Oh, no," she said; "I have been coughing all the morning; this fearful weather has given me a sore throat. I am afraid that I may be ill." She was silent a moment, then added: "If I had not wanted to see you very much indeed I would not have come to-day." As he did not reply, in his grief and anger, she went on: "This return of cold weather is very dangerous, coming as it does after the fine days of the past two weeks."

She looked out into the garden, where the trees were already almost green despite the clouds of snow that were driving among their branches. He looked at her and thought: "So that is the kind of love that she feels for me!" and for the first time he began to feel a sort of jealous hatred of her, of her face, of her elusive affection, of her form, so long pursued, so subtle to escape him. "She pretends that she is cold," he said to himself. "She is cold only because I am here. If it were a question of some party of pleasure, some of those idiotic caprices that go to make up the useless existence of these frivolous creatures, she would brave everything and risk her life. Does she not ride about in an open carriage on the coldest days to show her fine clothes? Ah! that is the way with them all nowadays!"

He looked at her as she sat there facing him so calmly, and he knew that in that head, that dear little head that he adored so, there was one wish paramount, the wish that their *tête-à-tête* might not be protracted; it was becoming painful to her.

Was it true that there had ever existed, that there existed now, women capable of passion, of emotion, who weep, suffer, and bestow themselves in a transport, loving with heart and soul and body, with mouth that speaks and eyes that gaze, with heart that beats and hand that caresses; women ready to brave all for the sake of their love, and to go, by day or by night, regardless of menaces and watchful eyes, fearlessly, tremorously, to him who stands with open arms waiting to receive them, mad, ready to sink with their happiness?

Oh, that horrible love that which now held him in its fetters! — love without issue, without end, joyless and triumphless, eating away his strength and devouring him with its anxieties; love in which there was no charm and no delight, cause to him only of suffering, sorrow, and bitter tears, where he was constantly pursued by the intolerable regret of the impossibility of awaking responsive kisses upon lips that are as cold and dry and sterile as dead trees!

He looked at her as she sat there, so charming in her feathery dress. Were not her dresses the great enemy that he had to contend against, more than the woman herself, jealous guardians, coquettish and costly barriers, that kept him from his mistress?

“Your toilette is charming,” he said, not caring to speak of the subject that was torturing him so cruelly.

She replied with a smile: “You must see the one that I shall wear to-night.” Then she coughed several times in succession and said: “I am really taking cold. Let me go, my friend. The sun will show himself again shortly, and I will follow his example.”

He made no effort to detain her, for he was discouraged, seeing that nothing could now avail to overcome the inertia of this sluggish nature, that his romance was ended, ended forever, and that it was useless to hope for ardent words from those tranquil lips, or a kindling glance from those calm eyes. All at once he felt rising with gathering strength within him the stern determination to end this torturing subserviency. She had nailed him upon a cross; he was bleeding from every limb, and she watched his agony without feeling for his suffering, even rejoicing that she had had it in her power to effect so much. But he would tear himself from his deathly gibbet, leaving there bits of his body, strips of his flesh, and all his mangled heart. He would flee like a wild animal that the hunters have wounded almost unto death, he would go and hide himself in some lonely place where his wounds might heal and where he might feel only those dull pangs that remain with the mutilated until they are released by death.

“Farewell, then,” he said.

She was struck by the sadness of his voice and rejoined: “Until this evening, my friend.”

“Until this evening,” he re-echoed. “Farewell.” He saw her to the garden gate, and came back and seated himself, alone, before the fire.

Alonel How cold it was; how cold, indeed! How sad he was, how lonely! It was all ended! Ah, what a horrible thought! There was an end of hoping and waiting for her, dreaming of her, with that fierce blazing of the heart that at times brings out our existence upon this somber earth with the vividness of fireworks displayed against the blackness of the night. Farewell those nights of solitary emotion when, almost until the dawn, he paced his chamber thinking of her; farewell those wakings when, upon opening his eyes, he said to himself: “Soon I shall see her at our little house.”

How he loved her! how he loved her! What a long, hard task it would be to him to forget her! She had left him because it was cold! He saw her before him as but now, looking at him and bewitching him, bewitching him the better to break his heart. Ah, how well she had done her work! With one single stroke, the first and last, she had cleft it asunder. He felt the old gaping wound begin to open, the wound that she had dressed and now had made incurable by plunging into it the knife of death-dealing indifference. He even felt that from this broken heart there was something distilling itself through his frame, mounting to his throat and choking him; then, covering his eyes with his hands, as if to conceal this weakness even from himself, he wept.

She had left him because it was cold! He would have walked naked through the driving snow to meet her, no matter where; he would have cast himself from the house top, only to fall at her feet. An old tale came to his mind, that has been made into a legend: that of the Côte des Deux Amans, a spot which the traveler may behold as he journeys toward Rouen. A maiden, obedient to her father’s cruel caprice, which prohibited her from marrying the man of her choice unless she accomplished the task of carrying him, unassisted, to the summit of the steep mountain, succeeded in dragging him up there on her hands and knees, and died as she reached the top. Love, then, is but a legend, made to be sung in verse or told in lying romances!

Had not his mistress herself, in one of their earliest interviews, made use of an expression that he had never forgotten: “Men nowadays do not love women so as really to harm themselves by it. You may believe me, for I know them both” She had been wrong in his case, but not in her own, for on another occasion she had said: “In any event, I give you fair warning that I am incapable of being really smitten with anyone, be he who he may.”

Be he who he may? Was that quite a sure thing? Of him, no; of that he was quite well assured now, but of another?

Of him? She could not love him. Why not?

Then the feeling that his life had been a wasted one, which had haunted him for a long time past, fell upon him as if it would crush him. He had done nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing, succeeded in nothing. When he had felt an attraction toward the arts he had not found in himself the courage that is required to devote one’s self exclusively to one of them, nor the persistent determination that they demand as the price of success. There had been no triumph to cheer him; no elevated taste for some noble career to ennoble and aggrandize his mind. The only strenuous effort that he had ever put forth, the attempt to conquer a woman’s heart, had proved ineffectual like all the rest. Take him all in all, he was only a miserable failure.

He was weeping still beneath his hands which he held pressed to his eyes. The tears, trickling down his cheeks, wet his mustache and left a salty taste upon his lips, and their bitterness increased his wretchedness and his despair.

When he raised his head at last he saw that it was night. He had only just sufficient time to go home and dress for her dinner.

CHAPTER X. FLIGHT

ANDRÉ MARIOLLE was the first to arrive at Mme de Burne's. He took a seat and gazed about him upon the walls, the furniture, the hangings, at all the small objects and *fa* trinkets that were so dear to him from their association with her — at the familiar apartment where he had first known her, where he had come to her so many times since then, and where he had discovered in himself the germs of that ill-starred passion that had kept on growing, day by day, until the hour of his barren victory. With what eagerness had he many a time awaited her coming in this charming spot which seemed to have been made for no one but her, an exquisite setting for an exquisite creature! How well he knew the pervading odor of this salon and its hangings; a subdued odor of iris, so simple and aristocratic. He grasped the arms of the great armchair, from which he had so often watched her smile and listened to her talk, as if they had been the hands of some friend that he was parting with forever. It would have pleased him if she could not come, if no one could come, and if he could remain there alone, all night, dreaming of his love, as people watch beside a dead man. Then at daylight he could go away for a long time, perhaps forever.

The door opened, and she appeared and came forward to him with outstretched hand. He was master of himself, and showed nothing of his agitation. She was not a woman, but a living bouquet — an indescribable bouquet of flowers.

A girdle of pinks enclasped her waist and fell about her in cascades, reaching to her feet. About her bare arms and shoulders ran a garland of mingled myosotis and lilies-of-the-valley, while three fairy-like orchids seemed to be growing from her breast and caressing the milk-white flesh with the rosy and red flesh of their supernal blooms. Her blond hair was studded with violets in enamel, in which minute diamonds glistened, and other diamonds, trembling upon golden pins, sparkled like dewdrops among the odorous trimming of her corsage.

"I shall have a headache," she said, "but I don't care; my dress is becoming."

Delicious odors emanated from her, like spring among the gardens. She was more fresh than the garlands that she wore. André was dazzled as he looked at her, reflecting that it would be no less brutal and barbarous to take her in his arms at that moment than it would be to trample upon a blossoming flower-bed. So their bodies were no longer objects to inspire love; they were objects to be adorned, simply frames on which to hang fine clothes. They were like birds, they were like flowers, they were like a thousand other things as much as they were like women. Their mothers, all women of past and gone generations, had used coquettish arts to enhance their natural beauties, but it had been their aim to please in the first place by their direct physical seductiveness, by the charm of native grace, by the irresistible attraction that the female form exercises over the heart of the males. At the present day coquetry was everything. Artifice was now the great means, and not only the means, but the end as well, for they employed it even more frequently to dazzle the eyes of rivals and excite barren jealousy than to subjugate men.

What end, then, was this toilette designed to serve, the gratification of the eyes of him, the lover, or the humiliation of the Princess de Malten?

The door opened, and the lady whose name was in his thoughts was announced.

Mme de Burne moved quickly forward to meet her and gave her a kiss, not unmindful of the orchids during the operation, her lips slightly parted, with a little grimace of tenderness. It was a pretty kiss, an extremely desirable kiss, given and returned from the heart by those two pairs of lips.

Mariolle gave a start of pain. Never once had she run to meet him with that joyful eagerness, never had she kissed him like that, and with a sudden change of ideas he said to himself: “Women are no longer made to fulfill our requirements.”

Massival made his appearance, then M. de Pradon and the Comte de Bernhaus, then George de Maltry, resplendent with English “chic.”

Lamarthe and Prédolé were now the only ones missing. The sculptor’s name was mentioned, and every voice was at once raised in praise of him. “He had restored to life the grace of form, he had recovered the lost traditions of the Renaissance, with something additional: the sincerity of modern art!” M. de Maltry maintained that he was the exquisite revealer of the suppleness of the human form. Such phrases as these had been current in the salons for the last two months, where they had been bandied about from mouth to mouth.

At last the great man appeared. Everyone was surprised. He was a large man of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a coal-heaver, a powerful face with strongly-marked features, surrounded by hair and beard that were beginning to turn white, a prominent nose, thick full lips, wearing a timid and embarrassed air. He held his arms away from his body in an awkward sort of way that was doubtless to be attributed to the immense hands that protruded from his sleeves. They were broad and thick, with hairy and muscular fingers; the hands of a Hercules or a butcher, and they seemed to be conscious of being in the way, embarrassed at finding themselves there and looking vainly for some convenient place to hide themselves. Upon looking more closely at his face, however, it was seen to be illuminated by clear, piercing, gray eyes of extreme expressiveness, and these alone served to impart some degree of life to the man’s heavy and torpid expression. They were constantly searching, inquiring, scrutinizing, darting their rapid, shifting glances here, there, and everywhere, and it was plainly to be seen that these eager, inquisitive looks were the animating principle of a deep and comprehensive intellect.

Mme de Burne was somewhat disappointed; she politely led the artist to a chair which he took and where he remained seated, apparently disconcerted by this introduction to a strange house.

Lamarthe, master of the situation, approached his friend with the intention of breaking the ice and relieving him from the awkwardness of his position. “My dear fellow,” he said, “let me make for you a little map to let you know where you are. You have seen our divine hostess; now look at her surroundings.” He showed him upon the mantelpiece a bust, authenticated in due form, by Houdon, then upon a cabinet in buhl a group representing two women dancing, with arms about each other’s waists, by Clodion, and finally four Tanagra statuettes upon an *étagère,* selected for their perfection of finish and detail.

Then all at once Prédolé’s face brightened as if he had found his children in the desert. He arose and went to the four little earthen figures, and when Mme de Burne saw him grasp two of them at once in his great hands that seemed made to slaughter oxen, she trembled for her treasures. When he laid hands on them, however, it appeared that it was only for the purpose of caressing them, for he handled them with wonderful delicacy and dexterity, turning them about in his thick fingers which somehow seemed all at once to have become as supple as a juggler's. It was evident by the gentle way the big man had of looking at and handling them that he had in his soul and his very finger-ends an ideal and delicate tenderness for such small elegancies.

"Are they not pretty?" Lamarthe asked him.

The sculptor went on to extol them as if they had been his own, and he spoke of some others, the most remarkable that he had met with, briefly and in a voice that was rather low but confident and calm, the expression of a clearly defined thought that was not ignorant of the value of words and their uses.

Still under the guidance of the author, he next inspected the other rare bric-à-brac that Mme de Burne had collected, thanks to the counsels of her friends. He looked with astonishment and delight at the various articles, apparently agreeably disappointed to find them there, and in every case he took them up and turned them lightly over in his hands, as if to place himself in direct personal contact with them. There was a statuette of bronze, heavy as a cannon-ball, hidden away in a dark corner; he took it up with one hand, carried it to the lamp, examined it at length, and replaced jt where it belonged without visible effort. Lamarthe exclaimed: "The great, strong fellow! he is built expressly to wrestle with stone and marble!" while the ladies looked at him approvingly.

Dinner was now announced. The mistress of the house took the sculptor's arm to pass to the diningroom, and when she had seated him in the place of honor at her right hand, she asked him out of courtesy, just as she would have questioned a scion of some great family as to the exact origin of his name: "Your art, Monsieur, has also the additional honor, has it not, of being the most ancient of all?"

He replied in his calm deep voice: *"Mon Dieu,* Madame, the shepherds in the Bible play upon the flute, therefore music would seem to be the more ancient — although true music, as we understand it, does not go very far back, while true sculpture dates from remote antiquity."

"You are fond of music?"

"I love all the arts," he replied with grave earnestness.

"Is it known who was the inventor of your art?" He reflected a moment, then replied in tender accents, as if he had been relating some touching tale: "According to Grecian tradition it was Dædalus the Athenian. The most attractive legend, however, is that which attributes the invention to a Sicyonian potter named Dibutades. His daughter Kora having traced her betrothed's profile with the assistance of an arrow, her father filled in the rude sketch with clay and modeled it. It was then that my art was born."

"Charming!" murmured Lamarthe. Then turning to Mme de Burne, he said: "You cannot imagine, Madame, how interesting this man becomes when he talks of what he loves; what power he has to express and explain it and make people adore it."

But the sculptor did not seem disposed either to pose for the admiration of the guests or to perorate. He had tucked a corner of his napkin between his shirt-collar and his neck and was reverentially eating his soup, with that appearance of respect that peasants manifest for that portion of the meal. Then he drank a glass of wine and drew himself up with an air of greater ease, of making himself more at home. Now and then he made a movement as if to turn around, for he had perceived the reflection in a mirror of a modern group that stood on the mantelshelf behind him. He did not recognize it and was seeking to divine the author. At last, unable longer to resist the impulse, he asked: "It is by Falguière, is it not?"

Mme de Burne laughed. "Yes, it is by Falguière. How could you tell, in a glass?"

He smiled in turn. "Ah, Madame, I can't explain how it is done, but I can tell at a glance the sculpture of those men who are painters as well, and the painting of those who also practice sculpture. It is not a bit like the work of a man who devotes himself to one art exclusively."

Lamarthe, wishing to show off his friend, called for explanations, and Prédolé proceeded to give them. In his slow, precise manner of speech he defined and illustrated the painting of sculptors and the sculpture of painters in such a clear and original way that he was listened to as much with eyes as with ears. Commencing his demonstration at the earliest period and pursuing it through the history of art and gathering examples from epoch to epoch, he came down to the time of the early Italian masters who were painters and sculptors at the same time, Nicolas and John of Pisa, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He spoke of Diderot's interesting remarks upon the same subject, and in conclusion mentioned Ghiberti's bronze gates of the baptistry of Saint John at Florence, such living and dramatically forceful bas-reliefs that they seem more like paintings upon canvas. He waved his great hands before him as if he were modeling, with such ease and grace of motion as to delight every eye, calling up above the plates and glasses the pictures that his tongue told of, and reconstructing the work that he mentioned with such conviction that everyone followed the motions of his fingers with breathless attention. Then some dishes that he fancied were placed before him and he ceased talking and began eating.

He scarcely spoke during the remainder of the dinner, not troubling himself to follow the conversation, which ranged from some bit of theatrical gossip to a political rumor; from a ball to a wedding; from an article in the "Revue des Deux Mondes" to the horse-show that had just opened. His appetite was good, and he drank a good deal, without being at all affected by it, having a sound, hard head that good wine could not easily upset.

When they had returned to the drawing-room, Lamarthe, who had not drawn the sculptor out to the extent that he wished to do, drew him over to a glass case to show him a priceless object, a classic, historic gem: a silver inkstand carved by Benvenuto Cellini. The men listened with extreme interest to his long and eloquent rhapsody as they stood grouped about him, while the two women, seated in front of the fire and rather disgusted to see so much enthusiasm wasted upon the form of inanimate objects, appeared to be a little bored and chatted together in a low voice from time to time. After that conversation became general, but not animated, for it had been somewhat damped by the ideas that had passed into the atmosphere of this pretty room, with its furnishing of precious objects.

Prédolé left early, assigning as a reason that he had to be at work at daybreak every morning. When he was gone Lamarthe enthusiastically asked Mme, de Burne: "Well, how did you like him?"

She replied, hesitatingly and with something of an air of ill nature: "He is quite interesting, but prosy."

The novelist smiled and said to himself: "*Parbleu,* that is because he did not admire your toilette; and you are the only one of all your pretty things that he hardly condescended to look at." He exchanged a few pleasant remarks with her and went over and took a seat by Mme de Malten, to whom he began to be very attentive. The Comte de Bernhaus approached the mistress of the house, and taking a small footstool, appeared sunk in devotion at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry, and M. de Pradon continued to talk of the sculptor, who had made a deep impression on their minds. M. de Maltry was comparing him to the old masters, for whom life was embellished and illuminated by an exclusive and consuming love of the manifestations of beauty, and he philosophized upon his theme with many very subtle and very tiresome observations.

Massival, quickly tiring of a conversation which made no reference to his own art, crossed the room to Mme de Malten and seated himself beside Lamarthe, who soon yielded his place to him and went and rejoined the men.

“Shall we go?” he said to Mariolle.

“Yes, by all means!”

The novelist liked to walk the streets at night with some friend and talk, when the incisive, peremptory tones of his voice seemed to lay hold of the walls of the houses and climb up them. He had an impression that he was very eloquent, witty, and sagacious during these nocturnal *tête-à-têtes,* which were monologues rather than conversations so far as his part in them was concerned. The approbation that he thus gained for himself sufficed his needs, and the gentle fatigue of legs and lungs assured him a good night’s rest.

Mariolle, for his part, had reached the limit of his endurance. The moment that he was outside her door all his wretchedness and sorrow, all his irremediable disappointment, boiled up and overflowed his heart. He could stand it no longer; he would have no more of it. He would go away and never return.

The two men found themselves alone with each other in the street. The wind had changed and the cold that had prevailed during the day had yielded; it was warm and pleasant, as it almost always is two hours after a snowstorm in spring. The sky was vibrating with the light of innumerable stars, as if a breath of summer in the immensity of space had lighted up the heavenly bodies and set them twinkling. The sidewalks were gray and dry again, while in the roadway pools of water reflected the light of the gas-lamps.

Lamarthe said: “What a fortunate man he is, that Prédolé! He lives only for one thing, his art; thinks but of that, loves but that; it occupies all his being; consoles and cheers him, and affords him a life of happiness and comfort. He is really a great artist of the old stock. Ah! he doesn’t let women trouble his head, not much, our women of to-day with their frills and furbelows and fantastic disguises! Did you remark how little attention he paid to our two pretty dames? And yet they were rather seductive. But what he is looking for is the plastic — the plastic pure and simple; he has no use for the artificial. It is true that our divine hostess put him down in her books as an insupportable fool. In her estimation a bust by Houdon, Tanagra statuettes, and an inkstand by Cellini are but so many unconsidered trifles that go to the adornment and the rich and natural setting of a masterpiece, which is Herself; she and her dress, for dress is part and parcel of Herself; it is the fresh accentuation that she places on her beauty day by day. What a trivial, personal thing is woman!"

He stopped and gave the sidewalk a great thump with his cane, so that the noise resounded through the quiet street, then he went on.

"They have a very clear and exact perception of what adds to their attractions: the toilette and the ornaments in which there is an entire change of fashion every ten years; but they are heedless of that attribute which involves rare and constant power of selection, which demands from them keen and delicate artistic penetration and a purely aesthetic exercise of their senses. Their senses, moreover, are extremely rudimentary, incapable of high development, inaccessible to whatever does not touch directly the feminine egotism that absorbs everything in them. Their acuteness is the stratagem of the savage, of the red Indian; of war and ambush. They are even almost incapable of enjoying the material pleasures of the lower order, which require a physical education and the intelligent exercise of an organ, such as good living. When, as they do in exceptional cases, they come to have some respect for decent cookery, they still remain incapable of appreciating our great wines, which speak to masculine palates only, for wine does speak."

He again thumped the pavement with his cane, accenting his last dictum and punctuating the sentence, and continued.

"It won't do, however, to expect too much from them, but this want of taste and appreciation that so frequently clouds their intellectual vision when higher considerations are at stake often serves to blind them still more when our interests are in question. A man may have heart, feeling, intelligence, exceptional merits, and qualities of all kinds, they will all be unavailing to secure their favor as in bygone days when a man was valued for his worth and his courage. The women of to-day are actresses, second-rate actresses at that, who are merely playing for effect a part that has been handed down to them and in which they have no belief. They have to have actors of the same stamp to act up to them and lie through the rôle just as they do; and these actors are the coxcombs that we see hanging around them; from the fashionable world, or elsewhere."

They walked along in silence for a few moments, side by side. Mariolle had listened attentively to the words of his companion, repeating them in his mind and approving of his sentiments under the influence of his sorrow. He was aware also that a sort of Italian adventurer who was then in Paris giving lessons in swordsmanship, Prince Epilati by name, a gentleman of the fencing-schools, of considerable celebrity for his elegance and graceful vigor that he was in the habit of exhibiting in black-silk tights before the upper ten and the select few of the demimonde, was just then in full enjoyment of the attentions and coquetries of the pretty little Baronne de Frémines.

As Lamarthe said nothing further, he remarked to him:

"It is all our own fault; we make our selections badly; there are other women besides those."

The novelist replied: "The only ones now that are capable of real attachment are the shopgirls and some sentimental little *bourgeoises*, poor and unhappily married. I have before now carried consolation to one of those distressed souls. They are overflowing with sentiment, but such cheap, vulgar sentiment that to exchange ours against it is like throwing your money to a beggar. Now I assert that in our young, wealthy society, where the women feel no needs and no desires, where all that they require is some mild distraction to enable them to kill time, and where the men regulate their pleasures as scrupulously as they regulate their daily labors, I assert that under such conditions the old natural attraction, charming and powerful as it was, that used to bring the sexes toward each other, has disappeared."

"You are right," Mariolle murmured.

He felt an increasing desire to fly, to put a' great distance between himself and these people, these puppets who in their empty idleness mimicked the beautiful, impassioned, and tender life of other days and were incapable of savoring its lost delights.

"Good night," he said; "I am going to bed." He went home and seated himself at his table and wrote:

"Farewell, Madame. Do you remember my first letter? In it too I said farewell, but I did not go. What a mistake that was!

When you receive this I shall have left Paris; need I tell you why? Men like me ought never to meet with women like you. Were I an artist and were my emotions capable of expression in such manner as to afford me consolation, you would have perhaps inspired me with talent, but I am only a poor fellow who was so unfortunate as to be seized with love for you, and with it its accompanying bitter, unendurable sorrow.

“When I met you for the first time I could not have deemed myself capable of feeling and suffering as I have done. Another in your place would have filled my heart with divine joy in bidding it wake and live, but you could do nothing but torture it. It was not your fault, I know; I reproach you with nothing and I bear you no hard feeling; I have not even the right to send you these lines. Pardon me. You are so constituted that you cannot feel as I feel; you cannot even divine what passes in my breast when I am with you, when you speak to me and I look on you.

“Yes, I know; you have accepted me and offered me a rational and tranquil happiness, for which I ought to thank you on my knees all my life long, but I will not have it. Ah, what a horrible, agonizing love is that which is constantly craving a tender word, a warm caress, without ever receiving them! My heart is empty, empty as the stomach of a beggar who has long followed your carriage with outstretched hand and to whom you have thrown out pretty toys, but no bread. It was bread, it was love, that I hungered for. I am about to go away wretched and in need, in sore need of your love, a few crumbs of which would have saved me. I have nothing left in the world but a cruel memory that clings and will not leave me, and that I must try to kill.

“Adieu, Madame. Thanks, and pardon me. I love you still, this evening, with all the strength of my soul. Adieu.

“ANDRE MARIOLLE.”

CHAPTER XI. LONELINESS

THE city lay basking in the brightness of a sunny morning. Mariolle climbed into the carriage that stood waiting at his door with a traveling bag and two trunks on top. He had made his valet the night before pack the linen and other necessaries for a long absence, and now he was going away, leaving as his temporary address Fontainebleau post-office. He was taking no one with him, it being his wish to see no face that might remind him of Paris and to hear no voice that he had heard while brooding over certain matters.

He told the driver to go to the Lyons station and the cab started. Then he thought of that other trip of his, last spring, to Mont Saint-Michel; it was a year ago now lacking three months. He looked out into the street to drive the recollection from his mind.

The vehicle turned into the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, which was flooded with the light of the sun of early spring. The green leaves, summoned forth by the grateful warmth that had prevailed for a couple of weeks and not materially retarded by the cold storm of the last two days, were opening so rapidly on this bright morning that they seemed to impregnate the air with an odor of fresh verdure and of sap evaporating on the way to its work of building up new growths. It was one of those growing mornings when one feels that the dome-topped chestnut-trees in the public gardens and all along the avenues will burst into bloom in a single day through the length and breadth of Paris, like chandeliers that are lighted simultaneously. The earth was thrilling with the movement preparatory to the full life of summer, and the very street was silently stirred beneath its paving of bitumen as the roots ate their way through the soil. He said to himself as he jolted along in his cab: “At last I shall be able to enjoy a little peace of mind. I will witness the birth of spring in solitude deep in the forest.”

The journey seemed long to him. The few hours of sleeplessness that he had spent in bemoaning his fate had broken him down as if he had passed ten nights at the bedside of a dying man. When he reached the village of Fontainebleau he went to a notary to see if there was a small house to be had furnished in the neighborhood of the forest. He was told of several. In looking over the photographs the one that pleased him most was a cottage that had just been given up by a young couple, man and wife, who had resided for almost the entire winter in the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. The notary smiled, notwithstanding that he was a man of serious aspect; he probably scented a love story.

"You are alone, Monsieur!" he inquired.

"I am alone."

"No servants, even?"

"No servants, even; I left them at Paris. I wish to engage some of the residents here. I am coming here to work in complete seclusion."

"You will have no difficulty in finding that, at this season of the year."

A few minutes afterward an open landau was whirling Mariolle and his trunks away to Montigny.

The forest was beginning to awake. The copses at the foot of the great trees, whose heads were covered with a light veil of foliage, were beginning to assume a denser aspect. The early birches, with their silvery trunks, were the only trees that seemed completely attired for the summer, while the great oaks only displayed small tremulous splashes of green at the ends of their branches and the beeches, more quick to open their pointed buds, were just shedding the dead leaves of the past year.

The grass by the roadside, unobscured as yet by the thick shade of the tree-tops, was growing lush and bright with the influx of new sap, and the odor of new growth that Mariolle had already remarked in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, now wrapped him about and immersed him in a great bath of green life budding in the sunshine of the early season. He inhaled it greedily, like one just liberated from prison, and with the sensation of a man whose fetters have just been broken he luxuriously extended his arms along the two sides of the landau and let his hands hang down over the two wheels.

He passed through Marlotte, where the driver called his attention to the Hotel Corot, then just opened, of the original design of which there was much talk. Then the road continued, with the forest on the left hand and on the right a wide plain with trees here and there and hills bounding the horizon. To this succeeded a long village street, a blinding white street lying between two endless rows of little tile-roofed houses. Here and there an enormous lilac bush displayed its flowers over the top of a wall.

This street followed the course of a narrow valley along which ran a little stream. It was a narrow, rapid, twisting, nimble little stream, on one of its banks laving the foundations of the houses and the garden-walls and on the other bathing the meadows where the small trees were just beginning to put forth their scanty foliage. The sight of it inspired Mariolle with a sensation of delight.

He had no difficulty in finding his house and was greatly pleased with it. It was an old house that had been restored by a painter, who had tired of it after living there five years and offered it for rent. It was directly on the water, separated from the stream only by a pretty garden that ended in a terrace of lindens. The Loing, which just above this point had a picturesque fall of a foot or two over a dam erected there, ran rapidly by this terrace, whirling in great eddies. From the front windows of the house the meadows on the other bank were visible.

"I shall get well here," Mariolle thought.

Everything had been arranged with the notary in case the house should prove suitable. The driver carried back his acceptance of it. Then the housekeeping details had to be attended to, which did not take much time, the" mayor's clerk having provided two women, one to do the cooking, the other to wash and attend to the chamber-work.

Downstairs there were a parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and two small rooms; on the floor above a handsome bedroom and a large apartment that the artist owner had fitted up as a studio. The furniture had all been selected with loving care, as people always furnish when they are enamored of a place, but now it had lost a little of its freshness and was in some disorder, with the air of desolation that is noticeable in dwellings that have been abandoned by their master. A pleasant odor of verbena, however, still lingered in the air, showing that the little house had not been long uninhabited. "Ah!" thought Mariolle, "verbena, that indicates simplicity of taste. The woman that preceded me could not have been one of those complex, mystifying natures. Happy man!"

It was getting toward evening, all these occupations having made the day pass rapidly. He took a seat by an open window, drinking in the agreeable coolness that exhaled from the surrounding vegetation and watching the setting sun as it cast long shadows across the meadows.

The two servants were talking while getting the dinner ready and the sound of their voices ascended to him faintly by the stairway, while through the window came the mingled sounds of the lowing of cows, the barking of dogs, and the cries of men bringing home the cattle or conversing with their companions on the other bank of the stream. Everything was peaceful and restful.

For the thousandth time since the snorning Mariolle; asked himself: "What did she think when she received my letter? What will she do?" Then he said to himself: "I wonder what she is doing now?" He looked at his watch; it was half past six. "She has come in from the street. She is receiving."

There rose before his mental vision a picture of the drawing-room, and the young woman chatting with the Princess de Malten, Mme de Frémines, Massival, and the Comte de Bernhaus.

His soul was suddenly moved with an impulse that was something like anger. He wished that he was there. It was the hour of his accustomed visit to her, almost every day, and he felt within him a feeling of discomfort, not of regret. His will was firm, but a sort of physical suffering afflicted him akin to that of one who is denied his morphine at the accustomed time. He no longer beheld the meadows, nor the sun sinking behind the hills of the horizon; all that he could see was her, among her friends, given over to those cares of the world that had robbed him of her. "I will think of her no more," he said to himself.

He arose, went down to the garden and passed on to the terrace. There was a cool mist there rising from the water that had been agitated in its fall over the dam, and this sensation of chilliness, striking to a heart already sad, caused him to retrace his steps. His dinner was awaiting him in the diningroom. He ate it quickly; then, having nothing to occupy him, and feeling that distress of mind and body, of which he had had the presage, now increasing on him, he went to bed and closed his eyes in an attempt to slumber, but it was to no purpose. His thoughts refused to leave that woman; he beheld her in his thought and he suffered.

On whom would she bestow her favor now? On the Comte de Bernhaus, doubtless! He was just the man, elegant, conspicuous, sought after, to suit that creature of display. He had found favor with her, for had she not employed all her arts to conquer him even at a time when she was mistress to another man?

Notwithstanding that his mind was beset by these haunting thoughts, it would still keep wandering off into that misty condition of semisomnolence in which the man and woman were constantly reappearing to his eyes. Of true sleep he got none, and all night long he saw them at his bedside, braving and mocking him, now retiring as if they would at last permit him to snatch a little sleep, then returning as soon as oblivion had begun to creep over him and awaking him with a spasm of jealous agony in his heart. He left his bed at earliest break of day and went away into the forest with a cane in his hand, a stout serviceable stick that the last occupant of the house had left behind him.

The rays of the newly risen sun were falling through the tops of the oaks, almost leafless as yet, upon the ground, which was carpeted in spots by patches of verdant grass, here by a carpet of dead leaves and there by heather reddened by the frosts of winter. Yellow butterflies were fluttering along the road like little dancing flames. To the right of the road was a hill, almost large enough to be called a mountain. Mariolle ascended it leisurely, and when he reached the top seated himself on a great stone, for he was quite out of breath. His legs were overcome with weakness and refused to support him; all his system seemed to be yielding to a sudden breaking down. He was well aware that this languor did not proceed from fatigue; it came from her, from the love that weighed him down like an intolerable burden, and he murmured: “What wretchedness! why does it possess me thus, me, a man who has always taken from existence only that which would enable him to enjoy it without suffering afterward?”

His attention was awakened by the fear of this malady that might prove so hard to cure, and he probed his feelings, went down to the very depths of his nature, endeavoring to know and understand it better, and make clear to his own eyes the reason of this inexplicable crisis. He said to himself: “I have never yielded to any undue attraction. I am not enthusiastic or passionate by nature; my judgment is more powerful than my instinct, my curiosity than my appetite, my fancy than my perseverance.

I am essentially nothing more than a man that is delicate, intelligent, and hard to please in his enjoyments.

I have loved the things of this life without ever allowing myself to become greatly attached to them, with the perceptions of an expert who sips and does not suffer himself to become surfeited, who knows better than to lose his head. I submit everything to the test of reason, and generally I analyze my likings too severely to submit to them blindly. That is even my great defect, the only cause of my weakness.

"And now that woman has taken possession of me, in spite of myself, in spite of my fears and of my knowledge of her, and she retains her hold as if she had plucked away one by one all the different aspirations that existed in me. That may be the case. Those aspirations of mine went out toward inanimate objects, toward nature, that entices and softens me, toward music, which is a sort of ideal caress, toward reflection, which is the delicate feasting of the mind, toward everything on earth that is beautiful and agreeable.

"Then I met a creature who collected and concentrated all my somewhat fickle and fluctuating likings, and directing them toward herself, converted them into love. Charming and beautiful, she pleased my eyes; bright, intelligent, and witty, she pleased my mind, and she pleased my heart by the mysterious charm of her contact and her presence and by the secret and irresistible emanation from her personality, until all these things enslaved me as the perfume of certain flowers intoxicates. She has taken the place of everything for me, for I no longer have any aspirations, I no longer wish or care for anything."

"In other days how my feelings would have thrilled and started in this forest that is putting forth its new life! To-day I see nothing of it, I am regardless of it; I am still at that woman's side, whom I desire to love no more.

"Come! I must kill these ideas by physical fatigue; unless I do I shall never get well."

He arose, descended the rocky hillside and resumed his walk with long strides, but still the haunting presence crushed him as if it had been a burden that he was bearing on his back. He went on, constantly increasing his speed, now and then encountering a brief sensation of comfort at the sight of the sunlight piercing through the foliage or at a breath of perfumed air from some grove of resinous pine-trees, which inspired in him a presentiment of distant consolation.

Suddenly he came to a halt. "I am not walking any longer," he said, "I am flying from somethingl" Indeed, he was flying, straight ahead, he cared not where, pursued by the agony of his love.

Then he started on again at a more reasonable speed. The appearance of the forest was undergoing a change. The growth was denser and the shadows deeper, for he was coming to the warmer portions of it, to the beautiful region of the beeches. No sensation of winter lingered there. It was wondrous spring, that seemed to have been the birth of a night, so young and fresh was everything.

Mariolle made his way among the thickets, beneath the gigantic trees that towered above him higher and higher still, and in this way he went on for a long time, an hour, two hours, pushing his way through the branches, through the countless multitudes of little shining leaves, bright with their varnish of new sap. The heavens were quite concealed by the immense dome of verdure, supported on its lofty columns, now perpendicular, now leaning, now of a whitish hue, now dark beneath the black moss that drew its nourishment from the bark.

Thus they towered, stretching away indefinitely in the distance, one behind the other, lording it over the bushy young copses that grew in confused tangles at their feet and wrapping them in dense shadow through which in places poured floods of vivid sunlight. The golden rain streamed down through all this luxuriant growth until the wood no longer remained a wood, but became a brilliant sea of verdure illumined by yellow rays. Mariolle stopped, seized with an ineffable surprise. Where was he? Was he in a forest, or had he descended to the bottom of a sea, a sea of leaves and light, an ocean of green resplendency?

He felt better — more tranquil; more remote, more hidden from his misery, and he threw himself down upon the red carpet of dead leaves that these trees do not cast until they are ready to put on their new garments. Rejoicing in the cool contact of the earth and the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon conscious of a wish, vague at first but soon becoming more defined, not to be alone in this charming spot, and he said to himself: “Ah! if she were only here, at my side!”

He suddenly remembered Mont Saint-Michel, and recollecting how different she had been down there to what she was in Paris, how her affection had blossomed out in the open air before the yellow sands, he thought that on that day she had surely loved him a little for a few hours. Yes, surely, on the road where they had watched the receding tide, in the cloisters where, murmuring his name: “André,” she had seemed to say, “I am yours,” and on the “Madman’s Path,” where he had almost borne her through space, she had felt an impulsion toward him that had never returned since she placed her foot, the foot of a coquette, on the pavement of Paris.

He continued to yield himself to his mournful reveries, still stretched at length upon his back, his look lost among the gold and green of the tree-tops, and little by little his eyes closed, weighed down with sleep and the tranquillity that reigned among the trees. When he awoke he saw that it was past two o'clock of the afternoon.

When he arose and proceeded on his way he felt less sad, less ailing. At length he emerged from the thickness of the wood and came to a great open space where six broad avenues converged and then stretched away and lost themselves in the leafy, transparent distance. A signboard told him that the name of the locality was "Le Bouquet-du-Roi." It was indeed the capital of this royal country of the beeches.

A carriage passed, and as it was empty and disengaged Mariolle took it and ordered the driver to take him to Marlotte, whence he could make his way to Montigny after getting something to eat at the inn, for he was beginning to be hungry.

He remembered that he had seen this establishment, which was only recently opened, the day before: the Hotel Corot, it was called, an artistic public-house in middle-age style of decoration, modeled on the Chat Noir in Paris. His driver set him down there and he passed through an open door into a vast room where old-fashioned tables and uncomfortable benches seemed to be awaiting drinkers of a past century. At the far end a woman, a young waitress, no doubt, was standing on top of a little folding ladder, fastening some old plates to nails that were driven in the wall and seemed nearly beyond her reach. Now raising herself on tiptoe on both feet, now on one, supporting herself with one hand against the wall while the other held the plate, she reached up with pretty and adroit movements; for her figure was pleasing and the undulating lines from wrist to ankle assumed changing forms of grace at every fresh posture. As her back was toward him she had been unaware of Mariolle's entrance, who stopped to watch her. He thought of Prédolé and his *figurines;* "It is a pretty picture, though!" he said to himself. "She is very graceful, that little girl."

He gave a little cough. She was so startled that she came near falling, but as soon as she had recovered her self-possession, she jumped down from her ladder as lightly as a rope dancer, and came to him with a pleasant smile on her face. "What will Monsieur have?" she inquired.

"Breakfast, Mademoiselle."

She ventured to say: "It should be dinner, rather, for it is half past three o'clock."

"We will call it dinner if you like. I lost myself in the forest."

Then she told him what dishes there were ready; he made his selection and took a seat. She went away to give the order, returning shortly to set the table for him. He watched her closely as she bustled around the table; she was pretty and very neat in her attire. She had a spry little air that was very pleasant to behold, in her working dress with skirt pinned up, sleeves rolled back, and neck exposed; and her corset fitted closely to her pretty form, of which she had no reason to be ashamed.

Her face was rather red painted by exposure to me open air, and it seemed somewhat too fat and puffy, but it was as fresh as a new-blown rose, with fine, bright, brown eyes, a large mouth with its complement of handsome teeth, and chestnut hair that revealed by its abundance the healthy vigor of this strong young frame.

She brought radishes and bread and butter and he began to eat, ceasing to pay attention to the attendant. He called for a bottle of champagne and drank the whole of it, as he did two glasses of kummel after his coffee, and as his stomach was empty — he had taken nothing before he left his house but a little bread and cold meat — he soon felt a comforting feeling of tipsiness stealing over him that he mistook for oblivion. His griefs and sorrows were diluted and tempered by the sparkling wine which, in so short a time, had transformed the torments of his heart into insensibility. He walked slowly back to Montigny, and being very tired and sleepy went to bed as soon as it was dark, falling asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

He awoke after a while, however, in the dense darkness, ill at ease and disquieted as if a nightman that had left him for an hour or two had furtively reappeared at his bedside to murder sleep. She was there, she, Mme de Burne, back again, roaming about his bed, and accompanied still by M. de Bernhaus. “Come!” he said, “it must be that I am jealous. What is the reason of it?”

Why was he jealous? He quickly told himself why. Notwithstanding all his doubts and fears he knew that as long as he had been her lover she had been faithful to him — faithful, indeed, without tenderness and without transports, but with a loyal strength of resolution. Now, however, he had broken it all off, and it was ended; he had restored her freedom to her. Would she remain without a *liaison?* Yes, doubtless, for a while. And then? This very fidelity that she had observed toward him up to the present moment, a fidelity beyond the reach of suspicion, was it not due to the feeling that if she left him, Mariolle, because she was tired of him, she would some day, sooner or later, have to take some one to fill his place, not from passion, but from weariness of being alone?

Is it not true that lovers often owe their long lease of favor simply to the dread of an unknown successor? And then to dismiss one lover and take up with another would not have seemed the right thing to such a woman — she was too intelligent, indeed, to bow to social prejudices, but was gifted with a delicate sense of moral purity that kept her from real indelicacies. She was a worldly philosopher and not a prudish *bourgeoise*, and while she would not have quailed at the idea of a secret attachment, her nature would have revolted at the thought of a succession of lovers.

He had given her her freedom — and now? Now most certainly she would take up with someone else, and that some one would be the Comte de Bernhaus. He was sure of it, and the thought was now affording him inexpressible suffering. Why had he left her? She had been faithful, a good friend to him, charming in every way. Why? Was it because he was a brutal sensualist who could not separate true love from its physical transports? Was that it? Yes —— but there was something besides. He had fled from the pain of not being loved as he loved, from the cruel feeling that he did not receive an equivalent return for the warmth of his kisses, an incurable affliction from which his heart, grievously smitten, would perhaps never recover. He looked forward with dread to the prospect of enduring for years the torments that he had been anticipating for a few months and suffering for a few weeks. In accordance with his nature he had weakly recoiled before this prospect, just as he had recoiled all his life long before any effort that called for resolution. It followed that he was incapable of carrying anything to its conclusion, of throwing himself heart and soul into such a passion as one develops for a science or an art, for it is impossible, perhaps, to have loved greatly without having suffered greatly.

Until daylight he pursued this train of thought, which tore him like wild horses; then he got up and went down to the bank of the little stream. A fisherman was casting his net near the little dam, and when he withdrew it from the water that flashed and eddied in the sunlight and spread it on the deck of his small boat, the little fishes danced among the meshes like animated silver.

Mariolle's agitation subsided little by little in the balmy freshness of the early morning air. The cool mist that rose from the miniature waterfall, about which faint rainbows fluttered, and the stream that ran at his feet in rapid and ceaseless current, carried off with them a portion of his sorrow. He said to himself: “Truly, I have done the right thing; I should have been too unhappy otherwise!” Then he returned to the house, and taking possession of a hammock that he had noticed in the vestibule, he made it fast between two of the lindens and throwing himself into it, endeavored to drive away reflection by fixing his eyes and thoughts upon the flowing stream.

Thus he idled away the time until the hour of breakfast, in an agreeable torpor, a physical sensation of well-being that communicated itself to the mind, and he protracted the meal as much as possible that he might have some occupation for the dragging minutes. There was one thing, however, that he looked forward to with eager expectation, and that was his mail. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau to have his letters forwarded, but had received nothing, and the sensation of being entirely abandoned was beginning to be oppressive. Why? He had no reason to expect that there would be anything particularly pleasing or comforting for him in the little black box that the carrier bore slung at his side, nothing beyond useless invitations and unmeaning communications. Why, then, should he long for letters of whose contents he knew nothing as if the salvation of his soul depended on them? Was it not that there lay concealed in his heart the vainglorious expectation that she would write to him?

He asked one of his old women: “At what time does the mail arrive?”

“At noon, Monsieur.”

It was just midday, and he listened with increased attention to the noises that reached him from outdoors. A knock at the outer door brought him to his feet; the messenger brought him only the newspapers and three unimportant letters. Mariolle glanced over the journals until he was tired, and went out.

What should he do? He went to the hammock and lay down in it, but after half an hour of that he experienced an uncontrollable desire to go somewhere else. The forest? Yes, the forest was very pleasant, but then the solitude there was even deeper than it was in his house, much deeper than it was in the village, where there were at least some signs of life now and then. And the silence and loneliness of all those trees and leaves filled his mind with sadness and regrets, steeping him more deeply still in wretchedness. He mentally reviewed his long walk of the day before, and when he came to the wideawake little waitress of the Hotel Corot, he said to himself: “I have it! I will go and dine there.” The idea did him good; it was something to occupy him, a means of killing two or three hours, and he set out forthwith.

The long village street stretched straight away in the middle of the valley between two rows of low, white, tile-roofed houses, some of them standing boldly up with their fronts close to the road, others, more retiring, situated in a garden where there was a lilac-bush in bloom and chickens scratching over manure-heaps, where wooden stairways in the open air climbed to doors cut in the wall. Peasants were at work before their dwellings, lazily fulfilling their domestic duties. An old woman, bent with age and with threads of gray in her yellow hair, for country folk rarely have white hair, passed close to him, a ragged jacket upon her shoulders and her lean and sinewy legs covered by a woolen petticoat that failed to conceal the angles and protuberances of her frame. She was looking aimlessly before her with expressionless eyes, eyes that had never looked on other objects than those that might be of use to her in her poor existence.

Another woman, younger than this one, was hanging out the family wash before her door. The lifting of her skirt as she raised her arms aloft disclosed to view thick, coarse ankles incased in blue knitted stockings, with great, projecting, fleshless bones, while the breast and shoulders, flat and broad as those of a man, told of a body whose form must have been horrible to behold.

Mariolle thought: “They are women! Those scarecrows are women!” The vision of Mme de Burne arose before his eyes. He beheld her in all her elegance and beauty, the perfection of the human female form, coquettish and adorned to meet the looks of man, and again he smarted with the sorrow of an irreparable loss; then he walked on more quickly to shake himself free of this impression.

When he reached the inn at Marlotte the little waitress - recognized him immediately, and accosted him almost familiarly: “Good day, Monsieur.”

“Good day, Mademoiselle.”

“Do you wish something to drink?”

“Yes, to begin with; then I will have dinner.” They discussed the question of what he should drink in the first place and what he should eat subsequently. He asked her advice for the pleasure of hearing her talk, for she had a nice way of expressing herself. She had a short little Parisian accent, and her speech was as unconstrained as was her movements. He thought as he listened: "The little girl is quite agreeable; she seems to me to have a bit of the *cocotte* about her."

"Are you a Parisian?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been here long?"

"Two weeks, sir."

"And do you like it?"

"Not very well so far, but it is too soon to tell, and then I was tired of the air of Paris, and the country has done me good; that is why I made up my mind to come here. Then I shall bring you a vermouth, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and tell the cook to be careful and pay attention to my dinner."

"Never fear, Monsieur."

After she had gone away he went into the garden of the hotel, and took a seat in an arbor, where his vermouth was served. He remained there all the rest of the day, listening to a blackbird whistling in its cage, and watching the little waitress in her goings and comings. She played the coquette, and put on her sweetest looks for the gentleman, for she had not failed to observe that he found her to his liking.

He went away as he had done the day before after drinking a bottle of champagne to dispel gloom, but the darkness of the way and the coolness of the night air quickly dissipated his incipient tipsiness, and sorrow again took possession of his devoted soul. He thought: "What am I to do? Shall I remain here? Shall I be condemned for long to drag out this desolate way of living?" It was very late when he got to sleep.

The next morning he again installed himself in the hammock, and all at once the sight of a man casting his net inspired him with the idea of going fishing. The grocer from whom he bought his lines gave him some instructions upon the soothing sport, and even offered to go with him and act as his guide upon his first attempt. The offer was accepted, and between nine o'clock and noon Mariolle succeeded, by dint of vigorous exertion and unintermitting patience, in capturing three small fish.

When he had dispatched his breakfast he took up his march again for Mariotte. Why? To kill time, of course.

The little waitress began to laugh when she saw him coming. Amused by her recognition of him, he smiled back at her, and tried to engage her in conversation. She was more familiar than she had been the preceding day, and met him halfway.

Her name was Elisabeth Ledru. Her mother, who took in dressmaking, had died the year before; then the husband, an accountant by profession, always drunk and out of work, who had lived on the little earnings of his wife and daughter, disappeared, for the girl could not support two persons, though she shut herself up in her garret room and sewed all day long. Tiring of her lonely occupation after a while, she got a position as waitress in a cook-shop, remained there a year, and as the hard work had worn her down, the proprietor of the Hotel Corot at Mariotte, upon whom she had waited at times, engaged her for the summer with two other girls who were to come down a little later on. It was evident that the proprietor knew how to attract customers.

Her little story pleased Mariolle, and by treating her with respect and asking her a few discriminating questions, he succeeded in eliciting from her many interesting details of this poor dismal home that had been laid in ruins by a drunken father. She, poor, homeless, wandering creature that she was, gay and cheerful because she could not help it, being young, and feeling that the interest that this stranger took in her was unfeigned, talked to him with confidence, with that expansiveness of soul that she could no more restrain than she could restrain the agile movements of her limbs.

When she had finished he asked her: “And — do you expect to be a waitress all your life?”

“I could not answer that question, Monsieur. How can I tell what may happen to me to-morrow?” “And yet it is necessary to think of the future.” She had assumed a thoughtful air that did not linger long upon her features, then she replied: “I suppose that I shall have to take whatever comes to me. So much the worse!”

They parted very good friends. After a few days he returned, then again, and soon he began to go there frequently, finding a vague distraction in the girl’s conversation, and that her artless prattle helped him somewhat to forget his grief.

When he returned on foot to Montigny in the evening, however, he had terrible fits of despair as he thought of Mme de Burne. His heart became a little lighter with the morning sun, but with the night his bitter regrets and fierce jealousy closed in on him again. He had no intelligence; he had written to no one and had received letters from no one.

Then, alone with his thoughts upon the dark road, his imagination would picture the progress of the approaching *liaison* that he had foreseen between his quondam mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This had now become a settled idea with him and fixed itself more firmly in his mind every day. That man, he thought, will be to her just what she requires; a distinguished, assiduous, unexacting lover, contented and happy to be the chosen one of this superlatively delicious coquette. He compared him with himself. The other most certainly would not behave as he had, would not be guilty of that tiresome impatience and of that insatiable thirst for a return of his affection that had been the destruction of their amorous understanding. He was a very discreet, pliant, and well-posted man of the world, and would manage to get along and content himself with but little, for he did not seem to belong to the class of impassioned mortals.

On one of André Mariolle's visits to Marlotte one day, he beheld two bearded young fellows in the other arbor of the Hotel Corot, smoking pipes and wearing Scotch caps on their heads. The proprietor, a big, broad-faced man, came forward to pay his respects as soon as he saw him, for he had an interested liking for this faithful patron of his dinner-table, and said to him: "I have two new customers since yesterday, two painters."

"Those gentlemen sitting there?"

"Yes. They are beginning to be heard of. One of them got a second-class medal last year." And having told all that he knew about the embryo artists, he asked: "What will you take to-day, Monsieur Mariolle?"

"You may send me out a vermouth, as usual." The proprietor went away, and soon Elisabeth appeared, bringing the salver, the glass, the *carafe,* and the bottle. Whereupon one of the painters called to her: "Well! little one, are we angry still?"

She did not answer and when she approached Mariolle he saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been crying," he said.

"Yes, a little," she simply replied.

"What was the matter?"

"Those two gentlemen there behaved rudely to me."

"What did they do to you?"

"They took me for a bad character."

"Did you complain to the proprietor?"

She gave a sorrowful shrug of the shoulders, “Oh! Monsieur — the proprietor. I know what he is now —— the proprietor!”

Mariolle was touched, and a little angry; he said to her: “Tell me what it was all about.”

She told him of the brutal conduct of the two painters immediately upon their arrival the night before, and then began to cry again, asking what she was to do, alone in the country and without friends or relatives, money or protection.

Mariolle suddenly said to her: “Will you enter my service? You shall be well treated in my house, and when I return to Paris you will be free to do what you please.”

She looked him in the face with questioning eyes, and then quickly replied: “I will, Monsieur.

“How much are you earning here?”

“Sixty francs a month,” she added, rather uneasily, “and I have my share of the *pourboires* besides; that makes it about seventy.”

“I will pay you a hundred.”

She repeated in astonishment: “A hundred francs a month?”

“Yes. Is that enough?”

“I should think that it was enough!”

“All that you will have to do will be to wait on me, take care of my clothes and linen, and attend to my room.”

“It is a bargain, Monsieur.”

“When will you come?”

“To-morrow, if you wish. After what has happened here I will go to the mayor and will leave whether they are willing or not.”

Mariolle took two louis from his pocket and handed them to her. “There’s the money to bind our bargain.”

A look of joy flashed across her face and she said in a tone of decision: “I will be at your house before midday to-morrow, Monsieur.”

CHAPTER XII. CONSOLATION

ELISABETH came to Montigny next day, attended by a countryman with her trunk on a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had made a generous settlement with one of his old women and got rid of her, and the newcomer took possession of a small room on the top floor adjoining that of the cook. She was quite different from what she had been at Marlotte, when she presented herself before her new master, less effusive, more respectful, more self-contained; she was now the servant of the gentleman to whom she had been almost an humble friend beneath the arbor of the inn. He told her in a few words what she would have to do. She listened attentively, went and took possession of her room, and then entered upon her new service.

A week passed and brought no noticeable change in the state of Mariolle's feelings. The only difference was that he remained at home more than he had been accustomed to do, for he had nothing to attract him to Mariotte, and his house seemed less dismal to him than at first. The bitterness of his grief was subsiding a little, as all storms subside after a while; but in place of this aching wound there was arising in him a settled melancholy, one of those deep-seated sorrows that are like chronic and lingering maladies, and sometimes end in death. His former liveliness of mind and body, his mental activity, his interests in the pursuits that had served to occupy and amuse him hitherto were all dead, and their place had been taken by a universal disgust and an invincible torpor, that left him without even strength of will to get up and go out of doors. He no longer left his house, passing from the salon to the hammock and from the hammock to the salon, and his chief distraction consisted in watching the current of the Loing as it flowed by the terrace and the fisherman casting his net.

When the reserve of the first few days had begun to wear off, Elisabeth gradually grew a little bolder, and remarking with her keen feminine instinct the constant dejection of her employer, she would say to him when the other servant was not by: "Monsieur finds his time hang heavy on his hands?"

He would answer resignedly: "Yes, pretty heavy."

"Monsieur should go for a walk."

“That would not do me any good.”

She quietly did many little unassuming things for his pleasure and comfort. Every morning when he came into his drawing-room, he found it filled with flowers and smelling as sweetly as a conservatory. Elisabeth must surely have enlisted all the boys in the village to bring her primroses, violets, and buttercups from the forest, as well as putting under contribution the small gardens where the peasant girls tended their few plants at evening. In his loneliness and distress he was grateful for her kind thoughtfulness and her unobtrusive desire to please him in these small ways.

It also seemed to him that she was growing prettier, more refined in her appearance, and that she devoted more attention to the care of her person. One day when she was handing him a cup of tea, he noticed that her hands were no longer the hands of a servant, but of a lady, with well-trimmed, clean nails, quite irreproachable. On another occasion he observed that the shoes that she wore were almost elegant in shape and material. Then she had gone up to her room one afternoon and come down wearing a delightful little gray dress, quite simple and in perfect taste. “Hallo!” he exclaimed, as he saw her, “how dressy you are getting to be, Elisabeth!” She blushed up to the whites of her eyes. “What, I, Monsieur? Why, no. I dress a little better because I have more money.”

“Where did you buy that dress that you have on?”

“I made it myself, Monsieur.”

“You made it? When? I always see you busy at work about the house during the day.”

“Why, during my evenings, Monsieur.”

“But where did you get the stuff? and who cut it for you?”

She told him that the shopkeeper at Montigny had brought her some samples from Fontainebleau, that she had made her selection from them, and paid for the goods out of the two louis that he had paid her as advanced wages. The cutting and fitting had not troubled her at all, for she and her mother had worked four years for a ready-made clothing house. He could not resist telling her: “It is very becoming to you. You look very pretty in it.” And she had to blush again, this time to the roots of her hair.

When she had left the room he said to himself: “I wonder if she is beginning to fall in love with me?” He reflected on it, hesitated, doubted, and finally came to the conclusion that after all it might be possible. He had been kind and compassionate toward her, had assisted her, and been almost her friend; there would be nothing very surprising in this little girl being smitten with the master, who had been so good to her. The idea did not strike him very disagreeably, moreover, for she was really very presentable, and retained nothing of the appearance of a servant about her. He experienced a flattering feeling of consolation, and his masculine vanity, that had been so cruelly wounded and trampled on and crushed by another woman, felt comforted. It was a compensation — trivial and unnoteworthy though it might be, it was a compensation — for when love comes to a man unsought, no matter whence it comes, it is because that man possesses the capacity of inspiring it. His unconscious selfishness was also gratified by it; it would occupy his attention and do him a little good, perhaps, to watch this young heart opening and beating for him. The thought never occurred to him of sending the child away, of rescuing her from the peril from which he himself was suffering so cruclly, of having more pity for her than others had showed toward him, for compassion is never an ingredient that enters into sentimental conquests.

So he continued his observations, and soon saw that he had not been mistaken. Petty details revealed it to him more clearly day by day. As she came near him one morning while waiting on him at table, he smelled on her clothing an odor of perfumery — villainous, cheap perfumery, from the village shopkeeper’s, doubtless, or the druggist’s — so he presented her with a bottle of Cyprus toilette-water that he had been in the habit of using for a long time, and of which he always carried a supply about with him. He also gave her fine soaps, tooth-washes, and rice-powder. He thus lent his assistance to the transformation that was becoming more apparent every day, watching it meantime with a pleased and curious eye. While remaining his faithful and respectful servant, she was thus becoming a woman in whom the coquettish instincts of her sex were artlessly developing themselves.

He, on his part, was imperceptibly becoming attached to her. She inspired him at the same time with amusement and gratitude. He trifled with this dawning tenderness as one trifles in his hours of melancholy with anything that can divert his mind. He was conscious of no other emotion toward her than that undefined desire which impels every man toward a prepossessing woman, even if she be a pretty servant, or a peasant maiden with the form of a goddess — a sort of rustic Venus. He felt himself drawn to her more than all else by the womanliness that he now found in her. He felt the need of that — an undefined and irresistible need, bequeathed to him by that other one, the woman whom he loved, who had first awakened in him that invincible and mysterious fondness for the nature, the companionship, the contact of women, for the subtle aroma, ideal or sensual, that every beautiful creature, whether of the people or of the upper class, whether a lethargic, sensual native of the Orient with great black eyes, or a blue-eyed, keen-witted daughter of the North, inspires in men in whom still survives the immemorial attraction of femininity.

These gentle, loving, and unceasing attentions that were felt rather than seen, wrapped his wound in a sort of soft, protecting envelope that shielded it to some extent from its recurrent attacks of suffering, which did return, nevertheless, like flies to a raw sore. He was made especially impatient by the absence of all news, for his friends had religiously respected his request not to divulge his address. Now and then he would see Massival's or Lamarthe's name in the newspapers among those who had been present at some great dinner or ceremonial, and one day he saw Mme de Burne's, who was mentioned as being one of the most elegant, the prettiest, and best dressed of the women who were at the ball at the Austrian embassy. It sent a trembling through him from head to foot. The name of the Comte de Bernhaus appeared a few lines further down, and that day Mariolle's jealousy returned and wrung his heart until night. The suspected *liaison* was no longer subject for doubt for him now. It was one of those imaginary convictions that are even more torturing than reality, for there is no getting rid of them and they leave a wound that hardly ever heals.

No longer able to endure this state of ignorance and uncertainty, he determined to write to Lamarthe, who was sufficiently well acquainted with him to divine the wretchedness of his soul, and would be likely to afford him some clew as to the justice of his suspicions, even without being directly questioned on the subject. One evening, therefore, he sat down and by the light of his lamp concocted a long, artful letter, full of vague sadness and poetical allusions to the delights of early spring in the country and veiled requests for information. When he got his mail four days later he recognized at the very first glance the novelist's firm, upright handwriting.

Lamarthe sent him a thousand items of news that were of great importance to his jealous eyes. Without laying more stress upon Mme de Burne and Bernhaus than upon any other of the crowd of people whom he mentioned, he seemed to place them in the foreground by one of those tricks of style characteristic of him, which led the attention to just the point where he wished to lead it without revealing his design. The impression that this letter, taken as a whole, left upon Mariolle was that his suspicions were at least not destitute of foundation. His fears would be realized to-morrow, if they had not been yesterday. His former mistress was always the same, leading the same busy, brilliant, fashionable life. He had been the subject of some talk after his disappearance, as the world always talks of people who have disappeared, with lukewarm curiosity.

After the receipt of this letter he remained in his hammock until nightfall; then he could eat no dinner, and after that he could get no sleep; he was feverish through the night. The next morning he felt so tired, so discouraged, so disgusted with his weary, monotonous life, between the deep silent forest that was now dark with verdure on the one hand and the tiresome little stream that flowed beneath his windows on the other, that he did not leave his bed.

When Elisabeth came to his room in response to the summons of his bell, she stood in the doorway pale with surprise and asked him: “Is Monsieur ill?”

“Yes, a little.”

“Shall I send for the doctor?”

“No. I am subject to these slight indispositions.”

“What can I do for Monsieur?”

He ordered his bath to be got ready, a breakfast of eggs alone, and tea at intervals during the day.

About one o’clock, however, he became so restless that he determined to get up. Elisabeth, whom he had rung for repeatedly during the morning with the fretful irresolution of a man who imagines himself ill and who had always come up to him with a deep desire of being of assistance, now, beholding him so nervous and restless, with a blush for her own boldness, offered to read to him.

He asked her: “Do you read well?”

“Yes, Monsieur; I gained all the prizes for reading when I was at school in the city, and I have read so many novels to mamma that I can’t begin to remember the names of them.”

He was curious to see how she would do, and he sent her into the studio to look among the books that he had packed up for the one that he liked best of all, “Manon Lescaut.”

When she returned she helped him to settle himself in bed, arranged two pillows behind his back, took a chair, and began to read. She read well, very well indeed, intelligently and with a pleasing accent that seemed a special gift. She evinced her interest in the story from the commencement and showed so much feeling as she advanced in it that he stopped her now and then to ask her a question and have a little conversation about the plot and the characters.

Through the open windows, on the warm breeze loaded with the sweet odors of growing things, came the trills and *roulades* of the nightingales among the trees saluting their mates with their amorous ditties in this season of awakening love. The young girl, too, was moved beneath André's gaze as she followed with bright eyes the plot unwinding page by page.

She answered the questions that he put to her with an innate appreciation of the things connected with tenderness and passion, an appreciation that was just, but, owing to the ignorance natural to her position, sometimes crude. He thought: "This girl would be very intelligent and bright if she had a little teaching."

Her womanly charm had already begun to make itself felt in him, and really did him good that warm, still, spring afternoon, mingling strangely with that other charm, so powerful and so mysterious, of "Manon," the strangest conception of woman ever evoked by human ingenuity.

When it became dark after this day of inactivity Mariolle sank into a kind of dreaming, dozing state, in which confused visions of Mme de Burne and Elisabeth and the mistress of Des Grieux rose before his eyes. As he had not left his room since the day before and had taken no exercise to fatigue him he slept lightly and was disturbed by an unusual noise that he heard about the house.

Once or twice before he had thought that he heard faint sounds and footsteps at night coming from the ground floor, not directly underneath his room, but from the laundry and bath-room, small rooms that adjoined the kitchen. He had given the matter no attention, however.

This evening, tired of lying in bed and knowing that he had a long period of wakefulness before him, he listened and distinguished something that sounded like the rustling of a woman's garments and the splashing of water. He decided that he would go and investigate, lighted a candle and looked at his watch; it was barely ten o'clock. He dressed himself, and having slipped a revolver into his pocket, made his way down the stairs on tiptoe with the stealthiness of a cat.

When he reached the kitchen, he was surprised to see that there was a fire burning in the furnace. There was not a sound to be heard, but presently he was conscious of something stirring in the bath-room, a small, whitewashed apartment that opened off the kitchen and contained nothing but the tub. He went noiselessly to the door and threw it open with a quick movement; there, extended in the tub, he beheld the most beautiful form that he had ever seen in his life.

It was Elisabeth.

CHAPTER XIII. MARIOLLE COPIES MME DE BURNE

WHEN she appeared before him next morning bringing him his tea and toast, and their eyes met, she began to tremble so that the cup and sugar-bowl rattled on the salver. Mariolle went to her and relieved her of her burden and placed it on the table; then, as she still kept her eyes fastened on the floor, he said to her: “Look at me, little one.”

She raised her eyes to him; they were full of tears.

“You must not cry,” he continued. As he held her in his arms, she murmured: “*Oh! mon Dieu!*” He knew that it was not regret, nor sorrow, nor remorse that had elicited from her those three agitated words, but happiness, true happiness. It gave him a strange, selfish feeling of delight, physical rather than moral, to feel this small person resting against his heart, to feel there at last the presence of a woman who loved him. He thanked her for it, as a wounded man lying by the roadside would thank a woman who had stopped to succor him; he thanked her with all his lacerated heart, and he pitied her a little, too, in the depths of his soul. As he watched her thus, pale and tearful, with eyes alight with love, he suddenly said to himself: “Why, she is beautiful! How quickly a woman changes, becomes what she ought to be, under the influence of the desires of her feelings and the necessities of her existence!”

“Sit down,” he said to her. He took her hands in his, her poor toiling hands that she had made white and pretty for his sake, and very gently, in carefully chosen phrases, he spoke to her of the attitude that they should maintain toward each other. She was no longer his servant, but she would preserve the appearance of being so for a while yet, so as not to create a scandal in the village. She would live with him as his housekeeper and would read to him frequently, and that would serve to account for the change in the situation. He would have her eat at his table after a little, as soon as she should be permanently installed in her position as his reader.

When he had finished she simply replied: “No, Monsieur, I am your servant, and I will continue to be so. I do not wish to have people learn what has taken place and talk about it.”

He could not shake her determination, although he urged her strenuously, and when he had drunk his tea she carried away the salver while he followed her with a softened look.

When she was gone he reflected. “She is a woman,” he thought, “and all women are equal when they are pleasing in our eyes. I have made my waitress my mistress. She is pretty, she will be charming! At all events she is younger and fresher than the *mondaines* and the *cocottes.* What difference does it make, after all? How many celebrated actresses have been daughters of *concierges!* And yet they are received as ladies, they are adored like heroines of romance, and princes bow before them as if they were queens. Is this to be accounted for on the score of their talent, which is often doubtful, or of their beauty, which is often questionable? Not at all. But a woman, in truth, always holds the place that she is able to create for herself by the illusion that she is capable of inspiring.”

He took a long walk that day, and although he still felt the same distress at the bottom of his heart and his legs were heavy under him, as if his suffering had loosened all the springs of his energy, there was a feeling of gladness within him like the song of a little bird. He was not so lonely, he felt himself less utterly abandoned; the forest appeared to him less silent and less void.

He returned to his house with the glad thought that Elisabeth would come out to meet him with a smile upon her lips and a look of tenderness in her eyes.

The life that he now led for about a month on the bank of the little stream was a real idyl. Mariolle was loved as perhaps very few men have ever been, as a child is loved by its mother, as the hunter is loved by his dog. He was all in all to her, her Heaven and earth, her charm and delight. He responded to all her ardent and artless womanly advances, giving her in a kiss her fill of ecstasy. In her eyes and in her soul, in her heart and in her flesh there was no object but him; her intoxication was like that of a young man who tastes wine for the first time. Surprised and delighted, he reveled in the bliss of this absolute self-surrender, and he felt that this was drinking of love at its fountain-head, at the very lips of nature.

Nevertheless he continued to be sad, sad, and haunted by his deep, unyielding disenchantment. His little mistress was agreeable, but he always felt the absence of another, and when he walked in the meadows or on the banks of the Loing and asked himself: “Why does this lingering care stay by me so?” such an intolerable feeling of desolation rose within him as the recollection of Paris crossed his mind that he had to return to the house so as not to be alone.

Then he would swing in the hammock, while Elisabeth, seated on a camp-chair, would read to him. As he watched her and listened to her he would recall to mind conversations in the drawingroom of Michèle, in the days when he passed whole evenings alone with her. Then tears would start to his eyes, and such bitter regret would tear his heart that he felt that he must start at once for Paris or else leave the country forever.

Elisabeth, seeing his gloom and melancholy, asked him: “Are you suffering? Your eyes are full of tears.”

“Give me a kiss, little one,” he replied; “you could not understand.”

She kissed him, anxiously, with a foreboding of some tragedy that was beyond her knowledge. He, forgetting his woes for a moment beneath her caresses, thought: “Oh! for a woman who could be these two in one, who might have the affection of the one and the charm of the other! Why is it that we never encounter the object of our dreams, that we always meet with something that is only approximately like them?”

He continued his vague reflections, soothed by the monotonous sound of the voice that fell unheeded on his ear, upon all the charms that had combined to seduce and vanquish him in the mistress whom he had abandoned. In the besetment of her memory, of her imaginary presence, by which he was haunted as a visionary by a phantom, he asked himself: “Am I condemned to carry her image with me to all eternity?”

He again applied himself to taking long walks, to roaming through the thicknesses of the forest, with the vague hope that he might lose her somewhere, in the depths of a ravine, behind a rock, in a thicket, as a man who wishes to rid himself of an animal that he does not care to kill sometimes takes it away a long distance so that it may not find its way home.

In the course of one of these walks he one day came again to the spot where the beeches grew. It was now a gloomy forest, almost as black as night, with impenetrable foliage. He passed along beneath the immense, deep vault in the damp, sultry air, thinking regretfully of his earlier visit when the little half-opened leaves resembled a verdant, sunshiny mist, and as he was following a narrow path, he suddenly stopped in astonishment before two trees that had grown together. It was a sturdy beech embracing with two of its branches a tall, slender oak; and there could have been no picture of his love that would have appealed more forcibly and more touchingly to his imagination. Mariolle seated himself to contemplate them at his ease. To his diseased mind, as they stood there in their motionless strife, they became splendid and terrible symbols, telling to him, and to all who might pass that way the everlasting story of his love.

Then he went on his way again, sadder than before, and as he walked along, slowly and with eyes downcast, he all at once perceived, half hidden by the grass and stained by mud and rain, an old telegram that had been lost or thrown there by some wayfarer. He stopped. What was the message of joy or sorrow that the bit of blue paper that lay there at his feet had brought to some expectant soul?

He could not help picking it up and opening it with a mingled feeling of curiosity and disgust. The words "Come — me — four o'clock— "were still legible; the names had been obliterated by the moisture.

Memories, at once cruel and delightful, thronged upon his mind of all the messages that he had received from her, now to appoint the hour for a rendezvous, now to tell him that she could not come to him. Never had anything caused him such emotion, nor startled him so violently, nor so stopped his poor heart and then set it thumping again as had the sight of those messages, burning or freezing him as the case might be. The thought that he should never receive more of them filled him with unutterable sorrow.

Again he asked himself what her thoughts had been since he left her. Had she suffered, had she regretted the friend whom her coldness had driven from her, or had she merely experienced a feeling of wounded vanity and thought nothing more of his abandonment? His desire to learn the truth was so strong and so persistent that a strange and audacious, yet only half-formed resolve, came into his head. He took the road to Fontainebleau, and when he reached the city went to the telegraph office, his mind in a fluctuating state of unrest and indecision; but an irresistible force proceeding from his heart seemed to urge him on. With a trembling hand, then, he took from the desk a printed blank and beneath the name and address of Mme de Burne wrote this dispatch:

"I would so much like to know what you think of me! For my part I can forget nothing. — André Mariolle."

Then he went out, engaged a carriage, and returned to Montigny, disturbed in mind by what he had done and regretting it already.

He had calculated that in case she condescended \o answer him he would receive a letter from her two days later, but the fear and the hope that she might send him a dispatch kept him in his house all the following day. He was in his hammock under the lindens on the terrace, when, about three o'clock, Elisabeth came to tell him that there was a lady at the house who wanted to see him.

The shock was so great that his breath failed him for a moment and his legs bent under him, and his heart beat violently as he went toward the house. And yet he could not dare hope that it was she.

When he appeared at the drawing-room door Mme de Burne arose from the sofa where she was sitting and came forward to shake hands with a rather reserved smile upon her face, with a slight constraint of manner and attitude, saying: "I came to see how you are, as your message did not give me much information on the subject."

He had become so pale that a flash of delight rose to her eyes, and his emotion was so great that he could not speak, could only hold his lips glued to the hand that she had given him.

"Dieu! how kind of you!" he said at last.

"No; but I do not forget my friends, and I was anxious about you."

She looked him in the face with that rapid, searching woman's look that reads everything, fathoms one's thoughts to their very roots, and unmasks every artifice. She was satisfied, apparently, for her face brightened with a smile. "You have a pretty hermitage here," she continued. "Does happiness reside in it?"

"No, Madame."

"Is it possible? In this fine country, at the side of this beautiful forest, on the banks of this pretty stream? Why, you ought to be at rest and quite contented here."

"I am not, Madame."

"Why not, then?"

"Because I cannot forget."

"Is it indispensable to your happiness that you should forget something?"

"Yes, Madame."

"May one know what?"

"You know."

"And then?"

"And then I am very wretched."

She said to him with mingled fatuity and commiseration: "I thought that was the case when I received your telegram, and that was the reason that I came, with the resolve that I would go back again at once if I found that I had made a mistake." She was silent a moment and then went on: "Since I am not going back immediately, may I go and look around your place? That little alley of lindens yonder has a very charming appearance; it looks as if it might be cooler out there than here in this drawingroom."

They went out. She had on a mauve dress that harmonized so well with the verdure of the trees and the blue of the sky that she appeared to him like some amazing apparition, of an entirely new style of beauty and seductiveness. Her tall and willowy form, her bright, clean-cut features, the little blaze of blond hair beneath a hat that was mauve, like the dress, and lightly crowned by a long plume of ostrich-feathers rolled about it, her tapering arms with the two hands holding the closed sunshade crosswise before her, the loftiness of her carriage, and the directness of her step seemed to introduce into the humble little garden something exotic, something that was foreign to it. It was a figure from one of Watteau's pictures, or from some fairy-tale or dream, the imagination of a poet's or an artist's fancy, which had been seized by the whim of coming away to the country to show how beautiful it was. As Mariolle looked at her, all trembling with his newly lighted passion, he recalled to mind the two peasant women that he had seen in Montigny village.

"Who is the little person who opened the door for me?" she inquired.

"She is my servant."

"She does not look like a waitress."

"No; she is very good looking."

"Where did you secure her?"

"Quite near here; in an inn frequented by painters, where her innocence was in danger from the customers."

"And you preserved it?"

He blushed and replied: "Yes, I preserved it."

"To your own advantage, perhaps."

"Certainly, to my own advantage, for I would rather have a pretty face about me than an ugly one."

"Is that the only feeling that she inspires in you?"

“Perhaps it was she who inspired in me the irresistible desire of seeing you again, for every woman when she attracts my eyes, even if it is only for the duration of a second, carries my thoughts back to you.”

“That was a very pretty piece of special pleading! And does she love her preserver?”

He blushed more deeply than before. Quick as lightning the thought flashed through his mind that jealousy is always efficacious as a stimulant to a woman’s feelings, and decided him to tell only half a lie, so he answered, hesitatingly: “I don’t know how that is; it may be so. She is very attentive to me.”

Rather pettishly, Mme de Burne murmured: And you?”

He fastened upon her his eyes that were aflame with love, and replied: “Nothing could ever distract my thoughts from you.”

This was also a very shrewd answer, but the phrase seemed to her so much the expression of an indisputable truth, that she let it pass without noticing it. Could a woman such as she have any doubts about a thing like that? So she was satisfied, in fact, and had no further doubts upon the subject of Elisabeth.

They took two canvas chairs and seated themselves in the shade of the lindens over the running stream. He asked her: “What did you think of me?”

“That you must have been very wretched.”

“Was it through my fault or yours?”

“Through the fault of us both.”

“And then?”

“And then, knowing how beside yourself you were, I reflected that it would be best to give you a little time to cool down. So I waited.”

“What were you waiting for?”

“For a word from you. I received it, and here I am. Now we are going to talk like people of sense. So you love me still? I do not ask you this as a coquette — I ask it as your friend.”

“I love you still.”

“And what is it that you wish?”

“How can I answer that? I am in your power.”

“Oh! my ideas are very clear, but I will not tell you them without first knowing what yours are.

Tell me of yourself, of what has been passing in your heart and in your mind since you ran away from me."

"I have been thinking of you; I have had no other occupation." He told her of his resolution to forget her, his flight, his coming to the great forest in which he had found nothing but her image, of his days filled with memories of her, and his long nights of consuming jealousy; he told her everything, with entire truthfulness, always excepting his love for Elisabeth, whose name he did not mention.

She listened, well assured that he was not lying, convinced by her inner consciousness of her power over him, even more than by the sincerity of his manner, and delighted with her victory, glad that she was about to regain him, for she loved him still.

Then he bemoaned himself over this situation that seemed to have no end, and warming up as he told of all that he had suffered after having carried it so long in his thoughts, he again reproached her, but without anger, without bitterness, in terms of impassioned poetry, with that impotency of loving of which she was the victim. He told her over and over: "Others have not the gift of pleasing; you have not the gift of loving."

She interrupted him, speaking warmly, full of arguments and illustrations. "At least I have the gift of being faithful," she said. "Suppose I had adored you for ten months, and then fallen in love with another man, would you be less unhappy than you are?"

He exclaimed: "Is it, then, impossible for a woman to love only one man?"

But she had her answer ready for him: "No one can keep on loving forever; all that one can do is to be constant. Do you believe that that exalted delirium of the senses can last for years? No, no. As for the most of those women who are addicted to passions, to violent caprices of greater or less duration, they simply transform life into a novel. Their heroes are different, the events and circumstances are unforeseen and constantly changing, the *dénouement* varies. I admit that for them it is amusing and diverting, for with every change they have a new set of emotions, but for *him* — when it is ended, that is the last of it. Do you understand me?"

"Yes; what you say has some truth in it. But I do not see what you are getting at."

"It is this: there is no passion that endures a very long time; by that I mean a burning, torturing passion like that from which you are suffering now. It is a crisis that I have made hard, very hard for you to bear — I know it, and I feel it — by — by the aridity of my tenderness and the paralysis of my emotional nature. This crisis will pass away, however, for it cannot last forever."

"And then?" he asked with anxiety.

"Then I think that to a woman who is as reasonable and calm as I am you can make yourself a lover who will be pleasing in every way, for you have a great deal of tact. On the other hand you would make a terrible husband. But there is no such thing as a good husband, there never can be."

He was surprised and a little offended. "Why," he asked, "do you wish to keep a lover that you do not love?"

She answered, impetuously: "I do love him, my friend, after my fashion. I do not love ardently, but I love."

"You require above everything else to be loved and to have your lovers make a show of their love."

"It is true. That is what I like. But beyond that my heart requires a companion apart from the others. My vainglorious passion for public homage does not interfere with my capacity for being faithful and devoted; it does not destroy my belief that I have something of myself that I could bestow upon a lover that no other man should have: my loyal affection, the sincere attachment of my heart, the entire and secret trustfulness of my soul; in exchange for which I should receive from him, together with all the tenderness of a lover, the sensation, so sweet and so rare, of not being entirely alone upon the earth. That is not love from the way you look at it, but it is not entirely valueless, either."

He bent over toward her, trembling with emotion, and stammered: "Will you let me be that man?"

"Yes, after a little, when you are more yourself. In the meantime, resign yourself to a little suffering once in a while, for my sake. Since you have to suffer in any event, isn't it better to endure it at my side rather than somewhere far from me?" Her smile seemed to say to him: "Why can you not have confidence in me?" and as she eyed him there, his whole frame quivering with passion, she experienced through every fiber of her being a feeling of satisfied well-being that made her happy in her way, in the way that the bird of prey is happy when he sees his quarry lying fascinated beneath him and awaiting the fatal talons.

"When do you return to Paris?" she asked.

“Why — to-morrow!”

“To-morrow be it. You will come and dine with me?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“And now I must be going,” said she, looking at the watch set in the handle of her parasol.

“Oh! why so soon?”

“Because I must catch the five o’clock train. I have company to dinner to-day, several persons: the Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, De Maltry, and a stranger, M. de Charlaine, the explorer, who is just back from upper Cambodia, after a wonderful journey. He is all the talk just now.”

Mariolle’s spirits fell; it hurt him to hear these names mentioned one after the other, as if he had been stung by so many wasps. They were poison *to* him.

“Will you go now?” he said, “and we can drive through the forest and see something of it.”

“I shall be very glad to. First give me a cup of tea and some toast.”

When the tea was served, Elisabeth was not to be found. The cook said that she had gone out to make some purchases. This did not surprise Mme de Burne, for what had she to fear now from this servant? Then they got into the landau that was standing before the door, and Mariolle made the coachman take them to the station by a roundabout way which took them past the Gorge-aux-Loups. As they rolled along beneath the shade of the great trees where the nightingales were singing, she was seized by the ineffable sensation that the mysterious and all-powerful charm of nature impresses on the heart of man. “*Dieu!”* she said, “how beautiful it is, how calm and restful!”

He accompanied her to the station, and as they were about to part she said to him: “I shall see you to-morrow at eight o’clock, then?”

“To-morrow at eight o’clock, Madame.”

She, radiant with happiness, went her way, and he returned to his house in the landau, happy and contented, but uneasy withal, for he knew that this was not the end.

Why should he resist? He felt that he could not. She held him by a charm that he could not understand, that was stronger than all. Flight would not deliver him, would not sever him from her, but would be an intolerable privation, while if he could only succeed in showing a little resignation, he would obtain from her at least as much as she had promised, for she was a woman who always kept her word.

The horses trotted along under the trees and he reflected that not once during that interview had she put up her lips to him for a kiss. She was ever the same; nothing in her would ever change and he would always, perhaps, have to suffer at her hands in just that same way. The remembrance of the bitter hours that he had already passed, with the intolerable certainty that he would never succeed in rousing her to passion, laid heavy on his heart, and gave him a clear foresight of struggles to come and of similar distress in the future. Still, he was content to suffer everything rather than lose her again, resigned even to that everlasting, ever unappeased desire that rioted in his veins and burned into his flesh.

The raging thoughts that had so often possessed him on his way back alone from Auteuil were now setting in again. They began to agitate his frame as the landau rolled smoothly along in the cool shadows of the great trees, when all at once the thought of Elisabeth awaiting him there at his door, she, too, young and fresh and pretty, her heart full of love and her mouth full of kisses, brought peace to his soul. Presently he would be holding her in his arms, and, closing his eyes and deceiving himself as men deceive others, confounding in the intoxication of the embrace her whom he loved and her by whom he was loved, he would possess them both at once. Even now it was certain that he had a liking for her, that grateful attachment of soul and body that always pervades the human animal as the result of love inspired and pleasure shared in common. This child whom he had made his own, would she not be to his dry and wasting love the little spring that bubbles up at the evening halting place, the promise of the cool draught that sustains our energy as wearily we traverse the burning desert?

When he regained the house, however, the girl had not come in. He was frightened and uneasy and said to the other servant: “You are sure that she went out?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

Thereupon he also went out in the hope of finding her. When he had taken a few steps and was about to turn into the long street that runs up the valley, he beheld before him the old, low church, surmounted by its square tower, seated upon a little knoll and watching the houses of its small village as a hen watches over her chicks. A presentiment that she was there impelled him to enter. Who can tell the strange glimpses of the truth that a woman's heart is capable of perceiving? What had she thought, how much had she understood? Where could she have fled for refuge but there, if the shadow of the truth had passed before her eyes?

The church was very dark, for night was closing in. The dim lamp, hanging from its chain, suggested in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the divine Consoler. With hushed footsteps Mariolle passed up along the lines of benches. When he reached the choir he saw a woman on her knees, her face hidden in her hands. He approached, recognized her, and touched her on the shoulder. They were alone.

She gave a great start as she turned her head. She was weeping.

"What is the matter?" he said.

She murmured: "I see it all. You cams here because she had caused you to suffer. She came to take you away."

He spoke in broken accents, touched by the grief that he in turn had caused: "You are mistaken, little one. I am going back to Paris, indeed, but I shall take you with me."

She repeated, incredulously: "It can't be true, it can't be true."

"I swear to you that it is true."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

She began again to sob and groan: "My God! My God!"

Then he raised her to her feet and led her down the hill through the thick blackness of the night, but when they came to the river-bank he made her sit down upon the grass and placed himself beside her. He heard the beating of her heart and her quick breathing, and clasping her to his heart, troubled by his remorse, he whispered to her gentle words that he had never used before. Softened by pity and burning with desire, every word that he uttered was true; he did not endeavor to deceive her, and surprised himself at what he said and what he felt, he wondered how it was that, thrilling yet with the presence of that other one whose slave he was always to be, he could tremble thus with longing and emotion while consoling this love-stricken heart.

He promised that he would love her, — he did not say simply "love" — , that he would give her a nice little house near his own and pretty furniture to put in it and a servant to wait on her. She was reassured as she listened to him, and gradually grew calmer, for she could not believe that he was capable of deceiving her, and besides his tone and manner told her that he was sincere. Convinced at length and dazzled by the vision of being a lady, by the prospect — so undreamed of by the poor girl, the servant of the inn — of becoming the "good friend" of such a rich, nice gentleman, she was carried away in a whirl of pride, covetousness, and gratitude that mingled with her fondness for André. Throwing her arms about his neck and covering his face with kisses, she stammered: "Oh! I love you so! You are all in all to me!"

He was touched and returned her caresses. "Darling! My little darling!" he murmured.

Already she had almost forgotten the appearance of the stranger who but now had caused her so much sorrow. There must have been some vague feeling of doubt floating in her mind, however, for presently she asked him in a tremulous voice: "Really and truly, you will love me as you love me now?"

And unhesitatingly he replied: "I will love you as I love you now."

THE END

The Short Stories

The Villa Verguies in Étretat where the author's mother moved her two children in 1860.

Maupassant: The Master of the Short Story

As Maupassant embarked on his literary career, Gustave Flaubert, the famous author of *Madame Bovary*, took the younger man under his protection and acted as a kind of literary guardian to him, guiding his debut in journalism and later in literature. At Flaubert's home, Maupassant met Émile Zola and the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, as well as many of the proponents of the realist and naturalist schools.

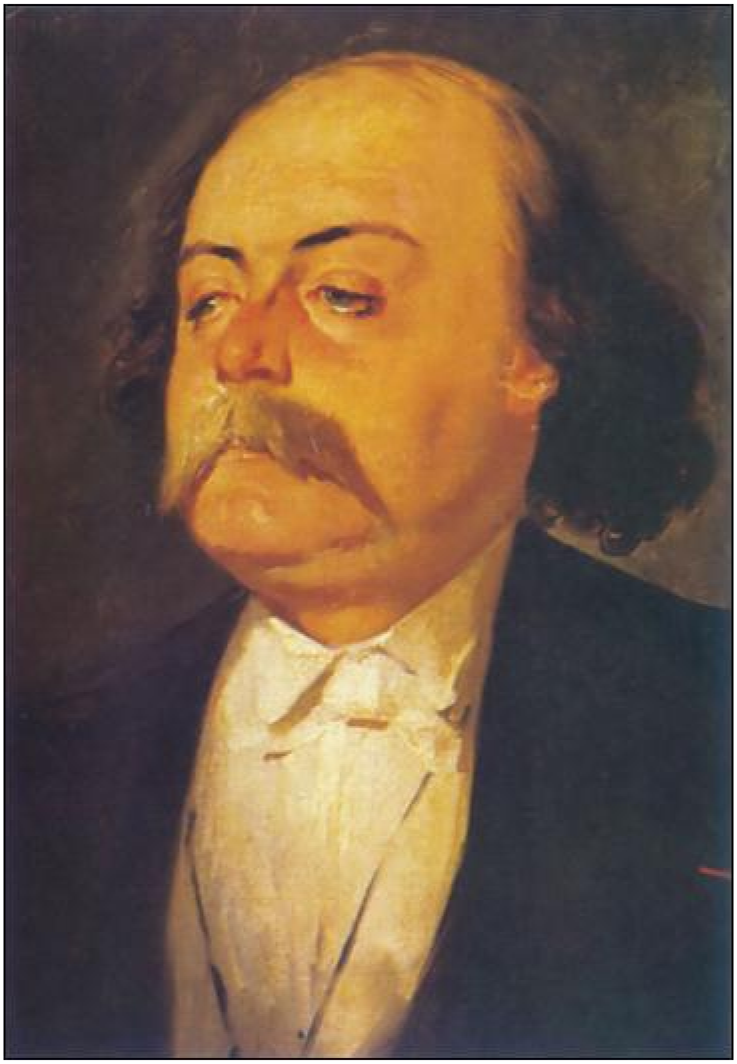
In 1878 Maupassant was transferred to the Ministry of Public Instruction and became a contributing editor to several leading newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *Gil Blas*, *Le Gaulois* and *l'Écho de Paris*, while devoting his spare time to the composition of short stories. After two years he published what is now considered his first masterpiece, *Boule de Suif*, which enjoyed instant success. Flaubert at once announced it as being "a masterpiece that will endure". The tale is set during the Franco-Prussian War and follows a group of French residents of Rouen, recently occupied by the Prussian army. The ten travellers decide, for various reasons, to leave Rouen and flee to Le Havre in a stagecoach. Boule de Suif (which can be translated as 'suet dumpling' or 'ball of fat') is the nickname of a prostitute whose real name is Elisabeth Rousset. She is travelling in the carriage with the strict Democrat Cornudet; a shop-owning couple from the petty bourgeoisie, M. and Mme. Loiseau; a wealthy upper-bourgeoisie factory-owner and his wife, M. and Mme. Carré-Lamadon, the Comte and Comtesse of Bréville and two nuns. Therefore the carriage represents a reflection of French society. The main theme of the short story focuses on the French resistance to the German occupiers throughout the war. During the first half of the story, the narrator explains the background of each of the occupants, with particular emphasis on the petty bourgeois Democrat, Cornudet, who is said to have devised all manner of defences for Rouen. The overriding theme is that while the occupants talk a great deal about resisting the invaders, they are ultimately running away in a cowardly fashion rather than staying in the town.

Following the success of *Boule de Suif*, a string of similar stories followed, as demand for tales by the popular newcomer were high, with stories such as *Deux Amis*, *Mother Savage* and *Mademoiselle Fifi* winning further acclaim. Maupassant's literary career was launched.

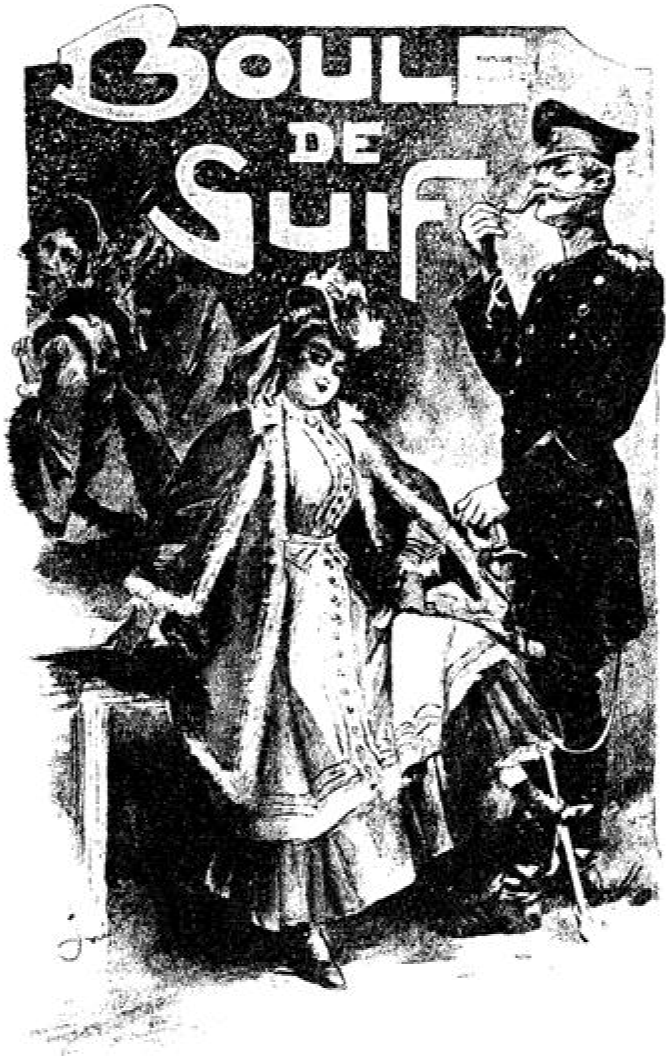
The decade from 1880 to 1891 was the most fertile period of the author’s career. Now famous due to his first short story, he worked methodically and produced two or sometimes four volumes annually, whilst his practical business sense made him wealthy. In 1881 he published his first volume of short stories under the title of *La Maison Tellier*, which reached its twelfth edition within two years. His editor, Havard, commissioned him to write more stories, and Maupassant continued to produce them efficiently and frequently. At this time he wrote what many consider to be his greatest novel, *Pierre et Jean.* But it would be as a master of the short story that posterity would remember Guy de Maupassant.

Many of Maupassant’s tales feature Parisian society women, prostitutes and the small-minded bourgeoisie, as well as the isolated villages of rural Normandy that the author knew as a child. Maupassant's stories are characterised by their economy of style and their efficient and often surprising dénouements, as exemplified in the famous *The Diamond Necklace*. His stories are also often darkly humorous, focusing in depth on the relationships between men and women, brothers and sisters, and between masters and servants. Through these relationships, Maupassant explores the dualistic nature of the human character, probing the nobility and generosity of his fellow men, whilst repeatedly laying bare humanity with deft wit and disturbing honesty.

Maupassant, early in his career



Gustave Flaubert, Maupassant's great friend and mentor


Boule de Suif

An early front illustration for Maupassant's 'break-through' short story 'Boule de Suif'

BOULE DE SUIF

For several days in succession fragments of a defeated army had passed through the town. They were mere disorganized bands, not disciplined forces. The men wore long, dirty beards and tattered uniforms; they advanced in listless fashion, without a flag, without a leader. All seemed exhausted, worn out, incapable of thought or resolve, marching onward merely by force of habit, and dropping to the ground with fatigue the moment they halted. One saw, in particular, many enlisted men, peaceful citizens, men who lived quietly on their income, bending beneath the weight of their rifles; and little active volunteers, easily frightened but full of enthusiasm, as eager to attack as they were ready to take to flight; and amid these, a sprinkling of red-breeched soldiers, the pitiful remnant of a division cut down in a great battle; somber artillerymen, side by side with nondescript foot-soldiers; and, here and there, the gleaming helmet of a heavy-footed dragoon who had difficulty in keeping up with the quicker pace of the soldiers of the line. Legions of irregulars with high-sounding names “Avengers of Defeat,” “Citizens of the Tomb,” “Brethren in Death” — passed in their turn, looking like banditti. Their leaders, former drapers or grain merchants, or tallow or soap chandlers — warriors by force of circumstances, officers by reason of their mustachios or their money — covered with weapons, flannel and gold lace, spoke in an impressive manner, discussed plans of campaign, and behaved as though they alone bore the fortunes of dying France on their braggart shoulders; though, in truth, they frequently were afraid of their own men — scoundrels often brave beyond measure, but pillagers and debauchees.

Rumor had it that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen.

The members of the National Guard, who for the past two months had been reconnoitering with the utmost caution in the neighboring woods, occasionally shooting their own sentinels, and making ready for fight whenever a rabbit rustled in the undergrowth, had now returned to their homes. Their arms, their uniforms, all the death-dealing paraphernalia with which they had terrified all the milestones along the highroad for eight miles round, had suddenly and marvellously disappeared.

The last of the French soldiers had just crossed the Seine on their way to Pont-Audemer, through Saint-Sever and Bourg-Achard, and in their rear the vanquished general, powerless to do aught with the forlorn remnants of his army, himself dismayed at the final overthrow of a nation accustomed to victory and disastrously beaten despite its legendary bravery, walked between two orderlies.

Then a profound calm, a shuddering, silent dread, settled on the city. Many a round-paunched citizen, emasculated by years devoted to business, anxiously awaited the conquerors, trembling lest his roasting-jacks or kitchen knives should be looked upon as weapons.

Life seemed to have stopped short; the shops were shut, the streets deserted. Now and then an inhabitant, awed by the silence, glided swiftly by in the shadow of the walls. The anguish of suspense made men even desire the arrival of the enemy.

In the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops, a number of uhlans, coming no one knew whence, passed rapidly through the town. A little later on, a black mass descended St. Catherine’s Hill, while two other invading bodies appeared respectively on the Darnetal and the Boisguillaume roads. The advance guards of the three corps arrived at precisely the same moment at the Square of the Hotel de Ville, and the German army poured through all the adjacent streets, its battalions making the pavement ring with their firm, measured tread.

Orders shouted in an unknown, guttural tongue rose to the windows of the seemingly dead, deserted houses; while behind the fast-closed shutters eager eyes peered forth at the victors-masters now of the city, its fortunes, and its lives, by “right of war.” The inhabitants, in their darkened rooms, were possessed by that terror which follows in the wake of cataclysms, of deadly upheavals of the earth, against which all human skill and strength are vain. For the same thing happens whenever the established order of things is upset, when security no longer exists, when all those rights usually protected by the law of man or of Nature are at the mercy of unreasoning, savage force. The earthquake crushing a whole nation under falling roofs; the flood let loose, and engulfing in its swirling depths the corpses of drowned peasants, along with dead oxen and beams torn from shattered houses; or the army, covered with glory, murdering those who defend themselves, making prisoners of the rest, pillaging in the name of the Sword, and giving thanks to God to the thunder of cannon — all these are appalling scourges, which destroy all belief in eternal justice, all that confidence we have been taught to feel in the protection of Heaven and the reason of man.

Small detachments of soldiers knocked at each door, and then disappeared within the houses; for the vanquished saw they would have to be civil to their conquerors.

At the end of a short time, once the first terror had subsided, calm was again restored. In many houses the Prussian officer ate at the same table with the family. He was often well-bred, and, out of politeness, expressed sympathy with France and repugnance at being compelled to take part in the war. This sentiment was received with gratitude; besides, his protection might be needful some day or other. By the exercise of tact the number of men quartered in one's house might be reduced; and why should one provoke the hostility of a person on whom one's whole welfare depended? Such conduct would savor less of bravery than of fool-hardiness. And foolhardiness is no longer a failing of the citizens of Rouen as it was in the days when their city earned renown by its heroic defenses. Last of all-final argument based on the national politeness — the folk of Rouen said to one another that it was only right to be civil in one's own house, provided there was no public exhibition of familiarity with the foreigner. Out of doors, therefore, citizen and soldier did not know each other; but in the house both chatted freely, and each evening the German remained a little longer warming himself at the hospitable hearth.

Even the town itself resumed by degrees its ordinary aspect. The French seldom walked abroad, but the streets swarmed with Prussian soldiers. Moreover, the officers of the Blue Hussars, who arrogantly dragged their instruments of death along the pavements, seemed to hold the simple townsmen in but little more contempt than did the French cavalry officers who had drunk at the same cafes the year before.

But there was something in the air, a something strange and subtle, an intolerable foreign atmosphere like a penetrating odor — the odor of invasion. It permeated dwellings and places of public resort, changed the taste of food, made one imagine one's self in far-distant lands, amid dangerous, barbaric tribes.

The conquerors exacted money, much money. The inhabitants paid what was asked; they were rich. But, the wealthier a Norman tradesman becomes, the more he suffers at having to part with anything that belongs to him, at having to see any portion of his substance pass into the hands of another.

Nevertheless, within six or seven miles of the town, along the course of the river as it flows onward to Croisset, Dieppedalle and Biessart, boat-men and fishermen often hauled to the surface of the water the body of a German, bloated in his uniform, killed by a blow from knife or club, his head crushed by a stone, or perchance pushed from some bridge into the stream below. The mud of the river-bed swallowed up these obscure acts of vengeance — savage, yet legitimate; these unrecorded deeds of bravery; these silent attacks fraught with greater danger than battles fought in broad day, and surrounded, moreover, with no halo of romance. For hatred of the foreigner ever arms a few intrepid souls, ready to die for an idea.

At last, as the invaders, though subjecting the town to the strictest discipline, had not committed any of the deeds of horror with which they had been credited while on their triumphal march, the people grew bolder, and the necessities of business again animated the breasts of the local merchants. Some of these had important commercial interests at Havre — occupied at present by the French army — and wished to attempt to reach that port by overland route to Dieppe, taking the boat from there.

Through the influence of the German officers whose acquaintance they had made, they obtained a permit to leave town from the general in command.

A large four-horse coach having, therefore, been engaged for the journey, and ten passengers having given in their names to the proprietor, they decided to start on a certain Tuesday morning before daybreak, to avoid attracting a crowd.

The ground had been frozen hard for some time-past, and about three o’clock on Monday afternoon — large black clouds from the north shed their burden of snow uninterruptedly all through that evening and night.

At half-past four in the morning the travellers met in the courtyard of the Hotel de Normandie, where they were to take their seats in the coach.

They were still half asleep, and shivering with cold under their wraps. They could see one another but indistinctly in the darkness, and the mountain of heavy winter wraps in which each was swathed made them look like a gathering of obese priests in their long cassocks. But two men recognized each other, a third accosted them, and the three began to talk. “I am bringing my wife,” said one. “So am I.” “And I, too.” The first speaker added: “We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians approach Havre we will cross to England.” All three, it turned out, had made the same plans, being of similar disposition and temperament.

Still the horses were not harnessed. A small lantern carried by a stable-boy emerged now and then from one dark doorway to disappear immediately in another. The stamping of horses’ hoofs, deadened by the dung and straw of the stable, was heard from time to time, and from inside the building issued a man’s voice, talking to the animals and swearing at them. A faint tinkle of bells showed that the harness was being got ready; this tinkle soon developed into a continuous jingling, louder or softer according to the movements of the horse, sometimes stopping altogether, then breaking out in a sudden peal accompanied by a pawing of the ground by an iron-shod hoof.

The door suddenly closed. All noise ceased.

The frozen townsmen were silent; they remained motionless, stiff with cold.

A thick curtain of glistening white flakes fell ceaselessly to the ground; it obliterated all outlines, enveloped all objects in an icy mantle of foam; nothing was to be heard throughout the length and breadth of the silent, winter-bound city save the vague, nameless rustle of falling snow — a sensation rather than a sound — the gentle mingling of light atoms which seemed to fill all space, to cover the whole world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, leading by a rope a melancholy-looking horse, evidently being led out against his inclination. The hostler placed him beside the pole, fastened the traces, and spent some time in walking round him to make sure that the harness was all right; for he could use only one hand, the other being engaged in holding the lantern. As he was about to fetch the second horse he noticed the motionless group of travellers, already white with snow, and said to them: “Why don’t you get inside the coach? You’d be under shelter, at least.”

This did not seem to have occurred to them, and they at once took his advice. The three men seated their wives at the far end of the coach, then got in themselves; lastly the other vague, snow-shrouded forms clambered to the remaining places without a word.

The floor was covered with straw, into which the feet sank. The ladies at the far end, having brought with them little copper foot-warmers heated by means of a kind of chemical fuel, proceeded to light these, and spent some time in expatiating in low tones on their advantages, saying over and over again things which they had all known for a long time.

At last, six horses instead of four having been harnessed to the diligence, on account of the heavy roads, a voice outside asked: “Is every one there?” To which a voice from the interior replied: “Yes,” and they set out.

The vehicle moved slowly, slowly, at a snail’s pace; the wheels sank into the snow; the entire body of the coach creaked and groaned; the horses slipped, puffed, steamed, and the coachman’s long whip cracked incessantly, flying hither and thither, coiling up, then flinging out its length like a slender serpent, as it lashed some rounded flank, which instantly grew tense as it strained in further effort.

But the day grew apace. Those light flakes which one traveller, a native of Rouen, had compared to a rain of cotton fell no longer. A murky light filtered through dark, heavy clouds, which made the country more dazzlingly white by contrast, a whiteness broken sometimes by a row of tall trees spangled with hoarfrost, or by a cottage roof hooded in snow.

Within the coach the passengers eyed one another curiously in the dim light of dawn.

Right at the back, in the best seats of all, Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, wholesale wine merchants of the Rue Grand-Pont, slumbered opposite each other. Formerly clerk to a merchant who had failed in business, Loiseau had bought his master’s interest, and made a fortune for himself. He sold very bad wine at a very low price to the retail-dealers in the country, and had the reputation, among his friends and acquaintances, of being a shrewd rascal a true Norman, full of quips and wiles. So well established was his character as a cheat that, in the mouths of the citizens of Rouen, the very name of Loiseau became a byword for sharp practice.

Above and beyond this, Loiseau was noted for his practical jokes of every description — his tricks, good or ill-natured; and no one could mention his name without adding at once: “He’s an extraordinary man — Loiseau.” He was undersized and potbellied, had a florid face with grayish whiskers.

His wife-tall, strong, determined, with a loud voice and decided manner — represented the spirit of order and arithmetic in the business house which

Loiseau enlivened by his jovial activity.

Beside them, dignified in bearing, belonging to a superior caste, sat Monsieur Carre-Lamadon, a man of considerable importance, a king in the cotton trade, proprietor of three spinning-mills, officer of the Legion of Honor, and member of the General Council. During the whole time the Empire was in the ascendancy he remained the chief of the well-disposed Opposition, merely in order to command a higher value for his devotion when he should rally to the cause which he meanwhile opposed with "courteous weapons," to use his own expression.

Madame Carre-Lamadon, much younger than her husband, was the consolation of all the officers of good family quartered at Rouen. Pretty, slender, graceful, she sat opposite her husband, curled up in her furs, and gazing mournfully at the sorry interior of the coach.

Her neighbors, the Comte and Comtesse Hubert de Breville, bore one of the noblest and most ancient names in Normandy. The count, a nobleman advanced in years and of aristocratic bearing, strove to enhance by every artifice of the toilet, his natural resemblance to King Henry IV, who, according to a legend of which the family were inordinately proud, had been the favored lover of a De Breville lady, and father of her child — the frail one's husband having, in recognition of this fact, been made a count and governor of a province.

A colleague of Monsieur Carre-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orleanist party in his department. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a small shipowner at Nantes had always remained more or less of a mystery. But as the countess had an air of unmistakable breeding, entertained faultlessly, and was even supposed to have been loved by a son of Louis-Philippe, the nobility vied with one another in doing her honor, and her drawing-room remained the most select in the whole countryside — the only one which retained the old spirit of gallantry, and to which access was not easy.

The fortune of the Brevilles, all in real estate, amounted, it was said, to five hundred thousand francs a year.

These six people occupied the farther end of the coach, and represented Society — with an income — the strong, established society of good people with religion and principle.

It happened by chance that all the women were seated on the same side; and the countess had, moreover, as neighbors two nuns, who spent the time in fingering their long rosaries and murmuring paternosters and aves. One of them was old, and so deeply pitted with smallpox that she looked for all the world as if she had received a charge of shot full in the face. The other, of sickly appearance, had a pretty but wasted countenance, and a narrow, consumptive chest, sapped by that devouring faith which is the making of martyrs and visionaries.

A man and woman, sitting opposite the two nuns, attracted all eyes.

The man — a well-known character — was Cornudet, the democrat, the terror of all respectable people. For the past twenty years his big red beard had been on terms of intimate acquaintance with the tankards of all the republican cafes. With the help of his comrades and brethren he had dissipated a respectable fortune left him by his father, an old-established confectioner, and he now impatiently awaited the Republic, that he might at last be rewarded with the post he had earned by his revolutionary orgies. On the fourth of September — possibly as the result of a practical joke — he was led to believe that he had been appointed prefect; but when he attempted to take up the duties of the position the clerks in charge of the office refused to recognize his authority, and he was compelled in consequence to retire. A good sort of fellow in other respects, inoffensive and obliging, he had thrown himself zealously into the work of making an organized defence of the town. He had had pits dug in the level country, young forest trees felled, and traps set on all the roads; then at the approach of the enemy, thoroughly satisfied with his preparations, he had hastily returned to the town. He thought he might now do more good at Havre, where new intrenchments would soon be necessary.

The woman, who belonged to the courtesan class, was celebrated for an embonpoint unusual for her age, which had earned for her the sobriquet of “Boule de Suif” (Tallow Ball). Short and round, fat as a pig, with puffy fingers constricted at the joints, looking like rows of short sausages; with a shiny, tightly-stretched skin and an enormous bust filling out the bodice of her dress, she was yet attractive and much sought after, owing to her fresh and pleasing appearance. Her face was like a crimson apple, a peony-bud just bursting into bloom; she had two magnificent dark eyes, fringed with thick, heavy lashes, which cast a shadow into their depths; her mouth was small, ripe, kissable, and was furnished with the tiniest of white teeth.

As soon as she was recognized the respectable matrons of the party began to whisper among themselves, and the words “hussy” and “public scandal” were uttered so loudly that Boule de Suif raised her head. She forthwith cast such a challenging, bold look at her neighbors that a sudden silence fell on the company, and all lowered their eyes, with the exception of Loiseau, who watched her with evident interest.

But conversation was soon resumed among the three ladies, whom the presence of this girl had suddenly drawn together in the bonds of friendship — one might almost say in those of intimacy. They decided that they ought to combine, as it were, in their dignity as wives in face of this shameless hussy; for legitimized love always despises its easygoing brother.

The three men, also, brought together by a certain conservative instinct awakened by the presence of Cornudet, spoke of money matters in a tone expressive of contempt for the poor. Count Hubert related the losses he had sustained at the hands of the Prussians, spoke of the cattle which had been stolen from him, the crops which had been ruined, with the easy manner of a nobleman who was also a tenfold millionaire, and whom such reverses would scarcely inconvenience for a single year. Monsieur Carre-Lamadon, a man of wide experience in the cotton industry, had taken care to send six hundred thousand francs to England as provision against the rainy day he was always anticipating. As for Loiseau, he had managed to sell to the French commissariat department all the wines he had in stock, so that the state now owed him a considerable sum, which he hoped to receive at Havre.

And all three eyed one another in friendly, well-disposed fashion. Although of varying social status, they were united in the brotherhood of money — in that vast freemasonry made up of those who possess, who can jingle gold wherever they choose to put their hands into their breeches' pockets.

The coach went along so slowly that at ten o'clock in the morning it had not covered twelve miles. Three times the men of the party got out and climbed the hills on foot. The passengers were becoming uneasy, for they had counted on lunching at Totes, and it seemed now as if they would hardly arrive there before nightfall. Every one was eagerly looking out for an inn by the roadside, when, suddenly, the coach foundered in a snowdrift, and it took two hours to extricate it.

As appetites increased, their spirits fell; no inn, no wine shop could be discovered, the approach of the Prussians and the transit of the starving French troops having frightened away all business.

The men sought food in the farmhouses beside the road, but could not find so much as a crust of bread; for the suspicious peasant invariably hid his stores for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers, who, being entirely without food, would take violent possession of everything they found.

About one o'clock Loiseau announced that he positively had a big hollow in his stomach. They had all been suffering in the same way for some time, and the increasing gnawings of hunger had put an end to all conversation.

Now and then some one yawned, another followed his example, and each in turn, according to his character, breeding and social position, yawned either quietly or noisily, placing his hand before the gaping void whence issued breath condensed into vapor.

Several times Boule de Suif stooped, as if searching for something under her petticoats. She would hesitate a moment, look at her neighbors, and then quietly sit upright again. All faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau declared he would give a thousand francs for a knuckle of ham. His wife made an involuntary and quickly checked gesture of protest. It always hurt her to hear of money being squandered, and she could not even understand jokes on such a subject.

"As a matter of fact, I don't feel well," said the count. "Why did I not think of bringing provisions?" Each one reproached himself in similar fashion.

Cornudet, however, had a bottle of rum, which he offered to his neighbors. They all coldly refused except Loiseau, who took a sip, and returned the bottle with thanks, saying: "That's good stuff; it warms one up, and cheats the appetite." The alcohol put him in good humor, and he proposed they should do as the sailors did in the song: eat the fattest of the passengers. This indirect allusion to Boule de Suif shocked the respectable members of the party. No one replied; only Cornudet smiled. The two good sisters had ceased to mumble their rosary, and, with hands enfolded in their wide sleeves, sat motionless, their eyes steadfastly cast down, doubtless offering up as a sacrifice to Heaven the suffering it had sent them.

At last, at three o'clock, as they were in the midst of an apparently limitless plain, with not a single village in sight, Boule de Suif stooped quickly, and drew from underneath the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

From this she extracted first of all a small earthenware plate and a silver drinking cup, then an enormous dish containing two whole chickens cut into joints and imbedded in jelly. The basket was seen to contain other good things: pies, fruit, dainties of all sorts-provisions, in fine, for a three days' journey, rendering their owner independent of wayside inns. The necks of four bottles protruded from among the food. She took a chicken wing, and began to eat it daintily, together with one of those rolls called in Normandy "Regence."

All looks were directed toward her. An odor of food filled the air, causing nostrils to dilate, mouths to water, and jaws to contract painfully. The scorn of the ladies for this disreputable female grew positively ferocious; they would have liked to kill her, or throw, her and her drinking cup, her basket, and her provisions, out of the coach into the snow of the road below.

But Loiseau's gaze was fixed greedily on the dish of chicken. He said:

"Well, well, this lady had more forethought than the rest of us. Some people think of everything."

She looked up at him.

"Would you like some, sir? It is hard to go on fasting all day."

He bowed.

"Upon my soul, I can't refuse; I cannot hold out another minute. All is fair in war time, is it not, madame?" And, casting a glance on those around, he added:

"At times like this it is very pleasant to meet with obliging people."

He spread a newspaper over his knees to avoid soiling his trousers, and, with a pocketknife he always carried, helped himself to a chicken leg coated with jelly, which he thereupon proceeded to devour.

Then Boule le Suif, in low, humble tones, invited the nuns to partake of her repast. They both accepted the offer unhesitatingly, and after a few stammered words of thanks began to eat quickly, without raising their eyes. Neither did Cornudet refuse his neighbor's offer, and, in combination with the nuns, a sort of table was formed by opening out the newspaper over the four pairs of knees.

Mouths kept opening and shutting, ferociously masticating and devouring the food. Loiseau, in his corner, was hard at work, and in low tones urged his wife to follow his example. She held out for a long time, but overstrained Nature gave way at last. Her husband, assuming his politest manner, asked their "charming companion" if he might be allowed to offer Madame Loiseau a small helping.

“Why, certainly, sir,” she replied, with an amiable smile, holding out the dish.

When the first bottle of claret was opened some embarrassment was caused by the fact that there was only one drinking cup, but this was passed from one to another, after being wiped. Cornudet alone, doubtless in a spirit of gallantry, raised to his own lips that part of the rim which was still moist from those of his fair neighbor.

Then, surrounded by people who were eating, and well-nigh suffocated by the odor of food, the Comte and Comtesse de Breville and Monsieur and Madame Carre-Lamadon endured that hateful form of torture which has perpetuated the name of Tantalus. All at once the manufacturer’s young wife heaved a sigh which made every one turn and look at her; she was white as the snow without; her eyes closed, her head fell forward; she had fainted. Her husband, beside himself, implored the help of his neighbors. No one seemed to know what to do until the elder of the two nuns, raising the patient’s head, placed Boule de Suif’s drinking cup to her lips, and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty invalid moved, opened her eyes, smiled, and declared in a feeble voice that she was all right again. But, to prevent a recurrence of the catastrophe, the nun made her drink a cupful of claret, adding: “It’s just hunger — that’s what is wrong with you.”

Then Boule de Suif, blushing and embarrassed, stammered, looking at the four passengers who were still fasting:

“‘Mon Dieu’, if I might offer these ladies and gentlemen — — “

She stopped short, fearing a snub. But Loiseau continued:

“Hang it all, in such a case as this we are all brothers and sisters and ought to assist each other. Come, come, ladies, don’t stand on ceremony, for goodness’ sake! Do we even know whether we shall find a house in which to pass the night? At our present rate of going we sha’n’t be at Totes till midday to-morrow.”

They hesitated, no one daring to be the first to accept. But the count settled the question. He turned toward the abashed girl, and in his most distinguished manner said:

“We accept gratefully, madame.”

As usual, it was only the first step that cost. This Rubicon once crossed, they set to work with a will. The basket was emptied. It still contained a pate de foie gras, a lark pie, a piece of smoked tongue, Crassane pears, Pont-Leveque gingerbread, fancy cakes, and a cup full of pickled gherkins and onions — Boule de Suif, like all women, being very fond of indigestible things.

They could not eat this girl's provisions without speaking to her. So they began to talk, stiffly at first; then, as she seemed by no means forward, with greater freedom. Mesdames de Breville and Carre-Lamadon, who were accomplished women of the world, were gracious and tactful. The countess especially displayed that amiable condescension characteristic of great ladies whom no contact with baser mortals can sully, and was absolutely charming. But the sturdy Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a gendarme, continued morose, speaking little and eating much.

Conversation naturally turned on the war. Terrible stories were told about the Prussians, deeds of bravery were recounted of the French; and all these people who were fleeing themselves were ready to pay homage to the courage of their compatriots. Personal experiences soon followed, and Bottle le Suif related with genuine emotion, and with that warmth of language not uncommon in women of her class and temperament, how it came about that she had left Rouen.

"I thought at first that I should be able to stay," she said. "My house was well stocked with provisions, and it seemed better to put up with feeding a few soldiers than to banish myself goodness knows where. But when I saw these Prussians it was too much for me! My blood boiled with rage; I wept the whole day for very shame. Oh, if only I had been a man! I looked at them from my window — the fat swine, with their pointed helmets! — and my maid held my hands to keep me from throwing my furniture down on them. Then some of them were quartered on me; I flew at the throat of the first one who entered. They are just as easy to strangle as other men! And I'd have been the death of that one if I hadn't been dragged away from him by my hair. I had to hide after that. And as soon as I could get an opportunity I left the place, and here I am."

She was warmly congratulated. She rose in the estimation of her companions, who had not been so brave; and Cornudet listened to her with the approving and benevolent smile of an apostle, the smile a priest might wear in listening to a devotee praising God; for long-bearded democrats of his type have a monopoly of patriotism, just as priests have a monopoly of religion. He held forth in turn, with dogmatic self-assurance, in the style of the proclamations daily pasted on the walls of the town, winding up with a specimen of stump oratory in which he reviled “that besotted fool of a Louis-Napoleon.”

But Boule de Suif was indignant, for she was an ardent Bonapartist. She turned as red as a cherry, and stammered in her wrath: “I’d just like to have seen you in his place — you and your sort! There would have been a nice mix-up. Oh, yes! It was you who betrayed that man. It would be impossible to live in France if we were governed by such rascals as you!”

Cornudet, unmoved by this tirade, still smiled a superior, contemptuous smile; and one felt that high words were impending, when the count interposed, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in calming the exasperated woman, saying that all sincere opinions ought to be respected. But the countess and the manufacturer’s wife, imbued with the unreasoning hatred of the upper classes for the Republic, and instinct, moreover, with the affection felt by all women for the pomp and circumstance of despotic government, were drawn, in spite of themselves, toward this dignified young woman, whose opinions coincided so closely with their own.

The basket was empty. The ten people had finished its contents without difficulty amid general regret that it did not hold more. Conversation went on a little longer, though it flagged somewhat after the passengers had finished eating.

Night fell, the darkness grew deeper and deeper, and the cold made Boule de Suif shiver, in spite of her plumpness. So Madame de Breville offered her her foot-warmer, the fuel of which had been several times renewed since the morning, and she accepted the offer at once, for her feet were icy cold. Mesdames Carre-Lamadon and Loiseau gave theirs to the nuns.

The driver lighted his lanterns. They cast a bright gleam on a cloud of vapor which hovered over the sweating flanks of the horses, and on the roadside snow, which seemed to unroll as they went along in the changing light of the lamps.

All was now indistinguishable in the coach; but suddenly a movement occurred in the corner occupied by Boule de Suif and Cornudet; and Loiseau, peering into the gloom, fancied he saw the big, bearded democrat move hastily to one side, as if he had received a well-directed, though noiseless, blow in the dark.

Tiny lights glimmered ahead. It was Totes. The coach had been on the road eleven hours, which, with the three hours allotted the horses in four periods for feeding and breathing, made fourteen. It entered the town, and stopped before the Hotel du Commerce.

The coach door opened; a well-known noise made all the travellers start; it was the clanging of a scabbard, on the pavement; then a voice called out something in German.

Although the coach had come to a standstill, no one got out; it looked as if they were afraid of being murdered the moment they left their seats. Thereupon the driver appeared, holding in his hand one of his lanterns, which cast a sudden glow on the interior of the coach, lighting up the double row of startled faces, mouths agape, and eyes wide open in surprise and terror.

Beside the driver stood in the full light a German officer, a tall young man, fair and slender, tightly encased in his uniform like a woman in her corset, his flat shiny cap, tilted to one side of his head, making him look like an English hotel runner. His exaggerated mustache, long and straight and tapering to a point at either end in a single blond hair that could hardly be seen, seemed to weigh down the corners of his mouth and give a droop to his lips.

In Alsatian French he requested the travellers to alight, saying stiffly:

“Kindly get down, ladies and gentlemen.”

The two nuns were the first to obey, manifesting the docility of holy women accustomed to submission on every occasion. Next appeared the count and countess, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, after whom came Loiseau, pushing his larger and better half before him.

“Good-day, sir,” he said to the officer as he put his foot to the ground, acting on an impulse born of prudence rather than of politeness. The other, insolent like all in authority, merely stared without replying.

Boule de Suif and Cornudet, though near the door, were the last to alight, grave and dignified before the enemy. The stout girl tried to control herself and appear calm; the democrat stroked his long russet beard with a somewhat trembling hand. Both strove to maintain their dignity, knowing well that at such a time each individual is always looked upon as more or less typical of his nation; and, also, resenting the complaisant attitude of their companions, Boule de Suif tried to wear a bolder front than her neighbors, the virtuous women, while he, feeling that it was incumbent on him to set a good example, kept up the attitude of resistance which he had first assumed when he undertook to mine the high roads round Rouen.

They entered the spacious kitchen of the inn, and the German, having demanded the passports signed by the general in command, in which were mentioned the name, description and profession of each traveller, inspected them all minutely, comparing their appearance with the written particulars.

Then he said brusquely: “All right,” and turned on his heel.

They breathed freely, All were still hungry; so supper was ordered. Half an hour was required for its preparation, and while two servants were apparently engaged in getting it ready the travellers went to look at their rooms. These all opened off a long corridor, at the end of which was a glazed door with a number on it.

They were just about to take their seats at table when the innkeeper appeared in person. He was a former horse dealer — a large, asthmatic individual, always wheezing, coughing, and clearing his throat. Follenvie was his patronymic.

He called:

“Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset?”

Boule de Suif started, and turned round.

“That is my name.”

“Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wishes to speak to you immediately.”

“To me?”

“Yes; if you are Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset.”

She hesitated, reflected a moment, and then declared roundly:

“That may be; but I’m not going.”

They moved restlessly around her; every one wondered and speculated as to the cause of this order. The count approached:

“You are wrong, madame, for your refusal may bring trouble not only on yourself but also on all your companions. It never pays to resist those in authority. Your compliance with this request cannot possibly be fraught with any danger; it has probably been made because some formality or other was forgotten.”

All added their voices to that of the count; Boule de Suif was begged, urged, lectured, and at last convinced; every one was afraid of the complications which might result from headstrong action on her part. She said finally:

“I am doing it for your sakes, remember that!”

The countess took her hand.

“And we are grateful to you.”

She left the room. All waited for her return before commencing the meal. Each was distressed that he or she had not been sent for rather than this impulsive, quick-tempered girl, and each mentally rehearsed platitudes in case of being summoned also.

But at the end of ten minutes she reappeared breathing hard, crimson with indignation.

“Oh! the scoundrel! the scoundrel!” she stammered.

All were anxious to know what had happened; but she declined to enlighten them, and when the count pressed the point, she silenced him with much dignity, saying:

“No; the matter has nothing to do with you, and I cannot speak of it.”

Then they took their places round a high soup tureen, from which issued an odor of cabbage. In spite of this coincidence, the supper was cheerful. The cider was good; the Loiseaus and the nuns drank it from motives of economy. The others ordered wine; Cornudet demanded beer. He had his own fashion of uncorking the bottle and making the beer foam, gazing at it as he inclined his glass and then raised it to a position between the lamp and his eye that he might judge of its color. When he drank, his great beard, which matched the color of his favorite beverage, seemed to tremble with affection; his eyes positively squinted in the endeavor not to lose sight of the beloved glass, and he looked for all the world as if he were fulfilling the only function for which he was born. He seemed to have established in his mind an affinity between the two great passions of his life — pale ale and revolution — and assuredly he could not taste the one without dreaming of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie dined at the end of the table. The man, wheezing like a broken-down locomotive, was too short-winded to talk when he was eating. But the wife was not silent a moment; she told how the Prussians had impressed her on their arrival, what they did, what they said; execrating them in the first place because they cost her money, and in the second because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself principally to the countess, flattered at the opportunity of talking to a lady of quality.

Then she lowered her voice, and began to broach delicate subjects. Her husband interrupted her from time to time, saying:

“You would do well to hold your tongue, Madame Follenvie.”

But she took no notice of him, and went on:

“Yes, madame, these Germans do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and then pork and potatoes. And don’t imagine for a moment that they are clean! No, indeed! And if only you saw them drilling for hours, indeed for days, together; they all collect in a field, then they do nothing but march backward and forward, and wheel this way and that. If only they would cultivate the land, or remain at home and work on their high roads! Really, madame, these soldiers are of no earthly use! Poor people have to feed and keep them, only in order that they may learn how to kill! True, I am only an old woman with no education, but when I see them wearing themselves out marching about from morning till night, I say to myself: When there are people who make discoveries that are of use to people, why should others take so much trouble to do harm? Really, now, isn’t it a terrible thing to kill people, whether they are Prussians, or English, or Poles, or French? If we revenge ourselves on any one who injures us we do wrong, and are punished for it; but when our sons are shot down like partridges, that is all right, and decorations are given to the man who kills the most. No, indeed, I shall never be able to understand it.”

Cornudet raised his voice:

“War is a barbarous proceeding when we attack a peaceful neighbor, but it is a sacred duty when undertaken in defence of one’s country.”

The old woman looked down:

“Yes; it’s another matter when one acts in self-defence; but would it not be better to kill all the kings, seeing that they make war just to amuse themselves?”

Cornudet’s eyes kindled.

“Bravo, citizens!” he said.

Monsieur Carre-Lamadon was reflecting profoundly. Although an ardent admirer of great generals, the peasant woman’s sturdy common sense made him reflect on the wealth which might accrue to a country by the employment of so many idle hands now maintained at a great expense, of so much unproductive force, if they were employed in those great industrial enterprises which it will take centuries to complete.

But Loiseau, leaving his seat, went over to the innkeeper and began chatting in a low voice. The big man chuckled, coughed, sputtered; his enormous carcass shook with merriment at the pleasantries of the other; and he ended by buying six casks of claret from Loiseau to be delivered in spring, after the departure of the Prussians.

The moment supper was over every one went to bed, worn out with fatigue.

But Loiseau, who had been making his observations on the sly, sent his wife to bed, and amused himself by placing first his ear, and then his eye, to the bedroom keyhole, in order to discover what he called "the mysteries of the corridor."

At the end of about an hour he heard a rustling, peeped out quickly, and caught sight of Boule de Suif, looking more rotund than ever in a dressing-gown of blue cashmere trimmed with white lace. She held a candle in her hand, and directed her steps to the numbered door at the end of the corridor. But one of the side doors was partly opened, and when, at the end of a few minutes, she returned, Cornudet, in his shirt-sleeves, followed her. They spoke in low tones, then stopped short. Boule de Suif seemed to be stoutly denying him admission to her room. Unfortunately, Loiseau could not at first hear what they said; but toward the end of the conversation they raised their voices, and he caught a few words. Cornudet was loudly insistent.

"How silly you are! What does it matter to you?" he said.

She seemed indignant, and replied:

"No, my good man, there are times when one does not do that sort of thing; besides, in this place it would be shameful."

Apparently he did not understand, and asked the reason. Then she lost her temper and her caution, and, raising her voice still higher, said:

"Why? Can't you understand why? When there are Prussians in the house! Perhaps even in the very next room!"

He was silent. The patriotic shame of this wanton, who would not suffer herself to be caressed in the neighborhood of the enemy, must have roused his dormant dignity, for after bestowing on her a simple kiss he crept softly back to his room. Loiseau, much edified, capered round the bedroom before taking his place beside his slumbering spouse.

Then silence reigned throughout the house. But soon there arose from some remote part — it might easily have been either cellar or attic — a stertorous, monotonous, regular snoring, a dull, prolonged rumbling, varied by tremors like those of a boiler under pressure of steam. Monsieur Follenvie had gone to sleep.

As they had decided on starting at eight o'clock the next morning, every one was in the kitchen at that hour; but the coach, its roof covered with snow, stood by itself in the middle of the yard, without either horses or driver. They sought the latter in the stables, coach-houses and barns — but in vain. So the men of the party resolved to scour the country for him, and sallied forth. They found them selves in the square, with the church at the farther side, and to right and left low-roofed houses where there were some Prussian soldiers. The first soldier they saw was peeling potatoes. The second, farther on, was washing out a barber's shop. An other, bearded to the eyes, was fondling a crying infant, and dandling it on his knees to quiet it; and the stout peasant women, whose men-folk were for the most part at the war, were, by means of signs, telling their obedient conquerors what work they were to do: chop wood, prepare soup, grind coffee; one of them even was doing the washing for his hostess, an infirm old grandmother.

The count, astonished at what he saw, questioned the beadle who was coming out of the presbytery. The old man answered:

"Oh, those men are not at all a bad sort; they are not Prussians, I am told; they come from somewhere farther off, I don't exactly know where. And they have all left wives and children behind them; they are not fond of war either, you may be sure! I am sure they are mourning for the men where they come from, just as we do here; and the war causes them just as much unhappiness as it does us. As a matter of fact, things are not so very bad here just now, because the soldiers do no harm, and work just as if they were in their own homes. You see, sir, poor folk always help one another; it is the great ones of this world who make war."

Cornudet indignant at the friendly understanding established between conquerors and conquered, withdrew, preferring to shut himself up in the inn.

"They are repeopling the country," jested Loiseau.

"They are undoing the harm they have done," said Monsieur Carre-Lamadon gravely.

But they could not find the coach driver. At last he was discovered in the village cafe, fraternizing cordially with the officer's orderly.

"Were you not told to harness the horses at eight o'clock?" demanded the count.

"Oh, yes; but I've had different orders since."

"What orders?"

"Not to harness at all."

"Who gave you such orders?"

"Why, the Prussian officer."

“But why?”

“I don’t know. Go and ask him. I am forbidden to harness the horses, so I don’t harness them — that’s all.”

“Did he tell you so himself?”

“No, sir; the innkeeper gave me the order from him.”

“When?”

“Last evening, just as I was going to bed.”

The three men returned in a very uneasy frame of mind.

They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but the servant replied that on account of his asthma he never got up before ten o’clock. They were strictly forbidden to rouse him earlier, except in case of fire.

They wished to see the officer, but that also was impossible, although he lodged in the inn. Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorized to interview him on civil matters. So they waited. The women returned to their rooms, and occupied themselves with trivial matters.

Cornudet settled down beside the tall kitchen fireplace, before a blazing fire. He had a small table and a jug of beer placed beside him, and he smoked his pipe — a pipe which enjoyed among democrats a consideration almost equal to his own, as though it had served its country in serving Cornudet. It was a fine meerschaum, admirably colored to a black the shade of its owner’s teeth, but sweet-smelling, gracefully curved, at home in its master’s hand, and completing his physiognomy. And Cornudet sat motionless, his eyes fixed now on the dancing flames, now on the froth which crowned his beer; and after each draught he passed his long, thin fingers with an air of satisfaction through his long, greasy hair, as he sucked the foam from his mustache.

Loiseau, under pretence of stretching his legs, went out to see if he could sell wine to the country dealers. The count and the manufacturer began to talk politics. They forecast the future of France. One believed in the Orleans dynasty, the other in an unknown savior — a hero who should rise up in the last extremity: a Du Guesclin, perhaps a Joan of Arc? or another Napoleon the First? Ah! if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet, listening to them, smiled like a man who holds the keys of destiny in his hands. His pipe perfumed the whole kitchen.

As the clock struck ten, Monsieur Follenvie appeared. He was immediately surrounded and questioned, but could only repeat, three or four times in succession, and without variation, the words:

"The officer said to me, just like this: 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid them to harness up the coach for those travellers to-morrow. They are not to start without an order from me. You hear? That is sufficient.'"

Then they asked to see the officer. The count sent him his card, on which Monsieur Carre-Lamadon also inscribed his name and titles. The Prussian sent word that the two men would be admitted to see him after his luncheon — that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies reappeared, and they all ate a little, in spite of their anxiety. Boule de Suif appeared ill and very much worried.

They were finishing their coffee when the orderly came to fetch the gentlemen.

Loiseau joined the other two; but when they tried to get Cornudet to accompany them, by way of adding greater solemnity to the occasion, he declared proudly that he would never have anything to do with the Germans, and, resuming his seat in the chimney corner, he called for another jug of beer.

The three men went upstairs, and were ushered into the best room in the inn, where the officer received them lolling at his ease in an armchair, his feet on the mantelpiece, smoking a long porcelain pipe, and enveloped in a gorgeous dressing-gown, doubtless stolen from the deserted dwelling of some citizen destitute of taste in dress. He neither rose, greeted them, nor even glanced in their direction. He afforded a fine example of that insolence of bearing which seems natural to the victorious soldier.

After the lapse of a few moments he said in his halting French:

"What do you want?"

"We wish to start on our journey," said the count.

"No."

"May I ask the reason of your refusal?"

"Because I don't choose."

"I would respectfully call your attention, monsieur, to the fact that your general in command gave us a permit to proceed to Dieppe; and I do not think we have done anything to deserve this harshness at your hands."

"I don't choose — that's all. You may go."

They bowed, and retired.

The afternoon was wretched. They could not understand the caprice of this German, and the strangest ideas came into their heads. They all congregated in the kitchen, and talked the subject to death, imagining all kinds of unlikely things. Perhaps they were to be kept as hostages — but for what reason? or to be extradited as prisoners of war? or possibly they were to be held for ransom? They were panic-stricken at this last supposition. The richest among them were the most alarmed, seeing themselves forced to empty bags of gold into the insolent soldier's hands in order to buy back their lives. They racked their brains for plausible lies whereby they might conceal the fact that they were rich, and pass themselves off as poor — very poor. Loiseau took off his watch chain, and put it in his pocket. The approach of night increased their apprehension. The lamp was lighted, and as it wanted yet two hours to dinner Madame Loiseau proposed a game of trente et un. It would distract their thoughts. The rest agreed, and Cornudet himself joined the party, first putting out his pipe for politeness' sake.

The count shuffled the cards — dealt — and Boule de Suif had thirty-one to start with; soon the interest of the game assuaged the anxiety of the players. But Cornudet noticed that Loiseau and his wife were in league to cheat.

They were about to sit down to dinner when Monsieur Follenvie appeared, and in his grating voice announced:

"The Prussian officer sends to ask Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset if she has changed her mind yet."

Boule de Suif stood still, pale as death. Then, suddenly turning crimson with anger, she gasped out:

"Kindly tell that scoundrel, that cur, that carrion of a Prussian, that I will never consent — you understand? — never, never, never!"

The fat innkeeper left the room. Then Boule de Suif was surrounded, questioned, entreated on all sides to reveal the mystery of her visit to the officer. She refused at first; but her wrath soon got the better of her.

"What does he want? He wants to make me his mistress!" she cried.

No one was shocked at the word, so great was the general indignation. Cornudet broke his jug as he banged it down on the table. A loud outcry arose against this base soldier. All were furious. They drew together in common resistance against the foe, as if some part of the sacrifice exacted of Boule de Suif had been demanded of each. The count declared, with supreme disgust, that those people behaved like ancient barbarians. The women, above all, manifested a lively and tender sympathy for Boule de Suif. The nuns, who appeared only at meals, cast down their eyes, and said nothing.

They dined, however, as soon as the first indignant outburst had subsided; but they spoke little and thought much.

The ladies went to bed early; and the men, having lighted their pipes, proposed a game of ecarte, in which Monsieur Follenvie was invited to join, the travellers hoping to question him skillfully as to the best means of vanquishing the officer's obduracy. But he thought of nothing but his cards, would listen to nothing, reply to nothing, and repeated, time after time: "Attend to the game, gentlemen! attend to the game!" So absorbed was his attention that he even forgot to expectorate. The consequence was that his chest gave forth rumbling sounds like those of an organ. His wheezing lungs struck every note of the asthmatic scale, from deep, hollow tones to a shrill, hoarse piping resembling that of a young cock trying to crow.

He refused to go to bed when his wife, overcome with sleep, came to fetch him. So she went off alone, for she was an early bird, always up with the sun; while he was addicted to late hours, ever ready to spend the night with friends. He merely said: "Put my egg-nogg by the fire," and went on with the game. When the other men saw that nothing was to be got out of him they declared it was time to retire, and each sought his bed.

They rose fairly early the next morning, with a vague hope of being allowed to start, a greater desire than ever to do so, and a terror at having to spend another day in this wretched little inn.

Alas! the horses remained in the stable, the driver was invisible. They spent their time, for want of something better to do, in wandering round the coach.

Luncheon was a gloomy affair; and there was a general coolness toward Boule de Suif, for night, which brings counsel, had somewhat modified the judgment of her companions. In the cold light of the morning they almost bore a grudge against the girl for not having secretly sought out the Prussian, that the rest of the party might receive a joyful surprise when they awoke. What more simple?

Besides, who would have been the wiser? She might have saved appearances by telling the officer that she had taken pity on their distress. Such a step would be of so little consequence to her.

But no one as yet confessed to such thoughts.

In the afternoon, seeing that they were all bored to death, the count proposed a walk in the neighborhood of the village. Each one wrapped himself up well, and the little party set out, leaving behind only Cornudet, who preferred to sit over the fire, and the two nuns, who were in the habit of spending their day in the church or at the presbytery.

The cold, which grew more intense each day, almost froze the noses and ears of the pedestrians, their feet began to pain them so that each step was a penance, and when they reached the open country it looked so mournful and depressing in its limitless mantle of white that they all hastily retraced their steps, with bodies benumbed and hearts heavy.

The four women walked in front, and the three men followed a little in their rear.

Loiseau, who saw perfectly well how matters stood, asked suddenly "if that trollop were going to keep them waiting much longer in this Godforsaken spot." The count, always courteous, replied that they could not exact so painful a sacrifice from any woman, and that the first move must come from herself. Monsieur Carre-Lamadon remarked that if the French, as they talked of doing, made a counter attack by way of Dieppe, their encounter with the enemy must inevitably take place at Totes. This reflection made the other two anxious.

"Supposing we escape on foot?" said Loiseau.

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"How can you think of such a thing, in this snow? And with our wives? Besides, we should be pursued at once, overtaken in ten minutes, and brought back as prisoners at the mercy of the soldiery."

This was true enough; they were silent.

The ladies talked of dress, but a certain constraint seemed to prevail among them.

Suddenly, at the end of the street, the officer appeared. His tall, wasp-like, uniformed figure was outlined against the snow which bounded the horizon, and he walked, knees apart, with that motion peculiar to soldiers, who are always anxious not to soil their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, then glanced scornfully at the men, who had sufficient dignity not to raise their hats, though Loiseau made a movement to do so.

Boule de Suif flushed crimson to the ears, and the three married women felt unutterably humiliated at being met thus by the soldier in company with the girl whom he had treated with such scant ceremony.

Then they began to talk about him, his figure, and his face. Madame Carre-Lamadon, who had known many officers and judged them as a connoisseur, thought him not at all bad-looking; she even regretted that he was not a Frenchman, because in that case he would have made a very handsome hussar, with whom all the women would assuredly have fallen in love.

When they were once more within doors they did not know what to do with themselves. Sharp words even were exchanged apropos of the merest trifles. The silent dinner was quickly over, and each one went to bed early in the hope of sleeping, and thus killing time.

They came down next morning with tired faces and irritable tempers; the women scarcely spoke to Boule de Suif.

A church bell summoned the faithful to a baptism. Boule de Suif had a child being brought up by peasants at Yvetot. She did not see him once a year, and never thought of him; but the idea of the child who was about to be baptized induced a sudden wave of tenderness for her own, and she insisted on being present at the ceremony.

As soon as she had gone out, the rest of the company looked at one another and then drew their chairs together; for they realized that they must decide on some course of action. Loiseau had an inspiration: he proposed that they should ask the officer to detain Boule de Suif only, and to let the rest depart on their way.

Monsieur Follenvie was intrusted with this commission, but he returned to them almost immediately. The German, who knew human nature, had shown him the door. He intended to keep all the travellers until his condition had been complied with.

Whereupon Madame Loiseau's vulgar temperament broke bounds.

"We're not going to die of old age here!" she cried. "Since it's that vixen's trade to behave so with men I don't see that she has any right to refuse one more than another. I may as well tell you she took any lovers she could get at Rouen — even coachmen! Yes, indeed, madame — the coachman at the prefecture! I know it for a fact, for he buys his wine of us. And now that it is a question of getting us out of a difficulty she puts on virtuous airs, the drab! For my part, I think this officer has behaved very well. Why, there were three others of us, any one of whom he would undoubtedly have preferred. But no, he contents himself with the girl who is common property. He respects married women. Just think. He is master here. He had only to say: 'I wish it!' and he might have taken us by force, with the help of his soldiers."

The two other women shuddered; the eyes of pretty Madame Carre-Lamadon glistened, and she grew pale, as if the officer were indeed in the act of laying violent hands on her.

The men, who had been discussing the subject among themselves, drew near. Loiseau, in a state of furious resentment, was for delivering up “that miserable woman,” bound hand and foot, into the enemy’s power. But the count, descended from three generations of ambassadors, and endowed, moreover, with the lineaments of a diplomat, was in favor of more tactful measures.

“We must persuade her,” he said.

Then they laid their plans.

The women drew together; they lowered their voices, and the discussion became general, each giving his or her opinion. But the conversation was not in the least coarse. The ladies, in particular, were adepts at delicate phrases and charming subtleties of expression to describe the most improper things. A stranger would have understood none of their allusions, so guarded was the language they employed. But, seeing that the thin veneer of modesty with which every woman of the world is furnished goes but a very little way below the surface, they began rather to enjoy this unedifying episode, and at bottom were hugely delighted — feeling themselves in their element, furthering the schemes of lawless love with the gusto of a gourmand cook who prepares supper for another.

Their gaiety returned of itself, so amusing at last did the whole business seem to them. The count uttered several rather risky witticisms, but so tactfully were they said that his audience could not help smiling. Loiseau in turn made some considerably broader jokes, but no one took offence; and the thought expressed with such brutal directness by his wife was uppermost in the minds of all: “Since it’s the girl’s trade, why should she refuse this man more than another?” Dainty Madame Carre-Lamadon seemed to think even that in Boule de Suif’s place she would be less inclined to refuse him than another.

The blockade was as carefully arranged as if they were investing a fortress. Each agreed on the role which he or she was to play, the arguments to be used, the maneuvers to be executed. They decided on the plan of campaign, the stratagems they were to employ, and the surprise attacks which were to reduce this human citadel and force it to receive the enemy within its walls.

But Cornudet remained apart from the rest, taking no share in the plot.

So absorbed was the attention of all that Boule de Suif's entrance was almost unnoticed. But the count whispered a gentle "Hush!" which made the others look up. She was there. They suddenly stopped talking, and a vague embarrassment prevented them for a few moments from addressing her. But the countess, more practiced than the others in the wiles of the drawing-room, asked her:

"Was the baptism interesting?"

The girl, still under the stress of emotion, told what she had seen and heard, described the faces, the attitudes of those present, and even the appearance of the church. She concluded with the words:

"It does one good to pray sometimes."

Until lunch time the ladies contented themselves with being pleasant to her, so as to increase her confidence and make her amenable to their advice.

As soon as they took their seats at table the attack began. First they opened a vague conversation on the subject of self-sacrifice. Ancient examples were quoted: Judith and Holofernes; then, irrationally enough, Lucrece and Sextus; Cleopatra and the hostile generals whom she reduced to abject slavery by a surrender of her charms. Next was recounted an extraordinary story, born of the imagination of these ignorant millionaires, which told how the matrons of Rome seduced Hannibal, his lieutenants, and all his mercenaries at Capua. They held up to admiration all those women who from time to time have arrested the victorious progress of conquerors, made of their bodies a field of battle, a means of ruling, a weapon; who have vanquished by their heroic caresses hideous or detested beings, and sacrificed their chastity to vengeance and devotion.

All was said with due restraint and regard for propriety, the effect heightened now and then by an outburst of forced enthusiasm calculated to excite emulation.

A listener would have thought at last that the one role of woman on earth was a perpetual sacrifice of her person, a continual abandonment of herself to the caprices of a hostile soldiery.

The two nuns seemed to hear nothing, and to be lost in thought. Boule de Suif also was silent.

During the whole afternoon she was left to her reflections. But instead of calling her "madame" as they had done hitherto, her companions addressed her simply as "mademoiselle," without exactly knowing why, but as if desirous of making her descend a step in the esteem she had won, and forcing her to realize her degraded position.

Just as soup was served, Monsieur Follenvie reappeared, repeating his phrase of the evening before:

"The Prussian officer sends to ask if Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset has changed her mind."

Boule de Suif answered briefly:

"No, monsieur."

But at dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three unfortunate remarks. Each was cudgeling his brains for further examples of self-sacrifice, and could find none, when the countess, possibly without ulterior motive, and moved simply by a vague desire to do homage to religion, began to question the elder of the two nuns on the most striking facts in the lives of the saints. Now, it fell out that many of these had committed acts which would be crimes in our eyes, but the Church readily pardons such deeds when they are accomplished for the glory of God or the good of mankind. This was a powerful argument, and the countess made the most of it. Then, whether by reason of a tacit understanding, a thinly veiled act of complaisance such as those who wear the ecclesiastical habit excel in, or whether merely as the result of sheer stupidity — a stupidity admirably adapted to further their designs — the old nun rendered formidable aid to the conspirator. They had thought her timid; she proved herself bold, talkative, bigoted. She was not troubled by the ins and outs of casuistry; her doctrines were as iron bars; her faith knew no doubt; her conscience no scruples. She looked on Abraham's sacrifice as natural enough, for she herself would not have hesitated to kill both father and mother if she had received a divine order to that effect; and nothing, in her opinion, could displease our Lord, provided the motive were praiseworthy. The countess, putting to good use the consecrated authority of her unexpected ally, led her on to make a lengthy and edifying paraphrase of that axiom enunciated by a certain school of moralists: "The end justifies the means."

"Then, sister," she asked, "you think God accepts all methods, and pardons the act when the motive is pure?"

"Undoubtedly, madame. An action reprehensible in itself often derives merit from the thought which inspires it."

And in this wise they talked on, fathoming the wishes of God, predicting His judgments, describing Him as interested in matters which assuredly concern Him but little.

All was said with the utmost care and discretion, but every word uttered by the holy woman in her nun's garb weakened the indignant resistance of the courtesan. Then the conversation drifted somewhat, and the nun began to talk of the convents of her order, of her Superior, of herself, and of her fragile little neighbor, Sister St. Nicephore. They had been sent for from Havre to nurse the hundreds of soldiers who were in hospitals, stricken with smallpox. She described these wretched invalids and their malady. And, while they themselves were detained on their way by the caprices of the Prussian officer, scores of Frenchmen might be dying, whom they would otherwise have saved! For the nursing of soldiers was the old nun's specialty; she had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria; and as she told the story of her campaigns she revealed herself as one of those holy sisters of the fife and drum who seem designed by nature to follow camps, to snatch the wounded from amid the strife of battle, and to quell with a word, more effectually than any general, the rough and insubordinate troopers — a masterful woman, her seamed and pitted face itself an image of the devastations of war.

No one spoke when she had finished for fear of spoiling the excellent effect of her words.

As soon as the meal was over the travellers retired to their rooms, whence they emerged the following day at a late hour of the morning.

Luncheon passed off quietly. The seed sown the preceding evening was being given time to germinate and bring forth fruit.

In the afternoon the countess proposed a walk; then the count, as had been arranged beforehand, took Boule de Suif's arm, and walked with her at some distance behind the rest.

He began talking to her in that familiar, paternal, slightly contemptuous tone which men of his class adopt in speaking to women like her, calling her "my dear child," and talking down to her from the height of his exalted social position and stainless reputation. He came straight to the point.

"So you prefer to leave us here, exposed like yourself to all the violence which would follow on a repulse of the Prussian troops, rather than consent to surrender yourself, as you have done so many times in your life?"

The girl did not reply.

He tried kindness, argument, sentiment. He still bore himself as count, even while adopting, when desirable, an attitude of gallantry, and making pretty — nay, even tender — speeches. He exalted the service she would render them, spoke of their gratitude; then, suddenly, using the familiar “thou”:

“And you know, my dear, he could boast then of having made a conquest of a pretty girl such as he won’t often find in his own country.”

Boule de Suif did not answer, and joined the rest of the party.

As soon as they returned she went to her room, and was seen no more. The general anxiety was at its height. What would she do? If she still resisted, how awkward for them all!

The dinner hour struck; they waited for her in vain. At last Monsieur Follenvie entered, announcing that Mademoiselle Rousset was not well, and that they might sit down to table. They all pricked up their ears. The count drew near the innkeeper, and whispered:

“Is it all right?”

“Yes.”

Out of regard for propriety he said nothing to his companions, but merely nodded slightly toward them. A great sigh of relief went up from all breasts; every face was lighted up with joy.

“By Gad!” shouted Loiseau, “I’ll stand champagne all round if there’s any to be found in this place.” And great was Madame Loiseau’s dismay when the proprietor came back with four bottles in his hands. They had all suddenly become talkative and merry; a lively joy filled all hearts. The count seemed to perceive for the first time that Madame Carre-Lamadon was charming; the manufacturer paid compliments to the countess. The conversation was animated, sprightly, witty, and, although many of the jokes were in the worst possible taste, all the company were amused by them, and none offended — indignation being dependent, like other emotions, on surroundings. And the mental atmosphere had gradually become filled with gross imaginings and unclean thoughts.

At dessert even the women indulged in discreetly worded allusions. Their glances were full of meaning; they had drunk much. The count, who even in his moments of relaxation preserved a dignified demeanor, hit on a much-appreciated comparison of the condition of things with the termination of a winter spent in the icy solitude of the North Pole and the joy of shipwrecked mariners who at last perceive a southward track opening out before their eyes.

Loiseau, fairly in his element, rose to his feet, holding aloft a glass of champagne.

"I drink to our deliverance!" he shouted.

All stood up, and greeted the toast with acclamation. Even the two good sisters yielded to the solicitations of the ladies, and consented to moisten their lips with the foaming wine, which they had never before tasted. They declared it was like effervescent lemonade, but with a pleasanter flavor.

"It is a pity," said Loiseau, "that we have no piano; we might have had a quadrille."

Cornudet had not spoken a word or made a movement; he seemed plunged in serious thought, and now and then tugged furiously at his great beard, as if trying to add still further to its length. At last, toward midnight, when they were about to separate, Loiseau, whose gait was far from steady, suddenly slapped him on the back, saying thickly:

"You're not jolly to-night; why are you so silent, old man?"

Cornudet threw back his head, cast one swift and scornful glance over the assemblage, and answered:

"I tell you all, you have done an infamous thing!"

He rose, reached the door, and repeating: "Infamous!" disappeared.

A chill fell on all. Loiseau himself looked foolish and disconcerted for a moment, but soon recovered his aplomb, and, writhing with laughter, exclaimed:

"Really, you are all too green for anything!"

Pressed for an explanation, he related the "mysteries of the corridor," whereat his listeners were hugely amused. The ladies could hardly contain their delight. The count and Monsieur Carre-Lamadon laughed till they cried. They could scarcely believe their ears.

"What! you are sure? He wanted — — "

"I tell you I saw it with my own eyes."

"And she refused?"

"Because the Prussian was in the next room!"

"Surely you are mistaken?"

"I swear I'm telling you the truth."

The count was choking with laughter. The manufacturer held his sides. Loiseau continued:

"So you may well imagine he doesn't think this evening's business at all amusing."

And all three began to laugh again, choking, coughing, almost ill with merriment.

Then they separated. But Madame Loiseau, who was nothing if not spiteful, remarked to her husband as they were on the way to bed that “that stuck-up little minx of a Carre-Lamadon had laughed on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening.”

“You know,” she said, “when women run after uniforms it’s all the same to them whether the men who wear them are French or Prussian. It’s perfectly sickening!”

The next morning the snow showed dazzling white tinder a clear winter sun. The coach, ready at last, waited before the door; while a flock of white pigeons, with pink eyes spotted in the centres with black, puffed out their white feathers and walked sedately between the legs of the six horses, picking at the steaming manure.

The driver, wrapped in his sheepskin coat, was smoking a pipe on the box, and all the passengers, radiant with delight at their approaching departure, were putting up provisions for the remainder of the journey.

They were waiting only for Boule de Suif. At last she appeared.

She seemed rather shamefaced and embarrassed, and advanced with timid step toward her companions, who with one accord turned aside as if they had not seen her. The count, with much dignity, took his wife by the arm, and removed her from the unclean contact.

The girl stood still, stupefied with astonishment; then, plucking up courage, accosted the manufacturer’s wife with a humble “Good-morning, madame,” to which the other replied merely with a slight and insolent nod, accompanied by a look of outraged virtue. Every one suddenly appeared extremely busy, and kept as far from Boule de Suif as if tier skirts had been infected with some deadly disease. Then they hurried to the coach, followed by the despised courtesan, who, arriving last of all, silently took the place she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

The rest seemed neither to see nor to know her — all save Madame Loiseau, who, glancing contemptuously in her direction, remarked, half aloud, to her husband:

“What a mercy I am not sitting beside that creature!”

The lumbering vehicle started on its way, and the journey began afresh.

At first no one spoke. Boule de Suif dared not even raise her eyes. She felt at once indignant with her neighbors, and humiliated at having yielded to the Prussian into whose arms they had so hypocritically cast her.

But the countess, turning toward Madame Carre-Lamadon, soon broke the painful silence:

"I think you know Madame d'Etrelles?"

"Yes; she is a friend of mine."

"Such a charming woman!"

"Delightful! Exceptionally talented, and an artist to the finger tips. She sings marvellously and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer was chatting with the count, and amid the clatter of the window-panes a word of their conversation was now and then distinguishable: "Shares — maturity — premium — time-limit."

Loiseau, who had abstracted from the inn the timeworn pack of cards, thick with the grease of five years' contact with half-wiped-off tables, started a game of bezique with his wife.

The good sisters, taking up simultaneously the long rosaries hanging from their waists, made the sign of the cross, and began to mutter in unison interminable prayers, their lips moving ever more and more swiftly, as if they sought which should outdistance the other in the race of orisons; from time to time they kissed a medal, and crossed themselves anew, then resumed their rapid and unintelligible murmur.

Cornudet sat still, lost in thought.

Ah the end of three hours Loiseau gathered up the cards, and remarked that he was hungry.

His wife thereupon produced a parcel tied with string, from which she extracted a piece of cold veal. This she cut into neat, thin slices, and both began to eat.

"We may as well do the same," said the countess. The rest agreed, and she unpacked the provisions which had been prepared for herself, the count, and the Carre-Lamadons. In one of those oval dishes, the lids of which are decorated with an earthenware hare, by way of showing that a game pie lies within, was a succulent delicacy consisting of the brown flesh of the game larded with streaks of bacon and flavored with other meats chopped fine. A solid wedge of Gruyere cheese, which had been wrapped in a newspaper, bore the imprint: "Items of News," on its rich, oily surface.

The two good sisters brought to light a hunk of sausage smelling strongly of garlic; and Cornudet, plunging both hands at once into the capacious pockets of his loose overcoat, produced from one four hard-boiled eggs and from the other a crust of bread. He removed the shells, threw them into the straw beneath his feet, and began to devour the eggs, letting morsels of the bright yellow yolk fall in his mighty beard, where they looked like stars.

Boule de Suif, in the haste and confusion of her departure, had not thought of anything, and, stifling with rage, she watched all these people placidly eating. At first, ill-suppressed wrath shook her whole person, and she opened her lips to shriek the truth at them, to overwhelm them with a volley of insults; but she could not utter a word, so choked was she with indignation.

No one looked at her, no one thought of her. She felt herself swallowed up in the scorn of these virtuous creatures, who had first sacrificed, then rejected her as a thing useless and unclean. Then she remembered her big basket full of the good things they had so greedily devoured: the two chickens coated in jelly, the pies, the pears, the four bottles of claret; and her fury broke forth like a cord that is overstrained, and she was on the verge of tears. She made terrible efforts at self-control, drew herself up, swallowed the sobs which choked her; but the tears rose nevertheless, shone at the brink of her eyelids, and soon two heavy drops coursed slowly down her cheeks. Others followed more quickly, like water filtering from a rock, and fell, one after another, on her rounded bosom. She sat upright, with a fixed expression, her face pale and rigid, hoping desperately that no one saw her give way.

But the countess noticed that she was weeping, and with a sign drew her husband’s attention to the fact. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: “Well, what of it? It’s not my fault.” Madame Loiseau chuckled triumphantly, and murmured:

“She’s weeping for shame.”

The two nuns had betaken themselves once more to their prayers, first wrapping the remainder of their sausage in paper:

Then Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs under the opposite seat, threw himself back, folded his arms, smiled like a man who had just thought of a good joke, and began to whistle the Marseillaise.

The faces of his neighbors clouded; the popular air evidently did not find favor with them; they grew nervous and irritable, and seemed ready to howl as a dog does at the sound of a barrel-organ. Cornudet saw the discomfort he was creating, and whistled the louder; sometimes he even hummed the words:

Amour sacre de la patrie,
Conduis, soutiens, nos bras vengeurs,
Liberte, liberte cherie,
Combats avec tes defenseurs!

The coach progressed more swiftly, the snow being harder now; and all the way to Dieppe, during the long, dreary hours of the journey, first in the gathering dusk, then in the thick darkness, raising his voice above the rumbling of the vehicle, Cornudet continued with fierce obstinacy his vengeful and monotonous whistling, forcing his weary and exasperated-hearers to follow the song from end to end, to recall every word of every line, as each was repeated over and over again with untiring persistency.

And Boule de Suif still wept, and sometimes a sob she could not restrain was heard in the darkness between two verses of the song.

JADIS, OR, THE LOVE OF LONG AGO

The old-fashioned chateau was built on a wooded knoll in the midst of tall trees with dark-green foliage; the park extended to a great distance, in one direction to the edge of the forest, in another to the distant country. A few yards from the front of the house was a huge stone basin with marble ladies taking a bath; other, basins were seen at intervals down to the foot of the slope, and a stream of water fell in cascades from one basin to another.

From the manor house, which preserved the grace of a superannuated coquette, down to the grottos incrusted with shell-work, where slumbered the loves of a bygone age, everything in this antique demesne had retained the physiognomy of former days. Everything seemed to speak still of ancient customs, of the manners of long ago, of former gallantries, and of the elegant trivialities so dear to our grandmothers.

In a parlor in the style of Louis XV, whose walls were covered with shepherds paying court to shepherdesses, beautiful ladies in hoop-skirts, and gallant gentlemen in wigs, a very old woman, who seemed dead as soon as she ceased to move, was almost lying down in a large easy-chair, at each side of which hung a thin, mummy-like hand.

Her dim eyes were gazing dreamily toward the distant horizon as if they sought to follow through the park the visions of her youth. Through the open window every now and then came a breath of air laden with the odor of grass and the perfume of flowers. It made her white locks flutter around her wrinkled forehead and old memories float through her brain.

Beside her, on a tapestried stool, a young girl, with long fair hair hanging in braids down her back, was embroidering an altar-cloth. There was a pensive expression in her eyes, and it was easy to see that she was dreaming, while her agile fingers flew over her work.

But the old lady turned round her head, and said:

“Berthe, read me something out of the newspapers, that I may still know sometimes what is going on in the world.”

The young girl took up a newspaper, and cast a rapid glance over it.

"There is a great deal about politics, grandmamma; shall I pass that over?"

"Yes, yes, darling. Are there no love stories? Is gallantry, then, dead in France, that they no longer talk about abductions or adventures as they did formerly?"

The girl made a long search through the columns of the newspaper.

"Here is one," she said. "It is entitled 'A Love Drama!'"

The old woman smiled through her wrinkles. "Read that for me," she said.

And Berthe commenced. It was a case of vitriol throwing. A wife, in order to avenge herself on her husband's mistress, had burned her face and eyes. She had left the Court of Assizes acquitted, declared to be innocent, amid the applause of the crowd.

The grandmother moved about excitedly in her chair, and exclaimed:

"This is horrible — why, it is perfectly horrible!

"See whether you can find anything else to read to me, darling."

Berthe again made a search; and farther down among the reports of criminal cases, she read:

"'Gloomy Drama. A shop girl, no longer young, allowed herself to be led astray by a young man. Then, to avenge herself on her lover, whose heart proved fickle, she shot him with a revolver. The unhappy man is maimed for life. The jury, all men of moral character, condoning the illicit love of the murderess, honorably acquitted her.'"

This time the old grandmother appeared quite shocked, and, in a trembling voice, she said:

"Why, you people are mad nowadays. You are mad! The good God has given you love, the only enchantment in life. Man has added to this gallantry the only distraction of our dull hours, and here you are mixing up with it vitriol and revolvers, as if one were to put mud into a flagon of Spanish wine."

Berthe did not seem to understand her grandmother's indignation.

"But, grandmamma, this woman avenged herself. Remember she was married, and her husband deceived her."

The grandmother gave a start.

"What ideas have they been filling your head with, you young girls of today?"

Berthe replied:

“But marriage is sacred, grandmamma.”

The grandmother’s heart, which had its birth in the great age of gallantry, gave a sudden leap.

“It is love that is sacred,” she said. “Listen, child, to an old woman who has seen three generations, and who has had a long, long experience of men and women. Marriage and love have nothing in common. We marry to found a family, and we form families in order to constitute society. Society cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links, we always seek metals of the same order. When we marry, we must bring together suitable conditions; we must combine fortunes, unite similar races and aim at the common interest, which is riches and children. We marry only once my child, because the world requires us to do so, but we may love twenty times in one lifetime because nature has made us like this. Marriage, you see, is law, and love is an instinct which impels us, sometimes along a straight, and sometimes along a devious path. The world has made laws to combat our instincts — it was necessary to make them; but our instincts are always stronger, and we ought not to resist them too much, because they come from God; while the laws only come from men. If we did not perfume life with love, as much love as possible, darling, as we put sugar into drugs for children, nobody would care to take it just as it is.”

Berthe opened her eyes wide in astonishment. She murmured:

“Oh! grandmamma, we can only love once.”

The grandmother raised her trembling hands toward Heaven, as if again to invoke the defunct god of gallantries. She exclaimed indignantly:

“You have become a race of serfs, a race of common people. Since the Revolution, it is impossible any longer to recognize society. You have attached big words to every action, and wearisome duties to every corner of existence; you believe in equality and eternal passion. People have written poetry telling you that people have died of love. In my time poetry was written to teach men to love every woman. And we! when we liked a gentleman, my child, we sent him a page. And when a fresh caprice came into our hearts, we were not slow in getting rid of the last Lover — unless we kept both of them.”

The old woman smiled a keen smile, and a gleam of roguery twinkled in her gray eye, the intellectual, skeptical roguery of those people who did not believe that they were made of the same clay as the rest, and who lived as masters for whom common beliefs were not intended.

The young girl, turning very pale, faltered out:

“So, then, women have no honor?”

The grandmother ceased to smile. If she had kept in her soul some of Voltaire’s irony, she had also a little of Jean Jacques’s glowing philosophy: “No honor! because we loved, and dared to say so, and even boasted of it? But, my child, if one of us, among the greatest ladies in France, had lived without a lover, she would have had the entire court laughing at her. Those who wished to live differently had only to enter a convent. And you imagine, perhaps, that your husbands will love but you alone, all their lives. As if, indeed, this could be the case. I tell you that marriage is a thing necessary in order that society should exist, but it is not in the nature of our race, do you understand? There is only one good thing in life, and that is love. And how you misunderstand it! how you spoil it! You treat it as something solemn like a sacrament, or something to be bought, like a dress.”

The young girl caught the old woman’s trembling hands in her own.

“Hold your tongue, I beg of you, grandmamma!”

And, on her knees, with tears in her eyes, she prayed to Heaven to bestow on her a great passion, one sole, eternal passion in accordance with the dream of modern poets, while the grandmother, kissing her on the forehead, quite imbued still with that charming, healthy reason with which gallant philosophers tinctured the thought of the eighteenth century, murmured:

“Take care, my poor darling! If you believe in such folly as that, you will be very unhappy.”

THE DISPENSER OF HOLY WATER

We lived formerly in a little house beside the high road outside the village. He had set up in business as a wheelwright, after marrying the daughter of a farmer of the neighborhood, and as they were both industrious, they managed to save up a nice little fortune. But they had no children, and this caused them great sorrow. Finally a son was born, whom they named Jean. They both loved and petted him, enfolding him with their affection, and were unwilling to let him be out of their sight.

When he was five years old some mountebanks passed through the country and set up their tent in the town hall square.

Jean, who had seen them pass by, made his escape from the house, and after his father had made a long search for him, he found him among the learned goats and trick dogs, uttering shouts of laughter and sitting on the knees of an old clown.

Three days later, just as they were sitting down to dinner, the wheelwright and his wife noticed that their son was not in the house. They looked for him in the garden, and as they did not find him, his father went out into the road and shouted at the top of his voice, “Jean!”

Night came on. A brown vapor arose making distant objects look still farther away and giving them a dismal, weird appearance. Three tall pines, close at hand, seemed to be weeping. Still there was no reply, but the air appeared to be full of indistinct sighing. The father listened for some time, thinking he heard a sound first in one direction, then in another, and, almost beside himself, he ran, out into the night, calling incessantly “Jean! Jean!”

He ran along thus until daybreak, filling the, darkness with his shouts, terrifying stray animals, torn by a terrible anguish and fearing that he was losing his mind. His wife, seated on the stone step of their home, sobbed until morning.

They did not find their son. They both aged rapidly in their inconsolable sorrow. Finally they sold their house and set out to search together.

They inquired of the shepherds on the hillsides, of the tradesmen passing by, of the peasants in the villages and of the authorities in the towns. But their boy had been lost a long time and no one knew anything about him. He had probably forgotten his own name by this time and also the name of his village, and his parents wept in silence, having lost hope.

Before long their money came to an end, and they worked out by the day in the farms and inns, doing the most menial work, eating what was left from the tables, sleeping on the ground and suffering from cold. Then as they became enfeebled by hard work no one would employ them any longer, and they were forced to beg along the high roads. They accosted passers-by in an entreating voice and with sad, discouraged faces; they begged a morsel of bread from the harvesters who were dining around a tree in the fields at noon, and they ate in silence seated on the edge of a ditch. An innkeeper to whom they told their story said to them one day:

"I know some one who had lost their daughter, and they found her in Paris."

They at once set out for Paris.

When they entered the great city they were bewildered by its size and by the crowds that they saw. But they knew that Jean must be in the midst of all these people, though they did not know how to set about looking for him. Then they feared that they might not recognize him, for he was only five years old when they last saw him.

They visited every place, went through all the streets, stopping whenever they saw a group of people, hoping for some providential meeting, some extraordinary luck, some compassionate fate.

They frequently walked at haphazard straight ahead, leaning one against the other, looking so sad and poverty-stricken that people would give them alms without their asking.

They spent every Sunday at the doors of the churches, watching the crowds entering and leaving, trying to distinguish among the faces one that might be familiar. Several times they thought they recognized him, but always found they had made a mistake.

In the vestibule of one of the churches which they visited the most frequently there was an old dispenser of holy Water who had become their friend. He also had a very sad history, and their sympathy for him had established a bond of close friendship between them. It ended by them all three living together in a poor lodging on the top floor of a large house situated at some distance, quite on the outskirts of the city, and the wheelwright would sometimes take his new friend’s place at the church when the latter was ill.

Winter came, a very severe winter. The poor holy water sprinkler died and the parish priest appointed the wheelwright, whose misfortunes had come to his knowledge, to replace him. He went every morning and sat in the same place, on the same chair, wearing away the old stone pillar by continually leaning against it. He would gaze steadily at every man who entered the church and looked forward to Sunday with as much impatience as a schoolboy, for on that day the church was filled with people from morning till night.

He became very old, growing weaker each day from the dampness of the church, and his hope oozed away gradually.

He now knew by sight all the people who came to the services; he knew their hours, their manners, could distinguish their step on the stone pavement.

His interests had become so contracted that the entrance of a stranger in the church was for him a great event. One day two ladies came in; one was old, the other young — a mother and daughter probably. Behind them came a man who was following them. He bowed to them as they came out, and after offering them some holy water, he took the arm of the elder lady.

“That must be the fiance of the younger one,” thought the wheelwright. And until evening he kept trying to recall where he had formerly seen a young man who resembled this one. But the one he was thinking of must be an old man by this time, for it seemed as if he had known him down home in his youth.

The same man frequently came again to walk home with the ladies, and this vague, distant, familiar resemblance which he could not place worried the old man so much that he made his wife come with him to see if she could help his impaired memory.

One evening as it was growing dusk the three strangers entered together. When they had passed the old man said:

“Well, do you know him?”

His wife anxiously tried to ransack her memory. Suddenly she said in a low tone:

“Yes — yes — but he is darker, taller, stouter and is dressed like a gentleman, but, father, all the same, it is your face when you were young!”

The old man started violently.

It was true. He looked like himself and also like his brother who was dead, and like his father, whom he remembered while he was yet young. The old couple were so affected that they could not speak. The three persons came out and were about to leave the church.

The man touched his finger to the holy water sprinkler. Then the old man, whose hand was trembling so that he was fairly sprinkling the ground with holy water, exclaimed:

“Jean!”

The young man stopped and looked at him.

He repeated in a lower tone:

“Jean!”

The two women looked at them without understanding.

He then said for the third time, sobbing as he did so:

“Jean!”

The man stooped down, with his face close to the old man’s, and as a memory of his childhood dawned on him he replied:

“Papa Pierre, Mamma Jeanne!”

He had forgotten everything, his father’s surname and the name of his native place, but he always remembered those two words that he had so often repeated: “Papa Pierre, Mamma Jeanne.”

He sank to the floor, his face on the old man’s knees, and he wept, kissing now his father and then his mother, while they were almost breathless from intense joy.

The two ladies also wept, understanding as they did that some great happiness had come to pass.

Then they all went to the young man’s house and he told them his history. The circus people had carried him off. For three years he traveled with them in various countries. Then the troupe disbanded, and one day an old lady in a chateau had paid to have him stay with her because she liked his appearance. As he was intelligent, he was sent to school, then to college, and the old lady having no children, had left him all her money. He, for his part, had tried to find his parents, but as he could remember only the two names, “Papa Pierre, Mamma Jeanne,” he had been unable to do so. Now he was about to be married, and he introduced his fiancee, who was very good and very pretty.

When the two old people had told their story in their turn he kissed them once more. They sat up very late that night, not daring to retire lest the happiness they had so long sought should escape them again while they were asleep.

But misfortune had lost its hold on them and they were happy for the rest of their lives.

SUNDAYS OF A BOURGEOIS

PREPARATIONS FOR THE EXCURSION

M. Patissot, born in Paris, after having failed in his examinations at the College Henri IV., like many others, had entered the government service through the influence of one of his aunts, who kept a tobacco store where the head of one of the departments bought his provisions.

He advanced very slowly, and would, perhaps, have died a fourth-class clerk without the aid of a kindly Providence, which sometimes watches over our destiny. He is today fifty-two years old, and it is only at this age that he is beginning to explore, as a tourist, all that part of France which lies between the fortifications and the provinces.

The story of his advance might be useful to many employees, just as the tale of his excursions may be of value to many Parisians who will take them as a model for their own outings, and will thus, through his example, avoid certain mishaps which occurred to him.

In 1854 he only enjoyed a salary of 1,800 francs. Through a peculiar trait of his character he was unpopular with all his superiors, who let him languish in the eternal and hopeless expectation of the clerk's ideal, an increase of salary. Nevertheless he worked; but he did not know how to make himself appreciated. He had too much self-respect, he claimed. His self-respect consisted in never bowing to his superiors in a low and servile manner, as did, according to him, certain of his colleagues, whom he would not mention. He added that his frankness embarrassed many people, for, like all the rest, he protested against injustice and the favoritism shown to persons entirely foreign to the bureaucracy. But his indignant voice never passed beyond the little cage where he worked.

First as a government clerk, then as a Frenchman and finally as a man who believed in order he would adhere to whatever government was established, having an unbounded reverence for authority, except for that of his chiefs.

Each time that he got the chance he would place himself where he could see the emperor pass, in order to have the honor of taking his hat off to him; and he would go away puffed up with pride at having bowed to the head of the state.

From his habit of observing the sovereign he did as many others do; he imitated the way he trimmed his beard or arranged his hair, the cut of his clothes, his walk, his mannerisms. Indeed, how many men in each country seemed to be the living images of the head of the government! Perhaps he vaguely resembled Napoleon III., but his hair was black; therefore he dyed it, and then the likeness was complete; and when he met another gentleman in the street also imitating the imperial countenance he was jealous and looked at him disdainfully. This need of imitation soon became his hobby, and, having heard an usher at the Tuilleries imitate the voice of the emperor, he also acquired the same intonations and studied slowness.

He thus became so much like his model that they might easily have been mistaken for each other, and certain high dignitaries were heard to remark that they found it unseemly and even vulgar; the matter was mentioned to the prime minister, who ordered that the employee should appear before him. But at the sight of him he began to laugh and repeated two or three times: “That’s funny, really funny!” This was repeated, and the following day Patissot’s immediate superior recommended that his subordinate receive an increase of salary of three hundred francs. He received it immediately.

From that time on his promotions came regularly, thanks to his ape-like faculty of imitation. The presentiment that some high honor might come to him some day caused his chiefs to speak to him with deference.

When the Republic was proclaimed it was a disaster for him. He felt lost, done for, and, losing his head, he stopped dyeing his hair, shaved his face clean and had his hair cut short, thus acquiring a paternal and benevolent expression which could not compromise him in any way.

Then his chiefs took revenge for the long time during which he had imposed upon them, and, having all turned Republican through an instinct of self preservation, they cut down his salary and delayed his promotion. He, too, changed his opinions. But the Republic not being a palpable and living person whom one can resemble, and the presidents succeeding each other with rapidity, he found himself plunged in the greatest embarrassment, in terrible distress, and, after an unsuccessful imitation of his last ideal, M. Thiers, he felt a check put on all his attempts at imitation. He needed a new manifestation of his personality. He searched for a long time; then, one morning, he arrived at the office wearing a new hat which had on the side a small red, white and blue rosette. His colleagues were astounded; they laughed all that day, the next day, all the week, all the month. But the seriousness of his demeanor at last disconcerted them, and once more his superiors became anxious. What mystery could be hidden under this sign? Was it a simple manifestation of patriotism, or an affirmation of his allegiance to the Republic, or perhaps the badge of some powerful association? But to wear it so persistently he must surely have some powerful and hidden protection. It would be well to be on one's guard, especially as he received all pleasantries with unruffled calmness. After that he was treated with respect, and his sham courage saved him; he was appointed head clerk on the first of January, 1880. His whole life had been spent indoors. He hated noise and bustle, and because of this love of rest and quiet he had remained a bachelor. He spent his Sundays reading tales of adventure and ruling guide lines which he afterward offered to his colleagues. In his whole existence he had only taken three vacations of a week each, when he was changing his quarters. But sometimes, on a holiday, he would leave by an excursion train for Dieppe or Havre in order to elevate his mind by the inspiring sight of the sea.

He was full of that common sense which borders on stupidity. For a long time he had been living quietly, with economy, temperate through prudence, chaste by temperament, when suddenly he was assailed by a terrible apprehension. One evening in the street he suddenly felt an attack of dizziness which made him fear a stroke of apoplexy. He hastened to a physician and for five francs obtained the following prescription:

> M. X-, fifty-five years old, bachelor, clerk. Full-blooded,
> danger of apoplexy. Cold-water applications, moderate nourishment,
> plenty of exercise. MONTELLIER, M.D.

Patissot was greatly distressed, and for a whole month, in his office, he kept a wet towel wrapped around his head like a turban while the water continually dripped on his work, which he would have to do over again. Every once in a while he would read the prescription over, probably in the hope of finding some hidden meaning, of penetrating into the secret thought of the physician, and also of discovering some forms of exercise which, might perhaps make him immune from apoplexy.

Then he consulted his friends, showing them the fateful paper. One advised boxing. He immediately hunted up an instructor, and, on the first day, he received a punch in the nose which immediately took away all his ambition in this direction. Single-stick made him gasp for breath, and he grew so stiff from fencing that for two days and two nights he could not get sleep. Then a bright idea struck him. It was to walk, every Sunday, to some suburb of Paris and even to certain places in the capital which he did not know.

For a whole week his mind was occupied with thoughts of the equipment which you need for these excursions; and on Sunday, the 30th of May, he began his preparations. After reading all the extraordinary advertisements which poor, blind and halt beggars distribute on the street corners, he began to visit the stores with the intention of looking about him only and of buying later on. First of all, he visited a so-called American shoe store, where heavy travelling shoes were shown him. The clerk brought out a kind of ironclad contrivance, studded with spikes like a harrow, which he claimed to be made from Rocky Mountain bison skin. He was so carried away with them that he would willingly have bought two pair, but one was sufficient. He carried them away under his arm, which soon became numb from the weight. He next invested in a pair of corduroy trousers, such as carpenters wear, and a pair of oiled canvas leggings. Then he needed a knapsack for his provisions, a telescope so as to recognize villages perched on the slope of distant hills, and finally, a government survey map to enable him to find his way about without asking the peasants toiling in the fields. Lastly, in order more comfortably to stand the heat, he decided to purchase a light alpaca jacket offered by the famous firm of Raminau, according to their advertisement, for the modest sum of six francs and fifty centimes. He went to this store and was welcomed by a distinguished-looking young man with a marvellous head of hair, nails as pink as those of a lady and a pleasant smile. He showed him the garment. It did not correspond with the glowing style of the advertisement. Then Patissot hesitatingly asked, “Well, monsieur, will it wear well?” The young man turned his eyes away in well-feigned embarrassment, like an honest man who does not wish to deceive a customer, and, lowering his eyes, he said in a hesitating manner: “Dear me, monsieur, you understand that for six francs fifty we cannot turn out an article like this for instance.” And he showed him a much finer jacket than the first one. Patissot examined it and asked the price. “Twelve francs fifty.”

It was very tempting, but before deciding, he once more questioned the big young man, who was observing him attentively. “And — is that good? Do you guarantee it?” “Oh! certainly, monsieur, it is quite goad! But, of course, you must not get it wet! Yes, it’s really quite good, but you understand that there are goods and goods. It’s excellent for the price. Twelve francs fifty, just think. Why, that’s nothing at all. Naturally a twenty-five-franc coat is much better. For twenty-five francs you get a superior quality, as strong as linen, and which wears even better. If it gets wet a little ironing will fix it right up. The color never fades, and it does not turn red in the sunlight. It is the warmest and lightest material out.” He unfolded his wares, holding them up, shaking them, crumpling and stretching them in order to show the excellent quality of the cloth. He talked on convincingly, dispelling all hesitation by words and gesture. Patissot was convinced; he bought the coat. The pleasant salesman, still talking, tied up the bundle and continued praising the value of the purchase. When it was paid for he was suddenly silent. He bowed with a superior air, and, holding the door open, he watched his customer disappear, both arms filled with bundles and vainly trying to reach his hat to bow.

M. Patissot returned home and carefully studied the map. He wished to try on his shoes, which were more like skates than shoes, owing to the spikes. He slipped and fell, promising himself to be more careful in the future. Then he spread out all his purchases on a chair and looked at them for a long time. He went to sleep with this thought: “Isn’t it strange that I didn’t think before of taking an excursion to the country?”

During the whole week Patissot worked without ambition. He was dreaming of the outing which he had planned for the following Sunday, and he was seized by a sudden longing for the country, a desire of growing tender over nature, this thirst for rustic scenes which overwhelms the Parisians in spring time.

Only one person gave him any attention; it was a silent old copying clerk named Boivin, nicknamed Boileau. He himself lived in the country and had a little garden which he cultivated carefully; his needs were small, and he was perfectly happy, so they said. Patissot was now able to understand his tastes and the similarity of their ideals made them immediately fast friends. Old man Boivin said to him:

“Do I like fishing, monsieur? Why, it’s the delight of my life!”

Then Patissot questioned him with deep interest. Boivin named all the fish who frolicked under this dirty water — and Patissot thought he could see them. Boivin told about the different hooks, baits, spots and times suitable for each kind. And Patissot felt himself more like a fisherman than Boivin himself. They decided that the following Sunday they would meet for the opening of the season for the edification of Patissot, who was delighted to have found such an experienced instructor.

FISHING EXCURSION

The day before the one when he was, for the first time in his life, to throw a hook into a river, Monsieur Patissot bought, for eighty centimes, "How to Become a Perfect Fisherman." In this work he learned many useful things, but he was especially impressed by the style, and he retained the following passage:

"In a word, if you wish, without books, without rules, to fish successfully, to the left or to the right, up or down stream, in the masterly manner that halts at no difficulty, then fish before, during and after a storm, when the clouds break and the sky is streaked with lightning, when the earth shakes with the grumbling thunder; it is then that, either through hunger or terror, all the fish forget their habits in a turbulent flight.

"In this confusion follow or neglect all favorable signs, and just go on fishing; you will march to victory!"

In order to catch fish of all sizes, he bought three well-perfected poles, made to be used as a cane in the city, which, on the river, could be transformed into a fishing rod by a simple jerk. He bought some number fifteen hooks for gudgeon, number twelve for bream, and with his number seven he expected to fill his basket with carp. He bought no earth worms because he was sure of finding them everywhere; but he laid in a provision of sand worms. He had a jar full of them, and in the evening he watched them with interest. The hideous creatures swarmed in their bath of bran as they do in putrid meat. Patissot wished to practice baiting his hook. He took up one with disgust, but he had hardly placed the curved steel point against it when it split open. Twenty times he repeated this without success, and he might have continued all night had he not feared to exhaust his supply of vermin.

He left by the first train. The station was full of people equipped with fishing lines. Some, like Patissot's, looked like simple bamboo canes; others, in one piece, pointed their slender ends to the skies. They looked like a forest of slender sticks, which mingled and clashed like swords or swayed like masts over an ocean of broad-brimmed straw hats.

When the train started fishing rods could be seen sticking out of all the windows and doors, giving to the train the appearance of a huge, bristly caterpillar winding through the fields.

Everybody got off at Courbevoie and rushed for the stage for Bezons. A crowd of fishermen crowded on top of the coach, holding their rods in their hands, giving the vehicle the appearance of a porcupine.

All along the road men were travelling in the same direction as though on a pilgrimage to an unknown Jerusalem. They were carrying those long, slender sticks resembling those carried by the faithful returning from Palestine. A tin box on a strap was fastened to their backs. They were in a hurry.

At Bezons the river appeared. People were lined along bath banks, men in frock coats, others in duck suits, others in blouses, women, children and even young girls of marriageable age; all were fishing.

Patissot started for the dam where his friend Boivin was waiting for him. The latter greeted him rather coolly. He had just made the acquaintance of a big, fat man of about fifty, who seemed very strong and whose skin was tanned. All three hired a big boat and lay off almost under the fall of the dam, where the fish are most plentiful.

Boivin was immediately ready. He baited his line and threw it out, and then sat motionless, watching the little float with extraordinary concentration. From time to time he would jerk his line out of the water and cast it farther out. The fat gentleman threw out his well-baited hooks, put his line down beside him, filled his pipe, lit it, crossed his arms, and, without another glance at the cork, he watched the water flow by. Patissot once more began trying to stick sand worms on his hooks. After about five minutes of this occupation he called to Boivin; “Monsieur Boivin, would you be so kind as to help me put these creatures on my hook? Try as I will, I can’t seem to succeed.” Boivin raised his head: “Please don’t disturb me, Monsieur Patissot; we are not here for pleasure!” However, he baited the line, which Patissot then threw out, carefully imitating all the motions of his friend.

The boat was tossing wildly, shaken by the waves, and spun round like a top by the current, although anchored at both ends. Patissot, absorbed in the sport, felt a vague kind of uneasiness; he was uncomfortably heavy and somewhat dizzy.

They caught nothing. Little Boivin, very nervous, was gesticulating and shaking his head in despair. Patissot was as sad as though some disaster had overtaken him. The fat gentleman alone, still motionless, was quietly smoking without paying any attention to his line. At last Patissot, disgusted, turned toward him and said in a mournful voice:

“They are not biting, are they?”

He quietly replied:

“Of course not!”

Patissot surprised, looked at him.

“Do you ever catch many?”

“Never!”

“What! Never?”

The fat man, still smoking like a factory chimney, let out the following words, which completely upset his neighbor:

“It would bother me a lot if they did bite. I don’t come here to fish; I come because I’m very comfortable here; I get shaken up as though I were at sea. If I take a line along, it’s only to do as others do.”

Monsieur Patissot, on the other hand, did not feel at all well. His discomfort, at first vague, kept increasing, and finally took on a definite form. He felt, indeed, as though he were being tossed by the sea, and he was suffering from seasickness. After the first attack had calmed down, he proposed leaving, but Boivin grew so furious that they almost came to blows. The fat man, moved by pity, rowed the boat back, and, as soon as Patissot had recovered from his seasickness, they bethought themselves of luncheon.

Two restaurants presented themselves. One of them, very small, looked like a beer garden, and was patronized by the poorer fishermen. The other one, which bore the imposing name of “Linden Cottage,” looked like a middle-class residence and was frequented by the aristocracy of the rod. The two owners, born enemies, watched each other with hatred across a large field, which separated them, and where the white house of the dam keeper and of the inspector of the life-saving department stood out against the green grass. Moreover, these two officials disagreed, one of them upholding the beer garden and the other one defending the Elms, and the internal feuds which arose in these three houses reproduced the whole history of mankind.

Boivin, who knew the beer garden, wished to go there, exclaiming: “The food is very good, and it isn’t expensive; you’ll see. Anyhow, Monsieur Patissot, you needn’t expect to get me tipsy the way you did last Sunday. My wife was furious, you know; and she has sworn never to forgive you!”

The fat gentleman declared that he would only eat at the Elms, because it was an excellent place and the cooking was as good as in the best restaurants in Paris.

“Do as you wish,” declared Boivin; “I am going where I am accustomed to go.” He left. Patissot, displeased at his friend’s actions, followed the fat gentleman.

They ate together, exchanged ideas, discussed opinions and found that they were made for each other.

After the meal everyone started to fish again, but the two new friends left together. Following along the banks, they stopped near the railroad bridge and, still talking, they threw their lines in the water. The fish still refused to bite, but Patissot was now making the best of it.

A family was approaching. The father, whose whiskers stamped him as a judge, was holding an extraordinarily long rod; three boys of different sizes were carrying poles of different lengths, according to age; and the mother, who was very stout, gracefully manoeuvred a charming rod with a ribbon tied to the handle. The father bowed and asked:

“Is this spot good, gentlemen?” Patissot was going to speak, when his friend answered: “Fine!” The whole family smiled and settled down beside the fishermen. The Patissot was seized with a wild desire to catch a fish, just one, any kind, any size, in order to win the consideration of these people; so he began to handle his rod as he had seen Boivin do in the morning. He would let the cork follow the current to the end of the line, jerk the hooks out of the water, make them describe a large circle in the air and throw them out again a little higher up. He had even, as he thought, caught the knack of doing this movement gracefully. He had just jerked his line out rapidly when he felt it caught in something behind him. He tugged, and a scream burst from behind him. He perceived, caught on one of his hooks, and describing in the air a curve like a meteor, a magnificent hat which he placed right in the middle of the river.

He turned around, bewildered, dropping his pole, which followed the hat down the stream, while the fat gentleman, his new friend, lay on his back and roared with laughter. The lady, hatless and astounded, choked with anger; her husband was outraged and demanded the price of the hat, and Patissot paid about three times its value.

Then the family departed in a very dignified manner.

Patissot took another rod, and, until nightfall, he gave baths to sand worms. His neighbor was sleeping peacefully on the grass. Toward seven in the evening he awoke.

"Let's go away from here!" he said.

Then Patissot withdrew his line, gave a cry and sat down hard from astonishment. At the end of the string was a tiny little fish. When they looked at him more closely they found that he had been hooked through the stomach; the hook had caught him as it was being drawn out of the water.

Patissot was filled with a boundless, triumphant joy; he wished to have the fish fried for himself alone.

During the dinner the friends grew still more intimate. He learned that the fat gentleman lived at Argenteuil and had been sailing boats for thirty years without losing interest in the sport. He accepted to take luncheon with him the following Sunday and to take a sail in his friend's clipper, Plongeon. He became so interested in the conversation that he forgot all about his catch. He did not remember it until after the coffee, and he demanded that it be brought him. It was alone in the middle of a platter, and looked like a yellow, twisted match, But he ate it with pride and relish, and at night, on the omnibus, he told his neighbors that he had caught fourteen pounds of fish during the day.

TWO CELEBRITIES

Monsieur Patissot had promised his friend, the boating man, that he would spend the following Sunday with him. An unforeseen occurrence changed his plan. One evening, on the boulevard, he met one of his cousins whom he saw but very seldom. He was a pleasant journalist, well received in all classes of society, who offered to show Patissot many interesting things.

"What are you going to do next Sunday?"

"I'm going boating at Argenteuil."

"Come on! Boating is an awful bore; there is no variety to it. Listen — I'll take you along with me. I'll introduce you to two celebrities. We will visit the homes of two artists."

"But I have been ordered to go to the country!"

"That's just where we'll go. On the way we'll call on Meissonier, at his place in Poissy; then we'll walk over to Medan, where Zola lives. I have been commissioned to obtain his next novel for our newspaper."

Patissot, wild with joy, accepted the invitation. He even bought a new frock coat, as his own was too much worn to make a good appearance. He was terribly afraid of saying something foolish either to the artist or to the man of letters, as do people who speak of an art which they have never professed.

He mentioned his fears to his cousin, who laughed and answered: "Pshaw! Just pay them compliments, nothing but compliments, always compliments; in that way, if you say anything foolish it will be overlooked. Do you know Meissonier's paintings?"

"I should say I do."

"Have you read the Rougon-Macquart series?"

"From first to last."

"That's enough. Mention a painting from time to time, speak of a novel here and there and add:

"'Superb! Extraordinary! Delightful technique! Wonderfully powerful!' In that way you can always get along. I know that those two are very blase about everything, but admiration always pleases an artist."

Sunday morning they left for Poissy.

Just a few steps from the station, at the end of the church square, they found Meissonier's property. After passing through a low door, painted red, which led into a beautiful alley of vines, the journalist stopped and, turning toward his companion, asked:

"What is your idea of Meissonier?"

Patissot hesitated. At last he decided: "A little man, well groomed, clean shaven, a soldierly appearance." The other smiled: "All right, come along." A quaint building in the form of a chalet appeared to the left; and to the right side, almost opposite, was the main house. It was a strange-looking building, where there was a mixture of everything, a mingling of Gothic fortress, manor, villa, hut, residence, cathedral, mosque, pyramid, a, weird combination of Eastern and Western architecture. The style was complicated enough to set a classical architect crazy, and yet there was something whimsical and pretty about it. It had been invented and built under the direction of the artist.

They went in; a collection of trunks encumbered a little parlor. A little man appeared, dressed in a jumper. The striking thing about him was his beard. He bowed to the journalist, and said: “My dear sir, I hope that you will excuse me; I only returned yesterday, and everything is all upset here. Please be seated.” The other refused, excusing himself: “My dear master, I only dropped in to pay my respects while passing by.” Patissot, very much embarrassed, was bowing at every word of his friend’s, as though moving automatically, and he murmured, stammering: “What a su — su — superb property!” The artist, flattered, smiled, and suggested visiting it.

He led them first to a little pavilion of feudal aspect, where his former studio was. Then they crossed a parlor, a dining-room, a vestibule full of beautiful works of art, of beautiful Beauvais, Gobelin and Flanders tapestries. But the strange external luxury of ornamentation became, inside, a revel of immense stairways. A magnificent grand stairway, a secret stairway in one tower, a servants’ stairway in another, stairways everywhere! Patissot, by chance, opened a door and stepped back astonished. It was a veritable temple, this place of which respectable people only mention the name in English, an original and charming sanctuary in exquisite taste, fitted up like a pagoda, and the decoration of which must certainly have caused a great effort.

They next visited the park, which was complex, varied, with winding paths and full of old trees. But the journalist insisted on leaving; and, with many thanks, he took leave of the master: As they left they met a gardener; Patissot asked him: “Has Monsieur Meissonier owned this place for a long time?” The man answered: “Oh, monsieur! that needs explaining. I guess he bought the grounds in 1846. But, as for the house! he has already torn down and rebuilt that five or six times. It must have cost him at least two millions!” As Patissot left he was seized with an immense respect for this man, not on account of his success, glory or talent, but for putting so much money into a whim, because the bourgeois deprive themselves of all pleasure in order to hoard money.

After crossing Poissy, they struck out on foot along the road to Medan. The road first followed the Seine, which is dotted with charming islands at this place. Then they went up a hill and crossed the pretty village of

Villaines, went down a little; and finally reached the neighborhood inhabited by the author of the Rougon-Macquart series.

A pretty old church with two towers appeared on the left. They walked along a short distance, and a passing farmer directed them to the writer's dwelling.

Before entering, they examined the house. A large building, square and new, very high, seemed, as in the fable of the mountain and the mouse, to have given birth to a tiny little white house, which nestled near it. This little house was the original dwelling, and had been built by the former owner. The tower had been erected by Zola.

They rang the bell. An enormous dog, a cross between a Saint Bernard and a Newfoundland, began to howl so terribly that Patissot felt a vague desire to retrace his steps. But a servant ran forward, calmed "Bertrand," opened the door, and took the journalist's card in order to carry it to his master.

"I hope that he will receive us!" murmured Patissot. "It would be too bad if we had come all this distance not to see him."

His companion smiled and answered: "Never fear, I have a plan for getting in."

But the servant, who had returned, simply asked them to follow him.

They entered the new building, and Patissot, who was quite enthusiastic, was panting as he climbed a stairway of ancient style which led to the second story.

At the same time he was trying to picture to himself this man whose glorious name echoes at present in all corners of the earth, amid the exasperated hatred of some, the real or feigned indignation of society, the envious scorn of several of his colleagues, the respect of a mass of readers, and the frenzied admiration of a great number. He expected to see a kind of bearded giant, of awe-inspiring aspect, with a thundering voice and an appearance little prepossessing at first.

The door opened on a room of uncommonly large dimensions, broad and high, lighted by an enormous window looking out over the valley. Old tapestries covered the walls; on the left, a monumental fireplace, flanked by two stone men, could have burned a century-old oak in one day. An immense table littered with books, papers and magazines stood in the middle of this apartment so vast and grand that it first engrossed the eye, and the attention was only afterward drawn to the man, stretched out when they entered on an Oriental divan where twenty persons could have slept. He took a few steps toward them, bowed, motioned to two seats, and turned back to his divan, where he sat with one leg drawn under him. A book lay open beside him, and in his right hand he held an ivory paper-cutter, the end of which he observed from time to time with one eye, closing the other with the persistency of a near-sighted person.

While the journalist explained the purpose of the visit, and the writer listened to him without yet answering, at times staring at him fixedly, Patissot, more and more embarrassed, was observing this celebrity.

Hardly forty, he was of medium height, fairly stout, and with a good-natured look. His head (very similar to those found in many Italian paintings of the sixteenth century), without being beautiful in the plastic sense of the word, gave an impression of great strength of character, power and intelligence. Short hair stood up straight on the high, well-developed forehead. A straight nose stopped short, as if cut off suddenly above the upper lip which was covered with a black mustache; over the whole chin was a closely-cropped beard. The dark, often ironical look was piercing, one felt that behind it there was a mind always actively at work observing people, interpreting words, analyzing gestures, uncovering the heart. This strong, round head was appropriate to his name, quick and short, with the bounding resonance of the two vowels.

When the journalist had fully explained his proposition, the writer answered him that he did not wish to make any definite arrangement, that he would, however, think the matter over, that his plans were not yet sufficiently defined. Then he stopped. It was a dismissal, and the two men, a little confused, arose. A desire seized Patissot; he wished this well-known person to say something to him, anything, some word which he could repeat to his colleagues; and, growing bold, he stammered: “Oh, monsieur! If you knew how I appreciate your works!” The other bowed, but answered nothing. Patissot became very bold and continued: “It is a great honor for me to speak to you to-day.” The writer once more bowed, but with a stiff and impatient look. Patissot noticed it, and, completely losing his head, he added as he retreated: “What a su — su — superb property!”

Then, in the heart of the man of letters, the landowner awoke, and, smiling, he opened the window to show them the immense stretch of view. An endless horizon broadened out on all sides, giving a view of Triel, Pisse-Fontaine, Chanteloup, all the heights of Hautrie, and the Seine as far as the eye could see. The two visitors, delighted, congratulated him, and the house was opened to them. They saw everything, down to the dainty kitchen, whose walls and even ceilings were covered with porcelain tiles ornamented with blue designs, which excited the wonder of the farmers.

"How did you happen to buy this place?" asked the journalist.

The novelist explained that, while looking for a cottage to hire for the summer, he had found the little house, which was for sale for several thousand francs, a song, almost nothing. He immediately bought it.

"But everything that you have added must have cost you a good deal!"

The writer smiled, and answered: "Yes, quite a little."

The two men left. The journalist, taking Patissot by the arm, was philosophizing in a low voice:

"Every general has his Waterloo," he said; "every Balzac has his Jardies, and every artist living in the country feels like a landed proprietor."

They took the train at the station of Villaines, and, on the way home, Patissot loudly mentioned the names of the famous painter and of the great novelist as though they were his friends. He even allowed people to think that he had taken luncheon with one and dinner with the other.

BEFORE THE CELEBRATION

The celebration is approaching and preliminary quivers are already running through the streets, just as the ripples disturb the water preparatory to a storm. The shops, draped with flags, display a variety of gay-colored bunting materials, and the dry-goods people deceive one about the three colors as grocers do about the weight of candles. Little by little, hearts warm up to the matter; people speak about it in the street after dinner; ideas are exchanged:

"What a celebration it will be, my friend; what a celebration!"

"Have you heard the news? All the rulers are coming incognito, as bourgeois, in order to see it."

"I hear that the Emperor of Russia has arrived; he expects to go about everywhere with the Prince of Wales."

"It certainly will be a fine celebration!"

It is going to a celebration; what Monsieur Patissot, Parisian bourgeois, calls a celebration; one of these nameless tumults which, for fifteen hours, roll from one end of the city to the other, every ugly specimen togged out in its finest, a mob of perspiring bodies, where side by side are tossed about the stout gossip bedecked in red, white and blue ribbons, grown fat behind her counter and panting from lack of breath, the rickety clerk with his wife and brat in tow, the laborer carrying his youngster astride his neck, the bewildered provincial with his foolish, dazed expression, the groom, barely shaved and still spreading the perfume of the stable. And the foreigners dressed like monkeys, English women like giraffes, the water-carrier, cleaned up for the occasion, and the innumerable phalanx of little bourgeois, inoffensive little people, amused at everything. All this crowding and pressing, the sweat and dust, and the turmoil, all these eddies of human flesh, trampling of corns beneath the feet of your neighbors, this city all topsy-turvy, these vile odors, these frantic efforts toward nothing, the breath of millions of people, all redolent of garlic, give to Monsieur Patissot all the joy which it is possible for his heart to hold.

After reading the proclamation of the mayor on the walls of his district he had made his preparations.

This bit of prose said:

> I wish to call your attention particularly to the part of individuals in this celebration. Decorate your homes, illuminate your windows. Get together, open up a subscription in order to give to your houses and to your street a more brilliant and more artistic appearance than the neighboring houses and streets.

Then Monsieur Patissot tried to imagine how he could give to his home an artistic appearance.

One serious obstacle stood in the way. His only window looked out on a courtyard, a narrow, dark shaft, where only the rats could have seen his three Japanese lanterns.

He needed a public opening. He found it. On the first floor of his house lived a rich man, a nobleman and a royalist, whose coachman, also a reactionary, occupied a garret-room on the sixth floor, facing the street. Monsieur Patissot supposed that by paying (every conscience can be bought) he could obtain the use of the room for the day. He proposed five francs to this citizen of the whip for the use of his room from noon till midnight. The offer was immediately accepted.

Then he began to busy himself with the decorations. Three flags, four lanterns, was that enough to give to this box an artistic appearance — to express all the noble feelings of his soul? No; assuredly not! But, notwithstanding diligent search and nightly meditation, Monsieur Patissot could think of nothing else. He consulted his neighbors, who were surprised at the question; he questioned his colleagues — every one had bought lanterns and flags, some adding, for the occasion, red, white and blue bunting.

Then he began to rack his brains for some original idea. He frequented the cafes, questioning the patrons; they lacked imagination. Then one morning he went out on top of an omnibus. A respectable-looking gentleman was smoking a cigar beside him, a little farther away a laborer was smoking his pipe upside down, near the driver two rough fellows were joking, and clerks of every description were going to business for three cents.

Before the stores stacks of flags were resplendent under the rising sun. Patissot turned to his neighbor.

“It is going to be a fine celebration,” he said. The gentleman looked at him sideways and answered in a haughty manner:

“That makes no difference to me!”

“You are not going to take part in it?” asked the surprised clerk. The other shook his head disdainfully and declared:

“They make me tired with their celebrations! Whose celebration is it? The government’s? I do not recognize this government, monsieur!”

But Patissot, as government employee, took on his superior manner, and answered in a stern voice:

“Monsieur, the Republic is the government.”

His neighbor was not in the least disturbed, and, pushing his hands down in his pockets, he exclaimed:

“Well, and what then? It makes no difference to me. Whether it’s for the Republic or something else, I don’t care! What I want, monsieur, is to know my government. I saw Charles X. and adhered to him, monsieur; I saw Louis-Philippe and adhered to him, monsieur; I saw Napoleon and adhered to him; but I have never seen the Republic.”

Patissot, still serious, answered:

“The Republic, monsieur, is represented by its president!”

The other grumbled:

“Well, them, show him to me!”

Patissot shrugged his shoulders.

“Every one can see him; he’s not shut up in a closet!”

Suddenly the fat man grew angry.

"Excuse me, monsieur, he cannot be seen. I have personally tried more than a hundred times, monsieur. I have posted myself near the Elysee; he did not come out. A passer-by informed me that he was playing billiards in the cafe opposite; I went to the cafe opposite; he was not there. I had been promised that he would go to Melun for the convention; I went to Melun, I did not see him. At last I became weary. I did not even see Monsieur Gambetta, and I do not know a single deputy."

He was, growing excited:

"A government, monsieur, is made to be seen; that's what it's there for, and for nothing else. One must be able to know that on such and such a day at such an hour the government will pass through such and such a street. Then one goes there and is satisfied."

Patissot, now calm, was enjoying his arguments.

"It is true," he said, "that it is agreeable to know the people by whom one is governed."

The gentleman continued more gently:

"Do you know how I would manage the celebration? Well, monsieur, I would have a procession of gilded cars, like the chariots used at the crowning of kings; in them I would parade all the members of the government, from the president to the deputies, throughout Paris all day long. In that manner, at least, every one would know by sight the personnel of the state."

But one of the toughs near the coachman turned around, exclaiming:

"And the fatted ox, where would you put him?"

A laugh ran round the two benches. Patissot understood the objection, and murmured:

"It might not perhaps be very dignified."

The gentleman thought the matter over and admitted it.

"Then," he said, "I would place them in view some place, so that every one could see them without going out of his way; on the Triumphal Arch at the Place de l'Etoile, for instance; and I would have the whole population pass before them. That would be very imposing."

Once more the tough turned round and said:

"You'd have to take telescopes to see their faces."

The gentleman did not answer; he continued:

"It's just like the presentation of the flags! There ought, to be some pretext, a mimic war ought to be organized, and the banners would be awarded to the troops as a reward. I had an idea about which I wrote to the minister; but he has not deigned to answer me. As the taking of the Bastille has been chosen for the date of the national celebration, a reproduction of this event might be made; there would be a pasteboard Bastille, fixed up by a scene-painter and concealing within its walls the whole Column of July. Then, monsieur, the troop would attack. That would be a magnificent spectacle as well as a lesson, to see the army itself overthrow the ramparts of tyranny. Then this Bastille would be set fire to and from the midst of the flames would appear the Column with the genius of Liberty, symbol of a new order and of the freedom of the people."

This time every one was listening to him and finding his idea excellent. An old gentleman exclaimed:

"That is a great idea, monsieur, which does you honor. It is to be regretted that the government did not adopt it."

A young man declared that actors ought to recite the "Iambes" of Barbier through the streets in order to teach the people art and liberty simultaneously.

These propositions excited general enthusiasm. Each one wished to have his word; all were wrought up. From a passing hand-organ a few strains of the Marseillaise were heard; the laborer started the song, and everybody joined in, roaring the chorus. The exalted nature of the song and its wild rhythm fired the driver, who lashed his horses to a gallop. Monsieur Patissot was bawling at the top of his lungs, and the passengers inside, frightened, were wondering what hurricane had struck them.

At last they stopped, and Monsieur Patissot, judging his neighbor to be a man of initiative, consulted him about the preparations which he expected to make:

"Lanterns and flags are all right,"' said Patissot; "but I prefer something better."

The other thought for a long time, but found nothing. Then, in despair, the clerk bought three flags and four lanterns.

AN EXPERIMENT IN LOVE

Many poets think that nature is incomplete without women, and hence, doubtless, come all the flowery comparisons which, in their songs, make our natural companion in turn a rose, a violet, a tulip, or something of that order. The need of tenderness which seizes us at dusk, when the evening mist begins to roll in from the hills, and when all the perfumes of the earth intoxicate us, is but imperfectly satisfied by lyric invocations. Monsieur Patissot, like all others, was seized with a wild desire for tenderness, for sweet kisses exchanged along a path where sunshine steals in at times, for the pressure of a pair of small hands, for a supple waist bending under his embrace.

He began to look at love as an unbounded pleasure, and, in his hours of reverie, he thanked the Great Unknown for having put so much charm into the caresses of human beings. But he needed a companion, and he did not know where to find one. On the advice of a friend, he went to the Folies-Bergere. There he saw a complete assortment. He was greatly perplexed to choose between them, for the desires of his heart were chiefly composed of poetic impulses, and poetry did not seem to be the strong point of these young ladies with penciled eyebrows who smiled at him in such a disturbing manner, showing the enamel of their false teeth. At last his choice fell on a young beginner who seemed poor and timid and whose sad look seemed to announce a nature easily influenced-by poetry.

He made an appointment with her for the following day at nine o'clock at the Saint-Lazare station. She did not come, but she was kind enough to send a friend in her stead.

She was a tall, red-haired girl, patriotically dressed in three colors, and covered by an immense tunnel hat, of which her head occupied the centre. Monsieur Patissot, a little disappointed, nevertheless accepted this substitute. They left for Maisons-Laffite, where regattas and a grand Venetian festival had been announced.

As soon as they were in the car, which was already occupied by two gentlemen who wore the red ribbon and three ladies who must at least have been duchesses, they were so dignified, the big red-haired girl, who answered the name of Octavie, announced to Patissot, in a screeching voice, that she was a fine girl fond of a good time and loving the country because there she could pick flowers and eat fried fish. She laughed with a shrillness which almost shattered the windows, familiarly calling her companion "My big darling."

Shame overwhelmed Patissot, who as a government employee, had to observe a certain amount of decorum. But Octavie stopped talking, glancing at her neighbors, seized with the overpowering desire which haunts all women of a certain class to make the acquaintance of respectable women. After about five minutes she thought she had found an opening, and, drawing from her pocket a Gil-Blas, she politely offered it to one of the amazed ladies, who declined, shaking her head. Then the big, red-haired girl began saying things with a double meaning, speaking of women who are stuck up without being any better than the others; sometimes she would let out a vulgar word which acted like a bomb exploding amid the icy dignity of the passengers.

At last they arrived. Patissot immediately wished to gain the shady nooks of the park, hoping that the melancholy of the forest would quiet the ruffled temper of his companion. But an entirely different effect resulted. As soon as she was amid the leaves and grass she began to sing at the top of her lungs snatches from operas which had stuck in her frivolous mind, warbling and trilling, passing from "Robert le Diable" to the "Muette," lingering especially on a sentimental love-song, whose last verses she sang in a voice as piercing as a gimlet.

Then suddenly she grew hungry. Patissot, who was still awaiting the hoped-for tenderness, tried in vain to retain her. Then she grew angry, exclaiming:

"I am not here for a dull time, am I?"

He had to take her to the Petit-Havre restaurant, which was near the place where the regatta was to be held.

She ordered an endless luncheon, a succession of dishes substantial enough to feed a regiment. Then, unable to wait, she called for relishes. A box of sardines was brought; she started in on it as though she intended to swallow the box itself. But when she had eaten two or three of the little oily fish she declared that she was no longer hungry and that she wished to see the preparations for the race.

Patissot, in despair and in his turn seized with hunger, absolutely refused to move. She started off alone, promising to return in time for the dessert. He began to eat in lonely silence, not knowing how to lead this rebellious nature to the realization of his dreams.

As she did not return he set out in search of her. She had found some friends, a troop of boatmen, in scanty garb, sunburned to the tips of their ears, and gesticulating, who were loudly arranging the details of the race in front of the house of Fourmaise, the builder.

Two respectable-looking gentlemen, probably the judges, were listening attentively. As soon as she saw Patissot, Octavie, who was leaning on the tanned arm of a strapping fellow who probably had more muscle than brains, whispered a few words in his ears. He answered:

"That's an agreement."

She returned to the clerk full of joy, her eyes sparkling, almost caressing.

"Let's go for a row," said she.

Pleased to see her so charming, he gave in to this new whim and procured a boat. But she obstinately refused to go to the races, notwithstanding Patissot's wishes.

"I had rather be alone with you, darling."

His heart thrilled. At last!

He took off his coat and began to row madly.

An old dilapidated mill, whose worm-eaten wheels hung over the water, stood with its two arches across a little arm of the river. Slowly they passed beneath it, and, when they were on the other side, they noticed before them a delightful little stretch of river, shaded by great trees which formed an arch over their heads. The little stream flowed along, winding first to the right and then to the left, continually revealing new scenes, broad fields on one side and on the other side a hill covered with cottages. They passed before a bathing establishment almost entirely hidden by the foliage, a charming country spot where gentlemen in clean gloves and beribboned ladies displayed all the ridiculous awkwardness of elegant people in the country. She cried joyously:

"Later on we will take a dip there."

Farther on, in a kind of bay, she wished to stop, coaxing:

"Come here, honey, right close to me."

She put her arm around his neck and, leaning her head on his shoulder, she murmured:

"How nice it is! How delightful it is on the water!"

Patissot was reveling in happiness. He was thinking of those foolish boatmen who, without ever feeling the penetrating charm of the river banks and the delicate grace of the reeds, row along out of breath, perspiring and tired out, from the tavern where they take luncheon to the tavern where they take dinner.

He was so comfortable that he fell asleep. When he awoke, he was alone. He called, but no one answered. Anxious, he climbed up on the side of the river, fearing that some accident might have happened.

Then, in the distance, coming in his direction, he saw a long, slender gig which four oarsmen as black as negroes were driving through the water like an arrow. It came nearer, skimming over the water; a woman was holding the tiller. Heavens! It looked — it was she! In order to regulate the rhythm of the stroke, she was singing in her shrill voice a boating song, which she interrupted for a minute as she got in front of Patissot. Then, throwing him a kiss, she cried:

"You big goose!"

A DINNER AND SOME OPINIONS

On the occasion of the national celebration Monsieur Antoine Perdrix, chief of Monsieur Patissot's department, was made a knight of the Legion of Honor. He had been in service for thirty years under preceding governments, and for ten years under the present one. His employees, although grumbling a little at being thus rewarded in the person of their chief, thought it wise, nevertheless, to offer him a cross studded with paste diamonds. The new knight, in turn, not wishing to be outdone, invited them all to dinner for the following Sunday, at his place at Asnieres.

The house, decorated with Moorish ornaments, looked like a cafe concert, but its location gave it value, as the railroad cut through the whole garden, passing within a hundred and fifty feet of the porch. On the regulation plot of grass stood a basin of Roman cement, containing goldfish and a stream of water the size of that which comes from a syringe, which occasionally made microscopic rainbows at which the guests marvelled.

The feeding of this irrigator was the constant preoccupation of Monsieur Perdrix, who would sometimes get up at five o'clock in the morning in order to fill the tank. Then, in his shirt sleeves, his big stomach almost bursting from his trousers, he would pump wildly, so that on returning from the office he could have the satisfaction of letting the fountain play and of imagining that it was cooling off the garden.

On the night of the official dinner all the guests, one after the other, went into ecstasies over the surroundings, and each time they heard a train in the distance, Monsieur Perdrix would announce to them its destination: Saint-Germain, Le Havre, Cherbourg, or Dieppe, and they would playfully wave to the passengers leaning from the windows.

The whole office force was there. First came Monsieur Capitaine, the assistant chief; Monsieur Patissot, chief clerk; then Messieurs de Sombreterre and Vallin, elegant young employees who only came to the office when they had to; lastly Monsieur Rade, known throughout the ministry for the absurd doctrines which he upheld, and the copying clerk, Monsieur Boivin.

Monsieur Rade passed for a character. Some called him a dreamer or an idealist, others a revolutionary; every one agreed that he was very clumsy. Old, thin and small, with bright eyes and long, white hair, he had all his life professed a profound contempt for administrative work. A book rummager and a great reader, with a nature continually in revolt against everything, a seeker of truth and a despiser of popular prejudices, he had a clear and paradoxical manner of expressing his opinions which closed the mouths of self-satisfied fools and of those that were discontented without knowing why. People said: “That old fool of a Rade,” or else: “That harebrained Rade”; and the slowness, of his promotion seemed to indicate the reason, according to commonplace minds. His freedom of speech often made — his colleagues tremble; they asked themselves with terror how he had been able to keep his place as long as he had. As soon as they had seated themselves, Monsieur Perdrix thanked his “collaborators” in a neat little speech, promising them his protection, the more valuable as his power grew, and he ended with a stirring peroration in which he thanked and glorified a government so liberal and just that it knows how to seek out the worthy from among the humble.

Monsieur Capitaine, the assistant chief, answered in the name of the office, congratulated, greeted, exalted, sang the praises of all; frantic applause greeted these two bits of eloquence. After that they settled down seriously to the business of eating.

Everything went well up to the dessert; lack of conversation went unnoticed. But after the coffee a discussion arose, and Monsieur Rade let himself loose and soon began to overstep the bounds of discretion.

They naturally discussed love, and a breath of chivalry intoxicated this room full of bureaucrats; they praised and exalted the superior beauty of woman, the delicacy of hex soul, her aptitude for exquisite things, the correctness of her judgment, and the refinement of her sentiments. Monsieur Rade began to protest, energetically refusing to credit the so-called “fair” sex with all the qualities they ascribed to it; then, amidst the general indignation, he quoted some authors:

“Schopenhauer, gentlemen, Schopenhauer, the great philosopher, revered by all Germany, says: ‘Man’s intelligence must have been terribly deadened by love in order to call this sex with the small waist, narrow shoulders, large hips and crooked legs, the fair sex. All its beauty lies in the instinct of love. Instead of calling it the fair, it would have been better to call it the unaesthetic sex. Women have neither the appreciation nor the knowledge of music, any more than they have of poetry or of the plastic arts; with them it is merely an apelike imitation, pure pretence, affectation cultivated from their desire to please.'"

"The man who said that is an idiot," exclaimed Monsieur de Sombreterre.

Monsieur Rade smilingly continued:

"And how about Rousseau, gentlemen? Here is his opinion: 'Women, as a rule, love no art, are skilled in none, and have no talent.'"

Monsieur de Sombreterre disdainfully shrugged his shoulders:

"Then Rousseau is as much of a fool as the other, that's all."

Monsieur Rade, still smiling, went on:

"And this is what Lord Byron said, who, nevertheless, loved women: 'They should be well fed and well dressed, but not allowed to mingle with society. They should also be taught religion, but they should ignore poetry and politics, only being allowed to read religious works or cook-books.'"

Monsieur Rade continued:

"You see, gentlemen, all of them study painting and music. But not a single one of them has ever painted a remarkable picture or composed a great opera! Why, gentlemen? Because they are the 'sexes sequior', the secondary sex in every sense of the word, made to be kept apart, in the background."

Monsieur Patissot was growing angry, and exclaimed:

"And how about Madame Sand, monsieur?"

"She is the one exception, monsieur, the one exception. I will quote to you another passage from another great philosopher, this one an Englishman, Herbert Spencer. Here is what he says: 'Each sex is capable, under the influence of abnormal stimulation, of manifesting faculties ordinarily reserved for the other one. Thus, for instance, in extreme cases a special excitement may cause the breasts of men to give milk; children deprived of their mothers have often thus been saved in time of famine. Nevertheless, we do not place this faculty of giving milk among the male attributes. It is the same with female intelligence, which, in certain cases, will give superior products, but which is not to be considered in an estimate of the feminine nature as a social factor.'"

All Monsieur Patissot's chivalric instincts were wounded and he declared:

"You are not a Frenchman, monsieur. French gallantry is a form of patriotism."

Monsieur Rade retorted:

"I have very little patriotism, monsieur, as little as I can get along with."

A coolness settled over the company, but he continued quietly:

"Do you admit with me that war is a barbarous thing; that this custom of killing off people constitutes a condition of savagery; that it is odious, when life is the only real good, to see governments, whose duty is to protect the lives of their subjects, persistently looking for means of destruction? Am I not right? Well, if war is a terrible thing, what about patriotism, which is the idea at the base of it? When a murderer kills he has a fixed idea; it is to steal. When a good man sticks his bayonet through another good man, father of a family, or, perhaps, a great artist, what idea is he following out?"

Everybody was shocked.

"When one has such thoughts, one should not express them in public."

M. Patissot continued:

"There are, however, monsieur, principles which all good people recognize."

M. Rade asked: "Which ones?"

Then very solemnly, M. Patissot pronounced: "Morality, monsieur."

M. Rade was beaming; he exclaimed:

"Just let me give you one example, gentlemen, one little example. What is your opinion of the gentlemen with the silk caps who thrive along the boulevard's on the delightful traffic which you know, and who make a living out of it?"

A look of disgust ran round the table:

"Well, gentlemen! only a century ago, when an elegant gentleman, very ticklish about his honor, had for — friend — a beautiful and rich lady, it was considered perfectly proper to live at her expense and even to squander her whole fortune. This game was considered delightful. This only goes to show that the principles of morality are by no means settled — and that— "

M. Perdrix, visibly embarrassed, stopped him:

"M. Rade, you are sapping the very foundations of society. One must always have principles. Thus, in politics, here is M. de Sombreterre, who is a Legitimist; M. Vallin, an Orleanist; M. Patissot and myself, Republicans;

we all have very different principles, and yet we agree very well because we have them."

But M. Rade exclaimed:

"I also have principles, gentlemen, very distinct ones."

M. Patissot raised his head and coldly asked:

"It would please me greatly to know them, monsieur."

M. Rade did not need to be coaxed.

"Here they are, monsieur:

"First principle — Government by one person is a monstrosity.

"Second principle — Restricted suffrage is an injustice.

"Third principle — Universal suffrage is idiotic.

"To deliver up millions of men, superior minds, scientists, even geniuses, to the caprice and will of a being who, in an instant of gaiety, madness, intoxication or love, would not hesitate to sacrifice everything for his exalted fancy, would spend the wealth of the country amassed by others with difficulty, would have thousands of men slaughtered on the battle-fields, all this appears to me — a simple logician — a monstrous aberration.

"But, admitting that a country must govern itself, to exclude, on some always debatable pretext, a part of the citizens from the administration of affairs is such an injustice that it seems to me unworthy of a further discussion.

"There remains universal suffrage. I suppose that you will agree with me that geniuses are a rarity. Let us be liberal and say that there are at present five in France. Now, let us add, perhaps, two hundred men with a decided talent, one thousand others possessing various talents, and ten thousand superior intellects. This is a staff of eleven thousand two hundred and five minds. After that you have the army of mediocrities followed by the multitude of fools. As the mediocrities and the fools always form the immense majority, it is impossible for them to elect an intelligent government.

"In order to be fair I admit that logically universal suffrage seems to me the only admissible principle, but it is impracticable. Here are the reasons why:

"To make all the living forces of the country cooperate in the government, to represent all the interests, to take into account all the rights, is an ideal dream, but hardly practicable, because the only force which can be measured is that very one which should be neglected, the stupid strength of numbers, According to your method, unintelligent numbers equal genius, knowledge, learning, wealth and industry. When you are able to give to a member of the Institute ten thousand votes to a ragman's one, one hundred votes for a great land-owner as against his farmer's ten, then you will have approached an equilibrium of forces and obtained a national representation which will really represent the strength of the nation. But I challenge you to do it.

"Here are my conclusions:

"Formerly, when a man was a failure at every other profession he turned photographer; now he has himself elected a deputy. A government thus composed will always be sadly lacking, incapable of evil as well as of good. On the other hand, a despot, if he be stupid, can do a lot of harm, and, if he be intelligent (a thing which is very scarce), he may do good.

"I cannot decide between these two forms of government; I declare myself to be an anarchist, that is to say, a partisan of that power which is the most unassuming, the least felt, the most liberal, in the broadest sense of the word, and revolutionary at the same time; by that I mean the everlasting enemy of this same power, which can in no way be anything but defective. That's all!"

Cries of indignation rose about the table, and all, whether Legitimist, Orleanist or Republican through force of circumstances, grew red with anger. M. Patissot especially was choking with rage, and, turning toward M. Rade, he cried:

"Then, monsieur, you believe in nothing?"

The other answered quietly:

"You're absolutely correct, monsieur."

The anger felt by all the guests prevented M. Rade from continuing, and M. Perdrix, as chief, closed the discussion.

"Enough, gentlemen! We each have our opinion, and we have no intention of changing it."

All agreed with the wise words. But M. Rade, never satisfied, wished to have the last word.

"I have, however, one moral," said he. "It is simple and always applicable. One sentence embraces the whole thought; here it is: 'Never do unto another that which you would not have him do unto you.' I defy you to pick any flaw in it, while I will undertake to demolish your most sacred principles with three arguments."

This time there was no answer. But as they were going home at night, by couples, each one was saying to his companion: “Really, M. Rade goes much too far. His mind must surely be unbalanced. He ought to be appointed assistant chief at the Charenton Asylum.”

SIMON’S PAPA

Noon had just struck. The school door opened and the youngsters darted out, jostling each other in their haste to get out quickly. But instead of promptly dispersing and going home to dinner as usual, they stopped a few paces off, broke up into knots, and began whispering.

The fact was that, that morning, Simon, the son of La Blanchotte, had, for the first time, attended school.

They had all of them in their families heard talk of La Blanchotte; and, although in public she was welcome enough, the mothers among themselves treated her with a somewhat disdainful compassion, which the children had imitated without in the least knowing why.

As for Simon himself, they did not know him, for he never went out, and did not run about with them in the streets of the village, or along the banks of the river. And they did not care for him; so it was with a certain delight, mingled with considerable astonishment, that they met and repeated to each other what had been said by a lad of fourteen or fifteen who appeared to know all about it, so sagaciously did he wink. “You know — Simon — well, he has no papa.”

Just then La Blanchotte’s son appeared in the doorway of the school.

He was seven or eight years old, rather pale, very neat, with a timid and almost awkward manner.

He was starting home to his mother’s house when the groups of his schoolmates, whispering and watching him with the mischievous and heartless eyes of children bent upon playing a nasty trick, gradually closed in around him and ended by surrounding him altogether. There he stood in their midst, surprised and embarrassed, not understanding what they were going to do with him. But the lad who had brought the news, puffed up with the success he had met with already, demanded:

“What is your name, you?”

He answered: “Simon.”

"Simon what?" retorted the other.

The child, altogether bewildered, repeated: "Simon."

The lad shouted at him: "One is named Simon something — that is not a name — Simon indeed."

The child, on the brink of tears, replied for the third time:

"My name is Simon."

The urchins began to laugh. The triumphant tormentor cried: "You can see plainly that he has no papa."

A deep silence ensued. The children were dumfounded by this extraordinary, impossible, monstrous thing — a boy who had not a papa; they looked upon him as a phenomenon, an unnatural being, and they felt that hitherto inexplicable contempt of their mothers for La Blanchotte growing upon them. As for Simon, he had leaned against a tree to avoid falling, and he remained as if prostrated by an irreparable disaster. He sought to explain, but could think of nothing-to say to refute this horrible charge that he had no papa. At last he shouted at them quite recklessly: "Yes, I have one."

"Where is he?" demanded the boy.

Simon was silent, he did not know. The children roared, tremendously excited; and those country boys, little more than animals, experienced that cruel craving which prompts the fowls of a farmyard to destroy one of their number as soon as it is wounded. Simon suddenly espied a little neighbor, the son of a widow, whom he had seen, as he himself was to be seen, always alone with his mother.

"And no more have you," he said; "no more have you a papa."

"Yes," replied the other, "I have one."

"Where is he?" rejoined Simon.

"He is dead," declared the brat, with superb dignity; "he is in the cemetery, is my papa."

A murmur of approval rose among the little wretches as if this fact of possessing a papa dead in a cemetery had caused their comrade to grow big enough to crush the other one who had no papa at all. And these boys, whose fathers were for the most part bad men, drunkards, thieves, and who beat their wives, jostled each other to press closer and closer, as though they, the legitimate ones, would smother by their pressure one who was illegitimate.

The boy who chanced to be next Simon suddenly put his tongue out at him with a mocking air and shouted at him:

"No papa! No papa!"

Simon seized him by the hair with both hands and set to work to disable his legs with kicks, while he bit his cheek ferociously. A tremendous struggle ensued between the two combatants, and Simon found himself beaten, torn, bruised, rolled on the ground in the midst of the ring of applauding schoolboys. As he arose, mechanically brushing with his hand his little blouse all covered with dust, some one shouted at him:

"Go and tell your papa."

Then he felt a great sinking at his heart. They were stronger than he was, they had beaten him, and he had no answer to give them, for he knew well that it was true that he had no papa. Full of pride, he attempted for some moments to struggle against the tears which were choking him. He had a feeling of suffocation, and then without any sound he commenced to weep, with great shaking sobs. A ferocious joy broke out among his enemies, and, with one accord, just like savages in their fearful festivals, they took each other by the hand and danced round him in a circle, repeating as a refrain:

"No papa! No papa!"

But suddenly Simon ceased sobbing. He became ferocious. There were stones under his feet; he picked them up and with all his strength hurled them at his tormentors. Two or three were struck and rushed off yelling, and so formidable did he appear that the rest became panic-stricken. Cowards, as the mob always is in presence of an exasperated man, they broke up and fled. Left alone, the little fellow without a father set off running toward the fields, for a recollection had been awakened in him which determined his soul to a great resolve. He made up his mind to drown himself in the river.

He remembered, in fact, that eight days before, a poor devil who begged for his livelihood had thrown himself into the water because he had no more money. Simon had been there when they fished him out again; and the wretched man, who usually seemed to him so miserable, and ugly, had then struck him as being so peaceful with his pale cheeks, his long drenched beard, and his open eyes full of calm. The bystanders had said:

"He is dead."

And some one had said:

"He is quite happy now."

And Simon wished to drown himself also, because he had no father, just like the wretched being who had no money.

He reached the water and watched it flowing. Some fish were sporting briskly in the clear stream and occasionally made a little bound and caught the flies flying on the surface. He stopped crying in order to watch them, for their maneuvers interested him greatly. But, at intervals, as in a tempest intervals of calm alternate suddenly with tremendous gusts of wind, which snap off the trees and then lose themselves in the horizon, this thought would return to him with intense pain:

"I am going to drown myself because I have no papa."

It was very warm, fine weather. The pleasant sunshine warmed the grass. The water shone like a mirror. And Simon enjoyed some minutes of happiness, of that languor which follows weeping, and felt inclined to fall asleep there upon the grass in the warm sunshine.

A little green frog leaped from under his feet. He endeavored to catch it. It escaped him. He followed it and lost it three times in succession. At last he caught it by one of its hind legs and began to laugh as he saw the efforts the creature made to escape. It gathered itself up on its hind legs and then with a violent spring suddenly stretched them out as stiff as two bars; while it beat the air with its front legs as though they were hands, its round eyes staring in their circle of yellow. It reminded him of a toy made of straight slips of wood nailed zigzag one on the other; which by a similar movement regulated the movements of the little soldiers fastened thereon. Then he thought of his home, and then of his mother, and, overcome by sorrow, he again began to weep. A shiver passed over him. He knelt down and said his prayers as before going to bed. But he was unable to finish them, for tumultuous, violent sobs shook his whole frame. He no longer thought, he no longer saw anything around him, and was wholly absorbed in crying.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder, and a rough voice asked him:

"What is it that causes you so much grief, my little man?"

Simon turned round. A tall workman with a beard and black curly hair was staring at him good-naturedly. He answered with his eyes and throat full of tears:

"They beat me — because — I — I have no — papa — no papa."

"What!" said the man, smiling; "why, everybody has one."

The child answered painfully amid his spasms of grief:

"But I — I — I have none."

Then the workman became serious. He had recognized La Blanchotte's son, and, although himself a new arrival in the neighborhood, he had a vague idea of her history.

"Well," said he, "console yourself, my boy, and come with me home to your mother. They will give you — a papa."

And so they started on the way, the big fellow holding the little fellow by the hand, and the man smiled, for he was not sorry to see this Blanchotte, who was, it was said, one of the prettiest girls of the countryside, and, perhaps, he was saying to himself, at the bottom of his heart, that a lass who had erred might very well err again.

They arrived in front of a very neat little white house.

"There it is," exclaimed the child, and he cried, "Mamma!"

A woman appeared, and the workman instantly left off smiling, for he saw at once that there was no fooling to be done with the tall pale girl who stood austerely at her door as though to defend from one man the threshold of that house where she had already been betrayed by another. Intimidated, his cap in his hand, he stammered out:

"See, madame, I have brought you back your little boy who had lost himself near the river."

But Simon flung his arms about his mother's neck and told her, as he again began to cry:

"No, mamma, I wished to drown myself, because the others had beaten me — had beaten me — because I have no papa."

A burning redness covered the young woman's cheeks; and, hurt to the quick, she embraced her child passionately, while the tears coursed down her face. The man, much moved, stood there, not knowing how to get away.

But Simon suddenly ran to him and said:

"Will you be my papa?"

A deep silence ensued. La Blanchotte, dumb and tortured with shame, leaned herself against the wall, both her hands upon her heart. The child, seeing that no answer was made him, replied:

"If you will not, I shall go back and drown myself."

The workman took the matter as a jest and answered, laughing:

"Why, yes, certainly I will."

"What is your name," went on the child, "so that I may tell the others when they wish to know your name?"

"Philip," answered the man:

Simon was silent a moment so that he might get the name well into his head; then he stretched out his arms, quite consoled, as he said:

"Well, then, Philip, you are my papa."

The workman, lifting him from the ground, kissed him hastily on both cheeks, and then walked away very quickly with great strides. When the child returned to school next day he was received with a spiteful laugh, and at the end of school, when the lads were on the point of recommencing, Simon threw these words at their heads as he would have done a stone: "He is named Philip, my papa."

Yells of delight burst out from all sides.

"Philip who? Philip what? What on earth is Philip? Where did you pick up your Philip?"

Simon answered nothing; and, immovable in his faith, he defied them with his eye, ready to be martyred rather than fly before them. The school master came to his rescue and he returned home to his mother.

During three months, the tall workman, Philip, frequently passed by La Blanchotte's house, and sometimes he made bold to speak to her when he saw her sewing near the window. She answered him civilly, always sedately, never joking with him, nor permitting him to enter her house. Notwithstanding, being, like all men, a bit of a coxcomb, he imagined that she was often rosier than usual when she chatted with him.

But a lost reputation is so difficult to regain and always remains so fragile that, in spite of the shy reserve of La Blanchotte, they already gossiped in the neighborhood.

As for Simon he loved his new papa very much, and walked with him nearly every evening when the day's work was done. He went regularly to school, and mixed with great dignity with his schoolfellows without ever answering them back.

One day, however, the lad who had first attacked him said to him:

"You have lied. You have not a papa named Philip."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Simon, much disturbed.

The youth rubbed his hands. He replied:

"Because if you had one he would be your mamma's husband."

Simon was confused by the truth of this reasoning; nevertheless, he retorted:

"He is my papa, all the same."

"That can very well be," exclaimed the urchin with a sneer, "but that is not being your papa altogether."

La Blanchotte's little one bowed his head and went off dreaming in the direction of the forge belonging to old Loizon, where Philip worked. This forge was as though buried beneath trees. It was very dark there; the red glare of a formidable furnace alone lit up with great flashes five blacksmiths; who hammered upon their anvils with a terrible din. They were standing enveloped in flame, like demons, their eyes fixed on the red-hot iron they were pounding; and their dull ideas rose and fell with their hammers.

Simon entered without being noticed, and went quietly to pluck his friend by the sleeve. The latter turned round. All at once the work came to a standstill, and all the men looked on, very attentive. Then, in the midst of this unaccustomed silence, rose the slender pipe of Simon:

"Say, Philip, the Michaude boy told me just now that you were not altogether my papa."

"Why not?" asked the blacksmith,

The child replied with all innocence:

"Because you are not my mamma's husband."

No one laughed. Philip remained standing, leaning his forehead upon the back of his great hands, which supported the handle of his hammer standing upright upon the anvil. He mused. His four companions watched him, and Simon, a tiny mite among these giants, anxiously waited. Suddenly, one of the smiths, answering to the sentiment of all, said to Philip:

"La Blanchotte is a good, honest girl, and upright and steady in spite of her misfortune, and would make a worthy wife for an honest man."

"That is true," remarked the three others.

The smith continued:

"Is it the girl's fault if she went wrong? She had been promised marriage; and I know more than one who is much respected to-day, and who sinned every bit as much."

"That is true," responded the three men in chorus.

He resumed:

"How hard she has toiled, poor thing, to bring up her child all alone, and how she has wept all these years she has never gone out except to church, God only knows."

"This is also true," said the others.

Then nothing was heard but the bellows which fanned the fire of the furnace. Philip hastily bent himself down to Simon:

"Go and tell your mother that I am coming to speak to her this evening." Then he pushed the child out by the shoulders. He returned to his work, and with a single blow the five hammers again fell upon their anvils. Thus they wrought the iron until nightfall, strong, powerful, happy, like contented hammers. But just as the great bell of a cathedral resounds upon feast days above the jingling of the other bells, so Philip's hammer, sounding above the rest, clanged second after second with a deafening uproar. And he stood amid the flying sparks plying his trade vigorously.

The sky was full of stars as he knocked at La Blanchotte's door. He had on his Sunday blouse, a clean shirt, and his beard was trimmed. The young woman showed herself upon the threshold, and said in a grieved tone:

"It is ill to come thus when night has fallen, Mr. Philip."

He wished to answer, but stammered and stood confused before her.

She resumed:

"You understand, do you not, that it will not do for me to be talked about again."

"What does that matter to me, if you will be my wife!"

No voice replied to him, but he believed that he heard in the shadow of the room the sound of a falling body. He entered quickly; and Simon, who had gone to bed, distinguished the sound of a kiss and some words that his mother murmured softly. Then, all at once, he found himself lifted up by the hands of his friend, who, holding him at the length of his herculean arms, exclaimed:

"You will tell them, your schoolmates, that your papa is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and that he will pull the ears of all who do you any harm."

On the morrow, when the school was full and lessons were about to begin, little Simon stood up, quite pale with trembling lips:

"My papa," said he in a clear voice, "is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and he has promised to pull the ears of all who does me any harm."

This time no one laughed, for he was very well known, was Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and was a papa of whom any one in the world would have been proud.

SUICIDES

To Georges Legrand.

Hardly a day goes by without our reading a news item like the following in some newspaper:

"On Wednesday night the people living in No. 40 Rue de —— , were awakened by two successive shots. The explosions seemed to come from the apartment occupied by M. X —— . The door was broken in and the man was found bathed in his blood, still holding in one hand the revolver with which he had taken his life.

"M. X —— was fifty-seven years of age, enjoying a comfortable income, and had everything necessary to make him happy. No cause can be found for his action."

What terrible grief, what unknown suffering, hidden despair, secret wounds drive these presumably happy persons to suicide? We search, we imagine tragedies of love, we suspect financial troubles, and, as we never find anything definite, we apply to these deaths the word "mystery."

A letter found on the desk of one of these "suicides without cause," and written during his last night, beside his loaded revolver, has come into our hands. We deem it rather interesting. It reveals none of those great catastrophes which we always expect to find behind these acts of despair; but it shows us the slow succession of the little vexations of life, the disintegration of a lonely existence, whose dreams have disappeared; it gives the reason for these tragic ends, which only nervous and high-strung people can understand.

Here it is:

"It is midnight. When I have finished this letter I shall kill myself. Why? I shall attempt to give the reasons, not for those who may read these lines, but for myself, to kindle my waning courage, to impress upon myself the fatal necessity of this act which can, at best, be only deferred.

"I was brought up by simple-minded parents who were unquestioning believers. And I believed as they did.

"My dream lasted a long time. The last veil has just been torn from my eyes.

"During the last few years a strange change has been taking place within me. All the events of Life, which formerly had to me the glow of a beautiful sunset, are now fading away. The true meaning of things has appeared to me in its brutal reality; and the true reason for love has bred in me disgust even for this poetic sentiment: 'We are the eternal toys of foolish and charming illusions, which are always being renewed.'

"On growing older, I had become partly reconciled to the awful mystery of life, to the uselessness of effort; when the emptiness of everything appeared to me in a new light, this evening, after dinner.

"Formerly, I was happy! Everything pleased me: the passing women, the appearance of the streets, the place where I lived; and I even took an interest in the cut of my clothes. But the repetition of the same sights has had the result of filling my heart with weariness and disgust, just as one would feel were one to go every night to the same theatre.

"For the last thirty years I have been rising at the same hour; and, at the same restaurant, for thirty years, I have been eating at the same hours the same dishes brought me by different waiters.

"I have tried travel. The loneliness which one feels in strange places terrified me. I felt so alone, so small on the earth that I quickly started on my homeward journey.

"But here the unchanging expression of my furniture, which has stood for thirty years in the same place, the smell of my apartments (for, with time, each dwelling takes on a particular odor) each night, these and other things disgust me and make me sick of living thus.

"Everything repeats itself endlessly. The way in which I put my key in the lock, the place where I always find my matches, the first object which meets my eye when I enter the room, make me feel like jumping out of the window and putting an end to those monotonous events from which we can never escape.

"Each day, when I shave, I feel an inordinate desire to cut my throat; and my face, which I see in the little mirror, always the same, with soap on my cheeks, has several times made me weak from sadness.

“Now I even hate to be with people whom I used to meet with pleasure; I know them so well, I can tell just what they are going to say and what I am going to answer. Each brain is like a circus, where the same horse keeps circling around eternally. We must circle round always, around the same ideas, the same joys, the same pleasures, the same habits, the same beliefs, the same sensations of disgust.

“The fog was terrible this evening. It enfolded the boulevard, where the street lights were dimmed and looked like smoking candles. A heavier weight than usual oppressed me. Perhaps my digestion was bad.

“For good digestion is everything in life. It gives the inspiration to the artist, amorous desires to young people, clear ideas to thinkers, the joy of life to everybody, and it also allows one to eat heartily (which is one of the greatest pleasures). A sick stomach induces scepticism unbelief, nightmares and the desire for death. I have often noticed this fact. Perhaps I would not kill myself, if my digestion had been good this evening.

“When I sat down in the arm-chair where I have been sitting every day for thirty years, I glanced around me, and just then I was seized by such a terrible distress that I thought I must go mad.

“I tried to think of what I could do to run away from myself. Every occupation struck me as being worse even than inaction. Then I bethought me of putting my papers in order.

“For a long time I have been thinking of clearing out my drawers; for, for the last thirty years, I have been throwing my letters and bills pell-mell into the same desk, and this confusion has often caused me considerable trouble. But I feel such moral and physical laziness at the sole idea of putting anything in order that I have never had the courage to begin this tedious business.

“I therefore opened my desk, intending to choose among my old papers and destroy the majority of them.

“At first I was bewildered by this array of documents, yellowed by age, then I chose one.

“Oh! if you cherish life, never disturb the burial place of old letters!

“And if, perchance, you should, take the contents by the handful, close your eyes that you may not read a word, so that you may not recognize some forgotten handwriting which may plunge you suddenly into a sea of memories; carry these papers to the fire; and when they are in ashes, crush them to an invisible powder, or otherwise you are lost — just as I have been lost for an hour.

“The first letters which I read did not interest me greatly. They were recent, and came from living men whom I still meet quite often, and whose presence does not move me to any great extent. But all at once one envelope made me start. My name was traced on it in a large, bold handwriting; and suddenly tears came to my eyes. That letter was from my dearest friend, the companion of my youth, the confidant of my hopes; and he appeared before me so clearly, with his pleasant smile and his hand outstretched, that a cold shiver ran down my back. Yes, yes, the dead come back, for I saw him! Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist.

“With trembling hand and dimmed eyes I reread everything that he told me, and in my poor sobbing heart I felt a wound so painful that I began to groan as a man whose bones are slowly being crushed.

“Then I travelled over my whole life, just as one travels along a river. I recognized people, so long forgotten that I no longer knew their names. Their faces alone lived in me. In my mother’s letters I saw again the old servants, the shape of our house and the little insignificant odds and ends which cling to our minds.

“Yes, I suddenly saw again all my mother’s old gowns, the different styles which she adopted and the several ways in which she dressed her hair. She haunted me especially in a silk dress, trimmed with old lace; and I remembered something she said one day when she was wearing this dress. She said: ‘Robert, my child, if you do not stand up straight you will be round-shouldered all your life.’

“Then, opening another drawer, I found myself face to face with memories of tender passions: a dancing-pump, a torn handkerchief, even a garter, locks of hair and dried flowers. Then the sweet romances of my life, whose living heroines are now white-haired, plunged me into the deep melancholy of things. Oh, the young brows where blond locks curl, the caress of the hands, the glance which speaks, the hearts which beat, that smile which promises the lips, those lips which promise the embrace! And the first kiss-that endless kiss which makes you close your eyes, which drowns all thought in the immeasurable joy of approaching possession!

“Taking these old pledges of former love in both my hands, I covered them with furious caresses, and in my soul, torn by these memories, I saw them each again at the hour of surrender; and I suffered a torture more cruel than all the tortures invented in all the fables about hell.

"One last letter remained. It was written by me and dictated fifty years ago by my writing teacher. Here it is:

"'MY DEAR LITTLE MAMMA:

"'I am seven years old to-day. It is the age of reason. I take advantage of it to thank you for having brought me into this world.

"'Your little son, who loves you

"'ROBERT.'

"It is all over. I had gone back to the beginning, and suddenly I turned my glance on what remained to me of life. I saw hideous and lonely old age, and approaching infirmities, and everything over and gone. And nobody near me!

"My revolver is here, on the table. I am loading it . . . . Never reread your old letters!"

And that is how many men come to kill themselves; and we search in vain to discover some great sorrow in their lives.

ON THE RIVER

I rented a little country house last summer on the banks of the Seine, several leagues from Paris, and went out there to sleep every evening. After a few days I made the acquaintance of one of my neighbors, a man between thirty and forty, who certainly was the most curious specimen I ever met. He was an old boating man, and crazy about boating. He was always beside the water, on the water, or in the water. He must have been born in a boat, and he will certainly die in a boat at the last.

One evening as we were walking along the banks of the Seine I asked him to tell me some stories about his life on the water. The good man at once became animated, his whole expression changed, he became eloquent, almost poetical. There was in his heart one great passion, an absorbing, irresistible passion-the river.

Ah, he said to me, how many memories I have, connected with that river that you see flowing beside us! You people who live in streets know nothing about the river. But listen to a fisherman as he mentions the word. To him it is a mysterious thing, profound, unknown, a land of mirages and phantasmagoria, where one sees by night things that do not exist, hears sounds that one does not recognize, trembles without knowing why, as in passing through a cemetery — and it is, in fact, the most sinister of cemeteries, one in which one has no tomb.

The land seems limited to the river boatman, and on dark nights, when there is no moon, the river seems limitless. A sailor has not the same feeling for the sea. It is often remorseless and cruel, it is true; but it shrieks, it roars, it is honest, the great sea; while the river is silent and perfidious. It does not speak, it flows along without a sound; and this eternal motion of flowing water is more terrible to me than the high waves of the ocean.

Dreamers maintain that the sea hides in its bosom vast tracts of blue where those who are drowned roam among the big fishes, amid strange forests and crystal grottoes. The river has only black depths where one rots in the slime. It is beautiful, however, when it sparkles in the light of the rising sun and gently laps its banks covered with whispering reeds.

The poet says, speaking of the ocean,

“O waves, what mournful tragedies ye know
— Deep waves, the dread of kneeling mothers’ hearts!
Ye tell them to each other as ye roll
On flowing tide, and this it is that gives
The sad despairing tones unto your voice
As on ye roll at eve by mounting tide.”

Well, I think that the stories whispered by the slender reeds, with their little soft voices, must be more sinister than the lugubrious tragedies told by the roaring of the waves.

But as you have asked for some of my recollections, I will tell you of a singular adventure that happened to me ten years ago.

I was living, as I am now, in Mother Lafon’s house, and one of my closest friends, Louis Bernet who has now given up boating, his low shoes and his bare neck, to go into the Supreme Court, was living in the village of C., two leagues further down the river. We dined together every day, sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine.

One evening as I was coming home along and was pretty tired, rowing with difficulty my big boat, a twelve-footer, which I always took out at night, I stopped a few moments to draw breath near the reed-covered point yonder, about two hundred metres from the railway bridge.

It was a magnificent night, the moon shone brightly, the river gleamed, the air was calm and soft. This peacefulness tempted me. I thought to myself that it would be pleasant to smoke a pipe in this spot. I took up my anchor and cast it into the river.

The boat floated downstream with the current, to the end of the chain, and then stopped, and I seated myself in the stern on my sheepskin and made myself as comfortable as possible. There was not a sound to be heard, except that I occasionally thought I could perceive an almost imperceptible lapping of the water against the bank, and I noticed taller groups of reeds which assumed strange shapes and seemed, at times, to move.

The river was perfectly calm, but I felt myself affected by the unusual silence that surrounded me. All the creatures, frogs and toads, those nocturnal singers of the marsh, were silent.

Suddenly a frog croaked to my right, and close beside me. I shuddered. It ceased, and I heard nothing more, and resolved to smoke, to soothe my mind. But, although I was a noted colorer of pipes, I could not smoke; at the second draw I was nauseated, and gave up trying. I began to sing. The sound of my voice was distressing to me. So I lay still, but presently the slight motion of the boat disturbed me. It seemed to me as if she were making huge lurches, from bank to bank of the river, touching each bank alternately. Then I felt as though an invisible force, or being, were drawing her to the surface of the water and lifting her out, to let her fall again. I was tossed about as in a tempest. I heard noises around me. I sprang to my feet with a single bound. The water was glistening, all was calm.

I saw that my nerves were somewhat shaky, and I resolved to leave the spot. I pulled the anchor chain, the boat began to move; then I felt a resistance. I pulled harder, the anchor did not come up; it had caught on something at the bottom of the river and I could not raise it. I began pulling again, but all in vain. Then, with my oars, I turned the boat with its head up stream to change the position of the anchor. It was no use, it was still caught. I flew into a rage and shook the chain furiously. Nothing budged. I sat down, disheartened, and began to reflect on my situation. I could not dream of breaking this chain, or detaching it from the boat, for it was massive and was riveted at the bows to a piece of wood as thick as my arm. However, as the weather was so fine I thought that it probably would not be long before some fisherman came to my aid. My ill-luck had quieted me. I sat down and was able, at length, to smoke my pipe. I had a bottle of rum; I drank two or three glasses, and was able to laugh at the situation. It was very warm; so that, if need be, I could sleep out under the stars without any great harm.

All at once there was a little knock at the side of the boat. I gave a start, and a cold sweat broke out all over me. The noise was, doubtless, caused by some piece of wood borne along by the current, but that was enough, and I again became a prey to a strange nervous agitation. I seized the chain and tensed my muscles in a desperate effort. The anchor held firm. I sat down again, exhausted.

The river had slowly become enveloped in a thick white fog which lay close to the water, so that when I stood up I could see neither the river, nor my feet, nor my boat; but could perceive only the tops of the reeds, and farther off in the distance the plain, lying white in the moonlight, with big black patches rising up from it towards the sky, which were formed by groups of Italian poplars. I was as if buried to the waist in a cloud of cotton of singular whiteness, and all sorts of strange fancies came into my mind. I thought that someone was trying to climb into my boat which I could no longer distinguish, and that the river, hidden by the thick fog, was full of strange creatures which were swimming all around me. I felt horribly uncomfortable, my forehead felt as if it had a tight band round it, my heart beat so that it almost suffocated me, and, almost beside myself, I thought of swimming away from the place. But then, again, the very idea made me tremble with fear. I saw myself, lost, going by guesswork in this heavy fog, struggling about amid the grasses and reeds which I could not escape, my breath rattling with fear, neither seeing the bank, nor finding my boat; and it seemed as if I would feel myself dragged down by the feet to the bottom of these black waters.

In fact, as I should have had to ascend the stream at least five hundred metres before finding a spot free from grasses and rushes where I could land, there were nine chances to one that I could not find my way in the fog and that I should drown, no matter how well I could swim.

I tried to reason with myself. My will made me resolve not to be afraid, but there was something in me besides my will, and that other thing was afraid. I asked myself what there was to be afraid of. My brave “ego” ridiculed my coward “ego,” and never did I realize, as on that day, the existence in us of two rival personalities, one desiring a thing, the other resisting, and each winning the day in turn.

This stupid, inexplicable fear increased, and became terror. I remained motionless, my eyes staring, my ears on the stretch with expectation. Of what? I did not know, but it must be something terrible. I believe if it had occurred to a fish to jump out of the water, as often happens, nothing more would have been required to make me fall over, stiff and unconscious.

However, by a violent effort I succeeded in becoming almost rational again. I took up my bottle of rum and took several pulls. Then an idea came to me, and I began to shout with all my might towards all the points of the compass in succession. When my throat was absolutely paralyzed I listened. A dog was howling, at a great distance.

I drank some more rum and stretched myself out at the bottom of the boat. I remained there about an hour, perhaps two, not sleeping, my eyes wide open, with nightmares all about me. I did not dare to rise, and yet I intensely longed to do so. I delayed it from moment to moment. I said to myself: “Come, get up!” and I was afraid to move. At last I raised myself with infinite caution as though my life depended on the slightest sound that I might make; and looked over the edge of the boat. I was dazzled by the most marvellous, the most astonishing sight that it is possible to see. It was one of those phantasmagoria of fairyland, one of those sights described by travellers on their return from distant lands, whom we listen to without believing.

The fog which, two hours before, had floated on the water, had gradually cleared off and massed on the banks, leaving the river absolutely clear; while it formed on either bank an uninterrupted wall six or seven metres high, which shone in the moonlight with the dazzling brilliance of snow. One saw nothing but the river gleaming with light between these two white mountains; and high above my head sailed the great full moon, in the midst of a bluish, milky sky.

All the creatures in the water were awake. The frogs croaked furiously, while every few moments I heard, first to the right and then to the left, the abrupt, monotonous and mournful metallic note of the bullfrogs. Strange to say, I was no longer afraid. I was in the midst of such an unusual landscape that the most remarkable things would not have astonished me.

How long this lasted I do not know, for I ended by falling asleep. When I opened my eyes the moon had gone down and the sky was full of clouds. The water lapped mournfully, the wind was blowing, it was pitch dark. I drank the rest of the rum, then listened, while I trembled, to the rustling of the reeds and the foreboding sound of the river. I tried to see, but could not distinguish my boat, nor even my hands, which I held up close to my eyes.

Little by little, however, the blackness became less intense. All at once I thought I noticed a shadow gliding past, quite near me. I shouted, a voice replied; it was a fisherman. I called him; he came near and I told him of my ill-luck. He rowed his boat alongside of mine and, together, we pulled at the anchor chain. The anchor did not move. Day came, gloomy gray, rainy and cold, one of those days that bring one sorrows and misfortunes. I saw another boat. We hailed it. The man on board of her joined his efforts to ours, and gradually the anchor yielded. It rose, but slowly, slowly, loaded down by a considerable weight. At length we perceived a black mass and we drew it on board. It was the corpse of an old women with a big stone round her neck.

LIEUTENANT LARE’S MARRIAGE

Since the beginning of the campaign Lieutenant Lare had taken two cannon from the Prussians. His general had said: “Thank you, lieutenant,” and had given him the cross of honor.

As he was as cautious as he was brave, wary, inventive, wily and resourceful, he was entrusted with a hundred soldiers and he organized a company of scouts who saved the army on several occasions during a retreat.

But the invading army entered by every frontier like a surging sea. Great waves of men arrived one after the other, scattering all around them a scum of freebooters. General Carrel’s brigade, separated from its division, retreated continually, fighting each day, but remaining almost intact, thanks to the vigilance and agility of Lieutenant Lare, who seemed to be everywhere at the same moment, baffling all the enemy’s cunning, frustrating their plans, misleading their Uhlans and killing their vanguards.

One morning the general sent for him.

“Lieutenant,” said he, “here is a dispatch from General de Lacere, who will be destroyed if we do not go to his aid by sunrise to-morrow. He is at Blainville, eight leagues from here. You will start at nightfall with three hundred men, whom you will echelon along the road. I will follow you two hours later. Study the road carefully; I fear we may meet a division of the enemy.”

It had been freezing hard for a week. At two o’clock it began to snow, and by night the ground was covered and heavy white swirls concealed objects hard by.

At six o’clock the detachment set out.

Two men walked alone as scouts about three yards ahead. Then came a platoon of ten men commanded by the lieutenant himself. The rest followed them in two long columns. To the right and left of the little band, at a distance of about three hundred feet on either side, some soldiers marched in pairs.

The snow, which was still falling, covered them with a white powder in the darkness, and as it did not melt on their uniforms, they were hardly distinguishable in the night amid the dead whiteness of the landscape.

From time to time they halted. One heard nothing but that indescribable, nameless flutter of falling snow — a sensation rather than a sound, a vague, ominous murmur. A command was given in a low tone and when the troop resumed its march it left in its wake a sort of white phantom standing in the snow. It gradually grew fainter and finally disappeared. It was the echelons who were to lead the army.

The scouts slackened their pace. Something was ahead of them.

“Turn to the right,” said the lieutenant; “it is the Ronfi wood; the chateau is more to the left.”

Presently the command “Halt” was passed along. The detachment stopped and waited for the lieutenant, who, accompanied by only ten men, had undertaken a reconnoitering expedition to the chateau.

They advanced, creeping under the trees. Suddenly they all remained motionless. Around them was a dead silence. Then, quite near them, a little clear, musical young voice was heard amid the stillness of the wood.

“Father, we shall get lost in the snow. We shall never reach Blainville.”

A deeper voice replied:

“Never fear, little daughter; I know the country as well as I know my pocket.”

The lieutenant said a few words and four men moved away silently, like shadows.

All at once a woman’s shrill cry was heard through the darkness. Two prisoners were brought back, an old man and a young girl. The lieutenant questioned them, still in a low tone:

“Your name?”

“Pierre Bernard.”

“Your profession?”

“Butler to Comte de Ronfi.”

“Is this your daughter?”

‘Yes!’

“What does she do?”

“She is laundress at the chateau.”

"Where are you going?"

"We are making our escape."

"Why?"

"Twelve Uhlans passed by this evening. They shot three keepers and hanged the gardener. I was alarmed on account of the little one."

"Whither are you bound?"

"To Blainville."

"Why?"

"Because there is a French army there."

"Do you know the way?"

"Perfectly."

"Well then, follow us."

They rejoined the column and resumed their march across country. The old man walked in silence beside the lieutenant, his daughter walking at his side. All at once she stopped.

"Father," she said, "I am so tired I cannot go any farther."

And she sat down. She was shaking with cold and seemed about to lose consciousness. Her father wanted to carry her, but he was too old and too weak.

"Lieutenant," said he, sobbing, "we shall only impede your march. France before all. Leave us here."

The officer had given a command. Some men had started off. They came back with branches they had cut, and in a minute a litter was ready. The whole detachment had joined them by this time.

"Here is a woman dying of cold," said the lieutenant. "Who will give his cape to cover her?"

Two hundred capes were taken off. The young girl was wrapped up in these warm soldiers' capes, gently laid in the litter, and then four' hardy shoulders lifted her up, and like an Eastern queen borne by her slaves she was placed in the center of the detachment of soldiers, who resumed their march with more energy, more courage, more cheerfulness, animated by the presence of a woman, that sovereign inspiration that has stirred the old French blood to so many deeds of valor.

At the end of an hour they halted again and every one lay down in the snow. Over yonder on the level country a big, dark shadow was moving. It looked like some weird monster stretching itself out like a serpent, then suddenly coiling itself into a mass, darting forth again, then back, and then forward again without ceasing. Some whispered orders were passed around among the soldiers, and an occasional little, dry, metallic click was heard. The moving object suddenly came nearer, and twelve Uhlans were seen approaching at a gallop, one behind the other, having lost their way in the darkness. A brilliant flash suddenly revealed to them two hundred mete lying on the ground before them. A rapid fire was heard, which died away in the snowy silence, and all the twelve fell to the ground, their horses with them.

After a long rest the march was resumed. The old man whom they had captured acted as guide.

Presently a voice far off in the distance cried out: “Who goes there?”

Another voice nearer by gave the countersign.

They made another halt; some conferences took place. It had stopped snowing. A cold wind was driving the clouds, and innumerable stars were sparkling in the sky behind them, gradually paling in the rosy light of dawn.

A staff officer came forward to receive the detachment. But when he asked who was being carried in the litter, the form stirred; two little hands moved aside the big blue army capes and, rosy as the dawn, with two eyes that were brighter than the stars that had just faded from sight, and a smile as radiant as the morn, a dainty face appeared.

“It is I, monsieur.”

The soldiers, wild with delight, clapped their hands and bore the young girl in triumph into the midst of the camp, that was just getting to arms. Presently General Carrel arrived on the scene. At nine o’clock the Prussians made an attack. They beat a retreat at noon.

That evening, as Lieutenant Lare, overcome by fatigue, was sleeping on a bundle of straw, he was sent for by the general. He found the commanding officer in his tent, chatting with the old man whom they had come across during the night. As soon as he entered the tent the general took his hand, and addressing the stranger, said:

“My dear comte, this is the young man of whom you were telling me just now; he is one of my best officers.”

He smiled, lowered his tone, and added:

“The best.”

Then, turning to the astonished lieutenant, he presented “Comte de Ronfi-Quedissac.”

The old man took both his hands, saying:

“My dear lieutenant, you have saved my daughter’s life. I have only one way of thanking you. You may come in a few months to tell me — if you like her.”

One year later, on the very same day, Captain Lare and Miss Louise-Hortense-Genevieve de Ronfi-Quedissac were married in the church of St. Thomas Aquinas.

She brought a dowry of six thousand francs, and was said to be the prettiest bride that had been seen that year.

TWO FRIENDS

Besieged Paris was in the throes of famine. Even the sparrows on the roofs and the rats in the sewers were growing scarce. People were eating anything they could get.

As Monsieur Morissot, watchmaker by profession and idler for the nonce, was strolling along the boulevard one bright January morning, his hands in his trousers pockets and stomach empty, he suddenly came face to face with an acquaintance — Monsieur Sauvage, a fishing chum.

Before the war broke out Morissot had been in the habit, every Sunday morning, of setting forth with a bamboo rod in his hand and a tin box on his back. He took the Argenteuil train, got out at Colombes, and walked thence to the Ile Marante. The moment he arrived at this place of his dreams he began fishing, and fished till nightfall.

Every Sunday he met in this very spot Monsieur Sauvage, a stout, jolly, little man, a draper in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, and also an ardent fisherman. They often spent half the day side by side, rod in hand and feet dangling over the water, and a warm friendship had sprung up between the two.

Some days they did not speak; at other times they chatted; but they understood each other perfectly without the aid of words, having similar tastes and feelings.

In the spring, about ten o’clock in the morning, when the early sun caused a light mist to float on the water and gently warmed the backs of the two enthusiastic anglers, Morissot would occasionally remark to his neighbor:

“My, but it’s pleasant here.”

To which the other would reply:

“I can’t imagine anything better!”

And these few words sufficed to make them understand and appreciate each other.

In the autumn, toward the close of day, when the setting sun shed a blood-red glow over the western sky, and the reflection of the crimson clouds tinged the whole river with red, brought a glow to the faces of the two friends, and gilded the trees, whose leaves were already turning at the first chill touch of winter, Monsieur Sauvage would sometimes smile at Morissot, and say:

"What a glorious spectacle!"

And Morissot would answer, without taking his eyes from his float:

"This is much better than the boulevard, isn't it?"

As soon as they recognized each other they shook hands cordially, affected at the thought of meeting under such changed circumstances.

Monsieur Sauvage, with a sigh, murmured:

"These are sad times!"

Morissot shook his head mournfully.

"And such weather! This is the first fine day of the year."

The sky was, in fact, of a bright, cloudless blue.

They walked along, side by side, reflective and sad.

"And to think of the fishing!" said Morissot. "What good times we used to have!"

"When shall we be able to fish again?" asked Monsieur Sauvage.

They entered a small cafe and took an absinthe together, then resumed their walk along the pavement.

Morissot stopped suddenly.

"Shall we have another absinthe?" he said.

"If you like," agreed Monsieur Sauvage.

And they entered another wine shop.

They were quite unsteady when they came out, owing to the effect of the alcohol on their empty stomachs. It was a fine, mild day, and a gentle breeze fanned their faces.

The fresh air completed the effect of the alcohol on Monsieur Sauvage. He stopped suddenly, saying:

"Suppose we go there?"

"Where?"

"Fishing."

"But where?"

"Why, to the old place. The French outposts are close to Colombes. I know Colonel Dumoulin, and we shall easily get leave to pass."

Morissot trembled with desire.

“Very well. I agree.”

And they separated, to fetch their rods and lines.

An hour later they were walking side by side on the-highroad. Presently they reached the villa occupied by the colonel. He smiled at their request, and granted it. They resumed their walk, furnished with a password.

Soon they left the outposts behind them, made their way through deserted Colombes, and found themselves on the outskirts of the small vineyards which border the Seine. It was about eleven o’clock.

Before them lay the village of Argenteuil, apparently lifeless. The heights of Orgement and Sannois dominated the landscape. The great plain, extending as far as Nanterre, was empty, quite empty-a waste of dun-colored soil and bare cherry trees.

Monsieur Sauvage, pointing to the heights, murmured:

“The Prussians are up yonder!”

And the sight of the deserted country filled the two friends with vague misgivings.

The Prussians! They had never seen them as yet, but they had felt their presence in the neighborhood of Paris for months past — ruining France, pillaging, massacring, starving them. And a kind of superstitious terror mingled with the hatred they already felt toward this unknown, victorious nation.

“Suppose we were to meet any of them?” said Morissot.

“We’d offer them some fish,” replied Monsieur Sauvage, with that Parisian light-heartedness which nothing can wholly quench.

Still, they hesitated to show themselves in the open country, overawed by the utter silence which reigned around them.

At last Monsieur Sauvage said boldly:

“Come, we’ll make a start; only let us be careful!”

And they made their way through one of the vineyards, bent double, creeping along beneath the cover afforded by the vines, with eye and ear alert.

A strip of bare ground remained to be crossed before they could gain the river bank. They ran across this, and, as soon as they were at the water’s edge, concealed themselves among the dry reeds.

Morissot placed his ear to the ground, to ascertain, if possible, whether footsteps were coming their way. He heard nothing. They seemed to be utterly alone.

Their confidence was restored, and they began to fish.

Before them the deserted Ile Marante hid them from the farther shore. The little restaurant was closed, and looked as if it had been deserted for years.

Monsieur Sauvage caught the first gudgeon, Monsieur Morissot the second, and almost every moment one or other raised his line with a little, glittering, silvery fish wriggling at the end; they were having excellent sport.

They slipped their catch gently into a close-meshed bag lying at their feet; they were filled with joy — the joy of once more indulging in a pastime of which they had long been deprived.

The sun poured its rays on their backs; they no longer heard anything or thought of anything. They ignored the rest of the world; they were fishing.

But suddenly a rumbling sound, which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, shook the ground beneath them: the cannon were resuming their thunder.

Morissot turned his head and could see toward the left, beyond the banks of the river, the formidable outline of Mont-Valerien, from whose summit arose a white puff of smoke.

The next instant a second puff followed the first, and in a few moments a fresh detonation made the earth tremble.

Others followed, and minute by minute the mountain gave forth its deadly breath and a white puff of smoke, which rose slowly into the peaceful heaven and floated above the summit of the cliff.

Monsieur Sauvage shrugged his shoulders.

“They are at it again!” he said.

Morissot, who was anxiously watching his float bobbing up and down, was suddenly seized with the angry impatience of a peaceful man toward the madmen who were firing thus, and remarked indignantly:

“What fools they are to kill one another like that!”

“They’re worse than animals,” replied Monsieur Sauvage.

And Morissot, who had just caught a bleak, declared:

“And to think that it will be just the same so long as there are governments!”

“The Republic would not have declared war,” interposed Monsieur Sauvage.

Morissot interrupted him:

"Under a king we have foreign wars; under a republic we have civil war."

And the two began placidly discussing political problems with the sound common sense of peaceful, matter-of-fact citizens — agreeing on one point: that they would never be free. And Mont-Valerien thundered ceaselessly, demolishing the houses of the French with its cannon balls, grinding lives of men to powder, destroying many a dream, many a cherished hope, many a prospective happiness; ruthlessly causing endless woe and suffering in the hearts of wives, of daughters, of mothers, in other lands.

"Such is life!" declared Monsieur Sauvage.

"Say, rather, such is death!" replied Morissot, laughing.

But they suddenly trembled with alarm at the sound of footsteps behind them, and, turning round, they perceived close at hand four tall, bearded men, dressed after the manner of livery servants and wearing flat caps on their heads. They were covering the two anglers with their rifles.

The rods slipped from their owners' grasp and floated away down the river.

In the space of a few seconds they were seized, bound, thrown into a boat, and taken across to the Ile Marante.

And behind the house they had thought deserted were about a score of German soldiers.

A shaggy-looking giant, who was bestriding a chair and smoking a long clay pipe, addressed them in excellent French with the words:

"Well, gentlemen, have you had good luck with your fishing?"

Then a soldier deposited at the officer's feet the bag full of fish, which he had taken care to bring away. The Prussian smiled.

"Not bad, I see. But we have something else to talk about. Listen to me, and don't be alarmed:

"You must know that, in my eyes, you are two spies sent to reconnoitre me and my movements. Naturally, I capture you and I shoot you. You pretended to be fishing, the better to disguise your real errand. You have fallen into my hands, and must take the consequences. Such is war.

"But as you came here through the outposts you must have a password for your return. Tell me that password and I will let you go."

The two friends, pale as death, stood silently side by side, a slight fluttering of the hands alone betraying their emotion.

"No one will ever know," continued the officer. "You will return peacefully to your homes, and the secret will disappear with you. If you refuse, it means death-instant death. Choose!"

They stood motionless, and did not open their lips.

The Prussian, perfectly calm, went on, with hand outstretched toward the river:

"Just think that in five minutes you will be at the bottom of that water. In five minutes! You have relations, I presume?"

Mont-Valerien still thundered.

The two fishermen remained silent. The German turned and gave an order in his own language. Then he moved his chair a little way off, that he might not be so near the prisoners, and a dozen men stepped forward, rifle in hand, and took up a position, twenty paces off.

"I give you one minute," said the officer; "not a second longer."

Then he rose quickly, went over to the two Frenchmen, took Morissot by the arm, led him a short distance off, and said in a low voice:

"Quick! the password! Your friend will know nothing. I will pretend to relent."

Morissot answered not a word.

Then the Prussian took Monsieur Sauvage aside in like manner, and made him the same proposal.

Monsieur Sauvage made no reply.

Again they stood side by side.

The officer issued his orders; the soldiers raised their rifles.

Then by chance Morissot's eyes fell on the bag full of gudgeon lying in the grass a few feet from him.

A ray of sunlight made the still quivering fish glisten like silver. And Morissot's heart sank. Despite his efforts at self-control his eyes filled with tears.

"Good-by, Monsieur Sauvage," he faltered.

"Good-by, Monsieur Morissot," replied Sauvage.

They shook hands, trembling from head to foot with a dread beyond their mastery.

The officer cried:

"Fire!"

The twelve shots were as one.

Monsieur Sauvage fell forward instantaneously. Morissot, being the taller, swayed slightly and fell across his friend with face turned skyward and blood oozing from a rent in the breast of his coat.

The German issued fresh orders.

His men dispersed, and presently returned with ropes and large stones, which they attached to the feet of the two friends; then they carried them to the river bank.

Mont-Valerien, its summit now enshrouded in smoke, still continued to thunder.

Two soldiers took Morissot by the head and the feet; two others did the same with Sauvage. The bodies, swung lustily by strong hands, were cast to a distance, and, describing a curve, fell feet foremost into the stream.

The water splashed high, foamed, eddied, then grew calm; tiny waves lapped the shore.

A few streaks of blood flecked the surface of the river.

The officer, calm throughout, remarked, with grim humor:

“It’s the fishes’ turn now!”

Then he retraced his way to the house.

Suddenly he caught sight of the net full of gudgeons, lying forgotten in the grass. He picked it up, examined it, smiled, and called:

“Wilhelm!”

A white-aproned soldier responded to the summons, and the Prussian, tossing him the catch of the two murdered men, said:

“Have these fish fried for me at once, while they are still alive; they’ll make a tasty dish.”

Then he resumed his pipe.

THE LANCER’S WIFE

I

It was after Bourbaki’s defeat in the east of France. The army, broken up, decimated, and worn out, had been obliged to retreat into Switzerland after that terrible campaign, and it was only its short duration that saved a hundred and fifty thousand men from certain death. Hunger, the terrible cold, forced marches in the snow without boots, over bad mountain roads, had caused us ‘francs-tireurs’, especially, the greatest suffering, for we were without tents, and almost without food, always in the van when we were marching toward Belfort, and in the rear when returning by the Jura. Of our little band that had numbered twelve hundred men on the first of January, there remained only twenty-two pale, thin, ragged wretches, when we at length succeeded in reaching Swiss territory.

There we were safe, and could rest. Everybody knows what sympathy was shown to the unfortunate French army, and how well it was cared for. We all gained fresh life, and those who had been rich and happy before the war declared that they had never experienced a greater feeling of comfort than they did then. Just think. We actually had something to eat every day, and could sleep every night.

Meanwhile, the war continued in the east of France, which had been excluded from the armistice. Besancon still kept the enemy in check, and the latter had their revenge by ravaging Franche Comte. Sometimes we heard that they had approached quite close to the frontier, and we saw Swiss troops, who were to form a line of observation between us and them, set out on their march.

That pained us in the end, and, as we regained health and strength, the longing to fight took possession of us. It was disgraceful and irritating to know that within two or three leagues of us the Germans were victorious and insolent, to feel that we were protected by our captivity, and to feel that on that account we were powerless against them.

One day our captain took five or six of us aside, and spoke to us about it, long and furiously. He was a fine fellow, that captain. He had been a sublieutenant in the Zouaves, was tall and thin and as hard as steel, and during the whole campaign he had cut out their work for the Germans. He fretted in inactivity, and could not accustom himself to the idea of being a prisoner and of doing nothing.

"Confound it!" he said to us, "does it not pain you to know that there is a number of uhlans within two hours of us? Does it not almost drive you mad to know that those beggarly wretches are walking about as masters in our mountains, when six determined men might kill a whole spitful any day? I cannot endure it any longer, and I must go there."

"But how can you manage it, captain?"

"How? It is not very difficult! Just as if we had not done a thing or two within the last six months, and got out of woods that were guarded by very different men from the Swiss. The day that you wish to cross over into France, I will undertake to get you there."

"That may be; but what shall we do in France without any arms?"

"Without arms? We will get them over yonder, by Jove!"

"You are forgetting the treaty," another soldier said; "we shall run the risk of doing the Swiss an injury, if Manteuffel learns that they have allowed prisoners to return to France."

"Come," said the captain, "those are all bad reasons. I mean to go and kill some Prussians; that is all I care about. If you do not wish to do as I do, well and good; only say so at once. I can quite well go by myself; I do not require anybody's company."

Naturally we all protested, and, as it was quite impossible to make the captain alter his mind, we felt obliged to promise to go with him. We liked him too much to leave him in the lurch, as he never failed us in any extremity; and so the expedition was decided on.

II

The captain had a plan of his own, that he had been cogitating over for some time. A man in that part of the country whom he knew was going to lend him a cart and six suits of peasants' clothes. We could hide under some straw at the bottom of the wagon, which would be loaded with Gruyere cheese, which he was supposed to be going to sell in France. The captain told the sentinels that he was taking two friends with him to protect his goods, in case any one should try to rob him, which did not seem an extraordinary precaution. A Swiss officer seemed to look at the wagon in a knowing manner, but that was in order to impress his soldiers. In a word, neither officers nor men could make it out.

“Get up,” the captain said to the horses, as he cracked his whip, while our three men quietly smoked their pipes. I was half suffocated in my box, which only admitted the air through those holes in front, and at the same time I was nearly frozen, for it was terribly cold.

“Get up,” the captain said again, and the wagon loaded with Gruyere cheese entered France.

The Prussian lines were very badly guarded, as the enemy trusted to the watchfulness of the Swiss. The sergeant spoke North German, while our captain spoke the bad German of the Four Cantons, and so they could not understand each other. The sergeant, however, pretended to be very intelligent; and, in order to make us believe that he understood us, they allowed us to continue our journey; and, after travelling for seven hours, being continually stopped in the same manner, we arrived at a small village of the Jura in ruins, at nightfall.

What were we going to do? Our only arms were the captain’s whip, our uniforms our peasants’ blouses, and our food the Gruyere cheese. Our sole wealth consisted in our ammunition, packages of cartridges which we had stowed away inside some of the large cheeses. We had about a thousand of them, just two hundred each, but we needed rifles, and they must be chassepots. Luckily, however, the captain was a bold man of an inventive mind, and this was the plan that he hit upon:

While three of us remained hidden in a cellar in the abandoned village, he continued his journey as far as Besancon with the empty wagon and one man. The town was invested, but one can always make one’s way into a town among the hills by crossing the tableland till within about ten miles of the walls, and then following paths and ravines on foot. They left their wagon at Omans, among the Germans, and escaped out of it at night on foot; so as to gain the heights which border the River Doubs; the next day they entered Besancon, where there were plenty of chassepots. There were nearly forty thousand of them left in the arsenal, and General Roland, a brave marine, laughed at the captain’s daring project, but let him have six rifles and wished him “good luck.” There he had also found his wife, who had been through all the war with us before the campaign in the East, and who had been only prevented by illness from continuing with Bourbaki’s army. She had recovered, however, in spite of the cold, which was growing more and more intense, and in spite of the numberless privations that awaited her, she persisted in accompanying her husband. He was obliged to give way to her, and they all three, the captain, his wife, and our comrade, started on their expedition.

Going was nothing in comparison to returning. They were obliged to travel by night, so as to avoid meeting anybody, as the possession of six rifles would have made them liable to suspicion. But, in spite of everything, a week after leaving us, the captain and his two men were back with us again. The campaign was about to begin.

III

The first night of his arrival he began it himself, and, under pretext of examining the surrounding country, he went along the high road.

I must tell you that the little village which served as our fortress was a small collection of poor, badly built houses, which had been deserted long before. It lay on a steep slope, which terminated in a wooded plain. The country people sell the wood; they send it down the slopes, which are called coulees, locally, and which lead down to the plain, and there they stack it into piles, which they sell thrice a year to the wood merchants. The spot where this market is held in indicated by two small houses by the side of the highroad, which serve for public houses. The captain had gone down there by way of one of these coulees.

He had been gone about half an hour, and we were on the lookout at the top of the ravine, when we heard a shot. The captain had ordered us not to stir, and only to come to him when we heard him blow his trumpet. It was made of a goat’s horn, and could be heard a league off; but it gave no sound, and, in spite of our cruel anxiety, we were obliged to wait in silence, with our rifles by our side.

It is nothing to go down these coulees; one just lets one’s self slide down; but it is more difficult to get up again; one has to scramble up by catching hold of the hanging branches of the trees, and sometimes on all fours, by sheer strength. A whole mortal hour passed, and he did not come; nothing moved in the brushwood. The captain’s wife began to grow impatient. What could he be doing? Why did he not call us? Did the shot that we had heard proceed from an enemy, and had he killed or wounded our leader, her husband? They did not know what to think, but I myself fancied either that he was dead or that his enterprise was successful; and I was merely anxious and curious to know what he had done.

Suddenly we heard the sound of his trumpet, and we were much surprised that instead of coming from below, as we had expected, it came from the village behind us. What did that mean? It was a mystery to us, but the same idea struck us all, that he had been killed, and that the Prussians were blowing the trumpet to draw us into an ambush. We therefore returned to the cottage, keeping a careful lookout with our fingers on the trigger, and hiding under the branches; but his wife, in spite of our entreaties, rushed on, leaping like a tigress. She thought that she had to avenge her husband, and had fixed the bayonet to her rifle, and we lost sight of her at the moment that we heard the trumpet again; and, a few moments later, we heard her calling out to us:

"Come on! come on! He is alive! It is he!"

We hastened on, and saw the captain smoking his pipe at the entrance of the village, but strangely enough, he was on horseback.

"Ah! ah!" he said to us, "you see that there is something to be done here. Here I am on horseback already; I knocked over an uhlan yonder, and took his horse; I suppose they were guarding the wood, but it was by drinking and swilling in clover. One of them, the sentry at the door, had not time to see me before I gave him a sugarplum in his stomach, and then, before the others could come out, I jumped on the horse and was off like a shot. Eight or ten of them followed me, I think; but I took the crossroads through the woods. I have got scratched and torn a bit, but here I am, and now, my good fellows, attention, and take care! Those brigands will not rest until they have caught us, and we must receive them with rifle bullets. Come along; let us take up our posts!"

We set out. One of us took up his position a good way from the village on the crossroads; I was posted at the entrance of the main street, where the road from the level country enters the village, while the two others, the captain and his wife, were in the middle of the village, near the church, whose tower-served for an observatory and citadel.

We had not been in our places long before we heard a shot, followed by another, and then two, then three. The first was evidently a chassepot —

one recognized it by the sharp report, which sounds like the crack of a whip — while the other three came from the lancers' carbines.

The captain was furious. He had given orders to the outpost to let the enemy pass and merely to follow them at a distance if they marched toward the village, and to join me when they had gone well between the houses. Then they were to appear suddenly, take the patrol between two fires, and not allow a single man to escape; for, posted as we were, the six of us could have hemmed in ten Prussians, if needful.

"That confounded Piedelot has roused them," the captain said, "and they will not venture to come on blindfolded any longer. And then I am quite sure that he has managed to get a shot into himself somewhere or other, for we hear nothing of him. It serves him right; why did he not obey orders?" And then, after a moment, he grumbled in his beard: "After all I am sorry for the poor fellow; he is so brave, and shoots so well!"

The captain was right in his conjectures. We waited until evening, without seeing the uhlans; they had retreated after the first attack; but unfortunately we had not seen Piedelot, either. Was he dead or a prisoner? When night came, the captain proposed that we should go out and look for him, and so the three of us started. At the crossroads we found a broken rifle and some blood, while the ground was trampled down; but we did not find either a wounded man or a dead body, although we searched every thicket, and at midnight we returned without having discovered anything of our unfortunate comrade.

"It is very strange," the captain growled. "They must have killed him and thrown him into the bushes somewhere; they cannot possibly have taken him prisoner, as he would have called out for help. I cannot understand it at all." Just as he said that, bright flames shot up in the direction of the inn on the high road, which illuminated the sky.

"Scoundrels! cowards!" he shouted. "I will bet that they have set fire to the two houses on the marketplace, in order to have their revenge, and then they will scuttle off without saying a word. They will be satisfied with having killed a man and set fire to two houses. All right. It shall not pass over like that. We must go for them; they will not like to leave their illuminations in order to fight."

"It would be a great stroke of luck if we could set Piedelot free at the same time," some one said.

The five of us set off, full of rage and hope. In twenty minutes we had got to the bottom of the coulee, and had not yet seen any one when we were within a hundred yards of the inn. The fire was behind the house, and all we saw of it was the reflection above the roof. However, we were walking rather slowly, as we were afraid of an ambush, when suddenly we heard Piedelot's well-known voice. It had a strange sound, however; for it was at the same time — dull and vibrating, stifled and clear, as if he were calling out as loud as he could with a bit of rag stuffed into his mouth. He seemed to be hoarse and gasping, and the unlucky fellow kept exclaiming: "Help! Help!"

We sent all thoughts of prudence to the devil, and in two bounds we were at the back of the inn, where a terrible sight met our eyes.

IV

Piedelot was being burned alive. He was writhing in the midst of a heap of fagots, tied to a stake, and the flames were licking him with their burning tongues. When he saw us, his tongue seemed to stick in his throat; he drooped his head, and seemed as if he were going to die. It was only the affair of a moment to upset the burning pile, to scatter the embers, and to cut the ropes that fastened him.

Poor fellow! In what a terrible state we found him. The evening before he had had his left arm broken, and it seemed as if he had been badly beaten since then, for his whole body was covered with wounds, bruises and blood. The flames had also begun their work on him, and he had two large burns, one on his loins and the other on his right thigh, and his beard and hair were scorched. Poor Piedelot!

No one knows the terrible rage we felt at this sight! We would have rushed headlong at a hundred thousand Prussians; our thirst for vengeance was intense. But the cowards had run away, leaving their crime behind them. Where could we find them now? Meanwhile, however, the captain's wife was looking after Piedelot, and dressing his wounds as best she could, while the captain himself shook hands with him excitedly, and in a few minutes he came to himself.

"Good-morning, captain; good-morning, all of you," he said. "Ah! the scoundrels, the wretches! Why, twenty of them came to surprise us."

"Twenty, do you say?"

"Yes; there was a whole band of them, and that is why I disobeyed orders, captain, and fired on them, for they would have killed you all, and I preferred to stop them. That frightened them, and they did not venture to go farther than the crossroads. They were such cowards. Four of them shot at me at twenty yards, as if I had been a target, and then they slashed me with their swords. My arm was broken, so that I could only use my bayonet with one hand."

"But why did you not call for help?"

"I took good care not to do that, for you would all have come; and you would neither have been able to defend me nor yourselves, being only five against twenty."

"You know that we should not have allowed you to have been taken, poor old fellow."

"I preferred to die by myself, don't you see! I did not want to bring you here, for it would have been a mere ambush."

"Well, we will not talk about it any more. Do you feel rather easier?"

"No, I am suffocating. I know that I cannot live much longer. The brutes! They tied me to a tree, and beat me till I was half dead, and then they shook my broken arm; but I did not make a sound. I would rather have bitten my tongue out than have called out before them. Now I can tell what I am suffering and shed tears; it does one good. Thank you, my kind friends."

"Poor Piedelot! But we will avenge you, you may be sure!"

"Yes, yes; I want you to do that. There is, in particular, a woman among them who passes as the wife of the lancer whom the captain killed yesterday. She is dressed like a lancer, and she tortured me the most yesterday, and suggested burning me; and it was she who set fire to the wood. Oh! the wretch, the brute! Ah! how I am suffering! My loins, my arms!" and he fell back gasping and exhausted, writhing in his terrible agony, while the captain's wife wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and we all shed tears of grief and rage, as if we had been children. I will not describe the end to you; he died half an hour later, previously telling us in what direction the enemy had gone. When he was dead we gave ourselves time to bury him, and then we set out in pursuit of them, with our hearts full of fury and hatred.

"We will throw ourselves on the whole Prussian army, if it be necessary," the captain said; "but we will avenge Piedelot. We must catch those scoundrels. Let us swear to die, rather than not to find them; and if I am killed first, these are my orders: All the prisoners that you take are to be shot immediately, and as for the lancer's wife, she is to be tortured before she is put to death."

"She must not be shot, because she is a woman," the captain's wife said. "If you survive, I am sure that you would not shoot a woman. Torturing her will be quite sufficient; but if you are killed in this pursuit, I want one thing, and that is to fight with her; I will kill her with my own hands, and the others can do what they like with her if she kills me."

"We will outrage her! We will burn her! We will tear her to pieces! Piedelot shall be avenged!

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

V

The next morning we unexpectedly fell on an outpost of uhlans four leagues away. Surprised by our sudden attack, they were not able to mount their horses, nor even to defend themselves; and in a few moments we had five prisoner, corresponding to our own number. The captain questioned them, and from their answers we felt certain that they were the same whom we had encountered the previous day. Then a very curious operation took place. One of us was told off to ascertain their sex, and nothing can describe our joy when we discovered what we were seeking among them, the female executioner who had tortured our friend.

The four others were shot on the spot, with their backs to us and close to the muzzles of our rifles; and then we turned our attention to the woman. What were we going to do with her? I must acknowledge that we were all of us in favor of shooting her. Hatred, and the wish to avenge Piedelot, had extinguished all pity in us, and we had forgotten that we were going to shoot a woman, but a woman reminded us of it, the captain's wife; at her entreaties, therefore, we determined to keep her a prisoner.

The captain's poor wife was to be severely punished for this act of clemency.

The next day we heard that the armistice had been extended to the eastern part of France, and we had to put an end to our little campaign. Two of us, who belonged to the neighborhood, returned home, so there were only four of us, all told: the captain, his wife, and two men. We belonged to Besancon, which was still being besieged in spite of the armistice.

“Let us stop here,” said the captain. “I cannot believe that the war is going to end like this. The devil take it! Surely there are men still left in France; and now is the time to prove what they are made of. The spring is coming on, and the armistice is only a trap laid for the Prussians. During the time that it lasts, a new army will be raised, and some fine morning we shall fall upon them again. We shall be ready, and we have a hostage — let us remain here.”

We fixed our quarters there. It was terribly cold, and we did not go out much, and somebody had always to keep the female prisoner in sight.

She was sullen, and never said anything, or else spoke of her husband, whom the captain had killed. She looked at him continually with fierce eyes, and we felt that she was tortured by a wild longing for revenge. That seemed to us to be the most suitable punishment for the terrible torments that she had made Piedelot suffer, for impotent vengeance is such intense pain!

Alas! we who knew how to avenge our comrade ought to have thought that this woman would know how to avenge her husband, and have been on our guard. It is true that one of us kept watch every night, and that at first we tied her by a long rope to the great oak bench that was fastened to the wall. But, by and by, as she had never tried to escape, in spite of her hatred for us, we relaxed our extreme prudence, and allowed her to sleep somewhere else except on the bench, and without being tied. What had we to fear? She was at the end of the room, a man was on guard at the door, and between her and the sentinel the captain’s wife and two other men used to lie. She was alone and unarmed against four, so there could be no danger.

One night when we were asleep, and the captain was on guard, the lancer’s wife was lying more quietly in her corner than usual, and she had even smiled for the first time since she had been our prisoner during the evening. Suddenly, however, in the middle of the night, we were all awakened by a terrible cry. We got up, groping about, and at once stumbled over a furious couple who were rolling about and fighting on the ground. It was the captain and the lancer’s wife. We threw ourselves on them, and separated them in a moment. She was shouting and laughing, and he seemed to have the death rattle. All this took place in the dark. Two of us held her, and when a light was struck a terrible sight met our eyes. The captain was lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with an enormous gash in his throat, and his sword bayonet, that had been taken from his rifle, was sticking in the red, gaping wound. A few minutes afterward he died, without having been able to utter a word.

His wife did not shed a tear. Her eyes were dry, her throat was contracted, and she looked at the lancer's wife steadfastly, and with a calm ferocity that inspired fear.

"This woman belongs to me," she said to us suddenly. "You swore to me not a week ago to let me kill her as I chose, if she killed my husband; and you must keep your oath. You must fasten her securely to the fireplace, upright against the back of it, and then you can go where you like, but far from here. I will take my revenge on her myself. Leave the captain's body, and we three, he, she and I, will remain here."

We obeyed, and went away. She promised to write to us to Geneva, as we were returning thither.

VI

Two days later I received the following letter, dated the day after we had left, that had been written at an inn on the high road:

"MY FRIEND: I am writing to you, according to my promise. For the moment I am at the inn, where I have just handed my prisoner over to a Prussian officer.

"I must tell you, my friend, that this poor woman has left two children in Germany. She had followed her husband, whom she adored, as she did not wish him to be exposed to the risks of war by himself, and as her children were with their grandparents. I have learned all this since yesterday, and it has turned my ideas of vengeance into more humane feelings. At the very moment when I felt pleasure in insulting this woman, and in threatening her with the most fearful torments, in recalling Piedelot, who had been burned alive, and in threatening her with a similar death, she looked at me coldly, and said:

"'What have you got to reproach me with, Frenchwoman? You think that you will do right in avenging your husband's death, is not that so?'

"'Yes,' I replied.

"'Very well, then; in killing him, I did what you are going to do in burning me. I avenged my husband, for your husband killed him.'

"'Well,' I replied, 'as you approve of this vengeance, prepare to endure it.'

"'I do not fear it.'

“And in fact she did not seem to have lost courage. Her face was calm, and she looked at me without trembling, while I brought wood and dried leaves together, and feverishly threw on to them the powder from some cartridges, which was to make her funeral pile the more cruel.

“I hesitated in my thoughts of persecution for a moment. But the captain was there, pale and covered with blood, and he seemed to be looking at me with his large, glassy eyes, and I applied myself to my work again after kissing his pale lips. Suddenly, however, on raising my head, I saw that she was crying, and I felt rather surprised.

“‘So you are frightened?’ I said to her.

“‘No, but when I saw you kiss your husband, I thought of mine, of all whom I love.’

“She continued to sob, but stopping suddenly, she said to me in broken words and in a low voice:

“‘Have you any children?’

“A shiver rare over me, for I guessed that this poor woman had some. She asked me to look in a pocketbook which was in her bosom, and in it I saw two photographs of quite young children, a boy and a girl, with those kind, gentle, chubby faces that German children have. In it there were also two locks of light hair and a letter in a large, childish hand, and beginning with German words which meant:

“‘My dear little mother.

“‘I could not restrain my tears, my dear friend, and so I untied her, and without venturing to look at the face of my poor dead husband, who was not to be avenged, I went with her as far as the inn. She is free; I have just left her, and she kissed me with tears. I am going upstairs to my husband; come as soon as possible, my dear friend, to look for our two bodies.’”

I set off with all speed, and when I arrived there was a Prussian patrol at the cottage; and when I asked what it all meant, I was told that there was a captain of francs-tireurs and his wife inside, both dead. I gave their names; they saw that I knew them, and I begged to be allowed to arrange their funeral.

“Somebody has already undertaken it,” was the reply. “Go in if you wish to, as you know them. You can settle about their funeral with their friend.”

I went in. The captain and his wife were lying side by side on a bed, and were covered by a sheet. I raised it, and saw that the woman had inflicted a similar wound in her throat to that from which her husband had died.

At the side of the bed there sat, watching and weeping, the woman who had been mentioned to me as their best friend. It was the lancer’s wife.

THE PRISONERS

There was not a sound in the forest save the indistinct, fluttering sound of the snow falling on the trees. It had been snowing since noon; a little fine snow, that covered the branches as with frozen moss, and spread a silvery covering over the dead leaves in the ditches, and covered the roads with a white, yielding carpet, and made still more intense the boundless silence of this ocean of trees.

Before the door of the forester's dwelling a young woman, her arms bare to the elbow, was chopping wood with a hatchet on a block of stone. She was tall, slender, strong-a true girl of the woods, daughter and wife of a forester.

A voice called from within the house:

"We are alone to-night, Berthine; you must come in. It is getting dark, and there may be Prussians or wolves about."

"I've just finished, mother," replied the young woman, splitting as she spoke an immense log of wood with strong, deft blows, which expanded her chest each time she raised her arms to strike. "Here I am; there's no need to be afraid; it's quite light still."

Then she gathered up her sticks and logs, piled them in the chimney corner, went back to close the great oaken shutters, and finally came in, drawing behind her the heavy bolts of the door.

Her mother, a wrinkled old woman whom age had rendered timid, was spinning by the fireside.

"I am uneasy," she said, "when your father's not here. Two women are not much good."

"Oh," said the younger woman, "I'd cheerfully kill a wolf or a Prussian if it came to that."

And she glanced at a heavy revolver hanging above the hearth.

Her husband had been called upon to serve in the army at the beginning of the Prussian invasion, and the two women had remained alone with the old father, a keeper named Nicolas Pichon, sometimes called Long-legs, who refused obstinately to leave his home and take refuge in the town.

This town was Rethel, an ancient stronghold built on a rock. Its inhabitants were patriotic, and had made up their minds to resist the invaders, to fortify their native place, and, if need be, to stand a siege as in the good old days. Twice already, under Henri IV and under Louis XIV, the people of Rethel had distinguished themselves by their heroic defence of their town. They would do as much now, by gad! or else be slaughtered within their own walls.

They had, therefore, bought cannon and rifles, organized a militia, and formed themselves into battalions and companies, and now spent their time drilling all day long in the square. All-bakers, grocers, butchers, lawyers, carpenters, booksellers, chemists-took their turn at military training at regular hours of the day, under the auspices of Monsieur Lavigne, a former noncommissioned officer in the dragoons, now a draper, having married the daughter and inherited the business of Monsieur Ravaudan, Senior.

He had taken the rank of commanding officer in Rethel, and, seeing that all the young men had gone off to the war, he had enlisted all the others who were in favor of resisting an attack. Fat men now invariably walked the streets at a rapid pace, to reduce their weight and improve their breathing, and weak men carried weights to strengthen their muscles.

And they awaited the Prussians. But the Prussians did not appear. They were not far off, however, for twice already their scouts had penetrated as far as the forest dwelling of Nicolas Pichon, called Long-legs.

The old keeper, who could run like a fox, had come and warned the town. The guns had been got ready, but the enemy had not shown themselves.

Long-legs’ dwelling served as an outpost in the Aveline forest. Twice a week the old man went to the town for provisions and brought the citizens news of the outlying district.

On this particular day he had gone to announce the fact that a small detachment of German infantry had halted at his house the day before, about two o’clock in the afternoon, and had left again almost immediately. The noncommissioned officer in charge spoke French.

When the old man set out like this he took with him his dogs — two powerful animals with the jaws of lions-as a safeguard against the wolves, which were beginning to get fierce, and he left directions with the two women to barricade themselves securely within their dwelling as soon as night fell.

The younger feared nothing, but her mother was always apprehensive, and repeated continually:

"We'll come to grief one of these days. You see if we don't!"

This evening she was, if possible, more nervous than ever.

"Do you know what time your father will be back?" she asked.

"Oh, not before eleven, for certain. When he dines with the commandant he's always late."

And Berthine was hanging her pot over the fire to warm the soup when she suddenly stood still, listening attentively to a sound that had reached her through the chimney.

"There are people walking in the wood," she said; "seven or eight men at least."

The terrified old woman stopped her spinning wheel, and gasped:

"Oh, my God! And your father not here!"

She had scarcely finished speaking when a succession of violent blows shook the door.

As the woman made no reply, a loud, guttural voice shouted:

"Open the door!"

After a brief silence the same voice repeated:

"Open the door or I'll break it down!"

Berthine took the heavy revolver from its hook, slipped it into the pocket of her skirt, and, putting her ear to the door, asked:

"Who are you?" demanded the young woman. "What do you want?".

"The detachment that came here the other day," replied the voice.

"My men and I have lost our way in the forest since morning. Open the door or I'll break it down!"

The forester's daughter had no choice; she shot back the heavy bolts, threw open the ponderous shutter, and perceived in the wan light of the snow six men, six Prussian soldiers, the same who had visited the house the day before.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" she asked dauntlessly.

"I lost my bearings," replied the officer; "lost them completely. Then I recognized this house. I've eaten nothing since morning, nor my men either."

"But I'm quite alone with my mother this evening," said Berthine.

"Never mind," replied the soldier, who seemed a decent sort of fellow. "We won't do you any harm, but you must give us something to eat. We are nearly dead with hunger and fatigue."

Then the girl moved aside.

"Come in;" she said.

Then entered, covered with snow, their helmets sprinkled with a creamy-looking froth, which gave them the appearance of meringues. They seemed utterly worn out.

The young woman pointed to the wooden benches on either side of the large table.

"Sit down," she said, "and I'll make you some soup. You certainly look tired out, and no mistake."

Then she bolted the door afresh.

She put more water in the pot, added butter and potatoes; then, taking down a piece of bacon from a hook in the chimney earner, cut it in two and slipped half of it into the pot.

The six men watched her movements with hungry eyes. They had placed their rifles and helmets in a corner and waited for supper, as well behaved as children on a school bench.

The old mother had resumed her spinning, casting from time to time a furtive and uneasy glance at the soldiers. Nothing was to be heard save the humming of the wheel, the crackling of the fire, and the singing of the water in the pot.

But suddenly a strange noise — a sound like the harsh breathing of some wild animal sniffing under the door-startled the occupants of the room.

The German officer sprang toward the rifles. Berthine stopped him with a gesture, and said, smilingly:

"It's only the wolves. They are like you — prowling hungry through the forest."

The incredulous man wanted to see with his own eyes, and as soon as the door was opened he perceived two large grayish animals disappearing with long, swinging trot into the darkness.

He returned to his seat, muttering:

"I wouldn't have believed it!"

And he waited quietly till supper was ready.

The men devoured their meal voraciously, with mouths stretched to their ears that they might swallow the more. Their round eyes opened at the same time as their jaws, and as the soup coursed down their throats it made a noise like the gurgling of water in a rainpipe.

The two women watched in silence the movements of the big red beards. The potatoes seemed to be engulfed in these moving fleeces.

But, as they were thirsty, the forester’s daughter went down to the cellar to draw them some cider. She was gone some time. The cellar was small, with an arched ceiling, and had served, so people said, both as prison and as hiding-place during the Revolution. It was approached by means of a narrow, winding staircase, closed by a trap-door at the farther end of the kitchen.

When Berthine returned she was smiling mysteriously to herself. She gave the Germans her jug of cider.

Then she and her mother supped apart, at the other end of the kitchen.

The soldiers had finished eating, and were all six falling asleep as they sat round the table. Every now and then a forehead fell with a thud on the board, and the man, awakened suddenly, sat upright again.

Berthine said to the officer:

“Go and lie down, all of you, round the fire. There’s lots of room for six. I’m going up to my room with my mother.”

And the two women went upstairs. They could be heard locking the door and walking about overhead for a time; then they were silent.

The Prussians lay down on the floor, with their feet to the fire and their heads resting on their rolled-up cloaks. Soon all six snored loudly and uninterruptedly in six different keys.

They had been sleeping for some time when a shot rang out so loudly that it seemed directed against the very wall’s of the house. The soldiers rose hastily. Two-then three-more shots were fired.

The door opened hastily, and Berthine appeared, barefooted and only half dressed, with her candle in her hand and a scared look on her face.

“There are the French,” she stammered; “at least two hundred of them. If they find you here they’ll burn the house down. For God’s sake, hurry down into the cellar, and don’t make a ‘sound, whatever you do. If you make any noise we are lost.”

“We’ll go, we’ll go,” replied the terrified officer. “Which is the way?”

The young woman hurriedly raised the small, square trap-door, and the six men disappeared one after another down the narrow, winding staircase, feeling their way as they went.

But as soon as the spike of the out of the last helmet was out of sight Berthine lowered the heavy oaken lid — thick as a wall, hard as steel, furnished with the hinges and bolts of a prison cell — shot the two heavy bolts, and began to laugh long and silently, possessed with a mad longing to dance above the heads of her prisoners.

They made no sound, inclosed in the cellar as in a strong-box, obtaining air only from a small, iron-barred vent-hole.

Berthine lighted her fire again, hung the pot over it, and prepared more soup, saying to herself:

"Father will be tired to-night."

Then she sat and waited. The heavy pendulum of the clock swung to and fro with a monotonous tick.

Every now and then the young woman cast an impatient glance at the dial-a glance which seemed to say:

"I wish he'd be quick!"

But soon there was a sound of voices beneath her feet. Low, confused words reached her through the masonry which roofed the cellar. The Prussians were beginning to suspect the trick she had played them, and presently the officer came up the narrow staircase, and knocked at the trapdoor.

"Open the door!" he cried.

"What do you want?" she said, rising from her seat and approaching the cellarway.

"Open the door!"

"I won't do any such thing!"

"Open it or I'll break it down!" shouted the man angrily.

She laughed.

"Hammer away, my good man! Hammer away!"

He struck with the butt-end of his gun at the closed oaken door. But it would have resisted a battering-ram.

The forester's daughter heard him go down the stairs again. Then the soldiers came one after another and tried their strength against the trapdoor. But, finding their efforts useless, they all returned to the cellar and began to talk among themselves.

The young woman heard them for a short time, then she rose, opened the door of the house; looked out into the night, and listened.

A sound of distant barking reached her ear. She whistled just as a huntsman would, and almost immediately two great dogs emerged from the darkness, and bounded to her side. She held them tight, and shouted at the top of her voice:

"Hullo, father!"

A far-off voice replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

She waited a few seconds, then repeated:

"Hullo, father!"

The voice, nearer now, replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

"Don't go in front of the vent-hole!" shouted his daughter. "There are Prussians in the cellar!"

Suddenly the man's tall figure could be seen to the left, standing between two tree trunks.

"Prussians in the cellar?" he asked anxiously. "What are they doing?"

The young woman laughed.

"They are the same as were here yesterday. They lost their way, and I've given them free lodgings in the cellar."

She told the story of how she had alarmed them by firing the revolver, and had shut them up in the cellar.

The man, still serious, asked:

"But what am I to do with them at this time of night?"

"Go and fetch Monsieur Lavigne with his men," she replied. "He'll take them prisoners. He'll be delighted."

Her father smiled.

"So he will-delighted."

"Here's some soup for you," said his daughter. "Eat it quick, and then be off."

The old keeper sat down at the table, and began to eat his soup, having first filled two plates and put them on the floor for the dogs.

The Prussians, hearing voices, were silent.

Long-legs set off a quarter of an hour later, and Berthine, with her head between her hands, waited.

The prisoners began to make themselves heard again. They shouted, called, and beat furiously with the butts of their muskets against the rigid trap-door of the cellar.

Then they fired shots through the vent-hole, hoping, no doubt, to be heard by any German detachment which chanced to be passing that way.

The forester’s daughter did not stir, but the noise irritated and unnerved her. Blind anger rose in her heart against the prisoners; she would have been only too glad to kill them all, and so silence them.

Then, as her impatience grew, she watched the clock, counting the minutes as they passed.

Her father had been gone an hour and a half. He must have reached the town by now. She conjured up a vision of him telling the story to Monsieur Lavigne, who grew pale with emotion, and rang for his servant to bring him his arms and uniform. She fancied she could bear the drum as it sounded the call to arms. Frightened faces appeared at the windows. The citizen-soldiers emerged from their houses half dressed, out of breath, buckling on their belts, and hurrying to the commandant’s house.

Then the troop of soldiers, with Long-legs at its head, set forth through the night and the snow toward the forest.

She looked at the clock. “They may be here in an hour.”

A nervous impatience possessed her. The minutes seemed interminable. Would the time never come?

At last the clock marked the moment she had fixed on for their arrival. And she opened the door to listen for their approach. She perceived a shadowy form creeping toward the house. She was afraid, and cried out. But it was her father.

“They have sent me,” he said, “to see if there is any change in the state of affairs.”

“No-none.”

Then he gave a shrill whistle. Soon a dark mass loomed up under the trees; the advance guard, composed of ten men.

“Don’t go in front of the vent-hole!” repeated Long-legs at intervals.

And the first arrivals pointed out the much-dreaded vent-hole to those who came after.

At last the main body of the troop arrived, in all two hundred men, each carrying two hundred cartridges.

Monsieur Lavigne, in a state of intense excitement, posted them in such a fashion as to surround the whole house, save for a large space left vacant in front of the little hole on a level with the ground, through which the cellar derived its supply of air.

Monsieur Lavigne struck the trap-door a blow with his foot, and called:

“I wish to speak to the Prussian officer!”

The German did not reply.

“The Prussian officer!” again shouted the commandant.

Still no response. For the space of twenty minutes Monsieur Lavigne called on this silent officer to surrender with bag and baggage, promising him that all lives should be spared, and that he and his men should be accorded military honors. But he could extort no sign, either of consent or of defiance. The situation became a puzzling one.

The citizen-soldiers kicked their heels in the snow, slapping their arms across their chest, as cabdrivers do, to warm themselves, and gazing at the vent-hole with a growing and childish desire to pass in front of it.

At last one of them took the risk-a man named Potdevin, who was fleet of limb. He ran like a deer across the zone of danger. The experiment succeeded. The prisoners gave no sign of life.

A voice cried:

“There’s no one there!”

And another soldier crossed the open space before the dangerous vent-hole. Then this hazardous sport developed into a game. Every minute a man ran swiftly from one side to the other, like a boy playing baseball, kicking up the snow behind him as he ran. They had lighted big fires of dead wood at which to warm themselves, and the, figures of the runners were illumined by the flames as they passed rapidly from the camp on the right to that on the left.

Some one shouted:

“It’s your turn now, Maloison.”

Maloison was a fat baker, whose corpulent person served to point many a joke among his comrades.

He hesitated. They chaffed him. Then, nerving himself to the effort, he set off at a little, waddling gait, which shook his fat paunch and made the whole detachment laugh till they cried.

“Bravo, bravo, Maloison!” they shouted for his encouragement.

He had accomplished about two-thirds of his journey when a long, crimson flame shot forth from the vent-hole. A loud report followed, and the fat baker fell face forward to the ground, uttering a frightful scream. No one went to his assistance. Then he was seen to drag himself, groaning, on all-fours through the snow until he was beyond danger, when he fainted.

He was shot in the upper part of the thigh.

After the first surprise and fright were over they laughed at him again. But Monsieur Lavigne appeared on the threshold of the forester's dwelling. He had formed his plan of attack. He called in a loud voice "I want Planchut, the plumber, and his workmen."

Three men approached.

"Take the eavestroughs from the roof."

In a quarter of an hour they brought the commandant thirty yards of pipes.

Next, with infinite precaution, he had a small round hole drilled in the trap-door; then, making a conduit with the troughs from the pump to this opening, he said, with an air of extreme satisfaction:

"Now we'll give these German gentlemen something to drink."

A shout of frenzied admiration, mingled with uproarious laughter, burst from his followers. And the commandant organized relays of men, who were to relieve one another every five minutes. Then he commanded:

"Pump!!!"

And, the pump handle having been set in motion, a stream of water trickled throughout the length of the piping, and flowed from step to step down the cellar stairs with a gentle, gurgling sound.

They waited.

An hour passed, then two, then three. The commandant, in a state of feverish agitation, walked up and down the kitchen, putting his ear to the ground every now and then to discover, if possible, what the enemy were doing and whether they would soon capitulate.

The enemy was astir now. They could be heard moving the casks about, talking, splashing through the water.

Then, about eight o'clock in the morning, a voice came from the vent-hole "I want to speak to the French officer."

Lavigne replied from the window, taking care not to put his head out too far:

"Do you surrender?"

"I surrender."

"Then put your rifles outside."

A rifle immediately protruded from the hole, and fell into the snow, then another and another, until all were disposed of. And the voice which had spoken before said:

“I have no more. Be quick! I am drowned.”

“Stop pumping!” ordered the commandant.

And the pump handle hung motionless.

Then, having filled the kitchen with armed and waiting soldiers, he slowly raised the oaken trapdoor.

Four heads appeared, soaking wet, four fair heads with long, sandy hair, and one after another the six Germans emerged — scared, shivering and dripping from head to foot.

They were seized and bound. Then, as the French feared a surprise, they set off at once in two convoys, one in charge of the prisoners, and the other conducting Maloison on a mattress borne on poles.

They made a triumphal entry into Rethel.

Monsieur Lavigne was decorated as a reward for having captured a Prussian advance guard, and the fat baker received the military medal for wounds received at the hands of the enemy.

TWO LITTLE SOLDIERS

Every Sunday, as soon as they were free, the little soldiers would go for a walk. They turned to the right on leaving the barracks, crossed Courbevoie with rapid strides, as though on a forced march; then, as the houses grew scarcer, they slowed down and followed the dusty road which leads to Bezons.

They were small and thin, lost in their ill-fitting capes, too large and too long, whose sleeves covered their hands; their ample red trousers fell in folds around their ankles. Under the high, stiff shako one could just barely perceive two thin, hollow-cheeked Breton faces, with their calm, naive blue eyes. They never spoke during their journey, going straight before them, the same idea in each one's mind taking the place of conversation. For at the entrance of the little forest of Champioux they had found a spot which reminded them of home, and they did not feel happy anywhere else.

At the crossing of the Colombes and Chatou roads, when they arrived under the trees, they would take off their heavy, oppressive headgear and wipe their foreheads.

They always stopped for a while on the bridge at Bezons, and looked at the Seine. They stood there several minutes, bending over the railing, watching the white sails, which perhaps reminded them of their home, and of the fishing smacks leaving for the open.

As soon as they had crossed the Seine, they would purchase provisions at the delicatessen, the baker's, and the wine merchant's. A piece of bologna, four cents' worth of bread, and a quart of wine, made up the luncheon which they carried away, wrapped up in their handkerchiefs. But as soon as they were out of the village their gait would slacken and they would begin to talk.

Before them was a plain with a few clumps of trees, which led to the woods, a little forest which seemed to remind them of that other forest at

Kermarivan. The wheat and oat fields bordered on the narrow path, and Jean Kerderen said each time to Luc Le Ganidec:

"It's just like home, just like Plounivon."

"Yes, it's just like home."

And they went on, side by side, their minds full of dim memories of home. They saw the fields, the hedges, the forests, and beaches.

Each time they stopped near a large stone on the edge of the private estate, because it reminded them of the dolmen of Locneuven.

As soon as they reached the first clump of trees, Luc Le Ganidec would cut off a small stick, and, whittling it slowly, would walk on, thinking of the folks at home.

Jean Kerderen carried the provisions.

From time to time Luc would mention a name, or allude to some boyish prank which would give them food for plenty of thought. And the home country, so dear and so distant, would little by little gain possession of their minds, sending them back through space, to the well-known forms and noises, to the familiar scenery, with the fragrance of its green fields and sea air. They no longer noticed the smells of the city. And in their dreams they saw their friends leaving, perhaps forever, for the dangerous fishing grounds.

They were walking slowly, Luc Le Ganidec and Jean Kerderen, contented and sad, haunted by a sweet sorrow, the slow and penetrating sorrow of a captive animal which remembers the days of its freedom.

And when Luc had finished whittling his stick, they came to a little nook, where every Sunday they took their meal. They found the two bricks, which they had hidden in a hedge, and they made a little fire of dry branches and roasted their sausages on the ends of their knives.

When their last crumb of bread had been eaten and the last drop of wine had been drunk, they stretched themselves out on the grass side by side, without speaking, their half-closed eyes looking away in the distance, their hands clasped as in prayer, their red-trousered legs mingling with the bright colors of the wild flowers.

Towards noon they glanced, from time to time, towards the village of Bezons, for the dairy maid would soon be coming. Every Sunday she would pass in front of them on the way to milk her cow, the only cow in the neighborhood which was sent out to pasture.

Soon they would see the girl, coming through the fields, and it pleased them to watch the sparkling sunbeams reflected from her shining pail. They never spoke of her. They were just glad to see her, without understanding why.

She was a tall, strapping girl, freckled and tanned by the open air — a girl typical of the Parisian suburbs.

Once, on noticing that they were always sitting in the same place, she said to them:

“Do you always come here?”

Luc Le Ganidec, more daring than his friend, stammered:

“Yes, we come here for our rest.”

That was all. But the following Sunday, on seeing them, she smiled with the kindly smile of a woman who understood their shyness, and she asked:

“What are you doing here? Are you watching the grass grow?”

Luc, cheered up, smiled: “P’raps.”

She continued: “It’s not growing fast, is it?”

He answered, still laughing: “Not exactly.”

She went on. But when she came back with her pail full of milk, she stopped before them and said:

“Want some? It will remind you of home.”

She had, perhaps instinctively, guessed and touched the right spot.

Both were moved. Then not without difficulty, she poured some milk into the bottle in which they had brought their wine. Luc started to drink, carefully watching lest he should take more than his share. Then he passed the bottle to Jean. She stood before them, her hands on her hips, her pail at her feet, enjoying the pleasure that she was giving them. Then she went on, saying: “Well, bye-bye until next Sunday!”

For a long time they watched her tall form as it receded in the distance, blending with the background, and finally disappeared.

The following week as they left the barracks, Jean said to Luc:

“Don’t you think we ought to buy her something good?”

They were sorely perplexed by the problem of choosing something to bring to the dairy maid. Luc was in favor of bringing her some chitterlings; but Jean, who had a sweet tooth, thought that candy would be the best thing. He won, and so they went to a grocery to buy two sous’ worth, of red and white candies.

This time they ate more quickly than usual, excited by anticipation.

Jean was the first one to notice her. “There she is,” he said; and Luc answered: “Yes, there she is.”

She smiled when she saw them, and cried:

“Well, how are you to-day?”

They both answered together:

“All right! How’s everything with you?”

Then she started to talk of simple things which might interest them; of the weather, of the crops, of her masters.

They didn’t dare to offer their candies, which were slowly melting in Jean’s pocket. Finally Luc, growing bolder, murmured:

“We have brought you something.”

She asked: “Let’s see it.”

Then Jean, blushing to the tips of his ears, reached in his pocket, and drawing out the little paper bag, handed it to her.

She began to eat the little sweet dainties. The two soldiers sat in front of her, moved and delighted.

At last she went to do her milking, and when she came back she again gave them some milk.

They thought of her all through the week and often spoke of her: The following Sunday she sat beside them for a longer time.

The three of them sat there, side by side, their eyes looking far away in the distance, their hands clasped over their knees, and they told each other little incidents and little details of the villages where they were born, while the cow, waiting to be milked, stretched her heavy head toward the girl and mooed.

Soon the girl consented to eat with them and to take a sip of wine. Often she brought them plums pocket for plums were now ripe. Her presence enlivened the little Breton soldiers, who chattered away like two birds.

One Tuesday something unusual happened to Luc Le Ganidec; he asked for leave and did not return until ten o’clock at night.

Jean, worried and racked his brain to account for his friend’s having obtained leave.

The following Friday, Luc borrowed ten sons from one of his friends, and once more asked and obtained leave for several hours.

When he started out with Jean on Sunday he seemed queer, disturbed, changed. Kerderen did not understand; he vaguely suspected something, but he could not guess what it might be.

They went straight to the usual place, and lunched slowly. Neither was hungry.

Soon the girl appeared. They watched her approach as they always did. When she was near, Luc arose and went towards her. She placed her pail on the ground and kissed him. She kissed him passionately, throwing her arms around his neck, without paying attention to Jean, without even noticing that he was there.

Poor Jean was dazed, so dazed that he could not understand. His mind was upset and his heart broken, without his even realizing why.

Then the girl sat down beside Luc, and they started to chat.

Jean was not looking at them. He understood now why his friend had gone out twice during the week. He felt the pain and the sting which treachery and deceit leave in their wake.

Luc and the girl went together to attend to the cow.

Jean followed them with his eyes. He saw them disappear side by side, the red trousers of his friend making a scarlet spot against the white road. It was Luc who sank the stake to which the cow was tethered. The girl stooped down to milk the cow, while he absent-mindedly stroked the animal’s glossy neck. Then they left the pail in the grass and disappeared in the woods.

Jean could no longer see anything but the wall of leaves through which they had passed. He was unmanned so that he did not have strength to stand. He stayed there, motionless, bewildered and grieving-simple, passionate grief. He wanted to weep, to run away, to hide somewhere, never to see anyone again.

Then he saw them coming back again. They were walking slowly, hand in hand, as village lovers do. Luc was carrying the pail.

After kissing him again, the girl went on, nodding carelessly to Jean. She did not offer him any milk that day.

The two little soldiers sat side by side, motionless as always, silent and quiet, their calm faces in no way betraying the trouble in their hearts. The sun shone down on them. From time to time they could hear the plaintive lowing of the cow. At the usual time they arose to return.

Luc was whittling a stick. Jean carried the empty bottle. He left it at the wine merchant’s in Bezons. Then they stopped on the bridge, as they did every Sunday, and watched the water flowing by.

Jean leaned over the railing, farther and farther, as though he had seen something in the stream which hypnotized him. Luc said to him:

“What’s the matter? Do you want a drink?”

He had hardly said the last word when Jean’s head carried away the rest of his body, and the little blue and red soldier fell like a shot and disappeared in the water.

Luc, paralyzed with horror, tried vainly to shout for help. In the distance he saw something move; then his friend’s head bobbed up out of the water only to disappear again.

Farther down he again noticed a hand, just one hand, which appeared and again went out of sight. That was all.

The boatmen who had rushed to the scene found the body that day.

Luc ran back to the barracks, crazed, and with eyes and voice full of tears, he related the accident: “He leaned — he — he was leaning — so far over — that his head carried him away — and — he — fell — he fell — — “

Emotion choked him so that he could say no more. If he had only known.

FATHER MILON

For a month the hot sun has been parching the fields. Nature is expanding beneath its rays; the fields are green as far as the eye can see. The big azure dome of the sky is unclouded. The farms of Normandy, scattered over the plains and surrounded by a belt of tall beeches, look, from a distance, like little woods. On closer view, after lowering the worm-eaten wooden bars, you imagine yourself in an immense garden, for all the ancient apple-trees, as gnarled as the peasants themselves, are in bloom. The sweet scent of their blossoms mingles with the heavy smell of the earth and the penetrating odor of the stables. It is noon. The family is eating under the shade of a pear tree planted in front of the door; father, mother, the four children, and the help — two women and three men are all there. All are silent. The soup is eaten and then a dish of potatoes fried with bacon is brought on.

From time to time one of the women gets up and takes a pitcher down to the cellar to fetch more cider.

The man, a big fellow about forty years old, is watching a grape vine, still bare, which is winding and twisting like a snake along the side of the house.

At last he says: “Father’s vine is budding early this year. Perhaps we may get something from it.”

The woman then turns round and looks, without saying a word.

This vine is planted on the spot where their father had been shot.

It was during the war of 1870. The Prussians were occupying the whole country. General Faidherbe, with the Northern Division of the army, was opposing them.

The Prussians had established their headquarters at this farm. The old farmer to whom it belonged, Father Pierre Milon, had received and quartered them to the best of his ability.

For a month the German vanguard had been in this village. The French remained motionless, ten leagues away; and yet, every night, some of the Uhlans disappeared.

Of all the isolated scouts, of all those who were sent to the outposts, in groups of not more than three, not one ever returned.

They were picked up the next morning in a field or in a ditch. Even their horses were found along the roads with their throats cut.

These murders seemed to be done by the same men, who could never be found.

The country was terrorized. Farmers were shot on suspicion, women were imprisoned; children were frightened in order to try and obtain information. Nothing could be ascertained.

But, one morning, Father Milon was found stretched out in the barn, with a sword gash across his face.

Two Uhlans were found dead about a mile and a half from the farm. One of them was still holding his bloody sword in his hand. He had fought, tried to defend himself. A court-martial was immediately held in the open air, in front of the farm. The old man was brought before it.

He was sixty-eight years old, small, thin, bent, with two big hands resembling the claws of a crab. His colorless hair was sparse and thin, like the down of a young duck, allowing patches of his scalp to be seen. The brown and wrinkled skin of his neck showed big veins which disappeared behind his jaws and came out again at the temples. He had the reputation of being miserly and hard to deal with.

They stood him up between four soldiers, in front of the kitchen table, which had been dragged outside. Five officers and the colonel seated themselves opposite him.

The colonel spoke in French:

“Father Milon, since we have been here we have only had praise for you. You have always been obliging and even attentive to us. But to-day a terrible accusation is hanging over you, and you must clear the matter up. How did you receive that wound on your face?”

The peasant answered nothing.

The colonel continued:

“Your silence accuses you, Father Milon. But I want you to answer me! Do you understand? Do you know who killed the two Uhlans who were found this morning near Calvaire?”

The old man answered clearly

“I did.”

The colonel, surprised, was silent for a minute, looking straight at the prisoner. Father Milon stood impassive, with the stupid look of the peasant, his eyes lowered as though he were talking to the priest. Just one thing betrayed an uneasy mind; he was continually swallowing his saliva, with a visible effort, as though his throat were terribly contracted.

The man's family, his son Jean, his daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren were standing a few feet behind him, bewildered and affrighted.

The colonel went on:

"Do you also know who killed all the scouts who have been found dead, for a month, throughout the country, every morning?"

The old man answered with the same stupid look:

"I did."

"You killed them all?"

"Uh huh! I did."

"You alone? All alone?"

"Uh huh!"

"Tell me how you did it."

This time the man seemed moved; the necessity for talking any length of time annoyed him visibly. He stammered:

"I dunno! I simply did it."

The colonel continued:

"I warn you that you will have to tell me everything. You might as well make up your mind right away. How did you begin?"

The man cast a troubled look toward his family, standing close behind him. He hesitated a minute longer, and then suddenly made up his mind to obey the order.

"I was coming home one night at about ten o'clock, the night after you got here. You and your soldiers had taken more than fifty ecus worth of forage from me, as well as a cow and two sheep. I said to myself: 'As much as they take from you; just so much will you make them pay back.' And then I had other things on my mind which I will tell you. Just then I noticed one of your soldiers who was smoking his pipe by the ditch behind the barn. I went and got my scythe and crept up slowly behind him, so that he couldn't hear me. And I cut his head off with one single blow, just as I would a blade of grass, before he could say 'Booh!' If you should look at the bottom of the pond, you will find him tied up in a potato-sack, with a stone fastened to it.

"I got an idea. I took all his clothes, from his boots to his cap, and hid them away in the little wood behind the yard."

The old man stopped. The officers remained speechless, looking at each other. The questioning began again, and this is what they learned.

Once this murder committed, the man had lived with this one thought: "Kill the Prussians!" He hated them with the blind, fierce hate of the greedy yet patriotic peasant. He had his idea, as he said. He waited several days.

He was allowed to go and come as he pleased, because he had shown himself so humble, submissive and obliging to the invaders. Each night he saw the outposts leave. One night he followed them, having heard the name of the village to which the men were going, and having learned the few words of German which he needed for his plan through associating with the soldiers.

He left through the back yard, slipped into the woods, found the dead man's clothes and put them on. Then he began to crawl through the fields, following along the hedges in order to keep out of sight, listening to the slightest noises, as wary as a poacher.

As soon as he thought the time ripe, he approached the road and hid behind a bush. He waited for a while. Finally, toward midnight, he heard the sound of a galloping horse. The man put his ear to the ground in order to make sure that only one horseman was approaching, then he got ready.

An Uhlan came galloping along, carrying des patches. As he went, he was all eyes and ears. When he was only a few feet away, Father Milon dragged himself across the road, moaning: "Hilfe! Hilfe!" (Help! Help!) The horseman stopped, and recognizing a German, he thought he was wounded and dismounted, coming nearer without any suspicion, and just as he was leaning over the unknown man, he received, in the pit of his stomach, a heavy thrust from the long curved blade of the sabre. He dropped without suffering pain, quivering only in the final throes. Then the farmer, radiant with the silent joy of an old peasant, got up again, and, for his own pleasure, cut the dead man's throat. He then dragged the body to the ditch and threw it in.

The horse quietly awaited its master. Father Milon mounted him and started galloping across the plains.

About an hour later he noticed two more Uhlans who were returning home, side by side. He rode straight for them, once more crying "Hilfe! Hilfe!"

The Prussians, recognizing the uniform, let him approach without distrust. The old man passed between them like a cannon-ball, felling them both, one with his sabre and the other with a revolver.

Then he killed the horses, German horses! After that he quickly returned to the woods and hid one of the horses. He left his uniform there and again put on his old clothes; then going back into bed, he slept until morning.

For four days he did not go out, waiting for the inquest to be terminated; but on the fifth day he went out again and killed two more soldiers by the same stratagem. From that time on he did not stop. Each night he wandered about in search of adventure, killing Prussians, sometimes here and sometimes there, galloping through deserted fields, in the moonlight, a lost Uhlan, a hunter of men. Then, his task accomplished, leaving behind him the bodies lying along the roads, the old farmer would return and hide his horse and uniform.

He went, toward noon, to carry oats and water quietly to his mount, and he fed it well as he required from it a great amount of work.

But one of those whom he had attacked the night before, in defending himself slashed the old peasant across the face with his sabre.

However, he had killed them both. He had come back and hidden the horse and put on his ordinary clothes again; but as he reached home he began to feel faint, and had dragged himself as far as the stable, being unable to reach the house.

They had found him there, bleeding, on the straw.

When he had finished his tale, he suddenly lifted up his head and looked proudly at the Prussian officers.

The colonel, who was gnawing at his mustache, asked:

"You have nothing else to say?"

"Nothing more; I have finished my task; I killed sixteen, not one more or less."

"Do you know that you are going to die?"

"I haven't asked for mercy."

"Have you been a soldier?"

"Yes, I served my time. And then, you had killed my father, who was a soldier of the first Emperor. And last month you killed my youngest son, Francois, near Evreux. I owed you one for that; I paid. We are quits."

The officers were looking at each other.

The old man continued:

"Eight for my father, eight for the boy — we are quits. I did not seek any quarrel with you. I don't know you. I don't even know where you come from. And here you are, ordering me about in my home as though it were your own. I took my revenge upon the others. I'm not sorry."

And, straightening up his bent back, the old man folded his arms in the attitude of a modest hero.

The Prussians talked in a low tone for a long time. One of them, a captain, who had also lost his son the previous month, was defending the poor wretch. Then the colonel arose and, approaching Father Milon, said in a low voice:

"Listen, old man, there is perhaps a way of saving your life, it is to— "

But the man was not listening, and, his eyes fixed on the hated officer, while the wind played with the downy hair on his head, he distorted his slashed face, giving it a truly terrible expression, and, swelling out his chest, he spat, as hard as he could, right in the Prussian's face.

The colonel, furious, raised his hand, and for the second time the man spat in his face.

All the officers had jumped up and were shrieking orders at the same time.

In less than a minute the old man, still impassive, was pushed up against the wall and shot, looking smilingly the while toward Jean, his eldest son, his daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren, who witnessed this scene in dumb terror.

A COUP D’ETAT

Paris had just heard of the disaster at Sedan. A republic had been declared. All France was wavering on the brink of this madness which lasted until after the Commune. From one end of the country to the other everybody was playing soldier.

Cap-makers became colonels, fulfilling the duties of generals; revolvers and swords were displayed around big, peaceful stomachs wrapped in flaming red belts; little tradesmen became warriors commanding battalions of brawling volunteers, and swearing like pirates in order to give themselves some prestige.

The sole fact of handling firearms crazed these people, who up to that time had only handled scales, and made them, without any reason, dangerous to all. Innocent people were shot to prove that they knew how to kill; in forests which had never seen a Prussian, stray dogs, grazing cows and browsing horses were killed.

Each one thought himself called upon to play a great part in military affairs. The cafes of the smallest villages, full of uniformed tradesmen, looked like barracks or hospitals.

The town of Canneville was still in ignorance of the maddening news from the army and the capital; nevertheless, great excitement had prevailed for the last month, the opposing parties finding themselves face to face.

The mayor, Viscount de Varnetot, a thin, little old man, a conservative, who had recently, from ambition, gone over to the Empire, had seen a determined opponent arise in Dr. Massarel, a big, full-blooded man, leader of the Republican party of the neighborhood, a high official in the local masonic lodge, president of the Agricultural Society and of the firemen’s banquet and the organizer of the rural militia which was to save the country.

In two weeks, he had managed to gather together sixty-three volunteers, fathers of families, prudent farmers and town merchants, and every morning he would drill them in the square in front of the town-hall.

When, perchance, the mayor would come to the municipal building, Commander Massarel, girt with pistols, would pass proudly in front of his troop, his sword in his hand, and make all of them cry: “Long live the Fatherland!” And it had been noticed that this cry excited the little viscount, who probably saw in it a menace, a threat, as well as the odious memory of the great Revolution.

On the morning of the fifth of September, the doctor, in full uniform, his revolver on the table, was giving a consultation to an old couple, a farmer who had been suffering from varicose veins for the last seven years and had waited until his wife had them also, before he would consult the doctor, when the postman brought in the paper.

M. Massarel opened it, grew pale, suddenly rose, and lifting his hands to heaven in a gesture of exaltation, began to shout at the top of his voice before the two frightened country folks:

“Long live the Republic! long live the Republic! long live the Republic!”

Then he fell back in his chair, weak from emotion.

And as the peasant resumed: “It started with the ants, which began to run up and down my legs— “ Dr. Massarel exclaimed:

“Shut up! I haven’t got time to bother with your nonsense. The Republic has been proclaimed, the emperor has been taken prisoner, France is saved! Long live the Republic!”

Running to the door, he howled:

“Celeste, quick, Celeste!”

The servant, affrighted, hastened in; he was trying to talk so rapidly, that he could only stammer:

“My boots, my sword, my cartridge-box and the Spanish dagger which is on my night-table! Hasten!”

As the persistent peasant, taking advantage of a moment’s silence, continued, “I seemed to get big lumps which hurt me when I walk,” the physician, exasperated, roared:

“Shut up and get out! If you had washed your feet it would not have happened!”

Then, grabbing him by the collar, he yelled at him:

“Can’t you understand that we are a republic, you brass-plated idiot!”

But professional sentiment soon calmed him, and he pushed the bewildered couple out, saying:

"Come back to-morrow, come back to-morrow, my friends. I haven't any time to-day."

As he equipped himself from head to foot, he gave a series of important orders to his servant:

"Run over to Lieutenant Picart and to Second Lieutenant Pommel, and tell them that I am expecting them here immediately. Also send me Torchebeuf with his drum. Quick! quick!"

When Celeste had gone out, he sat down and thought over the situation and the difficulties which he would have to surmount.

The three men arrived together in their working clothes. The commandant, who expected to see them in uniform, felt a little shocked.

"Don't you people know anything? The emperor has been taken prisoner, the Republic has been proclaimed. We must act. My position is delicate, I might even say dangerous."

He reflected for a few moments before his bewildered subordinates, then he continued:

"We must act and not hesitate; minutes count as hours in times like these. All depends on the promptness of our decision. You, Picart, go to the cure and order him to ring the alarm-bell, in order to get together the people, to whom I am going to announce the news. You, Torchebeuf beat the tattoo throughout the whole neighborhood as far as the hamlets of Gerisaie and Salmare, in order to assemble the militia in the public square. You, Pommel, get your uniform on quickly, just the coat and cap. We are going to the town-hall to demand Monsieur de Varnetot to surrender his powers to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Now carry out those orders quickly. I will go over to your house with you, Pommel, since we shall act together."

Five minutes later, the commandant and his subordinates, armed to the teeth, appeared on the square, just as the little Viscount de Varnetot, his legs encased in gaiters as for a hunting party, his gun on his shoulder, was coming down the other street at double-quick time, followed by his three green-coated guards, their swords at their sides and their guns swung over their shoulders.

While the doctor stopped, bewildered, the four men entered the town-hall and closed the door behind them.

"They have outstripped us," muttered the physician, "we must now wait for reenforcements. There is nothing to do for the present."

Lieutenant Picart now appeared on the scene.

"The priest refuses to obey," he said. "He has even locked himself in the church with the sexton and beadle."

On the other side of the square, opposite the white, tightly closed town-hall, stood the church, silent and dark, with its massive oak door studded with iron.

But just as the perplexed inhabitants were sticking their heads out of the windows or coming out on their doorsteps, the drum suddenly began to be heard, and Torchebeuf appeared, furiously beating the tattoo. He crossed the square running, and disappeared along the road leading to the fields.

The commandant drew his sword, and advanced alone to half way between the two buildings behind which the enemy had intrenched itself, and, waving his sword over his head, he roared with all his might:

"Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!"

Then he returned to his officers.

The butcher, the baker and the druggist, much disturbed, were anxiously pulling down their shades and closing their shops. The grocer alone kept open.

However, the militia were arriving by degrees, each man in a different uniform, but all wearing a black cap with gold braid, the cap being the principal part of the outfit. They were armed with old rusty guns, the old guns which had hung for thirty years on the kitchen wall; and they looked a good deal like an army of tramps.

When he had about thirty men about him, the commandant, in a few words, outlined the situation to them. Then, turning to his staff: "Let us act," he said.

The villagers were gathering together and talking the matter over.

The doctor quickly decided on a plan of campaign.

"Lieutenant Picart, you will advance under the windows of this town-hall and summon Monsieur de Varnetot, in the name of the Republic, to hand the keys over to me."

But the lieutenant, a master mason, refused:

"You're smart, you are. I don't care to get killed, thank you. Those people in there shoot straight, don't you forget it. Do your errands yourself."

The commandant grew very red.

"I command you to go in the name of discipline!"

The lieutenant rebelled:

"I'm not going to have my beauty spoiled without knowing why."

All the notables, gathered in a group near by, began to laugh. One of them cried:

"You are right, Picart, this isn't the right time."

The doctor then muttered:

"Cowards!"

And, leaving his sword and his revolver in the hands of a soldier, he advanced slowly, his eye fastened on the windows, expecting any minute to see a gun trained on him.

When he was within a few feet of the building, the doors at both ends, leading into the two schools, opened and a flood of children ran out, boys from one side, girls from the ether, and began to play around the doctor, in the big empty square, screeching and screaming, and making so much noise that he could not make himself heard.

As soon as the last child was out of the building, the two doors closed again.

Most of the youngsters finally dispersed, and the commandant called in a loud voice:

"Monsieur de Varnetot!"

A window on the first floor opened and M. de Varnetot appeared.

The commandant continued:

"Monsieur, you know that great events have just taken place which have changed the entire aspect of the government. The one which you represented no longer exists. The one which I represent is taking control. Under these painful, but decisive circumstances, I come, in the name of the new Republic, to ask you to turn over to me the office which you held under the former government."

M. de Varnetot answered:

"Doctor, I am the mayor of Canneville, duly appointed, and I shall remain mayor of Canneville until I have been dismissed by a decree from my superiors. As mayor, I am in my place in the townhall, and here I stay. Anyhow, just try to get me out."

He closed the window.

The commandant returned to his troop. But before giving any information, eyeing Lieutenant Picart from head to foot, he exclaimed:

"You're a great one, you are! You're a fine specimen of manhood! You're a disgrace to the army! I degrade you."

"I don't give a —— !"

He turned away and mingled with a group of townspeople.

Then the doctor hesitated. What could he do? Attack? But would his men obey orders? And then, did he have the right to do so?

An idea struck him. He ran to the telegraph office, opposite the town-hall, and sent off three telegrams:

To the new republican government in Paris.

To the new prefect of the Seine-Inferieure, at Rouen.

To the new republican sub-prefect at Dieppe.

He explained the situation, pointed out the danger which the town would run if it should remain in the hands of the royalist mayor; offered his faithful services, asked for orders and signed, putting all his titles after his name.

Then he returned to his battalion, and, drawing ten francs from his pocket, he cried: "Here, my friends, go eat and drink; only leave me a detachment of ten men to guard against anybody's leaving the town-hall."

But ex-Lieutenant Picart, who had been talking with the watchmaker, heard him; he began to laugh, and exclaimed: "By Jove, if they come out, it'll give you a chance to get in. Otherwise I can see you standing out there for the rest of your life!"

The doctor did not reply, and he went to luncheon.

In the afternoon, he disposed his men about the town as though they were in immediate danger of an ambush.

Several times he passed in front of the town-hall and of the church without noticing anything suspicious; the two buildings looked as though empty.

The butcher, the baker and the druggist once more opened up their stores.

Everybody was talking about the affair. If the emperor were a prisoner, there must have been some kind of treason. They did not know exactly which of the republics had returned to power.

Night fell.

Toward nine o'clock, the doctor, alone, noiselessly approached the entrance of the public building, persuaded that the enemy must have gone to bed; and, as he was preparing to batter down the door with a pick-axe, the deep voice of a sentry suddenly called:

"Who goes there?"

And M. Massarel retreated as fast as his legs could carry him.

Day broke without any change in the situation.

Armed militia occupied the square. All the citizens had gathered around this troop awaiting developments. Even neighboring villagers had come to look on.

Then the doctor, seeing that his reputation was at stake, resolved to put an end to the matter in one way or another; and he was about to take some measures, undoubtedly energetic ones, when the door of the telegraph station opened and the little servant of the postmistress appeared, holding in her hands two papers.

First she went to the commandant and gave him one of the despatches; then she crossed the empty square, confused at seeing the eyes of everyone on her, and lowering her head and running along with little quick steps, she went and knocked softly at the door of the barricaded house, as though ignorant of the fact that those behind it were armed.

The door opened wide enough to let a man's hand reach out and receive the message; and the young girl returned blushing, ready to cry at being thus stared at by the whole countryside.

In a clear voice, the doctor cried:

"Silence, if you please."

When the populace had quieted down, he continued proudly:

"Here is the communication which I have received from the government."

And lifting the telegram he read:

> Former mayor dismissed. Inform him immediately, More orders following.
>
> For the sub-prefect:
>
> SAPIN, Councillor.

He was-triumphant; his heart was throbbing with joy and his hands were trembling; but Picart, his former subordinate, cried to him from a neighboring group:

"That's all right; but supposing the others don't come out, what good is the telegram going to do you?"

M. Massarel grew pale. He had not thought of that; if the others did not come out, he would now have to take some decisive step. It was not only his right, but his duty.

He looked anxiously at the town-hall, hoping to see the door open and his adversary give in.

The door remained closed. What could he do? The crowd was growing and closing around the militia. They were laughing.

One thought especially tortured the doctor. If he attacked, he would have to march at the head of his men; and as, with him dead, all strife would cease, it was at him and him only that M. de Varnetot and his three guards would aim. And they were good shots, very good shots, as Picart had just said. But an idea struck him and, turning to Pommel, he ordered:

“Run quickly to the druggist and ask him to lend me a towel and a stick.”

The lieutenant hastened.

He would make a flag of truce, a white flag, at the sight of which the royalist heart of the mayor would perhaps rejoice.

Pommel returned with the cloth and a broom-stick. With some twine they completed the flag, and M. Massarel, grasping it in both hands and holding it in front of him, again advanced in the direction of the town-hall. When he was opposite the door, he once more called: “Monsieur de Varnetot!” The door suddenly opened and M. de Varnetot and his three guards appeared on the threshold.

Instinctively the doctor stepped back; then he bowed courteously to his enemy, and, choking with emotion, he announced: “I have come, monsieur, to make you acquainted with the orders which I have received.”

The nobleman, without returning the bow, answered: “I resign, monsieur, but understand that it is neither through fear of, nor obedience to, the odious government which has usurped the power.” And, emphasizing every word, he declared: “I do not wish to appear, for a single day, to serve the Republic. That’s all.”

Massarel, stunned, answered nothing; and M. de Varnetot, walking quickly, disappeared around the corner of the square, still followed by his escort.

The doctor, puffed up with pride, returned to the crowd. As soon as he was near enough to make himself heard, he cried: “Hurrah! hurrah! Victory crowns the Republic everywhere.”

There was no outburst of joy.

The doctor continued: “We are free, you are free, independent! Be proud!”

The motionless villagers were looking at him without any signs of triumph shining in their eyes.

He looked at them, indignant at their indifference, thinking of what he could say or do in order to make an impression to electrify this calm peasantry, to fulfill his mission as a leader.

He had an inspiration and, turning to Pommel, he ordered: “Lieutenant, go get me the bust of the ex-emperor which is in the meeting room of the municipal council, and bring it here with a chair.”

The man presently reappeared, carrying on his right shoulder the plaster Bonaparte, and holding in his left hand a cane-seated chair.

M. Massarel went towards him, took the chair, placed the white bust on it, then stepping back a few steps, he addressed it in a loud voice:

“Tyrant, tyrant, you have fallen down in the mud. The dying fatherland was in its death throes under your oppression. Vengeful Destiny has struck you. Defeat and shame have pursued you; you fall conquered, a prisoner of the Prussians; and from the ruins of your crumbling empire, the young and glorious Republic arises, lifting from the ground your broken sword — — “

He waited for applause. Not a sound greeted his listening ear. The peasants, nonplussed, kept silent; and the white, placid, well-groomed statue seemed to look at M. Massarel with its plaster smile, ineffaceable and sarcastic.

Thus they stood, face to face, Napoleon on his chair, the physician standing three feet away. Anger seized the commandant. What could he do to move this crowd and definitely to win over public opinion?

He happened to carry his hand to his stomach, and he felt, under his red belt, the butt of his revolver.

Not another inspiration, not another word cane to his mind. Then, he drew his weapon, stepped back a few steps and shot the former monarch.

The bullet made a little black hole: like a spot, in his forehead. No sensation was created. M. Massarel shot a second time and made a second hole, then a third time, then, without stopping, he shot off the three remaining shots. Napoleon’s forehead was blown away in a white powder, but his eyes, nose and pointed mustache remained intact.

Then in exasperation, the doctor kicked the chair over, and placing one foot on what remained of the bust in the position of a conqueror, he turned to the amazed public and yelled: “Thus may all traitors die!”

As no enthusiasm was, as yet, visible, the spectators appearing to be dumb with astonishment, the commandant cried to the militia: “You may go home now.” And he himself walked rapidly, almost ran, towards his house.

As soon as he appeared, the servant told him that some patients had been waiting in his office for over three hours. He hastened in. They were the same two peasants as a few days before, who had returned at daybreak, obstinate and patient.

The old man immediately began his explanation:

“It began with ants, which seemed to be crawling up and down my legs — — “

THE HORRIBLE

The shadows of a balmy night were slowly falling. The women remained in the drawing-room of the villa. The men, seated, or astride of garden chairs, were smoking outside the door of the house, around a table laden with cups and liqueur glasses.

Their lighted cigars shone like eyes in the darkness, which was gradually becoming more dense. They had been talking about a frightful accident which had occurred the night before — two men and three women drowned in the river before the eyes of the guests.

General de G —— remarked:

“Yes, these things are affecting, but they are not horrible.

“Horrible, that well-known word, means much more than terrible. A frightful accident like this affects, upsets, terrifies; it does not horrify. In order that we should experience horror, something more is needed than emotion, something more than the spectacle of a dreadful death; there must be a shuddering sense of mystery, or a sensation of abnormal terror, more than natural. A man who dies, even under the most tragic circumstances, does not excite horror; a field of battle is not horrible; blood is not horrible; the vilest crimes are rarely horrible.

“Here are two personal examples which have shown me what is the meaning of horror.

“It was during the war of 1870. We were retreating toward Pont-Audemer, after having passed through Rouen. The army, consisting of about twenty thousand men, twenty thousand routed men, disbanded, demoralized, exhausted, were going to disband at Havre.

“The earth was covered with snow. The night was falling. They had not eaten anything since the day before. They were fleeing rapidly, the Prussians not being far off.

“All the Norman country, sombre, dotted with the shadows of the trees surrounding the farms, stretched out beneath a black, heavy, threatening sky.

“Nothing else could be heard in the wan twilight but the confused sound, undefined though rapid, of a marching throng, an endless tramping, mingled with the vague clink of tin bowls or swords. The men, bent, round-shouldered, dirty, in many cases even in rags, dragged themselves along, hurried through the snow, with a long, broken-backed stride.

“The skin of their hands froze to the butt ends of their muskets, for it was freezing hard that night. I frequently saw a little soldier take off his shoes in order to walk barefoot, as his shoes hurt his weary feet; and at every step he left a track of blood. Then, after some time, he would sit down in a field for a few minutes’ rest, and he never got up again. Every man who sat down was a dead man.

“Should we have left behind us those poor, exhausted soldiers, who fondly counted on being able to start afresh as soon as they had somewhat refreshed their stiffened legs? But scarcely had they ceased to move, and to make their almost frozen blood circulate in their veins, than an unconquerable torpor congealed them, nailed them to the ground, closed their eyes, and paralyzed in one second this overworked human mechanism. And they gradually sank down, their foreheads on their knees, without, however, falling over, for their loins and their limbs became as hard and immovable as wood, impossible to bend or to stand upright.

“And the rest of us, more robust, kept straggling on, chilled to the marrow, advancing by a kind of inertia through the night, through the snow, through that cold and deadly country, crushed by pain, by defeat, by despair, above all overcome by the abominable sensation of abandonment, of the end, of death, of nothingness.

“I saw two gendarmes holding by the arm a curious-looking little man, old, beardless, of truly surprising aspect.

“They were looking for an officer, believing that they had caught a spy. The word ‘spy’ at once spread through the midst of the stragglers, and they gathered in a group round the prisoner. A voice exclaimed: ‘He must be shot!’ And all these soldiers who were falling from utter prostration, only holding themselves on their feet by leaning on their guns, felt all of a sudden that thrill of furious and bestial anger which urges on a mob to massacre.

“I wanted to speak. I was at that time in command of a battalion; but they no longer recognized the authority of their commanding officers; they would even have shot me.

“One of the gendarmes said: ‘He has been following us for the three last days. He has been asking information from every one about the artillery.’”

I took it on myself to question this person.

“What are you doing? What do you want? Why are you accompanying the army?”

“He stammered out some words in some unintelligible dialect. He was, indeed, a strange being, with narrow shoulders, a sly look, and such an agitated air in my presence that I really no longer doubted that he was a spy. He seemed very aged and feeble. He kept looking at me from under his eyes with a humble, stupid, crafty air.

“The men all round us exclaimed.

“‘To the wall! To the wall!’

“I said to the gendarmes:

“‘Will you be responsible for the prisoner?’

“I had not ceased speaking when a terrible shove threw me on my back, and in a second I saw the man seized by the furious soldiers, thrown down, struck, dragged along the side of the road, and flung against a tree. He fell in the snow, nearly dead already.

“And immediately they shot him. The soldiers fired at him, reloaded their guns, fired again with the desperate energy of brutes. They fought with each other to have a shot at him, filed off in front of the corpse, and kept on firing at him, as people at a funeral keep sprinkling holy water in front of a coffin.

“But suddenly a cry arose of ‘The Prussians! the Prussians!’

“And all along the horizon I heard the great noise of this panic-stricken army in full flight.

“A panic, the result of these shots fired at this vagabond, had filled his very executioners with terror; and, without realizing that they were themselves the originators of the scare, they fled and disappeared in the darkness.

“I remained alone with the corpse, except for the two gendarmes whose duty compelled them to stay with me.

“They lifted up the riddled mass of bruised and bleeding flesh.

“‘He must be searched,’ I said. And I handed them a box of taper matches which I had in my pocket. One of the soldiers had another box. I was standing between the two.

“The gendarme who was examining the body announced:

“‘Clothed in a blue blouse, a white shirt, trousers, and a pair of shoes.’

“The first match went out; we lighted a second. The man continued, as he turned out his pockets:

“‘A horn-handled pocketknife, check handkerchief, a snuffbox, a bit of pack thread, a piece of bread.’

“The second match went out; we lighted a third. The gendarme, after having felt the corpse for a long time, said:

“‘That is all.’

“I said:

“‘Strip him. We shall perhaps find something next his skin.”

“And in order that the two soldiers might help each other in this task, I stood between them to hold the lighted match. By the rapid and speedily extinguished flame of the match, I saw them take off the garments one by one, and expose to view that bleeding bundle of flesh, still warm, though lifeless.

“And suddenly one of them exclaimed:

“‘Good God, general, it is a woman!’

“I cannot describe to you the strange and poignant sensation of pain that moved my heart. I could not believe it, and I knelt down in the snow before this shapeless pulp of flesh to see for myself: it was a woman.

“The two gendarmes, speechless and stunned, waited for me to give my opinion on the matter. But I did not know what to think, what theory to adopt.

“Then the brigadier slowly drawled out:

“‘Perhaps she came to look for a son of hers in the artillery, whom she had not heard from.’

“And the other chimed in:

“‘Perhaps, indeed, that is so.’

“And I, who had seen some very terrible things in my time, began to cry. And I felt, in the presence of this corpse, on that icy cold night, in the midst of that gloomy plain; at the sight of this mystery, at the sight of this murdered stranger, the meaning of that word ‘horror.’

“I had the same sensation last year, while interrogating one of the survivors of the Flatters Mission, an Algerian sharpshooter.

“You know the details of that atrocious drama. It is possible, however, that you are unacquainted with one of them.

“The colonel travelled through the desert into the Soudan, and passed through the immense territory of the Touaregs, who, in that great ocean of sand which stretches from the Atlantic to Egypt and from the Soudan to Algeria, are a kind of pirates, resembling those who ravaged the seas in former days.

“The guides who accompanied the column belonged to the tribe of the Chambaa, of Ouargla.

“Now, one day we encamped in the middle of the desert, and the Arabs declared that, as the spring was still some distance away, they would go with all their camels to look for water.

“One man alone warned the colonel that he had been betrayed. Flatters did not believe this, and accompanied the convoy with the engineers, the doctors, and nearly all his officers.

“They were massacred round the spring, and all the camels were captured.

“The captain of the Arab Intelligence Department at Ouargla, who had remained in the camp, took command of the survivors, spahis and sharpshooters, and they began to retreat, leaving behind them the baggage and provisions, for want of camels to carry them.

“Then they started on their journey through this solitude without shade and boundless, beneath the devouring sun, which burned them from morning till night.

“One tribe came to tender its submission and brought dates as a tribute. The dates were poisoned. Nearly all the Frenchmen died, and, among them, the last officer.

“There now only remained a few spahis with their quartermaster, Pobeguin, and some native sharpshooters of the Chambaa tribe. They had still two camels left. They disappeared one night, along with two, Arabs.

“Then the survivors understood that they would be obliged to eat each other, and as soon as they discovered the flight of the two men with the two camels, those who remained separated, and proceeded to march, one by one, through the soft sand, under the glare of a scorching sun, at a distance of more than a gunshot from each other.

“So they went on all day, and when they reached a spring each of them came to drink at it in turn, as soon as each solitary marcher had moved forward the number of yards arranged upon. And thus they continued marching the whole day, raising everywhere they passed, in that level, burnt up expanse, those little columns of dust which, from a distance, indicate those who are trudging through the desert.

"But one morning one of the travellers suddenly turned round and approached the man behind him. And they all stopped to look.

"The man toward whom the famished soldier drew near did not flee, but lay flat on the ground, and took aim at the one who was coming toward him. When he believed he was within gunshot, he fired. The other was not hit, and he continued then to advance, and levelling his gun, in turn, he killed his comrade.

"Then from all directions the others rushed to seek their share. And he who had killed the fallen man, cutting the corpse into pieces, distributed it.

"And they once more placed themselves at fixed distances, these irreconcilable allies, preparing for the next murder which would bring them together.

"For two days they lived on this human flesh which they divided between them. Then, becoming famished again, he who had killed the first man began killing afresh. And again, like a butcher, he cut up the corpse and offered it to his comrades, keeping only his own portion of it.

"And so this retreat of cannibals continued.

"The last Frenchman, Pobeguin, was massacred at the side of a well, the very night before the supplies arrived.

"Do you understand now what I mean by the horrible?"

This was the story told us a few nights ago by General de G —— .

MADAME PARISSE

I was sitting on the pier of the small port of Obernon, near the village of Salis, looking at Antibes, bathed in the setting sun. I had never before seen anything so wonderful and so beautiful.

The small town, enclosed by its massive ramparts, built by Monsieur de Vauban, extended into the open sea, in the middle of the immense Gulf of Nice. The great waves, coming in from the ocean, broke at its feet, surrounding it with a wreath of foam; and beyond the ramparts the houses climbed up the hill, one after the other, as far as the two towers, which rose up into the sky, like the peaks of an ancient helmet. And these two towers were outlined against the milky whiteness of the Alps, that enormous distant wall of snow which enclosed the entire horizon.

Between the white foam at the foot of the walls and the white snow on the sky-line the little city, dazzling against the bluish background of the nearest mountain ranges, presented to the rays of the setting sun a pyramid of red-roofed houses, whose facades were also white, but so different one from another that they seemed to be of all tints.

And the sky above the Alps was itself of a blue that was almost white, as if the snow had tinted it; some silvery clouds were floating just over the pale summits, and on the other side of the gulf Nice, lying close to the water, stretched like a white thread between the sea and the mountain. Two great sails, driven by a strong breeze, seemed to skim over the waves. I looked upon all this, astounded.

This view was one of those sweet, rare, delightful things that seem to permeate you and are unforgettable, like the memory of a great happiness. One sees, thinks, suffers, is moved and loves with the eyes. He who can feel with the eye experiences the same keen, exquisite and deep pleasure in looking at men and things as the man with the delicate and sensitive ear, whose soul music overwhelms.

I turned to my companion, M. Martini, a pureblooded Southerner.

“This is certainly one of the rarest sights which it has been vouchsafed to me to admire.

“I have seen Mont Saint-Michel, that monstrous granite jewel, rise out of the sand at sunrise.

“I have seen, in the Sahara, Lake Raianechergui, fifty kilometers long, shining under a moon as brilliant as our sun and breathing up toward it a white cloud, like a mist of milk.

“I have seen, in the Lipari Islands, the weird sulphur crater of the Volcanello, a giant flower which smokes and burns, an enormous yellow flower, opening out in the midst of the sea, whose stem is a volcano.

“But I have seen nothing more wonderful than Antibes, standing against the Alps in the setting sun.

“And I know not how it is that memories of antiquity haunt me; verses of Homer come into my mind; this is a city of the ancient East, a city of the odyssey; this is Troy, although Troy was very far from the sea.”

M. Martini drew the Sarty guide-book out of his pocket and read: “This city was originally a colony founded by the Phocians of Marseilles, about 340 B.C. They gave it the Greek name of Antipolis, meaning counter-city, city opposite another, because it is in fact opposite to Nice, another colony from Marseilles.

“After the Gauls were conquered, the Romans turned Antibes into a municipal city, its inhabitants receiving the rights of Roman citizenship.

“We know by an epigram of Martial that at this time — — “

I interrupted him:

“I don’t care what she was. I tell you that I see down there a city of the Odyssey. The coast of Asia and the coast of Europe resemble each other in their shores, and there is no city on the other coast of the Mediterranean which awakens in me the memories of the heroic age as this one does.”

A footstep caused me to turn my head; a woman, a large, dark woman, was walking along the road which skirts the sea in going to the cape.

“That is Madame Parisse, you know,” muttered Monsieur Martini, dwelling on the final syllable.

No, I did not know, but that name, mentioned carelessly, that name of the Trojan shepherd, confirmed me in my dream.

However, I asked: “Who is this Madame Parisse?”

He seemed astonished that I did not know the story.

I assured him that I did not know it, and I looked after the woman, who passed by without seeing us, dreaming, walking with steady and slow step, as doubtless the ladies of old walked.

She was perhaps thirty-five years old and still very beautiful, though a trifle stout.

And Monsieur Martini told me the following story:

Mademoiselle Combelombe was married, one year before the war of 1870, to Monsieur Parisse, a government official. She was then a handsome young girl, as slender and lively as she has now become stout and sad.

Unwillingly she had accepted Monsieur Parisse, one of those little fat men with short legs, who trip along, with trousers that are always too large.

After the war Antibes was garrisoned by a single battalion commanded by Monsieur Jean de Carmelin, a young officer decorated during the war, and who had just received his four stripes.

As he found life exceedingly tedious in this fortress this stuffy mole-hole enclosed by its enormous double walls, he often strolled out to the cape, a kind of park or pine wood shaken by all the winds from the sea.

There he met Madame Parisse, who also came out in the summer evenings to get the fresh air under the trees. How did they come to love each other? Who knows? They met, they looked at each other, and when out of sight they doubtless thought of each other. The image of the young woman with the brown eyes, the black hair, the pale skin, this fresh, handsome Southerner, who displayed her teeth in smiling, floated before the eyes of the officer as he continued his promenade, chewing his cigar instead of smoking it; and the image of the commanding officer, in his close-fitting coat, covered with gold lace, and his red trousers, and a little blond mustache, would pass before the eyes of Madame Parisse, when her husband, half shaven and ill-clad, short-legged and big-bellied, came home to supper in the evening.

As they met so often, they perhaps smiled at the next meeting; then, seeing each other again and again, they felt as if they knew each other. He certainly bowed to her. And she, surprised, bowed in return, but very, very slightly, just enough not to appear impolite. But after two weeks she returned his salutation from a distance, even before they were side by side.

He spoke to her. Of what? Doubtless of the setting sun. They admired it together, looking for it in each other’s eyes more often than on the horizon.

And every evening for two weeks this was the commonplace and persistent pretext for a few minutes' chat.

Then they ventured to take a few steps together, talking of anything that came into their minds, but their eyes were already saying to each other a thousand more intimate things, those secret, charming things that are reflected in the gentle emotion of the glance, and that cause the heart to beat, for they are a better revelation of the soul than the spoken ward.

And then he would take her hand, murmuring those words which the woman divines, without seeming to hear them.

And it was agreed between them that they would love each other without evidencing it by anything sensual or brutal.

She would have remained indefinitely at this stage of intimacy, but he wanted more. And every day he urged her more hotly to give in to his ardent desire.

She resisted, would not hear of it, seemed determined not to give way.

But one evening she said to him casually: "My husband has just gone to Marseilles. He will be away four days."

Jean de Carmelin threw himself at her feet, imploring her to open her door to him that very night at eleven o'clock. But she would not listen to him, and went home, appearing to be annoyed.

The commandant was in a bad humor all the evening, and the next morning at dawn he went out on the ramparts in a rage, going from one exercise field to the other, dealing out punishment to the officers and men as one might fling stones into a crowd,

On going in to breakfast he found an envelope under his napkin with these four words: "To-night at ten." And he gave one hundred sous without any reason to the waiter.

The day seemed endless to him. He passed part of it in curling his hair and perfuming himself.

As he was sitting down to the dinner-table another envelope was handed to him, and in it he found the following telegram:

> "My Love: Business completed. I return this evening on the nine o'clock train.
>
> PARISSE."

The commandant let loose such a vehement oath that the waiter dropped the soup-tureen on the floor.

What should he do? He certainly wanted her, that very, evening at whatever cost; and he would have her. He would resort to any means, even to arresting and imprisoning the husband. Then a mad thought struck him. Calling for paper, he wrote the following note:

> MADAME: He will not come back this evening, I swear it to
> you, — and I shall be, you know where, at ten o'clock. Fear nothing.
> I will answer for everything, on my honor as an officer.
> JEAN DE CARMELIN.

And having sent off this letter, he quietly ate his dinner.

Toward eight o'clock he sent for Captain Gribois, the second in command, and said, rolling between his fingers the crumpled telegram of Monsieur Parisse:

"Captain, I have just received a telegram of a very singular nature, which it is impossible for me to communicate to you. You will immediately have all the gates of the city closed and guarded, so that no one, mind me, no one, will either enter or leave before six in the morning. You will also have men patrol the streets, who will compel the inhabitants to retire to their houses at nine o'clock. Any one found outside beyond that time will be conducted to his home 'manu militari'. If your men meet me this night they will at once go out of my way, appearing not to know me. You understand me?"

"Yes, commandant."

"I hold you responsible for the execution of my orders, my dear captain."

"Yes, commandant."

"Would you like to have a glass of chartreuse?"

"With great pleasure, commandant."

They clinked glasses drank down the brown liquor and Captain Gribois left the room.

The train from Marseilles arrived at the station at nine o'clock sharp, left two passengers on the platform and went on toward Nice.

One of them, tall and thin, was Monsieur Saribe, the oil merchant, and the other, short and fat, was Monsieur Parisse.

Together they set out, with their valises, to reach the city, one kilometer distant.

But on arriving at the gate of the port the guards crossed their bayonets, commanding them to retire.

Frightened, surprised, cowed with astonishment, they retired to deliberate; then, after having taken counsel one with the other, they came back cautiously to parley, giving their names.

But the soldiers evidently had strict orders, for they threatened to shoot; and the two scared travellers ran off, throwing away their valises, which impeded their flight.

Making the tour of the ramparts, they presented themselves at the gate on the route to Cannes. This likewise was closed and guarded by a menacing sentinel. Messrs. Saribe and Parisse, like the prudent men they were, desisted from their efforts and went back to the station for shelter, since it was not safe to be near the fortifications after sundown.

The station agent, surprised and sleepy, permitted them to stay till morning in the waiting-room.

And they sat there side by side, in the dark, on the green velvet sofa, too scared to think of sleeping.

It was a long and weary night for them.

At half-past six in the morning they were informed that the gates were open and that people could now enter Antibes.

They set out for the city, but failed to find their abandoned valises on the road.

When they passed through the gates of the city, still somewhat anxious, the Commandant de Carmelin, with sly glance and mustache curled up, came himself to look at them and question them.

Then he bowed to them politely, excusing himself for having caused them a bad night. But he had to carry out orders.

The people of Antibes were scared to death. Some spoke of a surprise planned by the Italians, others of the landing of the prince imperial and others again believed that there was an Orleanist conspiracy. The truth was suspected only later, when it became known that the battalion of the commandant had been sent away, to a distance and that Monsieur de Carmelin had been severely punished.

Monsieur Martini had finished his story. Madame Parisse returned, her promenade being ended. She passed gravely near me, with her eyes fixed on the Alps, whose summits now gleamed rosy in the last rays of the setting sun.

I longed to speak to her, this poor, sad woman, who would ever be thinking of that night of love, now long past, and of the bold man who for the sake of a kiss from her had dared to put a city into a state of siege and to compromise his whole future.

And to-day he had probably forgotten her, if he did not relate this audacious, comical and tender farce to his comrades over their cups.

Had she seen him again? Did she still love him? And I thought: Here is an instance of modern love, grotesque and yet heroic. The Homer who should sing of this new Helen and the adventure of her Menelaus must be gifted with the soul of a Paul de Kock. And yet the hero of this deserted woman was brave, daring, handsome, strong as Achilles and more cunning than Ulysses.

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

Major Graf Von Farlsberg, the Prussian commandant, was reading his newspaper as he lay back in a great easy-chair, with his booted feet on the beautiful marble mantelpiece where his spurs had made two holes, which had grown deeper every day during the three months that he had been in the chateau of Uville.

A cup of coffee was smoking on a small inlaid table, which was stained with liqueur, burned by cigars, notched by the penknife of the victorious officer, who occasionally would stop while sharpening a pencil, to jot down figures, or to make a drawing on it, just as it took his fancy.

When he had read his letters and the German newspapers, which his orderly had brought him, he got up, and after throwing three or four enormous pieces of green wood on the fire, for these gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park in order to keep themselves warm, he went to the window. The rain was descending in torrents, a regular Normandy rain, which looked as if it were being poured out by some furious person, a slanting rain, opaque as a curtain, which formed a kind of wall with diagonal stripes, and which deluged everything, a rain such as one frequently experiences in the neighborhood of Rouen, which is the watering-pot of France.

For a long time the officer looked at the sodden turf and at the swollen Andelle beyond it, which was overflowing its banks; he was drumming a waltz with his fingers on the window-panes, when a noise made him turn round. It was his second in command, Captain Baron van Kelweinstein.

The major was a giant, with broad shoulders and a long, fan-like beard, which hung down like a curtain to his chest. His whole solemn person suggested the idea of a military peacock, a peacock who was carrying his tail spread out on his breast. He had cold, gentle blue eyes, and a scar from a swordcut, which he had received in the war with Austria; he was said to be an honorable man, as well as a brave officer.

The captain, a short, red-faced man, was tightly belted in at the waist, his red hair was cropped quite close to his head, and in certain lights he almost looked as if he had been rubbed over with phosphorus. He had lost two front teeth one night, though he could not quite remember how, and this sometimes made him speak unintelligibly, and he had a bald patch on top of his head surrounded by a fringe of curly, bright golden hair, which made him look like a monk.

The commandant shook hands with him and drank his cup of coffee (the sixth that morning), while he listened to his subordinate's report of what had occurred; and then they both went to the window and declared that it was a very unpleasant outlook. The major, who was a quiet man, with a wife at home, could accommodate himself to everything; but the captain, who led a fast life, who was in the habit of frequenting low resorts, and enjoying women's society, was angry at having to be shut up for three months in that wretched hole.

There was a knock at the door, and when the commandant said, "Come in," one of the orderlies appeared, and by his mere presence announced that breakfast was ready. In the dining-room they met three other officers of lower rank — a lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two sub-lieutenants, Fritz Scheuneberg and Baron von Eyrick, a very short, fair-haired man, who was proud and brutal toward men, harsh toward prisoners and as explosive as gunpowder.

Since he had been in France his comrades had called him nothing but Mademoiselle Fifi. They had given him that nickname on account of his dandified style and small waist, which looked as if he wore corsets; of his pale face, on which his budding mustache scarcely showed, and on account of the habit he had acquired of employing the French expression, 'Fi, fi donc', which he pronounced with a slight whistle when he wished to express his sovereign contempt for persons or things.

The dining-room of the chateau was a magnificent long room, whose fine old mirrors, that were cracked by pistol bullets, and whose Flemish tapestry, which was cut to ribbons, and hanging in rags in places from sword-cuts, told too well what Mademoiselle Fifi's occupation was during his spare time.

There were three family portraits on the walls a steel-clad knight, a cardinal and a judge, who were all smoking long porcelain pipes, which had been inserted into holes in the canvas, while a lady in a long, pointed waist proudly exhibited a pair of enormous mustaches, drawn with charcoal. The officers ate their breakfast almost in silence in that mutilated room, which looked dull in the rain and melancholy in its dilapidated condition, although its old oak floor had become as solid as the stone floor of an inn.

When they had finished eating and were smoking and drinking, they began, as usual, to berate the dull life they were leading. The bottles of brandy and of liqueur passed from hand to hand, and all sat back in their chairs and took repeated sips from their glasses, scarcely removing from their mouths the long, curved stems, which terminated in china bowls, painted in a manner to delight a Hottentot.

As soon as their glasses were empty they filled them again, with a gesture of resigned weariness, but Mademoiselle Fifi emptied his every minute, and a soldier immediately gave him another. They were enveloped in a cloud of strong tobacco smoke, and seemed to be sunk in a state of drowsy, stupid intoxication, that condition of stupid intoxication of men who have nothing to do, when suddenly the baron sat up and said: “Heavens! This cannot go on; we must think of something to do.” And on hearing this, Lieutenant Otto and Sub-lieutenant Fritz, who preeminently possessed the serious, heavy German countenance, said: “What, captain?”

He thought for a few moments and then replied: “What? Why, we must get up some entertainment, if the commandant will allow us.” “What sort of an entertainment, captain?” the major asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth. “I will arrange all that, commandant,” the baron said. “I will send Le Devoir to Rouen, and he will bring back some ladies. I know where they can be found, We will have supper here, as all the materials are at hand and; at least, we shall have a jolly evening.”

Graf von Farlsberg shrugged his shoulders with a smile: “You must surely be mad, my friend.”

But all the other officers had risen and surrounded their chief, saying: “Let the captain have his way, commandant; it is terribly dull here.” And the major ended by yielding. “Very well,” he replied, and the baron immediately sent for Le Devoir. He was an old non-commissioned officer, who had never been seen to smile, but who carried out all the orders of his superiors to the letter, no matter what they might be. He stood there, with an impassive face, while he received the baron’s instructions, and then went out, and five minutes later a large military wagon, covered with tarpaulin, galloped off as fast as four horses could draw it in the pouring rain. The officers all seemed to awaken from their lethargy, their looks brightened, and they began to talk.

Although it was raining as hard as ever, the major declared that it was not so dark, and Lieutenant von Grossling said with conviction that the sky was clearing up, while Mademoiselle Fifi did not seem to be able to keep still. He got up and sat down again, and his bright eyes seemed to be looking for something to destroy. Suddenly, looking at the lady with the mustaches, the young fellow pulled out his revolver and said: “You shall not see it.” And without leaving his seat he aimed, and with two successive bullets cut out both the eyes of the portrait.

“Let us make a mine!” he then exclaimed, and the conversation was suddenly interrupted, as if they had found some fresh and powerful subject of interest. The mine was his invention, his method of destruction, and his favorite amusement.

When he left the chateau, the lawful owner, Comte Fernand d’Amoys d’Uville, had not had time to carry away or to hide anything except the plate, which had been stowed away in a hole made in one of the walls. As he was very rich and had good taste, the large drawing-room, which opened into the dining-room, looked like a gallery in a museum, before his precipitate flight.

Expensive oil paintings, water colors and drawings hung against the walls, while on the tables, on the hanging shelves and in elegant glass cupboards there were a thousand ornaments: small vases, statuettes, groups of Dresden china and grotesque Chinese figures, old ivory and Venetian glass, which filled the large room with their costly and fantastic array.

Scarcely anything was left now; not that the things had been stolen, for the major would not have allowed that, but Mademoiselle Fifi would every now and then have a mine, and on those occasions all the officers thoroughly enjoyed themselves for five minutes. The little marquis went into the drawing-room to get what he wanted, and he brought back a small, delicate china teapot, which he filled with gunpowder, and carefully introduced a piece of punk through the spout. This he lighted and took his infernal machine into the next room, but he came back immediately and shut the door. The Germans all stood expectant, their faces full of childish, smiling curiosity, and as soon as the explosion had shaken the chateau, they all rushed in at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who got in first, clapped his hands in delight at the sight of a terra-cotta Venus, whose head had been blown off, and each picked up pieces of porcelain and wondered at the strange shape of the fragments, while the major was looking with a paternal eye at the large drawing-room, which had been wrecked after the fashion of a Nero, and was strewn with the fragments of works of art. He went out first and said with a smile: “That was a great success this time.”

But there was such a cloud of smoke in the dining-room, mingled with the tobacco smoke, that they could not breathe, so the commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had returned for a last glass of cognac, went up to it.

The moist air blew into the room, bringing with it a sort of powdery spray, which sprinkled their beards. They looked at the tall trees which were dripping with rain, at the broad valley which was covered with mist, and at the church spire in the distance, which rose up like a gray point in the beating rain.

The bells had not rung since their arrival. That was the only resistance which the invaders had met with in the neighborhood. The parish priest had not refused to take in and to feed the Prussian soldiers; he had several times even drunk a bottle of beer or claret with the hostile commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary; but it was no use to ask him for a single stroke of the bells; he would sooner have allowed himself to be shot. That was his way of protesting against the invasion, a peaceful and silent protest, the only one, he said, which was suitable to a priest, who was a man of mildness, and not of blood; and every one, for twenty-five miles round, praised Abbe Chantavoine’s firmness and heroism in venturing to proclaim the public mourning by the obstinate silence of his church bells.

The whole village, enthusiastic at his resistance, was ready to back up their pastor and to risk anything, for they looked upon that silent protest as the safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that thus they deserved better of their country than Belfort and Strassburg, that they had set an equally valuable example, and that the name of their little village would become immortalized by that; but, with that exception, they refused their Prussian conquerors nothing.

The commandant and his officers laughed among themselves at this inoffensive courage, and as the people in the whole country round showed themselves obliging and compliant toward them, they willingly tolerated their silent patriotism. Little Baron Wilhelm alone would have liked to have forced them to ring the bells. He was very angry at his superior's politic compliance with the priest's scruples, and every day begged the commandant to allow him to sound "ding-dong, ding-dong," just once, only just once, just by way of a joke. And he asked it in the coaxing, tender voice of some loved woman who is bent on obtaining her wish, but the commandant would not yield, and to console himself, Mademoiselle Fifi made a mine in the Chateau d'Uville.

The five men stood there together for five minutes, breathing in the moist air, and at last Lieutenant Fritz said with a laugh: "The ladies will certainly not have fine weather for their drive." Then they separated, each to his duty, while the captain had plenty to do in arranging for the dinner.

When they met again toward evening they began to laugh at seeing each other as spick and span and smart as on the day of a grand review. The commandant's hair did not look so gray as it was in the morning, and the captain had shaved, leaving only his mustache, which made him look as if he had a streak of fire under his nose.

In spite of the rain, they left the window open, and one of them went to listen from time to time; and at a quarter past six the baron said he heard a rumbling in the distance. They all rushed down, and presently the wagon drove up at a gallop with its four horses steaming and blowing, and splashed with mud to their girths. Five women dismounted, five handsome girls whom a comrade of the captain, to whom Le Devoir had presented his card, had selected with care.

They had not required much pressing, as they had got to know the Prussians in the three months during which they had had to do with them, and so they resigned themselves to the men as they did to the state of affairs.

They went at once into the dining-room, which looked still more dismal in its dilapidated condition when it was lighted up; while the table covered with choice dishes, the beautiful china and glass, and the plate, which had been found in the hole in the wall where its owner had hidden it, gave it the appearance of a bandits' inn, where they were supping after committing a robbery in the place. The captain was radiant, and put his arm round the women as if he were familiar with them; and when the three young men wanted to appropriate one each, he opposed them authoritatively, reserving to himself the right to apportion them justly, according to their several ranks, so as not to offend the higher powers. Therefore, to avoid all discussion, jarring, and suspicion of partiality, he placed them all in a row according to height, and addressing the tallest, he said in a voice of command:

"What is your name?" "Pamela," she replied, raising her voice. And then he said: "Number One, called Pamela, is adjudged to the commandant." Then, having kissed Blondina, the second, as a sign of proprietorship, he proffered stout Amanda to Lieutenant Otto; Eva, "the Tomato," to Sub-lieutenant Fritz, and Rachel, the shortest of them all, a very young, dark girl, with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, whose snub nose proved the rule which allots hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, frail Count Wilhelm d'Eyrick.

They were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive features, and all had a similarity of complexion and figure.

The three young men wished to carry off their prizes immediately, under the pretext that they might wish to freshen their toilets; but the captain wisely opposed this, for he said they were quite fit to sit down to dinner, and his experience in such matters carried the day. There were only many kisses, expectant kisses.

Suddenly Rachel choked, and began to cough until the tears came into her eyes, while smoke came through her nostrils. Under pretence of kissing her, the count had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage and did not say a word, but she looked at her tormentor with latent hatred in her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The commandant seemed delighted; he made Pamela sit on his right, and Blondina on his left, and said, as he unfolded his table napkin: "That was a delightful idea of yours, captain."

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, who were as polite as if they had been with fashionable ladies, rather intimidated their guests, but Baron von Kelweinstein beamed, made obscene remarks and seemed on fire with his crown of red hair. He paid the women compliments in French of the Rhine, and sputtered out gallant remarks, only fit for a low pothouse, from between his two broken teeth.

They did not understand him, however, and their intelligence did not seem to be awakened until he uttered foul words and broad expressions, which were mangled by his accent. Then they all began to laugh at once like crazy women and fell against each other, repeating the words, which the baron then began to say all wrong, in order that he might have the pleasure of hearing them say dirty things. They gave him as much of that stuff as he wanted, for they were drunk after the first bottle of wine, and resuming their usual habits and manners, they kissed the officers to right and left of them, pinched their arms, uttered wild cries, drank out of every glass and sang French couplets and bits of German songs which they had picked up in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves became very unrestrained, shouted and broke the plates and dishes, while the soldiers behind them waited on them stolidly. The commandant was the only one who kept any restraint upon himself.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on his knee, and, getting excited, at one moment he kissed the little black curls on her neck and at another he pinched her furiously and made her scream, for he was seized by a species of ferocity, and tormented by his desire to hurt her. He often held her close to him and pressed a long kiss on the Jewess' rosy mouth until she lost her breath, and at last he bit her until a stream of blood ran down her chin and on to her bodice.

For the second time she looked him full in the face, and as she bathed the wound, she said: “You will have to pay for, that!” But he merely laughed a hard laugh and said: “I will pay.”

At dessert champagne was served, and the commandant rose, and in the same voice in which he would have drunk to the health of the Empress Augusta, he drank: “To our ladies!” And a series of toasts began, toasts worthy of the lowest soldiers and of drunkards, mingled with obscene jokes, which were made still more brutal by their ignorance of the language. They got up, one after the other, trying to say something witty, forcing themselves to be funny, and the women, who were so drunk that they almost fell off their chairs, with vacant looks and clammy tongues applauded madly each time.

The captain, who no doubt wished to impart an appearance of gallantry to the orgy, raised his glass again and said: “To our victories over hearts.” and, thereupon Lieutenant Otto, who was a species of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed and saturated with drink, and suddenly seized by an access of alcoholic patriotism, he cried: “To our victories over France!”

Drunk as they were, the women were silent, but Rachel turned round, trembling, and said: “See here, I know some Frenchmen in whose presence you would not dare say that.” But the little count, still holding her on his knee, began to laugh, for the wine had made him very merry, and said: “Ha! ha! ha! I have never met any of them myself. As soon as we show ourselves, they run away!” The girl, who was in a terrible rage, shouted into his face: “You are lying, you dirty scoundrel!”

For a moment he looked at her steadily with his bright eyes upon her, as he had looked at the portrait before he destroyed it with bullets from his revolver, and then he began to laugh: “Ah! yes, talk about them, my dear! Should we be here now if they were brave?” And, getting excited, he exclaimed: “We are the masters! France belongs to us!” She made one spring from his knee and threw herself into her chair, while he arose, held out his glass over the table and repeated: “France and the French, the woods, the fields and the houses of France belong to us!”

The others, who were quite drunk, and who were suddenly seized by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses, and shouting, “Long live Prussia!” they emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, for they were reduced to silence and were afraid. Even Rachel did not say a word, as she had no reply to make. Then the little marquis put his champagne glass, which had just been refilled, on the head of the Jewess and exclaimed: “All the women in France belong to us also!”

At that she got up so quickly that the glass upset, spilling the amber-colored wine on her black hair as if to baptize her, and broke into a hundred fragments, as it fell to the floor. Her lips trembling, she defied the looks of the officer, who was still laughing, and stammered out in a voice choked with rage:

“That — that — that — is not true — for you shall not have the women of France!”

He sat down again so as to laugh at his ease; and, trying to speak with the Parisian accent, he said: “She is good, very good! Then why did you come here, my dear?” She was thunderstruck and made no reply for a moment, for in her agitation she did not understand him at first, but as soon as she grasped his meaning she said to him indignantly and vehemently: “I! I! I am not a woman, I am only a strumpet, and that is all that Prussians want.”

Almost before she had finished he slapped her full in the face; but as he was raising his hand again, as if to strike her, she seized a small dessert knife with a silver blade from the table and, almost mad with rage, stabbed him right in the hollow of his neck. Something that he was going to say was cut short in his throat, and he sat there with his mouth half open and a terrible look in his eyes.

All the officers shouted in horror and leaped up tumultuously; but, throwing her chair between the legs of Lieutenant Otto, who fell down at full length, she ran to the window, opened it before they could seize her and jumped out into the night and the pouring rain.

In two minutes Mademoiselle Fifi was dead, and Fritz and Otto drew their swords and wanted to kill the women, who threw themselves at their feet and clung to their knees. With some difficulty the major stopped the slaughter and had the four terrified girls locked up in a room under the care of two soldiers, and then he organized the pursuit of the fugitive as carefully as if he were about to engage in a skirmish, feeling quite sure that she would be caught.

The table, which had been cleared immediately, now served as a bed on which to lay out the lieutenant, and the four officers stood at the windows, rigid and sobered with the stern faces of soldiers on duty, and tried to pierce through the darkness of the night amid the steady torrent of rain. Suddenly a shot was heard and then another, a long way off; and for four hours they heard from time to time near or distant reports and rallying cries, strange words of challenge, uttered in guttural voices.

In the morning they all returned. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded by their comrades in the ardor of that chase and in the confusion of that nocturnal pursuit, but they had not caught Rachel.

Then the inhabitants of the district were terrorized, the houses were turned topsy-turvy, the country was scoured and beaten up, over and over again, but the Jewess did not seem to have left a single trace of her passage behind her.

When the general was told of it he gave orders to hush up the affair, so as not to set a bad example to the army, but he severely censured the commandant, who in turn punished his inferiors. The general had said: “One does not go to war in order to amuse one’s self and to caress prostitutes.” Graf von Farlsberg, in his exasperation, made up his mind to have his revenge on the district, but as he required a pretext for showing severity, he sent for the priest and ordered him to have the bell tolled at the funeral of Baron von Eyrick.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest showed himself humble and most respectful, and when Mademoiselle Fifi's body left the Chateau d'Uville on its way to the cemetery, carried by soldiers, preceded, surrounded and followed by soldiers who marched with loaded rifles, for the first time the bell sounded its funeral knell in a lively manner, as if a friendly hand were caressing it. At night it rang again, and the next day, and every day; it rang as much as any one could desire. Sometimes even it would start at night and sound gently through the darkness, seized with a strange joy, awakened one could not tell why. All the peasants in the neighborhood declared that it was bewitched, and nobody except the priest and the sacristan would now go near the church tower. And they went because a poor girl was living there in grief and solitude and provided for secretly by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed, and then one evening the priest borrowed the baker's cart and himself drove his prisoner to Rouen. When they got there he embraced her, and she quickly went back on foot to the establishment from which she had come, where the proprietress, who thought that she was dead, was very glad to see her.

A short time afterward a patriot who had no prejudices, and who liked her because of her bold deed, and who afterward loved her for herself, married her and made her a lady quite as good as many others.

A DUEL

The war was over. The Germans occupied France. The whole country was pulsating like a conquered wrestler beneath the knee of his victorious opponent.

The first trains from Paris, distracted, starving, despairing Paris, were making their way to the new frontiers, slowly passing through the country districts and the villages. The passengers gazed through the windows at the ravaged fields and burned hamlets. Prussian soldiers, in their black helmets with brass spikes, were smoking their pipes astride their chairs in front of the houses which were still left standing. Others were working or talking just as if they were members of the families. As you passed through the different towns you saw entire regiments drilling in the squares, and, in spite of the rumble of the carriage-wheels, you could every moment hear the hoarse words of command.

M. Dubuis, who during the entire siege had served as one of the National Guard in Paris, was going to join his wife and daughter, whom he had prudently sent away to Switzerland before the invasion.

Famine and hardship had not diminished his big paunch so characteristic of the rich, peace-loving merchant. He had gone through the terrible events of the past year with sorrowful resignation and bitter complaints at the savagery of men. Now that he was journeying to the frontier at the close of the war, he saw the Prussians for the first time, although he had done his duty on the ramparts and mounted guard on many a cold night.

He stared with mingled fear and anger at those bearded armed men, installed all over French soil as if they were at home, and he felt in his soul a kind of fever of impotent patriotism, at the same time also the great need of that new instinct of prudence which since then has, never left us. In the same railway carriage were two Englishmen, who had come to the country as sightseers and were gazing about them with looks of quiet curiosity. They were both also stout, and kept chatting in their own language, sometimes referring to their guidebook, and reading aloud the names of the places indicated.

Suddenly the train stopped at a little village station, and a Prussian officer jumped up with a great clatter of his sabre on the double footboard of the railway carriage. He was tall, wore a tight-fitting uniform, and had whiskers up to his eyes. His red hair seemed to be on fire, and his long mustache, of a paler hue, stuck out on both sides of his face, which it seemed to cut in two.

The Englishmen at once began staring, at him with smiles of newly awakened interest, while M. Dubuis made a show of reading a newspaper. He sat concealed in his corner like a thief in presence of a gendarme.

The train started again. The Englishmen went on chatting and looking out for the exact scene of different battles; and all of a sudden, as one of them stretched out his arm toward the horizon as he pointed out a village, the Prussian officer remarked in French, extending his long legs and lolling backward:

"I killed a dozen Frenchmen in that village and took more than a hundred prisoners."

The Englishmen, quite interested, immediately asked:

"Ha! and what is the name of this village?"

The Prussian replied:

"Pharsbourg." He added: "We caught those French scoundrels by the ears."

And he glanced toward M. Dubuis, laughing conceitedly into his mustache.

The train rolled on, still passing through hamlets occupied by the victorious army. German soldiers could be seen along the roads, on the edges of fields, standing in front of gates or chatting outside cafes. They covered the soil like African locusts.

The officer said, with a wave of his hand:

"If I had been in command, I'd have taken Paris, burned everything, killed everybody. No more France!"

The Englishman, through politeness, replied simply:

"Ah! yes."

He went on:

"In twenty years all Europe, all of it, will belong to us. Prussia is more than a match for all of them."

The Englishmen, getting uneasy, no longer replied. Their faces, which had become impassive, seemed made of wax behind their long whiskers. Then the Prussian officer began to laugh. And still, lolling back, he began to sneer. He sneered at the downfall of France, insulted the prostrate enemy; he sneered at Austria, which had been recently conquered; he sneered at the valiant but fruitless defence of the departments; he sneered at the Garde Mobile and at the useless artillery. He announced that Bismarck was going to build a city of iron with the captured cannon. And suddenly he placed his boots against the thigh of M. Dubuis, who turned away his eyes, reddening to the roots of his hair.

The Englishmen seemed to have become indifferent to all that was going on, as if they were suddenly shut up in their own island, far from the din of the world.

The officer took out his pipe, and looking fixedly at the Frenchman, said:

"You haven't any tobacco — have you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The German resumed:

"You might go and buy some for me when the train stops."

And he began laughing afresh as he added:

"I'll give you the price of a drink."

The train whistled, and slackened its pace. They passed a station that had been burned down; and then they stopped altogether.

The German opened the carriage door, and, catching M. Dubuis by the arm, said:

"Go and do what I told you — quick, quick!"

A Prussian detachment occupied the station. Other soldiers were standing behind wooden gratings, looking on. The engine was getting up steam before starting off again. Then M. Dubuis hurriedly jumped on the platform, and, in spite of the warnings of the station master, dashed into the adjoining compartment.

He was alone! He tore open his waistcoat, his heart was beating so rapidly, and, gasping for breath, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

The train drew up at another station. And suddenly the officer appeared at the carriage door and jumped in, followed close behind by the two

Englishmen, who were impelled by curiosity. The German sat facing the Frenchman, and, laughing still, said:

"You did not want to do what I asked you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The train had just left the station.

The officer said:

"I'll cut off your mustache to fill my pipe with."

And he put out his hand toward the Frenchman's face.

The Englishmen stared at them, retaining their previous impassive manner.

The German had already pulled out a few hairs, and was still tugging at the mustache, when M. Dubuis, with a back stroke of his hand, flung aside the officer's arm, and, seizing him by the collar, threw him down on the seat. Then, excited to a pitch of fury, his temples swollen and his eyes glaring, he kept throttling the officer with one hand, while with the other clenched he began to strike him violent blows in the face. The Prussian struggled, tried to draw his sword, to clinch with his adversary, who was on top of him. But M. Dubuis crushed him with his enormous weight and kept punching him without taking breath or knowing where his blows fell. Blood flowed down the face of the German, who, choking and with a rattling in his throat, spat out his broken teeth and vainly strove to shake off this infuriated man who was killing him.

The Englishmen had got on their feet and came closer in order to see better. They remained standing, full of mirth and curiosity, ready to bet for, or against, either combatant.

Suddenly M. Dubuis, exhausted by his violent efforts, rose and resumed his seat without uttering a word.

The Prussian did not attack him, for the savage assault had terrified and astonished the officer as well as causing him suffering. When he was able to breathe freely, he said:

"Unless you give me satisfaction with pistols I will kill you."

M. Dubuis replied:

"Whenever you like. I'm quite ready."

The German said:

"Here is the town of Strasbourg. I'll get two officers to be my seconds, and there will be time before the train leaves the station."

M. Dubuis, who was puffing as hard as the engine, said to the Englishmen:

"Will you be my seconds?" They both answered together:

"Oh, yes!"

And the train stopped.

In a minute the Prussian had found two comrades, who brought pistols, and they made their way toward the ramparts.

The Englishmen were continually looking at their watches, shuffling their feet and hurrying on with the preparations, uneasy lest they should be too late for the train.

M. Dubuis had never fired a pistol in his life.

They made him stand twenty paces away from his enemy. He was asked:

"Are you ready?"

While he was answering, "Yes, monsieur," he noticed that one of the Englishmen had opened his umbrella in order to keep off the rays of the sun.

A voice gave the signal:

"Fire!"

M. Dubuis fired at random without delay, and he was amazed to see the Prussian opposite him stagger, lift up his arms and fall forward, dead. He had killed the officer.

One of the Englishmen exclaimed: "Ah!" He was quivering with delight, with satisfied curiosity and joyous impatience. The other, who still kept his watch in his hand, seized M. Dubuis' arm and hurried him in double-quick time toward the station, his fellow-countryman marking time as he ran beside them, with closed fists, his elbows at his sides, "One, two; one, two!"

And all three, running abreast rapidly, made their way to the station like three grotesque figures in a comic newspaper.

The train was on the point of starting. They sprang into their carriage. Then the Englishmen, taking off their travelling caps, waved them three times over their heads, exclaiming:

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!"

And gravely, one after the other, they extended their right hands to M. Dubuis and then went back and sat down in their own corner.

THE MAISON TELLIER

They went there every evening about eleven o’clock, just as they would go to the club. Six or eight of them; always the same set, not fast men, but respectable tradesmen, and young men in government or some other employ, and they would drink their Chartreuse, and laugh with the girls, or else talk seriously with Madame Tellier, whom everybody respected, and then they would go home at twelve o’clock! The younger men would sometimes stay later.

It was a small, comfortable house painted yellow, at the corner of a street behind Saint Etienne’s Church, and from the windows one could see the docks full of ships being unloaded, the big salt marsh, and, rising beyond it, the Virgin’s Hill with its old gray chapel.

Madame Tellier, who came of a respectable family of peasant proprietors in the Department of the Eure, had taken up her profession, just as she would have become a milliner or dressmaker. The prejudice which is so violent and deeply rooted in large towns, does not exist in the country places in Normandy. The peasant says:

“It is a paying-business,” and he sends his daughter to keep an establishment of this character just as he would send her to keep a girls’ school.

She had inherited the house from an old uncle, to whom it had belonged. Monsieur and Madame Tellier, who had formerly been innkeepers near Yvetot, had immediately sold their house, as they thought that the business at Fecamp was more profitable, and they arrived one fine morning to assume the direction of the enterprise, which was declining on account of the absence of the proprietors. They were good people enough in their way, and soon made themselves liked by their staff and their neighbors.

Monsieur died of apoplexy two years later, for as the new place kept him in idleness and without any exercise, he had grown excessively stout, and his health had suffered. Since she had been a widow, all the frequenters of the establishment made much of her; but people said that, personally, she was quite virtuous, and even the girls in the house could not discover anything against her. She was tall, stout and affable, and her complexion, which had become pale in the dimness of her house, the shutters of which were scarcely ever opened, shone as if it had been varnished. She had a fringe of curly false hair, which gave her a juvenile look, that contrasted strongly with the ripeness of her figure. She was always smiling and cheerful, and was fond of a joke, but there was a shade of reserve about her, which her occupation had not quite made her lose. Coarse words always shocked her, and when any young fellow who had been badly brought up called her establishment a hard name, she was angry and disgusted.

In a word, she had a refined mind, and although she treated her women as friends, yet she very frequently used to say that "she and they were not made of the same stuff."

Sometimes during the week she would hire a carriage and take some of her girls into the country, where they used to enjoy themselves on the grass by the side of the little river. They were like a lot of girls let out from school, and would run races and play childish games. They had a cold dinner on the grass, and drank cider, and went home at night with a delicious feeling of fatigue, and in the carriage they kissed Madame' Tellier as their kind mother, who was full of goodness and complaisance.

The house had two entrances. At the corner there was a sort of tap-room, which sailors and the lower orders frequented at night, and she had two girls whose special duty it was to wait on them with the assistance of Frederic, a short, light-haired, beardless fellow, as strong as a horse. They set the half bottles of wine and the jugs of beer on the shaky marble tables before the customers, and then urged the men to drink.

The three other girls — there were only five of them — formed a kind of aristocracy, and they remained with the company on the first floor, unless they were wanted downstairs and there was nobody on the first floor. The salon de Jupiter, where the tradesmen used to meet, was papered in blue, and embellished with a large drawing representing Leda and the swan. The room was reached by a winding staircase, through a narrow door opening on the street, and above this door a lantern inclosed in wire, such as one still sees in some towns, at the foot of the shrine of some saint, burned all night long.

The house, which was old and damp, smelled slightly of mildew. At times there was an odor of eau de Cologne in the passages, or sometimes from a half-open door downstairs the noisy mirth of the common men sitting and drinking rose to the first floor, much to the disgust of the gentlemen who were there. Madame Tellier, who was on friendly terms with her customers, did not leave the room, and took much interest in what was going on in the town, and they regularly told her all the news. Her serious conversation was a change from the ceaseless chatter of the three women; it was a rest from the obscene jokes of those stout individuals who every evening indulged in the commonplace debauchery of drinking a glass of liqueur in company with common women.

The names of the girls on the first floor were Fernande, Raphaele, and Rosa, the Jade. As the staff was limited, madame had endeavored that each member of it should be a pattern, an epitome of the feminine type, so that every customer might find as nearly as possible the realization of his ideal. Fernande represented the handsome blonde; she was very tall, rather fat, and lazy; a country girl, who could not get rid of her freckles, and whose short, light, almost colorless, tow-like hair, like combed-out hemp, barely covered her head.

Raphaele, who came from Marseilles, played the indispensable part of the handsome Jewess, and was thin, with high cheekbones, which were covered with rouge, and black hair covered with pomatum, which curled on her forehead. Her eyes would have been handsome, if the right one had not had a speck in it. Her Roman nose came down over a square jaw, where two false upper teeth contrasted strangely with the bad color of the rest.

Rosa was a little roll of fat, nearly all body, with very short legs, and from morning till night she sang songs, which were alternately risque or sentimental, in a harsh voice; told silly, interminable tales, and only stopped talking in order to eat, and left off eating in order to talk; she was never still, and was active as a squirrel, in spite of her embonpoint and her short legs; her laugh, which was a torrent of shrill cries, resounded here and there, ceaselessly, in a bedroom, in the loft, in the cafe, everywhere, and all about nothing.

The two women on the ground floor, Lodise, who was nicknamed La Cocotte, and Flora, whom they called Balancoise, because she limped a little, the former always dressed as the Goddess of Liberty, with a tri-colored sash, and the other as a Spanish woman, with a string of copper coins in her carroty hair, which jingled at every uneven step, looked like cooks dressed up for the carnival. They were like all other women of the lower orders, neither uglier nor better looking than they usually are.

They looked just like servants at an inn, and were generally called “the two pumps.”

A jealous peace, which was, however, very rarely disturbed, reigned among these five women, thanks to Madame Tellier’s conciliatory wisdom, and to her constant good humor, and the establishment, which was the only one of the kind in the little town, was very much frequented. Madame Tellier had succeeded in giving it such a respectable appearance, she was so amiable and obliging to everybody, her good heart was so well known, that she was treated with a certain amount of consideration. The regular customers spent money on her, and were delighted when she was especially friendly toward them, and when they met during the day, they would say: “Until this evening, you know where,” just as men say: “At the club, after dinner.” In a word, Madame Tellier’s house was somewhere to go to, and they very rarely missed their daily meetings there.

One evening toward the end of May, the first arrival, Monsieur Poulin, who was a timber merchant, and had been mayor, found the door shut. The lantern behind the grating was not alight; there was not a sound in the house; everything seemed dead. He knocked, gently at first, but then more loudly, but nobody answered the door. Then he went slowly up the street, and when he got to the market place he met Monsieur Duvert, the gunmaker, who was going to the same place, so they went back together, but did not meet with any better success. But suddenly they heard a loud noise, close to them, and on going round the house, they saw a number of English and French sailors, who were hammering at the closed shutters of the taproom with their fists.

The two tradesmen immediately made their escape, but a low “Pst!” stopped them; it was Monsieur Tournevau, the fish curer, who had recognized them, and was trying to attract their attention. They told him what had happened, and he was all the more annoyed, as he was a married man and father of a family, and only went on Saturdays. That was his regular evening, and now he should be deprived of this dissipation for the whole week.

The three men went as far as the quay together, and on the way they met young Monsieur Philippe, the banker’s son, who frequented the place regularly, and Monsieur Pinipesse, the collector, and they all returned to the Rue aux Juifs together, to make a last attempt. But the exasperated sailors were besieging the house, throwing stones at the shutters, and shouting, and the five first-floor customers went away as quickly as possible, and walked aimlessly about the streets.

Presently they met Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and then Monsieur Vasse, the Judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and they took a long walk, going to the pier first of all, where they sat down in a row on the granite parapet and watched the rising tide, and when the promenaders had sat there for some time, Monsieur Tournevau said:

"This is not very amusing!"

"Decidedly not," Monsieur Pinipesse replied, and they started off to walk again.

After going through the street alongside the hill, they returned over the wooden bridge which crosses the Retenue, passed close to the railway, and came out again on the market place, when, suddenly, a quarrel arose between Monsieur Pinipesse, the collector, and Monsieur Tournevau about an edible mushroom which one of them declared he had found in the neighborhood.

As they were out of temper already from having nothing to do, they would very probably have come to blows, if the others had not interfered. Monsieur Pinipesse went off furious, and soon another altercation arose between the ex-mayor, Monsieur Poulin, and Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, on the subject of the tax collector's salary and the profits which he might make. Insulting remarks were freely passing between them, when a torrent of formidable cries was heard, and the body of sailors, who were tired of waiting so long outside a closed house, came into the square. They were walking arm in arm, two and two, and formed a long procession, and were shouting furiously. The townsmen hid themselves in a doorway, and the yelling crew disappeared in the direction of the abbey. For a long time they still heard the noise, which diminished like a storm in the distance, and then silence was restored. Monsieur Poulin and Monsieur Dupuis, who were angry with each other, went in different directions, without wishing each other good-by.

The other four set off again, and instinctively went in the direction of Madame Tellier's establishment, which was still closed, silent, impenetrable. A quiet, but obstinate drunken man was knocking at the door of the lower room, antd then stopped and called Frederic, in a low voice, but finding that he got no answer, he sat down on the doorstep, and waited the course of events.

The others were just going to retire, when the noisy band of sailors reappeared at the end of the street. The French sailors were shouting the "Marseillaise," and the Englishmen "Rule Britannia." There was a general lurching against the wall, and then the drunken fellows went on their way toward the quay, where a fight broke out between the two nations, in the course of which an Englishman had his arm broken and a Frenchman his nose split.

The drunken man who had waited outside the door, was crying by that time, as drunken men and children cry when they are vexed, and the others went away. By degrees, calm was restored in the noisy town; here and there, at moments, the distant sound of voices could be heard, and then died away in the distance.

One man only was still wandering about, Monsieur Tournevau, the fish curer, who was annoyed at having to wait until the following Saturday, and he hoped something would turn up, he did not know what; but he was exasperated at the police for thus allowing an establishment of such public utility, which they had under their control, to be closed.

He went back to it and examined the walls, trying to find out some reason, and on the shutter he saw a notice stuck up. He struck a wax match and read the following, in a large, uneven hand: "Closed on account of the Confirmation."

Then he went away, as he saw it was useless to remain, and left the drunken man lying on the pavement fast asleep, outside that inhospitable door.

The next day, all the regular customers, one after the other, found some reason for going through the street, with a bundle of papers under their arm to keep them in countenance, and with a furtive glance they all read that mysterious notice:

"Closed on account of the Confirmation."

PART II

Madame Tellier had a brother, who was a carpenter in their native place, Virville, in the Department of Eure. When she still kept the inn at Yvetot, she had stood godmother to that brother's daughter, who had received the name of Constance — Constance Rivet; she herself being a Rivet on her father's side. The carpenter, who knew that his sister was in a good position, did not lose sight of her, although they did not meet often, for they were both kept at home by their occupations, and lived a long way from each other. But as the girl was twelve years old, and going to be confirmed, he seized that opportunity to write to his sister, asking her to come and be present at the ceremony. Their old parents were dead, and as she could not well refuse her goddaughter, she accepted the invitation. Her brother, whose name was Joseph, hoped that by dint of showing his sister attention, she might be induced to make her will in the girl's favor, as she had no children of her own.

His sister's occupation did not trouble his scruples in the least, and, besides, nobody knew anything about it at Virville. When they spoke of her, they only said: "Madame Tellier is living at Fecamp," which might mean that she was living on her own private income. It was quite twenty leagues from Fecamp to Virville, and for a peasant, twenty leagues on land is as long a journey as crossing the ocean would be to city people. The people at Virville had never been further than Rouen, and nothing attracted the people from Fecamp to a village of five hundred houses in the middle of a plain, and situated in another department; at any rate, nothing was known about her business.

But the Confirmation was coming on, and Madame Tellier was in great embarrassment. She had no substitute, and did not at all care to leave her house, even for a day; for all the rivalries between the girls upstairs and those downstairs would infallibly break out. No doubt Frederic would get drunk, and when he was in that state, he would knock anybody down for a mere word. At last, however, she made up her mind to take them all with her, with the exception of the man, to whom she gave a holiday until the next day but one.

When she asked her brother, he made no objection, but undertook to put them all up for a night, and so on Saturday morning the eight-o'clock express carried off Madame Tellier and her companions in a second-class carriage. As far as Beuzeville they were alone, and chattered like magpies, but at that station a couple got in. The man, an old peasant, dressed in a blue blouse with a turned-down collar, wide sleeves tight at the wrist, ornamented with white embroidery, wearing an old high hat with long nap, held an enormous green umbrella in one hand, and a large basket in the other, from which the heads of three frightened ducks protruded. The woman, who sat up stiffly in her rustic finery, had a face like a fowl, with a nose that was as pointed as a bill. She sat down opposite her husband and did not stir, as she was startled at finding herself in such smart company.

There was certainly an array of striking colors in the carriage. Madame Tellier was dressed in blue silk from head to foot, and had on a dazzling red imitation French cashmere shawl. Fernande was puffing in a Scotch plaid dress, of which her companions had laced the bodice as tight as they could, forcing up her full bust, that was continually heaving up and down. Raphaele, with a bonnet covered with feathers, so that it looked like a bird's nest, had on a lilac dress with gold spots on it, and there was something Oriental about it that suited her Jewish face. Rosa had on a pink skirt with largo flounces, and looked like a very fat child, an obese dwarf; while the two Pumps looked as if they had cut their dresses out of old flowered curtains dating from the Restoration.

As soon as they were no longer alone in the compartment, the ladies put on staid looks, and began to talk of subjects which might give others a high opinion of them. But at Bolbeck a gentleman with light whiskers, a gold chain, and wearing two or three rings, got in, and put several parcels wrapped in oilcloth on the rack over his head. He looked inclined for a joke, and seemed a good-hearted fellow.

"Are you ladies changing your quarters?" he said, and that question embarrassed them all considerably. Madame Tellier, however, quickly regained her composure, and said sharply, to avenge the honor of her corps:

"I think you might try and be polite!"

He excused himself, and said: "I beg your pardon, I ought to have said your nunnery."

She could not think of a retort, so, perhaps thinking she had said enough, madame gave him a dignified bow and compressed her lips.

Then the gentleman, who was sitting between Rosa and the old peasant, began to wink knowingly at the ducks whose heads were sticking out of the basket, and when he felt that he had fixed the attention of his public, he began to tickle them under the bills and spoke funnily to them to make the company smile.

"We have left our little pond, quack! quack! to make the acquaintance of the little spit, qu-ack! qu-ack!"

The unfortunate creatures turned their necks away, to avoid his caresses, and made desperate efforts to get out of their wicker prison, and then, suddenly, all at once, uttered the most lamentable quacks of distress. The women exploded with laughter. They leaned forward and pushed each other, so as to see better; they were very much interested in the ducks, and the gentleman redoubled his airs, his wit and his teasing.

Rosa joined in, and leaning over her neighbor's legs, she kissed the three animals on the head, and immediately all the girls wanted to kiss them, in turn, and as they did so the gentleman took them on his knee, jumped them up and down and pinched their arms. The two peasants, who were even in greater consternation than their poultry, rolled their eyes as if they were possessed, without venturing to move, and their old wrinkled faces had not a smile, not a twitch.

Then the gentleman, who was a commercial traveller, offered the ladies suspenders by way of a joke, and taking up one of his packages, he opened it. It was a joke, for the parcel contained garters. There were blue silk, pink silk, red silk, violet silk, mauve silk garters, and the buckles were made of two gilt metal cupids embracing each other. The girls uttered exclamations of delight and looked at them with that gravity natural to all women when they are considering an article of dress. They consulted one another by their looks or in a whisper, and replied in the same manner, and Madame Tellier was longingly handling a pair of orange garters that were broader and more imposing looking than the rest; really fit for the mistress of such an establishment.

The gentleman waited, for he had an idea.

"Come, my kittens," he said, "you must try them on."

There was a torrent of exclamations, and they squeezed their petticoats between their legs, but he quietly waited his time and said: "Well, if you will not try them on I shall pack them up again."

And he added cunningly: "I offer any pair they like to those who will try them on."

But they would not, and sat up very straight and looked dignified.

But the two Pumps looked so distressed that he renewed his offer to them, and Flora, especially, visibly hesitated, and he insisted: “Come, my dear, a little courage! Just look at that lilac pair; it will suit your dress admirably.”

That decided her, and pulling up her dress she showed a thick leg fit for a milkmaid, in a badly fitting, coarse stocking. The commercial traveller stooped down and fastened the garter. When he had done this, he gave her the lilac pair and asked: “Who next?”

“I! I!” they all shouted at once, and he began on Rosa, who uncovered a shapeless, round thing without any ankle, a regular “sausage of a leg,” as Raphaele used to say.

Lastly, Madame Tellier herself put out her leg, a handsome, muscular Norman leg, and in his surprise and pleasure, the commercial traveller gallantly took off his hat to salute that master calf, like a true French cavalier.

The two peasants, who were speechless from surprise, glanced sideways out of the corner of one eye, and they looked so exactly like fowls that the man with the light whiskers, when he sat up, said: “Co — co — ri — co” under their very noses, and that gave rise to another storm of amusement.

The old people got out at Motteville with their basket, their ducks and their umbrella, and they heard the woman say to her husband as they went away:

“They are no good and are off to that cursed place, Paris.”

The funny commercial traveller himself got out at Rouen, after behaving so coarsely that Madame Tellier was obliged sharply to put him in his right place, and she added, as a moral: “This will teach us not to talk to the first comer.”

At Oissel they changed trains, and at a little station further on Monsieur Joseph Rivet was waiting for them with a large cart with a number of chairs in it, drawn by a white horse.

The carpenter politely kissed all the ladies and then helped them into his conveyance.

Three of them sat on three chairs at the back, Raphaele, Madame Tellier and her brother on the three chairs in front, while Rosa, who had no seat, settled herself as comfortably as she could on tall Fernande’s knees, and then they set off.

But the horse's jerky trot shook the cart so terribly that the chairs began to dance and threw the travellers about, to the right and to the left, as if they were dancing puppets, which made them scream and make horrible grimaces.

They clung on to the sides of the vehicle, their bonnets fell on their backs, over their faces and on their shoulders, and the white horse went on stretching out his head and holding out his little hairless tail like a rat's, with which he whisked his buttocks from time to time.

Joseph Rivet, with one leg on the shafts and the other doubled under him, held the reins with his elbows very high, and kept uttering a kind of clucking sound, which made the horse prick up its ears and go faster.

The green country extended on either side of the road, and here and there the colza in flower presented a waving expanse of yellow, from which arose a strong, wholesome, sweet and penetrating odor, which the wind carried to some distance.

The cornflowers showed their little blue heads amid the rye, and the women wanted to pick them, but Monsieur Rivet refused to stop.

Then, sometimes, a whole field appeared to be covered with blood, so thick were the poppies, and the cart, which looked as if it were filled with flowers of more brilliant hue, jogged on through fields bright with wild flowers, and disappeared behind the trees of a farm, only to reappear and to go on again through the yellow or green standing crops, which were studded with red or blue.

One o'clock struck as they drove up to the carpenter's door. They were tired out and pale with hunger, as they had eaten nothing since they left home. Madame Rivet ran out and made them alight, one after another, and kissed them as soon as they were on the ground, and she seemed as if she would never tire of kissing her sister-in-law, whom she apparently wanted to monopolize. They had lunch in the workshop, which had been cleared out for the next day's dinner.

The capital omelet, followed by boiled chitterlings and washed down with good hard cider, made them all feel comfortable.

Rivet had taken a glass so that he might drink with them, and his wife cooked, waited on them, brought in the dishes, took them out and asked each of them in a whisper whether they had everything they wanted. A number of boards standing against the walls and heaps of shavings that had been swept into the corners gave out a smell of planed wood, a smell of a carpenter's shop, that resinous odor which penetrates to the lungs.

They wanted to see the little girl, but she had gone to church and would not be back again until evening, so they all went out for a stroll in the country.

It was a small village, through which the highroad passed. Ten or a dozen houses on either side of the single street were inhabited by the butcher, the grocer, the carpenter, the innkeeper, the shoemaker and the baker.

The church was at the end of the street and was surrounded by a small churchyard, and four immense lime-trees, which stood just outside the porch, shaded it completely. It was built of flint, in no particular style, and had a slate-roofed steeple. When you got past it, you were again in the open country, which was varied here and there by clumps of trees which hid the homesteads.

Rivet had given his arm to his sister, out of politeness, although he was in his working clothes, and was walking with her in a dignified manner. His wife, who was overwhelmed by Raphaele's gold-striped dress, walked between her and Fernande, and roly-poly Rosa was trotting behind with Louise and Flora, the Seesaw, who was limping along, quite tired out.

The inhabitants came to their doors, the children left off playing, and a window curtain would be raised, so as to show a muslin cap, while an old woman with a crutch, who was almost blind, crossed herself as if it were a religious procession, and they all gazed for a long time at those handsome ladies from town, who had come so far to be present at the confirmation of Joseph Rivet's little girl, and the carpenter rose very much in the public estimation.

As they passed the church they heard some children singing. Little shrill voices were singing a hymn, but Madame Tellier would not let them go in, for fear of disturbing the little cherubs.

After the walk, during which Joseph Rivet enumerated the principal landed proprietors, spoke about the yield of the land and the productiveness of the cows and sheep, he took his tribe of women home and installed them in his house, and as it was very small, they had to put them into the rooms, two and two.

Just for once Rivet would sleep in the workshop on the shavings; his wife was to share her bed with her sister-in-law, and Fernande and Raphaele were to sleep together in the next room. Louise and Flora were put into the kitchen, where they had a mattress on the floor, and Rosa had a little dark cupboard to herself at the top of the stairs, close to the loft, where the candidate for confirmation was to sleep.

When the little girl came in she was overwhelmed with kisses; all the women wished to caress her with that need of tender expansion, that habit of professional affection which had made them kiss the ducks in the railway carriage.

They each of them took her on their knees, stroked her soft, light hair and pressed her in their arms with vehement and spontaneous outbursts of affection, and the child, who was very good and religious, bore it all patiently.

As the day had been a fatiguing one for everybody, they all went to bed soon after dinner. The whole village was wrapped in that perfect stillness of the country, which is almost like a religious silence, and the girls, who were accustomed to the noisy evenings of their establishment, felt rather impressed by the perfect repose of the sleeping village, and they shivered, not with cold, but with those little shivers of loneliness which come over uneasy and troubled hearts.

As soon as they were in bed, two and two together, they clasped each other in their arms, as if to protect themselves against this feeling of the calm and profound slumber of the earth. But Rosa, who was alone in her little dark cupboard, felt a vague and painful emotion come over her.

She was tossing about in bed, unable to get to sleep, when she heard the faint sobs of a crying child close to her head, through the partition. She was frightened, and called out, and was answered by a weak voice, broken by sobs. It was the little girl, who was always used to sleeping in her mother’s room, and who was afraid in her small attic.

Rosa was delighted, got up softly so as not to awaken any one, and went and fetched the child. She took her into her warm bed, kissed her and pressed her to her bosom, lavished exaggerated manifestations of tenderness on her, and at last grew calmer herself and went to sleep. And till morning the candidate for confirmation slept with her head on Rosa’s bosom.

At five o’clock the little church bell, ringing the Angelus, woke the women, who usually slept the whole morning long.

The villagers were up already, and the women went busily from house to house, carefully bringing short, starched muslin dresses or very long wax tapers tied in the middle with a bow of silk fringed with gold, and with dents in the wax for the fingers.

The sun was already high in the blue sky, which still had a rosy tint toward the horizon, like a faint remaining trace of dawn. Families of fowls were walking about outside the houses, and here and there a black cock, with a glistening breast, raised his head, which was crowned by his red comb, flapped his wings and uttered his shrill crow, which the other cocks repeated.

Vehicles of all sorts came from neighboring parishes, stopping at the different houses, and tall Norman women dismounted, wearing dark dresses, with kerchiefs crossed over the bosom, fastened with silver brooches a hundred years old.

The men had put on their blue smocks over their new frock-coats or over their old dress-coats of green-cloth, the two tails of which hung down below their blouses. When the horses were in the stable there was a double line of rustic conveyances along the road: carts, cabriolets, tilburies, wagonettes, traps of every shape and age, tipping forward on their shafts or else tipping backward with the shafts up in the air.

The carpenter’s house was as busy as a bee-hive. The women, in dressing-jackets and petticoats, with their thin, short hair, which looked faded and worn, hanging down their backs, were busy dressing the child, who was standing quietly on a table, while Madame Tellier was directing the movements of her battalion. They washed her, did her hair, dressed her, and with the help of a number of pins, they arranged the folds of her dress and took in the waist, which was too large.

Then, when she was ready, she was told to sit down and not to move, and the women hurried off to get ready themselves.

The church bell began to ring again, and its tinkle was lost in the air, like a feeble voice which is soon drowned in space. The candidates came out of the houses and went toward the parochial building, which contained the two schools and the mansion house, and which stood quite at one end of the village, while the church was situated at the other.

The parents, in their very best clothes, followed their children, with embarrassed looks, and those clumsy movements of a body bent by toil.

The little girls disappeared in a cloud of muslin, which looked like whipped cream, while the lads, who looked like embryo waiters in a cafe and whose heads shone with pomatum, walked with their legs apart, so as not to get any dust or dirt on their black trousers.

It was something for a family, to be proud of, when a large number of relatives, who had come from a distance, surrounded the child, and the carpenter's triumph was complete.

Madame Tellier's regiment, with its leader at its head, followed Constance; her father gave his arm to his sister, her mother walked by the side of Raphaele, Fernande with Rosa and Louise and Flora together, and thus they proceeded majestically through the village, like a general's staff in full uniform, while the effect on the village was startling.

At the school the girls ranged themselves under the Sister of Mercy and the boys under the schoolmaster, and they started off, singing a hymn as they went. The boys led the way, in two files, between the two rows of vehicles, from which the horses had been taken out, and the girls followed in the same order; and as all the people in the village had given the town ladies the precedence out of politeness, they came immediately behind the girls, and lengthened the double line of the procession still more, three on the right and three on the left, while their dresses were as striking as a display of fireworks.

When they went into the church the congregation grew quite excited. They pressed against each other, turned round and jostled one another in order to see, and some of the devout ones spoke almost aloud, for they were so astonished at the sight of those ladies whose dresses were more elaborate than the priest's vestments.

The mayor offered them his pew, the first one on the right, close to the choir, and Madame Tellier sat there with her sister-in-law, Fernande and Raphaele. Rosa, Louise and Flora occupied the second seat, in company with the carpenter.

The choir was full of kneeling children, the girls on one side and the boys on the other, and the long wax tapers which they held looked like lances pointing in all directions, and three men were standing in front of the lectern, singing as loud as they could.

They prolonged the syllables of the sonorous Latin indefinitely, holding on to "Amens" with interminable "a-a's," which the reed stop of the organ sustained in a monotonous, long-drawn-out tone.

A child's shrill voice took up the reply, and from time to time a priest sitting in a stall and wearing a biretta got up, muttered something and sat down again, while the three singers continued, their eyes fixed on the big book of plain chant lying open before them on the outstretched wings of a wooden eagle.

Then silence ensued and the service went on. Toward the close Rosa, with her head in both hands, suddenly thought of her mother, her village church and her first communion. She almost fancied that that day had returned, when she was so small anti was almost hidden in her white dress, and she began to cry.

First of all she wept silently, and the tears dropped slowly from her eyes, but her emotion in creased with her recollections, and she began to sob. She took out her pocket handkerchief, wiped her eyes and held it to her mouth, so as not to scream, but it was in vain. A sort of rattle escaped her throat, and she was answered by two other profound, heartbreaking sobs, for her two neighbors, Louise and Flora, who were kneeling near her, overcome by similar recollections, were sobbing by her side, amid a flood of tears; and as tears are contagious, Madame Tellier soon in turn found that her eyes were wet, and on turning to her sister-in-law, she saw that all the occupants of her seat were also crying.

Soon, throughout the church, here and there, a wife, a mother, a sister, seized by the strange sympathy of poignant emotion, and affected at the sight of those handsome ladies on their knees, shaken with sobs was moistening her cambric pocket handkerchief and pressing her beating heart with her left hand.

Just as the sparks from an engine will set fire to dry grass, so the tears of Rosa and of her companions infected the whole congregation in a moment. Men, women, old men and lads in new smocks were soon all sobbing, and something superhuman seemed to be hovering over their heads — a spirit, the powerful breath of an invisible and all powerful Being.

Suddenly a species of madness seemed to pervade the church, the noise of a crowd in a state of frenzy, a tempest of sobs and stifled cries. It came like gusts of wind which blow the trees in a forest, and the priest, paralyzed by emotion, stammered out incoherent prayers, without finding words, ardent prayers of the soul soaring to heaven.

The people behind him gradually grew calmer. The cantors, in all the dignity of their white surplices, went on in somewhat uncertain voices, and the reed stop itself seemed hoarse, as if the instrument had been weeping;

the priest, however, raised his hand to command silence and went and stood on the chancel steps, when everybody was silent at once.

After a few remarks on what had just taken place, and which he attributed to a miracle, he continued, turning to the seats where the carpenter's guests were sitting; "I especially thank you, my dear sisters, who have come from such a distance, and whose presence among us, whose evident faith and ardent piety have set such a salutary example to all. You have edified my parish; your emotion has warmed all hearts; without you, this great day would not, perhaps, have had this really divine character. It is sufficient, at times, that there should be one chosen lamb, for the Lord to descend on His flock."

His voice failed him again, from emotion, and he said no more, but concluded the service.

They now left the church as quickly as possible; the children themselves were restless and tired with such a prolonged tension of the mind. The parents left the church by degrees to see about dinner.

There was a crowd outside, a noisy crowd, a babel of loud voices, where the shrill Norman accent was discernible. The villagers formed two ranks, and when the children appeared, each family took possession of their own.

The whole houseful of women caught hold of Constance, surrounded her and kissed her, and Rosa was especially demonstrative. At last she took hold of one hand, while Madame Tellier took the other, and Raphaele and Fernande held up her long muslin skirt, so that it might not drag in the dust; Louise and Flora brought up the rear with Madame Rivet; and the child, who was very silent and thoughtful, set off for home in the midst of this guard of honor.

Dinner was served in the workshop on long boards supported by trestles, and through the open door they could see all the enjoyment that was going on in the village. Everywhere they were feasting, and through every window were to be seen tables surrounded by people in their Sunday best, and a cheerful noise was heard in every house, while the men sat in their shirt-sleeves, drinking glass after glass of cider.

In the carpenter's house the gaiety maintained somewhat of an air of reserve, the consequence of the emotion of the girls in the morning, and Rivet was the only one who was in a jolly mood, and he was drinking to excess. Madame Tellier looked at the clock every moment, for, in order not to lose two days running, they must take the 3:55 train, which would bring them to Fecamp by dark.

The carpenter tried very hard to distract her attention, so as to keep his guests until the next day, but he did not succeed, for she never joked when there was business on hand, and as soon as they had had their coffee she ordered her girls to make haste and get ready, and then, turning to her brother, she said:

"You must put in the horse immediately," and she herself went to finish her last preparations.

When she came down again, her sister-in-law was waiting to speak to her about the child, and a long conversation took place, in which, however, nothing was settled. The carpenter's wife was artful and pretended to be very much affected, and Madame Tellier, who was holding the girl on her knee, would not pledge herself to anything definite, but merely gave vague promises — she would not forget her, there was plenty of time, and besides, they would meet again.

But the conveyance did not come to the door and the women did not come downstairs. Upstairs they even heard loud laughter, romping, little screams, and much clapping of hands, and so, while the carpenter's wife went to the stable to see whether the cart was ready, madame went upstairs.

Rivet, who was very drunk, was plaguing Rosa, who was half choking with laughter. Louise and Flora were holding him by the arms and trying to calm him, as they were shocked at his levity after that morning's ceremony; but Raphaele and Fernande were urging him on, writhing and holding their sides with laughter, and they uttered shrill cries at every rebuff the drunken fellow received.

The man was furious, his face was red, and he was trying to shake off the two women who were clinging to him, while he was pulling Rosa's skirt with all his might and stammering incoherently.

But Madame Tellier, who was very indignant, went up to her brother, seized him by the shoulders, and threw him out of the room with such violence that he fell against the wall in the passage, and a minute afterward they heard him pumping water on his head in the yard, and when he reappeared with the cart he was quite calm.

They started off in the same way as they had come the day before, and the little white horse started off with his quick, dancing trot. Under the hot sun, their fun, which had been checked during dinner, broke out again. The girls now were amused at the jolting of the cart, pushed their neighbors' chairs, and burst out laughing every moment.

There was a glare of light over the country, which dazzled their eyes, and the wheels raised two trails of dust along the highroad. Presently, Fernande, who was fond of music, asked Rosa to sing something, and she boldly struck up the "Gros Cure de Meudon," but Madame Tellier made her stop immediately, as she thought it a very unsuitable song for such a day, and she added:

"Sing us something of Beranger's." And so, after a moment's hesitation, Rosa began Beranger's song "The Grandmother" in her worn-out voice, and all the girls, and even Madame Tellier herself, joined in the chorus:

"How I regret
My dimpled arms,
My nimble legs,
And vanished charms."

"That is first rate," Rivet declared, carried away by the rhythm, and they shouted the refrain to every verse, while Rivet beat time on the shaft with his foot, and with the reins on the back of the horse, who, as if he himself were carried away by the rhythm, broke into a wild gallop, and threw all the women in a heap, one on top of the other, on the bottom of the conveyance.

They got up, laughing as if they were mad, and the Gong went on, shouted at the top of their voices, beneath the burning sky, among the ripening grain, to the rapid gallop of the little horse, who set off every time the refrain was sung, and galloped a hundred yards, to their great delight, while occasionally a stone-breaker by the roadside sat up and looked at the load of shouting females through his wire spectacles.

When they got out at the station, the carpenter said:

"I am sorry you are going; we might have had some good times together." But Madame Tellier replied very sensibly: "Everything has its right time, and we cannot always be enjoying ourselves." And then he had a sudden inspiration:

"Look here, I will come and see you at Fecamp next month." And he gave Rosa a roguish and knowing look.

"Come," his sister replied, "you must be sensible; you may come if you like, but you are not to be up to any of your tricks."

He did not reply, and as they heard the whistle of the train, he immediately began to kiss them all. When it came to Rosa's turn, he tried to get to her mouth, which she, however, smiling with her lips closed, turned away from him each time by a rapid movement of her head to one side. He held her in his arms, but he could not attain his object, as his large whip, which he was holding in his hand and waving behind the girl's back in desperation, interfered with his movements.

"Passengers for Rouen, take your seats!" a guard cried, and they got in. There was a slight whistle, followed by a loud whistle from the engine, which noisily puffed cut its first jet of steam, while the wheels began to turn a little with a visible effort, and Rivet left the station and ran along by the track to get another look at Rosa, and as the carriage passed him, he began to crack his whip and to jump, while he sang at the top of his voice:

"How I regret
My dimpled arms,
My nimble legs,
And vanished charms."

And then he watched a white pocket-handkerchief, which somebody was waving, as it disappeared in the distance.

PART III

They slept the peaceful sleep of a quiet conscience, until they got to Rouen, and when they returned to the house, refreshed and rested, Madame Tellier could not help saying:

"It was all very well, but I was longing to get home."

They hurried over their supper, and then, when they had put on their usual evening costume, waited for their regular customers, and the little colored lamp outside the door told the passers-by that Madame Tellier had returned, and in a moment the news spread, nobody knew how or through whom.

Monsieur Philippe, the banker's son, even carried his friendliness so far as to send a special messenger to Monsieur Tournevau, who was in the bosom of his family.

The fish curer had several cousins to dinner every Sunday, and they were having coffee, when a man came in with a letter in his hand. Monsieur Tournevau was much excited; he opened the envelope and grew pale; it contained only these words in pencil:

“The cargo of cod has been found; the ship has come into port; good business for you. Come immediately.”

He felt in his pockets, gave the messenger two sons, and suddenly blushing to his ears, he said: “I must go out.” He handed his wife the laconic and mysterious note, rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he asked her to bring him has hat and overcoat immediately. As soon as he was in the street, he began to hurry, and the way seemed to him to be twice as long as usual, in consequence of his impatience.

Madame Tellier’s establishment had put on quite a holiday look. On the ground floor, a number of sailors were making a deafening noise, and Louise and Flora drank with one and the other, and were being called for in every direction at once.

The upstairs room was full by nine o’clock. Monsieur Vasse, the Judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, Madame Tellier’s regular but Platonic wooer, was talking to her in a corner in a low voice, and they were both smiling, as if they were about to come to an understanding.

Monsieur Poulin, the ex-mayor, was talking to Rosa, and she was running her hands through the old gentleman’s white whiskers.

Tall Fernande was on the sofa, her feet on the coat of Monsieur Pinipesse, the tax collector, and leaning back against young Monsieur Philippe, her right arm around his neck, while she held a cigarette in her left hand.

Raphaele appeared to be talking seriously with Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and she finished by saying: “Yes, I will, yes.”

Just then, the door opened suddenly, and Monsieur Tournevau came in, and was greeted with enthusiastic cries of “Long live Tournevau!” And Raphaele, who was dancing alone up and down the room, went and threw herself into his arms. He seized her in a vigorous embrace and, without saying a word, lifted her up as if she had been a feather.

Rosa was chatting to the ex-mayor, kissing him and puffing; both his whiskers at the same time, in order to keep his head straight.

Fernanae and Madame Tellier remained with the four men, and Monsieur Philippe exclaimed: “I will pay for some champagne; get three bottles, Madame Tellier.” And Fernande gave him a hug, and whispered to him:

"Play us a waltz, will you?" So he rose and sat down at the old piano in the corner, and managed to get a hoarse waltz out of the depths of the instrument.

The tall girl put her arms round the tax collector, Madame Tellier let Monsieur Vasse take her round the waist, and the two couples turned round, kissing as they danced. Monsieur Vasse, who had formerly danced in good society, waltzed with such elegance that Madame Tellier was quite captivated.

Frederic brought the champagne; the first cork popped, and Monsieur Philippe played the introduction to a quadrille, through which the four dancers walked in society fashion, decorously, with propriety, deportment, bows and curtsies, and then they began to drink.

Monsieur Philippe next struck up a lively polka, and Monsieur Tournevau started off with the handsome Jewess, whom he held without letting her feet touch the ground. Monsieur Pinipesse and Monsieur Vasse had started off with renewed vigor, and from time to time one or other couple would stop to toss off a long draught of sparkling wine, and that dance was threatening to become never-ending, when Rosa opened the door.

"I want to dance," she exclaimed. And she caught hold of Monsieur Dupuis, who was sitting idle on the couch, and the dance began again.

But the bottles were empty. "I will pay for one," Monsieur Tournevau said. "So will I," Monsieur Vasse declared. "And. I will do the same," Monsieur Dupuis remarked.

They all began to clap their hands, and it soon became a regular ball, and from time to time Louise and Flora ran upstairs quickly and had a few turns, while their customers downstairs grew impatient, and then they returned regretfully to the tap-room. At midnight they were still dancing.

Madame Tellier let them amuse themselves while she had long private talks in corners with Monsieur Vasse, as if to settle the last details of something that had already been settled.

At last, at one o'clock, the two married men, Monsieur Tournevau and Monsieur Pinipesse, declared that they were going home, and wanted to pay. Nothing was charged for except the champagne, and that cost only six francs a bottle, instead of ten, which was the usual price, and when they expressed their surprise at such generosity, Madame Tellier, who was beaming, said to them:

"We don't have a holiday every day."

IN THE SPRING

With the first day of spring, when the awakening earth puts on its garment of green, and the warm, fragrant air fans our faces and fills our lungs and appears even to penetrate to our hearts, we experience a vague, undefined longing for freedom, for happiness, a desire to run, to wander aimlessly, to breathe in the spring. The previous winter having been unusually severe, this spring feeling was like a form of intoxication in May, as if there were an overabundant supply of sap.

One morning on waking I saw from my window the blue sky glowing in the sun above the neighboring houses. The canaries hanging in the windows were singing loudly, and so were the servants on every floor; a cheerful noise rose up from the streets, and I went out, my spirits as bright as the day, to go — I did not exactly know where. Everybody I met seemed to be smiling; an air of happiness appeared to pervade everything in the warm light of returning spring. One might almost have said that a breeze of love was blowing through the city, and the sight of the young women whom I saw in the streets in their morning toilets, in the depths of whose eyes there lurked a hidden tenderness, and who walked with languid grace, filled my heart with agitation.

Without knowing how or why, I found myself on the banks of the Seine. Steamboats were starting for Suresnes, and suddenly I was seized by an unconquerable desire to take a walk through the woods. The deck of the Mouche was covered with passengers, for the sun in early spring draws one out of the house, in spite of themselves, and everybody moves about, goes and comes and talks to his neighbor.

I had a girl neighbor; a little work-girl, no doubt, who possessed the true Parisian charm: a little head, with light curly hair, which looked like a shimmer of light as it danced in the wind, came down to her ears, and descended to the nape of her neck, where it became such fine, light-colored clown that one could scarcely see it, but felt an irresistible desire to shower kisses on it.

Under my persistent gaze, she turned her head toward me, and then immediately looked down, while a slight crease at the side of her mouth, that was ready to break out into a smile, also showed a fine, silky, pale down which the sun was gilding a little.

The calm river grew wider; the atmosphere was warm and perfectly still, but a murmur of life seemed to fill all space.

My neighbor raised her eyes again, and this time, as I was still looking at her, she smiled decidedly. She was charming, and in her passing glance I saw a thousand things, which I had hitherto been ignorant of, for I perceived unknown depths, all the charm of tenderness, all the poetry which we dream of, all the happiness which we are continually in search of. I felt an insane longing to open my arms and to carry her off somewhere, so as to whisper the sweet music of words of love into her ears.

I was just about to address her when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and as I turned round in some surprise, I saw an ordinary-looking man, who was neither young nor old, and who gazed at me sadly.

“I should like to speak to you,” he said.

I made a grimace, which he no doubt saw, for he added:

“It is a matter of importance.”

I got up, therefore, and followed him to the other end of the boat and then he said:

“Monsieur, when winter comes, with its cold, wet and snowy weather, your doctor says to you constantly: ‘Keep your feet warm, guard against chills, colds, bronchitis, rheumatism and pleurisy.’

“Then you are very careful, you wear flannel, a heavy greatcoat and thick shoes, but all this does not prevent you from passing two months in bed. But when spring returns, with its leaves and flowers, its warm, soft breezes and its smell of the fields, all of which causes you vague disquiet and causeless emotion, nobody says to you:

“‘Monsieur, beware of love! It is lying in ambush everywhere; it is watching for you at every corner; all its snares are laid, all its weapons are sharpened, all its guiles are prepared! Beware of love! Beware of love! It is more dangerous than brandy, bronchitis or pleurisy! It never forgives and makes everybody commit irreparable follies.’

“Yes, monsieur, I say that the French Government ought to put large public notices on the walls, with these words: ‘Return of spring. French citizens, beware of love!’ just as they put: ‘Beware of paint:

“However, as the government will not do this, I must supply its place, and I say to you: ‘Beware of love!’ for it is just going to seize you, and it is my duty to inform you of it, just as in Russia they inform any one that his nose is frozen.”

I was much astonished at this individual, and assuming a dignified manner, I said:

“Really, monsieur, you appear to me to be interfering in a matter which is no concern of yours.”

He made an abrupt movement and replied:

“Ah! monsieur, monsieur! If I see that a man is in danger of being drowned at a dangerous spot, ought I to let him perish? So just listen to my story and you will see why I ventured to speak to you like this.

“It was about this time last year that it occurred. But, first of all, I must tell you that I am a clerk in the Admiralty, where our chiefs, the commissioners, take their gold lace as quill-driving officials seriously, and treat us like forecastle men on board a ship. Well, from my office I could see a small bit of blue sky and the swallows, and I felt inclined to dance among my portfolios.

“My yearning for freedom grew so intense that, in spite of my repugnance, I went to see my chief, a short, bad-tempered man, who was always in a rage. When I told him that I was not well, he looked at me and said: ‘I do not believe it, monsieur, but be off with you! Do you think that any office can go on with clerks like you?’ I started at once and went down the Seine. It was a day like this, and I took the Mouche, to go as far as Saint Cloud. Ah! what a good thing it would have been if my chief had refused me permission to leave the office that day!

“I seemed to myself to expand in the sun. I loved everything — the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses and my fellow-passengers. I felt inclined to kiss something, no matter what; it was love, laying its snare. Presently, at the Trocadero, a girl, with a small parcel in her hand, came on board and sat down opposite me. She was decidedly pretty, but it is surprising, monsieur, how much prettier women seem to us when the day is fine at the beginning of the spring. Then they have an intoxicating charm, something quite peculiar about them. It is just like drinking wine after cheese.

“I looked at her and she also looked at me, but only occasionally, as that girl did at you, just now; but at last, by dint of looking at each other constantly, it seemed to me that we knew each other well enough to enter into conversation, and I spoke to her and she replied. She was decidedly pretty and nice and she intoxicated me, monsieur!

“She got out at Saint-Cloud, and I followed her. She went and delivered her parcel, and when she returned the boat had just started. I walked by her side, and the warmth of the ‘air made us both sigh. ‘It would be very nice in the woods,’ I said. ‘Indeed, it would!’ she replied. ‘Shall we go there for a walk, mademoiselie?’

“She gave me a quick upward look, as if to see exactly what I was like, and then, after a little hesitation, she accepted my proposal, and soon we were there, walking side by side. Under the foliage, which was still rather scanty, the tall, thick, bright green grass was inundated by the sun, and the air was full of insects that were also making love to one another, and birds were singing in all directions. My companion began to jump and to run, intoxicated by the air and the smell of the country, and I ran and jumped, following her example. How silly we are at times, monsieur!

“Then she sang unrestrainedly a thousand things, opera airs and the song of Musette! The song of Musette! How poetical it seemed to me, then! I almost cried over it. Ah! Those silly songs make us lose our heads; and, believe me, never marry a woman who sings in the country, especially if she sings the song of Musette!

“She soon grew tired, and sat down on a grassy slope, and I sat at her feet and took her hands, her little hands, that were so marked with the needle, and that filled me with emotion. I said to myself:

“‘These are the sacred marks of toil.’ Oh! monsieur, do you know what those sacred marks of toil mean? They mean all the gossip of the workroom, the whispered scandal, the mind soiled by all the filth that is talked; they mean lost chastity, foolish chatter, all the wretchedness of their everyday life, all the narrowness of ideas which belongs to women of the lower orders, combined to their fullest extent in the girl whose fingers bear the sacred marks of toil.

“Then we looked into each other’s eyes for a long while. Oh! what power a woman’s eye has! How it agitates us, how it invades our very being, takes possession of us, and dominates us! How profound it seems, how full of infinite promises! People call that looking into each other's souls! Oh! monsieur, what humbug! If we could see into each other's souls, we should be more careful of what we did. However, I was captivated and was crazy about her and tried to take her into my arms, but she said: 'Paws off!'. Then I knelt down and opened my heart to her and poured out all the affection that was suffocating me. She seemed surprised at my change of manner and gave me a sidelong glance, as if to say, 'Ah! so that is the way women make a fool of you, old fellow! Very well, we will see.'

"In love, monsieur, we are always novices, and women artful dealers.

"No doubt I could have had her, and I saw my own stupidity later, but what I wanted was not a woman's person, it was love, it was the ideal. I was sentimental, when I ought to have been using my time to a better purpose.

"As soon as she had had enough of my declarations of affection, she got up, and we returned to Saint-Cloud, and I did not leave her until we got to Paris; but she had looked so sad as we were returning, that at last I asked her what was the matter. 'I am thinking,' she replied, 'that this has been one of those days of which we have but few in life.' My heart beat so that it felt as if it would break my ribs.

"I saw her on the following Sunday, and the next Sunday, and every Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maisons-Lafitte, Poissy; to every suburban resort of lovers.

"The little jade, in turn, pretended to love me, until, at last, I altogether lost my head, and three months later I married her.

"What can you expect, monsieur, when a man is a clerk, living alone, without any relations, or any one to advise him? One says to one's self: 'How sweet life would be with a wife!'

"And so one gets married and she calls you names from morning till night, understands nothing, knows nothing, chatters continually, sings the song of Musette at the, top of her voice (oh! that song of Musette, how tired one gets of it!); quarrels with the charcoal dealer, tells the janitor all her domestic details, confides all the secrets of her bedroom to the neighbor's servant, discusses her husband with the tradespeople and has her head so stuffed with stupid stories, with idiotic superstitions, with extraordinary ideas and monstrous prejudices, that I — for what I have said applies more particularly to myself — shed tears of discouragement every time I talk to her."

He stopped, as he was rather out of breath and very much moved, and I looked at him, for I felt pity for this poor, artless devil, and I was just going to give him some sort of answer, when the boat stopped. We were at Saint-Cloud.

The little woman who had so taken my fancy rose from her seat in order to land. She passed close to me, and gave me a sidelong glance and a furtive smile, one of those smiles that drive you wild. Then she jumped on the landing-stage. I sprang forward to follow her, but my neighbor laid hold of my arm. I shook myself loose, however, whereupon he seized the skirt of my coat and pulled me back, exclaiming: “You shall not go! you shall not go!” in such a loud voice that everybody turned round and laughed, and I remained standing motionless and furious, but without venturing to face scandal and ridicule, and the steamboat started.

The little woman on the landing-stage looked at me as I went off with an air of disappointment, while my persecutor rubbed his hands and whispered to me:

“You must acknowledge that I have done you a great service.”

A FAMILY

I was to see my old friend, Simon Radevin, of whom I had lost sight for fifteen years. At one time he was my most intimate friend, the friend who knows one's thoughts, with whom one passes long, quiet, happy evenings, to whom one tells one's secret love affairs, and who seems to draw out those rare, ingenious, delicate thoughts born of that sympathy that gives a sense of repose.

For years we had scarcely been separated; we had lived, travelled, thought and dreamed together; had liked the same things, had admired the same books, understood the same authors, trembled with the same sensations, and very often laughed at the same individuals, whom we understood completely by merely exchanging a glance.

Then he married. He married, quite suddenly, a little girl from the provinces, who had come to Paris in search of a husband. How in the world could that little thin, insipidly fair girl, with her weak hands, her light, vacant eyes, and her clear, silly voice, who was exactly like a hundred thousand marriageable dolls, have picked up that intelligent, clever young fellow? Can any one understand these things? No doubt he had hoped for happiness, simple, quiet and long-enduring happiness, in the arms of a good, tender and faithful woman; he had seen all that in the transparent looks of that schoolgirl with light hair.

He had not dreamed of the fact that an active, living and vibrating man grows weary of everything as soon as he understands the stupid reality, unless, indeed, he becomes so brutalized that he understands nothing whatever.

What would he be like when I met him again? Still lively, witty, light-hearted and enthusiastic, or in a state of mental torpor induced by provincial life? A man may change greatly in the course of fifteen years!

The train stopped at a small station, and as I got out of the carriage, a stout, a very stout man with red cheeks and a big stomach rushed up to me with open arms, exclaiming: “George!” I embraced him, but I had not recognized him, and then I said, in astonishment: “By Jove! You have not grown thin!” And he replied with a laugh:

“What did you expect? Good living, a good table and good nights! Eating and sleeping, that is my existence!”

I looked at him closely, trying to discover in that broad face the features I held so dear. His eyes alone had not changed, but I no longer saw the same expression in them, and I said to myself: “If the expression be the reflection of the mind, the thoughts in that head are not what they used to be formerly; those thoughts which I knew so well.”

Yet his eyes were bright, full of happiness and friendship, but they had not that clear, intelligent expression which shows as much as words the brightness of the intellect. Suddenly he said:

“Here are my two eldest children.” A girl of fourteen, who was almost a woman, and a boy of thirteen, in the dress of a boy from a Lycee, came forward in a hesitating and awkward manner, and I said in a low voice: “Are they yours?” “Of course they are,” he replied, laughing. “How many have you?” “Five! There are three more at home.”

He said this in a proud, self-satisfied, almost triumphant manner, and I felt profound pity, mingled with a feeling of vague contempt, for this vainglorious and simple reproducer of his species.

I got into a carriage which he drove himself, and we set off through the town, a dull, sleepy, gloomy town where nothing was moving in the streets except a few dogs and two or three maidservants. Here and there a shopkeeper, standing at his door, took off his hat, and Simon returned his salute and told me the man’s name; no doubt to show me that he knew all the inhabitants personally, and the thought struck me that he was thinking of becoming a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, that dream of all those who bury themselves in the provinces.

We were soon out of the town, and the carriage turned into a garden that was an imitation of a park, and stopped in front of a turreted house, which tried to look like a chateau.

“That is my den,” said Simon, so that I might compliment him on it. “It is charming,” I replied.

A lady appeared on the steps, dressed for company, and with company phrases all ready prepared. She was no longer the light-haired, insipid girl I had seen in church fifteen years previously, but a stout lady in curls and flounces, one of those ladies of uncertain age, without intellect, without any of those things that go to make a woman. In short, she was a mother, a stout, commonplace mother, a human breeding machine which procreates without any other preoccupation but her children and her cook-book.

She welcomed me, and I went into the hall, where three children, ranged according to their height, seemed set out for review, like firemen before a mayor, and I said: “Ah! ah! so there are the others?” Simon, radiant with pleasure, introduced them: “Jean, Sophie and Gontran.”

The door of the drawing-room was open. I went in, and in the depths of an easy-chair, I saw something trembling, a man, an old, paralyzed man. Madame Radevin came forward and said: “This is my grandfather, monsieur; he is eighty-seven.” And then she shouted into the shaking old man’s ears: “This is a friend of Simon’s, papa.” The old gentleman tried to say “good-day” to me, and he muttered: “Oua, oua, oua,” and waved his hand, and I took a seat saying: “You are very kind, monsieur.”

Simon had just come in, and he said with a laugh: “So! You have made grandpapa’s acquaintance. He is a treasure, that old man; he is the delight of the children. But he is so greedy that he almost kills himself at every meal; you have no idea what he would eat if he were allowed to do as he pleased. But you will see, you will see. He looks at all the sweets as if they were so many girls. You never saw anything so funny; you will see presently.”

I was then shown to my room, to change my dress for dinner, and hearing a great clatter behind me on the stairs, I turned round and saw that all the children were following me behind their father; to do me honor, no doubt.

My windows looked out across a dreary, interminable plain, an ocean of grass, of wheat and of oats, without a clump of trees or any rising ground, a striking and melancholy picture of the life which they must be leading in that house.

A bell rang; it was for dinner, and I went downstairs. Madame Radevin took my arm in a ceremonious manner, and we passed into the dining-room. A footman wheeled in the old man in his armchair. He gave a greedy and curious look at the dessert, as he turned his shaking head with difficulty from one dish to the other.

Simon rubbed his hands: “You will be amused,” he said; and all the children understanding that I was going to be indulged with the sight of their greedy grandfather, began to laugh, while their mother merely smiled and shrugged her shoulders, and Simon, making a speaking trumpet of his hands, shouted at the old man: “This evening there is sweet creamed rice!” The wrinkled face of the grandfather brightened, and he trembled more violently, from head to foot, showing that he had understood and was very pleased. The dinner began.

“Just look!” Simon whispered. The old man did not like the soup, and refused to eat it; but he was obliged to do it for the good of his health, and the footman forced the spoon into his mouth, while the old man blew so energetically, so as not to swallow the soup, that it was scattered like a spray all over the table and over his neighbors. The children writhed with laughter at the spectacle, while their father, who was also amused, said: “Is not the old man comical?”

During the whole meal they were taken up solely with him. He devoured the dishes on the table with his eyes, and tried to seize them and pull them over to him with his trembling hands. They put them almost within his reach, to see his useless efforts, his trembling clutches at them, the piteous appeal of his whole nature, of his eyes, of his mouth and of his nose as he smelt them, and he slobbered on his table napkin with eagerness, while uttering inarticulate grunts. And the whole family was highly amused at this horrible and grotesque scene.

Then they put a tiny morsel on his plate, and he ate with feverish gluttony, in order to get something more as soon as possible, and when the sweetened rice was brought in, he nearly had a fit, and groaned with greediness, and Gontran called out to him:

“You have eaten too much already; you can have no more.” And they pretended not to give him any. Then he began to cry; he cried and trembled more violently than ever, while all the children laughed. At last, however, they gave him his helping, a very small piece; and as he ate the first mouthful, he made a comical noise in his throat, and a movement with his neck as ducks do when they swallow too large a morsel, and when he had swallowed it, he began to stamp his feet, so as to get more.

I was seized with pity for this saddening and ridiculous Tantalus, and interposed on his behalf:

“Come, give him a little more rice!” But Simon replied: “Oh! no, my dear fellow, if he were to eat too much, it would harm him, at his age.”

I held my tongue, and thought over those words. Oh, ethics! Oh, logic! Oh, wisdom! At his age! So they deprived him of his only remaining pleasure out of regard for his health! His health! What would he do with it, inert and trembling wreck that he was? They were taking care of his life, so they said. His life? How many days? Ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred? Why? For his own sake? Or to preserve for some time longer the spectacle of his impotent greediness in the family.

There was nothing left for him to do in this life, nothing whatever. He had one single wish left, one sole pleasure; why not grant him that last solace until he died?

After we had played cards for a long time, I went up to my room and to bed; I was low-spirited and sad, sad, sad! and I sat at my window. Not a sound could be heard outside but the beautiful warbling of a bird in a tree, somewhere in the distance. No doubt the bird was singing in a low voice during the night, to lull his mate, who was asleep on her eggs. And I thought of my poor friend's five children, and pictured him to myself, snoring by the side of his ugly wife.

THE COLONEL’S IDEAS

“Upon my word,” said Colonel Laporte, “although I am old and gouty, my legs as stiff as two pieces of wood, yet if a pretty woman were to tell me to go through the eye of a needle, I believe I should take a jump at it, like a clown through a hoop. I shall die like that; it is in the blood. I am an old beau, one of the old school, and the sight of a woman, a pretty woman, stirs me to the tips of my toes. There!

“We are all very much alike in France in this respect; we still remain knights, knights of love and fortune, since God has been abolished whose bodyguard we really were. But nobody can ever get woman out of our hearts; there she is, and there she will remain, and we love her, and shall continue to love her, and go on committing all kinds of follies on her account as long as there is a France on the map of Europe; and even if France were to be wiped off the map, there would always be Frenchmen left.

“When I am in the presence of a woman, of a pretty woman, I feel capable of anything. By Jove! when I feel her looks penetrating me, her confounded looks which set your blood on fire, I should like to do I don’t know what; to fight a duel, to have a row, to smash the furniture, in order to show that I am the strongest, the bravest, the most daring and the most devoted of men.

“But I am not the only one, certainly not; the whole French army is like me, I swear to you. From the common soldier to the general, we all start out, from the van to the rear guard, when there is a woman in the case, a pretty woman. Do you remember what Joan of Arc made us do formerly? Come. I will make a bet that if a pretty woman had taken command of the army on the eve of Sedan, when Marshal MacMahon was wounded, we should have broken through the Prussian lines, by Jove! and had a drink out of their guns.

"It was not a Trochu, but a Sainte-Genevieve, who was needed in Paris; and I remember a little anecdote of the war which proves that we are capable of everything in presence of a woman.

"I was a captain, a simple captain, at the time, and I was in command of a detachment of scouts, who were retreating through a district which swarmed with Prussians. We were surrounded, pursued, tired out and half dead with fatigue and hunger, but we were bound to reach Bar-sur-Tain before the morrow, otherwise we should be shot, cut down, massacred. I do not know how we managed to escape so far. However, we had ten leagues to go during the night, ten leagues through the night, ten leagues through the snow, and with empty stomachs, and I thought to myself:

"'It is all over; my poor devils of fellows will never be able to do it.'

"We had eaten nothing since the day before, and the whole day long we remained hidden in a barn, huddled close together, so as not to feel the cold so much, unable to speak or even move, and sleeping by fits and starts, as one does when worn out with fatigue.

"It was dark by five o'clock, that wan darkness of the snow, and I shook my men. Some of them would not get up; they were almost incapable of moving or of standing upright; their joints were stiff from cold and hunger.

"Before us there was a large expanse of flat, bare country; the snow was still falling like a curtain, in large, white flakes, which concealed everything under a thick, frozen coverlet, a coverlet of frozen wool One might have thought that it was the end of the world.

"'Come, my lads, let us start.'

"They looked at the thick white flakes that were coming down, and they seemed to think: 'We have had enough of this; we may just as well die here!' Then I took out my revolver and said:

"'I will shoot the first man who flinches.' And so they set off, but very slowly, like men whose legs were of very little use to them, and I sent four of them three hundred yards ahead to scout, and the others followed pell-mell, walking at random and without any order. I put the strongest in the rear, with orders to quicken the pace of the sluggards with the points of their bayonets in the back.

"The snow seemed as if it were going to bury us alive; it powdered our kepis and cloaks without melting, and made phantoms of us, a kind of spectres of dead, weary soldiers. I said to myself: 'We shall never get out of this except by a, miracle.'

“Sometimes we had to stop for a few minutes, on account of those who could not follow us, and then we heard nothing except the falling snow, that vague, almost undiscernible sound made by the falling flakes. Some of the men shook themselves, others did not move, and so I gave the order to set off again. They shouldered their rifles, and with weary feet we resumed our march, when suddenly the scouts fell back. Something had alarmed them; they had heard voices in front of them. I sent forward six men and a sergeant and waited.

“All at once a shrill cry, a woman’s cry, pierced through the heavy silence of the snow, and in a few minutes they brought back two prisoners, an old man and a girl, whom I questioned in a low voice. They were escaping from the Prussians, who had occupied their house during the evening and had got drunk. The father was alarmed on his daughter’s account, and, without even telling their servants, they had made their escape in the darkness. I saw immediately that they belonged to the better class. I invited them to accompany us, and we started off again, the old man who knew the road acting as our guide.

“It had ceased snowing, the stars appeared and the cold became intense. The girl, who was leaning on her father’s arm, walked unsteadily as though in pain, and several times she murmured:

“‘I have no feeling at all in my feet’; and I suffered more than she did to see that poor little woman dragging herself like that through the snow. But suddenly she stopped and said:

“‘Father, I am so tired that I cannot go any further.’

“The old man wanted to carry her, but he could not even lift her up, and she sank to the ground with a deep sigh. We all gathered round her, and, as for me, I stamped my foot in perplexity, not knowing what to do, and being unwilling to abandon that man and girl like that, when suddenly one of the soldiers, a Parisian whom they had nicknamed Pratique, said:

“‘Come, comrades, we must carry the young lady, otherwise we shall not show ourselves Frenchmen, confound it!’

“I really believe that I swore with pleasure. ‘That is very good of you, my children,’ I said; ‘and I will take my share of the burden.’

“We could indistinctly see, through the darkness, the trees of a little wood on the left. Several of the men went into it, and soon came back with a bundle of branches made into a litter.

"'Who will lend his cape? It is for a pretty girl, comrades,' Pratique said, and ten cloaks were thrown to him. In a moment the girl was lying, warm and comfortable, among them, and was raised upon six shoulders. I placed myself at their head, on the right, well pleased with my position.

"We started off much more briskly, as if we had had a drink of wine, and I even heard some jokes. A woman is quite enough to electrify Frenchmen, you see. The soldiers, who had become cheerful and warm, had almost reformed their ranks, and an old 'franc-tireur' who was following the litter, waiting for his turn to replace the first of his comrades who might give out, said to one of his neighbors, loud enough for me to hear: "'I am not a young man now, but by — , there is nothing like the women to put courage into you!'

"We went on, almost without stopping, until three o'clock in the morning, when suddenly our scouts fell back once more, and soon the whole detachment showed nothing but a vague shadow on the ground, as the men lay on the snow. I gave my orders in a low voice, and heard the harsh, metallic sound of the cocking, of rifles. For there, in the middle of the plain, some strange object was moving about. It looked like some enormous animal running about, now stretching out like a serpent, now coiling itself into a ball, darting to the right, then to the left, then stopping, and presently starting off again. But presently that wandering shape came nearer, and I saw a dozen lancers at full gallop, one behind the other. They had lost their way and were trying to find it.

"They were so near by that time that I could hear the loud breathing of their horses, the clinking of their swords and the creaking of their saddles, and cried: 'Fire!'

"Fifty rifle shots broke the stillness of the night, then there were four or five reports, and at last one single shot was heard, and when the smoke had cleared away, we saw that the twelve men and nine horses had fallen. Three of the animals were galloping away at a furious pace, and one of them was dragging the dead body of its rider, which rebounded violently from the ground; his foot had caught in the stirrup.

"One of the soldiers behind me gave a terrible laugh and said: 'There will be some widows there!'

"Perhaps he was married. A third added: 'It did not take long!'

"A head emerged from the litter.

"'What is the matter?' she asked; 'are you fighting?'

"'It is nothing, mademoiselle,' I replied; 'we have got rid of a dozen Prussians!'

"'Poor fellows!' she said. But as she was cold, she quickly disappeared beneath the cloaks again, and we started off once more. We marched on for a long time, and at last the sky began to grow lighter. The snow became quite clear, luminous and glistening, and a rosy tint appeared in the east. Suddenly a voice in the distance cried:

"'Who goes there?'

"The whole detachment halted, and I advanced to give the countersign. We had reached the French lines, and, as my men defiled before the outpost, a commandant on horseback, whom I had informed of what had taken place, asked in a sonorous voice, as he saw the litter pass him: 'What have you in there?'

"And immediately a small head covered with light hair appeared, dishevelled and smiling, and replied:

"'It is I, monsieur.'

"At this the men raised a hearty laugh, and we felt quite light-hearted, while Pratique, who was walking by the side of the litter, waved his kepi and shouted:

"'Vive la France!' And I felt really affected. I do not know why, except that I thought it a pretty and gallant thing to say.

"It seemed to me as if we had just saved the whole of France and had done something that other men could not have done, something simple and really patriotic. I shall never forget that little face, you may be sure; and if I had to give my opinion about abolishing drums, trumpets and bugles, I should propose to replace them in every regiment by a pretty girl, and that would be even better than playing the 'Marseillaise: By Jove! it would put some spirit into a trooper to have a Madonna like that, a live Madonna, by the colonel's side."

He was silent for a few moments and then continued, with an air of conviction, and nodding his head:

"All the same, we are very fond of women, we Frenchmen!"

MOTHER SAUVAGE

Fifteen years had passed since I was at Virelogne. I returned there in the autumn to shoot with my friend Serval, who had at last rebuilt his chateau, which the Prussians had destroyed.

I loved that district. It is one of those delightful spots which have a sensuous charm for the eyes. You love it with a physical love. We, whom the country enchants, keep tender memories of certain springs, certain woods, certain pools, certain hills seen very often which have stirred us like joyful events. Sometimes our thoughts turn back to a corner in a forest, or the end of a bank, or an orchard filled with flowers, seen but a single time on some bright day, yet remaining in our hearts like the image of certain women met in the street on a spring morning in their light, gauzy dresses, leaving in soul and body an unsatisfied desire which is not to be forgotten, a feeling that you have just passed by happiness.

At Virelogne I loved the whole countryside, dotted with little woods and crossed by brooks which sparkled in the sun and looked like veins carrying blood to the earth. You fished in them for crawfish, trout and eels. Divine happiness! You could bathe in places and you often found snipe among the high grass which grew along the borders of these small water courses.

I was stepping along light as a goat, watching my two dogs running ahead of me, Serval, a hundred metres to my right, was beating a field of lucerne. I turned round by the thicket which forms the boundary of the wood of Sandres and I saw a cottage in ruins.

Suddenly I remembered it as I had seen it the last time, in 1869, neat, covered with vines, with chickens before the door. What is sadder than a dead house, with its skeleton standing bare and sinister?

I also recalled that inside its doors, after a very tiring day, the good woman had given me a glass of wine to drink and that Serval had told me the history of its people. The father, an old poacher, had been killed by the gendarmes. The son, whom I had once seen, was a tall, dry fellow who also passed for a fierce slayer of game. People called them “Les Sauvage.”

Was that a name or a nickname?

I called to Serval. He came up with his long strides like a crane.

I asked him:

“What’s become of those people?”

This was his story:

When war was declared the son Sauvage, who was then thirty-three years old, enlisted, leaving his mother alone in the house. People did not pity the old woman very much because she had money; they knew it.

She remained entirely alone in that isolated dwelling, so far from the village, on the edge of the wood. She was not afraid, however, being of the same strain as the men folk — a hardy old woman, tall and thin, who seldom laughed and with whom one never jested. The women of the fields laugh but little in any case, that is men’s business. But they themselves have sad and narrowed hearts, leading a melancholy, gloomy life. The peasants imbibe a little noisy merriment at the tavern, but their helpmates always have grave, stern countenances. The muscles of their faces have never learned the motions of laughter.

Mother Sauvage continued her ordinary existence in her cottage, which was soon covered by the snows. She came to the village once a week to get bread and a little meat. Then she returned to her house. As there was talk of wolves, she went out with a gun upon her shoulder — her son’s gun, rusty and with the butt worn by the rubbing of the hand — and she was a strange sight, the tall “Sauvage,” a little bent, going with slow strides over the snow, the muzzle of the piece extending beyond the black headdress, which confined her head and imprisoned her white hair, which no one had ever seen.

One day a Prussian force arrived. It was billeted upon the inhabitants, according to the property and resources of each. Four were allotted to the old woman, who was known to be rich.

They were four great fellows with fair complexion, blond beards and blue eyes, who had not grown thin in spite of the fatigue which they had endured already and who also, though in a conquered country, had remained kind and gentle. Alone with this aged woman, they showed themselves full of consideration, sparing her, as much as they could, all expense and fatigue. They could be seen, all four of them, making their toilet at the well in their shirt-sleeves in the gray dawn, splashing with great swishes of water their pink-white northern skin, while La Mere Sauvage went and came, preparing their soup. They would be seen cleaning the kitchen, rubbing the tiles, splitting wood, peeling potatoes, doing up all the housework like four good sons around their mother.

But the old woman thought always of her own son, so tall and thin, with his hooked nose and his brown eyes and his heavy mustache which made a roll of black hair upon his lip. She asked every day of each of the soldiers who were installed beside her hearth: “Do you know where the French marching regiment, No. 23, was sent? My boy is in it.”

They invariably answered, “No, we don’t know, don’t know a thing at all.” And, understanding her pain and her uneasiness — they who had mothers, too, there at home — they rendered her a thousand little services. She loved them well, moreover, her four enemies, since the peasantry have no patriotic hatred; that belongs to the upper class alone. The humble, those who pay the most because they are poor and because every new burden crushes them down; those who are killed in masses, who make the true cannon’s prey because they are so many; those, in fine, who suffer most cruelly the atrocious miseries of war because they are the feeblest and offer least resistance — they hardly understand at all those bellicose ardors, that excitable sense of honor or those pretended political combinations which in six months exhaust two nations, the conqueror with the conquered.

They said in the district, in speaking of the Germans of La Mere Sauvage:

“There are four who have found a soft place.”

Now, one morning, when the old woman was alone in the house, she observed, far off on the plain, a man coming toward her dwelling. Soon she recognized him; it was the postman to distribute the letters. He gave her a folded paper and she drew out of her case the spectacles which she used for sewing. Then she read:

> MADAME SAUVAGE: This letter is to tell you sad news. Your boy Victor was killed yesterday by a shell which almost cut him in two. I was near by, as we stood next each other in the company, and he told me about you and asked me to let you know on the same day if anything happened to him.
>
> I took his watch, which was in his pocket, to bring it back to you

when the war is done.
CESAIRE RIVOT,

Soldier of the 2d class, March. Reg. No. 23.

The letter was dated three weeks back.

She did not cry at all. She remained motionless, so overcome and stupefied that she did not even suffer as yet. She thought: “There’s Victor killed now.” Then little by little the tears came to her eyes and the sorrow filled her heart. Her thoughts came, one by one, dreadful, torturing. She would never kiss him again, her child, her big boy, never again! The gendarmes had killed the father, the Prussians had killed the son. He had been cut in two by a cannon-ball. She seemed to see the thing, the horrible thing: the head falling, the eyes open, while he chewed the corner of his big mustache as he always did in moments of anger.

What had they done with his body afterward? If they had only let her have her boy back as they had brought back her husband — with the bullet in the middle of the forehead!

But she heard a noise of voices. It was the Prussians returning from the village. She hid her letter very quickly in her pocket, and she received them quietly, with her ordinary face, having had time to wipe her eyes.

They were laughing, all four, delighted, for they brought with them a fine rabbit — stolen, doubtless — and they made signs to the old woman that there was to be something good to east.

She set herself to work at once to prepare breakfast, but when it came to killing the rabbit, her heart failed her. And yet it was not the first. One of the soldiers struck it down with a blow of his fist behind the ears.

The beast once dead, she skinned the red body, but the sight of the blood which she was touching, and which covered her hands, and which she felt cooling and coagulating, made her tremble from head to foot, and she kept seeing her big boy cut in two, bloody, like this still palpitating animal.

She sat down at table with the Prussians, but she could not eat, not even a mouthful. They devoured the rabbit without bothering themselves about her. She looked at them sideways, without speaking, her face so impassive that they perceived nothing.

All of a sudden she said: “I don’t even know your names, and here’s a whole month that we’ve been together.” They understood, not without difficulty, what she wanted, and told their names.

That was not sufficient; she had them written for her on a paper, with the addresses of their families, and, resting her spectacles on her great nose, she contemplated that strange handwriting, then folded the sheet and put it in her pocket, on top of the letter which told her of the death of her son.

When the meal was ended she said to the men:

“I am going to work for you.”

And she began to carry up hay into the loft where they slept.

They were astonished at her taking all this trouble; she explained to them that thus they would not be so cold; and they helped her. They heaped the stacks of hay as high as the straw roof, and in that manner they made a sort of great chamber with four walls of fodder, warm and perfumed, where they should sleep splendidly.

At dinner one of them was worried to see that La Mere Sauvage still ate nothing. She told him that she had pains in her stomach. Then she kindled a good fire to warm herself, and the four Germans ascended to their lodging-place by the ladder which served them every night for this purpose.

As soon as they closed the trapdoor the old woman removed the ladder, then opened the outside door noiselessly and went back to look for more bundles of straw, with which she filled her kitchen. She went barefoot in the snow, so softly that no sound was heard. From time to time she listened to the sonorous and unequal snoring of the four soldiers who were fast asleep.

When she judged her preparations to be sufficient, she threw one of the bundles into the fireplace, and when it was alight she scattered it over all the others. Then she went outside again and looked.

In a few seconds the whole interior of the cottage was illumined with a brilliant light and became a frightful brasier, a gigantic fiery furnace, whose glare streamed out of the narrow window and threw a glittering beam upon the snow.

Then a great cry issued from the top of the house; it was a clamor of men shouting heartrending calls of anguish and of terror. Finally the trapdoor having given way, a whirlwind of fire shot up into the loft, pierced the straw roof, rose to the sky like the immense flame of a torch, and all the cottage flared.

Nothing more was heard therein but the crackling of the fire, the cracking of the walls, the falling of the rafters. Suddenly the roof fell in and the burning carcass of the dwelling hurled a great plume of sparks into the air, amid a cloud of smoke.

The country, all white, lit up by the fire, shone like a cloth of silver tinted with red.

A bell, far off, began to toll.

The old "Sauvage" stood before her ruined dwelling, armed with her gun, her son's gun, for fear one of those men might escape.

When she saw that it was ended, she threw her weapon into the brasier. A loud report followed.

People were coming, the peasants, the Prussians.

They found the woman seated on the trunk of a tree, calm and satisfied.

A German officer, but speaking French like a son of France, demanded:

"Where are your soldiers?"

She reached her bony arm toward the red heap of fire which was almost out and answered with a strong voice:

"There!"

They crowded round her. The Prussian asked:

"How did it take fire?"

"It was I who set it on fire."

They did not believe her, they thought that the sudden disaster had made her crazy. While all pressed round and listened, she told the story from beginning to end, from the arrival of the letter to the last shriek of the men who were burned with her house, and never omitted a detail.

When she had finished, she drew two pieces of paper from her pocket, and, in order to distinguish them by the last gleams of the fire, she again adjusted her spectacles. Then she said, showing one:

"That, that is the death of Victor." Showing the other, she added, indicating the red ruins with a bend of the head: "Here are their names, so that you can write home." She quietly held a sheet of paper out to the officer, who held her by the shoulders, and she continued:

"You must write how it happened, and you must say to their mothers that it was I who did that, Victoire Simon, la Sauvage! Do not forget."

The officer shouted some orders in German. They seized her, they threw her against the walls of her house, still hot. Then twelve men drew quickly up before her, at twenty paces. She did not move. She had understood; she waited.

An order rang out, followed instantly by a long report. A belated shot went off by itself, after the others.

The old woman did not fall. She sank as though they had cut off her legs.

The Prussian officer approached. She was almost cut in two, and in her withered hand she held her letter bathed with blood.

My friend Serval added:

"It was by way of reprisal that the Germans destroyed the chateau of the district, which belonged to me."

I thought of the mothers of those four fine fellows burned in that house and of the horrible heroism of that other mother shot against the wall.

And I picked up a little stone, still blackened by the flames.

EPIPHANY

I should say I did remember that Epiphany supper during the war! exclaimed Count de Garens, an army captain.

I was quartermaster of cavalry at the time, and for a fortnight had been scouting in front of the German advance guard. The evening before we had cut down a few Uhlans and had lost three men, one of whom was that poor little Raudeville. You remember Joseph de Raudeville, of course.

Well, on that day my commanding officer ordered me to take six troopers and to go and occupy the village of Porterin, where there had been five skirmishes in three weeks, and to hold it all night. There were not twenty houses left standing, not a dozen houses in that wasps' nest. So I took ten troopers and set out about four o'clock, and at five o'clock, while it was still pitch dark, we reached the first houses of Porterin. I halted and ordered Marchas — you know Pierre de Marchas, who afterward married little Martel-Auvelin, the daughter of the Marquis de Martel-Auvelin — to go alone into the village, and to report to me what he saw.

I had selected nothing but volunteers, all men of good family. It is pleasant when on duty not to be forced to be on intimate terms with unpleasant fellows. This Marchas was as smart as possible, cunning as a fox and supple as a serpent. He could scent the Prussians as a dog can scent a hare, could discover food where we should have died of hunger without him, and obtained information from everybody, and information which was always reliable, with incredible cleverness.

In ten minutes he returned. "All right," he said; "there have been no Prussians here for three days. It is a sinister place, is this village. I have been talking to a Sister of Mercy, who is caring for four or five wounded men in an abandoned convent."

I ordered them to ride on, and we entered the principal street. On the right and left we could vaguely see roofless walls, which were hardly visible in the profound darkness. Here and there a light was burning in a room; some family had remained to keep its house standing as well as they were able; a family of brave or of poor people. The rain began to fall, a fine, icy cold rain, which froze as it fell on our cloaks. The horses stumbled against stones, against beams, against furniture. Marchas guided us, going before us on foot, and leading his horse by the bridle.

"Where are you taking us to?" I asked him. And he replied: "I have a place for us to lodge in, and a rare good one." And we presently stopped before a small house, evidently belonging to some proprietor of the middle class. It stood on the street, was quite inclosed, and had a garden in the rear.

Marchas forced open the lock by means of a big stone which he picked up near the garden gate; then he mounted the steps, smashed in the front door with his feet and shoulders, lit a bit of wax candle, which he was never without, and went before us into the comfortable apartments of some rich private individual, guiding us with admirable assurance, as if he lived in this house which he now saw for the first time.

Two troopers remained outside to take care of our horses, and Marchas said to stout Ponderel, who followed him: "The stables must be on the left; I saw that as we came in; go and put the animals up there, for we do not need them"; and then, turning to me, he said: "Give your orders, confound it all!"

This fellow always astonished me, and I replied with a laugh: "I will post my sentinels at the country approaches and will return to you here."

"How many men are you going to take?"

"Five. The others will relieve them at five o'clock in the evening."

"Very well. Leave me four to look after provisions, to do the cooking and to set the table. I will go and find out where the wine is hidden."

I went off, to reconnoitre the deserted streets until they ended in the open country, so as to post my sentries there.

Half an hour later I was back, and found Marchas lounging in a great easy-chair, the covering of which he had taken off, from love of luxury, as he said. He was warming his feet at the fire and smoking an excellent cigar, whose perfume filled the room. He was alone, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, his head sunk between his shoulders, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, and looking delighted.

I heard the noise of plates and dishes in the next room, and Marchas said to me, smiling in a con tented manner: "This is famous; I found the champagne under the flight of steps outside, the brandy — fifty bottles of the very finest in the kitchen garden under a pear tree, which did not seem to me to be quite straight when I looked at it by the light of my lantern. As for solids, we have two fowls, a goose, a duck, and three pigeons. They are being cooked at this moment. It is a delightful district."

I sat down opposite him, and the fire in the grate was burning my nose and cheeks. "Where did you find this wood?" I asked. "Splendid wood," he replied. "The owner's carriage. It is the paint which is causing all this flame, an essence of punch and varnish. A capital house!"

I laughed, for I saw the creature was funny, and he went on: "Fancy this being the Epiphany! I have had a bean put into the goose dressing; but there is no queen; it is really very annoying!" And I repeated like an echo: "It is annoying, but what do you want me to do in the matter?" "To find some, of course." "Some women. Women? — you must be mad?" "I managed to find the brandy under the pear tree, and the champagne under the steps; and yet there was nothing to guide me, while as for you, a petticoat is a sure bait. Go and look, old fellow."

He looked so grave, so convinced, that I could not tell whether he was joking or not, and so I replied: "Look here, Marchas, are you having a joke with me?" "I never joke on duty." "But where the devil do you expect me to find any women?" "Where you like; there must be two or three remaining in the neighborhood, so ferret them out and bring them here."

I got up, for it was too hot in front of the fire, and Marchas went off:

"Do you want an idea?" "Yes." "Go and see the priest." "The priest? What for?" "Ask him to supper, and beg him to bring a woman with him." "The priest! A woman! Ha! ha! ha!"

But Marchas continued with extraordinary gravity: "I am not laughing; go and find the priest and tell him how we are situated, and, as he must be horribly dull, he will come. But tell him that we want one woman at least, a lady, of course, since we, are all men of the world. He is sure to know his female parishioners on the tips of his fingers, and if there is one to suit us, and you manage it well, he will suggest her to you."

"Come, come, Marchas, what are you thinking of?" "My dear Garens, you can do this quite well. It will even be very funny. We are well bred, by Jove! and we will put on our most distinguished manners and our grandest style. Tell the abbe who we are, make him laugh, soften his heart, coax him and persuade him!" "No, it is impossible."

He drew his chair close to mine, and as he knew my special weakness, the scamp continued: "Just think what a swaggering thing it will be to do and how amusing to tell about; the whole army will talk about it, and it will give you a famous reputation.”

I hesitated, for the adventure rather tempted me, and he persisted: “Come, my little Garens. You are the head of this detachment, and you alone can go and call on the head of the church in this neighborhood. I beg of you to go, and I promise you that after the war I will relate the whole affair in verse in the Revue de Deux Mondes. You owe this much to your men, for you have made them march enough during the last month.”

I got up at last and asked: “Where is the priest’s house?” “Take the second turning at the end of the street, you will see an avenue, and at the end of the avenue you will find the church. The parsonage is beside it.” As I went out, he called out: “Tell him the bill of fare, to make him hungry!”

I discovered the ecclesiastic’s little house without any difficulty; it was by the side of a large, ugly brick church. I knocked at the door with my fist, as there was neither bell nor knocker, and a loud voice from inside asked: “Who is there?” To which I replied: “A quartermaster of hussars.”

I heard the noise of bolts and of a key being turned, and found myself face to face with a tall priest with a large stomach, the chest of a prizefighter, formidable hands projecting from turned-up sleeves, a red face, and the look of a kind man. I gave him a military salute and said: “Good-day, Monsieur le Cure.”

He had feared a surprise, some marauders’ ambush, and he smiled as he replied: “Good-day, my friend; come in.” I followed him into a small room with a red tiled floor, in which a small fire was burning, very different to Marchas’ furnace, and he gave me a chair and said: “What can I do for you?” “Monsieur, allow me first of all to introduce myself”; and I gave him my card, which he took and read half aloud: “Le Comte de Garens.”

I continued: “There are eleven of us here, Monsieur l’Abbe, five on picket duty, and six installed at the house of an unknown inhabitant. The names of the six are: Garens, myself; Pierre de Marchas, Ludovic de Ponderel, Baron d’Streillis, Karl Massouligny, the painter’s son, and Joseph Herbon, a young musician. I have come to ask you, in their name and my own, to do us the honor of supping with us. It is an Epiphany supper, Monsieur le Cure, and we should like to make it a little cheerful.”

The priest smiled and murmured: “It seems to me to be hardly a suitable occasion for amusing one’s self.” And I replied: “We are fighting during the day, monsieur. Fourteen of our comrades have been killed in a month, and three fell as late as yesterday. It is war time. We stake our life at every moment; have we not, therefore, the right to amuse ourselves freely? We are Frenchmen, we like to laugh, and we can laugh everywhere. Our fathers laughed on the scaffold! This evening we should like to cheer ourselves up a little, like gentlemen, and not like soldiers; you understand me, I hope. Are we wrong?"

He replied quickly: "You are quite right, my friend, and I accept your invitation with great pleasure." Then he called out: "Hermance!"

An old bent, wrinkled, horrible peasant woman appeared and said: "What do you want?" "I shall not dine at home, my daughter." "Where are you going to dine then?" "With some gentlemen, the hussars."

I felt inclined to say: "Bring your servant with you," just to see Marchas' face, but I did not venture, and continued: "Do you know any one among your parishioners, male or female, whom I could invite as well?" He hesitated, reflected, and then said: "No, I do not know anybody!"

I persisted: "Nobody! Come, monsieur, think; it would be very nice to have some ladies, I mean to say, some married couples! I know nothing about your parishioners. The baker and his wife, the grocer, the — the — the — watchmaker — the — shoemaker — the — the druggist with Mrs. Druggist. We have a good spread and plenty of wine, and we should be enchanted to leave pleasant recollections of ourselves with the people here."

The priest thought again for a long time, and then said resolutely: "No, there is nobody." I began to laugh. "By Jove, Monsieur le Cure, it is very annoying not to have an Epiphany queen, for we have the bean. Come, think. Is there not a married mayor, or a married deputy mayor, or a married municipal councillor or a schoolmaster?" "No, all the ladies have gone away." "What, is there not in the whole place some good tradesman's wife with her good tradesman, to whom we might give this pleasure, for it would be a pleasure to them, a great pleasure under present circumstances?"

But, suddenly, the cure began to laugh, and laughed so violently that he fairly shook, and presently exclaimed: "Ha! ha! ha! I have got what you want, yes. I have got what you want! Ha! ha! ha! We will laugh and enjoy ourselves, my children; we will have some fun. How pleased the ladies will be, I say, how delighted they will be! Ha! ha! Where are you staying?"

I described the house, and he understood where it was. "Very good," he said. "It belongs to Monsieur Bertin-Lavaille. I will be there in half an hour, with four ladies! Ha! ha! ha! four ladies!"

He went out with me, still laughing, and left me, repeating: “That is capital; in half an hour at Bertin-Lavaille’s house.”

I returned quickly, very much astonished and very much puzzled. “Covers for how many?” Marchas asked, as soon as he saw me. “Eleven. There are six of us hussars, besides the priest and four ladies.” He was thunderstruck, and I was triumphant. He repeated: “Four ladies! Did you say, four ladies?” “I said four women.” “Real women?” “Real women.” “Well, accept my compliments!” “I will, for I deserve them.”

He got out of his armchair, opened the door, and I saw a beautiful white tablecloth on a long table, round which three hussars in blue aprons were setting out the plates and glasses. “There are some women coming!” Marchas cried. And the three men began to dance and to cheer with all their might.

Everything was ready, and we were waiting. We waited for nearly an hour, while a delicious smell of roast poultry pervaded the whole house. At last, however, a knock against the shutters made us all jump up at the same moment. Stout Ponderel ran to open the door, and in less than a minute a little Sister of Mercy appeared in the doorway. She was thin, wrinkled and timid, and successively greeted the four bewildered hussars who saw her enter. Behind her, the noise of sticks sounded on the tiled floor in the vestibule, and as soon as she had come into the drawing-room, I saw three old heads in white caps, following each other one by one, who came in, swaying with different movements, one inclining to the right, while the other inclined to the left. And three worthy women appeared, limping, dragging their legs behind them, crippled by illness and deformed through old age, three infirm old women, past service, the only three pensioners who were able to walk in the home presided over by Sister Saint-Benedict.

She had turned round to her invalids, full of anxiety for them, and then, seeing my quartermaster’s stripes, she said to me: “I am much obliged to you for thinking of these poor women. They have very little pleasure in life, and you are at the same time giving them a great treat and doing them a great honor.”

I saw the priest, who had remained in the dark hallway, and was laughing heartily, and I began to laugh in my turn, especially when I saw Marchas’ face. Then, motioning the nun to the seats, I said:

“Sit down, sister; we are very proud and very happy that you have accepted our unpretentious invitation.”

She took three chairs which stood against the wall, set them before the fire, led her three old women to them, settled them on them, took their sticks and shawls, which she put into a corner, and then, pointing to the first, a thin woman with an enormous stomach, who was evidently suffering from the dropsy, she said: “This is Mother Paumelle; whose husband was killed by falling from a roof, and whose son died in Africa; she is sixty years old.” Then she pointed to another, a tall woman, whose head trembled unceasingly: “This is Mother Jean-Jean, who is sixty-seven. She is nearly blind, for her face was terribly singed in a fire, and her right leg was half burned off.”

Then she pointed to the third, a sort of dwarf, with protruding, round, stupid eyes, which she rolled incessantly in all directions, “This is La Putois, an idiot. She is only forty-four.”

I bowed to the three women as if I were being presented to some royal highnesses, and turning to the priest, I said: “You are an excellent man, Monsieur l’Abbe, to whom all of us here owe a debt of gratitude.”

Everybody was laughing, in fact, except Marchas, who seemed furious, and just then Karl Massouligny cried: “Sister Saint-Benedict, supper is on the table!”

I made her go first with the priest, then I helped up Mother Paumelle, whose arm I took and dragged her into the next room, which was no easy task, for she seemed heavier than a lump of iron.

Stout Ponderel gave his arm to Mother Jean-Jean, who bemoaned her crutch, and little Joseph Herbon took the idiot, La Putois, to the dining-room, which was filled with the odor of the viands.

As soon as we were opposite our plates, the sister clapped her hands three times, and, with the precision of soldiers presenting arms, the women made a rapid sign of the cross, and then the priest slowly repeated the Benedictus in Latin. Then we sat down, and the two fowls appeared, brought in by Marchas, who chose to wait at table, rather than to sit down as a guest to this ridiculous repast.

But I cried: “Bring the champagne at once!” and a cork flew out with the noise of a pistol, and in spite of the resistance of the priest and of the kind sister, the three hussars, sitting by the side of the three invalids, emptied their three full glasses down their throats by force.

Massouligny, who possessed the faculty of making himself at home, and of being on good terms with every one, wherever he was, made love to

Mother Paumelle in the drollest manner. The dropsical woman, who had retained her cheerfulness in spite of her misfortunes, answered him banteringly in a high falsetto voice which appeared as if it were put on, and she laughed so heartily at her neighbor's jokes that it was quite alarming. Little Herbon had seriously undertaken the task of making the idiot drunk, and Baron d'Streillis, whose wits were not always particularly sharp, was questioning old Jean-Jean about the life, the habits, and the rules of the hospital.

The nun said to Massouligny in consternation:

"Oh! oh! you will make her ill; pray do not make her laugh like that, monsieur. Oh! monsieur— " Then she got up and rushed at Herbon to take from him a full glass which he was hastily emptying down La Putois' throat, while the priest shook with laughter, and said to the sister: "Never mind; just this once, it will not hurt them. Do leave them alone."

After the two fowls they ate the duck, which was flanked by the three pigeons and the blackbird, and then the goose appeared, smoking, golden-brown, and diffusing a warm odor of hot, browned roast meat. La Paumelle, who was getting lively, clapped her hands; La Jean-Jean left off answering the baron's numerous questions, and La Putois uttered. grunts of pleasure, half cries and half sighs, as little children do when one shows them candy. "Allow me to take charge of this animal," the cure said. "I understand these sort of operations better than most people." "Certainly, Monsieur l'Abbe," and the sister said: "How would it be to open the window a little? They are too warm, and I am afraid they will be ill."

I turned to Marchas: "Open the window for a minute." He did so; the cold outer air as it came in made the candles flare, and the steam from the goose, which the cure was scientifically carving, with a table napkin round his neck, whirl about. We watched him doing it, without speaking now, for we were interested in his attractive handiwork, and seized with renewed appetite at the sight of that enormous golden-brown bird, whose limbs fell one after another into the brown gravy at the bottom of the dish. At that moment, in the midst of that greedy silence which kept us all attentive, the distant report of a shot came in at the open window.

I started to my feet so quickly that my chair fell down behind me, and I shouted: "To saddle, all of you! You, Marches, take two men and go and see what it is. I shall expect you back here in five minutes." And while the three riders went off at full gallop through the night, I got into the saddle with my three remaining hussars, in front of the steps of the villa, while the cure, the sister and the three old women showed their frightened faces at the window.

We heard nothing more, except the barking of a dog in the distance. The rain had ceased, and it was cold, very cold, and soon I heard the gallop of a horse, of a single horse, coming back. It was Marchas, and I called out to him: "Well?" "It is nothing; Francois has wounded an old peasant who refused to answer his challenge: 'Who goes there?' and who continued to advance in spite of the order to keep off; but they are bringing him here, and we shall see what is the matter."

I gave orders for the horses to be put back in the stable, and I sent my two soldiers to meet the others, and returned to the house. Then the cure, Marchas, and I took a mattress into the room to lay the wounded man on; the sister tore up a table napkin in order to make lint, while the three frightened women remained huddled up in a corner.

Soon I heard the rattle of sabres on the road, and I took a candle to show a light to the men who were returning; and they soon appeared, carrying that inert, soft, long, sinister object which a human body becomes when life no longer sustains it.

They put the wounded man on the mattress that had been prepared for him, and I saw at the first glance that he was dying. He had the death rattle and was spitting up blood, which ran out of the corners of his mouth at every gasp. The man was covered with blood! His cheeks, his beard, his hair, his neck and his clothes seemed to have been soaked, to have been dipped in a red tub; and that blood stuck to him, and had become a dull color which was horrible to look at.

The wounded man, wrapped up in a large shepherd's cloak, occasionally opened his dull, vacant eyes, which seemed stupid with astonishment, like those of animals wounded by a sportsman, which fall at his feet, more than half dead already, stupefied with terror and surprise.

The cure exclaimed: "Ah, it is old Placide, the shepherd from Les Moulins. He is deaf, poor man, and heard nothing. Ah! Oh, God! they have killed the unhappy man!" The sister had opened his blouse and shirt, and was looking at a little blue hole in his chest, which was not bleeding any more. "There is nothing to be done," she said.

The shepherd was gasping terribly and bringing up blood with every last breath, and in his throat, to the very depth of his lungs, they could hear an ominous and continued gurgling. The cure, standing in front of him, raised his right hand, made the sign of the cross, and in a slow and solemn voice pronounced the Latin words which purify men's souls, but before they were finished, the old man's body trembled violently, as if something had given way inside him, and he ceased to breathe. He was dead.

When I turned round, I saw a sight which was even more horrible than the death struggle of this unfortunate man; the three old women were standing up huddled close together, hideous, and grimacing with fear and horror. I went up to them, and they began to utter shrill screams, while La Jean-Jean, whose burned leg could no longer support her, fell to the ground at full length.

Sister Saint-Benedict left the dead man, ran up to her infirm old women, and without a word or a look for me, wrapped their shawls round them, gave them their crutches, pushed them to the door, made them go out, and disappeared with them into the dark night.

I saw that I could not even let a hussar accompany them, for the mere rattle of a sword would have sent them mad with fear.

The cure was still looking at the dead man; but at last he turned round to me and said:

"Oh! What a horrible thing!"

THE MUSTACHE

CHATEAU DE SOLLES,
July 30, 1883.

My Dear Lucy:

I have no news. We live in the drawing-room, looking out at the rain. We cannot go out in this frightful weather, so we have theatricals. How stupid they are, my dear, these drawing entertainments in the repertory of real life! All is forced, coarse, heavy. The jokes are like cannon balls, smashing everything in their passage. No wit, nothing natural, no sprightliness, no elegance. These literary men, in truth, know nothing of society. They are perfectly ignorant of how people think and talk in our set. I do not mind if they despise our customs, our conventionalities, but I do not forgive them for not knowing them. When they want to be humorous they make puns that would do for a barrack; when they try to be jolly, they give us jokes that they must have picked up on the outer boulevard in those beer houses artists are supposed to frequent, where one has heard the same students' jokes for fifty years.

So we have taken to Theatricals. As we are only two women, my husband takes the part of a soubrette, and, in order to do that, he has shaved off his mustache. You cannot imagine, my dear Lucy, how it changes him! I no longer recognize him-by day or at night. If he did not let it grow again I think I should no longer love him; he looks so horrid like this.

In fact, a man without a mustache is no longer a man. I do not care much for a beard; it almost always makes a man look untidy. But a mustache, oh, a mustache is indispensable to a manly face. No, you would never believe how these little hair bristles on the upper lip are a relief to the eye and good in other ways. I have thought over the matter a great deal but hardly dare to write my thoughts. Words look so different on paper and the subject is so difficult, so delicate, so dangerous that it requires infinite skill to tackle it.

Well, when my husband appeared, shaven, I understood at once that I never could fall in love with a strolling actor nor a preacher, even if it were Father Didon, the most charming of all! Later when I was alone with him (my husband) it was worse still. Oh, my dear Lucy, never let yourself be kissed by a man without a mustache; their kisses have no flavor, none whatever! They no longer have the charm, the mellowness and the snap — yes, the snap — of a real kiss. The mustache is the spice.

Imagine placing to your lips a piece of dry — or moist — parchment. That is the kiss of the man without a mustache. It is not worth while.

Whence comes this charm of the mustache, will you tell me? Do I know myself? It tickles your face, you feel it approaching your mouth and it sends a little shiver through you down to the tips of your toes.

And on your neck! Have you ever felt a mustache on your neck? It intoxicates you, makes you feel creepy, goes to the tips of your fingers. You wriggle, shake your shoulders, toss back your head. You wish to get away and at the same time to remain there; it is delightful, but irritating. But how good it is!

A lip without a mustache is like a body without clothing; and one must wear clothes, very few, if you like, but still some clothing.

I recall a sentence (uttered by a politician) which has been running in my mind for three months. My husband, who keeps up with the newspapers, read me one evening a very singular speech by our Minister of Agriculture, who was called M. Meline. He may have been superseded by this time. I do not know.

I was paying no attention, but the name Meline struck me. It recalled, I do not exactly know why, the ‘Scenes de la vie de boheme’. I thought it was about some grisette. That shows how scraps of the speech entered my mind. This M. Meline was making this statement to the people of Amiens, I believe, and I have ever since been trying to understand what he meant: “There is no patriotism without agriculture!” Well, I have just discovered his meaning, and I affirm in my turn that there is no love without a mustache. When you say it that way it sounds comical, does it not?

There is no love without a mustache!

“There is no patriotism without agriculture,” said M. Meline, and he was right, that minister; I now understand why.

From a very different point of view the mustache is essential. It gives character to the face. It makes a man look gentle, tender, violent, a monster, a rake, enterprising! The hairy man, who does not shave off his whiskers, never has a refined look, for his features are concealed; and the shape of the jaw and the chin betrays a great deal to those who understand.

The man with a mustache retains his own peculiar expression and his refinement at the same time.

And how many different varieties of mustaches there are! Sometimes they are twisted, curled, coquettish. Those seem to be chiefly devoted to women.

Sometimes they are pointed, sharp as needles, and threatening. That kind prefers wine, horses and war.

Sometimes they are enormous, overhanging, frightful. These big ones generally conceal a fine disposition, a kindliness that borders on weakness and a gentleness that savors of timidity.

But what I adore above all in the mustache is that it is French, altogether French. It came from our ancestors, the Gauls, and has remained the insignia of our national character.

It is boastful, gallant and brave. It sips wine gracefully and knows how to laugh with refinement, while the broad-bearded jaws are clumsy in everything they do.

I recall something that made me weep all my tears and also — I see it now — made me love a mustache on a man's face.

It was during the war, when I was living with my father. I was a young girl then. One day there was a skirmish near the chateau. I had heard the firing of the cannon and of the artillery all the morning, and that evening a German colonel came and took up his abode in our house. He left the following day.

My father was informed that there were a number of dead bodies in the fields. He had them brought to our place so that they might be buried together. They were laid all along the great avenue of pines as fast as they brought them in, on both sides of the avenue, and as they began to smell unpleasant, their bodies were covered with earth until the deep trench could be dug. Thus one saw only their heads which seemed to protrude from the clayey earth and were almost as yellow, with their closed eyes.

I wanted to see them. But when I saw those two rows of frightful faces, I thought I should faint. However, I began to look at them, one by one, trying to guess what kind of men these had been.

The uniforms were concealed beneath the earth, and yet immediately, yes, immediately, my dear, I recognized the Frenchmen by their mustache!

Some of them had shaved on the very day of the battle, as though they wished to be elegant up to the last; others seemed to have a week's growth, but all wore the French mustache, very plain, the proud mustache that seems to say: "Do not take me for my bearded friend, little one; I am a brother."

And I cried, oh, I cried a great deal more than I should if I had not recognized them, the poor dead fellows.

It was wrong of me to tell you this. Now I am sad and cannot chatter any longer. Well, good-by, dear Lucy. I send you a hearty kiss. Long live the mustache!

JEANNE.

MADAME BAPTISTE

The first thing I did was to look at the clock as I entered the waiting-room of the station at Loubain, and I found that I had to wait two hours and ten minutes for the Paris express.

I had walked twenty miles and felt suddenly tired. Not seeing anything on the station walls to amuse me, I went outside and stood there racking my brains to think of something to do. The street was a kind of boulevard, planted with acacias, and on either side a row of houses of varying shape and different styles of architecture, houses such as one only sees in a small town, and ascended a slight hill, at the extreme end of which there were some trees, as though it ended in a park.

From time to time a cat crossed the street and jumped over the gutters carefully. A cur sniffed at every tree and hunted for scraps from the kitchens, but I did not see a single human being, and I felt listless and disheartened. What could I do with myself? I was already thinking of the inevitable and interminable visit to the small cafe at the railway station, where I should have to sit over a glass of undrinkable beer and the illegible newspaper, when I saw a funeral procession coming out of a side street into the one in which I was, and the sight of the hearse was a relief to me. It would, at any rate, give me something to do for ten minutes.

Suddenly, however, my curiosity was aroused. The hearse was followed by eight gentlemen, one of whom was weeping, while the others were chatting together, but there was no priest, and I thought to myself:

“This is a non-religious funeral,” and then I reflected that a town like Loubain must contain at least a hundred freethinkers, who would have made a point of making a manifestation. What could it be, then? The rapid pace of the procession clearly proved that the body was to be buried without ceremony, and, consequently, without the intervention of the Church.

My idle curiosity framed the most complicated surmises, and as the hearse passed me, a strange idea struck me, which was to follow it, with the eight gentlemen. That would take up my time for an hour, at least, and I accordingly walked with the others, with a sad look on my face, and, on seeing this, the two last turned round in surprise, and then spoke to each other in a low voice.

No doubt they were asking each other whether I belonged to the town, and then they consulted the two in front of them, who stared at me in turn. This close scrutiny annoyed me, and to put an end to it I went up to them, and, after bowing, I said:

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for interrupting your conversation, but, seeing a civil funeral, I have followed it, although I did not know the deceased gentleman whom you are accompanying."

"It was a woman," one of them said.

I was much surprised at hearing this, and asked:

"But it is a civil funeral, is it not?"

The other gentleman, who evidently wished to tell me all about it, then said: "Yes and no. The clergy have refused to allow us the use of the church."

On hearing this I uttered a prolonged "A-h!" of astonishment. I could not understand it at all, but my obliging neighbor continued:

"It is rather a long story. This young woman committed suicide, and that is the reason why she cannot be buried with any religious ceremony. The gentleman who is walking first, and who is crying, is her husband."

I replied with some hesitation:

"You surprise and interest me very much, monsieur. Shall I be indiscreet if I ask you to tell me the facts of the case? If I am troubling you, forget that I have said anything about the matter."

The gentleman took my arm familiarly.

"Not at all, not at all. Let us linger a little behind the others, and I will tell it you, although it is a very sad story. We have plenty of time before getting to the cemetery, the trees of which you see up yonder, for it is a stiff pull up this hill."

And he began:

"This young woman, Madame Paul Hamot, was the daughter of a wealthy merchant in the neighborhood, Monsieur Fontanelle. When she was a mere child of eleven, she had a shocking adventure; a footman attacked her and she nearly died. A terrible criminal case was the result, and the man was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

“The little girl grew up, stigmatized by disgrace, isolated, without any companions; and grown-up people would scarcely kiss her, for they thought that they would soil their lips if they touched her forehead, and she became a sort of monster, a phenomenon to all the town. People said to each other in a whisper: ‘You know, little Fontanelle,’ and everybody turned away in the streets when she passed. Her parents could not even get a nurse to take her out for a walk, as the other servants held aloof from her, as if contact with her would poison everybody who came near her.

“It was pitiable to see the poor child go and play every afternoon. She remained quite by herself, standing by her maid and looking at the other children amusing themselves. Sometimes, yielding to an irresistible desire to mix with the other children, she advanced timidly, with nervous gestures, and mingled with a group, with furtive steps, as if conscious of her own disgrace. And immediately the mothers, aunts and nurses would come running from every seat and take the children entrusted to their care by the hand and drag them brutally away.

“Little Fontanelle remained isolated, wretched, without understanding what it meant, and then she began to cry, nearly heartbroken with grief, and then she used to run and hide her head in her nurse’s lap, sobbing.

“As she grew up, it was worse still. They kept the girls from her, as if she were stricken with the plague. Remember that she had nothing to learn, nothing; that she no longer had the right to the symbolical wreath of orange-flowers; that almost before she could read she had penetrated that redoubtable mystery which mothers scarcely allow their daughters to guess at, trembling as they enlighten them on the night of their marriage.

“When she went through the streets, always accompanied by her governess, as if, her parents feared some fresh, terrible adventure, with her eyes cast down under the load of that mysterious disgrace which she felt was always weighing upon her, the other girls, who were not nearly so innocent as people thought, whispered and giggled as they looked at her knowingly, and immediately turned their heads absently, if she happened to look at them. People scarcely greeted her; only a few men bowed to her, and the mothers pretended not to see her, while some young blackguards called her Madame Baptiste, after the name of the footman who had attacked her.

“Nobody knew the secret torture of her mind, for she hardly ever spoke, and never laughed, and her parents themselves appeared uncomfortable in her presence, as if they bore her a constant grudge for some irreparable fault.

"An honest man would not willingly give his hand to a liberated convict, would he, even if that convict were his own son? And Monsieur and Madame Fontanelle looked on their daughter as they would have done on a son who had just been released from the hulks. She was pretty and pale, tall, slender, distinguished-looking, and she would have pleased me very much, monsieur, but for that unfortunate affair.

"Well, when a new sub-prefect was appointed here, eighteen months ago, he brought his private secretary with him. He was a queer sort of fellow, who had lived in the Latin Quarter, it appears. He saw Mademoiselle Fontanelle and fell in love with her, and when told of what occurred, he merely said:

"'Bah! That is just a guarantee for the future, and I would rather it should have happened before I married her than afterward. I shall live tranquilly with that woman.'

"He paid his addresses to her, asked for her hand and married her, and then, not being deficient in assurance, he paid wedding calls, as if nothing had happened. Some people returned them, others did not; but, at last, the affair began to be forgotten, and she took her proper place in society.

"She adored her husband as if he had been a god; for, you must remember, he had restored her to honor and to social life, had braved public opinion, faced insults, and, in a word, performed such a courageous act as few men would undertake, and she felt the most exalted and tender love for him.

"When she became enceinte, and it was known, the most particular people and the greatest sticklers opened their doors to her, as if she had been definitely purified by maternity.

"It is strange, but so it is, and thus everything was going on as well as possible until the other day, which was the feast of the patron saint of our town. The prefect, surrounded by his staff and the authorities, presided at the musical competition, and when he had finished his speech the distribution of medals began, which Paul Hamot, his private secretary, handed to those who were entitled to them.

"As you know, there are always jealousies and rivalries, which make people forget all propriety. All the ladies of the town were there on the platform, and, in his turn, the bandmaster from the village of Mourmillon came up. This band was only to receive a second-class medal, for one cannot give first-class medals to everybody, can one? But when the private secretary handed him his badge, the man threw it in his face and exclaimed:

"'You may keep your medal for Baptiste. You owe him a first-class one, also, just as you do me.'

"There were a number of people there who began to laugh. The common herd are neither charitable nor refined, and every eye was turned toward that poor lady. Have you ever seen a woman going mad, monsieur? Well, we were present at the sight! She got up and fell back on her chair three times in succession, as if she wished to make her escape, but saw that she could not make her way through the crowd, and then another voice in the crowd exclaimed:

"'Oh! Oh! Madame Baptiste!'

"And a great uproar, partly of laughter and partly of indignation, arose. The word was repeated over and over again; people stood on tiptoe to see the unhappy woman's face; husbands lifted their wives up in their arms, so that they might see her, and people asked:

"'Which is she? The one in blue?'

"The boys crowed like cocks, and laughter was heard all over the place.

"She did not move now on her state chair, but sat just as if she had been put there for the crowd to look at. She could not move, nor conceal herself, nor hide her face. Her eyelids blinked quickly, as if a vivid light were shining on them, and she breathed heavily, like a horse that is going up a steep hill, so that it almost broke one's heart to see her. Meanwhile, however, Monsieur Hamot had seized the ruffian by the throat, and they were rolling on the ground together, amid a scene of indescribable confusion, and the ceremony was interrupted.

"An hour later, as the Hamots were returning home, the young woman, who had not uttered a word since the insult, but who was trembling as if all her nerves had been set in motion by springs, suddenly sprang over the parapet of the bridge and threw herself into the river before her husband could prevent her. The water is very deep under the arches, and it was two hours before her body was recovered. Of course, she was dead."

The narrator stopped and then added:

"It was, perhaps, the best thing she could do under the circumstances. There are some things which cannot be wiped out, and now you understand why the clergy refused to have her taken into church. Ah! If it had been a religious funeral the whole town would have been present, but you can understand that her suicide added to the other affair and made families abstain from attending her funeral; and then, it is not an easy matter here to attend a funeral which is performed without religious rites."

We passed through the cemetery gates and I waited, much moved by what I had heard, until the coffin had been lowered into the grave, before I went up to the poor fellow who was sobbing violently, to press his hand warmly. He looked at me in surprise through his tears and then said:

"Thank you, monsieur." And I was not sorry that I had followed the funeral.

THE QUESTION OF LATIN

This subject of Latin that has been dinned into our ears for some time past recalls to my mind a story — a story of my youth.

I was finishing my studies with a teacher, in a big central town, at the Institution Robineau, celebrated through the entire province for the special attention paid there to the study of Latin.

For the past ten years, the Robineau Institute beat the imperial lycee of the town at every competitive examination, and all the colleges of the subprefecture, and these constant successes were due, they said, to an usher, a simple usher, M. Piquedent, or rather Pere Piquedent.

He was one of those middle-aged men quite gray, whose real age it is impossible to tell, and whose history we can guess at first glance. Having entered as an usher at twenty into the first institution that presented itself so that he could proceed to take first his degree of Master of Arts and afterward the degree of Doctor of Laws, he found himself so enmeshed in this routine that he remained an usher all his life. But his love for Latin did not leave him and harassed him like an unhealthy passion. He continued to read the poets, the prose writers, the historians, to interpret them and penetrate their meaning, to comment on them with a perseverance bordering on madness.

One day, the idea came into his head to oblige all the students in his class to answer him in Latin only; and he persisted in this resolution until at last they were capable of sustaining an entire conversation with him just as they would in their mother tongue. He listened to them, as a leader of an orchestra listens to his musicians rehearsing, and striking his desk every moment with his ruler, he exclaimed:

“Monsieur Lefrere, Monsieur Lefrere, you are committing a solecism! You forget the rule.

“Monsieur Plantel, your way of expressing yourself is altogether French and in no way Latin. You must understand the genius of a language. Look here, listen to me."

Now, it came to pass that the pupils of the Institution Robineau carried off, at the end of the year, all the prizes for composition, translation, and Latin conversation.

Next year, the principal, a little man, as cunning as an ape, whom he resembled in his grinning and grotesque appearance, had had printed on his programmes, on his advertisements, and painted on the door of his institution:

"Latin Studies a Specialty. Five first prizes carried off in the five classes of the lycee.

"Two honor prizes at the general examinations in competition with all the lycees and colleges of France."

For ten years the Institution Robineau triumphed in the same fashion. Now my father, allured by these successes, sent me as a day pupil to Robineau's — or, as we called it, Robinetto or Robinettino's — and made me take special private lessons from Pere Piquedent at the rate of five francs per hour, out of which the usher got two francs and the principal three francs. I was then eighteen, and was in the philosophy class.

These private lessons were given in a little room looking out on the street. It so happened that Pere Piquedent, instead of talking Latin to me, as he did when teaching publicly in the institution, kept telling me his troubles in French. Without relations, without friends, the poor man conceived an attachment to me, and poured out his misery to me.

He had never for the last ten or fifteen years chatted confidentially with any one.

"I am like an oak in a desert," he said— "'sicut quercus in solitudine'."

The other ushers disgusted him. He knew nobody in the town, since he had no time to devote to making acquaintances.

"Not even the nights, my friend, and that is the hardest thing on me. The dream of my life is to have a room with my own furniture, my own books, little things that belong to myself and which others may not touch. And I have nothing of my own, nothing except my trousers and my frock-coat, nothing, not even my mattress and my pillow! I have not four walls to shut myself up in, except when I come to give a lesson in this room. Do you see what this means — a man forced to spend his life without ever having the right, without ever finding the time, to shut himself up all alone, no matter where, to think, to reflect, to work, to dream? Ah! my dear boy, a key, the key of a door which one can lock — this is happiness, mark you, the only happiness!

"Here, all day long, teaching all those restless rogues, and during the night the dormitory with the same restless rogues snoring. And I have to sleep in the bed at the end of two rows of beds occupied by these youngsters whom I must look after. I can never be alone, never! If I go out I find the streets full of people, and, when I am tired of walking, I go into some cafe crowded with smokers and billiard players. I tell you what, it is the life of a galley slave."

I said:

"Why did you not take up some other line, Monsieur Piquedent?"

He exclaimed:

"What, my little friend? I am not a shoemaker, or a joiner, or a hatter, or a baker, or a hairdresser. I only know Latin, and I have no diploma which would enable me to sell my knowledge at a high price. If I were a doctor I would sell for a hundred francs what I now sell for a hundred sous; and I would supply it probably of an inferior quality, for my title would be enough to sustain my reputation."

Sometimes he would say to me:

"I have no rest in life except in the hours spent with you. Don't be afraid! you'll lose nothing by that. I'll make it up to you in the class-room by making you speak twice as much Latin as the others."

One day, I grew bolder, and offered him a cigarette. He stared at me in astonishment at first, then he gave a glance toward the door.

"If any one were to come in, my dear boy?"

"Well, let us smoke at the window," said I.

And we went and leaned our elbows on the windowsill looking on the street, holding concealed in our hands the little rolls of tobacco. Just opposite to us was a laundry. Four women in loose white waists were passing hot, heavy irons over the linen spread out before them, from which a warm steam arose.

Suddenly, another, a fifth, carrying on her arm a large basket which made her stoop, came out to take the customers their shirts, their handkerchiefs, and their sheets. She stopped on the threshold as if she were already fatigued; then, she raised her eyes, smiled as she saw us smoking, flung at us, with her left hand, which was free, the sly kiss characteristic of a free-

and-easy working-woman, and went away at a slow place, dragging her feet as she went.

She was a woman of about twenty, small, rather thin, pale, rather pretty, with a roguish air and laughing eyes beneath her ill-combed fair hair.

Pere Piquedent, affected, began murmuring:

“What an occupation for a woman! Really a trade only fit for a horse.”

And he spoke with emotion about the misery of the people. He had a heart which swelled with lofty democratic sentiment, and he referred to the fatiguing pursuits of the working class with phrases borrowed from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and with sobs in his throat.

Next day, as we were leaning our elbows on the same window sill, the same woman perceived us and cried out to us:

“Good-day, scholars!” in a comical sort of tone, while she made a contemptuous gesture with her hands.

I flung her a cigarette, which she immediately began to smoke. And the four other ironers rushed out to the door with outstretched hands to get cigarettes also.

And each day a friendly intercourse was established between the working-women of the pavement and the idlers of the boarding school.

Pere Piquedent was really a comical sight. He trembled at being noticed, for he might lose his position; and he made timid and ridiculous gestures, quite a theatrical display of love signals, to which the women responded with a regular fusillade of kisses.

A perfidious idea came into my mind. One day, on entering our room, I said to the old usher in a low tone:

“You would not believe it, Monsieur Piquedent, I met the little washerwoman! You know the one I mean, the woman who had the basket, and I spoke to her!”

He asked, rather worried at my manner:

“What did she say to you?”

“She said to me — why, she said she thought you were very nice. The fact of the matter is, I believe, I believe, that she is a little in love with you.” I saw that he was growing pale.

“She is laughing at me, of course. These things don’t happen at my age,” he replied.

I said gravely:

“How is that? You are all right.”

As I felt that my trick had produced its effect on him, I did not press the matter.

But every day I pretended that I had met the little laundress and that I had spoken to her about him, so that in the end he believed me, and sent her ardent and earnest kisses.

Now it happened that one morning, on my way to the boarding school, I really came across her. I accosted her without hesitation, as if I had known her for the last ten years.

“Good-day, mademoiselle. Are you quite well?”

“Very well, monsieur, thank you.”

“Will you have a cigarette?”

“Oh! not in the street.”

“You can smoke it at home.”

“In that case, I will.”

“Let me tell you, mademoiselle, there’s something you don’t know.”

“What is that, monsieur?”

“The old gentleman — my old professor, I mean— “

“Pere Piquedent?”

“Yes, Pere Piquedent. So you know his name?”

“Faith, I do! What of that?”

“Well, he is in love with you!”

She burst out laughing wildly, and exclaimed:

“You are only fooling.”

“Oh! no, I am not fooling! He keeps talking of you all through the lesson. I bet that he’ll marry you!”

She ceased laughing. The idea of marriage makes every girl serious. Then she repeated, with an incredulous air:

“This is humbug!”

“I swear to you, it’s true.”

She picked up her basket which she had laid down at her feet.

“Well, we’ll see,” she said. And she went away.

Presently when I had reached the boarding school, I took Pere Piquedent aside, and said:

“You must write to her; she is infatuated with you.”

And he wrote a long letter, tenderly affectionate, full of phrases and circumlocutions, metaphors and similes, philosophy and academic gallantry; and I took on myself the responsibility of delivering it to the young woman.

She read it with gravity, with emotion; then she murmured:

“How well he writes! It is easy to see he has got education! Does he really mean to marry me?”

I replied intrepidly: “Faith, he has lost his head about you!”

“Then he must invite me to dinner on Sunday at the Ile des Fleurs.”

I promised that she should be invited.

Pere Piquedent was much touched by everything I told him about her.

I added:

“She loves you, Monsieur Piquedent, and I believe her to be a decent girl. It is not right to lead her on and then abandon her.”

He replied in a firm tone:

“I hope I, too, am a decent man, my friend.”

I confess I had at the time no plan. I was playing a practical joke a schoolboy joke, nothing more. I had been aware of the simplicity of the old usher, his innocence and his weakness. I amused myself without asking myself how it would turn out. I was eighteen, and I had been for a long time looked upon at the lycee as a sly practical joker.

So it was agreed that Pere Piquedent and I should set out in a hack for the ferry of Queue de Vache, that we should there pick up Angele, and that I should take them into my boat, for in those days I was fond of boating. I would then bring them to the Ile des Fleurs, where the three of us would dine. I had inflicted myself on them, the better to enjoy my triumph, and the usher, consenting to my arrangement, proved clearly that he was losing his head by thus risking the loss of his position.

When we arrived at the ferry, where my boat had been moored since morning, I saw in the grass, or rather above the tall weeds of the bank, an enormous red parasol, resembling a monstrous wild poppy. Beneath the parasol was the little laundress in her Sunday clothes. I was surprised. She was really pretty, though pale; and graceful, though with a rather suburban grace.

Pere Piquedent raised his hat and bowed. She put out her hand toward him, and they stared at one another without uttering a word. Then they stepped into my boat, and I took the oars. They were seated side by side near the stern.

The usher was the first to speak.

“This is nice weather for a row in a boat.”

She murmured:

“Oh! yes.”

She dipped her hand into the water, skimming the surface, making a thin, transparent film like a sheet of glass, which made a soft plashing along the side of the boat.

When they were in the restaurant, she took it on herself to speak, and ordered dinner, fried fish, a chicken, and salad; then she led us on toward the isle, which she knew perfectly.

After this, she was gay, romping, and even rather tantalizing.

Until dessert, no question of love arose. I had treated them to champagne, and Pere Piquedent was tipsy. Herself slightly the worse, she called out to him:

“Monsieur Piquenez.”

He said abruptly:

“Mademoiselle, Monsieur Raoul has communicated my sentiments to you.”

She became as serious as a judge.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“What is your reply?”

“We never reply to these questions!”

He puffed with emotion, and went on:

“Well, will the day ever come that you will like me?”

She smiled.

“You big stupid! You are very nice.”

“In short, mademoiselle, do you think that, later on, we might— “

She hesitated a second; then in a trembling voice she said:

“Do you mean to marry me when you say that? For on no other condition, you know.”

“Yes, mademoiselle!”

“Well, that’s all right, Monsieur Piquedent!”

It was thus that these two silly creatures promised marriage to each other through the trick of a young scamp. But I did not believe that it was serious, nor, indeed, did they, perhaps.

“You know, I have nothing, not four sous,” she said.

He stammered, for he was as drunk as Silenus:

“I have saved five thousand francs.”

She exclaimed triumphantly:

“Then we can set up in business?”

He became restless.

“In what business?”

“What do I know? We shall see. With five thousand francs we could do many things. You don’t want me to go and live in your boarding school, do you?”

He had not looked forward so far as this, and he stammered in great perplexity:

“What business could we set up in? That would not do, for all I know is Latin!”

She reflected in her turn, passing in review all her business ambitions.

“You could not be a doctor?”

“No, I have no diploma.”

“Or a chemist?”

“No more than the other.”

She uttered a cry of joy. She had discovered it.

“Then we’ll buy a grocer’s shop! Oh! what luck! we’ll buy a grocer’s shop. Not on a big scale, of course; with five thousand francs one does not go far.”

He was shocked at the suggestion.

“No, I can’t be a grocer. I am — I am — too well known: I only know Latin, that is all I know.”

But she poured a glass of champagne down his throat. He drank it and was silent.

We got back into the boat. The night was dark, very dark. I saw clearly, however, that he had caught her by the waist, and that they were hugging each other again and again.

It was a frightful catastrophe. Our escapade was discovered, with the result that Pere Piquedent was dismissed. And my father, in a fit of anger, sent me to finish my course of philosophy at Ribaudet’s school.

Six months later I took my degree of Bachelor of Arts. Then I went to study law in Paris, and did not return to my native town till two years later.

At the corner of the Rue de Serpent a shop caught my eye. Over the door were the words: “Colonial Products — Piquedent”; then underneath, so as to enlighten the most ignorant: “Grocery.”

I exclaimed:

"'Quantum mutatus ab illo!'"

Piquedent raised his head, left his female customer, and rushed toward me with outstretched hands.

"Ah! my young friend, my young friend, here you are! What luck! what luck!"

A beautiful woman, very plump, abruptly left the cashier's desk and flung herself on my breast. I had some difficulty in recognizing her, she had grown so stout.

I asked:

"So then you're doing well?"

Piquedent had gone back to weigh the groceries.

"Oh! very well, very well, very well. I have made three thousand francs clear this year!"

"And what about Latin, Monsieur Piquedent?"

"Oh, good heavens! Latin, Latin, Latin — you see it does not keep the pot boiling!"

A MEETING

It was nothing but an accident, an accident pure and simple. On that particular evening the princess' rooms were open, and as they appeared dark after the brilliantly lighted parlors, Baron d'Etraille, who was tired of standing, inadvertently wandered into an empty bedroom.

He looked round for a chair in which to have a doze, as he was sure his wife would not leave before daylight. As soon as he became accustomed to the light of the room he distinguished the big bed with its azure-and-gold hangings, in the middle of the great room, looking like a catafalque in which love was buried, for the princess was no longer young. Behind it, a large bright surface looked like a lake seen at a distance. It was a large mirror, discreetly covered with dark drapery, that was very rarely let down, and seemed to look at the bed, which was its accomplice. One might almost fancy that it had reminiscences, and that one might see in it charming female forms and the gentle movement of loving arms.

The baron stood still for a moment, smiling, almost experiencing an emotion on the threshold of this chamber dedicated to love. But suddenly something appeared in the looking-glass, as if the phantoms which he had evoked had risen up before him. A man and a woman who had been sitting on a low couch concealed in the shadow had arisen, and the polished surface, reflecting their figures, showed that they were kissing each other before separating.

Baron d'Etraille recognized his wife and the Marquis de Cervigne. He turned and went away like a man who is fully master of himself, and waited till it was day before taking away the baroness; but he had no longer any thoughts of sleeping.

As soon as they were alone he said:

"Madame, I saw you just now in Princesse de Raynes' room; I need say no more, and I am not fond either of reproaches, acts of violence, or of ridicule. As I wish to avoid all such things, we shall separate without any scandal. Our lawyers will settle your position according to my orders. You will be free to live as you please when you are no longer under my roof; but, as you will continue to bear my name, I must warn you that should any scandal arise I shall show myself inflexible.”

She tried to speak, but he stopped her, bowed, and left the room.

He was more astonished and sad than unhappy. He had loved her dearly during the first period of their married life; but his ardor had cooled, and now he often amused himself elsewhere, either in a theatre or in society, though he always preserved a certain liking for the baroness.

She was very young, hardly four-and-twenty, small, slight — too slight — and very fair. She was a true Parisian doll: clever, spoiled, elegant, coquettish, witty, with more charm than real beauty. He used to say familiarly to his brother, when speaking of her:

“My wife is charming, attractive, but — there is nothing to lay hold of. She is like a glass of champagne that is all froth; when you get to the wine it is very good, but there is too little of it, unfortunately.”

He walked up and down the room in great agitation, thinking of a thousand things. At one moment he was furious, and felt inclined to give the marquis a good thrashing, or to slap his face publicly, in the club. But he decided that would not do, it would not be good form; he would be laughed at, and not his rival, and this thought wounded his vanity. So he went to bed, but could not sleep. Paris knew in a few days that the Baron and Baroness d’Etraille had agreed to an amicable separation on account of incompatibility of temper. No one suspected anything, no one laughed, and no one was astonished.

The baron, however, to avoid meeting his wife, travelled for a year, then spent the summer at the seaside, and the autumn in shooting, returning to Paris for the winter. He did not meet the baroness once.

He did not even know what people said about her. In any case, she took care to respect appearances, and that was all he asked for.

He became dreadfully bored, travelled again, restored his old castle of Villebosc, which took him two years; then for over a year he entertained friends there, till at last, tired of all these so-called pleasures, he returned to his mansion in the Rue de Lille, just six years after the separation.

He was now forty-five, with a good crop of gray hair, rather stout, and with that melancholy look characteristic of those who have been handsome, sought after, and liked, but who are deteriorating, daily.

A month after his return to Paris, he took cold on coming out of his club, and had such a bad cough that his medical man ordered him to Nice for the rest of the winter.

He reached the station only a few minutes before the departure of the train on Monday evening, and had barely time to get into a carriage, with only one other occupant, who was sitting in a corner so wrapped in furs and cloaks that he could not even make out whether it was a man or a woman, as nothing of the figure could be seen. When he perceived that he could not find out, he put on his travelling cap, rolled himself up in his rugs, and stretched out comfortably to sleep.

He did not wake until the day was breaking, and looked at once at his fellow-traveller, who had not stirred all night, and seemed still to be sound asleep.

M. d'Etraille made use of the opportunity to brush his hair and his beard, and to try to freshen himself up a little generally, for a night's travel does not improve one's appearance when one has attained a certain age.

A great poet has said:

"When we are young, our mornings are triumphant!"

Then we wake up with a cool skin, a bright eye, and glossy hair.

As one grows older one wakes up in a very different condition. Dull eyes, red, swollen cheeks, dry lips, hair and beard disarranged, impart an old, fatigued, worn-out look to the face.

The baron opened his travelling case, and improved his looks as much as possible.

The engine whistled, the train stopped, and his neighbor moved. No doubt he was awake. They started off again, and then a slanting ray of sunlight shone into the carriage and on the sleeper, who moved again, shook himself, and then his face could be seen.

It was a young, fair, pretty, plump woman, and the baron looked at her in amazement. He did not know what to think. He could really have sworn that it was his wife, but wonderfully changed for the better: stouter — why she had grown as stout as he was, only it suited her much better than it did him.

She looked at him calmly, did not seem to recognize him, and then slowly laid aside her wraps. She had that quiet assurance of a woman who is sure of herself, who feels that on awaking she is in her full beauty and freshness.

The baron was really bewildered. Was it his wife, or else as like her as any sister could be? Not having seen her for six years, he might be mistaken.

She yawned, and this gesture betrayed her. She turned and looked at him again, calmly, indifferently, as if she scarcely saw him, and then looked out of the window again.

He was upset and dreadfully perplexed, and kept looking at her sideways.

Yes; it was surely his wife. How could he possibly have doubted it? There could certainly not be two noses like that, and a thousand recollections flashed through his mind. He felt the old feeling of the intoxication of love stealing over him, and he called to mind the sweet odor of her skin, her smile when she put her arms on to his shoulders, the soft intonations of her voice, all her graceful, coaxing ways.

But how she had changed and improved! It was she and yet not she. She seemed riper, more developed, more of a woman, more seductive, more desirable, adorably desirable.

And this strange, unknown woman, whom he had accidentally met in a railway carriage, belonged to him; he had only to say to her:

"I insist upon it."

He had formerly slept in her arms, existed only in her love, and now he had found her again certainly, but so changed that he scarcely knew her. It was another, and yet it was she herself. It was some one who had been born and had formed and grown since he had left her. It was she, indeed; she whom he had loved, but who was now altered, with a more assured smile and greater self-possession. There were two women in one, mingling a great part of what was new and unknown with many sweet recollections of the past. There was something singular, disturbing, exciting about it — a kind of mystery of love in which there floated a delicious confusion. It was his wife in a new body and in new flesh which lips had never pressed.

And he thought that in a few years nearly every thing changes in us; only the outline can be recognized, and sometimes even that disappears.

The blood, the hair, the skin, all changes and is renewed, and when people have not seen each other for a long time, when they meet they find each other totally different beings, although they are the same and bear the same name.

And the heart also can change. Ideas may be modified and renewed, so that in forty years of life we may, by gradual and constant transformations, become four or five totally new and different beings.

He dwelt on this thought till it troubled him; it had first taken possession of him when he surprised her in the princess' room. He was not the least angry; it was not the same woman that he was looking at — that thin, excitable little doll of those days.

What was he to do? How should he address her? and what could he say to her? Had she recognized him?

The train stopped again. He got up, bowed, and said: "Bertha, do you want anything I could bring you?"

She looked at him from head to foot, and answered, without showing the slightest surprise, or confusion, or anger, but with the most perfect indifference:

"I do not want anything — thank you."

He got out and walked up and down the platform a little in order to recover himself, and, as it were, to recover his senses after a fall. What should he do now? If he got into another carriage it would look as if he were running away. Should he be polite or importunate? That would look as if he were asking for forgiveness. Should he speak as if he were her master? He would look like a fool, and, besides, he really had no right to do so.

He got in again and took his place.

During his absence she had hastily arranged her dress and hair, and was now lying stretched out on the seat, radiant, and without showing any emotion.

He turned to her, and said: "My dear Bertha, since this singular chance has brought up together after a separation of six years — a quite friendly separation — are we to continue to look upon each other as irreconcilable enemies? We are shut up together, tete-a-tete, which is so much the better or so much the worse. I am not going to get into another carriage, so don't you think it is preferable to talk as friends till the end of our journey?"

She answered, quite calmly again:

"Just as you please."

Then he suddenly stopped, really not knowing what to say; but as he had plenty of assurance, he sat down on the middle seat, and said:

"Well, I see I must pay my court to you; so much the better. It is, however, really a pleasure, for you are charming. You cannot imagine how you have improved in the last six years. I do not know any woman who could give me that delightful sensation which I experienced just now when you emerged from your wraps. I really could not have thought such a change possible."

Without moving her head or looking at him, she said: "I cannot say the same with regard to you; you have certainly deteriorated a great deal."

He got red and confused, and then, with a smile of resignation, he said:

"You are rather hard."

"Why?" was her reply. "I am only stating facts. I don't suppose you intend to offer me your love? It must, therefore, be a matter of perfect indifference to you what I think about you. But I see it is a painful subject, so let us talk of something else. What have you been doing since I last saw you?"

He felt rather out of countenance, and stammered:

"I? I have travelled, done some shooting, and grown old, as you see. And you?"

She said, quite calmly: "I have taken care of appearances, as you ordered me."

He was very nearly saying something brutal, but he checked himself; and kissed his wife's hand:

"And I thank you," he said.

She was surprised. He was indeed diplomatic, and always master of himself.

He went on: "As you have acceded to my first request, shall we now talk without any bitterness?"

She made a little movement of surprise.

"Bitterness? I don't feel any; you are a complete stranger to me; I am only trying to keep up a difficult conversation."

He was still looking at her, fascinated in spite of her harshness, and he felt seized with a brutal Beside, the desire of the master.

Perceiving that she had hurt his feelings, she said:

"How old are you now? I thought you were younger than you look."

"I am forty-five"; and then he added: "I forgot to ask after Princesse de Raynes. Are you still intimate with her?"

She looked at him as if she hated him:

"Yes, I certainly am. She is very well, thank you."

They remained sitting side by side, agitated and irritated. Suddenly he said:

"My dear Bertha, I have changed my mind. You are my wife, and I expect you to come with me to-day. You have, I think, improved both morally and physically, and I am going to take you back again. I am your husband, and it is my right to do so."

She was stupefied, and looked at him, trying to divine his thoughts; but his face was resolute and impenetrable.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but I have made other engagements."

"So much the worse for you," was his reply. "The law gives me the power, and I mean to use it."

They were nearing Marseilles, and the train whistled and slackened speed. The baroness rose, carefully rolled up her wraps, and then, turning to her husband, said:

"My dear Raymond, do not make a bad use of this tete-a tete which I had carefully prepared. I wished to take precautions, according to your advice, so that I might have nothing to fear from you or from other people, whatever might happen. You are going to Nice, are you not?"

"I shall go wherever you go."

"Not at all; just listen to me, and I am sure that you will leave me in peace. In a few moments, when we get to the station, you will see the Princesse de Raynes and Comtesse Henriot waiting for me with their husbands. I wished them to see as, and to know that we had spent the night together in the railway carriage. Don't be alarmed; they will tell it everywhere as a most surprising fact.

"I told you just now that I had most carefully followed your advice and saved appearances. Anything else does not matter, does it? Well, in order to do so, I wished to be seen with you. You told me carefully to avoid any scandal, and I am avoiding it, for, I am afraid — I am afraid— "

She waited till the train had quite stopped, and as her friends ran up to open the carriage door, she said:

"I am afraid" — hesitating— "that there is another reason — je suis enceinte."

The princess stretched out her arms to embrace her, — and the baroness said, painting to the baron, who was dumb with astonishment, and was trying to get at the truth:

"You do not recognize Raymond? He has certainly changed a good deal, and he agreed to come with me so that I might not travel alone. We take little trips like this occasionally, like good friends who cannot live together. We are going to separate here; he has had enough of me already."

She put out her hand, which he took mechanically, and then she jumped out on to the platform among her friends, who were waiting for her.

The baron hastily shut the carriage door, for he was too much disturbed to say a word or come to any determination. He heard his wife's voice and their merry laughter as they went away.

He never saw her again, nor did he ever discover whether she had told him a lie or was speaking the truth.

THE BLIND MAN

How is it that the sunlight gives us such joy? Why does this radiance when it falls on the earth fill us with the joy of living? The whole sky is blue, the fields are green, the houses all white, and our enchanted eyes drink in those bright colors which bring delight to our souls. And then there springs up in our hearts a desire to dance, to run, to sing, a happy lightness of thought, a sort of enlarged tenderness; we feel a longing to embrace the sun.

The blind, as they sit in the doorways, impassive in their eternal darkness, remain as calm as ever in the midst of this fresh gaiety, and, not understanding what is taking place around them, they continually check their dogs as they attempt to play.

When, at the close of the day, they are returning home on the arm of a young brother or a little sister, if the child says: “It was a very fine day!” the other answers: “I could notice that it was fine. Loulou wouldn’t keep quiet.”

I knew one of these men whose life was one of the most cruel martyrdoms that could possibly be conceived.

He was a peasant, the son of a Norman farmer. As long as his father and mother lived, he was more or less taken care of; he suffered little save from his horrible infirmity; but as soon as the old people were gone, an atrocious life of misery commenced for him. Dependent on a sister of his, everybody in the farmhouse treated him as a beggar who is eating the bread of strangers. At every meal the very food he swallowed was made a subject of reproach against him; he was called a drone, a clown, and although his brother-in-law had taken possession of his portion of the inheritance, he was helped grudgingly to soup, getting just enough to save him from starving.

His face was very pale and his two big white eyes looked like wafers. He remained unmoved at all the insults hurled at him, so reserved that one could not tell whether he felt them.

Moreover, he had never known any tenderness, his mother having always treated him unkindly and caring very little for him; for in country places useless persons are considered a nuisance, and the peasants would be glad to kill the infirm of their species, as poultry do.

As soon as he finished his soup he went and sat outside the door in summer and in winter beside the fireside, and did not stir again all the evening. He made no gesture, no movement; only his eyelids, quivering from some nervous affection, fell down sometimes over his white, sightless orbs. Had he any intellect, any thinking faculty, any consciousness of his own existence? Nobody cared to inquire.

For some years things went on in this fashion. But his incapacity for work as well as his impassiveness eventually exasperated his relatives, and he became a laughingstock, a sort of butt for merriment, a prey to the inborn ferocity, to the savage gaiety of the brutes who surrounded him.

It is easy to imagine all the cruel practical jokes inspired by his blindness. And, in order to have some fun in return for feeding him, they now converted his meals into hours of pleasure for the neighbors and of punishment for the helpless creature himself.

The peasants from the nearest houses came to this entertainment; it was talked about from door to door, and every day the kitchen of the farmhouse was full of people. Sometimes they placed before his plate, when he was beginning to eat his soup, some cat or dog. The animal instinctively perceived the man’s infirmity, and, softly approaching, commenced eating noiselessly, lapping up the soup daintily; and, when they lapped the food rather noisily, rousing the poor fellow’s attention, they would prudently scamper away to avoid the blow of the spoon directed at random by the blind man!

Then the spectators ranged along the wall would burst out laughing, nudge each other and stamp their feet on the floor. And he, without ever uttering a word, would continue eating with his right hand, while stretching out his left to protect his plate.

Another time they made him chew corks, bits of wood, leaves or even filth, which he was unable to distinguish.

After this they got tired even of these practical jokes, and the brother-in-law, angry at having to support him always, struck him, cuffed him incessantly, laughing at his futile efforts to ward off or return the blows. Then came a new pleasure — the pleasure of smacking his face. And the plough-men, the servant girls and even every passing vagabond were every moment giving him cuffs, which caused his eyelashes to twitch spasmodically. He did not know where to hide himself and remained with his arms always held out to guard against people coming too close to him.

At last he was forced to beg.

He was placed somewhere on the high-road on market-days, and as soon as he heard the sound of footsteps or the rolling of a vehicle, he reached out his hat, stammering:

“Charity, if you please!”

But the peasant is not lavish, and for whole weeks he did not bring back a sou.

Then he became the victim of furious, pitiless hatred. And this is how he died.

One winter the ground was covered with snow, and it was freezing hard. His brother-in-law led him one morning a great distance along the high road in order that he might solicit alms. The blind man was left there all day; and when night came on, the brother-in-law told the people of his house that he could find no trace of the mendicant. Then he added:

“Pooh! best not bother about him! He was cold and got someone to take him away. Never fear! he’s not lost. He’ll turn up soon enough tomorrow to eat the soup.”

Next day he did not come back.

After long hours of waiting, stiffened with the cold, feeling that he was dying, the blind man began to walk. Being unable to find his way along the road, owing to its thick coating of ice, he went on at random, falling into ditches, getting up again, without uttering a sound, his sole object being to find some house where he could take shelter.

But, by degrees, the descending snow made a numbness steal over him, and his feeble limbs being incapable of carrying him farther, he sat down in the middle of an open field. He did not get up again.

The white flakes which fell continuously buried him, so that his body, quite stiff and stark, disappeared under the incessant accumulation of their rapidly thickening mass, and nothing was left to indicate the place where he lay.

His relatives made a pretence of inquiring about him and searching for him for about a week. They even made a show of weeping.

The winter was severe, and the thaw did not set in quickly. Now, one Sunday, on their way to mass, the farmers noticed a great flight of crows, who were whirling incessantly above the open field, and then descending like a shower of black rain at the same spot, ever going and coming.

The following week these gloomy birds were still there. There was a crowd of them up in the air, as if they had gathered from all corners of the horizon, and they swooped down with a great cawing into the shining snow, which they covered like black patches, and in which they kept pecking obstinately. A young fellow went to see what they were doing and discovered the body of the blind man, already half devoured, mangled. His wan eyes had disappeared, pecked out by the long, voracious beaks.

And I can never feel the glad radiance of sunlit days without sadly remembering and pondering over the fate of the beggar who was such an outcast in life that his horrible death was a relief to all who had known him.

INDISCRETION

They had loved each other before marriage with a pure and lofty love. They had first met on the sea-shore. He had thought this young girl charming, as she passed by with her light-colored parasol and her dainty dress amid the marine landscape against the horizon. He had loved her, blond and slender, in these surroundings of blue ocean and spacious sky. He could not distinguish the tenderness which this budding woman awoke in him from the vague and powerful emotion which the fresh salt air and the grand scenery of surf and sunshine and waves aroused in his soul.

She, on the other hand, had loved him because he courted her, because he was young, rich, kind, and attentive. She had loved him because it is natural for young girls to love men who whisper sweet nothings to them.

So, for three months, they had lived side by side, and hand in hand. The greeting which they exchanged in the morning before the bath, in the freshness of the morning, or in the evening on the sand, under the stars, in the warmth of a calm night, whispered low, very low, already had the flavor of kisses, though their lips had never met.

Each dreamed of the other at night, each thought of the other on awaking, and, without yet having voiced their sentiments, each longer for the other, body and soul.

After marriage their love descended to earth. It was at first a tireless, sensuous passion, then exalted tenderness composed of tangible poetry, more refined caresses, and new and foolish inventions. Every glance and gesture was an expression of passion.

But, little by little, without even noticing it, they began to get tired of each other. Love was still strong, but they had nothing more to reveal to each other, nothing more to learn from each other, no new tale of endearment, no unexpected outburst, no new way of expressing the well-known, oft-repeated verb.

They tried, however, to rekindle the dwindling flame of the first love. Every day they tried some new trick or desperate attempt to bring back to their hearts the uncooled ardor of their first days of married life. They tried moonlight walks under the trees, in the sweet warmth of the summer evenings: the poetry of mist-covered beaches; the excitement of public festivals.

One morning Henriette said to Paul:

“Will you take me to a cafe for dinner?”

“Certainly, dearie.”

“To some well-known cafe?”

“Of course!”

He looked at her with a questioning glance, seeing that she was thinking of something which she did not wish to tell.

She went on:

“You know, one of those cafes — oh, how can I explain myself? — a sporty cafe!”

He smiled: “Of course, I understand — you mean in one of the cafes which are commonly called bohemian.”

“Yes, that’s it. But take me to one of the big places, one where you are known, one where you have already supped — no — dined — well, you know — I — I — oh! I will never dare say it!”

“Go ahead, dearie. Little secrets should no longer exist between us.”

“No, I dare not.”

“Go on; don’t be prudish. Tell me.”

“Well, I — I — I want to be taken for your sweetheart — there! and I want the boys, who do not know that you are married, to take me for such; and you too — I want you to think that I am your sweetheart for one hour, in that place which must hold so many memories for you. There! And I will play that I am your sweetheart. It’s awful, I know — I am abominably ashamed, I am as red as a peony. Don’t look at me!”

He laughed, greatly amused, and answered:

“All right, we will go to-night to a very swell place where I am well known.”

Toward seven o’clock they went up the stairs of one of the big cafes on the Boulevard, he, smiling, with the look of a conqueror, she, timid, veiled, delighted. They were immediately shown to one of the luxurious private dining-rooms, furnished with four large arm-chairs and a red plush couch.

The head waiter entered and brought them the menu. Paul handed it to his wife.

"What do you want to eat?"

"I don't care; order whatever is good."

After handing his coat to the waiter, he ordered dinner and champagne. The waiter looked at the young woman and smiled. He took the order and murmured:

"Will Monsieur Paul have his champagne sweet or dry?"

"Dry, very dry."

Henriette was pleased to hear that this man knew her husband's name. They sat on the couch, side by side, and began to eat.

Ten candles lighted the room and were reflected in the mirrors all around them, which seemed to increase the brilliancy a thousand-fold. Henriette drank glass after glass in order to keep up her courage, although she felt dizzy after the first few glasses. Paul, excited by the memories which returned to him, kept kissing his wife's hands. His eyes were sparkling.

She was feeling strangely excited in this new place, restless, pleased, a little guilty, but full of life. Two waiters, serious, silent, accustomed to seeing and forgetting everything, to entering the room only when it was necessary and to leaving it when they felt they were intruding, were silently flitting hither and thither.

Toward the middle of the dinner, Henriette was well under the influence of champagne. She was prattling along fearlessly, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glistening.

"Come, Paul; tell me everything."

"What, sweetheart?"

"I don't dare tell you."

"Go on!"

"Have you loved many women before me?"

He hesitated, a little perplexed, not knowing whether he should hide his adventures or boast of them.

She continued:

"Oh! please tell me. How many have you loved?"

"A few."

"How many?"

"I don't know. How do you expect me to know such things?"

"Haven't you counted them?"

"Of course not."

"Then you must have loved a good many!"

"Perhaps."

"About how many? Just tell me about how many."

"But I don't know, dearest. Some years a good many, and some years only a few."

"How many a year, did you say?"

"Sometimes twenty or thirty, sometimes only four or five."

"Oh! that makes more than a hundred in all!"

"Yes, just about."

"Oh! I think that is dreadful!"

"Why dreadful?"

"Because it's dreadful when you think of it — all those women — and always — always the same thing. Oh! it's dreadful, just the same — more than a hundred women!"

He was surprised that she should think that dreadful, and answered, with the air of superiority which men take with women when they wish to make them understand that they have said something foolish:

"That's funny! If it is dreadful to have a hundred women, it's dreadful to have one."

"Oh, no, not at all!"

"Why not?"

"Because with one woman you have a real bond of love which attaches you to her, while with a hundred women it's not the same at all. There is no real love. I don't understand how a man can associate with such women."

"But they are all right."

"No, they can't be!"

"Yes, they are!"

"Oh, stop; you disgust me!"

"But then, why did you ask me how many sweethearts I had had?"

"Because — — "

"That's no reason!"

"What were they-actresses, little shop-girls, or society women?"

"A few of each."

"It must have been rather monotonous toward the last."

"Oh, no; it's amusing to change."

She remained thoughtful, staring at her champagne glass. It was full — she drank it in one gulp; then putting it back on the table, she threw her arms around her husband's neck and murmured in his ear:

"Oh! how I love you, sweetheart! how I love you!"

He threw his arms around her in a passionate embrace. A waiter, who was just entering, backed out, closing the door discreetly. In about five minutes the head waiter came back, solemn and dignified, bringing the fruit for dessert. She was once more holding between her fingers a full glass, and gazing into the amber liquid as though seeking unknown things. She murmured in a dreamy voice:

"Yes, it must be fun!"

THE CAKE

Let us say that her name was Madame Anserre so as not to reveal her real name.

She was one of those Parisian comets which leave, as it were, a trail of fire behind them. She wrote verses and novels; she had a poetic heart, and was rarely beautiful. She opened her doors to very few — only to exceptional people, those who are commonly described as princes of something or other. To be a visitor at her house constituted a claim, a genuine claim to intellect: at least this was the estimate set on her invitations. Her husband played the part of an obscure satellite. To be the husband of a comet is not an easy thing. This husband had, however, an original idea, that of creating a State within a State, of possessing a merit of his own, a merit of the second order, it is true; but he did, in fact, in this fashion, on the days when his wife held receptions, hold receptions also on his own account. He had his special set who appreciated him, listened to him, and bestowed on him more attention than they did on his brilliant partner.

He had devoted himself to agriculture — to agriculture in the Chamber. There are in the same way generals in the Chamber — those who are born, who live, and who die, on the round leather chairs of the War Office, are all of this sort, are they not? Sailors in the Chamber, — viz., in the Admiralty, — colonizers in the Chamber, etc., etc. So he had studied agriculture, had studied it deeply, indeed, in its relations to the other sciences, to political economy, to the Fine Arts — we dress up the Fine Arts with every kind of science, and we even call the horrible railway bridges “works of art.” At length he reached the point when it was said of him: “He is a man of ability.” He was quoted in the technical reviews; his wife had succeeded in getting him appointed a member of a committee at the Ministry of Agriculture.

This latest glory was quite sufficient for him.

Under the pretext of diminishing the expenses, he sent out invitations to his friends for the day when his wife received hers, so that they associated together, or rather did not — they formed two distinct groups. Madame, with her escort of artists, academicians, and ministers, occupied a kind of gallery, furnished and decorated in the style of the Empire. Monsieur generally withdrew with his agriculturists into a smaller portion of the house used as a smoking-room and ironically described by Madame Anserre as the Salon of Agriculture.

The two camps were clearly separate. Monsieur, without jealousy, moreover, sometimes penetrated into the Academy, and cordial hand-shakings were exchanged; but the Academy entertained infinite contempt for the Salon of Agriculture, and it was rarely that one of the princes of science, of thought, or of anything else, mingled with the agriculturists.

These receptions occasioned little expense — a cup of tea, a cake, that was all. Monsieur, at an earlier period, had claimed two cakes, one for the Academy, and one for the agriculturists, but Madame having rightly suggested that this way of acting seemed to indicate two camps, two receptions, two parties, Monsieur did not press the matter, so that they used only one cake, of which Madame Anserre did the honors at the Academy, and which then passed into the Salon de Agriculture.

Now, this cake was soon, for the Academy, a subject of observation well calculated to arouse curiosity. Madame Anserre never cut it herself. That function always fell to the lot of one or other of the illustrious guests. The particular duty, which was supposed to carry with it honorable distinction, was performed by each person for a pretty long period, in one case for three months, scarcely ever for more; and it was noticed that the privilege of "cutting the cake" carried with it a heap of other marks of superiority — a sort of royalty, or rather very accentuated viceroyalty.

The reigning cutter spoke in a haughty tone, with an air of marked command; and all the favors of the mistress of the house were for him alone.

These happy individuals were in moments of intimacy described in hushed tones behind doors as the "favorites of the cake," and every change of favorite introduced into the Academy a sort of revolution. The knife was a scepter, the pastry an emblem; the chosen ones were congratulated. The agriculturists never cut the cake. Monsieur himself was always excluded, although he ate his share.

The cake was cut in succession by poets, by painters, and by novelists. A great musician had the privilege of measuring the portions of the cake for some time; an ambassador succeeded him. Sometimes a man less well known, but elegant and sought after, one of those who are called according to the different epochs, "true gentleman," or "perfect knight," or "dandy," or something else, seated himself, in his turn, before the symbolic cake. Each of them, during this ephemeral reign, exhibited greater consideration toward the husband; then, when the hour of his fall had arrived, he passed on the knife toward the other, and mingled once more with the crowd of followers and admirers of the "beautiful Madame Anserre."

This state of things lasted a long time; but comets do not always shine with the same brilliance. Everything gets worn out in society. One would have said that gradually the eagerness of the cutters grew feebler; they seemed to hesitate at times when the tray was held out to them; this office, once so much coveted, became less and less desired. It was retained for a shorter time; they appeared to be less proud of it.

Madame Anserre was prodigal of smiles and civilities. Alas! no one was found any longer to cut it voluntarily. The newcomers seemed to decline the honor. The "old favorites" reappeared one by one like dethroned princes who have been replaced for a brief spell in power. Then, the chosen ones became few, very few. For a month (oh, prodigy!) M, Anserre cut open the cake; then he looked as if he were getting tired of it; and one evening Madame Anserre, the beautiful Madame Anserre, was seen cutting it herself. But this appeared to be very wearisome to her, and, next day, she urged one of her guests so strongly to do it that he did not dare to refuse.

The symbol was too well known, however; the guests stared at one another with scared, anxious faces. To cut the cake was nothing, but the privileges to which this favor had always given a claim now frightened people; therefore, the moment the dish made its appearance the academicians rushed pellmell into the Salon of Agriculture, as if to shelter themselves behind the husband, who was perpetually smiling. And when Madame Anserre, in a state of anxiety, presented herself at the door with a cake in one hand and the knife in the other, they all seemed to form a circle around her husband as if to appeal to him for protection.

Some years more passed. Nobody cut the cake now; but yielding to an old inveterate habit, the lady who had always been gallantly called "the beautiful Madame Anserre" looked out each evening for some devotee to take the knife, and each time the same movement took place around her, a general flight, skillfully arranged and full of combined maneuvers that showed great cleverness, in order to avoid the offer that was rising to her lips.

But, one evening, a young man presented himself at her reception — an innocent, unsophisticated youth. He knew nothing about the mystery of the cake; accordingly, when it appeared, and when all the rest ran away, when Madame Anserre took from the manservant's hands the dish and the pastry, he remained quietly by her side.

She thought that perhaps he knew about the matter; she smiled, and in a tone which showed some emotion, said:

"Will you be kind enough, dear Monsieur, to cut this cake?"

He displayed the utmost readiness, and took off his gloves, flattered at such an honor being conferred on him.

"Oh, to be sure, Madame, with the greatest pleasure."

Some distance away in the corner of the gallery, in the frame of the door which led into the Salon of the Agriculturists, faces which expressed utter amazement were staring at him. Then, when the spectators saw the newcomer cutting without any hesitation, they quickly came forward.

An old poet jocosely slapped the neophyte on the shoulder.

"Bravo, young man!" he whispered in his ear.

The others gazed at him with curiosity. Even the husband appeared to be surprised. As for the young man, he was astonished at the consideration which they suddenly seemed to show toward him; above all, he failed to comprehend the marked attentions, the manifest favor, and the species of mute gratitude which the mistress of the house bestowed on him.

It appears, however, that he eventually found out.

At what moment, in what place, was the revelation made to him? Nobody could tell; but, when he again presented himself at the reception, he had a preoccupied air, almost a shamefaced look, and he cast around him a glance of uneasiness.

The bell rang for tea. The manservant appeared. Madame Anserre, with a smile, seized the dish, casting a look about her for her young friend; but he had fled so precipitately that no trace of him could be seen any longer. Then, she went looking everywhere for him, and ere long she discovered him in the Salon of the Agriculturists. With his arm locked in that of the husband, he was consulting that gentleman as to the means employed for destroying phylloxera.

"My dear Monsieur," she said to him, "will you be so kind as to cut this cake for me?"

He reddened to the roots of his hair, and hanging down his head, stammered out some excuses. Thereupon M. Anserre took pity on him, and turning toward his wife, said:

"My dear, you might have the goodness not to disturb us. We are talking about agriculture. So get your cake cut by Baptiste."

And since that day nobody has ever cut Madame Anserre's cake.

CHÂLI

Admiral de la Vallee, who seemed to be half asleep in his armchair, said in a voice which sounded like an old woman's:

"I had a very singular little love adventure once; would you like to hear it?"

He spoke from the depths of his great chair, with that everlasting dry, wrinkled smile on his lips, that smile *à la Voltaire*, which made people take him for a terrible skeptic.

I

I was thirty years of age and first lieutenant in the navy, when I was intrusted with an astronomical expedition to Central India. The English Government provided me with all the necessary means for carrying out my enterprise, and I was soon busied with a few followers in that strange, surprising, prodigious country.

It would take me ten volumes to relate that journey. I went through wonderfully magnificent regions, and was received by strangely handsome princes, who entertained me with incredible magnificence. For two months it seemed to me as if I were walking in a poem, and that I was going about in a fairy kingdom, on the back of imaginary elephants. In the midst of wild forests I discovered extraordinary ruins, delicate and chiseled like jewels, fine as lace and enormous as mountains, those fabulous, divine monuments which are so graceful that one falls in love with their form like one falls in love with a woman, and that one feels a physical and sensual pleasure in looking at them. As Victor Hugo says, "*Whilst wide-awake, I was walking in a dream*."

Towards the end of my journey I reached Ganhard, which was formerly one of the most prosperous towns in Central India, but is now much decayed and governed by a wealthy, arbitrary, violent, generous, and cruel prince. His name is Rajah Maddan, a true Oriental potentate, delicate and barbarous, affable and sanguinary, combining feminine grace with pitiless ferocity.

The city lies at the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a little lake which is surrounded by pagodas, which bathe their walls in the water.

At a distance the city looks like a white spot which grows larger as one approaches it, and by degrees one discovers the domes and spires, all the slender and graceful summits of Indian monuments.

At about an hour’s distance from the gates, I met a superbly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by a guard of honor which the sovereign had sent me, and I was conducted to the palace with great ceremony.

I should have liked to have taken the time to put on my gala uniform, but royal impatience would not admit of it. He was anxious to make my acquaintance, to know what he might expect from me, and then he would see.

I was introduced into a great hall surrounded by galleries, in the midst of bronze-colored soldiers in splendid uniforms, while all about were standing men dressed in striking robes studded with precious stones.

I saw a shining mass, a kind of sitting sun reposing on a bench like our garden benches, without a back; it was the rajah who was waiting for me, motionless, in a robe of the purest canary color. He had some ten or fifteen million francs worth of diamonds on him, and by itself, on his forehead glistened the famous star of Delhi, which has always belonged to the illustrious dynasty of the Pariharas of Mundore, from whom my host was descended.

He was a man of about five-and-twenty, who seemed to have some negro blood in his veins, although he belonged to the purest Hindoo race. He had large, almost motionless, rather vague eyes, fat lips, a curly beard, low forehead, and dazzling sharp white teeth, which he frequently showed with a mechanical smile. He got up and gave me his hand in the English fashion, and then made me sit down beside him on a bench which was so high that my feet hardly touched the ground, and I was very uncomfortable on it.

He immediately proposed a tiger hunt for the next day; war and hunting were his chief occupations, and he could hardly understand how one could care for anything else. He was evidently fully persuaded that I had only come all that distance to amuse him a little, and to be the companion of his pleasures.

As I stood greatly in need of his assistance, I tried to flatter his tastes, and he was so pleased with me that he immediately wished to show me how his trained boxers fought, and he led the way into a kind of arena situated within the palace.

At his command two naked men appeared, their hands covered with steel claws. They immediately began to attack each other, trying to strike one another with this sharp weapon, which left long cuts, from which the blood flowed freely down their dark skin.

It lasted for a long time, till their bodies were a mass of wounds, and the combatants were tearing each other's flesh with this sort of rake made of pointed blades. One of them had his jaw smashed, while the ear of the other was split into three pieces.

The prince looked on with ferocious pleasure, uttered grunts of delight, and imitated all their movements with careless gestures, crying out constantly:

"Strike, strike hard!"

One fell down unconscious, and had to be carried out of the arena, covered with blood, while the rajah uttered a sigh of regret because it was over so soon.

He turned to me to know my opinion; I was disgusted, but I congratulated him loudly. He then gave orders that I was to be conducted to Couch-Mahal (the palace of pleasure), where I was to be lodged.

This bijou palace was situated at the extremity of the royal park, and one of its walls was built into the sacred lake of Vihara. It was square, with three rows of galleries with colonnades of most beautiful workmanship. At each angle there were light, lofty or low towers, standing either singly or in pairs: no two were alike, and they looked like flowers growing out of that graceful plant of Oriental architecture. All were surmounted by fantastic roofs, like coquettish ladies' caps.

In the middle of the edifice a large dome raised its round cupola like a large white woman's breast, beside a beautiful clock-tower.

The whole building was covered with sculpture from top to bottom, with those exquisite arabesques which delight the eye, of motionless processions of delicate figures whose attitudes and gestures in stone told the story of Indian manners and customs.

The rooms were lighted by windows with dentelated arches, looking on to the gardens. On the marble floor were designs of graceful bouquets in onyx, lapis-lazuli, and agate.

I had scarcely had time to finish my toilet when Haribada, a court dignitary who was specially charged to communicate between the prince and me, announced his sovereign's visit.

The saffron-colored rajah appeared, again shook hands with me, and began to tell me a thousand different things, constantly asking me for my opinion, which I had great difficulty in giving him. Then he wished to show me the ruins of the former palace at the other extremity of the gardens.

It was a real forest of stones inhabited by a large tribe of apes. On our approach the males began to run along the walls, making the most hideous faces at us, while the females ran away, showing their bare rumps, and carrying off their young in their arms. The rajah shouted with laughter and pinched my arm to draw my attention, and to testify his own delight, and sat down in the midst of the ruins, while around us, squatting on the top of the walls, perching on every eminence, a number of animals with white whiskers put out their tongues and shook their fists at us.

When he had seen enough of this, the yellow rajah rose and began to walk sedately on, keeping me always at his side, happy at having shown me such things on the very day of my arrival, and reminding me that a grand tiger-hunt was to take place the next day, in my honor.

I was present at it, at a second, a third, at ten, twenty in succession. We hunted all the animals which the country produces in turn; the panther, the bear, elephant, antelope, the hippopotamus and the crocodile — what do I know of, half the beasts in creation I should say. I was disgusted at seeing so much blood flow, and tired of this monotonous pleasure.

At length the prince's ardor abated and, at my urgent request, he left me a little leisure for work, and contented himself by loading me with costly presents. He sent me jewels, magnificent stuffs, and well-broken animals of all sorts, which Haribada presented to me with apparently as grave respect as if I had been the sun himself although he heartily despised me at the bottom of his heart.

Every day a procession of servants brought me in covered dishes, a portion of each course that was served at the royal table; every day he seemed to take an extreme pleasure in getting up some new entertainment for me — dances by the Bayaderes, jugglers, reviews of the troops, and I was obliged to pretend to be most delighted with it, so as not to hurt his feelings when he wished to show me his wonderful country in all its charm and all its splendor.

As soon as I was left alone for a few moments I either worked or went to see the monkeys, whose company pleased me a great deal better than that of their royal master.

One evening, however, on coming back from a walk, I found Haribada outside the gate of my palace. He told me in mysterious tones that a gift from the king was waiting for me in my room, and he said that his master begged me to excuse him for not having sooner thought of offering me that of which I had been deprived for such a long time.

After these obscure remarks the ambassador bowed and withdrew.

When I went in I saw six little girls standing against the wall motionless, side-by-side, like smelts on a skewer. The eldest was perhaps ten and the youngest eight years old. For the first moment I could not understand why this girls' school had taken up its abode in my rooms; then, however, I divined the prince's delicate attention: he had made me a present of a harem, and had chosen it very young from an excess of generosity. There, the more unripe the fruit is, in the higher estimation it is held.

For some time I remained confused and embarrassed, ashamed in the presence of these children, who looked at me with great grave eyes which seemed already to divine what I should want of them.

I did not know what to say to them; I felt inclined to send them back; but one cannot return the presents of a prince; it would have been a mortal insult. I was obliged, therefore, to keep them, and to install this troop of children in my rooms.

They stood motionless, looking at me, waiting for my orders, trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. Confound such a present! How dreadfully it was in my way. At last, thinking that I must be looking rather ridiculous, I asked the eldest her name.

"Châli," she replied.

This little creature, with her beautiful skin, which was slightly yellow, like old ivory, was a marvel, a perfect statue, with her face and its long and severe lines.

I then asked, in order to see what she would reply, and also, perhaps, to embarrass her:

"What have you come here for?"

She replied, in her soft, harmonious voice:

"I have come to be altogether at my lord's disposal, and to do whatever he wishes."

She was evidently quite resigned.

I put the same question to the youngest, who answered immediately in her shrill voice:

"I am here to do whatever you ask me, my master."

This one was like a little mouse, and was very taking, just as they all were, so I took her in my arms and kissed her. The others made a movement to go away, thinking, no doubt, that I had made my choice; but I ordered them to stay, and sitting down in the Indian fashion, I made them all sit round me, and began to tell them fairy-tales, for I spoke their language tolerably well.

They listened very attentively, and trembled, wringing their hands in agony. Poor little things, they were not thinking any longer of the reason why they were sent to me.

When I had finished my story, I called Latchmân, my confidential servant, and made him bring sweetmeats and cakes, of which they ate enough to make themselves ill; then, as I began to find the adventure rather funny, I organized games to amuse my wives.

One of these diversions had an enormous success. I made a bridge of my legs, and the six children ran underneath, the smallest beginning and the tallest always knocking against them a little, because she did not stoop enough. It made them shout with laughter, and these young voices sounding beneath the low vaults of my sumptuous palace, seemed to wake it up and to people it with childlike gaiety, filling it with life.

Next I took great interest in seeing to the sleeping apartments of my innocent concubines, and in the end I saw them safely locked up under the surveillance of four female servants, whom the prince had sent me at the same time in order to take care of my sultanas.

For a week I took the greatest pleasure in acting the papa towards these living dolls. We had capital games of *hide-and-seek*, *puss-in-the-corner*, &c., which gave them the greatest pleasure, for every day I taught them a new game, to their intense delight.

My house now seemed to be one large class, and my little friends, dressed in beautiful silk stuffs, and in materials embroidered with gold and silver, ran up and down the long galleries and the quiet rooms like little human animals.

At last, one evening, without my knowing exactly how it happened, the oldest of them, the one called Châli, and who looked so like an ivory statue, became my wife.

She was an adorable little creature, timid and gentle, who soon got to love me ardently, with some degree of shame, with hesitation as if afraid of European justice, with reserve and scruples, and yet with passionate tenderness. I cherished her as if I had been her father.

I beg your pardon, ladies; I am going rather too far.

The others continued to play in the palace, like a lot of happy kittens, and Châli never left me except when I went to the prince.

We passed delicious hours together in the ruins of the old castle, among the monkeys, who had become our friends.

She used to lie on my knees, and remain there, turning all sorts of things over in her little sphinx's head, or perhaps not thinking of anything, retaining that beautiful, charming, hereditary pose of that noble and dreamy people, the hieratic pose of the sacred statues.

In a large brass dish I had brought provisions, cakes, fruits. The apes came nearer and nearer, followed by their young ones, who were more timid; at last they sat down round us in a circle, without daring to come any nearer, waiting for me to distribute my delicacies. Then, almost invariably, a male more daring than the rest would come to me with outstretched hand, like a beggar, and I would give him something, which he would take to his wife. All the others immediately began to utter furious cries, cries of rage and jealousy; and I could not make the terrible racket cease except by throwing each one his share.

As I was very comfortable in the ruins I had my instruments brought there, so that I might be able to work. As soon, however, as they saw the copper fittings on my scientific instruments, the monkeys, no doubt taking them for some deadly engines, fled on all sides, uttering the most piercing cries.

I often also spent my evenings with Châli on one of the external galleries that looked on to the lake of Vihara. Without speaking we looked at the bright moon gliding over the sky and throwing a mantle of trembling silver over the water, and down there, on the further shore, the row of small pagodas like elegant mushrooms with their stalks in the water. Taking the thoughtful head of my little mistress between my hands, I printed a long, soft kiss on her polished brow, on her great eyes, which were full of the secret of that ancient and fabulous land, and on her calm lips which opened to my caress. I felt a confused, powerful, above all, a poetical, sensation, the sensation that I possessed a whole race in this little girl, that mysterious race from which all the others seem to have taken their origin.

The prince, however, continued to load me with presents. One day he sent me a very unexpected object, which excited a passionate admiration in Châli. It was merely one of those cardboard boxes covered with shells stuck on outside, and they can be bought at any European seaside resort for a penny or two. But there it was a jewel beyond price, and no doubt was the first that had found its way into the kingdom. I put it on a table and left it there, wondering at the value which was set upon this trumpery article out of a bazaar.

But Châli never got tired of looking at it, of admiring it ecstatically. From time to time she would say to me, “May I touch it?” And when I had given her permission she raised the lid, closed it again with the greatest precaution, touched the shells very gently, and the contact seemed to give her real physical pleasure.

However, I had finished my work, and it was time for me to return. I was a long time in making up my mind, kept back by my tenderness for my little friend, but at last I was obliged to fix the day of my departure.

The prince got up fresh hunting excursions and fresh wrestling matches, and after a fortnight of these pleasures I declared that I could stay no longer, and he gave me my liberty.

My farewell from Châli was heartrending. She wept, lying beside me, with her head on my breast, shaken with sobs. I did not know how to console her; my kisses were no good.

All at once an idea struck me, and getting up I went and got the shell-box, and putting it into her hands, I said, “That is for you; it is yours.”

Then I saw her smile at first. Her whole face was lighted up with internal joy, with that profound joy when impossible dreams are suddenly realized, and she embraced me ardently.

All the same, she wept bitterly when I bade her a last farewell.

I gave paternal kisses and cakes to all the rest of my wives, and then I started.

II

Two years had passed when my duties again called me to Bombay, and, because I knew the country and the language well, I was left there to undertake another mission.

I finished what I had to do as quickly as possible, and as I had a considerable amount of spare time on my hands I determined to go and see my friend the King of Ganhard and my dear little Châli once more, though I expected to find her much changed.

The rajah received me with every demonstration of pleasure, and hardly left me for a moment during the first day of my visit. At night, however, when I was alone, I sent for Haribada, and after several misleading questions I said to him:

"Do you know what has become of little Châli, whom the rajah gave me?"

He immediately assumed a sad and troubled look, and said, in evident embarrassment:

"We had better not speak of her."

"Why? She was a dear little woman."

"She turned out badly, Sir."

"What — Châli? What has become of her? Where is she?"

"I mean to say that she came to a bad end."

"A bad end! Is she dead?"

"Yes. She committed a very dreadful action."

I was very much distressed. I felt my heart beat, and my breast was oppressed with grief, and insisted on knowing what she had done and what had happened to her.

The man became more and more embarrassed, and murmured, "You had better not ask about it."

"But I want to know."

"She stole— "

"Who — Châli? What did she steal?"

"Something that belonged to you."

"To me? What do you mean?"

"The day you left she stole that little box which the prince had given you; it was found in her hands."

"What box are you talking about?"

"The box covered with shells."

"But I gave it to her."

The Indian looked at me with stupefaction, then replied: “Well, she declared with the most sacred oaths that you had given it to her, but nobody could believe that you could have given a king’s present to a slave, and so the rajah had her punished.”

“How was she punished? What was done to her?”

“She was tied up in a sack, and thrown into the lake from this window, from the window of the room in which we are, where she had committed the theft.”

I felt the most terrible grief that I ever experienced, and I made a sign to Haribada to go away, so that he might not see my tears; and I spent the night on the gallery that looked on to the lake, on the gallery where I had so often held the poor child on my knees.

I pictured to myself her pretty little body lying decomposed in a sack in the dark waters beneath me, which we had so often looked at together formerly.

The next day I left again, in spite of the rajah’s entreaties and evident vexation; and I now still feel as if I had never loved any woman but Châli.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The small engine attached to the Neuilly steam-tram whistled as it passed the Porte Maillot to warn all obstacles to get out of its way and puffed like a person out of breath as it sent out its steam, its pistons moving rapidly with a noise as of iron legs running. The train was going along the broad avenue that ends at the Seine. The sultry heat at the close of a July day lay over the whole city, and from the road, although there was not a breath of wind stirring, there arose a white, chalky, suffocating, warm dust, which adhered to the moist skin, filled the eyes and got into the lungs. People stood in the doorways of their houses to try and get a breath of air.

The windows of the steam-tram were open and the curtains fluttered in the wind. There were very few passengers inside, because on warm days people preferred the outside or the platforms. They consisted of stout women in peculiar costumes, of those shopkeepers' wives from the suburbs, who made up for the distinguished looks which they did not possess by ill-assumed dignity; of men tired from office-work, with yellow faces, stooped shoulders, and with one shoulder higher than the other, in consequence of, their long hours of writing at a desk. Their uneasy and melancholy faces also spoke of domestic troubles, of constant want of money, disappointed hopes, for they all belonged to the army of poor, threadbare devils who vegetate economically in cheap, plastered houses with a tiny piece of neglected garden on the outskirts of Paris, in the midst of those fields where night soil is deposited.

A short, corpulent man, with a puffy face, dressed all in black and wearing a decoration in his buttonhole, was talking to a tall, thin man, dressed in a dirty, white linen suit, the coat all unbuttoned, with a white Panama hat on his head. The former spoke so slowly and hesitatingly that it occasionally almost seemed as if he stammered; he was Monsieur Caravan, chief clerk in the Admiralty. The other, who had formerly been surgeon on board a merchant ship, had set up in practice in Courbevoie, where he applied the vague remnants of medical knowledge which he had retained after an adventurous life, to the wretched population of that district. His name was Chenet, and strange rumors were current as to his morality.

Monsieur Caravan had always led the normal life of a man in a Government office. For the last thirty years he had invariably gone the same way to his office every morning, and had met the same men going to business at the same time, and nearly on the same spot, and he returned home every evening by the same road, and again met the same faces which he had seen growing old. Every morning, after buying his penny paper at the corner of the Faubourg Saint Honore, he bought two rolls, and then went to his office, like a culprit who is giving himself up to justice, and got to his desk as quickly as possible, always feeling uneasy; as though he were expecting a rebuke for some neglect of duty of which he might have been guilty.

Nothing had ever occurred to change the monotonous order of his existence, for no event affected him except the work of his office, perquisites, gratuities, and promotion. He never spoke of anything but of his duties, either at the office, or at home — he had married the portionless daughter of one of his colleagues. His mind, which was in a state of atrophy from his depressing daily work, had no other thoughts, hopes or dreams than such as related to the office, and there was a constant source of bitterness that spoilt every pleasure that he might have had, and that was the employment of so many naval officials, tinsmiths, as they were called because of their silver-lace as first-class clerks; and every evening at dinner he discussed the matter hotly with his wife, who shared his angry feelings, and proved to their own satisfaction that it was in every way unjust to give places in Paris to men who ought properly to have been employed in the navy.

He was old now, and had scarcely noticed how his life was passing, for school had merely been exchanged for the office without any intermediate transition, and the ushers, at whom he had formerly trembled, were replaced by his chiefs, of whom he was terribly afraid. When he had to go into the rooms of these official despots, it made him tremble from head to foot, and that constant fear had given him a very awkward manner in their presence, a humble demeanor, and a kind of nervous stammering.

He knew nothing more about Paris than a blind man might know who was led to the same spot by his dog every day; and if he read the account of any uncommon events or scandals in his penny paper, they appeared to him like fantastic tales, which some pressman had made up out of his own head, in order to amuse the inferior employees. He did not read the political news, which his paper frequently altered as the cause which subsidized it might require, for he was not fond of innovations, and when he went through the Avenue of the Champs-Elysees every evening, he looked at the surging crowd of pedestrians, and at the stream of carriages, as a traveller might who has lost his way in a strange country.

As he had completed his thirty years of obligatory service that year, on the first of January, he had had the cross of the Legion of Honor bestowed upon him, which, in the semi-military public offices, is a recompense for the miserable slavery — the official phrase is, loyal services — of unfortunate convicts who are riveted to their desk. That unexpected dignity gave him a high and new idea of his own capacities, and altogether changed him. He immediately left off wearing light trousers and fancy waistcoats, and wore black trousers and long coats, on which his ribbon, which was very broad, showed off better. He got shaved every morning, manicured his nails more carefully, changed his linen every two days, from a legitimate sense of what was proper, and out of respect for the national Order, of which he formed a part, and from that day he was another Caravan, scrupulously clean, majestic and condescending.

At home, he said, “my cross,” at every moment, and he had become so proud of it, that he could not bear to see men wearing any other ribbon in their button-holes. He became especially angry on seeing strange orders: “Which nobody ought to be allowed to wear in France,” and he bore Chenet a particular grudge, as he met him on a tram-car every evening, wearing a decoration of one kind or another, white, blue, orange, or green.

The conversation of the two men, from the Arc de Triomphe to Neuilly, was always the same, and on that day they discussed, first of all, various local abuses which disgusted them both, and the Mayor of Neuilly received his full share of their censure. Then, as invariably happens in the company of medical man Caravan began to enlarge on the chapter of illness, as in that manner, he hoped to obtain a little gratuitous advice, if he was careful not to show his hand. His mother had been causing him no little anxiety for some time; she had frequent and prolonged fainting fits, and, although she was ninety, she would not take care of herself.

Caravan grew quite tender-hearted when he mentioned her great age, and more than once asked Doctor Chenet, emphasizing the word doctor — although he was not fully qualified, being only an Offcier de Sante — whether he had often met anyone as old as that. And he rubbed his hands with pleasure; not, perhaps, that he cared very much about seeing the good woman last forever here on earth, but because the long duration of his mother's life was, as it were an earnest of old age for himself, and he continued:

"In my family, we last long, and I am sure that, unless I meet with an accident, I shall not die until I am very old."

The doctor looked at him with pity, and glanced for a moment at his neighbor's red face, his short, thick neck, his "corporation," as Chenet called it to himself, his two fat, flabby legs, and the apoplectic rotundity of the old official; and raising the white Panama hat from his head, he said with a snigger:

"I am not so sure of that, old fellow; your mother is as tough as nails, and I should say that your life is not a very good one."

This rather upset Caravan, who did not speak again until the tram put them down at their destination, where the two friends got out, and Chenet asked his friend to have a glass of vermouth at the Cafe du Globe, opposite, which both of them were in the habit of frequenting. The proprietor, who was a friend of theirs, held out to them two fingers, which they shook across the bottles of the counter; and then they joined three of their friends, who were playing dominoes, and who had been there since midday. They exchanged cordial greetings, with the usual question: "Anything new?" And then the three players continued their game, and held out their hands without looking up, when the others wished them "Good-night," and then they both went home to dinner.

Caravan lived in a small two-story house in Courbevaie, near where the roads meet; the ground floor was occupied by a hair-dresser. Two bed rooms, a dining-room and a kitchen, formed the whole of their apartments, and Madame Caravan spent nearly her whole time in cleaning them up, while her daughter, Marie-Louise, who was twelve, and her son, Phillip-Auguste, were running about with all the little, dirty, mischievous brats of the neighborhood, and playing in the gutter.

Caravan had installed his mother, whose avarice was notorious in the neighborhood, and who was terribly thin, in the room above them. She was always cross, and she never passed a day without quarreling and flying into furious tempers. She would apostrophize the neighbors, who were standing at their own doors, the coster-mongers, the street-sweepers, and the street-boys, in the most violent language; and the latter, to have their revenge, used to follow her at a distance when she went out, and call out rude things after her.

A little servant from Normandy, who was incredibly giddy and thoughtless, performed the household work, and slept on the second floor in the same room as the old woman, for fear of anything happening to her in the night.

When Caravan got in, his wife, who suffered from a chronic passion for cleaning, was polishing up the mahogany chairs that were scattered about the room with a piece of flannel. She always wore cotton gloves, and adorned her head with a cap ornamented with many colored ribbons, which was always tilted over one ear; and whenever anyone caught her polishing, sweeping, or washing, she used to say:

“I am not rich; everything is very simple in my house, but cleanliness is my luxury, and that is worth quite as much as any other.”

As she was gifted with sound, obstinate, practical common sense, she led her husband in everything. Every evening during dinner, and afterwards when they were in their room, they talked over the business of the office for a long time, and although she was twenty years younger than he was, he confided everything to her as if she took the lead, and followed her advice in every matter.

She had never been pretty, and now she had grown ugly; in addition to that, she was short and thin, while her careless and tasteless way of dressing herself concealed her few small feminine attractions, which might have been brought out if she had possessed any taste in dress. Her skirts were always awry, and she frequently scratched herself, no matter on what part of her person, totally indifferent as to who might see her, and so persistently, that anyone who saw her might think that she was suffering from something like the itch. The only adornments that she allowed herself were silk ribbons, which she had in great profusion, and of various colors mixed together, in the pretentious caps which she wore at home.

As soon as she saw her husband she rose and said, as she kissed his whiskers:

“Did you remember Potin, my dear?”

He fell into a chair, in consternation, for that was the fourth time on which he had forgotten a commission that he had promised to do for her.

"It is a fatality," he said; "it is no good for me to think of it all day long, for I am sure to forget it in the evening."

But as he seemed really so very sorry, she merely said, quietly:

"You will think of it to-morrow, I dare say. Anything new at the office?"

"Yes, a great piece of news; another tinsmith has been appointed second chief clerk." She became very serious, and said:

"So he succeeds Ramon; this was the very post that I wanted you to have. And what about Ramon?"

"He retires on his pension."

She became furious, her cap slid down on her shoulder, and she continued:

"There is nothing more to be done in that shop now. And what is the name of the new commissioner?"

"Bonassot."

She took up the Naval Year Book, which she always kept close at hand, and looked him up.

"'Bonassot-Toulon. Born in 1851. Student Commissioner in 1871. Sub-Commissioner in 1875.' Has he been to sea?" she continued. At that question Caravan's looks cleared up, and he laughed until his sides shook.

"As much as Balin — as much as Baffin, his chief." And he added an old office joke, and laughed more than ever:

"It would not even do to send them by water to inspect the Point-du-Jour, for they would be sick on the penny steamboats on the Seine."

But she remained as serious as if she had not heard him, and then she said in a low voice, as she scratched her chin:

"If we only had a Deputy to fall back upon. When the Chamber hears everything that is going on at the Admiralty, the Minister will be turned out — — "

She was interrupted by a terrible noise on the stairs. Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who had just come in from the gutter, were slapping each other all the way upstairs. Their mother rushed at them furiously, and taking each of them by an arm she dragged them into the room, shaking them vigorously; but as soon as they saw their father, they rushed up to him, and he kissed them affectionately, and taking one of them on each knee, began to talk to them.

Philippe-Auguste was an ugly, ill-kempt little brat, dirty from head to foot, with the face of an idiot, and Marie-Louise was already like her mother — spoke like her, repeated her words, and even imitated her movements. She also asked him whether there was anything fresh at the office, and he replied merrily:

"Your friend, Ramon, who comes and dines here every Sunday, is going to leave us, little one. There is a new second head-clerk."

She looked at her father, and with a precocious child's pity, she said:

"Another man has been put over your head again."

He stopped laughing, and did not reply, and in order to create a diversion, he said, addressing his wife, who was cleaning the windows:

"How is mamma, upstairs?"

Madame Caravan left off rubbing, turned round pulled her cap up, as it had fallen quite on to her back, and said with trembling lips:

"Ah! yes; let us talk about your mother, for she has made a pretty scene. Just imagine: a short time ago Madame Lebaudin, the hairdresser's wife, came upstairs to borrow a packet of starch of me, and, as I was not at home, your mother chased her out as though she were a beggar; but I gave it to the old woman. She pretended not to hear, as she always does when one tells her unpleasant truths, but she is no more deaf than I am, as you know. It is all a sham, and the proof of it is, that she went up to her own room immediately, without saying a word."

Caravan, embarrassed, did not utter a word, and at that moment the little servant came in to announce dinner. In order to let his mother know, he took a broom-handle, which always stood in a corner, and rapped loudly on the ceiling three times, and then they went into the dining-room. Madame Caravan, junior, helped the soup, and waited for the old woman, but she did not come, and as the soup was getting cold, they began to eat slowly, and when their plates were empty, they waited again, and Madame Caravan, who was furious, attacked her husband:

"She does it on purpose, you know that as well as I do. But you always uphold her."

Not knowing which side to take, he sent Marie-Louise to fetch her grandmother, and he sat motionless, with his eyes cast down, while his wife tapped her glass angrily with her knife. In about a minute, the door flew open suddenly, and the child came in again, out of breath and very pale, and said hurriedly:

“Grandmamma has fallen on the floor.”

Caravan jumped up, threw his table-napkin down, and rushed upstairs, while his wife, who thought it was some trick of her mother-in-law’s, followed more slowly, shrugging her shoulders, as if to express her doubt. When they got upstairs, however, they found the old woman lying at full length in the middle of the room; and when they turned her over, they saw that she was insensible and motionless, while her skin looked more wrinkled and yellow than usual, her eyes were closed, her teeth clenched, and her thin body was stiff.

Caravan knelt down by her, and began to moan.

“My poor mother! my poor mother!” he said. But the other Madame Caravan said:

“Bah! She has only fainted again, that is all, and she has done it to prevent us from dining comfortably, you may be sure of that.”

They put her on the bed, undressed her completely, and Caravan, his wife, and the servant began to rub her; but, in spite of their efforts, she did not recover consciousness, so they sent Rosalie, the servant, to fetch Doctor Chenet. He lived a long way off, on the quay, going towards Suresnes, and so it was a considerable time before he arrived. He came at last, however, and, after having looked at the old woman, felt her pulse, and listened for a heart beat, he said: “It is all over.”

Caravan threw himself on the body, sobbing violently; he kissed his mother’s rigid face, and wept so that great tears fell on the dead woman’s face like drops of water, and, naturally, Madame Caravan, junior, showed a decorous amount of grief, and uttered feeble moans as she stood behind her husband, while she rubbed her eyes vigorously.

But, suddenly, Caravan raised himself up, with his thin hair in disorder, and, looking very ugly in his grief, said:

“But — are you sure, doctor? Are you quite sure?”

The doctor stooped over the body, and, handling it with professional dexterity, as a shopkeeper might do, when showing off his goods, he said:

“See, my dear friend, look at her eye.”

He raised the eyelid, and the old woman’s eye appeared altogether unaltered, unless, perhaps, the pupil was rather larger, and Caravan felt a severe shock at the sight. Then Monsieur Chenet took her thin arm, forced the fingers open, and said, angrily, as if he had been contradicted:

"Just look at her hand; I never make a mistake, you may be quite sure of that."

Caravan fell on the bed, and almost bellowed, while his wife, still whimpering, did what was necessary.

She brought the night-table, on which she spread a towel and placed four wax candles on it, which she lighted; then she took a sprig of box, which was hanging over the chimney glass, and put it between the four candles, in a plate, which she filled with clean water, as she had no holy water. But, after a moment's rapid reflection, she threw a pinch of salt into the water, no doubt thinking she was performing some sort of act of consecration by doing that, and when she had finished, she remained standing motionless, and the doctor, who had been helping her, whispered to her:

"We must take Caravan away."

She nodded assent, and, going up to her husband, who was still on his knees, sobbing, she raised him up by one arm, while Chenet took him by the other.

They put him into a chair, and his wife kissed his forehead, and then began to lecture him. Chenet enforced her words and preached firmness, courage, and resignation — the very things which are always wanting in such overwhelming misfortunes — and then both of them took him by the arms again and led him out.

He was crying like a great child, with convulsive sobs; his arms hanging down, and his legs weak, and he went downstairs without knowing what he was doing, and moving his feet mechanically. They put him into the chair which he always occupied at dinner, in front of his empty soup plate. And there he sat, without moving, his eyes fixed on his glass, and so stupefied with grief, that he could not even think.

In a corner, Madame Caravan was talking with the doctor and asking what the necessary formalities were, as she wanted to obtain practical information. At last, Monsieur Chenet, who appeared to be waiting for something, took up his hat and prepared to go, saying that he had not dined yet; whereupon she exclaimed:

"What! you have not dined? Why, stay here, doctor; don't go. You shall have whatever we have, for, of course, you understand that we do not fare sumptuously." He made excuses and refused, but she persisted, and said: "You really must stay; at times like this, people like to have friends near them, and, besides that, perhaps you will be able to persuade my husband to take some nourishment; he must keep up his strength."

The doctor bowed, and, putting down his hat, he said:

"In that case, I will accept your invitation, madame."

She gave Rosalie, who seemed to have lost her head, some orders, and then sat down, "to pretend to eat," as she said, "to keep the doctor company."

The soup was brought in again, and Monsieur Chenet took two helpings. Then there came a dish of tripe, which exhaled a smell of onions, and which Madame Caravan made up her mind to taste.

"It is excellent," the doctor said, at which she smiled, and, turning to her husband, she said:

"Do take a little, my poor Alfred, only just to put something in your stomach. Remember that you have got to pass the night watching by her!"

He held out his plate, docilely, just as he would have gone to bed, if he had been told to, obeying her in everything, without resistance and without reflection, and he ate; the doctor helped himself three times, while Madame Caravan, from time to time, fished out a large piece at the end of her fork, and swallowed it with a sort of studied indifference.

When a salad bowl full of macaroni was brought in, the doctor said:

"By Jove! That is what I am very fond of." And this time, Madame Caravan helped everybody. She even filled the saucers that were being scraped by the children, who, being left to themselves, had been drinking wine without any water, and were now kicking each other under the table.

Chenet remembered that Rossini, the composer, had been very fond of that Italian dish, and suddenly he exclaimed:

"Why! that rhymes, and one could begin some lines like this:

The Maestro Rossini
Was fond of macaroni."

Nobody listened to him, however. Madame Caravan, who had suddenly grown thoughtful, was thinking of all the probable consequences of the event, while her husband made bread pellets, which he put on the tablecloth, and looked at with a fixed, idiotic stare. As he was devoured by thirst, he was continually raising his glass full of wine to his lips, and the consequence was that his mind, which had been upset by the shock and grief, seemed to become vague, and his ideas danced about as digestion commenced.

The doctor, who, meanwhile, had been drinking away steadily, was getting visibly drunk, and Madame Caravan herself felt the reaction which follows all nervous shocks, and was agitated and excited, and, although she had drunk nothing but water, her head felt rather confused.

Presently, Chenet began to relate stories of death that appeared comical to him. For in that suburb of Paris, that is full of people from the provinces, one finds that indifference towards death which all peasants show, were it even their own father or mother; that want of respect, that unconscious brutality which is so common in the country, and so rare in Paris, and he said:

"Why, I was sent for last week to the Rue du Puteaux, and when I went, I found the patient dead and the whole family calmly sitting beside the bed finishing a bottle of aniseed cordial, which had been bought the night before to satisfy the dying man's fancy."

But Madame Caravan was not listening; she was continually thinking of the inheritance, and Caravan was incapable of understanding anything further.

Coffee was presently served, and it had been made very strong to give them courage. As every cup was well flavored with cognac, it made all their faces red, and confused their ideas still more. To make matters still worse, Chenet suddenly seized the brandy bottle and poured out "a drop for each of them just to wash their mouths out with," as he termed it, and then, without speaking any more, overcome in spite of themselves, by that feeling of animal comfort which alcohol affords after dinner, they slowly sipped the sweet cognac, which formed a yellowish syrup at the bottom of their cups.

The children had fallen asleep, and Rosalie carried them off to bed. Caravan, mechanically obeying that wish to forget oneself which possesses all unhappy persons, helped himself to brandy again several times, and his dull eyes grew bright. At last the doctor rose to go, and seizing his friend's arm, he said:

"Come with me; a little fresh air will do you good. When one is in trouble, one must not remain in one spot."

The other obeyed mechanically, put on his hat, took his stick, and went out, and both of them walked arm-in-arm towards the Seine, in the starlight night.

The air was warm and sweet, for all the gardens in the neighborhood were full of flowers at this season of the year, and their fragrance, which is scarcely perceptible during the day, seemed to awaken at the approach of night, and mingled with the light breezes which blew upon them in the darkness.

The broad avenue with its two rows of gas lamps, that extended as far as the Arc de Triomphe, was deserted and silent, but there was the distant roar of Paris, which seemed to have a reddish vapor hanging over it. It was a kind of continual rumbling, which was at times answered by the whistle of a train in the distance, travelling at full speed to the ocean, through the provinces.

The fresh air on the faces of the two men rather overcame them at first, made the doctor lose his equilibrium a little, and increased Caravan's giddiness, from which he had suffered since dinner. He walked as if he were in a dream; his thoughts were paralyzed, although he felt no great grief, for he was in a state of mental torpor that prevented him from suffering, and he even felt a sense of relief which was increased by the mildness of the night.

When they reached the bridge, they turned to the right, and got the fresh breeze from the river, which rolled along, calm and melancholy, bordered by tall poplar trees, while the stars looked as if they were floating on the water and were-moving with the current. A slight white mist that floated over the opposite banks, filled their lungs with a sensation of cold, and Caravan stopped suddenly, for he was struck by that smell from the water which brought back old memories to his mind. For, in his mind, he suddenly saw his mother again, in Picardy, as he had seen her years before, kneeling in front of their door, and washing the heaps of linen at her side in the stream that ran through their garden. He almost fancied that he could hear the sound of the wooden paddle with which she beat the linen in the calm silence of the country, and her voice, as she called out to him: "Alfred, bring me some soap." And he smelled that odor of running water, of the mist rising from the wet ground, that marshy smell, which he should never forget, and which came back to him on this very evening on which his mother had died.

He stopped, seized with a feeling of despair. A sudden flash seemed to reveal to him the extent of his calamity, and that breath from the river plunged him into an abyss of hopeless grief. His life seemed cut in half, his youth disappeared, swallowed up by that death. All the former days were over and done with, all the recollections of his youth had been swept away; for the future, there would be nobody to talk to him of what had happened in days gone by, of the people he had known of old, of his own part of the country, and of his past life; that was a part of his existence which existed no longer, and the rest might as well end now.

And then he saw "the mother" as she was when young, wearing well-worn dresses, which he remembered for such a long time that they seemed inseparable from her; he recollected her movements, the different tones of her voice, her habits, her predilections, her fits of anger, the wrinkles on her face, the movements of her thin fingers, and all her well-known attitudes, which she would never have again, and clutching hold of the doctor, he began to moan and weep. His thin legs began to tremble, his whole stout body was shaken by his sobs, all he could say was:

"My mother, my poor mother, my poor mother!"

But his companion, who was still drunk, and who intended to finish the evening in certain places of bad repute that he frequented secretly, made him sit down on the grass by the riverside, and left him almost immediately, under the pretext that he had to see a patient.

Caravan went on crying for some time, and when he had got to the end of his tears, when his grief had, so to say, run out, he again felt relief, repose and sudden tranquillity.

The moon had risen, and bathed the horizon in its soft light.

The tall poplar trees had a silvery sheen on them, and the mist on the plain looked like drifting snow; the river, in which the stars were reflected, and which had a sheen as of mother-of-pearl, was gently rippled by the wind. The air was soft and sweet, and Caravan inhaled it almost greedily, and thought that he could perceive a feeling of freshness, of calm and of superhuman consolation pervading him.

He actually resisted that feeling of comfort and relief, and kept on saying to himself: "My poor mother, my poor mother!" and tried to make himself cry, from a kind of conscientious feeling; but he could not succeed in doing so any longer, and those sad thoughts, which had made him sob so bitterly a shore time before, had almost passed away. In a few moments, he rose to go home, and returned slowly, under the influence of that serene night, and with a heart soothed in spite of himself.

When he reached the bridge, he saw that the last tramcar was ready to start, and behind it were the brightly lighted windows of the Cafe du Globe. He felt a longing to tell somebody of his loss, to excite pity, to make himself interesting. He put on a woeful face, pushed open the door, and went up to the counter, where the landlord still was. He had counted on creating a sensation, and had hoped that everybody would get up and come to him with outstretched hands, and say: “Why, what is the matter with you?” But nobody noticed his disconsolate face, so he rested his two elbows on the counter, and, burying his face in his hands, he murmured: “Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!”

The landlord looked at him and said: “Are you ill, Monsieur Caravan?”

“No, my friend,” he replied, “but my mother has just died.”

“Ah!” the other exclaimed, and as a customer at the other end of the establishment asked for a glass of Bavarian beer, he went to attend to him, leaving Caravan dumfounded at his want of sympathy.

The three domino players were sitting at the same table which they had occupied before dinner, totally absorbed in their game, and Caravan went up to them, in search of pity, but as none of them appeared to notice him he made up his mind to speak.

“A great misfortune has happened to me since I was here,” he said.

All three slightly raised their heads at the same instant, but keeping their eyes fixed on the pieces which they held in their hands.

“What do you say?”

“My mother has just died”; whereupon one of them said:

“Oh! the devil,” with that false air of sorrow which indifferent people assume. Another, who could not find anything to say, emitted a sort of sympathetic whistle, shaking his head at the same time, and the third turned to the game again, as if he were saying to himself: “Is that all!”

Caravan had expected some of these expressions that are said to “come from the heart,” and when he saw how his news was received, he left the table, indignant at their calmness at their friend’s sorrow, although this sorrow had stupefied him so that he scarcely felt it any longer. When he got home his wife was waiting for him in her nightgown, and sitting in a low chair by the open window, still thinking of the inheritance.

“Undress yourself,” she said; “we can go on talking.”

He raised his head, and looking at the ceiling, said:

“But — there is nobody upstairs.”

“I beg your pardon, Rosalie is with her, and you can go and take her place at three o’clock in the morning, when you have had some sleep.”

He only partially undressed, however, so as to be ready for anything that might happen, and after tying a silk handkerchief round his head, he lay down to rest, and for some time neither of them spoke. Madame Caravan was thinking.

Her nightcap was adorned with a red bow, and was pushed rather to one side, as was the way with all the caps she wore, and presently she turned towards him and said:

“Do you know whether your mother made a will?”

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

“I — I do not think so. No, I am sure that she did not.”

His wife looked at him, and she said, in a law, angry tone:

“I call that infamous; here we have been wearing ourselves out for ten years in looking after her, and have boarded and lodged her! Your sister would not have done so much for her, nor I either, if I had known how I was to be rewarded! Yes, it is a disgrace to her memory! I dare say that you will tell me that she paid us, but one cannot pay one’s children in ready money for what they do; that obligation is recognized after death; at any rate, that is how honorable people act. So I have had all my worry and trouble for nothing! Oh, that is nice! that is very nice!”

Poor Caravan, who was almost distracted, kept on repeating:

“My dear, my dear, please, please be quiet.”

She grew calmer by degrees, and, resuming her usual voice and manner, she continued:

“We must let your sister know to-morrow.”

He started, and said:

“Of course we must; I had forgotten all about it; I will send her a telegram the first thing in the morning.”

“No,” she replied, like a woman who had foreseen everything; “no, do not send it before ten or eleven o’clock, so that we may have time to turn round before she comes. It does not take more than two hours to get here from Charenton, and we can say that you lost your head from grief. If we let her know in the course of the day, that will be soon enough, and will give us time to look round.”

Caravan put his hand to his forehead, and, in the came timid voice in which he always spoke of his chief, the very thought of whom made him tremble, he said:

“I must let them know at the office.”

“Why?” she replied. “On occasions like this, it is always excusable to forget. Take my advice, and don’t let him know; your chief will not be able to say anything to you, and you will put him in a nice fix.

"Oh! yes, that I shall, and he will be in a terrible rage, too, when he notices my absence. Yes, you are right; it is a capital idea, and when I tell him that my mother is dead, he will be obliged to hold his tongue."

And he rubbed his hands in delight at the joke, when he thought of his chief's face; while upstairs lay the body of the dead old woman, with the servant asleep beside it.

But Madame Caravan grew thoughtful, as if she were preoccupied by something which she did not care to mention, and at last she said:

"Your mother had given you her clock, had she not — the girl playing at cup and ball?"

He thought for a moment, and then replied:

"Yes, yes; she said to me (but it was a long time ago, when she first came here): 'I shall leave the clock to you, if you look after me well.'"

Madame Caravan was reassured, and regained her serenity, and said:

"Well, then, you must go and fetch it out of her room, for if we get your sister here, she will prevent us from taking it."

He hesitated.

"Do you think so?"

That made her angry.

"I certainly think so; once it is in our possession, she will know nothing at all about where it came from; it belongs to us. It is just the same with the chest of drawers with the marble top, that is in her room; she gave it me one day when she was in a good temper. We will bring it down at the same time."

Caravan, however, seemed incredulous, and said:

"But, my dear, it is a great responsibility!"

She turned on him furiously.

"Oh! Indeed! Will you never change? You would let your children die of hunger, rather than make a move. Does not that chest of drawers belong to us, as she gave it to me? And if your sister is not satisfied, let her tell me so, me! I don't care a straw for your sister. Come, get up, and we will bring down what your mother gave us, immediately."

Trembling and vanquished, he got out of bed and began to put on his trousers, but she stopped him:

"It is not worth while to dress yourself; your underwear is quite enough. I mean to go as I am."

They both left the room in their night clothes, went upstairs quite noiselessly, opened the door and went into the room, where the four lighted tapers and the plate with the sprig of box alone seemed to be watching the old woman in her rigid repose, for Rosalie, who was lying back in the easy chair with her legs stretched out, her hands folded in her lap, and her head on one side, was also quite motionless, and was snoring with her mouth wide open.

Caravan took the clock, which was one of those grotesque objects that were produced so plentifully under the Empire. A girl in gilt bronze was holding a cup and ball, and the ball formed the pendulum.

“Give that to me,” his wife said, “and take the marble slab off the chest of drawers.”

He put the marble slab on his shoulder with considerable effort, and they left the room. Caravan had to stoop in the doorway, and trembled as he went downstairs, while his wife walked backwards, so as to light him, and held the candlestick in one hand, carrying the clock under the other arm.

When they were in their own room, she heaved a sigh.

“We have got over the worst part of the job,” she said; “so now let us go and fetch the other things.”

But the bureau drawers were full of the old woman’s wearing apparel, which they must manage to hide somewhere, and Madame Caravan soon thought of a plan.

“Go and get that wooden packing case in the vestibule; it is hardly worth anything, and we may just as well put it here.”

And when he had brought it upstairs they began to fill it. One by one they took out all the collars, cuffs, chemises, caps, all the well-worn things that had belonged to the poor woman lying there behind them, and arranged them methodically in the wooden box in such a manner as to deceive Madame Braux, the deceased woman’s other child, who would be coming the next day.

When they had finished, they first of all carried the bureau drawers downstairs, and the remaining portion afterwards, each of them holding an end, and it was some time before they could make up their minds where it would stand best; but at last they decided upon their own room, opposite the bed, between the two windows, and as soon as it was in its place Madame Caravan filled it with her own things. The clock was placed on the chimney-piece in the dining-room, and they looked to see what the effect was, and were both delighted with it and agreed that nothing could be better. Then they retired, she blew out the candle, and soon everybody in the house was asleep.

It was broad daylight when. Caravan opened his eyes again. His mind was rather confused when he woke up, and he did not clearly remember what had happened for a few minutes; when he did, he felt a weight at his heart, and jumped out of bed, almost ready to cry again.

He hastened to the room overhead, where Rosalie was still sleeping in the same position as the night before, not having awakened once. He sent her to do her work, put fresh tapers in the place of those that had burnt out, and then he looked at his mother, revolving in his brain those apparently profound thoughts, those religious and philosophical commonplaces which trouble people of mediocre intelligence in the presence of death.

But, as his wife was calling him, he went downstairs. She had written out a list of what had to be done during the morning, and he was horrified when he saw the memorandum:

1. Report the death at the mayor's office. 2. See the doctor who had attended her. 3. Order the coffin. 4. Give notice at the church. 5. Go to the undertaker. 6. Order the notices of her death at the printer's. 7. Go to the lawyer. 8. Telegraph the news to all the family.

Besides all this, there were a number of small commissions; so he took his hat and went out. As the news had spread abroad, Madame Caravan's female friends and neighbors soon began to come in and begged to be allowed to see the body. There had been a scene between husband and wife at the hairdresser's on the ground floor about the matter, while a customer was being shaved. The wife, who was knitting steadily, said: "Well, there is one less, and as great a miser as one ever meets with. I certainly did not care for her; but, nevertheless, I must go and have a look at her."

The husband, while lathering his patient's chin, said: "That is another queer fancy! Nobody but a woman would think of such a thing. It is not enough for them to worry you during life, but they cannot even leave you at peace when you are dead:" But his wife, without being in the least disconcerted, replied: "The feeling is stronger than I am, and I must go. It has been on me since the morning. If I were not to see her, I should think about it all my life; but when I have had a good look at her, I shall be satisfied."

The knight of the razor shrugged his shoulders and remarked in a low voice to the gentleman whose cheek he was scraping: “I just ask you, what sort of ideas do you think these confounded females have? I should not amuse myself by going to see a corpse!” But his wife had heard him and replied very quietly: “But it is so, it is so.” And then, putting her knitting on the counter, she went upstairs to the first floor, where she met two other neighbors, who had just come, and who were discussing the event with Madame Caravan, who was giving them the details, and they all went together to the death chamber. The four women went in softly, and, one after the other, sprinkled the bed clothes with the salt water, knelt down, made the sign of the cross while they mumbled a prayer. Then they rose from their knees and looked for some time at the corpse with round, wide-open eyes and mouths partly open, while the daughter-in-law of the dead woman, with her handkerchief to her face, pretended to be sobbing piteously.

When she turned about to walk away whom should she perceive standing close to the door but Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who were curiously taking stock of all that was going on. Then, forgetting her pretended grief, she threw herself upon them with uplifted hands, crying out in a furious voice, “Will you get out of this, you horrid brats!”

Ten minutes later, going upstairs again with another contingent of neighbors, she prayed, wept profusely, performed all her duties, and found once more her two children, who had followed her upstairs. She again boxed their ears soundly, but the next time she paid no heed to them, and at each fresh arrival of visitors the two urchins always followed in the wake, kneeling down in a corner and imitating slavishly everything they saw their mother do.

When the afternoon came the crowds of inquisitive people began to diminish, and soon there were no more visitors. Madame Caravan, returning to her own apartments, began to make the necessary preparations for the funeral ceremony, and the deceased was left alone.

The window of the room was open. A torrid heat entered, along with clouds of dust; the flames of the four candles were flickering beside the immobile corpse, and upon the cloth which covered the face, the closed eyes, the two stretched-out hands, small flies alighted, came, went and careered up and down incessantly, being the only companions of the old woman for the time being.

Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, however, had now left the house and were running up and down the street. They were soon surrounded by their playmates, by little girls especially, who were older and who were much more interested in all the mysteries of life, asking questions as if they were grown people.

"Then your grandmother is dead?" "Yes, she died yesterday evening." "What does a dead person look like?"

Then Marie began to explain, telling all about the candles, the sprig of box and the face of the corpse. It was not long before great curiosity was aroused in the minds of all the children, and they asked to be allowed to go upstairs to look at the departed.

Marie-Louise at once organized a first expedition, consisting of five girls and two boys — the biggest and the most courageous. She made them take off their shoes so that they might not be discovered. The troupe filed into the house and mounted the stairs as stealthily as an army of mice.

Once in the chamber, the little girl, imitating her mother, regulated the ceremony. She solemnly walked in advance of her comrades, went down on her knees, made the sign of the cross, moved her lips as in prayer, rose, sprinkled the bed, and while the children, all crowded together, were approaching — frightened and curious and eager to look at the face and hands of the deceased — she began suddenly to simulate sobbing and to bury her eyes in her little handkerchief. Then, becoming instantly consoled, on thinking of the other children who were downstairs waiting at the door, she ran downstairs followed by the rest, returning in a minute with another group, then a third; for all the little ragamuffins of the countryside, even to the little beggars in rags, had congregated in order to participate in this new pleasure; and each time she repeated her mother's grimaces with absolute perfection.

At length, however, she became tired. Some game or other drew the children away from the house, and the old grandmother was left alone, forgotten suddenly by everybody.

The room was growing dark, and upon the dry and rigid features of the corpse the fitful flames of the candles cast patches of light.

Towards 8 o'clock Caravan ascended to the chamber of death, closed the windows and renewed the candles. He was now quite composed on entering the room, accustomed already to regard the corpse as though it had been there for months. He even went the length of declaring that, as yet, there were no signs of decomposition, making this remark just at the moment when he and his wife were about to sit down at table. “Pshaw!” she responded, “she is now stark and stiff; she will keep for a year.”

The soup was eaten in silence. The children, who had been left to themselves all day, now worn out by fatigue, were sleeping soundly on their chairs, and nobody ventured to break the silence.

Suddenly the flame of the lamp went down. Madame Caravan immediately turned up the wick, a hollow sound ensued, and the light went out. They had forgotten to buy oil. To send for it now to the grocer’s would keep back the dinner, and they began to look for candles, but none were to be found except the tapers which had been placed upon the table upstairs in the death chamber.

Madame Caravan, always prompt in her decisions, quickly despatched Marie-Louise to fetch two, and her return was awaited in total darkness.

The footsteps of the girl who had ascended the stairs were distinctly heard. There was silence for a few seconds and then the child descended precipitately. She threw open the door and in a choking voice murmured: “Oh! papa, grandmamma is dressing herself!”

Caravan bounded to his feet with such precipitance that his chair fell over against the wall. He stammered out: “You say? . . . . What are you saying?”

But Marie-Louise, gasping with emotion, repeated: “Grand — grand — grandmamma is putting on her clothes, she is coming downstairs.”

Caravan rushed boldly up the staircase, followed by his wife, dumfounded; but he came to a standstill before the door of the second floor, overcome with terror, not daring to enter. What was he going to see? Madame Caravan, more courageous, turned the handle of the door and stepped forward into the room.

The old woman was standing up. In awakening from her lethargic sleep, before even regaining full consciousness, in turning upon her side and raising herself on her elbow, she had extinguished three of the candles which burned near the bed. Then, gaining strength, she got off the bed and began to look for her clothes. The absence of her chest of drawers had at first worried her, but, after a little, she had succeeded in finding her things at the bottom of the wooden box, and was now quietly dressing. She emptied the plateful of water, replaced the sprig of box behind the looking-glass, and arranged the chairs in their places, and was ready to go downstairs when there appeared before her her son and daughter-in-law.

Caravan rushed forward, seized her by the hands, embraced her with tears in his eyes, while his wife, who was behind him, repeated in a hypocritical tone of voice: “Oh, what a blessing! oh, what a blessing!”

But the old woman, without being at all moved, without even appearing to understand, rigid as a statue, and with glazed eyes, simply asked: “Will dinner soon be ready?”

He stammered out, not knowing what he said:

“Oh, yes, mother, we have been waiting for you.”

And with an alacrity unusual in him, he took her arm, while Madame Caravan, the younger, seized the candle and lighted them downstairs, walking backwards in front of them, step by step, just as she had done the previous night for her husband, who was carrying the marble.

On reaching the first floor, she almost ran against people who were ascending the stairs. It was the Charenton family, Madame Braux, followed by her husband.

The wife, tall and stout, with a prominent stomach, opened wide her terrified eyes and was ready to make her escape. The husband, a socialist shoemaker, a little hairy man, the perfect image of a monkey, murmured quite unconcerned: “Well, what next? Is she resurrected?”

As soon as Madame Caravan recognized them, she made frantic gestures to them; then, speaking aloud, she said: “Why, here you are! What a pleasant surprise!”

But Madame Braux, dumfounded, understood nothing. She responded in a low voice: “It was your telegram that brought us; we thought that all was over.”

Her husband, who was behind her, pinched her to make her keep silent. He added with a sly laugh, which his thick beard concealed: “It was very kind of you to invite us here. We set out post haste,” which remark showed the hostility which had for a long time reigned between the households. Then, just as the old woman reached the last steps, he pushed forward quickly and rubbed his hairy face against her cheeks, shouting in her ear, on account of her deafness: “How well you look, mother; sturdy as usual, hey!”

Madame Braux, in her stupefaction at seeing the old woman alive, whom they all believed to be dead, dared not even embrace her; and her enormous bulk blocked up the passageway and hindered the others from advancing. The old woman, uneasy and suspicious, but without speaking, looked at everyone around her; and her little gray eyes, piercing and hard, fixed themselves now on one and now on the other, and they were so full of meaning that the children became frightened.

Caravan, to explain matters, said: “She has been somewhat ill, but she is better now; quite well, indeed, are you not, mother?”

Then the good woman, continuing to walk, replied in a husky voice, as though it came from a distance: “It was syncope. I heard you all the while.”

An embarrassing silence followed. They entered the dining-room, and in a few minutes all sat down to an improvised dinner.

Only M. Braux had retained his self-possession. His gorilla features grinned wickedly, while he let fall some words of double meaning which painfully disconcerted everyone.

But the door bell kept ringing every second, and Rosalie, distracted, came to call Caravan, who rushed out, throwing down his napkin. His brother-in-law even asked him whether it was not one of his reception days, to which he stammered out in answer: “No, only a few packages; nothing more.”

A parcel was brought in, which he began to open carelessly, and the mourning announcements with black borders appeared unexpectedly. Reddening up to the very eyes, he closed the package hurriedly and pushed it under his waistcoat.

His mother had not seen it! She was looking intently at her clock which stood on the mantelpiece, and the embarrassment increased in midst of a dead silence. Turning her wrinkled face towards her daughter, the old woman, in whose eyes gleamed malice, said: “On Monday you must take me away from here, so that I can see your little girl. I want so much to see her.” Madame Braux, her features all beaming, exclaimed: “Yes, mother, that I will,” while Madame Caravan, the younger, who had turned pale, was ready to faint with annoyance. The two men, however, gradually drifted into conversation and soon became embroiled in a political discussion. Braux maintained the most revolutionary and communistic doctrines, his eyes glowing, and gesticulating and throwing about his arms. “Property, sir,” he said, “is a robbery perpetrated on the working classes; the land is the common property of every man; hereditary rights are an infamy and a disgrace.” But here he suddenly stopped, looking as if he had just said something foolish, then added in softer tones: “But this is not the proper moment to discuss such things.”

The door was opened and Dr. Chenet appeared. For a moment he seemed bewildered, but regaining his usual smirking expression of countenance, he jauntily approached the old woman and said: "Aha! mamma; you are better to-day. Oh! I never had any doubt but you would come round again; in fact, I said to myself as I was mounting the staircase, 'I have an idea that I shall find the old lady on her feet once more';" and as he patted her gently on the back: "Ah! she is as solid as the Pont-Neuf, she will bury us all; see if she does not."

He sat down, accepted the coffee that was offered him, and soon began to join in the conversation of the two men, backing up Braux, for he himself had been mixed up in the Commune.

The old woman, now feeling herself fatigued, wished to retire. Caravan rushed forward. She looked him steadily in the eye and said: "You, you must carry my clock and chest of drawers upstairs again without a moment's delay." "Yes, mamma," he replied, gasping; "yes, I will do so." The old woman then took the arm of her daughter and withdrew from the room. The two Caravans remained astounded, silent, plunged in the deepest despair, while Braux rubbed his hands and sipped his coffee gleefully.

Suddenly Madame Caravan, consumed with rage, rushed at him, exclaiming: "You are a thief, a footpad, a cur! I would spit in your face! I — I — would — — " She could find nothing further to say, suffocating as she was with rage, while he went on sipping his coffee with a smile.

His wife returning just then, Madame Caravan attacked her sister-in-law, and the two women — the one with her enormous bulk, the other epileptic and spare, with changed voices and trembling hands flew at one another with words of abuse.

Chenet and Braux now interposed, and the latter, taking his better half by the shoulders, pushed her out of the door before him, shouting: "Go on, you slut; you talk too much"; and the two were heard in the street quarrelling until they disappeared from sight.

M. Chenet also took his departure, leaving the Caravans alone, face to face. The husband fell back on his chair, and with the cold sweat standing out in beads on his temples, murmured: "What shall I say to my chief to-morrow?"

BESIDE SCHOPENHAUER’S CORPSE

OR

THE SMILE OF SCHOPENHAUER

He was slowly dying, as consumptives die. I saw him each day, about two o’clock, sitting beneath the hotel windows on a bench in the promenade, looking out on the calm sea. He remained for some time without moving, in the heat of the sun, gazing mournfully at the Mediterranean. Every now and then, he cast a glance at the lofty mountains with beclouded summits that shut in Mentone; then, with a very slow movement, he would cross his long legs, so thin that they seemed like two bones, around which fluttered the cloth of his trousers, and he would open a book, always the same book. And then he did not stir any more, but read on, read on with his eye and his mind; all his wasting body seemed to read, all his soul plunged, lost, disappeared, in this book, up to the hour when the cool air made him cough a little. Then, he got up and reentered the hotel.

He was a tall German, with fair beard, who breakfasted and dined in his own room, and spoke to nobody.

A vague, curiosity attracted me to him. One day, I sat down by his side, having taken up a book, too, to keep up appearances, a volume of Musset’s poems.

And I began to look through “Rolla.”

Suddenly, my neighbor said to me, in good French:

“Do you know German, monsieur?”

“Not at all, monsieur.”

“I am sorry for that. Since chance has thrown us side by side, I could have lent you, I could have shown you, an inestimable thing — this book which I hold in my hand.”

“What is it, pray?”

“It is a copy of my master, Schopenhauer, annotated with his own hand. All the margins, as you may see, are covered with his handwriting.”

I took the book from him reverently, and I gazed at these forms incomprehensible to me, but which revealed the immortal thoughts of the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth.

And Musset’s verses arose in my memory:

“Hast thou found out, Voltaire, that it is bliss to die,
And does thy hideous smile over thy bleached bones fly?”

And involuntarily I compared the childish sarcasm, the religious sarcasm of Voltaire with the irresistible irony of the German philosopher whose influence is henceforth ineffaceable.

Let us protest and let us be angry, let us be indignant, or let us be enthusiastic, Schopenhauer has marked humanity with the seal of his disdain and of his disenchantment.

A disabused pleasure-seeker, he overthrew beliefs, hopes, poetic ideals and chimeras, destroyed the aspirations, ravaged the confidence of souls, killed love, dragged down the chivalrous worship of women, crushed the illusions of hearts, and accomplished the most gigantic task ever attempted by scepticism. He spared nothing with his mocking spirit, and exhausted everything. And even to-day those who execrate him seem to carry in their own souls particles of his thought.

“So, then, you were intimately acquainted with Schopenhauer?” I said to the German.

He smiled sadly.

“Up to the time of his death, monsieur.”

And he spoke to me about the philosopher and told me about the almost supernatural impression which this strange being made on all who came near him.

He gave me an account of the interview of the old iconoclast with a French politician, a doctrinaire Republican, who wanted to get a glimpse of this man, and found him in a noisy tavern, seated in the midst of his disciples, dry, wrinkled, laughing with an unforgettable laugh, attacking and tearing to pieces ideas and beliefs with a single word, as a dog tears with one bite of his teeth the tissues with which he plays.

He repeated for me the comment of this Frenchman as he went away, astonished and terrified: “I thought I had spent an hour with the devil.”

Then he added:

“He had, indeed, monsieur, a frightful smile, which terrified us even after his death. I can tell you an anecdote about it that is not generally known, if it would interest you.”

And he began, in a languid voice, interrupted by frequent fits of coughing.

“Schopenhauer had just died, and it was arranged that we should watch, in turn, two by two, till morning.

“He was lying in a large apartment, very simple, vast and gloomy. Two wax candles were burning on the stand by the bedside.

“It was midnight when I went on watch, together with one of our comrades. The two friends whom we replaced had left the apartment, and we came and sat down at the foot of the bed.

“The face was not changed. It was laughing. That pucker which we knew so well lingered still around the corners of the lips, and it seemed to us that he was about to open his eyes, to move and to speak. His thought, or rather his thoughts, enveloped us. We felt ourselves more than ever in the atmosphere of his genius, absorbed, possessed by him. His domination seemed to be even more sovereign now that he was dead. A feeling of mystery was blended with the power of this incomparable spirit.

“The bodies of these men disappear, but they themselves remain; and in the night which follows the cessation of their heart’s pulsation I assure you, monsieur, they are terrifying.

“And in hushed tones we talked about him, recalling to mind certain sayings, certain formulas of his, those startling maxims which are like jets of flame flung, in a few words, into the darkness of the Unknown Life.

“‘It seems to me that he is going to speak,’ said my comrade. And we stared with uneasiness bordering on fear at the motionless face, with its eternal laugh. Gradually, we began to feel ill at ease, oppressed, on the point of fainting. I faltered:

“‘I don’t know what is the matter with me, but, I assure you I am not well.’

“And at that moment we noticed that there was an unpleasant odor from the corpse.

“Then, my comrade suggested that we should go into the adjoining room, and leave the door open; and I assented to his proposal.

“I took one of the wax candles which burned on the stand, and I left the second behind. Then we went and sat down at the other end of the adjoining apartment, in such a position that we could see the bed and the corpse, clearly revealed by the light.

“But he still held possession of us. One would have said that his immaterial essence, liberated, free, all-powerful and dominating, was flitting around us. And sometimes, too, the dreadful odor of the decomposed body came toward us and penetrated us, sickening and indefinable.

“Suddenly a shiver passed through our bones: a sound, a slight sound, came from the death-chamber. Immediately we fixed our glances on him, and we saw, yes, monsieur, we saw distinctly, both of us, something white pass across the bed, fall on the carpet, and vanish under an armchair.

“We were on our feet before we had time to think of anything, distracted by stupefying terror, ready to run away. Then we stared at each other. We were horribly pale. Our hearts throbbed fiercely enough to have raised the clothing on our chests. I was the first to speak:

“‘Did you see?’

“‘Yes, I saw.’

“‘Can it be that he is not dead?’

“‘Why, when the body is putrefying?’

“‘What are we to do?’

“My companion said in a hesitating tone:

“‘We must go and look.’

“I took our wax candle and entered first, glancing into all the dark corners in the large apartment. Nothing was moving now, and I approached the bed. But I stood transfixed with stupor and fright:

“Schopenhauer was no longer laughing! He was grinning in a horrible fashion, with his lips pressed together and deep hollows in his cheeks. I stammered out:

“‘He is not dead!’

“But the terrible odor ascended to my nose and stifled me. And I no longer moved, but kept staring fixedly at him, terrified as if in the presence of an apparition.

“Then my companion, having seized the other wax candle, bent forward. Next, he touched my arm without uttering a word. I followed his glance, and saw on the ground, under the armchair by the side of the bed, standing out white on the dark carpet, and open as if to bite, Schopenhauer’s set of artificial teeth.

“The work of decomposition, loosening the jaws, had made it jump out of the mouth.

“I was really frightened that day, monsieur.”

And as the sun was sinking toward the glittering sea, the consumptive German rose from his seat, gave me a parting bow, and retired into the hotel.

MISS HARRIET

There were seven of us on a drag, four women and three men; one of the latter sat on the box seat beside the coachman. We were ascending, at a snail's pace, the winding road up the steep cliff along the coast.

Setting out from Etretat at break of day in order to visit the ruins of Tancarville, we were still half asleep, benumbed by the fresh air of the morning. The women especially, who were little accustomed to these early excursions, half opened and closed their eyes every moment, nodding their heads or yawning, quite insensible to the beauties of the dawn.

It was autumn. On both sides of the road stretched the bare fields, yellowed by the stubble of wheat and oats which covered the soil like a beard that had been badly shaved. The moist earth seemed to steam. Larks were singing high up in the air, while other birds piped in the bushes.

The sun rose at length in front of us, bright red on the plane of the horizon, and in proportion as it ascended, growing clearer from minute to minute, the country seemed to awake, to smile, to shake itself like a young girl leaving her bed in her white robe of vapor. The Comte d'Etraille, who was seated on the box, cried:

"Look! look! a hare!" and he extended his arm toward the left, pointing to a patch of clover. The animal scurried along, almost hidden by the clover, only its large ears showing. Then it swerved across a furrow, stopped, started off again at full speed, changed its course, stopped anew, uneasy, spying out every danger, uncertain what route to take, when suddenly it began to run with great bounds, disappearing finally in a large patch of beet-root. All the men had waked up to watch the course of the animal.

Rene Lamanoir exclaimed:

"We are not at all gallant this morning," and; regarding his neighbor, the little Baroness de Serennes, who struggled against sleep, he said to her in a low tone: "You are thinking of your husband, baroness. Reassure yourself; he will not return before Saturday, so you have still four days."

She answered with a sleepy smile:

"How stupid you are!" Then, shaking off her torpor, she added: "Now, let somebody say something to make us laugh. You, Monsieur Chenal, who have the reputation of having had more love affairs than the Due de Richelieu, tell us a love story in which you have played a part; anything you like."

Leon Chenal, an old painter, who had once been very handsome, very strong, very proud of his physique and very popular with women, took his long white beard in his hand and smiled. Then, after a few moments' reflection, he suddenly became serious.

"Ladies, it will not be an amusing tale, for I am going to relate to you the saddest love affair of my life, and I sincerely hope that none of my friends may ever pass through a similar experience.

"I was twenty-five years of age and was pillaging along the coast of Normandy. I call 'pillaging' wandering about, with a knapsack on one's back, from inn to inn, under the pretext of making studies and sketching landscapes. I knew nothing more enjoyable than that happy-go-lucky wandering life, in which one is perfectly free, without shackles of any kind, without care, without preoccupation, without thinking even of the morrow. One goes in any direction one pleases, without any guide save his fancy, without any counsellor save his eyes. One stops because a running brook attracts one, because the smell of potatoes frying tickles one's olfactories on passing an inn. Sometimes it is the perfume of clematis which decides one in his choice or the roguish glance of the servant at an inn. Do not despise me for my affection for these rustics. These girls have a soul as well as senses, not to mention firm cheeks and fresh lips; while their hearty and willing kisses have the flavor of wild fruit. Love is always love, come whence it may. A heart that beats at your approach, an eye that weeps when you go away are things so rare, so sweet, so precious that they must never be despised.

"I have had rendezvous in ditches full of primroses, behind the cow stable and in barns among the straw, still warm from the heat of the day. I have recollections of coarse gray cloth covering supple peasant skin and regrets for simple, frank kisses, more delicate in their unaffected sincerity than the subtle favors of charming and distinguished women.

"But what one loves most amid all these varied adventures is the country, the woods, the rising of the sun, the twilight, the moonlight. These are, for the painter, honeymoon trips with Nature. One is alone with her in that long and quiet association. You go to sleep in the fields, amid marguerites and poppies, and when you open your eyes in the full glare of the sunlight you descry in the distance the little village with its pointed clock tower which sounds the hour of noon.

"You sit down by the side of a spring which gushes out at the foot of an oak, amid a growth of tall, slender weeds, glistening with life. You go down on your knees, bend forward and drink that cold, pellucid water which wets your mustache and nose; you drink it with a physical pleasure, as though you kissed the spring, lip to lip. Sometimes, when you find a deep hole along the course of these tiny brooks, you plunge in quite naked, and you feel on your skin, from head to foot, as it were, an icy and delicious caress, the light and gentle quivering of the stream.

"You are gay on the hills, melancholy on the edge of ponds, inspired when the sun is setting in an ocean of blood-red clouds and casts red reflections or the river. And at night, under the moon, which passes across the vault of heaven, you think of a thousand strange things which would never have occurred to your mind under the brilliant light of day.

"So, in wandering through the same country where we, are this year, I came to the little village of Benouville, on the cliff between Yport and Etretat. I came from Fecamp, following the coast, a high coast as straight as a wall, with its projecting chalk cliffs descending perpendicularly into the sea. I had walked since early morning on the short grass, smooth and yielding as a carpet, that grows on the edge of the cliff. And, singing lustily, I walked with long strides, looking sometimes at the slow circling flight of a gull with its white curved wings outlined on the blue sky, sometimes at the brown sails of a fishing bark on the green sea. In short, I had passed a happy day, a day of liberty and of freedom from care.

"A little farmhouse where travellers were lodged was pointed out to me, a kind of inn, kept by a peasant woman, which stood in the centre of a Norman courtyard surrounded by a double row of beeches.

"Leaving the coast, I reached the hamlet, which was hemmed in by great trees, and I presented myself at the house of Mother Lecacheur.

"She was an old, wrinkled and stern peasant woman, who seemed always to receive customers under protest, with a kind of defiance.

"It was the month of May. The spreading apple trees covered the court with a shower of blossoms which rained unceasingly both upon people and upon the grass.

"I said: 'Well, Madame Lecacheur, have you a room for me?'

"Astonished to find that I knew her name, she answered:

"'That depends; everything is let, but all the same I can find out."

"In five minutes we had come to an agreement, and I deposited my bag upon the earthen floor of a rustic room, furnished with a bed, two chairs, a table and a washbowl. The room looked into the large, smoky kitchen, where the lodgers took their meals with the people of the farm and the landlady, who was a widow.

"I washed my hands, after which I went out. The old woman was making a chicken fricassee for dinner in the large fireplace in which hung the iron pot, black with smoke.

"'You have travellers, then, at the present time?' said I to her.

"She answered in an offended tone of voice:

"'I have a lady, an English lady, who has reached years of maturity. She occupies the other room.'

"I obtained, by means of an extra five sous a day, the privilege of dining alone out in the yard when the weather was fine.

"My place was set outside the door, and I was beginning to gnaw the lean limbs of the Normandy chicken, to drink the clear cider and to munch the hunk of white bread, which was four days old but excellent.

"Suddenly the wooden gate which gave on the highway was opened, and a strange lady directed her steps toward the house. She was very thin, very tall, so tightly enveloped in a red Scotch plaid shawl that one might have supposed she had no arms, if one had not seen a long hand appear just above the hips, holding a white tourist umbrella. Her face was like that of a mummy, surrounded with curls of gray hair, which tossed about at every step she took and made me think, I know not why, of a pickled herring in curl papers. Lowering her eyes, she passed quickly in front of me and entered the house.

"That singular apparition cheered me. She undoubtedly was my neighbor, the English lady of mature age of whom our hostess had spoken.

"I did not see her again that day. The next day, when I had settled myself to commence painting at the end of that beautiful valley which you know and which extends as far as Etretat, I perceived, on lifting my eyes suddenly, something singular standing on the crest of the cliff, one might have said a pole decked out with flags. It was she. On seeing me, she suddenly disappeared. I reentered the house at midday for lunch and took my seat at the general table, so as to make the acquaintance of this odd character. But she did not respond to my polite advances, was insensible even to my little attentions. I poured out water for her persistently, I passed her the dishes with great eagerness. A slight, almost imperceptible, movement of the head and an English word, murmured so low that I did not understand it, were her only acknowledgments.

"I ceased occupying myself with her, although she had disturbed my thoughts.

"At the end of three days I knew as much about her as did Madame Lecacheur herself.

"She was called Miss Harriet. Seeking out a secluded village in which to pass the summer, she had been attracted to Benouville some six months before and did not seem disposed to leave it. She never spoke at table, ate rapidly, reading all the while a small book of the Protestant propaganda. She gave a copy of it to everybody. The cure himself had received no less than four copies, conveyed by an urchin to whom she had paid two sous commission. She said sometimes to our hostess abruptly, without preparing her in the least for the declaration:

"'I love the Saviour more than all. I admire him in all creation; I adore him in all nature; I carry him always in my heart.'

"And she would immediately present the old woman with one of her tracts which were destined to convert the universe.

"In, the village she was not liked. In fact, the schoolmaster having pronounced her an atheist, a kind of stigma attached to her. The cure, who had been consulted by Madame Lecacheur, responded:

"'She is a heretic, but God does not wish the death of the sinner, and I believe her to be a person of pure morals.'

"These words, 'atheist,' 'heretic,' words which no one can precisely define, threw doubts into some minds. It was asserted, however, that this English woman was rich and that she had passed her life in travelling through every country in the world because her family had cast her off. Why had her family cast her off? Because of her impiety, of course!

"She was, in fact, one of those people of exalted principles; one of those opinionated puritans, of which England produces so many; one of those good and insupportable old maids who haunt the tables d'hote of every hotel in Europe, who spoil Italy, poison Switzerland, render the charming cities of the Mediterranean uninhabitable, carry everywhere their fantastic manias their manners of petrified vestals, their indescribable toilets and a certain odor of india-rubber which makes one believe that at night they are slipped into a rubber casing.

"Whenever I caught sight of one of these individuals in a hotel I fled like the birds who see a scarecrow in a field.

"This woman, however, appeared so very singular that she did not displease me.

"Madame Lecacheur, hostile by instinct to everything that was not rustic, felt in her narrow soul a kind of hatred for the ecstatic declarations of the old maid. She had found a phrase by which to describe her, a term of contempt that rose to her lips, called forth by I know not what confused and mysterious mental ratiocination. She said: 'That woman is a demoniac.' This epithet, applied to that austere and sentimental creature, seemed to me irresistibly droll. I myself never called her anything now but 'the demoniac,' experiencing a singular pleasure in pronouncing aloud this word on perceiving her.

"One day I asked Mother Lecacheur: 'Well, what is our demoniac about to-day?'

"To which my rustic friend replied with a shocked air:

"'What do you think, sir? She picked up a toad which had had its paw crushed and carried it to her room and has put it in her washbasin and bandaged it as if it were a man. If that is not profanation I should like to know what is!'

"On another occasion, when walking along the shore she bought a large fish which had just been caught, simply to throw it back into the sea again. The sailor from whom she had bought it, although she paid him handsomely, now began to swear, more exasperated, indeed, than if she had put her hand into his pocket and taken his money. For more than a month he could not speak of the circumstance without becoming furious and denouncing it as an outrage. Oh, yes! She was indeed a demoniac, this Miss Harriet, and Mother Lecacheur must have had an inspiration in thus christening her.

"The stable boy, who was called Sapeur, because he had served in Africa in his youth, entertained other opinions. He said with a roguish air: 'She is an old hag who has seen life.'

"If the poor woman had but known!

"The little kind-hearted Celeste did not wait upon her willingly, but I was never able to understand why. Probably her only reason was that she was a stranger, of another race; of a different tongue and of another religion. She was, in fact, a demoniac!

"She passed her time wandering about the country, adoring and seeking God in nature. I found her one evening on her knees in a cluster of bushes. Having discovered something red through the leaves, I brushed aside the branches, and Miss Harriet at once rose to her feet, confused at having been found thus, fixing on me terrified eyes like those of an owl surprised in open day.

"Sometimes, when I was working among the rocks, I would suddenly descry her on the edge of the cliff like a lighthouse signal. She would be gazing in rapture at the vast sea glittering in the sunlight and the boundless sky with its golden tints. Sometimes I would distinguish her at the end of the valley, walking quickly with her elastic English step, and I would go toward her, attracted by I know not what, simply to see her illuminated visage, her dried-up, ineffable features, which seemed to glow with inward and profound happiness.

"I would often encounter her also in the corner of a field, sitting on the grass under the shadow of an apple tree, with her little religious booklet lying open on her knee while she gazed out at the distance.

"I could not tear myself away from that quiet country neighborhood, to which I was attached by a thousand links of love for its wide and peaceful landscape. I was happy in this sequestered farm, far removed from everything, but in touch with the earth, the good, beautiful, green earth. And — must I avow it? — there was, besides, a little curiosity which retained me at the residence of Mother Lecacheur. I wished to become acquainted a little with this strange Miss Harriet and to know what transpires in the solitary souls of those wandering old English women.

"We became acquainted in a rather singular manner. I had just finished a study which appeared to me to be worth something, and so it was, as it sold for ten thousand francs fifteen years later. It was as simple, however, as two and two make four and was not according to academic rules. The whole right side of my canvas represented a rock, an enormous rock, covered with sea-wrack, brown, yellow and red, across which the sun poured like a stream of oil. The light fell upon the rock as though it were aflame without the sun, which was at my back, being visible. That was all. A first bewildering study of blazing, gorgeous light.

"On the left was the sea, not the blue sea, the slate-colored sea, but a sea of jade, greenish, milky and solid beneath the deep-colored sky.

"I was so pleased with my work that I danced from sheer delight as I carried it back to the inn. I would have liked the whole world to see it at once. I can remember that I showed it to a cow that was browsing by the wayside, exclaiming as I did so: 'Look at that, my old beauty; you will not often see its like again.'

"When I had reached the house I immediately called out to Mother Lecacheur, shouting with all my might:

"'Hullo, there! Mrs. Landlady, come here and look at this.'

"The rustic approached and looked at my work with her stupid eyes which distinguished nothing and could not even tell whether the picture represented an ox or a house.

"Miss Harriet just then came home, and she passed behind me just as I was holding out my canvas at arm's length, exhibiting it to our landlady. The demoniac could not help but see it, for I took care to exhibit the thing in such a way that it could not escape her notice. She stopped abruptly and stood motionless, astonished. It was her rock which was depicted, the one which she climbed to dream away her time undisturbed.

"She uttered a British 'Aoh,' which was at once so accentuated and so flattering that I turned round to her, smiling, and said:

"'This is my latest study, mademoiselle.'

"She murmured rapturously, comically and tenderly:

"'Oh! monsieur, you understand nature as a living thing.'

"I colored and was more touched by that compliment than if it had come from a queen. I was captured, conquered, vanquished. I could have embraced her, upon my honor.

"I took my seat at table beside her as usual. For the first time she spoke, thinking aloud:

"'Oh! I do love nature.'

"I passed her some bread, some water, some wine. She now accepted these with a little smile of a mummy. I then began to talk about the scenery.

"After the meal we rose from the table together and walked leisurely across the courtyard; then, attracted doubtless by the fiery glow which the setting sun cast over the surface of the sea, I opened the gate which led to the cliff, and we walked along side by side, as contented as two persons might be who have just learned to understand and penetrate each other's motives and feelings.

"It was one of those warm, soft evenings which impart a sense of ease to flesh and spirit alike. All is enjoyment, everything charms. The balmy air, laden with the perfume of grasses and the smell of seaweed, soothes the olfactory sense with its wild fragrance, soothes the palate with its sea savor, soothes the mind with its pervading sweetness.

"We were now walking along the edge of the cliff, high above the boundless sea which rolled its little waves below us at a distance of a hundred metres. And we drank in with open mouth and expanded chest that fresh breeze, briny from kissing the waves, that came from the ocean and passed across our faces.

"Wrapped in her plaid shawl, with a look of inspiration as she faced the breeze, the English woman gazed fixedly at the great sun ball as it descended toward the horizon. Far off in the distance a three-master in full sail was outlined on the blood-red sky and a steamship, somewhat nearer, passed along, leaving behind it a trail of smoke on the horizon. The red sun globe sank slowly lower and lower and presently touched the water just behind the motionless vessel, which, in its dazzling effulgence, looked as though framed in a flame of fire. We saw it plunge, grow smaller and disappear, swallowed up by the ocean.

"Miss Harriet gazed in rapture at the last gleams of the dying day. She seemed longing to embrace the sky, the sea, the whole landscape.

"She murmured: 'Aoh! I love — I love' I saw a tear in her eye. She continued: 'I wish I were a little bird, so that I could mount up into the firmament.'

"She remained standing as I had often before seen her, perched on the cliff, her face as red as her shawl. I should have liked to have sketched her in my album. It would have been a caricature of ecstasy.

"I turned away so as not to laugh.

"I then spoke to her of painting as I would have done to a fellow artist, using the technical terms common among the devotees of the profession. She listened attentively, eagerly seeking to divine the meaning of the terms, so as to understand my thoughts. From time to time she would exclaim:

"'Oh! I understand, I understand. It is very interesting.'

"We returned home.

“The next day, on seeing me, she approached me, cordially holding out her hand; and we at once became firm friends.

“She was a good creature who had a kind of soul on springs, which became enthusiastic at a bound. She lacked equilibrium like all women who are spinsters at the age of fifty. She seemed to be preserved in a pickle of innocence, but her heart still retained something very youthful and inflammable. She loved both nature and animals with a fervor, a love like old wine fermented through age, with a sensuous love that she had never bestowed on men.

“One thing is certain, that the sight of a bitch nursing her puppies, a mare roaming in a meadow with a foal at its side, a bird’s nest full of young ones, screaming, with their open mouths and their enormous heads, affected her perceptibly.

“Poor, solitary, sad, wandering beings! I love you ever since I became acquainted with Miss Harriet.

“I soon discovered that she had something she would like to tell me, but dare not, and I was amused at her timidity. When I started out in the morning with my knapsack on my back, she would accompany me in silence as far as the end of the village, evidently struggling to find words with which to begin a conversation. Then she would leave me abruptly and walk away quickly with her springy step.

“One day, however, she plucked up courage:

“I would like to see how you paint pictures. Are you willing? I have been very curious.’

“And she blushed as if she had said something very audacious.

“I conducted her to the bottom of the Petit-Val, where I had begun a large picture.

“She remained standing behind me, following all my gestures with concentrated attention. Then, suddenly, fearing perhaps that she was disturbing me, she said: ‘Thank you,’ and walked away.

“But she soon became more friendly, and accompanied me every day, her countenance exhibiting visible pleasure. She carried her camp stool under her arm, not permitting me to carry it. She would remain there for hours, silent and motionless, following with her eyes the point of my brush, in its every movement. When I obtained unexpectedly just the effect I wanted by a dash of color put on with the palette knife, she involuntarily uttered a little ‘Ah!’ of astonishment, of joy, of admiration. She had the most tender respect for my canvases, an almost religious respect for that human reproduction of a part of nature's work divine. My studies appeared to her a kind of religious pictures, and sometimes she spoke to me of God, with the idea of converting me.

"Oh, he was a queer, good-natured being, this God of hers! He was a sort of village philosopher without any great resources and without great power, for she always figured him to herself as inconsolable over injustices committed under his eyes, as though he were powerless to prevent them.

"She was, however, on excellent terms with him, affecting even to be the confidante of his secrets and of his troubles. She would say:

"'God wills' or 'God does not will,' just like a sergeant announcing to a recruit: 'The colonel has commanded.'

"At the bottom of her heart she deplored my ignorance of the intentions of the Eternal, which she endeavored to impart to me.

"Almost every day I found in my pockets, in my hat when I lifted it from the ground, in my paintbox, in my polished shoes, standing in front of my door in the morning, those little pious tracts which she no doubt, received directly from Paradise.

"I treated her as one would an old friend, with unaffected cordiality. But I soon perceived that she had changed somewhat in her manner, though, for a while, I paid little attention to it.

"When I was painting, whether in my valley or in some country lane, I would see her suddenly appear with her rapid, springy walk. She would then sit down abruptly, out of breath, as though she had been running or were overcome by some profound emotion. Her face would be red, that English red which is denied to the people of all other countries; then, without any reason, she would turn ashy pale and seem about to faint away. Gradually, however, her natural color would return and she would begin to speak.

"Then, without warning, she would break off in the middle of a sentence, spring up from her seat and walk away so rapidly and so strangely that I was at my wits' ends to discover whether I had done or said anything to displease or wound her.

"I finally came to the conclusion that those were her normal manners, somewhat modified no doubt in my honor during the first days of our acquaintance.

"When she returned to the farm, after walking for hours on the windy coast, her long curls often hung straight down, as if their springs had been broken. This had hitherto seldom given her any concern, and she would come to dinner without embarrassment all dishevelled by her sister, the breeze.

"But now she would go to her room and arrange the untidy locks, and when I would say, with familiar gallantry, which, however, always offended her:

"'You are as beautiful as a star to-day, Miss Harriet,' a blush would immediately rise to her cheeks, the blush of a young girl, of a girl of fifteen.

"Then she would suddenly become quite reserved and cease coming to watch me paint. I thought, 'This is only a fit of temper; it will blow over.' But it did not always blow over, and when I spoke to her she would answer me either with affected indifference or with sullen annoyance.

"She became by turns rude, impatient and nervous. I never saw her now except at meals, and we spoke but little. I concluded at length that I must have offended her in some way, and, accordingly, I said to her one evening:

"'Miss Harriet, why is it that you do not act toward me as formerly? What have I done to displease you? You are causing me much pain!'

"She replied in a most comical tone of anger:

"'I am just the same with you as formerly. It is not true, not true,' and she ran upstairs and shut herself up in her room.

"Occasionally she would look at me in a peculiar manner. I have often said to myself since then that those who are condemned to death must look thus when they are informed that their last day has come. In her eye there lurked a species of insanity, an insanity at once mystical and violent; and even more, a fever, an aggravated longing, impatient and impotent, for the unattained and unattainable.

"Nay, it seemed to me there was also going on within her a struggle in which her heart wrestled with an unknown force that she sought to master, and even, perhaps, something else. But what do I know? What do I know?

"It was indeed a singular revelation.

"For some time I had commenced to work, as soon as daylight appeared, on a picture the subject of which was as follows:

"A deep ravine, enclosed, surmounted by two thickets of trees and vines, extended into the distance and was lost, submerged in that milky vapor, in that cloud like cotton down that sometimes floats over valleys at daybreak.

And at the extreme end of that heavy, transparent fog one saw, or, rather, surmised, that a couple of human beings were approaching, a human couple, a youth and a maiden, their arms interlaced, embracing each other, their heads inclined toward each other, their lips meeting.

“A first ray of the sun, glistening through the branches, pierced that fog of the dawn, illuminated it with a rosy reflection just behind the rustic lovers, framing their vague shadows in a silvery background. It was well done; yes, indeed, well done.

“I was working on the declivity which led to the Valley of Etretat. On this particular morning I had, by chance, the sort of floating vapor which I needed. Suddenly something rose up in front of me like a phantom; it was Miss Harriet. On seeing me she was about to flee. But I called after her, saying: ‘Come here, come here, mademoiselle. I have a nice little picture for you.’

“She came forward, though with seeming reluctance. I handed her my sketch. She said nothing, but stood for a long time, motionless, looking at it, and suddenly she burst into tears. She wept spasmodically, like men who have striven hard to restrain their tears, but who can do so no longer and abandon themselves to grief, though still resisting. I sprang to my feet, moved at the sight of a sorrow I did not comprehend, and I took her by the hand with an impulse of brusque affection, a true French impulse which acts before it reflects.

“She let her hands rest in mine for a few seconds, and I felt them quiver as if all her nerves were being wrenched. Then she withdrew her hands abruptly, or, rather, snatched them away.

“I recognized that tremor, for I had felt it, and I could not be deceived. Ah! the love tremor of a woman, whether she be fifteen or fifty years of age, whether she be of the people or of society, goes so straight to my heart that I never have any hesitation in understanding it!

“Her whole frail being had trembled, vibrated, been overcome. I knew it. She walked away before I had time to say a word, leaving me as surprised as if I had witnessed a miracle and as troubled as if I had committed a crime.

“I did not go in to breakfast. I went to take a turn on the edge of the cliff, feeling that I would just as lief weep as laugh, looking on the adventure as both comic and deplorable and my position as ridiculous, believing her unhappy enough to go insane.

"I asked myself what I ought to do. It seemed best for me to leave the place, and I immediately resolved to do so.

"Somewhat sad and perplexed, I wandered about until dinner time and entered the farmhouse just when the soup had been served up.

"I sat down at the table as usual. Miss Harriet was there, eating away solemnly, without speaking to any one, without even lifting her eyes. Her manner and expression were, however, the same as usual.

"I waited patiently till the meal had been finished, when, turning toward the landlady, I said: 'Well, Madame Lecacheur, it will not be long now before I shall have to take my leave of you.'

"The good woman, at once surprised and troubled, replied in her drawling voice: 'My dear sir, what is it you say? You are going to leave us after I have become so accustomed to you?'

"I glanced at Miss Harriet out of the corner of my eye. Her countenance did not change in the least. But Celeste, the little servant, looked up at me. She was a fat girl, of about eighteen years of age, rosy, fresh, as strong as a horse, and possessing the rare attribute of cleanliness. I had kissed her at odd times in out-of-the-way corners, after the manner of travellers — nothing more.

"The dinner being at length over, I went to smoke my pipe under the apple trees, walking up and down from one end of the enclosure to the other. All the reflections which I had made during the day, the strange discovery of the morning, that passionate and grotesque attachment for me, the recollections which that revelation had suddenly called up, recollections at once charming and perplexing, perhaps also that look which the servant had cast on me at the announcement of my departure — all these things, mixed up and combined, put me now in a reckless humor, gave me a tickling sensation of kisses on the lips and in my veins a something which urged me on to commit some folly.

"Night was coming on, casting its dark shadows under the trees, when I descried Celeste, who had gone to fasten up the poultry yard at the other end of the enclosure. I darted toward her, running so noiselessly that she heard nothing, and as she got up from closing the small trapdoor by which the chickens got in and out, I clasped her in my arms and rained on her coarse, fat face a shower of kisses. She struggled, laughing all the time, as she was accustomed to do in such circumstances. Why did I suddenly loose my grip of her? Why did I at once experience a shock? What was it that I heard behind me?

"It was Miss Harriet, who had come upon us, who had seen us and who stood in front of us motionless as a spectre. Then she disappeared in the darkness.

"I was ashamed, embarrassed, more desperate at having been thus surprised by her than if she had caught me committing some criminal act.

"I slept badly that night. I was completely unnerved and haunted by sad thoughts. I seemed to hear loud weeping, but in this I was no doubt deceived. Moreover, I thought several times that I heard some one walking up and down in the house and opening the hall door.

"Toward morning I was overcome by fatigue and fell asleep. I got up late and did not go downstairs until the late breakfast, being still in a bewildered state, not knowing what kind of expression to put on.

"No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her at table, but she did not appear. At length Mother Lecacheur went to her room. The English woman had gone out. She must have set out at break of day, as she was wont to do, in order to see the sun rise.

"Nobody seemed surprised at this, and we began to eat in silence.

"The weather was hot, very hot, one of those broiling, heavy days when not a leaf stirs. The table had been placed out of doors, under an apple tree, and from time to time Sapeur had gone to the cellar to draw a jug of cider, everybody was so thirsty. Celeste brought the dishes from the kitchen, a ragout of mutton with potatoes, a cold rabbit and a salad. Afterward she placed before us a dish of strawberries, the first of the season.

"As I wished to wash and freshen these, I begged the servant to go and draw me a pitcher of cold water.

"In about five minutes she returned, declaring that the well was dry. She had lowered the pitcher to the full extent of the cord and had touched the bottom, but on drawing the pitcher up again it was empty. Mother Lecacheur, anxious to examine the thing for herself, went and looked down the hole. She returned, announcing that one could see clearly something in the well, something altogether unusual. But this no doubt was bundles of straw, which a neighbor had thrown in out of spite.

"I wished to look down the well also, hoping I might be able to clear up the mystery, and I perched myself close to the brink. I perceived indistinctly a white object. What could it be? I then conceived the idea of lowering a lantern at the end of a cord. When I did so the yellow flame danced on the layers of stone and gradually became clearer. All four of us were leaning over the opening, Sapeur and Celeste having now joined us. The lantern rested on a black-and-white indistinct mass, singular, incomprehensible. Sapeur exclaimed:

"'It is a horse. I see the hoofs. It must have got out of the meadow during the night and fallen in headlong.'

"But suddenly a cold shiver froze me to the marrow. I first recognized a foot, then a leg sticking up; the whole body and the other leg were completely under water.

"I stammered out in a loud voice, trembling so violently that the lantern danced hither and thither over the slipper:

"'It is a woman! Who-who-can it be? It is Miss Harriet!'

"Sapeur alone did not manifest horror. He had witnessed many such scenes in Africa.

"Mother Lecacheur and Celeste began to utter piercing screams and ran away.

"But it was necessary to recover the corpse of the dead woman. I attached the young man securely by the waist to the end of the pulley rope and lowered him very slowly, watching him disappear in the darkness. In one hand he held the lantern and a rope in the other. Soon I recognized his voice, which seemed to come from the centre of the earth, saying:

"'Stop!'

"I then saw him fish something out of the water. It was the other leg. He then bound the two feet together and shouted anew:

"'Haul up!'

"I began to wind up, but I felt my arms crack, my muscles twitch, and I was in terror lest I should let the man fall to the bottom. When his head appeared at the brink I asked:

"'Well?' as if I expected he had a message from the drowned woman.

"We both got on the stone slab at the edge of the well and from opposite sides we began to haul up the body.

"Mother Lecacheur and Celeste watched us from a distance, concealed from view behind the wall of the house. When they saw issuing from the hole the black slippers and white stockings of the drowned person they disappeared.

“Sapeur seized the ankles, and we drew up the body of the poor woman. The head was shocking to look at, being bruised and lacerated, and the long gray hair, out of curl forevermore, hanging down tangled and disordered.

“‘In the name of all that is holy! how lean she is,’ exclaimed Sapeur in a contemptuous tone.

“We carried her into the room, and as the women did not put in an appearance I, with the assistance of the stable lad, dressed the corpse for burial.

“I washed her disfigured face. Under the touch of my finger an eye was slightly opened and regarded me with that pale, cold look, that terrible look of a corpse which seems to come from the beyond. I braided as well as I could her dishevelled hair and with my clumsy hands arranged on her head a novel and singular coiffure. Then I took off her dripping wet garments, baring, not without a feeling of shame, as though I had been guilty of some profanation, her shoulders and her chest and her long arms, as slim as the twigs of a tree.

“I next went to fetch some flowers, poppies, bluets, marguerites and fresh, sweet-smelling grass with which to strew her funeral couch.

“I then had to go through the usual formalities, as I was alone to attend to everything. A letter found in her pocket, written at the last moment, requested that her body be buried in the village in which she had passed the last days of her life. A sad suspicion weighed on my heart. Was it not on my account that she wished to be laid to rest in this place?

“Toward evening all the female gossips of the locality came to view the remains of the defunct, but I would not allow a single person to enter. I wanted to be alone, and I watched beside her all night.

“I looked at the corpse by the flickering light of the candles, at this unhappy woman, unknown to us all, who had died in such a lamentable manner and so far away from home. Had she left no friends, no relations behind her? What had her infancy been? What had been her life? Whence had she come thither alone, a wanderer, lost like a dog driven from home? What secrets of sufferings and of despair were sealed up in that unprepossessing body, in that poor body whose outward appearance had driven from her all affection, all love?

“How many unhappy beings there are! I felt that there weighed upon that human creature the eternal injustice of implacable nature! It was all over with her, without her ever having experienced, perhaps, that which sustains the greatest outcasts to wit, the hope of being loved once! Otherwise why should she thus have concealed herself, fled from the face of others? Why did she love everything so tenderly and so passionately, everything living that was not a man?

"I recognized the fact that she believed in a God, and that she hoped to receive compensation from the latter for all the miseries she had endured. She would now disintegrate and become, in turn, a plant. She would blossom in the sun, the cattle would browse on her leaves, the birds would bear away the seeds, and through these changes she would become again human flesh. But that which is called the soul had been extinguished at the bottom of the dark well. She suffered no longer. She had given her life for that of others yet to come.

"Hours passed away in this silent and sinister communion with the dead. A pale light at length announced the dawn of a new day; then a red ray streamed in on the bed, making a bar of light across the coverlet and across her hands. This was the hour she had so much loved. The awakened birds began to sing in the trees.

"I opened the window to its fullest extent and drew back the curtains that the whole heavens might look in upon us, and, bending over the icy corpse, I took in my hands the mutilated head and slowly, without terror or disgust, I imprinted a kiss, a long kiss, upon those lips which had never before been kissed."

Leon Chenal remained silent. The women wept. We heard on the box seat the Count d'Atraille blowing his nose from time to time. The coachman alone had gone to sleep. The horses, who no longer felt the sting of the whip, had slackened their pace and moved along slowly. The drag, hardly advancing at all, seemed suddenly torpid, as if it had been freighted with sorrow.

> [Miss Harriet appeared in Le Gaulois, July 9, 1883, under the title of Miss Hastings. The story was later revised, enlarged; and partly reconstructed. This is what De Maupassant wrote to Editor Havard March 15, 1884, in an unedited letter, in regard to the title of the story that was to give its name to the volume:
>
> "I do not believe that Hastings is a bad name, inasmuch as it is known all over the world, and recalls the greatest facts in English history. Besides, Hastings is as much a name as Duval is with us.

“The name Cherbuliez selected, Miss Revel, is no more like an English name than like a Turkish name. But here is another name as English as Hastings, and more euphonious; it is Miss Harriet.
I will ask you therefore to substitute Harriet for Hastings.”

It was in regard to this very tittle that De Maupassant had a disagreement with Audran and Boucheron director of the Bouffes Parisiens in October, 1890 They had given this title to an operetta about to be played at the Bouffes. It ended however, by their ceding to De Maupassant, and the title of the operetta was changed to Miss Helyett.]

LITTLE LOUISE ROQUE

OR

THE CASE OF LOUISE ROQUE

The former soldier, Mederic Rompel, familiarly called Mederic by the country folks, left the post office of Roily-le-Tors at the usual hour. After passing through the village with his long stride, he cut across the meadows of Villaume and reached the bank of the Brindille, following the path along the water's edge to the village of Carvelin, where he commenced to deliver his letters. He walked quickly, following the course of the narrow river, which frothed, murmured and boiled in its grassy bed beneath an arch of willows.

Mederic went on without stopping, with only this thought in his mind: "My first letter is for the Poivron family, then I have one for Monsieur Renardet; so I must cross the wood."

His blue blouse, fastened round his waist by a black leather belt, moved in a quick, regular fashion above the green hedge of willow trees, and his stout stick of holly kept time with his steady tread.

He crossed the Brindille on a bridge consisting of a tree trunk, with a handrail of rope, fastened at either end to a stake driven into the ground.

The wood, which belonged to Monsieur Renardet, the mayor of Carvelin and the largest landowner in the district, consisted of huge old trees, straight as pillars and extending for about half a league along the left bank of the stream which served as a boundary to this immense dome of foliage. Alongside the water large shrubs had grown up in the sunlight, but under the trees one found nothing but moss, thick, soft and yielding, from which arose, in the still air, an odor of dampness and of dead wood.

Mederic slackened his pace, took off his black cap adorned with red lace and wiped his forehead, for it was by this time hot in the meadows, though it was not yet eight o'clock in the morning.

He had just recovered from the effects of the heat and resumed his quick pace when he noticed at the foot of a tree a knife, a child's small knife. When he picked it up he discovered a thimble and also a needlecase not far away.

Having taken up these objects, he thought: "I'll entrust them to the mayor," and he resumed his journey, but now he kept his eyes open, expecting to find something else.

All of a sudden he stopped short, as if he had struck against a wooden barrier. Ten paces in front of him lay stretched on her back on the moss a little girl, perfectly nude, her face covered with a handkerchief. She was about twelve years old.

Meredic advanced on tiptoe, as if he apprehended some danger, and he glanced toward the spot uneasily.

What was this? No doubt she was asleep. Then he reflected that a person does not go to sleep naked at half-past seven in the morning under the cool trees. So, then, she must be dead, and he must be face to face with a crime. At this thought a cold shiver ran through his frame, although he was an old soldier. And then a murder was such a rare thing in the country, and, above all, the murder of a child, that he could not believe his eyes. But she had no wound-nothing save a spot of blood on her leg. How, then, had she been killed?

He stopped close to her and gazed at her, while he leaned on his stick. Certainly he must know her, for he knew all the inhabitants of the district; but, not being able to get a look at her face, he could not guess her name. He stooped forward in order to take off the handkerchief which covered her face, then paused, with outstretched hand, restrained by an idea that occurred to him.

Had he the right to disarrange anything in the condition of the corpse before the official investigation? He pictured justice to himself as a kind of general whom nothing escapes and who attaches as much importance to a lost button as to the stab of a knife in the stomach. Perhaps under this handkerchief evidence could be found to sustain a charge of murder; in fact, if such proof were there it might lose its value if touched by an awkward hand.

Then he raised himself with the intention of hastening toward the mayor’s residence, but again another thought held him back. If the little girl were still alive, by any chance, he could not leave her lying there in this way. He sank on his knees very gently, a little distance from her, through precaution, and extended his hand toward her foot. It was icy cold, with the terrible coldness of death which leaves us no longer in doubt. The letter carrier, as he touched her, felt his heart in his mouth, as he said himself afterward, and his mouth parched. Rising up abruptly, he rushed off under the trees toward Monsieur Renardet’s house.

He walked on faster than ever, with his stick under his arm, his hands clenched and his head thrust forward, while his leathern bag, filled with letters and newspapers, kept flapping at his side.

The mayor’s residence was at the end of the wood which served as a park, and one side of it was washed by the Brindille.

It was a big square house of gray stone, very old, and had stood many a siege in former days, and at the end of it was a huge tower, twenty metres high, rising out of the water.

From the top of this fortress one could formerly see all the surrounding country. It was called the Fox’s tower, without any one knowing exactly why; and from this appellation, no doubt, had come the name Renardet, borne by the owners of this fief, which had remained in the same family, it was said, for more than two hundred years. For the Renardets formed part of the upper middle class, all but noble, to be met with so often in the province before the Revolution.

The postman dashed into the kitchen, where the servants were taking breakfast, and exclaimed:

“Is the mayor up? I want to speak to him at once.”

Mederic was recognized as a man of standing and authority, and they understood that something serious had happened.

As soon as word was brought to Monsieur Renardet, he ordered the postman to be sent up to him. Pale and out of breath, with his cap in his hand, Mederic found the mayor seated at a long table covered with scattered papers.

He was a large, tall man, heavy and red-faced, strong as an ox, and was greatly liked in the district, although of an excessively violent disposition. Almost forty years old and a widower for the past six months, he lived on his estate like a country gentleman. His choleric temperament had often brought him into trouble from which the magistrates of Roily-le-Tors, like indulgent and prudent friends, had extricated him. Had he not one day thrown the conductor of the diligence from the top of his seat because he came near running over his retriever, Micmac? Had he not broken the ribs of a gamekeeper who abused him for having, gun in hand, passed through a neighbor's property? Had he not even caught by the collar the sub-prefect, who stopped over in the village during an administrative circuit, called by Monsieur Renardet an electioneering circuit, for he was opposed to the government, in accordance with family traditions.

The mayor asked:

"What's the matter now, Mederic?"

"I found a little girl dead in your wood."

Renardet rose to his feet, his face the color of brick.

"What do you say — a little girl?"

"Yes, m'sieu, a little girl, quite naked, on her back, with blood on her, dead — quite dead!"

The mayor gave vent to an oath:

"By God, I'd make a bet it is little Louise Roque! I have just learned that she did not go home to her mother last night. Where did you find her?"

The postman described the spot, gave full details and offered to conduct the mayor to the place.

But Renardet became brusque:

"No, I don't need you. Send the watchman, the mayor's secretary and the doctor to me at once, and resume your rounds. Quick, quick, go and tell them to meet me in the wood."

The letter carrier, a man used to discipline, obeyed and withdrew, angry and grieved at not being able to be present at the investigation.

The mayor, in his turn, prepared to go out, took his big soft hat and paused for a few seconds on the threshold of his abode. In front of him stretched a wide sward, in which were three large beds of flowers in full bloom, one facing the house and the others at either side of it. Farther on the outlying trees of the wood rose skyward, while at the left, beyond the Brindille, which at that spot widened into a pond, could be seen long meadows, an entirely green flat sweep of country, intersected by trenches and hedges of pollard willows.

To the right, behind the stables, the outhouses and all the buildings connected with the property, might be seen the village, which was wealthy, being mainly inhabited by cattle breeders.

Renardet slowly descended the steps in front of his house, and, turning to the left, gained the water's edge, which he followed at a slow pace, his hand behind his back. He walked on, with bent head, and from time to time glanced round in search of the persons he had sent for.

When he stood beneath the trees he stopped, took off his hat and wiped his forehead as Mederic had done, for the burning sun was darting its fiery rays on the earth. Then the mayor resumed his journey, stopped once more and retraced his steps. Suddenly, stooping down, he steeped his handkerchief in the stream that glided along at his feet and spread it over his head, under his hat. Drops of water flowed down his temples over his ears, which were always purple, over his strong red neck, and made their way, one after the other, under his white shirt collar.

As nobody had appeared, he began tapping with his foot, then he called out:

"Hello! Hello!"

A voice at his right answered:

"Hello! Hello!"

And the doctor appeared under the trees. He was a thin little man, an ex-military surgeon, who passed in the neighborhood for a very skillful practitioner. He limped, having been wounded while in the service, and had to use a stick to assist him in walking.

Next came the watchman and the mayor's secretary, who, having been sent for at the same time, arrived together. They looked scared, and hurried forward, out of breath, walking and running alternately to hasten their progress, and moving their arms up and down so vigorously that they seemed to do more work with them than with their legs.

Renardet said to the doctor:

"You know what the trouble is about?"

"Yes, a child found dead in the wood by Mederic."

"That's quite correct. Come on!"

They walked along, side by side, followed by the two men.

Their steps made no sound on the moss. Their eyes were gazing ahead in front of them.

Suddenly the doctor, extending his arm, said:

"See, there she is!"

Far ahead of them under the trees they saw something white on which the sun gleamed down through the branches. As they approached they gradually distinguished a human form lying there, its head toward the river, the face covered and the arms extended as though on a crucifix.

"I am fearfully warm," said the mayor, and stooping down, he again soaked his handkerchief in the water and placed it round his forehead.

The doctor hastened his steps, interested by the discovery. As soon as they were near the corpse, he bent down to examine it without touching it. He had put on his pince-nez, as one does in examining some curious object, and turned round very quietly.

He said, without rising:

"Violated and murdered, as we shall prove presently. This little girl, moreover, is almost a woman — look at her throat."

The doctor lightly drew away the handkerchief which covered her face, which looked black, frightful, the tongue protruding, the eyes bloodshot. He went on:

"By heavens! She was strangled the moment the deed was done."

He felt her neck.

"Strangled with the hands without leaving any special trace, neither the mark of the nails nor the imprint of the fingers. Quite right. It is little Louise Roque, sure enough!"

He carefully replaced the handkerchief.

"There's nothing for me to do. She's been dead for the last hour at least. We must give notice of the matter to the authorities."

Renardet, standing up, with his hands behind his back, kept staring with a stony look at the little body exposed to view on the grass. He murmured:

"What a wretch! We must find the clothes."

The doctor felt the hands, the arms, the legs. He said:

"She had been bathing no doubt. They ought to be at the water's edge."

The mayor thereupon gave directions:

"Do you, Principe" (this was his secretary), "go and find those clothes for me along the stream. You, Maxime" (this was the watchman), "hurry on toward Rouy-le-Tors and bring with you the magistrate with the gendarmes. They must be here within an hour. You understand?"

The two men started at once, and Renardet said to the doctor:

"What miscreant could have done such a deed in this part of the country?"

The doctor murmured:

"Who knows? Any one is capable of that. Every one in particular and nobody in general. No matter, it must be some prowler, some workman out of employment. Since we have become a Republic we meet only this kind of person along the roads."

Both of them were Bonapartists.

The mayor went on:

"Yes, it can only be a stranger, a passer-by, a vagabond without hearth or home."

The doctor added, with the shadow of a smile on his face:

"And without a wife. Having neither a good supper nor a good bed, he became reckless. You can't tell how many men there may be in the world capable of a crime at a given moment. Did you know that this little girl had disappeared?"

And with the end of his stick he touched one after the other the stiffened fingers of the corpse, resting on them as on the keys of a piano.

"Yes, the mother came last night to look for me about nine o'clock, the child not having come home at seven to supper. We looked for her along the roads up to midnight, but we did not think of the wood. However, we needed daylight to carry out a thorough search."

"Will you have a cigar?" said the doctor.

"Thanks, I don't care to smoke. This thing affects me so."

They remained standing beside the corpse of the young girl, so pale on the dark moss. A big blue fly was walking over the body with his lively, jerky movements. The two men kept watching this wandering speck.

The doctor said:

"How pretty it is, a fly on the skin! The ladies of the last century had good reason to paste them on their faces. Why has this fashion gone out?"

The mayor seemed not to hear, plunged as he was in deep thought.

But, all of a sudden, he turned round, surprised by a shrill noise. A woman in a cap and blue apron was running toward them under the trees. It was the mother, La Roque. As soon as she saw Renardet she began to shriek:

"My little girl! Where's my little girl?" so distractedly that she did not glance down at the ground. Suddenly she saw the corpse, stopped short, clasped her hands and raised both her arms while she uttered a sharp, heartrending cry — the cry of a wounded animal. Then she rushed toward the body, fell on her knees and snatched away the handkerchief that covered the face. When she saw that frightful countenance, black and distorted, she rose to her feet with a shudder, then sinking to the ground, face downward, she pressed her face against the ground and uttered frightful, continuous screams on the thick moss.

Her tall, thin frame, with its close-clinging dress, was palpitating, shaken with spasms. One could see her bony ankles and her dried-up calves covered with coarse blue stockings shaking horribly. She was digging the soil with her crooked fingers, as though she were trying to make a hole in which to hide herself.

The doctor, much affected, said in a low tone:

“Poor old woman!”

Renardet felt a strange sensation. Then he gave vent to a sort of loud sneeze, and, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he began to weep internally, coughing, sobbing and blowing his nose noisily.

He stammered:

“Damn — damn — damned pig to do this! I would like to seem him guillotined.”

Principe reappeared with his hands empty. He murmured:

“I have found nothing, M’sieu le Maire, nothing at all anywhere.”

The mayor, alarmed, replied in a thick voice, drowned in tears:

“What is that you could not find?”

“The little girl’s clothes.”

“Well — well — look again, and find them — or you’’ll have to answer to me.”

The man, knowing that the mayor would not brook opposition, set forth again with hesitating steps, casting a timid side glance at the corpse.

Distant voices were heard under the trees, a confused sound, the noise of an approaching crowd, for Mederic had, in the course of his rounds, carried the news from door to door. The people of the neighborhood, dazed at first, had gossiped about it in the street, from one threshold to another. Then they gathered together. They talked over, discussed and commented on the event for some minutes and had now come to see for themselves.

They arrived in groups, a little faltering and uneasy through fear of the first impression of such a scene on their minds. When they saw the body they stopped, not daring to advance, and speaking low. Then they grew bolder, went on a few steps, stopped again, advanced once more, and presently formed around the dead girl, her mother, the doctor and Renardet a close circle, restless and noisy, which crowded forward at the sudden impact of newcomers. And now they touched the corpse. Some of them even bent down to feel it with their fingers. The doctor kept them back. But the mayor, waking abruptly out of his torpor, flew into a rage, and seizing Dr. Labarbe's stick, flung himself on his townspeople, stammering:

"Clear out — clear out — you pack of brutes — clear out!"

And in a second the crowd of sightseers had fallen back two hundred paces.

Mother La Roque had risen to a sitting posture and now remained weeping, with her hands clasped over her face.

The crowd was discussing the affair, and young lads' eager eyes curiously scrutinized this nude young form. Renardet perceived this, and, abruptly taking off his coat, he flung it over the little girl, who was entirely hidden from view beneath the large garment.

The secretary drew near quietly. The wood was filled with people, and a continuous hum of voices rose up under the tangled foliage of the tall trees.

The mayor, in his shirt sleeves, remained standing, with his stick in his hands, in a fighting attitude. He seemed exasperated by this curiosity on the part of the people and kept repeating:

"If one of you come nearer I'll break his head just as I would a dog's."

The peasants were greatly afraid of him. They held back. Dr. Labarbe, who was smoking, sat down beside La Roque and spoke to her in order to distract her attention. The old woman at once removed her hands from her face and replied with a flood of tearful words, emptying her grief in copious talk. She told the whole story of her life, her marriage, the death of her man, a cattle drover, who had been gored to death, the infancy of her daughter, her wretched existence as a widow without resources and with a child to support. She had only this one, her little Louise, and the child had been killed — killed in this wood. Then she felt anxious to see her again, and, dragging herself on her knees toward the corpse, she raised up one corner of the garment that covered her; then she let it fall again and began wailing once more. The crowd remained silent, eagerly watching all the mother's gestures.

But suddenly there was a great commotion at the cry of "The gendarmes! the gendarmes!"

Two gendarmes appeared in the distance, advancing at a rapid trot, escorting their captain and a little gentleman with red whiskers, who was bobbing up and down like a monkey on a big white mare.

The watchman had just found Monsieur Putoin, the magistrate, at the moment when he was mounting his horse to take his daily ride, for he posed as a good horseman, to the great amusement of the officers.

He dismounted, along with the captain, and pressed the hands of the mayor and the doctor, casting a ferret-like glance on the linen coat beneath which lay the corpse.

When he was made acquainted with all the facts, he first gave orders to disperse the crowd, whom the gendarmes drove out of the wood, but who soon reappeared in the meadow and formed a hedge, a big hedge of excited and moving heads, on the other side of the stream.

The doctor, in his turn, gave explanations, which Renardet noted down in his memorandum book. All the evidence was given, taken down and commented on without leading to any discovery. Maxime, too, came back without having found any trace of the clothes.

This disappearance surprised everybody; no one could explain it except on the theory of theft, and as her rags were not worth twenty sous, even this theory was inadmissible.

The magistrate, the mayor, the captain and the doctor set to work searching in pairs, putting aside the smallest branch along the water.

Renardet said to the judge:

"How does it happen that this wretch has concealed or carried away the clothes, and has thus left the body exposed, in sight of every one?"

The other, crafty and sagacious, answered:

"Ha! ha! Perhaps a dodge? This crime has been committed either by a brute or by a sly scoundrel. In any case, we'll easily succeed in finding him."

The noise of wheels made them turn their heads round. It was the deputy magistrate, the doctor and the registrar of the court who had arrived in their turn. They resumed their search, all chatting in an animated fashion.

Renardet said suddenly:

"Do you know that you are to take luncheon with me?"

Every one smilingly accepted the invitation, and the magistrate, thinking that the case of little Louise Roque had occupied enough attention for one day, turned toward the mayor.

"I can have the body brought to your house, can I not? You have a room in which you can keep it for me till this evening?"

The other became confused and stammered:

"Yes — no — no. To tell the truth, I prefer that it should not come into my house on account of — on account of my servants, who are already talking about ghosts in — in my tower, in the Fox's tower. You know — I could no longer keep a single one. No — I prefer not to have it in my house."

The magistrate began to smile.

"Good! I will have it taken at once to Roily for the legal examination." And, turning to his deputy, he said:

"I can make use of your trap, can I not?"

"Yes, certainly."

They all came back to the place where the corpse lay. Mother La Roque, now seated beside her daughter, was holding her hand and was staring right before her with a wandering, listless eye.

The two doctors endeavored to lead her away, so that she might not witness the dead girl's removal, but she understood at once what they wanted to do, and, flinging herself on the body, she threw both arms round it. Lying on top of the corpse, she exclaimed:

"You shall not have it — it's mine — it's mine now. They have killed her for me, and I want to keep her — you shall not have her — — "

All the men, affected and not knowing how to act, remained standing around her. Renardet fell on his knees and said to her:

"Listen, La Roque, it is necessary, in order to find out who killed her. Without this, we could not find out. We must make a search for the man in order to punish him. When we have found him we'll give her up to you. I promise you this."

This explanation bewildered the woman, and a feeling of hatred manifested itself in her distracted glance.

"So then they'll arrest him?"

"Yes, I promise you that."

She rose up, deciding to let them do as they liked, but when the captain remarked:

"It is surprising that her clothes were not found," a new idea, which she had not previously thought of, abruptly entered her mind, and she asked:

"Where are her clothes? They're mine. I want them. Where have they been put?"

They explained to her that they had not been found. Then she demanded them persistently, crying and moaning.

"They're mine — I want them. Where are they? I want them!"

The more they tried to calm her the more she sobbed and persisted in her demands. She no longer wanted the body, she insisted on having the clothes, as much perhaps through the unconscious cupidity of a wretched being to whom a piece of silver represents a fortune as through maternal tenderness.

And when the little body, rolled up in blankets which had been brought out from Renardet's house, had disappeared in the vehicle, the old woman standing under the trees, sustained by the mayor and the captain, exclaimed:

"I have nothing, nothing, nothing in the world, not even her little cap — her little cap."

The cure, a young priest, had just arrived. He took it on himself to accompany the mother, and they went away together toward the village. The mother's grief was modified by the sugary words of the clergyman, who promised her a thousand compensations. But she kept repeating: "If I had only her little cap." This idea now dominated every other.

Renardet called from the distance:

"You will lunch with us, Monsieur l'Abbe — in an hour's time."

The priest turned his head round and replied:

"With pleasure, Monsieur le Maire. I'll be with you at twelve."

And they all directed their steps toward the house, whose gray front, with the large tower built on the edge of the Brindille, could be seen through the branches.

The meal lasted a long time. They talked about the crime. Everybody was of the same opinion. It had been committed by some tramp passing there by mere chance while the little girl was bathing.

Then the magistrates returned to Rouy, announcing that they would return next day at an early hour. The doctor and the cure went to their respective homes, while Renardet, after a long walk through the meadows, returned to the wood, where he remained walking till nightfall with slow steps, his hands behind his back.

He went to bed early and was still asleep next morning when the magistrate entered his room. He was rubbing his hands together with a self-satisfied air.

“Ha! ha! You are still sleeping! Well, my dear fellow, we have news this morning.”

The mayor sat up in his bed.

“What, pray?”

“Oh! Something strange. You remember well how the mother clamored yesterday for some memento of her daughter, especially her little cap? Well, on opening her door this morning she found on the threshold her child’s two little wooden shoes. This proves that the crime was perpetrated by some one from the district, some one who felt pity for her. Besides, the postman, Mederic, brought me the thimble, the knife and the needle case of the dead girl. So, then, the man in carrying off the clothes to hide them must have let fall the articles which were in the pocket. As for me, I attach special importance to the wooden shoes, as they indicate a certain moral culture and a faculty for tenderness on the part of the assassin. We will, therefore, if you have no objection, go over together the principal inhabitants of your district.”

The mayor got up. He rang for his shaving water and said:

“With pleasure, but it will take some time, and we may begin at once.”

M. Putoin sat astride a chair.

Renardet covered his chin with a white lather while he looked at himself in the glass. Then he sharpened his razor on the strop and continued:

“The principal inhabitant of Carvelin bears the name of Joseph Renardet, mayor, a rich landowner, a rough man who beats guards and coachmen— “

The examining magistrate burst out laughing.

“That’s enough. Let us pass on to the next.”

“The second in importance is Pelledent, his deputy, a cattle breeder, an equally rich landowner, a crafty peasant, very sly, very close-fisted on every question of money, but incapable in my opinion of having perpetrated such a crime.”

“Continue,” said M. Putoin.

Renardet, while proceeding with his toilet, reviewed the characters of all the inhabitants of Carvelin. After two hours’ discussion their suspicions were fixed on three individuals who had hitherto borne a shady reputation — a poacher named Cavalle, a fisherman named Paquet, who caught trout and crabs, and a cattle drover named Clovis. II

The search for the perpetrator of the crime lasted all summer, but he was not discovered. Those who were suspected and arrested easily proved their innocence, and the authorities were compelled to abandon the attempt to capture the criminal.

But this murder seemed to have moved the entire country in a singular manner. There remained in every one's mind a disquietude, a vague fear, a sensation of mysterious terror, springing not merely from the impossibility of discovering any trace of the assassin, but also and above all from that strange finding of the wooden shoes in front of La Roque's door the day after the crime. The certainty that the murderer had assisted at the investigation, that he was still, doubtless, living in the village, possessed all minds and seemed to brood over the neighborhood like a constant menace.

The wood had also become a dreaded spot, a place to be avoided and supposed to be haunted.

Formerly the inhabitants went there to spend every Sunday afternoon. They used to sit down on the moss at the feet of the huge tall trees or walk along the water's edge watching the trout gliding among the weeds. The boy's used to play bowls, hide-and-seek and other games where the ground had been cleared and levelled, and the girls, in rows of four or five, would trip along, holding one another by the arms and screaming songs with their shrill voices. Now nobody ventured there for fear of finding some corpse lying on the ground.

Autumn arrived, the leaves began to fall from the tall trees, whirling round and round to the ground, and the sky could be seen through the bare branches. Sometimes, when a gust of wind swept over the tree tops, the slow, continuous rain suddenly grew heavier and became a rough storm that covered the moss with a thick yellow carpet that made a kind of creaking sound beneath one's feet.

And the sound of the falling leaves seemed like a wail and the leaves themselves like tears shed by these great, sorrowful trees, that wept in the silence of the bare and empty wood, this dreaded and deserted wood where wandered lonely the soul, the little soul of little Louise Roque.

The Brindille, swollen by the storms, rushed on more quickly, yellow and angry, between its dry banks, bordered by two thin, bare, willow hedges.

And here was Renardet suddenly resuming his walks under the trees. Every day, at sunset, he came out of his house, descended the front steps slowly and entered the wood in a dreamy fashion, with his hands in his pockets, and paced over the damp soft moss, while a legion of rooks from all the neighboring haunts came thither to rest in the tall trees and then flew off like a black cloud uttering loud, discordant cries.

Night came on, and Renardet was still strolling slowly under the trees; then, when the darkness prevented him from walking any longer, he would go back to the house and sink into his armchair in front of the glowing hearth, stretching his damp feet toward the fire.

One morning an important bit of news was circulated through the district; the mayor was having his wood cut down.

Twenty woodcutters were already at work. They had commenced at the corner nearest to the house and worked rapidly in the master's presence.

And each day the wood grew thinner, losing its trees, which fell down one by one, as an army loses its soldiers.

Renardet no longer walked up, and down. He remained from morning till night, contemplating, motionless, with his hands behind his back, the slow destruction of his wood. When a tree fell he placed his foot on it as if it were a corpse. Then he raised his eyes to the next with a kind of secret, calm impatience, as if he expected, hoped for something at the end of this slaughter.

Meanwhile they were approaching the place where little Louise Roque had been found. They came to it one evening in the twilight.

As it was dark, the sky being overcast, the woodcutters wanted to stop their work, putting off till next day the fall of an enormous beech tree, but the mayor objected to this and insisted that they should at once lop and cut down this giant, which had sheltered the crime.

When the lopper had laid it bare and the woodcutters had sapped its base, five men commenced hauling at the rope attached to the top.

The tree resisted; its powerful trunk, although notched to the centre, was as rigid as iron. The workmen, all together, with a sort of simultaneous motion,' strained at the rope, bending backward and uttering a cry which timed and regulated their efforts.

Two woodcutters standing close to the giant remained with axes in their grip, like two executioners ready to strike once more, and Renardet, motionless, with his hand on the trunk, awaited the fall with an uneasy, nervous feeling.

One of the men said to him:

"You are too near, Monsieur le Maire. When it falls it may hurt you."

He did not reply and did not move away. He seemed ready to catch the beech tree in his open arms and to cast it on the ground like a wrestler.

All at once, at the base of the tall column of wood there was a rent which seemed to run to the top, like a painful shock; it bent slightly, ready to fall, but still resisting. The men, in a state of excitement, stiffened their arms, renewed their efforts with greater vigor, and, just as the tree came crashing down, Renardet suddenly made a forward step, then stopped, his shoulders raised to receive the irresistible shock, the mortal shock which would crush him to the earth.

But the beech tree, having deviated a little, only rubbed against his loins, throwing him on his face, five metres away.

The workmen dashed forward to lift him up. He had already arisen to his knees, stupefied, with bewildered eyes and passing his hand across his forehead, as if he were awaking from an attack of madness.

When he had got to his feet once more the men, astonished, questioned him, not being able to understand what he had done. He replied in faltering tones that he had been dazed for a moment, or, rather, he had been thinking of his childhood days; that he thought he would have time to run under the tree, just as street boys rush in front of vehicles driving rapidly past; that he had played at danger; that for the past eight days he felt this desire growing stronger within him, asking himself each time a tree began to fall whether he could pass beneath it without being touched. It was a piece of stupidity, he confessed, but every one has these moments of insanity and these temptations to boyish folly.

He made this explanation in a slow tone, searching for his words, and speaking in a colorless tone.

Then he went off, saying:

“Till to-morrow, my friends-till to-morrow.”

As soon as he got back to his room he sat down at his table which his lamp lighted up brightly, and, burying his head in his hands, he began to cry.

He remained thus for a long time, then wiped his eyes, raised his head and looked at the clock. It was not yet six o’clock.

He thought:

“I have time before dinner.”

And he went to the door and locked it. He then came back, and, sitting down at his table, pulled out the middle drawer. Taking from it a revolver, he laid it down on his papers in full view. The barrel of the firearm glittered, giving out gleams of light.

Renardet gazed at it for some time with the uneasy glance of a drunken man. Then he rose and began to pace up and down the room.

He walked from one end of the apartment to the other, stopping from time to time, only to pace up and down again a moment afterward. Suddenly he opened the door of his dressing-room, steeped a towel in the water pitcher and moistened his forehead, as he had done on the morning of the crime.

Then he, began walking up and down again. Each time he passed the table the gleaming revolver attracted his glance, tempted his hand, but he kept watching the clock and reflected:

"I have still time."

It struck half-past six. Then he took up the revolver, opened his mouth wide with a frightful grimace and stuck the barrel into it as if he wanted to swallow it. He remained in this position for some seconds without moving, his finger on the trigger. Then, suddenly seized with a shudder of horror, he dropped the pistol on the carpet.

He fell back on his armchair, sobbing:

"I cannot. I dare not! My God! my God! How can I have the courage to kill myself?'"

There was a knock at the door. He rose up, bewildered. A servant said:

"Monsieur's dinner is ready."

He replied:

"All right. I'm coming down."

Then he picked up the revolver, locked it up again in the drawer and looked at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece to see whether his face did not look too much troubled. It was as red as usual, a little redder perhaps. That was all. He went down and seated himself at table.

He ate slowly, like a man who wants to prolong the meal, who does not want to be alone.

Then he smoked several pipes in the hall while the table was being cleared. After that he went back to his room.

As soon as he had locked himself in he looked, under the bed, opened all the closets, explored every corner, rummaged through all the furniture. Then he lighted the candles on the mantelpiece, and, turning round several times, ran his eye all over the apartment with an anguish of terror that distorted his face, for he knew well that he would see her, as he did every night — little Louise Roque, the little girl he had attacked and afterward strangled.

Every night the odious vision came back again. First he seemed to hear a kind of roaring sound, such as is made by a threshing machine or the distant passage of a train over a bridge. Then he commenced to gasp, to suffocate, and he had to unbutton his collar and his belt. He moved about to make his blood circulate, he tried to read, he attempted to sing. It was in vain. His thoughts, in spite of himself, went back to the day of the murder and made him begin it all over again in all its most secret details, with all the violent emotions he had experienced from the first minute to the last.

He had felt on rising that morning, the morning of the horrible day, a little dizziness and headache, which he attributed to the heat, so that he remained in his room until breakfast time.

After the meal he had taken a siesta, then, toward the close of the afternoon, he had gone out to breathe the fresh, soothing breeze under the trees in the wood.

But, as soon as he was outside, the heavy, scorching air of the plain oppressed him still more. The sun, still high in the heavens, poured down on the parched soil waves of burning light. Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves. Every beast and bird, even the grasshoppers, were silent. Renardet reached the tall trees and began to walk over the moss where the Brindille produced a slight freshness of the air beneath the immense roof of branches. But he felt ill at ease. It seemed to him that an unknown, invisible hand was strangling him, and he scarcely thought of anything, having usually few ideas in his head. For the last three months only one thought haunted him, the thought of marrying again. He suffered from living alone, suffered from it morally and physically. Accustomed for ten years past to feeling a woman near him, habituated to her presence every moment, he had need, an imperious and perplexing need of such association. Since Madame Renardet’s death he had suffered continually without knowing why, he had suffered at not feeling her dress brushing past him, and, above all, from no longer being able to calm and rest himself in her arms. He had been scarcely six months a widower and he was already looking about in the district for some young girl or some widow he might marry when his period of mourning was at an end.

He had a chaste soul, but it was lodged in a powerful, herculean body, and carnal imaginings began to disturb his sleep and his vigils. He drove them away; they came back again; and he murmured from time to time, smiling at himself:

“Here I am, like St. Anthony.”

Having this special morning had several of these visions, the desire suddenly came into his breast to bathe in the Brindille in order to refresh himself and cool his blood.

He knew of a large deep pool, a little farther down, where the people of the neighborhood came sometimes to take a dip in summer. He went there.

Thick willow trees hid this clear body of water where the current rested and went to sleep for a while before starting on its way again. Renardet, as he appeared, thought he heard a light sound, a faint plashing which was not that of the stream on the banks. He softly put aside the leaves and looked. A little girl, quite naked in the transparent water, was beating the water with both hands, dancing about in it and dipping herself with pretty movements. She was not a child nor was she yet a woman. She was plump and developed, while preserving an air of youthful precocity, as of one who had grown rapidly. He no longer moved, overcome with surprise, with desire, holding his breath with a strange, poignant emotion. He remained there, his heart beating as if one of his sensuous dreams had just been realized, as if an impure fairy had conjured up before him this young creature, this little rustic Venus, rising from the eddies of the stream as the real Venus rose from the waves of the sea.

Suddenly the little girl came out of the water, and, without seeing him, came over to where he stood, looking for her clothes in order to dress herself. As she approached gingerly, on account of the sharp-pointed stones, he felt himself pushed toward her by an irresistible force, by a bestial transport of passion, which stirred his flesh, bewildered his mind and made him tremble from head to foot.

She remained standing some seconds behind the willow tree which concealed him from view. Then, losing his reason entirely, he pushed aside the branches, rushed on her and seized her in his arms. She fell, too terrified to offer any resistance, too terror-stricken to cry out. He seemed possessed, not understanding what he was doing.

He woke from his crime as one wakes from a nightmare. The child burst out weeping.

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue!" he said. "I'll give you money."

But she did not hear him and went on sobbing.

"Come now, hold your tongue! Do hold your tongue! Keep quiet!" he continued.

She kept shrieking as she tried to free herself. He suddenly realized that he was ruined, and he caught her by the neck to stop her mouth from uttering these heartrending, dreadful screams. As she continued to struggle with the desperate strength of a being who is seeking to fly from death, he pressed his enormous hands on the little throat swollen with screaming, and in a few seconds he had strangled her, so furiously did he grip her. He had not intended to kill her, but only to make her keep quiet.

Then he stood up, overwhelmed with horror.

She lay before him, her face bleeding and blackned. He was about to rush away when there sprang up in his agitated soul the mysterious and undefined instinct that guides all beings in the hour of danger.

He was going to throw the body into the water, but another impulse drove him toward the clothes, which he made into a small package. Then, as he had a piece of twine in his pocket, he tied it up and hid it in a deep portion of the stream, beneath the trunk of a tree that overhung the Brindille.

Then he went off at a rapid pace, reached the meadows, took a wide turn in order to show himself to some peasants who dwelt some distance away at the opposite side of the district, and came back to dine at the usual hour, telling his servants all that was supposed to have happened during his walk.

He slept, however, that night; he slept with a heavy, brutish sleep like the sleep of certain persons condemned to death. He did not open his eyes until the first glimmer of dawn, and he waited till his usual hour for riding, so as to excite no suspicion.

Then he had to be present at the inquiry as to the cause of death. He did so like a somnambulist, in a kind of vision which showed him men and things as in a dream, in a cloud of intoxication, with that sense of unreality which perplexes the mind at the time of the greatest catastrophes.

But the agonized cry of Mother Roque pierced his heart. At that moment he had felt inclined to cast himself at the old woman's feet and to exclaim:

"I am the guilty one!"

But he had restrained himself. He went back, however, during the night to fish up the dead girl's wooden shoes, in order to place them on her mother's threshold.

As long as the inquiry lasted, as long as it was necessary to lead justice astray he was calm, master of himself, crafty and smiling. He discussed quietly with the magistrates all the suppositions that passed through their minds, combated their opinions and demolished their arguments. He even took a keen and mournful pleasure in disturbing their investigations, in embroiling their ideas, in showing the innocence of those whom they suspected.

But as soon as the inquiry was abandoned he became gradually nervous, more excitable than he had been before, although he mastered his irritability. Sudden noises made him start with fear; he shuddered at the slightest thing and trembled sometimes from head to foot when a fly alighted on his forehead. Then he was seized with an imperious desire for motion, which impelled him to take long walks and to remain up whole nights pacing up and down his room.

It was not that he was goaded by remorse. His brutal nature did not lend itself to any shade of sentiment or of moral terror. A man of energy and even of violence, born to make war, to ravage conquered countries and to massacre the vanquished, full of the savage instincts of the hunter and the fighter, he scarcely took count of human life. Though he respected the Church outwardly, from policy, he believed neither in God nor the devil, expecting neither chastisement nor recompense for his acts in another life. His sole belief was a vague philosophy drawn from all the ideas of the encyclopedists of the last century, and he regarded religion as a moral sanction of the law, the one and the other having been invented by men to regulate social relations. To kill any one in a duel, or in war, or in a quarrel, or by accident, or for the sake of revenge, or even through bravado would have seemed to him an amusing and clever thing and would not have left more impression on his mind than a shot fired at a hare; but he had experienced a profound emotion at the murder of this child. He had, in the first place, perpetrated it in the heat of an irresistible gust of passion, in a sort of tempest of the senses that had overpowered his reason. And he had cherished in his heart, in his flesh, on his lips, even to the very tips of his murderous fingers a kind of bestial love, as well as a feeling of terrified horror, toward this little girl surprised by him and basely killed. Every moment his thoughts returned to that horrible scene, and, though he endeavored to drive this picture from his mind, though he put it aside with terror, with disgust, he felt it surging through his soul, moving about in him, waiting incessantly for the moment to reappear.

Then, as evening approached, he was afraid of the shadow falling around him. He did not yet know why the darkness seemed frightful to him, but he instinctively feared it, he felt that it was peopled with terrors. The bright daylight did not lend itself to fears. Things and beings were visible then, and only natural things and beings could exhibit themselves in the light of day. But the night, the impenetrable night, thicker than walls and empty; the infinite night, so black, so vast, in which one might brush against frightful things; the night, when one feels that a mysterious terror is wandering, prowling about, appeared to him to conceal an unknown threatening danger, close beside him.

What was it?

He knew ere long. As he sat in his armchair, rather late one evening when he could not sleep, he thought he saw the curtain of his window move. He waited, uneasily, with beating heart. The drapery did not stir; then, all of a sudden, it moved once more. He did not venture to rise; he no longer ventured to breathe, and yet he was brave. He had often fought, and he would have liked to catch thieves in his house.

Was it true that this curtain did move? he asked himself, fearing that his eyes had deceived him. It was, moreover, such a slight thing, a gentle flutter of drapery, a kind of trembling in its folds, less than an undulation caused by the wind.

Renardet sat still, with staring eyes and outstretched neck. He sprang to his feet abruptly, ashamed of his fear, took four steps, seized the drapery with both hands and pulled it wide apart. At first he saw nothing but darkened glass, resembling plates of glittering ink. The night, the vast, impenetrable night, stretched beyond as far as the invisible horizon. He remained standing in front of this illimitable shadow, and suddenly he perceived a light, a moving light, which seemed some distance away.

Then he put his face close to the window pane, thinking that a person looking for crabs might be poaching in the Brindille, for it was past midnight, and this light rose up at the edge of the stream, under the trees. As he was not yet able to see clearly, Renardet placed his hands over his eyes, and suddenly this light became an illumination, and he beheld little Louise Roque naked and bleeding on the moss. He recoiled, frozen with horror, knocked over his chair and fell over on his back. He remained there some minutes in anguish of mind; then he sat up and began to reflect. He had had a hallucination — that was all, a hallucination due to the fact that a night marauder was walking with a lantern in his hand near the water's edge. What was there astonishing, besides, in the circumstance that the recollection of his crime should sometimes bring before him the vision of the dead girl?

He rose from the ground, swallowed a glass of wine and sat down again. He was thinking:

"What am I to do if this occurs again?"

And it would occur; he felt it; he was sure of it. Already his glance was drawn toward the window; it called him; it attracted him. In order to avoid looking at it, he turned his chair round. Then he took a book and tried to read, but it seemed to him that he presently heard something stirring behind him, and he swung round his armchair on one foot.

The curtain was moving again; unquestionably, it moved this time. He could no longer have any doubt about it.

He rushed forward and grasped it so violently that he pulled it down with its pole. Then he eagerly glued his face to the glass. He saw nothing. All was black outside, and he breathed with the joy of a man whose life has just been saved.

Then he went back to his chair and sat down again, but almost immediately he felt a longing to look out once more through the window. Since the curtain had fallen down, the window made a sort of gap, fascinating and terrible, on the dark landscape. In order not to yield to this dangerous temptation, he undressed, blew out the light and closed his eyes.

Lying on his back motionless, his skin warm and moist, he awaited sleep. Suddenly a great gleam of light flashed across his eyelids. He opened them, believing that his dwelling was on fire. All was black as before, and he leaned on his elbow to try to distinguish the window which had still for him an unconquerable attraction. By dint of, straining his eyes he could perceive some stars, and he rose, groped his way across the room, discovered the panes with his outstretched hands, and placed his forehead close to them. There below, under the trees, lay the body of the little girl gleaming like phosphorus, lighting up the surrounding darkness.

Renardet uttered a cry and rushed toward his bed, where he lay till morning, his head hidden under the pillow.

From that moment his life became intolerable. He passed his days in apprehension of each succeeding night, and each night the vision came back again. As soon as he had locked himself up in his room he strove to resist it, but in vain. An irresistible force lifted him up and pushed him against the window, as if to call the phantom, and he saw it at once, lying first in the spot where the crime was committed in the position in which it had been found.

Then the dead girl rose up and came toward him with little steps just as the child had done when she came out of the river. She advanced quietly, passing straight across the grass and over the bed of withered flowers. Then she rose up in the air toward Renardet's window. She came toward him as she had come on the day of the crime. And the man recoiled before the apparition — he retreated to his bed and sank down upon it, knowing well that the little one had entered the room and that she now was standing behind the curtain, which presently moved. And until daybreak he kept staring at this curtain with a fixed glance, ever waiting to see his victim depart.

But she did not show herself any more; she remained there behind the curtain, which quivered tremulously now and then.

And Renardet, his fingers clutching the clothes, squeezed them as he had squeezed the throat of little Louise Roque.

He heard the clock striking the hours, and in the stillness the pendulum kept ticking in time with the loud beating of his heart. And he suffered, the wretched man, more than any man had ever suffered before.

Then, as soon as a white streak of light on the ceiling announced the approaching day, he felt himself free, alone at last, alone in his room; and he went to sleep. He slept several hours — a restless, feverish sleep in which he retraced in dreams the horrible vision of the past night.

When he went down to the late breakfast he felt exhausted as after unusual exertion, and he scarcely ate anything, still haunted as he was by the fear of what he had seen the night before.

He knew well, however, that it was not an apparition, that the dead do not come back, and that his sick soul, his soul possessed by one thought alone, by an indelible remembrance, was the only cause of his torture, was what brought the dead girl back to life and raised her form before his eyes, on which it was ineffaceably imprinted. But he knew, too, that there was no cure, that he would never escape from the savage persecution of his memory, and he resolved to die rather than to endure these tortures any longer.

Then he thought of how he would kill himself, It must be something simple and natural, which would preclude the idea of suicide. For he clung to his reputation, to the name bequeathed to him by his ancestors; and if his death awakened any suspicion people's thoughts might be, perhaps, directed toward the mysterious crime, toward the murderer who could not be found, and they would not hesitate to accuse him of the crime.

A strange idea came into his head, that of allowing himself to be crushed by the tree at the foot of which he had assassinated little Louise Roque. So he determined to have the wood cut down and to simulate an accident. But the beech tree refused to crush his ribs.

Returning to his house, a prey to utter despair, he had snatched up his revolver, and then did not dare to fire it.

The dinner bell summoned him. He could eat nothing, and he went upstairs again. And he did not know what to do. Now that he had escaped the first time, he felt himself a coward. Presently he would be ready, brave, decided, master of his courage and of his resolution; now he was weak and feared death as much as he did the dead girl.

He faltered:

"I dare not venture it again — I dare not venture it."

Then he glanced with terror, first at the revolver on the table and next at the curtain which hid his window. It seemed to him, moreover, that something horrible would occur as soon as his life was ended. Something? What? A meeting with her, perhaps. She was watching for him; she was waiting for him; she was calling him; and it was in order to seize him in her turn, to draw him toward the doom that would avenge her, and to lead him to die, that she appeared thus every night.

He began to cry like a child, repeating:

"I will not venture it again — I will not venture it."

Then he fell on his knees and murmured:

"My God! my God!" without believing, nevertheless, in God. And he no longer dared, in fact, to look at his window, where he knew the apparition was hiding, nor at his table, where his revolver gleamed. When he had risen up he said:

"This cannot last; there must be an end of it"

The sound of his voice in the silent room made a chill of fear pass through his limbs, but as he could not bring himself to come to a determination, as he felt certain that his finger would always refuse to pull the trigger of his revolver, he turned round to hide his head under the bedclothes and began to reflect.

He would have to find some way in which he could force himself to die, to play some trick on himself which would not permit of any hesitation on his part, any delay, any possible regrets. He envied condemned criminals who are led to the scaffold surrounded by soldiers. Oh! if he could only beg of some one to shoot him; if after confessing his crime to a true friend who would never divulge it he could procure death at his hand. But from whom could he ask this terrible service? From whom? He thought of all the people he knew. The doctor? No, he would talk about it afterward, most probably. And suddenly a fantastic idea entered his mind. He would write to the magistrate, who was on terms of close friendship with him, and would denounce himself as the perpetrator of the crime. He would in this letter confess everything, revealing how his soul had been tortured, how he had resolved to die, how he had hesitated about carrying out his resolution and what means he had employed to strengthen his failing courage. And in the name of their old friendship he would implore of the other to destroy the letter as soon as he had ascertained that the culprit had inflicted justice on himself. Renardet could rely on this magistrate; he knew him to be true, discreet, incapable of even an idle word. He was one of those men who have an inflexible conscience, governed, directed, regulated by their reason alone.

Scarcely had he formed this project when a strange feeling of joy took possession of his heart. He was calm now. He would write his letter slowly, then at daybreak he would deposit it in the box nailed to the outside wall of his office; then he would ascend his tower to watch for the postman's arrival; and when the man in the blue blouse had gone away, he would cast himself head foremost on the rocks on which the foundations rested, He would take care to be seen first by the workmen who had cut down his wood. He could climb to the projecting stone which bore the flagstaff displayed on festivals, He would smash this pole with a shake and carry it along with him as he fell.

Who would suspect that it was not an accident? And he would be killed outright, owing to his weight and the height of the tower.

Presently he got out of bed, went over to the table and began to write. He omitted nothing, not a single detail of the crime, not a single detail of the torments of his heart, and he ended by announcing that he had passed sentence on himself, that he was going to execute the criminal, and begged his friend, his old friend, to be careful that there should never be any stain on his memory.

When he had finished this letter he saw that the day had dawned.

He closed, sealed it and wrote the address. Then he descended with light steps, hurried toward the little white box fastened to the outside wall in the corner of the farmhouse, and when he had thrown into it this letter, which made his hand tremble, he came back quickly, drew the bolts of the great door and climbed up to his tower to wait for the passing of the postman, who was to bear away his death sentence.

He felt self-possessed now. Liberated! Saved!

A cold dry wind, an icy wind passed across his face. He inhaled it eagerly with open mouth, drinking in its chilling kiss. The sky was red, a wintry red, and all the plain, whitened with frost, glistened under the first rays of the sun, as if it were covered with powdered glass.

Renardet, standing up, his head bare, gazed at the vast tract of country before him, the meadows to the left and to the right the village whose chimneys were beginning to smoke in preparation for the morning meal. At his feet he saw the Brindille flowing amid the rocks, where he would soon be crushed to death. He felt new life on that beautiful frosty morning. The light bathed him, entered his being like a new-born hope. A thousand recollections assailed him, recollections of similar mornings, of rapid walks on the hard earth which rang beneath his footsteps, of happy days of shooting on the edges of pools where wild ducks sleep. All the good things that he loved, the good things of existence, rushed to his memory, penetrated him with fresh desires, awakened all the vigorous appetites of his active, powerful body.

And he was about to die! Why? He was going to kill himself stupidly because he was afraid of a shadow-afraid of nothing! He was still rich and in the prime of life. What folly! All he needed was distraction, absence, a voyage in order to forget.

This night even he had not seen the little girl because his mind was preoccupied and had wandered toward some other subject. Perhaps he would not see her any more? And even if she still haunted him in this house, certainly she would not follow him elsewhere! The earth was wide, the future was long.

Why should he die?

His glance travelled across the meadows, and he perceived a blue spot in the path which wound alongside the Brindille. It was Mederic coming to bring letters from the town and to carry away those of the village.

Renardet gave a start, a sensation of pain shot through his breast, and he rushed down the winding staircase to get back his letter, to demand it back from the postman. Little did it matter to him now whether he was seen, He hurried across the grass damp from the light frost of the previous night and arrived in front of the box in the corner of the farmhouse exactly at the same time as the letter carrier.

The latter had opened the little wooden door and drew forth the four papers deposited there by the inhabitants of the locality.

Renardet said to him:

“Good-morrow, Mederic.”

“Good-morrow, Monsieur le Maire.”

“I say, Mederic, I threw a letter into the box that I want back again. I came to ask you to give it back to me.”

“That’s all right, Monsieur le Maire — you’ll get it.”

And the postman raised his eyes. He stood petrified at the sight of Renardet’s face. The mayor’s cheeks were purple, his eyes were anxious and sunken, with black circles round them, his hair was unbrushed, his beard untrimmed, his necktie unfastened. It was evident that he had not been in bed.

The postman asked:

“Are you ill, Monsieur le Maire?”

The other, suddenly comprehending that his appearance must be unusual, lost countenance and faltered:

“Oh! no-oh! no. Only I jumped out of bed to ask you for this letter. I was asleep. You understand?”

He said in reply:

“What letter?”

“The one you are going to give back to me.”

Mederic now began to hesitate. The mayor’s attitude did not strike him as natural. There was perhaps a secret in that letter, a political secret. He knew

Renardet was not a Republican, and he knew all the tricks and chicanery employed at elections.

He asked:

“To whom is it addressed, this letter of yours?”

“To Monsieur Putoin, the magistrate — you know, my friend, Monsieur Putoin!”

The postman searched through the papers and found the one asked for. Then he began looking at it, turning it round and round between his fingers, much perplexed, much troubled by the fear of either committing a grave offence or of making an enemy of the mayor.

Seeing his hesitation, Renardet made a movement for the purpose of seizing the letter and snatching it away from him. This abrupt action convinced Mederic that some important secret was at stake and made him resolve to do his duty, cost what it may.

So he flung the letter into his bag and fastened it up, with the reply:

“No, I can’t, Monsieur le Maire. As long as it is for the magistrate, I can’t.”

A dreadful pang wrung Renardet’s heart and he murmured:

“Why, you know me well. You are even able to recognize my handwriting. I tell you I want that paper.”

“I can’t.”

“Look here, Mederic, you know that I’m incapable of deceiving you — I tell you I want it.”

“No, I can’t.”

A tremor of rage passed through Renardet’s soul.

“Damn it all, take care! You know that I never trifle and that I could get you out of your job, my good fellow, and without much delay, either, And then, I am the mayor of the district, after all; and I now order you to give me back that paper.”

The postman answered firmly:

“No, I can’t, Monsieur le Maire.”

Thereupon Renardet, losing his head, caught hold of the postman’s arms in order to take away his bag; but, freeing himself by a strong effort, and springing backward, the letter carrier raised his big holly stick. Without losing his temper, he said emphatically:

“Don’t touch me, Monsieur le Maire, or I’ll strike. Take care, I’m only doing my duty!”

Feeling that he was lost, Renardet suddenly became humble, gentle, appealing to him like a whimpering child:

"Look here, look here, my friend, give me back that letter and I'll recompense you — I'll give you money. Stop! stop! I'll give you a hundred francs, you understand — a hundred francs!"

The postman turned on his heel and started on his journey.

Renardet followed him, out of breath, stammering:

"Mederic, Mederic, listen! I'll give you a thousand francs, you understand — a thousand francs."

The postman still went on without giving any answer.

Renardet went on:

"I'll make your fortune, you understand — whatever you wish — fifty thousand francs — fifty thousand francs for that letter! What does it matter to you? You won't? Well, a hundred thousand — I say — a hundred thousand francs. Do you understand? A hundred thousand francs — a hundred thousand francs."

The postman turned back, his face hard, his eye severe:

"Enough of this, or else I'll repeat to the magistrate everything you have just said to me."

Renardet stopped abruptly. It was all over. He turned back and rushed toward his house, running like a hunted animal.

Then, in his turn, Mederic stopped and watched his flight with stupefaction. He saw the mayor reenter his house, and he waited still, as if something astonishing were about to happen.

In fact, presently the tall form of Renardet appeared on the summit of the Fox's tower. He ran round the platform like a madman. Then he seized the flagstaff and shook it furiously without succeeding in breaking it; then, all of a sudden, like a diver, with his two hands before him, he plunged into space.

Mederic rushed forward to his assistance. He saw the woodcutters going to work and called out to them, telling them an accident had occurred. At the foot of the walls they found a bleeding body, its head crushed on a rock. The Brindille surrounded this rock, and over its clear, calm waters could be seen a long red thread of mingled brains and blood.

THE DONKEY

There was not a breath of air stirring; a heavy mist was lying over the river. It was like a layer of cotton placed on the water. The banks themselves were indistinct, hidden behind strange fogs. But day was breaking and the hill was becoming visible. In the dawning light of day the plaster houses began to appear like white spots. Cocks were crowing in the barnyard.

On the other side of the river, hidden behind the fogs, just opposite Frette, a slight noise from time to time broke the dead silence of the quiet morning. At times it was an indistinct plashing, like the cautious advance of a boat, then again a sharp noise like the rattle of an oar and then the sound of something dropping in the water. Then silence.

Sometimes whispered words, coming perhaps from a distance, perhaps from quite near, pierced through these opaque mists. They passed by like wild birds which have slept in the rushes and which fly away at the first light of day, crossing the mist and uttering a low and timid sound which wakes their brothers along the shores.

Suddenly along the bank, near the village, a barely perceptible shadow appeared on the water. Then it grew, became more distinct and, coming out of the foggy curtain which hung over the river, a flatboat, manned by two men, pushed up on the grass.

The one who was rowing rose and took a pailful of fish from the bottom of the boat, then he threw the dripping net over his shoulder. His companion, who had not made a motion, exclaimed: “Say, Mailloche, get your gun and see if we can’t land some rabbit along the shore.”

The other one answered: “All right. I’ll be with you in a minute.” Then he disappeared, in order to hide their catch.

The man who had stayed in the boat slowly filled his pipe and lighted it. His name was Labouise, but he was called Chicot, and was in partnership with Maillochon, commonly called Mailloche, to practice the doubtful and undefined profession of junk-gatherers along the shore.

They were a low order of sailors and they navigated regularly only in the months of famine. The rest of the time they acted as junk-gatherers. Rowing about on the river day and night, watching for any prey, dead or alive, poachers on the water and nocturnal hunters, sometimes ambushing venison in the Saint-Germain forests, sometimes looking for drowned people and searching their clothes, picking up floating rags and empty bottles; thus did Labouise and Maillochon live easily.

At times they would set out on foot about noon and stroll along straight ahead. They would dine in some inn on the shore and leave again side by side. They would remain away for a couple of days; then one morning they would be seen rowing about in the tub which they called their boat.

At Joinville or at Nogent some boatman would be looking for his boat, which had disappeared one night, probably stolen, while twenty or thirty miles from there, on the Oise, some shopkeeper would be rubbing his hands, congratulating himself on the bargain he had made when he bought a boat the day before for fifty francs, which two men offered him as they were passing.

Maillochon reappeared with his gun wrapped up in rags. He was a man of forty or fifty, tall and thin, with the restless eye of people who are worried by legitimate troubles and of hunted animals. His open shirt showed his hairy chest, but he seemed never to have had any more hair on his face than a short brush of a mustache and a few stiff hairs under his lower lip. He was bald around the temples. When he took off the dirty cap that he wore his scalp seemed to be covered with a fluffy down, like the body of a plucked chicken.

Chicot, on the contrary, was red, fat, short and hairy. He looked like a raw beefsteak. He continually kept his left eye closed, as if he were aiming at something or at somebody, and when people jokingly cried to him, “Open your eye, Labouise!” he would answer quietly: “Never fear, sister, I open it when there’s cause to.”

He had a habit of calling every one “sister,” even his scavenger companion.

He took up the oars again, and once more the boat disappeared in the heavy mist, which was now turned snowy white in the pink-tinted sky.

“What kind of lead did you take, Maillochon?” Labouise asked.

“Very small, number nine; that’s the best for rabbits.”

They were approaching the other shore so slowly, so quietly that no noise betrayed them. This bank belongs to the Saint-Germain forest and is the boundary line for rabbit hunting. It is covered with burrows hidden under the roots of trees, and the creatures at daybreak frisk about, running in and out of the holes.

Maillochon was kneeling in the bow, watching, his gun hidden on the floor. Suddenly he seized it, aimed, and the report echoed for some time throughout the quiet country.

Labouise, in a few strokes, touched the beach, and his companion, jumping to the ground, picked up a little gray rabbit, not yet dead.

Then the boat once more disappeared into the fog in order to get to the other side, where it could keep away from the game wardens.

The two men seemed to be riding easily on the water. The weapon had disappeared under the board which served as a hiding place and the rabbit was stuffed into Chicot's loose shirt.

After about a quarter of an hour Labouise asked: "Well, sister, shall we get one more?"

"It will suit me," Maillochon answered.

The boat started swiftly down the current. The mist, which was hiding both shores, was beginning to rise. The trees could be barely perceived, as through a veil, and the little clouds of fog were floating up from the water. When they drew near the island, the end of which is opposite Herblay, the two men slackened their pace and began to watch. Soon a second rabbit was killed.

Then they went down until they were half way to Conflans. Here they stopped their boat, tied it to a tree and went to sleep in the bottom of it.

From time to time Labouise would sit up and look over the horizon with his open eye. The last of the morning mist had disappeared and the large summer sun was climbing in the blue sky.

On the other side of the river the vineyard-covered hill stretched out in a semicircle. One house stood out alone at the summit. Everything was silent.

Something was moving slowly along the tow-path, advancing with difficulty. It was a woman dragging a donkey. The stubborn, stiff-jointed beast occasionally stretched out a leg in answer to its companion's efforts, and it proceeded thus, with outstretched neck and ears lying flat, so slowly that one could not tell when it would ever be out of sight.

The woman, bent double, was pulling, turning round occasionally to strike the donkey with a stick.

As soon as he saw her, Labouise exclaimed: “Say, Mailloche!”

Mailloche answered: “What’s the matter?”

“Want to have some fun?”

“Of course!”

“Then hurry, sister; we’re going to have a laugh.”

Chicot took the oars. When he had crossed the river he stopped opposite the woman and called:

“Hey, sister!”

The woman stopped dragging her donkey and looked.

Labouise continued: “What are you doing — going to the locomotive show?”

The woman made no reply. Chicot continued:

“Say, your trotter’s prime for a race. Where are you taking him at that speed?”

At last the woman answered: “I’m going to Macquart, at Champioux, to have him killed. He’s worthless.”

Labouise answered: “You’re right. How much do you think Macquart will give you for him?”

The woman wiped her forehead on the back of her hand and hesitated, saying: “How do I know? Perhaps three francs, perhaps four.”

Chicot exclaimed: “I’ll give you five francs and your errand’s done! How’s that?”

The woman considered the matter for a second and then exclaimed: “Done!”

The two men landed. Labouise grasped the animal by the bridle. Maillochon asked in surprise:

“What do you expect to do with that carcass?”

Chicot this time opened his other eye in order to express his gaiety. His whole red face was grinning with joy. He chuckled: “Don’t worry, sister. I’ve got my idea.”

He gave five francs to the woman, who then sat down by the road to see what was going to happen. Then Labouise, in great humor, got the gun and held it out to Maillochon, saying: “Each one in turn; we’re going after big game, sister. Don’t get so near or you’ll kill it right away! You must make the pleasure last a little.”

He placed his companion about forty paces from the victim. The ass, feeling itself free, was trying to get a little of the tall grass, but it was so exhausted that it swayed on its legs as if it were about to fall.

Maillochon aimed slowly and said: “A little pepper for the ears; watch, Ghicot!” And he fired.

The tiny shot struck the donkey’s long ears and he began to shake them in order to get rid of the stinging sensation. The two men were doubled up with laughter and stamped their feet with joy. The woman, indignant, rushed forward; she did not want her donkey to be tortured, and she offered to return the five francs. Labouise threatened her with a thrashing and pretended to roll up his sleeves. He had paid, hadn’t he? Well, then, he would take a shot at her skirts, just to show that it didn’t hurt. She went away, threatening to call the police. They could hear her protesting indignantly and cursing as she went her way.

Maillochon held out the gun to his comrade, saying: “It’s your turn, Chicot.”

Labouise aimed and fired. The donkey received the charge in his thighs, but the shot was so small and came from such a distance that he thought he was being stung by flies, for he began to thrash himself with his tail.

Labouise sat down to laugh more comfortably, while Maillochon reloaded the weapon, so happy that he seemed to sneeze into the barrel. He stepped forward a few paces, and, aiming at the same place that his friend had shot at, he fired again. This time the beast started, tried to kick and turned its head. At last a little blood was running. It had been wounded and felt a sharp pain, for it tried to run away with a slow, limping, jerky gallop.

Both men darted after the beast, Maillochon with a long stride, Labouise with the short, breathless trot of a little man. But the donkey, tired out, had stopped, and, with a bewildered look, was watching his two murderers approach. Suddenly he stretched his neck and began to bray.

Labouise, out of breath, had taken the gun. This time he walked right up close, as he did not wish to begin the chase over again.

When the poor beast had finished its mournful cry, like a last call for help, the man called: “Hey, Mailloche! Come here, sister; I’m going to give him some medicine.” And while the other man was forcing the animal’s mouth open, Chicot stuck the barrel of his gun down its throat, as if he were trying to make it drink a potion. Then he said: “Look out, sister, here she goes!”

He pressed the trigger. The donkey stumbled back a few steps, fell down, tried to get up again and finally lay on its side and closed its eyes: The whole body was trembling, its legs were kicking as if it were, trying to run. A stream of blood was oozing through its teeth. Soon it stopped moving. It was dead.

The two men went along, laughing. It was over too quickly; they had not had their money's worth. Maillochon asked: "Well, what are we going to do now?"

Labouise answered: "Don't worry, sister. Get the thing on the boat; we're going to have some fun when night comes."

They went and got the boat. The animal's body was placed on the bottom, covered with fresh grass, and the two men stretched out on it and went to sleep.

Toward noon Labouise drew a bottle of wine, some bread and butter and raw onions from a hiding place in their muddy, worm-eaten boat, and they began to eat.

When the meal was over they once more stretched out on the dead donkey and slept. At nightfall Labouise awoke and shook his comrade, who was snoring like a buzzsaw. "Come on, sister," he ordered.

Maillochon began to row. As they had plenty of time they went up the Seine slowly. They coasted along the reaches covered with water-lilies, and the heavy, mud-covered boat slipped over the lily pads and bent the flowers, which stood up again as soon as they had passed.

When they reached the wall of the Eperon, which separates the Saint-Germain forest from the Maisons-Laffitte Park, Labouise stopped his companion and explained his idea to him. Maillochon was moved by a prolonged, silent laugh.

They threw into the water the grass which had covered the body, took the animal by the feet and hid it behind some bushes. Then they got into their boat again and went to Maisons-Laffitte.

The night was perfectly black when they reached the wine shop of old man Jules. As soon as the dealer saw them he came up, shook hands with them and sat down at their table. They began to talk of one thing and another. By eleven o'clock the last customer had left and old man Jules winked at Labouise and asked: "Well, have you got any?"

Labouise made a motion with his head and answered: "Perhaps so, perhaps not!"

The dealer insisted: “Perhaps you’ve not nothing but gray ones?”

Chicot dug his hands into his flannel shirt, drew out the ears of a rabbit and declared: “Three francs a pair!”

Then began a long discussion about the price. Two francs sixty-five and the two rabbits were delivered. As the two men were getting up to go, old man Jules, who had been watching them, exclaimed:

“You have something else, but you won’t say what.”

Labouise answered: “Possibly, but it is not for you; you’re too stingy.”

The man, growing eager, kept asking: “What is it? Something big? Perhaps we might make a deal.”

Labouise, who seemed perplexed, pretended to consult Maillochon with a glance. Then he answered in a slow voice: “This is how it is. We were in the bushes at Eperon when something passed right near us, to the left, at the end of the wall. Mailloche takes a shot and it drops. We skipped on account of the game people. I can’t tell you what it is, because I don’t know. But it’s big enough. But what is it? If I told you I’d be lying, and you know, sister, between us everything’s above-board.”

Anxiously the man asked: “Think it’s venison?”

Labouise answered: “Might be and then again it might not! Venison? — uh! uh! — might be a little big for that! Mind you, I don’t say it’s a doe, because I don’t know, but it might be.”

Still the dealer insisted: “Perhaps it’s a buck?”

Labouise stretched out his hand, exclaiming: “No, it’s not that! It’s not a buck. I should have seen the horns. No, it’s not a buck!”

“Why didn’t you bring it with you?” asked the man.

“Because, sister, from now on I sell from where I stand. Plenty of people will buy. All you have to do is to take a walk over there, find the thing and take it. No risk for me.”

The innkeeper, growing suspicious, exclaimed “Supposing he wasn’t there!”

Labouise once more raised his hand and said:

“He’s there, I swear! — first bush to the left. What it is, I don’t know. But it’s not a buck, I’m positive. It’s for you to find out what it is. Twenty-five francs, cash down!”

Still the man hesitated: “Couldn’t you bring it?”

Maillochon exclaimed: “No, indeed! You know our price! Take it or leave it!”

The dealer decided: “It’s a bargain for twenty francs!”

And they shook hands over the deal.

Then he took out four big five-franc pieces from the cash drawer, and the two friends pocketed the money. Labouise arose, emptied his glass and left. As he was disappearing in the shadows he turned round to exclaim: “It isn’t a buck. I don’t know what it is! — but it’s there. I’ll give you back your money if you find nothing!”

And he disappeared in the darkness. Maillochon, who was following him, kept punching him in the back to express his joy.

MOIRON

As we were still talking about Pranzini, M. Maloureau, who had been attorney general under the Empire, said: “Oh! I formerly knew a very curious affair, curious for several reasons, as you will see.

“I was at that time imperial attorney in one of the provinces. I had to take up the case which has remained famous under the name of the Moiron case.

“Monsieur Moiron, who was a teacher in the north of France, enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the whole country. He was a person of intelligence, quiet, very religious, a little taciturn; he had married in the district of Boislinot, where he exercised his profession. He had had three children, who had died of consumption, one after the other. From this time he seemed to bestow upon the youngsters confided to his care all the tenderness of his heart. With his own money he bought toys for his best scholars and for the good boys; he gave them little dinners and stuffed them with delicacies, candy and cakes: Everybody loved this good man with his big heart, when suddenly five of his pupils died, in a strange manner, one after the other. It was supposed that there was an epidemic due to the condition of the water, resulting from drought; they looked for the causes without being able to discover them, the more so that the symptoms were so peculiar. The children seemed to be attacked by a feeling of lassitude; they would not eat, they complained of pains in their stomachs, dragged along for a short time, and died in frightful suffering.

“A post-mortem examination was held over the last one, but nothing was discovered. The vitals were sent to Paris and analyzed, and they revealed the presence of no toxic substance.

“For a year nothing new developed; then two little boys, the best scholars in the class, Moiron’s favorites, died within four days of each other. An examination of the bodies was again ordered, and in both of them were discovered tiny fragments of crushed glass. The conclusion arrived at was that the two youngsters must imprudently have eaten from some carelessly cleaned receptacle. A glass broken over a pail of milk could have produced this frightful accident, and the affair would have been pushed no further if Moiron's servant had not been taken sick at this time. The physician who was called in noticed the same symptoms he had seen in the children. He questioned her and obtained the admission that she had stolen and eaten some candies that had been bought by the teacher for his scholars.

"On an order from the court the schoolhouse was searched, and a closet was found which was full of toys and dainties destined for the children. Almost all these delicacies contained bits of crushed glass or pieces of broken needles!

"Moiron was immediately arrested; but he seemed so astonished and indignant at the suspicion hanging over him that he was almost released. How ever, indications of his guilt kept appearing, and baffled in my mind my first conviction, based on his excellent reputation, on his whole life, on the complete absence of any motive for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple, religious man have killed little children, and the very children whom he seemed to love the most, whom he spoiled and stuffed with sweet things, for whom he spent half his salary in buying toys and bonbons?

"One must consider him insane to believe him guilty of this act. Now, Moiron seemed so normal, so quiet, so rational and sensible that it seemed impossible to adjudge him insane.

"However, the proofs kept growing! In none of the candies that were bought at the places where the schoolmaster secured his provisions could the slightest trace of anything suspicious be found.

"He then insisted that an unknown enemy must have opened his cupboard with a false key in order to introduce the glass and the needles into the eatables. And he made up a whole story of an inheritance dependent on the death of a child, determined on and sought by some peasant, and promoted thus by casting suspicions on the schoolmaster. This brute, he claimed, did not care about the other children who were forced to die as well.

"The story was possible. The man appeared to be so sure of himself and in such despair that we should undoubtedly have acquitted him, notwithstanding the charges against him, if two crushing discoveries had not been made, one after the other.

"The first one was a snuffbox full of crushed glass; his own snuffbox, hidden in the desk where he kept his money!

“He explained this new find in an acceptable manner, as the ruse of the real unknown criminal. But a mercer from Saint-Marlouf came to the presiding judge and said that a gentleman had several times come to his store to buy some needles; and he always asked for the thinnest needles he could find, and would break them to see whether they pleased him. The man was brought forward in the presence of a dozen or more persons, and immediately recognized Moiron. The inquest revealed that the schoolmaster had indeed gone into Saint-Marlouf on the days mentioned by the tradesman.

“I will pass over the terrible testimony of children on the choice of dainties and the care which he took to have them eat the things in his presence, and to remove the slightest traces.

“Public indignation demanded capital punishment, and it became more and more insistent, overturning all objections.

“Moiron was condemned to death, and his appeal was rejected. Nothing was left for him but the imperial pardon. I knew through my father that the emperor would not grant it.

“One morning, as I was working in my study, the visit of the prison almoner was announced. He was an old priest who knew men well and understood the habits of criminals. He seemed troubled, ill at ease, nervous. After talking for a few minutes about one thing and another, he arose and said suddenly: ‘If Moiron is executed, monsieur, you will have put an innocent man to death.’

“Then he left without bowing, leaving me behind with the deep impression made by his words. He had pronounced them in such a sincere and solemn manner, opening those lips, closed and sealed by the secret of confession, in order to save a life.

“An hour later I left for Paris, and my father immediately asked that I be granted an audience with the emperor.

“The following day I was received. His majesty was working in a little reception room when we were introduced. I described the whole case, and I was just telling about the priest’s visit when a door opened behind the sovereign’s chair and the empress, who supposed he was alone, appeared. His majesty, Napoleon, consulted her. As soon as she had heard the matter, she exclaimed: ‘This man must be pardoned. He must, since he is innocent.’

“Why did this sudden conviction of a religious woman cast a terrible doubt in my mind?

“Until then I had ardently desired a change of sentence. And now I suddenly felt myself the toy, the dupe of a cunning criminal who had employed the priest and confession as a last means of defence.

“I explained my hesitancy to their majesties. The emperor remained undecided, urged on one side by his natural kindness and held back on the other by the fear of being deceived by a criminal; but the empress, who was convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine inspiration, kept repeating: ‘Never mind! It is better to spare a criminal than to kill an innocent man!’ Her advice was taken. The death sentence was commuted to one of hard labor.

“A few years later I heard that Moiron had again been called to the emperor’s attention on account of his exemplary conduct in the prison at Toulon and was now employed as a servant by the director of the penitentiary.

“For a long time I heard nothing more of this man. But about two years ago, while I was spending a summer near Lille with my cousin, De Larielle, I was informed one evening, just as we were sitting down to dinner, that a young priest wished to speak to me.

“I had him shown in and he begged me to come to a dying man who desired absolutely to see me. This had often happened to me in my long career as a magistrate, and, although I had been set aside by the Republic, I was still often called upon in similar circumstances. I therefore followed the priest, who led me to a miserable little room in a large tenement house.

“There I found a strange-looking man on a bed of straw, sitting with his back against the wall, in order to get his breath. He was a sort of skeleton, with dark, gleaming eyes.

“As soon as he saw me, he murmured: ‘Don’t you recognize me?’

“‘No.’

“‘I am Moiron.’

“I felt a shiver run through me, and I asked ‘The schoolmaster?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘How do you happen to be here?’

“‘The story is too long. I haven’t time to tell it. I was going to die — and that priest was brought to me — and as I knew that you were here I sent for you. It is to you that I wish to confess — since you were the one who once saved my life.’

“His hands clutched the straw of his bed through the sheet and he continued in a hoarse, forcible and low tone: ‘You see — I owe you the truth — I owe it to you — for it must be told to some one before I leave this earth.

“‘It is I who killed the children — all of them. I did it — for revenge!

“‘Listen. I was an honest, straightforward, pure man — adoring God — this good Father — this Master who teaches us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth. I had never done any harm; I had never committed an evil act. I was as good as it is possible to be, monsieur.

“‘I married and had children, and I loved them as no father or mother ever loved their children. I lived only for them. I was wild about them. All three of them died! Why? why? What had I done? I was rebellious, furious; and suddenly my eyes were opened as if I were waking up out of a sleep. I understood that God is bad. Why had He killed my children? I opened my eyes and saw that He loves to kill. He loves only that, monsieur. He gives life but to destroy it! God, monsieur, is a murderer! He needs death every day. And He makes it of every variety, in order the better to be amused. He has invented sickness and accidents in order to give Him diversion all through the months and the years; and when He grows tired of this, He has epidemics, the plague, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, everything possible! But this does not satisfy Him; all these things are too similar; and so from time to time He has wars, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers killed at once, crushed in blood and in the mud, blown apart, their arms and legs torn off, their heads smashed by bullets, like eggs that fall on the ground.

“‘But this is not all. He has made men who eat each other. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts, in order to see men hunt them, kill them and eat them. That is not all. He has made tiny little animals which live one day, flies who die by the millions in one hour, ants which we are continually crushing under our feet, and so many, many others that we cannot even imagine. And all these things are continually killing each other and dying. And the good Lord looks on and is amused, for He sees everything, the big ones as well as the little ones, those who are in the drops of water and those in the other firmaments. He watches them and is amused. Wretch!

"'Then, monsieur, I began to kill children played a trick on Him. He did not get those. It was not He, but I! And I would have killed many others, but you caught me. There!

"'I was to be executed. I! How He would have laughed! Then I asked for a priest, and I lied. I confessed to him. I lied and I lived.

"'Now, all is over. I can no longer escape from Him. I no longer fear Him, monsieur; I despise Him too much.'

"This poor wretch was frightful to see as he lay there gasping, opening an enormous mouth in order to utter words which could scarcely be heard, his breath rattling, picking at his bed and moving his thin legs under a grimy sheet as though trying to escape.

"Oh! The mere remembrance of it is frightful!

"'You have nothing more to say?' I asked.

"'No, monsieur.'

"'Then, farewell.'

"'Farewell, monsieur, till some day — — '

"I turned to the ashen-faced priest, whose dark outline stood out against the wall, and asked: 'Are you going to stay here, Monsieur l'Abbe?'

"'Yes.'

"Then the dying man sneered: 'Yes, yes, He sends His vultures to the corpses.'

"I had had enough of this. I opened the door and ran away."

A PARRICIDE

The lawyer had presented a plea of insanity. How could anyone explain this strange crime otherwise?

One morning, in the grass near Chatou, two bodies had been found, a man and a woman, well known, rich, no longer young and married since the preceding year, the woman having been a widow for three years before.

They were not known to have enemies; they had not been robbed. They seemed to have been thrown from the roadside into the river, after having been struck, one after the other, with a long iron spike.

The investigation revealed nothing. The boatmen, who had been questioned, knew nothing. The matter was about to be given up, when a young carpenter from a neighboring village, Georges Louis, nicknamed "the Bourgeois," gave himself up.

To all questions he only answered this:

"I had known the man for two years, the woman for six months. They often had me repair old furniture for them, because I am a clever workman."

And when he was asked:

"Why did you kill them?"

He would obstinately answer:

"I killed them because I wanted to kill them."

They could get nothing more out of him.

This man was undoubtedly an illegitimate child, put out to nurse and then abandoned. He had no other name than Georges Louis, but as on growing up he became particularly intelligent, with the good taste and native refinement which his acquaintances did not have, he was nicknamed "the Bourgeois," and he was never called otherwise. He had become remarkably clever in the trade of a carpenter, which he had taken up. He was also said to be a socialist fanatic, a believer in communistic and nihilistic doctrines, a great reader of bloodthirsty novels, an influential political agitator and a clever orator in the public meetings of workmen or of farmers.

His lawyer had pleaded insanity.

Indeed, how could one imagine that this workman should kill his best customers, rich and generous (as he knew), who in two years had enabled him to earn three thousand francs (his books showed it)? Only one explanation could be offered: insanity, the fixed idea of the unclassed individual who reeks vengeance on two bourgeois, on all the bourgeoisie, and the lawyer made a clever allusion to this nickname of "The Bourgeois," given throughout the neighborhood to this poor wretch. He exclaimed:

"Is this irony not enough to unbalance the mind of this poor wretch, who has neither father nor mother? He is an ardent republican. What am I saying? He even belongs to the same political party, the members of which, formerly shot or exiled by the government, it now welcomes with open arms this party to which arson is a principle and murder an ordinary occurrence.

"These gloomy doctrines, now applauded in public meetings, have ruined this man. He has heard republicans — even women, yes, women — ask for the blood of M. Gambetta, the blood of M. Grevy; his weakened mind gave way; he wanted blood, the blood of a bourgeois!

"It is not he whom you should condemn, gentlemen; it is the Commune!"

Everywhere could be heard murmurs of assent. Everyone felt that the lawyer had won his case. The prosecuting attorney did not oppose him.

Then the presiding judge asked the accused the customary question:

"Prisoner, is there anything that you wish to add to your defense?"

The man stood up.

He was a short, flaxen blond, with calm, clear, gray eyes. A strong, frank, sonorous voice came from this frail-looking boy and, at the first words, quickly changed the opinion which had been formed of him.

He spoke loud in a declamatory manner, but so distinctly that every word could be understood in the farthest corners of the big hall:

"Your honor, as I do not wish to go to an insane asylum, and as I even prefer death to that, I will tell everything.

"I killed this man and this woman because they were my parents.

"Now, listen, and judge me.

"A woman, having given birth to a boy, sent him out, somewhere, to a nurse. Did she even know where her accomplice carried this innocent little being, condemned to eternal misery, to the shame of an illegitimate birth; to more than that — to death, since he was abandoned and the nurse, no longer receiving the monthly pension, might, as they often do, let him die of hunger and neglect!

"The woman who nursed me was honest, better, more noble, more of a mother than my own mother. She brought me up. She did wrong in doing her duty. It is more humane to let them die, these little wretches who are cast away in suburban villages just as garbage is thrown away.

"I grew up with the indistinct impression that I was carrying some burden of shame. One day the other children called me a 'b — — '. They did not know the meaning of this word, which one of them had heard at home. I was also ignorant of its meaning, but I felt the sting all the same.

"I was, I may say, one of the cleverest boys in the school. I would have been a good man, your honor, perhaps a man of superior intellect, if my parents had not committed the crime of abandoning me.

"This crime was committed against me. I was the victim, they were the guilty ones. I was defenseless, they were pitiless. Their duty was to love me, they rejected me.

"I owed them life — but is life a boon? To me, at any rate, it was a misfortune. After their shameful desertion, I owed them only vengeance. They committed against me the most inhuman, the most infamous, the most monstrous crime which can be committed against a human creature.

"A man who has been insulted, strikes; a man who has been robbed, takes back his own by force. A man who has been deceived, played upon, tortured, kills; a man who has been slapped, kills; a man who has been dishonored, kills. I have been robbed, deceived, tortured, morally slapped, dishonored, all this to a greater degree than those whose anger you excuse.

"I revenged myself, I killed. It was my legitimate right. I took their happy life in exchange for the terrible one which they had forced on me.

"You will call me parricide! Were these people my parents, for whom I was an abominable burden, a terror, an infamous shame; for whom my birth was a calamity and my life a threat of disgrace? They sought a selfish pleasure; they got an unexpected child. They suppressed the child. My turn came to do the same for them.

"And yet, up to quite recently, I was ready to love them.

"As I have said, this man, my father, came to me for the first time two years ago. I suspected nothing. He ordered two pieces of furniture. I found out, later on, that, under the seal of secrecy, naturally, he had sought information from the priest.

"He returned often. He gave me a lot of work and paid me well. Sometimes he would even talk to me of one thing or another. I felt a growing affection for him.

"At the beginning of this year he brought with him his wife, my mother. When she entered she was trembling so that I thought her to be suffering from some nervous disease. Then she asked for a seat and a glass of water. She said nothing; she looked around abstractedly at my work and only answered 'yes' and 'no,' at random, to all the questions which he asked her. When she had left I thought her a little unbalanced.

"The following month they returned. She was calm, self-controlled. That day they chattered for a long time, and they left me a rather large order. I saw her three more times, without suspecting anything. But one day she began to talk to me of my life, of my childhood, of my parents. I answered: 'Madame, my parents were wretches who deserted me.' Then she clutched at her heart and fell, unconscious. I immediately thought: 'She is my mother!' but I took care not to let her notice anything. I wished to observe her.

"I, in turn, sought out information about them. I learned that they had been married since last July, my mother having been a widow for only three years. There had been rumors that they had loved each other during the lifetime of the first husband, but there was no proof of it. I was the proof — the proof which they had at first hidden and then hoped to destroy.

"I waited. She returned one evening, escorted as usual by my father. That day she seemed deeply moved, I don't know why. Then, as she was leaving, she said to me: 'I wish you success, because you seem to me to be honest and a hard worker; some day you will undoubtedly think of getting married. I have come to help you to choose freely the woman who may suit you. I was married against my inclination once and I know what suffering it causes. Now I am rich, childless, free, mistress of my fortune. Here is your dowry.'

"She held out to me a large, sealed envelope.

"I looked her straight in the eyes and then said: 'Are you my mother?'

"She drew back a few steps and hid her face in her hands so as not to see me. He, the man, my father, supported her in his arms and cried out to me: 'You must be crazy!'

“I answered: ‘Not in the least. I know that you are my parents. I cannot be thus deceived. Admit it and I will keep the secret; I will bear you no ill will; I will remain what I am, a carpenter.’

“He retreated towards the door, still supporting his wife who was beginning to sob. Quickly I locked the door, put the key in my pocket and continued: ‘Look at her and dare to deny that she is my mother.’

“Then he flew into a passion, very pale, terrified at the thought that the scandal, which had so far been avoided, might suddenly break out; that their position, their good name, their honor might all at once be lost. He stammered out: ‘You are a rascal, you wish to get money from us! That’s the thanks we get for trying to help such common people!’

“My mother, bewildered, kept repeating: ‘Let’s get out of here, let’s get out!’

“Then, when he found the door locked, he exclaimed: ‘If you do not open this door immediately, I will have you thrown into prison for blackmail and assault!’

“I had remained calm; I opened the door and saw them disappear in the darkness.

“Then I seemed to have been suddenly orphaned, deserted, pushed to the wall. I was seized with an overwhelming sadness, mingled with anger, hatred, disgust; my whole being seemed to rise up in revolt against the injustice, the meanness, the dishonor, the rejected love. I began to run, in order to overtake them along the Seine, which they had to follow in order to reach the station of Chaton.

“I soon caught up with them. It was now pitch dark. I was creeping up behind them softly, that they might not hear me. My mother was still crying. My father was saying: ‘It’s all your own fault. Why did you wish to see him? It was absurd in our position. We could have helped him from afar, without showing ourselves. Of what use are these dangerous visits, since we can’t recognize him?’

“Then I rushed up to them, beseeching. I cried:

“‘You see! You are my parents. You have already rejected me once; would you repulse me again?’

“Then, your honor, he struck me. I swear it on my honor, before the law and my country. He struck me, and as I seized him by the collar, he drew from his pocket a revolver.

“The blood rushed to my head, I no longer knew what I was doing, I had my compass in my pocket; I struck him with it as often as I could.

“Then she began to cry: ‘Help! murder!’ and to pull my beard. It seems that I killed her also. How do I know what I did then?

“Then, when I saw them both lying on the ground, without thinking, I threw them into the Seine.

“That’s all. Now sentence me.”

The prisoner sat down. After this revelation the case was carried over to the following session. It comes up very soon. If we were jurymen, what would we do with this parricide?

BERTHA

Dr. Bonnet, my old friend — one sometimes has friends older than one's self — had often invited me to spend some time with him at Riom, and, as I did not know Auvergne, I made up my mind to visit him in the summer of 1876.

I arrived by the morning train, and the first person I saw on the platform was the doctor. He was dressed in a gray suit, and wore a soft, black, wide-brimmed, high-crowned felt hat, narrow at the top like a chimney pot, a hat which hardly any one except an Auvergnat would wear, and which reminded one of a charcoal burner. Dressed like that, the doctor had the appearance of an old young man, with his spare body under his thin coat, and his large head covered with white hair.

He embraced me with that evident pleasure which country people feel when they meet long-expected friends, and, stretching out his arm, he said proudly:

"This is Auvergne!" I saw nothing before me except a range of mountains, whose summits, which resembled truncated cones, must have been extinct volcanoes.

Then, pointing to the name of the station, he said:

"Riom, the fatherland of magistrates, the pride of the magistracy, and which ought rather to be the fatherland of doctors."

"Why?" I, asked.

"Why?" he replied with a laugh. "If you transpose the letters, you have the Latin word 'mori', to die. That is the reason why I settled here, my young friend."

And, delighted at his own joke, he carried me off, rubbing his hands.

As soon as I had swallowed a cup of coffee, he made me go and see the town. I admired the druggist's house, and the other noted houses, which were all black, but as pretty as bric-a-brac, with their facades of sculptured stone. I admired the statue of the Virgin, the patroness of butchers, and he told me an amusing story about this, which I will relate some other time, and then Dr. Bonnet said to me:

"I must beg you to excuse me for a few minutes while I go and see a patient, and then I will take you to Chatel-Guyon, so as to show you the general aspect of the town, and all the mountain chain of the Puy-de-Dome before lunch. You can wait for me outside; I shall only go upstairs and come down immediately."

He left me outside one of those old, gloomy, silent, melancholy houses, which one sees in the provinces, and this one appeared to look particularly sinister, and I soon discovered the reason. All the large windows on the first floor were boarded half way up. The upper part of them alone could be opened, as if one had wished to prevent the people who were locked up in that huge stone box from looking into the street.

When the doctor came down again, I told him how it struck me, and he replied:

"You are quite right; the poor creature who is living there must never see what is going on outside. She is a madwoman, or rather an idiot, what you Normans would call a Niente. It is a miserable story, but a very singular pathological case at the same time. Shall I tell you?"

I begged him to do so, and he continued:

"Twenty years ago the owners of this house, who were my patients, had a daughter who was like all other girls, but I soon discovered that while her body became admirably developed, her intellect remained stationary.

"She began to walk very early, but she could not talk. At first I thought she was deaf, but I soon discovered that, although she heard perfectly, she did not understand anything that was said to her. Violent noises made her start and frightened her, without her understanding how they were caused.

"She grew up into a superb woman, but she was dumb, from an absolute want of intellect. I tried all means to introduce a gleam of intelligence into her brain, but nothing succeeded. I thought I noticed that she knew her nurse, though as soon as she was weaned, she failed to recognize her mother. She could never pronounce that word which is the first that children utter and the last which soldiers murmur when they are dying on the field of battle. She sometimes tried to talk, but she produced nothing but incoherent sounds.

"When the weather was fine, she laughed continually, and emitted low cries which might be compared to the twittering of birds; when it rained she cried and moaned in a mournful, terrifying manner, which sounded like the howling of a dog before a death occurs in a house.

“She was fond of rolling on the grass, as young animals do, and of running about madly, and she would clap her hands every morning, when the sun shone into her room, and would insist, by signs, on being dressed as quickly as possible, so that she might get out.

“She did not appear to distinguish between people, between her mother and her nurse, or between her father and me, or between the coachman and the cook. I particularly liked her parents, who were very unhappy on her account, and went to see them nearly every day. I dined with them quite frequently, which enabled me to remark that Bertha (they had called her Bertha) seemed to recognize the various dishes, and to prefer some to others. At that time she was twelve years old, but as fully formed in figure as a girl of eighteen, and taller than I was. Then the idea struck me of developing her greediness, and by this means of cultivating some slight power of discrimination in her mind, and to force her, by the diversity of flavors, if not to reason, at any rate to arrive at instinctive distinctions, which would of themselves constitute a kind of process that was necessary to thought. Later on, by appealing to her passions, and by carefully making use of those which could serve our purpose, we might hope to obtain a kind of reaction on her intellect, and by degrees increase the unconscious action of her brain.

“One day I put two plates before her, one of soup, and the other of very sweet vanilla cream. I made her taste each of them successively, and then I let her choose for herself, and she ate the plate of cream. In a short time I made her very greedy, so greedy that it appeared as if the only idea she had in her head was the desire for eating. She perfectly recognized the various dishes, and stretched out her hands toward those that she liked, and took hold of them eagerly, and she used to cry when they were taken from her. Then I thought I would try and teach her to come to the dining-room when the dinner bell rang. It took a long time, but I succeeded in the end. In her vacant intellect a vague correlation was established between sound and taste, a correspondence between the two senses, an appeal from one to the other, and consequently a sort of connection of ideas — if one can call that kind of instinctive hyphen between two organic functions an idea — and so I carried my experiments further, and taught her, with much difficulty, to recognize meal times by the clock.

“It was impossible for me for a long time to attract her attention to the hands, but I succeeded in making her remark the clockwork and the striking apparatus. The means I employed were very simple; I asked them not to have the bell rung for lunch, and everybody got up and went into the dining-room when the little brass hammer struck twelve o’clock, but I found great difficulty in making her learn to count the strokes. She ran to the door each time she heard the clock strike, but by degrees she learned that all the strokes had not the same value as far as regarded meals, and she frequently fixed her eyes, guided by her ears, on the dial of the clock.

“When I noticed that, I took care every day at twelve, and at six o’clock, to place my fingers on the figures twelve and six, as soon as the moment she was waiting for had arrived, and I soon noticed that she attentively followed the motion of the small brass hands, which I had often turned in her presence.

“She had understood! Perhaps I ought rather to say that she had grasped the idea. I had succeeded in getting the knowledge, or, rather, the sensation, of the time into her, just as is the case with carp, who certainly have no clocks, when they are fed every day exactly at the same time.

“When once I had obtained that result all the clocks and watches in the house occupied her attention almost exclusively. She spent her time in looking at them, listening to them, and in waiting for meal time, and once something very funny happened. The striking apparatus of a pretty little Louis XVI clock that hung at the head of her bed having got out of order, she noticed it. She sat for twenty minutes with her eyes on the hands, waiting for it to strike ten, but when the hands passed the figure she was astonished at not hearing anything; so stupefied was she, indeed, that she sat down, no doubt overwhelmed by a feeling of violent emotion such as attacks us in the face of some terrible catastrophe. And she had the wonderful patience to wait until eleven o’clock in order to see what would happen, and as she naturally heard nothing, she was suddenly either seized with a wild fit of rage at having been deceived and imposed upon by appearances, or else overcome by that fear which some frightened creature feels at some terrible mystery, and by the furious impatience of a passionate individual who meets with some obstacle; she took up the tongs from the fireplace and struck the clock so violently that she broke it to pieces in a moment.

"It was evident, therefore, that her, brain did act and calculate, obscurely it is true, and within very restricted limits, for I could never succeed in making her distinguish persons as she distinguished the time; and to stir her intellect, it was necessary to appeal to her passions, in the material sense of the word, and we soon had another, and alas! a very terrible proof of this!

"She had grown up into a splendid girl, a perfect type of a race, a sort of lovely and stupid Venus. She was sixteen, and I have rarely seen such perfection of form, such suppleness and such regular features. I said she was a Venus; yes, a fair, stout, vigorous Venus, with large, bright, vacant eyes, which were as blue as the flowers of the flax plant; she had a large mouth with full lips, the mouth of a glutton, of a sensualist, a mouth made for kisses. Well, one morning her father came into my consulting room with a strange look on his face, and, sitting down without even replying to my greeting, he said:

"'I want to speak to you about a very serious matter. Would it be possible — would it be possible for Bertha to marry?'

"'Bertha to marry! Why, it is quite impossible!'

"'Yes, I know, I know,' he replied. 'But reflect, doctor. Don't you think — perhaps — we hoped — if she had children — it would be a great shock to her, but a great happiness, and — who knows whether maternity might not rouse her intellect?'

"I was in a state of great perplexity. He was right, and it was possible that such a new situation, and that wonderful instinct of maternity, which beats in the hearts of the lower animals as it does in the heart of a woman, which makes the hen fly at a dog's jaws to defend her chickens, might bring about a revolution, an utter change in her vacant mind, and set the motionless mechanism of her thoughts in motion. And then, moreover, I immediately remembered a personal instance. Some years previously I had owned a spaniel bitch who was so stupid that I could do nothing with her, but when she had had puppies she became, if not exactly intelligent, yet almost like many other dogs who had not been thoroughly broken.

"As soon as I foresaw the possibility of this, the wish to get Bertha married grew in me, not so much out of friendship for her and her poor parents as from scientific curiosity. What would happen? It was a singular problem. I said in reply to her father:

"'Perhaps you are right. You might make the attempt, but you will never find a man to consent to marry her.'

"'I have found somebody,' he said, in a low voice.

"I was dumfounded, and said: 'Somebody really suitable? Some one of your own rank and position in society?'

"'Decidedly,' he replied.

"'Oh! And may I ask his name?'

"'I came on purpose to tell you, and to consult you. It is Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles.'

"I felt inclined to exclaim: 'The wretch!' but I held my tongue, and after a few moments' silence I said:

"'Oh! Very good. I see nothing against it.'

"The poor man shook me heartily by the hand.

"'She is to be married next month,' he said.

"Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles was a scapegrace of good family, who, after having spent all that he had inherited from his father, and having incurred debts in all kinds of doubtful ways, had been trying to discover some other means of obtaining money, and he had discovered this method. He was a good-looking young fellow, and in capital health, but fast; one of that odious race of provincial fast men, and he appeared to me to be as suitable as anyone, and could be got rid of later by making him an allowance. He came to the house to pay his addresses and to strut about before the idiot girl, who, however, seemed to please him. He brought her flowers, kissed her hands, sat at her feet, and looked at her with affectionate eyes; but she took no notice of any of his attentions, and did not make any distinction between him and the other persons who were about her.

"However, the marriage took place, and you may guess how my curiosity was aroused. I went to see Bertha the next day to try and discover from her looks whether any feelings had been awakened in her, but I found her just the same as she was every day, wholly taken up with the clock and dinner, while he, on the contrary, appeared really in love, and tried to rouse his wife's spirits and affection by little endearments and such caresses as one bestows on a kitten. He could think of nothing better.

"I called upon the married couple pretty frequently, and I soon perceived that the young woman knew her husband, and gave him those eager looks which she had hitherto only bestowed on sweet dishes.

"She followed his movements, knew his step on the stairs or in the neighboring rooms, clapped her hands when he came in, and her face was changed and brightened by the flames of profound happiness and of desire.

"She loved him with her whole body and with all her soul to the very depths of her poor, weak soul, and with all her heart, that poor heart of some grateful animal. It was really a delightful and innocent picture of simple passion, of carnal and yet modest passion, such as nature had implanted in mankind, before man had complicated and disfigured it by all the various shades of sentiment. But he soon grew tired of this ardent, beautiful, dumb creature, and did not spend more than an hour during the day with her, thinking it sufficient if he came home at night, and she began to suffer in consequence. She used to wait for him from morning till night with her eyes on the clock; she did not even look after the meals now, for he took all his away from home, Clermont, Chatel-Guyon, Royat, no matter where, as long as he was not obliged to come home.

"She began to grow thin; every other thought, every other wish, every other expectation, and every confused hope disappeared from her mind, and the hours during which she did not see him became hours of terrible suffering to her. Soon he ceased to come home regularly of nights; he spent them with women at the casino at Royat and did not come home until daybreak. But she never went to bed before he returned. She remained sitting motionless in an easy-chair, with her eyes fixed on the hands of the clock, which turned so slowly and regularly round the china face on which the hours were painted.

"She heard the trot of his horse in the distance and sat up with a start, and when he came into the room she got up with the movements of an automaton and pointed to the clock, as if to say: 'Look how late it is!'

"And he began to be afraid of this amorous and jealous, half-witted woman, and flew into a rage, as brutes do; and one night he even went so far as to strike her, so they sent for me. When I arrived she was writhing and screaming in a terrible crisis of pain, anger, passion, how do I know what? Can one tell what goes on in such undeveloped brains?

"I calmed her by subcutaneous injections of morphine, and forbade her to see that man again, for I saw clearly that marriage would infallibly kill her by degrees.

"Then she went mad! Yes, my dear friend, that idiot went mad. She is always thinking of him and waiting for him; she waits for him all day and night, awake or asleep, at this very moment, ceaselessly. When I saw her getting thinner and thinner, and as she persisted in never taking her eyes off the clocks, I had them removed from the house. I thus made it impossible for her to count the hours, and to try to remember, from her indistinct reminiscences, at what time he used to come home formerly. I hope to destroy the recollection of it in time, and to extinguish that ray of thought which I kindled with so much difficulty.

"The other day I tried an experiment. I offered her my watch; she took it and looked at it for some time; then she began to scream terribly, as if the sight of that little object had suddenly awakened her memory, which was beginning to grow indistinct. She is pitiably thin now, with hollow and glittering eyes, and she walks up and down ceaselessly, like a wild beast in its cage; I have had gratings put on the windows, boarded them up half way, and have had the seats fixed to the floor so as to prevent her from looking to see whether he is coming.

"Oh! her poor parents! What a life they must lead!"

We had got to the top of the hill, and the doctor turned round and said to me:

"Look at Riom from here."

The gloomy town looked like some ancient city. Behind it a green, wooded plain studded with towns and villages, and bathed in a soft blue haze, extended until it was lost in the distance. Far away, on my right, there was a range of lofty mountains with round summits, or else cut off flat, as if with a sword, and the doctor began to enumerate the villages, towns and hills, and to give me the history of all of them. But I did not listen to him; I was thinking of nothing but the madwoman, and I only saw her. She seemed to be hovering over that vast extent of country like a mournful ghost, and I asked him abruptly:

"What has become of the husband?"

My friend seemed rather surprised, but after a few moments' hesitation, he replied:

"He is living at Royat, on an allowance that they made him, and is quite happy; he leads a very fast life."

As we were slowly going back, both of us silent and rather low-spirited, an English dogcart, drawn by a thoroughbred horse, came up behind us and passed us rapidly. The doctor took me by the arm.

"There he is," he said.

I saw nothing except a gray felt hat, cocked over one ear above a pair of broad shoulders, driving off in a cloud of dust.

THE PATRON

We never dreamed of such good fortune! The son of a provincial bailiff, Jean Marin had come, as do so many others, to study law in the Quartier Latin. In the various beer-houses that he had frequented he had made friends with several talkative students who spouted politics as they drank their beer. He had a great admiration for them and followed them persistently from cafe to cafe, even paying for their drinks when he had the money.

He became a lawyer and pleaded causes, which he lost. However, one morning he read in the papers that one of his former comrades of the Quartier had just been appointed deputy.

He again became his faithful hound, the friend who does the drudgery, the unpleasant tasks, for whom one sends when one has need of him and with whom one does not stand on ceremony. But it chanced through some parliamentary incident that the deputy became a minister. Six months later Jean Marin was appointed a state councillor.

He was so elated with pride at first that he lost his head. He would walk through the streets just to show himself off, as though one could tell by his appearance what position he occupied. He managed to say to the shopkeepers as soon as he entered a store, bringing it in somehow in the course of the most insignificant remarks and even to the news vendors and the cabmen:

“I, who am a state councillor— “

Then, in consequence of his position as well as for professional reasons and as in duty bound through being an influential and generous man, he felt an imperious need of patronizing others. He offered his support to every one on all occasions and with unbounded generosity.

When he met any one he recognized on the boulevards he would advance to meet them with a charmed air, would take their hand, inquire after their health, and, without waiting for any questions, remark:

"You know I am state councillor, and I am entirely at your service. If I can be of any use to you, do not hesitate to call on me. In my position one has great influence."

Then he would go into some cafe with the friend he had just met and ask for a pen and ink and a sheet of paper. "Just one, waiter; it is to write a letter of recommendation."

And he wrote ten, twenty, fifty letters of recommendation a day. He wrote them to the Cafe Americain, to Bignon's, to Tortoni's, to the Maison Doree, to the Cafe Riche, to the Helder, to the Cafe Anglais, to the Napolitain, everywhere, everywhere. He wrote them to all the officials of the republican government, from the magistrates to the ministers. And he was happy, perfectly happy.

One morning as he was starting out to go to the council it began to rain. He hesitated about taking a cab, but decided not to do so and set out on foot.

The rain came down in torrents, swamping the sidewalks and inundating the streets. M. Marin was obliged to take shelter in a doorway. An old priest was standing there — an old priest with white hair. Before he became a councillor M. Marin did not like the clergy. Now he treated them with consideration, ever since a cardinal had consulted him on an important matter. The rain continued to pour down in floods and obliged the two men to take shelter in the porter's lodge so as to avoid getting wet. M. Marin, who was always itching to talk so as to let people know who he was, remarked:

"This is horrible weather, Monsieur l'Abbe."

The old priest bowed:

"Yes indeed, sir, it is very unpleasant when one comes to Paris for only a few days."

"Ah! You come from the provinces?"

"Yes, monsieur. I am only passing through on my journey."

"It certainly is very disagreeable to have rain during the few days one spends in the capital. We officials who stay here the year round, we think nothing of it."

The priest did not reply. He was looking at the street where the rain seemed to be falling less heavily. And with a sudden resolve he raised his cassock just as women raise their skirts in stepping across water.

M. Marin, seeing him start away, exclaimed:

"You will get drenched, Monsieur l'Abbe. Wait a few moments longer; the rain will be over."

The good man stopped irresistibly and then said:

"But I am in a great hurry. I have an important engagement."

M. Marin seemed quite worried.

"But you will be absolutely drenched. Might I ask in which direction you are going?"

The priest appeared to hesitate. Then he said:

"I am going in the direction of the Palais Royal."

"In that case, if you will allow me, Monsieur l'Abbe, I will offer you the shelter of my umbrella: As for me, I am going to the council. I am a councillor of state."

The old priest raised his head and looked at his neighbor and then exclaimed:

"I thank you, monsieur. I shall be glad to accept your offer."

M. Marin then took his arm and led him away. He directed him, watched over him and advised him.

"Be careful of that stream, Monsieur l'Abbe. And be very careful about the carriage wheels; they spatter you with mud sometimes from head to foot. Look out for the umbrellas of the people passing by; there is nothing more dangerous to the eyes than the tips of the ribs. Women especially are unbearable; they pay no heed to where they are going and always jab you in the face with the point of their parasols or umbrellas. And they never move aside for anybody. One would suppose the town belonged to them. They monopolize the pavement and the street. It is my opinion that their education has been greatly neglected."

And M. Marin laughed.

The priest did not reply. He walked along, slightly bent over, picking his steps carefully so as not to get mud on his boots or his cassock.

M. Marin resumed:

"I suppose you have come to Paris to divert your mind a little?"

The good man replied:

"No, I have some business to attend to."

"Ali! Is it important business? Might I venture to ask what it is? If I can be of any service to you, you may command me."

The priest seemed embarrassed. He murmured:

"Oh, it is a little personal matter; a little difficulty with — with my bishop. It would not interest you. It is a matter of internal regulation — an ecclesiastical affair."

M. Marin was eager.

"But it is precisely the state council that regulates all those things. In that case, make use of me."

"Yes, monsieur, it is to the council that I am going. You are a thousand times too kind. I have to see M. Lerepere and M. Savon and also perhaps M. Petitpas."

M. Marin stopped short.

"Why, those are my friends, Monsieur l'Abbe, my best friends, excellent colleagues, charming men. I will speak to them about you, and very highly. Count upon me."

The cure thanked him, apologizing for troubling him, and stammered out a thousand grateful promises.

M. Marin was enchanted.

"Ah, you may be proud of having made a stroke of luck, Monsieur l'Abbe. You will see — you will see that, thanks to me, your affair will go along swimmingly."

They reached the council hall. M. Marin took the priest into his office, offered him a chair in front of the fire and sat down himself at his desk and began to write.

"My dear colleague, allow me to recommend to you most highly a venerable and particularly worthy and deserving priest, M. L'Abbe — — "

He stopped and asked:

"Your name, if you please?"

"L'Abbe Ceinture."

"M. l'Abbe Ceinture, who needs your good office in a little matter which he will communicate to you.

"I am pleased at this incident which gives me an opportunity, my dear colleague — — "

And he finished with the usual compliments.

When he had written the three letters he handed them to his protege, who took his departure with many protestations of gratitude.

M. Marin attended to some business and then went home, passed the day quietly, slept well, woke in a good humor and sent for his newspapers.

The first he opened was a radical sheet. He read:

"OUR CLERGY AND OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

"We shall never make an end of enumerating the misdeeds of the clergy. A certain priest, named Ceinture, convicted of conspiracy against the present government, accused of base actions to which we will not even allude, suspected besides of being a former Jesuit, metamorphosed into a simple priest, suspended by a bishop for causes that are said to be unmentionable and summoned to Paris to give an explanation of his conduct, has found an ardent defender in the man named Marin, a councillor of state, who was not afraid to give this frocked malefactor the warmest letters of recommendation to all the republican officials, his colleagues.

"We call the, attention of the ministry to the unheard of attitude of this councillor of state — — "

M. Marin bounded out of bed, dressed himself and hastened to his colleague, Petitpas, who said to him:

"How now? You were crazy to recommend to me that old conspirator!"

M. Marin, bewildered, stammered out:

"Why no — you see — I was deceived. He looked such an honest man. He played me a trick — a disgraceful trick! I beg that you will sentence him severely, very severely. I am going to write. Tell me to whom I should write about having him punished. I will go and see the attorney-general and the archbishop of Paris — yes, the archbishop."

And seating himself abruptly at M. Petitpas' desk, he wrote:

"Monseigneur, I have the honor to bring to your grace's notice the fact that I have recently been made a victim of the intrigues and lies of a certain Abbe Ceinture, who imposed on my kind-heartedness.

"Deceived by the representations of this ecclesiastic, I was led — — "

Then, having signed and sealed his letter, he turned to his colleague and exclaimed:

"See here; my dear friend, let this be a warning to you never to recommend any one again."

THE DOOR

“Bah!” exclaimed Karl Massouligny, “the question of complaisant husbands is a difficult one. I have seen many kinds, and yet I am unable to give an opinion about any of them. I have often tried to determine whether they are blind, weak or clairvoyant. I believe that there are some which belong to each of these categories.

“Let us quickly pass over the blind ones. They cannot rightly be called complaisant, since they do not know, but they are good creatures who cannot see farther than their nose. It is a curious and interesting thing to notice the ease with which men and women can, be deceived. We are taken in by the slightest trick of those who surround us, by our children, our friends, our servants, our tradespeople. Humanity is credulous, and in order to discover deceit in others, we do not display one-tenth the shrewdness which we use when we, in turn, wish to deceive some one else.

“Clairvoyant husbands may be divided into three classes: Those who have some interest, pecuniary, ambitious or otherwise, in their wife’s having love affairs. These ask only to safeguard appearances as much as possible, and they are satisfied.

“Next come those who get angry. What a beautiful novel one could write about them!

“Finally the weak ones! Those who are afraid of scandal.

“There are also those who are powerless, or, rather, tired, who flee from the duties of matrimony through fear of ataxia or apoplexy, who are satisfied to see a friend run these risks.

“But I once met a husband of a rare species, who guarded against the common accident in a strange and witty manner.

“In Paris I had made the acquaintance of an elegant, fashionable couple. The woman, nervous, tall, slender, courted, was supposed to have had many love adventures. She pleased me with her wit, and I believe that I pleased her also. I courted her, a trial courting to which she answered with evident provocations. Soon we got to tender glances, hand pressures, all the little gallantries which precede the final attack.

"Nevertheless, I hesitated. I consider that, as a rule, the majority of society intrigues, however short they may be, are not worth the trouble which they give us and the difficulties which may arise. I therefore mentally compared the advantages and disadvantages which I might expect, and I thought I noticed that the husband suspected me.

"One evening, at a ball, as I was saying tender things to the young woman in a little parlor leading from the big hall where the dancing was going on, I noticed in a mirror the reflection of some one who was watching me. It was he. Our looks met and then I saw him turn his head and walk away.

"I murmured: 'Your husband is spying on us.'

"She seemed dumbfounded and asked: 'My husband?'

"'Yes, he has been watching us for some time:

"'Nonsense! Are you sure?'

"'Very sure.'

"'How strange! He is usually extraordinarily pleasant to all my. friends.'

"'Perhaps he guessed that I love you!'

"'Nonsense! You are not the first one to pay attention to me. Every woman who is a little in view drags behind her a herd of admirers.'

"'Yes. But I love you deeply.'

"'Admitting that that is true, does a husband ever guess those things?'

"'Then he is not jealous?'

"'No-no!'

"She thought for an instant and then continued: 'No. I do not think that I ever noticed any jealousy on his part.'

"'Has he never-watched you?'

"'No. As I said, he is always agreeable to my friends.'

"From that day my courting became much more assiduous. The woman did not please me any more than before, but the probable jealousy of her husband tempted me greatly.

"As for her, I judged her coolly and clearly. She had a certain worldly charm, due to a quick, gay, amiable and superficial mind, but no real, deep attraction. She was, as I have already said, an excitable little being, all on the surface, with rather a showy elegance. How can I explain myself? She was an ornament, not a home.

“One day, after taking dinner with her, her husband said to me, just as I was leaving: ‘My dear friend’ (he now called me ‘friend’), ‘we soon leave for the country. It is a great pleasure to my wife and myself to entertain people whom we like. We would be very pleased to have you spend a month with us. It would be very nice of you to do so.’

“I was dumbfounded, but I accepted.

“A month later I arrived at their estate of Vertcresson, in Touraine. They were waiting for me at the station, five miles from the chateau. There were three of them, she, the husband and a gentleman unknown to me, the Comte de Morterade, to whom I was introduced. He appeared to be delighted to make my acquaintance, and the strangest ideas passed through my mind while we trotted along the beautiful road between two hedges. I was saying to myself: ‘Let’s see, what can this mean? Here is a husband who cannot doubt that his wife and I are on more than friendly terms, and yet he invites me to his house, receives me like an old friend and seems to say: “Go ahead, my friend, the road is clear!”’

“Then I am introduced to a very pleasant gentleman, who seems already to have settled down in the house, and — and who is perhaps trying to get out of it, and who seems as pleased at my arrival as the husband himself.

“Is it some former admirer who wishes to retire? One might think so. But, then, would these two men tacitly have come to one of these infamous little agreements so common in society? And it is proposed to me that I should quietly enter into the pact and carry it out. All hands and arms are held out to me. All doors and hearts are open to me.

“And what about her? An enigma. She cannot be ignorant of everything. However — however — Well, I cannot understand it.

“The dinner was very gay and cordial. On leaving the table the husband and his friend began to play cards, while I went out on the porch to look at the moonlight with madame. She seemed to be greatly affected by nature, and I judged that the moment for my happiness was near. That evening she was really delightful. The country had seemed to make her more tender. Her long, slender waist looked pretty on this stone porch beside a great vase in which grew some flowers. I felt like dragging her out under the trees, throwing myself at her feet and speaking to her words of love.

“Her husband’s voice called ‘Louise!’

“‘Yes, dear.’

“‘You are forgetting the tea.’

"'I'll go and see about it, my friend.'

"We returned to the house, and she gave us some tea. When the two men had finished playing cards, they were visibly tired. I had to go to my room. I did not get to sleep till late, and then I slept badly.

"An excursion was decided upon for the following afternoon, and we went in an open carriage to visit some ruins. She and I were in the back of the vehicle and they were opposite us, riding backward. The conversation was sympathetic and agreeable. I am an orphan, and it seemed to me as though I had just found my family, I felt so at home with them.

"Suddenly, as she had stretched out her foot between her husband's legs, he murmured reproachfully: 'Louise, please don't wear out your old shoes yourself. There is no reason for being neater in Paris than in the country.'

"I lowered my eyes. She was indeed wearing worn-out shoes, and I noticed that her stockings were not pulled up tight.

"She had blushed and hidden her foot under her dress. The friend was looking out in the distance with an indifferent and unconcerned look.

"The husband offered me a cigar, which I accepted. For a few days it was impossible for me to be alone with her for two minutes; he was with us everywhere. He was delightful to me, however.

"One morning he came to get me to take a walk before breakfast, and the conversation happened to turn on marriage. I spoke a little about solitude and about how charming life can be made by the affection of a woman. Suddenly he interrupted me, saying: 'My friend, don't talk about things you know nothing about. A woman who has no other reason for loving you will not love you long. All the little coquetries which make them so exquisite when they do not definitely belong to us cease as soon as they become ours. And then — the respectable women — that is to say our wives — are — are not — in fact do not understand their profession of wife. Do you understand?'

"He said no more, and I could not guess his thoughts.

"Two days after this conversation he called me to his room quite early, in order to show me a collection of engravings. I sat in an easy chair opposite the big door which separated his apartment from his wife's, and behind this door I heard some one walking and moving, and I was thinking very little of the engravings, although I kept exclaiming: 'Oh, charming! delightful! exquisite!'

“He suddenly said: ‘Oh, I have a beautiful specimen in the next room. I’ll go and get it.’

“He ran to the door quickly, and both sides opened as though for a theatrical effect.

“In a large room, all in disorder, in the midst of skirts, collars, waists lying around on the floor, stood a tall, dried-up creature. The lower part of her body was covered with an old, worn-out silk petticoat, which was hanging limply on her shapeless form, and she was standing in front of a mirror brushing some short, sparse blond hairs. Her arms formed two acute angles, and as she turned around in astonishment I saw under a common cotton chemise a regular cemetery of ribs, which were hidden from the public gaze by well-arranged pads.

“The husband uttered a natural exclamation and came back, closing the doors, and said: ‘Gracious! how stupid I am! Oh, how thoughtless! My wife will never forgive me for that!’

“I already felt like thanking him. I left three days later, after cordially shaking hands with the two men and kissing the lady’s fingers. She bade me a cold good-by.”

Karl Massouligny was silent. Some one asked: “But what was the friend?”

“I don’t know — however — however he looked greatly distressed to see me leaving so soon.”

A SALE

The defendants, Cesaire-Isidore Brument and Prosper-Napoleon Cornu, appeared before the Court of Assizes of the Seine-Inferieure, on a charge of attempted murder, by drowning, of Mme. Brument, lawful wife of the first of the aforenamed.

The two prisoners sat side by side on the traditional bench. They were two peasants; the first was small and stout, with short arms, short legs, and a round head with a red pimply face, planted directly on his trunk, which was also round and short, and with apparently no neck. He was a raiser of pigs and lived at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the district of Criquetot.

Cornu (Prosper-Napoleon) was thin, of medium height, with enormously long arms. His head was on crooked, his jaw awry, and he squinted. A blue blouse, as long as a shirt, hung down to his knees, and his yellow hair, which was scanty and plastered down on his head, gave his face a worn-out, dirty look, a dilapidated look that was frightful. He had been nicknamed "the cure" because he could imitate to perfection the chanting in church, and even the sound of the serpent. This talent attracted to his cafe — for he was a saloon keeper at Criquetot — a great many customers who preferred the "mass at Cornu" to the mass in church.

Mme. Brument, seated on the witness bench, was a thin peasant woman who seemed to be always asleep. She sat there motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, gazing fixedly before her with a stupid expression.

The judge continued his interrogation.

"Well, then, Mme. Brument, they came into your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Tell us the details. Stand up."

She rose. She looked as tall as a flag pole with her cap which looked like a white skull cap. She said in a drawling tone:

"I was shelling beans. Just then they came in. I said to myself, 'What is the matter with them? They do not seem natural, they seem up to some mischief.' They watched me sideways, like this, especially Cornu, because he squints. I do not like to see them together, for they are two good-for-nothings when they are in company. I said: ‘What do you want with me?’ They did not answer. I had a sort of mistrust — — “

The defendant Brument interrupted the witness hastily, saying:

“I was full.”

Then Cornu, turning towards his accomplice said in the deep tones of an organ:

“Say that we were both full, and you will be telling no lie.”

The judge, severely:

“You mean by that that you were both drunk?”

Brument: “There can be no question about it.”

Cornu: “That might happen to anyone.”

The judge to the victim: “Continue your testimony, woman Brument.”

“Well, Brument said to me, ‘Do you wish to earn a hundred sous?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, seeing that a hundred sous are not picked up in a horse’s tracks. Then he said: ‘Open your eyes and do as I do,’ and he went to fetch the large empty barrel which is under the rain pipe in the corner, and he turned it over and brought it into my kitchen, and stuck it down in the middle of the floor, and then he said to me: ‘Go and fetch water until it is full.’

“So I went to the pond with two pails and carried water, and still more water for an hour, seeing that the barrel was as large as a vat, saving your presence, m’sieu le president.

“All this time Brument and Cornu were drinking a glass, and then another glass, and then another. They were finishing their drinks when I said to them: ‘You are full, fuller than this barrel.’ And Brument answered me. ‘Do not worry, go on with your work, your turn will come, each one has his share.’ I paid no attention to what he said as he was full.

“When the barrel was full to the brim, I said: ‘There, that’s done.’

“And then Cornu gave me a hundred sous, not Brument, Cornu; it was Cornu gave them to me. And Brument said: ‘Do you wish to earn a hundred sous more?’ ‘Yes,’ I said, for I am not accustomed to presents like that. Then he said: ‘Take off your clothes!

“‘Take off my clothes?’

“‘Yes,’ he said.

“‘How many shall I take off?’

“‘If it worries you at all, keep on your chemise, that won’t bother us.’

“A hundred sous is a hundred sous, and I have to undress myself; but I did not fancy undressing before those two good-for-nothings. I took off my cap, and then my jacket, and then my skirt, and then my sabots. Brument said, ‘Keep on your stockings, also; we are good fellows.’

“And Cornu said, too, ‘We are good fellows.’

“So there I was, almost like mother Eve. And they got up from their chairs, but could not stand straight, they were so full, saving your presence, M’sieu le president.

“I said to myself: ‘What are they up to?’

“And Brument said: ‘Are you ready?’

“And Cornu said: ‘I’m ready!’

“And then they took me, Brument by the head, and Cornu by the feet, as one might take, for instance, a sheet that has been washed. Then I began to bawl.

“And Brument said: ‘Keep still, wretched creature!’

“And they lifted me up in the air and put me into the barrel, which was full of water, so that I had a check of the circulation, a chill to my very insides.

“And Brument said: ‘Is that all?’

“Cornu said: ‘That is all.’

“Brument said: ‘The head is not in, that will make a difference in the measure.’

“Cornu said: ‘Put in her head.’

“And then Brument pushed down my head as if to drown me, so that the water ran into my nose, so that I could already see Paradise. And he pushed it down, and I disappeared.

“And then he must have been frightened. He pulled me out and said: ‘Go and get dry, carcass.’

“As for me, I took to my heels and ran as far as M. le cure’s. He lent me a skirt belonging to his servant, for I was almost in a state of nature, and he went to fetch Maitre Chicot, the country watchman who went to Criquetot to fetch the police who came to my house with me.

“Then we found Brument and Cornu fighting each other like two rams.

“Brument was bawling: ‘It isn’t true, I tell you that there is at least a cubic metre in it. It is the method that was no good.’

“Cornu bawled: ‘Four pails, that is almost half a cubic metre. You need not reply, that’s what it is.’

"The police captain put them both under arrest. I have no more to tell."

She sat down. The audience in the court room laughed. The jurors looked at one another in astonishment. The judge said:

"Defendant Cornu, you seem to have been the instigator of this infamous plot. What have you to say?"

And Cornu rose in his turn.

"Judge," he replied, "I was full."

The Judge answered gravely:

"I know it. Proceed."

"I will. Well, Brument came to my place about nine o'clock, and ordered two drinks, and said: 'There's one for you, Cornu.' I sat down opposite him and drank, and out of politeness, I offered him a glass. Then he returned the compliment and so did I, and so it went on from glass to glass until noon, when we were full.

"Then Brument began to cry. That touched me. I asked him what was the matter. He said: 'I must have a thousand francs by Thursday.' That cooled me off a little, you understand. Then he said to me all at once: 'I will sell you my wife.'

"I was full, and I was a widower. You understand, that stirred me up. I did not know his wife, but she was a woman, wasn't she? I asked him: 'How much would you sell her for?'

"He reflected, or pretended to reflect. When one is full one is not very clear-headed, and he replied: 'I will sell her by the cubic metre.'

"That did not surprise me, for I was as drunk as he was, and I knew what a cubic metre is in my business. It is a thousand litres, that suited me.

"But the price remained to be settled. All depends on the quality. I said: 'How much do you want a cubic metre?'

"He answered: 'Two thousand francs.'

"I gave a bound like a rabbit, and then I reflected that a woman ought not to measure more than three hundred litres. So I said: 'That's too dear.'

"He answered: 'I cannot do it for less. I should lose by it.'

"You understand, one is not a dealer in hogs for nothing. One understands one's business. But, if he is smart, the seller of bacon, I am smarter, seeing that I sell them also. Ha, Ha, Ha! So I said to him: 'If she were new, I would not say anything, but she has been married to you for some time, so she is not as fresh as she was. I will give you fifteen hundred francs a cubic metre, not a sou more. Will that suit you?'

“He answered: ‘That will do. That’s a bargain!’

“I agreed, and we started out, arm in arm. We must help each other in this world.

“But a fear came to me: ‘How can you measure her unless you put her into the liquid?’

“Then he explained his idea, not without difficulty for he was full. He said to me: ‘I take a barrel, and fill it with water to the brim. I put her in it. All the water that comes out we will measure, that is the way to fix it.’

“I said: ‘I see, I understand. But this water that overflows will run away; how are you going to gather it up?’

“Then he began stuffing me and explained to me that all we should have to do would be to refill the barrel with the water his wife had displaced as soon as she should have left. All the water we should pour in would be the measure. I supposed about ten pails; that would be a cubic metre. He isn’t a fool, all the same, when he is drunk, that old horse.

“To be brief, we reached his house and I took a look at its mistress. A beautiful woman she certainly was not. Anyone can see her, for there she is. I said to myself: ‘I am disappointed, but never mind, she will be of value; handsome or ugly, it is all the same, is it not, monsieur le president?’ And then I saw that she was as thin as a rail. I said to myself: ‘She will not measure four hundred litres.’ I understand the matter, it being in liquids.

“She told you about the proceeding. I even let her keep on her chemise and stockings, to my own disadvantage.

“When that was done she ran away. I said: ‘Look out, Brument! she is escaping.’

“He replied: ‘Do not be afraid. I will catch her all right. She will have to come back to sleep, I will measure the deficit.’

“We measured. Not four pailfuls. Ha, Ha, Ha!”

The witness began to laugh so persistently that a gendarme was obliged to punch him in the back. Having quieted down, he resumed:

“In short, Brument exclaimed: ‘Nothing doing, that is not enough.’ I bawled and bawled, and bawled again, he punched me, I hit back. That would have kept on till the Day of judgment, seeing we were both drunk.

“Then came the gendarmes! They swore at us, they took us off to prison. I want damages.”

He sat down.

Brument confirmed in every particular the statements of his accomplice. The jury, in consternation, retired to deliberate.

At the end of an hour they returned a verdict of acquittal for the defendants, with some severe strictures on the dignity of marriage, and establishing the precise limitations of business transactions.

Brument went home to the domestic roof accompanied by his wife.

Cornu went back to his business.

THE IMPOLITE SEX

Madame de X. to Madame de L.

ETRETAT, Friday.

My Dear Aunt:

I am coming to see you without anyone knowing it. I shall be at Les Fresnes on the 2d of September, the day before the hunting season opens, as I do not want to miss it, so that I may tease these gentlemen. You are too good, aunt, and you will allow them, as you usually do when there are no strange guests, to come to table, under pretext of fatigue, without dressing or shaving for the occasion.

They are delighted, of course, when I am not present. But I shall be there and will hold a review, like a general, at dinner time; and, if I find a single one of them at all careless in dress, no matter how little, I mean to send them down to the kitchen with the servants.

The men of to-day have so little consideration for others and so little good manners that one must be always severe with them. We live indeed in an age of vulgarity. When they quarrel, they insult each other in terms worthy of longshoremen, and, in our presence, they do not conduct themselves even as well as our servants. It is at the seaside that you see this most clearly. They are to be found there in battalions, and you can judge them in the lump. Oh! what coarse beings they are!

Just imagine, in a train, a gentleman who looked well, as I thought at first sight, thanks to his tailor, carefully took off his boots in order to put on a pair of old shoes! Another, an old man who was probably some wealthy upstart (these are the most ill-bred), while sitting opposite to me, had the delicacy to place his two feet on the seat quite close to me. This is a positive fact.

At the watering-places the vulgarity is unrestrained. I must here make one admission — that my indignation is perhaps due to the fact that I am not accustomed to associate, as a rule, with the sort of people one comes across here, for I should be less shocked by their manners if I had the opportunity of observing them oftener. In the office of the hotel I was nearly thrown down by a young man who snatched the key over my head. Another knocked against me so violently without begging my pardon or lifting his hat, coming away from a ball at the Casino, that it gave me a pain in the chest. It is the same way with all of them. Watch them addressing ladies on the terrace; they scarcely ever bow. They merely raise their hands to their headgear. But, indeed, as they are all more or less bald, it is the best plan.

But what exasperates and disgusts me particularly is the liberty they take of talking in public, without any kind of precaution, about the most revolting adventures. When two men are together, they relate to each other, in the broadest language and with the most abominable comments really horrible stories, without caring in the slightest degree whether a woman's ear is within reach of their voices. Yesterday, on the beach, I was forced to leave the place where I was sitting in order not to be any longer the involuntary confidante of an obscene anecdote, told in such immodest language that I felt just as humiliated as indignant at having heard it. Would not the most elementary good-breeding teach them to speak in a lower tone about such matters when we are near at hand. Etretat is, moreover, the country of gossip and scandal. From five to seven o'clock you can see people wandering about in quest of scandal, which they retail from group to group. As you remarked to me, my dear aunt, tittle-tattle is the mark of petty individuals and petty minds. It is also the consolation of women who are no longer loved or sought after. It is enough for me to observe the women who are fondest of gossiping to be persuaded that you are quite right.

The other day I was present at a musical evening at the Casino, given by a remarkable artist, Madame Masson, who sings in a truly delightful manner. I took the opportunity of applauding the admirable Coquelin, as well as two charming vaudeville performers, M —— and Meillet. I met, on this occasion, all the bathers who were at the beach. It is no great distinction this year.

Next day I went to lunch at Yport. I noticed a tall man with a beard, coming out of a large house like a castle. It was the painter, Jean Paul Laurens. He is not satisfied apparently with imprisoning the subjects of his pictures, he insists on imprisoning himself.

Then I found myself seated on the shingle close to a man still young, of gentle and refined appearance, who was reading poetry. But he read it with such concentration, with such passion, I may say, that he did not even raise his eyes towards me. I was somewhat astonished and asked the proprietor of the baths, without appearing to be much concerned, the name of this gentleman. I laughed to myself a little at this reader of rhymes; he seemed behind the age, for a man. This person, I thought, must be a simpleton. Well, aunt, I am now infatuated about this stranger. Just fancy, his name is Sully Prudhomme! I went back and sat down beside him again so as to get a good look at him. His face has an expression of calmness and of penetration. Somebody came to look for him, and I heard his voice, which is sweet and almost timid. He would certainly not tell obscene stories aloud in public or knock up against ladies without apologizing. He is assuredly a man of refinement, but his refinement is of an almost morbid, sensitive character, I will try this winter to get an introduction to him.

I have no more news, my dear aunt, and I must finish this letter in haste, as the mail will soon close. I kiss your hands and your cheeks.

Your devoted niece,

BERTHE DE X.

P. S. — I should add, however, by way of justification of French politeness, that our fellow-countrymen are, when travelling, models of good manners in comparison with the abominable English, who seem to have been brought up in a stable, so careful are they not to discommode themselves in any way, while they always discommode their neighbors.

Madame de L. to Madame de X.

LES FRESNES, Saturday.

My Dear Child:

Many of the things you have said to me are very sensible, but that does not prevent you from being wrong. Like you, I used formerly to feel very indignant at the impoliteness of men, who, as I supposed, constantly treated me with neglect; but, as I grew older and reflected on everything, putting aside coquetry, and observing things without taking any part in them myself, I perceived this much — that if men are not always polite, women are always indescribably rude.

We imagine that we should be permitted to do anything, my darling, and at the same time we consider that we have a right to the utmost respect, and in the most flagrant manner we commit actions devoid of that elementary good-breeding of which you speak so feelingly.

I find, on the contrary, that men consider us much more than we consider them. Besides, darling, men must needs be, and are, what we make them. In a state of society, where women are all true gentlewomen, all men would become gentlemen.

Come now; just observe and reflect.

Look at two women meeting in the street. What an attitude each assumes towards the other! What disparaging looks! What contempt they throw into each glance! How they toss their heads while they inspect each other to find something to condemn! And, if the footpath is narrow, do you think one woman would make room for another, or would beg pardon as she sweeps by? Never! When two men jostle each other by accident in some narrow lane, each of them bows and at the same time gets out of the other's way, while we women press against each other stomach to stomach, face to face, insolently staring each other out of countenance.

Look at two women who are acquaintances meeting on a staircase outside the door of a friend's drawing-room, one of them just leaving, the other about to go in. They begin to talk to each other and block up all the landing. If anyone happens to be coming up behind them, man or woman, do you imagine that they will put themselves half an inch out of their way? Never! never!

I was waiting myself, with my watch in my hands, one day last winter at a certain drawing-room door. And, behind me, two gentlemen were also waiting without showing any readiness, as I did, to lose their temper. The reason was that they had long grown accustomed to our unconscionable insolence.

The other day, before leaving Paris, I went to dine with no less a person than your husband, in the Champs Elysees, in order to enjoy the fresh air. Every table was occupied. The waiter asked us to wait and there would soon be a vacant table.

At that moment I noticed an elderly lady of noble figure, who, having paid for her dinner, seemed on the point of going away. She saw me, scanned me from head to foot, and did not budge. For more than a quarter of an hour she sat there, immovable, putting on her gloves, and calmly staring at those who were waiting like myself. Now, two young men who were just finishing their dinner, having seen me in their turn, hastily summoned the waiter, paid what they owed, and at once offered me their seats, even insisting on standing while waiting for their change. And, bear in mind, my fair niece, that I am no longer pretty, like you, but old and white-haired.

It is we, you see, who should be taught politeness, and the task would be such a difficult one that Hercules himself would not be equal to it. You speak to me about Etretat and about the people who indulged in "tittle-tattle" along the beach of that delightful watering-place. It is a spot now lost to me, a thing of the past, but I found much amusement therein days gone by.

There were only a few of us, people in good society, really good society, and a few artists, and we all fraternized. We paid little attention to gossip in those days.

As we had no monotonous Casino, where people only gather for show, where they whisper, where they dance stupidly, where they succeed in thoroughly boring one another, we sought some other way of passing our evenings pleasantly. Now, just guess what came into the head of one of our husbands? Nothing less than to go and dance each night in one of the farm-houses in the neighborhood.

We started out in a group with a street-organ, generally played by Le Poittevin, the painter, with a cotton nightcap on his head. Two men carried lanterns. We followed in procession, laughing and chattering like a pack of fools.

We woke up the farmer and his servant-maids and farm hands. We got them to make onion soup (horror!), and we danced under the apple trees, to the sound of the barrel-organ. The cocks waking up began to crow in the darkness of the out-houses; the horses began prancing on the straw of their stables. The cool air of the country caressed our cheeks with the smell of grass and of new-mown hay.

How long ago it is! How long ago it is! It is thirty years since then!

I do not want you, my darling, to come for the opening of the hunting season. Why spoil the pleasure of our friends by inflicting on them fashionable toilettes on this day of vigorous exercise in the country? This is the way, child, that men are spoiled. I embrace you. Your old aunt,

GENEVIEVE DE L.

A WEDDING GIFT

For a long time Jacques Bourdillere had sworn that he would never marry, but he suddenly changed his mind. It happened suddenly, one summer, at the seashore.

One morning as he lay stretched out on the sand, watching the women coming out of the water, a little foot had struck him by its neatness and daintiness. He raised his eyes and was delighted with the whole person, although in fact he could see nothing but the ankles and the head emerging from a flannel bathrobe carefully held closed. He was supposed to be sensual and a fast liver. It was therefore by the mere grace of the form that he was at first captured. Then he was held by the charm of the young girl's sweet mind, so simple and good, as fresh as her cheeks and lips.

He was presented to the family and pleased them. He immediately fell madly in love. When he saw Berthe Lannis in the distance, on the long yellow stretch of sand, he would tingle to the roots of his hair. When he was near her he would become silent, unable to speak or even to think, with a kind of throbbing at his heart, and a buzzing in his ears, and a bewilderment in his mind. Was that love?

He did not know or understand, but he had fully decided to have this child for his wife.

Her parents hesitated for a long time, restrained by the young man's bad reputation. It was said that he had an old sweetheart, one of these binding attachments which one always believes to be broken off and yet which always hold.

Besides, for a shorter or longer period, he loved every woman who came within reach of his lips.

Then he settled down and refused, even once, to see the one with whom he had lived for so long. A friend took care of this woman's pension and assured her an income. Jacques paid, but he did not even wish to hear of her, pretending even to ignore her name. She wrote him letters which he never opened. Every week he would recognize the clumsy writing of the abandoned woman, and every week a greater anger surged within him against her, and he would quickly tear the envelope and the paper, without opening it, without reading one single line, knowing in advance the reproaches and complaints which it contained.

As no one had much faith in his constancy, the test was prolonged through the winter, and Berthe's hand was not granted him until the spring. The wedding took place in Paris at the beginning of May.

The young couple had decided not to take the conventional wedding trip, but after a little dance for the younger cousins, which would not be prolonged after eleven o'clock, in order that this day of lengthy ceremonies might not be too tiresome, the young pair were to spend the first night in the parental home and then, on the following morning, to leave for the beach so dear to their hearts, where they had first known and loved each other.

Night had come, and the dance was going on in the large parlor. 'The two had retired into a little Japanese boudoir hung with bright silks and dimly lighted by the soft rays of a large colored lantern hanging from the ceiling like a gigantic egg. Through the open window the fresh air from outside passed over their faces like a caress, for the night was warm and calm, full of the odor of spring.

They were silent, holding each other's hands and from time to time squeezing them with all their might. She sat there with a dreamy look, feeling a little lost at this great change in her life, but smiling, moved, ready to cry, often also almost ready to faint from joy, believing the whole world to be changed by what had just happened to her, uneasy, she knew not why, and feeling her whole body and soul filled with an indefinable and delicious lassitude.

He was looking at her persistently with a fixed smile. He wished to speak, but found nothing to say, and so sat there, expressing all his ardor by pressures of the hand. From time to time he would murmur: "Berthe!" And each time she would raise her eyes to him with a look of tenderness; they would look at each other for a second and then her look, pierced and fascinated by his, would fall.

They found no thoughts to exchange. They had been left alone, but occasionally some of the dancers would cast a rapid glance at them, as though they were the discreet and trusty witnesses of a mystery.

A door opened and a servant entered, holding on a tray a letter which a messenger had just brought. Jacques, trembling, took this paper, overwhelmed by a vague and sudden fear, the mysterious terror of swift misfortune.

He looked for a longtime at the envelope, the writing on which he did not know, not daring to open it, not wishing to read it, with a wild desire to put it in his pocket and say to himself: “I’ll leave that till to-morrow, when I’m far away!” But on one corner two big words, underlined, “Very urgent,” filled him with terror. Saying, “Please excuse me, my dear,” he tore open the envelope. He read the paper, grew frightfully pale, looked over it again, and, slowly, he seemed to spell it out word for word.

When he raised his head his whole expression showed how upset he was. He stammered: “My dear, it’s — it’s from my best friend, who has had a very great misfortune. He has need of me immediately — for a matter of life or death. Will you excuse me if I leave you for half an hour? I’ll be right back.”

Trembling and dazed, she stammered: “Go, my dear!” not having been his wife long enough to dare to question him, to demand to know. He disappeared. She remained alone, listening to the dancing in the neighboring parlor.

He had seized the first hat and coat he came to and rushed downstairs three steps at a time. As he was emerging into the street he stopped under the gas-jet of the vestibule and reread the letter. This is what it said:

> SIR: A girl by the name of Ravet, an old sweetheart of yours, it seems, has just given birth to a child that she says is yours. The mother is about to die and is begging for you. I take the liberty to write and ask you if you can grant this last request to a woman who seems to be very unhappy and worthy of pity.
>
> Yours truly, DR. BONNARD.

When he reached the sick-room the woman was already on the point of death. He did not recognize her at first. The doctor and two nurses were taking care of her. And everywhere on the floor were pails full of ice and rags covered with blood. Water flooded the carpet; two candles were burning on a bureau; behind the bed, in a little wicker crib, the child was crying, and each time it would moan the mother, in torture, would try to move, shivering under her ice bandages.

She was mortally wounded, killed by this birth. Her life was flowing from her, and, notwithstanding the ice and the care, the merciless hemorrhage continued, hastening her last hour.

She recognized Jacques and wished to raise her arms. They were so weak that she could not do so, but tears coursed down her pallid cheeks. He dropped to his knees beside the bed, seized one of her hands and kissed it frantically. Then, little by little, he drew close to the thin face, which started at the contact. One of the nurses was lighting them with a candle, and the doctor was watching them from the back of the room.

Then she said in a voice which sounded as though it came from a distance: “I am going to die, dear. Promise to stay to the end. Oh! don’t leave me now. Don’t leave me in my last moments!”

He kissed her face and her hair, and, weeping, he murmured: “Do not be uneasy; I will stay.”

It was several minutes before she could speak again, she was so weak. She continued: “The little one is yours. I swear it before God and on my soul. I swear it as I am dying! I have never loved another man but you — promise to take care of the child.”

He was trying to take this poor pain-racked body in his arms. Maddened by remorse and sorrow, he stammered: “I swear to you that I will bring him up and love him. He shall never leave me.”

Then she tried to kiss Jacques. Powerless to lift her head, she held out her white lips in an appeal for a kiss. He approached his lips to respond to this piteous entreaty.

As soon as she felt a little calmer, she murmured: “Bring him here and let me see if you love him.”

He went and got the child. He placed him gently on the bed between them, and the little one stopped crying. She murmured: “Don’t move any more!” And he was quiet. And he stayed there, holding in his burning hand this other hand shaking in the chill of death, just as, a while ago, he had been holding a hand trembling with love. From time to time he would cast a quick glance at the clock, which marked midnight, then one o’clock, then two.

The physician had returned. The two nurses, after noiselessly moving about the room for a while, were now sleeping on chairs. The child was asleep, and the mother, with eyes shut, appeared also to be resting.

Suddenly, just as pale daylight was creeping in behind the curtains, she stretched out her arms with such a quick and violent motion that she almost threw her baby on the floor. A kind of rattle was heard in her throat, then she lay on her back motionless, dead.

The nurses sprang forward and declared: “All is over!”

He looked once more at this woman whom he had so loved, then at the clock, which pointed to four, and he ran away, forgetting his overcoat, in the evening dress, with the child in his arms.

After he had left her alone the young wife had waited, calmly enough at first, in the little Japanese boudoir. Then, as she did not see him return, she went back to the parlor with an indifferent and calm appearance, but terribly anxious. When her mother saw her alone she asked: “Where is your husband?” She answered: “In his room; he is coming right back.”

After an hour, when everybody had questioned her, she told about the letter, Jacques’ upset appearance and her fears of an accident.

Still they waited. The guests left; only the nearest relatives remained. At midnight the bride was put to bed, sobbing bitterly. Her mother and two aunts, sitting around the bed, listened to her crying, silent and in despair. The father had gone to the commissary of police to see if he could obtain some news.

At five o’clock a slight noise was heard in the hall. A door was softly opened and closed. Then suddenly a little cry like the mewing of a cat was heard throughout the silent house.

All the women started forward and Berthe sprang ahead of them all, pushing her way past her aunts, wrapped in a bathrobe.

Jacques stood in the middle of the room, pale and out of breath, holding an infant in his arms. The four women looked at him, astonished; but Berthe, who had suddenly become courageous, rushed forward with anguish in her heart, exclaiming: “What is it? What’s the matter?”

He looked about him wildly and answered shortly:

“I — I have a child and the mother has just died.”

And with his clumsy hands he held out the screaming infant.

Without saying a word, Berthe seized the child, kissed it and hugged it to her. Then she raised her tear-filled eyes to him, asking: “Did you say that the mother was dead?” He answered: “Yes — just now — in my arms. I had broken with her since summer. I knew nothing. The physician sent for me.”

Then Berthe murmured: “Well, we will bring up the little one.”

FEAR

We went up on deck after dinner. Before us the Mediterranean lay without a ripple and shimmering in the moonlight. The great ship glided on, casting upward to the star-studded sky a long serpent of black smoke. Behind us the dazzling white water, stirred by the rapid progress of the heavy bark and beaten by the propeller, foamed, seemed to writhe, gave off so much brilliancy that one could have called it boiling moonlight.

There were six or eight of us silent with admiration and gazing toward far-away Africa whither we were going. The commandant, who was smoking a cigar with us, brusquely resumed the conversation begun at dinner.

"Yes, I was afraid then. My ship remained for six hours on that rock, beaten by the wind and with a great hole in the side. Luckily we were picked up toward evening by an English coaler which sighted us."

Then a tall man of sunburned face and grave demeanor, one of those men who have evidently traveled unknown and far-away lands, whose calm eye seems to preserve in its depths something of the foreign scenes it has observed, a man that you are sure is impregnated with courage, spoke for the first time.

"You say, commandant, that you were afraid. I beg to disagree with you. You are in error as to the meaning of the word and the nature of the sensation that you experienced. An energetic man is never afraid in the presence of urgent danger. He is excited, aroused, full of anxiety, but fear is something quite different."

The commandant laughed and answered: "Bah! I assure you that I was afraid."

Then the man of the tanned countenance addressed us deliberately as follows:

"Permit me to explain. Fear — and the boldest men may feel fear — is something horrible, an atrocious sensation, a sort of decomposition of the soul, a terrible spasm of brain and heart, the very memory of which brings a shudder of anguish, but when one is brave he feels it neither under fire nor in the presence of sure death nor in the face of any well-known danger. It springs up under certain abnormal conditions, under certain mysterious influences in the presence of vague peril. Real fear is a sort of reminiscence of fantastic terror of the past. A man who believes in ghosts and imagines he sees a specter in the darkness must feel fear in all its horror.

"As for me I was overwhelmed with fear in broad daylight about ten years ago and again one December night last winter.

"Nevertheless, I have gone through many dangers, many adventures which seemed to promise death. I have often been in battle. I have been left for dead by thieves. In America I was condemned as an insurgent to be hanged, and off the coast of China have been thrown into the sea from the deck of a ship. Each time I thought I was lost I at once decided upon my course of action without regret or weakness.

"That is not fear.

"I have felt it in Africa, and yet it is a child of the north. The sunlight banishes it like the mist. Consider this fact, gentlemen. Among the Orientals life has no value; resignation is natural. The nights are clear and empty of the somber spirit of unrest which haunts the brain in cooler lands. In the Orient panic is known, but not fear.

"Well, then! Here is the incident that befell me in Africa.

"I was crossing the great sands to the south of Onargla. It is one of the most curious districts in the world. You have seen the solid continuous sand of the endless ocean strands. Well, imagine the ocean itself turned to sand in the midst of a storm. Imagine a silent tempest with motionless billows of yellow dust. They are high as mountains, these uneven, varied surges, rising exactly like unchained billows, but still larger, and stratified like watered silk. On this wild, silent, and motionless sea, the consuming rays of the tropical sun are poured pitilessly and directly. You have to climb these streaks of red-hot ash, descend again on the other side, climb again, climb, climb without halt, without repose, without shade. The horses cough, sink to their knees and slide down the sides of these remarkable hills.

"We were a couple of friends followed by eight spahis and four camels with their drivers. We were no longer talking, overcome by heat, fatigue, and a thirst such as had produced this burning desert. Suddenly one of our men uttered a cry. We all halted, surprised by an unsolved phenomenon known only to travelers in these trackless wastes.

"Somewhere, near us, in an indeterminable direction, a drum was rolling, the mysterious drum of the sands. It was beating distinctly, now with greater resonance and again feebler, ceasing, then resuming its uncanny roll.

"The Arabs, terrified, stared at one another, and one said in his language: 'Death is upon us.' As he spoke, my companion, my friend, almost a brother, dropped from his horse, falling face downward on the sand, overcome by a sunstroke.

"And for two hours, while I tried in vain to save him, this weird drum filled my ears with its monotonous, intermittent and incomprehensible tone, and I felt lay hold of my bones fear, real fear, hideous fear, in the presence of this beloved corpse, in this hole scorched by the sun, surrounded by four mountains of sand, and two hundred leagues from any French settlement, while echo assailed our ears with this furious drum beat.

"On that day I realized what fear was, but since then I have had another, and still more vivid experience— "

The commandant interrupted the speaker:

"I beg your pardon, but what was the drum?"

The traveler replied:

"I cannot say. No one knows. Our officers are often surprised by this singular noise and attribute it generally to the echo produced by a hail of grains of sand blown by the wind against the dry and brittle leaves of weeds, for it has always been noticed that the phenomenon occurs in proximity to little plants burned by the sun and hard as parchment. This sound seems to have been magnified, multiplied, and swelled beyond measure in its progress through the valleys of sand, and the drum therefore might be considered a sort of sound mirage. Nothing more. But I did not know that until later.

"I shall proceed to my second instance.

"It was last winter, in a forest of the Northeast of France. The sky was so overcast that night came two hours earlier than usual. My guide was a peasant who walked beside me along the narrow road, under the vault of fir trees, through which the wind in its fury howled. Between the tree tops, I saw the fleeting clouds, which seemed to hasten as if to escape some object of terror. Sometimes in a fierce gust of wind the whole forest bowed in the same direction with a groan of pain, and a chill laid hold of me, despite my rapid pace and heavy clothing.

"We were to sup and sleep at an old gamekeeper's house not much farther on. I had come out for hunting.

"My guide sometimes raised his eyes and murmured: 'Ugly weather!' Then he told me about the people among whom we were to spend the night. The father had killed a poacher, two years before, and since then had been gloomy and behaved as though haunted by a memory. His two sons were married and lived with him.

"The darkness was profound. I could see nothing before me nor around me and the mass of overhanging interlacing trees rubbed together, filling the night with an incessant whispering. Finally I saw a light and soon my companion was knocking upon a door. Sharp women's voices answered us, then a man's voice, a choking voice, asked, 'Who goes there?' My guide gave his name. We entered and beheld a memorable picture.

"An old man with white hair, wild eyes, and a loaded gun in his hands, stood waiting for us in the middle of the kitchen, while two stalwart youths, armed with axes, guarded the door. In the somber corners I distinguished two women kneeling with faces to the wall.

"Matters were explained, and the old man stood his gun against the wall, at the same time ordering that a room be prepared for me. Then, as the women did not stir: 'Look you, monsieur,' said he, 'two years ago this night I killed a man, and last year he came back to haunt me. I expect him again to-night.'

"Then he added in a tone that made me smile:

"'And so we are somewhat excited.'

"I reassured him as best I could, happy to have arrived on that particular evening and to witness this superstitious terror. I told stories and almost succeeded in calming the whole household.

"Near the fireplace slept an old dog, mustached and almost blind, with his head between his paws, such a dog as reminds you of people you have known.

"Outside, the raging storm was beating against the little house, and suddenly through a small pane of glass, a sort of peep-window placed near the door, I saw in a brilliant flash of lightning a whole mass of trees thrashed by the wind.

“In spite of my efforts, I realized that terror was laying hold of these people, and each time that I ceased to speak, all ears listened for distant sounds. Annoyed at these foolish fears, I was about to retire to my bed, when the old gamekeeper suddenly leaped from his chair, seized his gun and stammered wildly: ‘There he is, there he is! I hear him!’ The two women again sank upon their knees in the corner and hid their faces, while the sons took up the axes. I was going to try to pacify them once more, when the sleeping dog awakened suddenly and, raising his head and stretching his neck, looked at the fire with his dim eyes and uttered one of those mournful howls which make travelers shudder in the darkness and solitude of the country. All eyes were focused upon him now as he rose on his front feet, as though haunted by a vision, and began to howl at something invisible, unknown, and doubtless horrible, for he was bristling all over. The gamekeeper with livid face cried: ‘He scents him! He scents him! He was there when I killed him.’ The two women, terrified, began to wail in concert with the dog.

“In spite of myself, cold chills ran down my spine. This vision of the animal at such a time and place, in the midst of these startled people, was something frightful to witness.

“Then for an hour the dog howled without stirring; he howled as though in the anguish of a nightmare; and fear, horrible fear came over me. Fear of what? How can I say? It was fear, and that is all I know.

“We remained motionless and pale, expecting something awful to happen. Our ears were strained and our hearts beat loudly while the slightest noise startled us. Then the beast began to walk around the room, sniffing at the walls and growling constantly. His maneuvers were driving us mad! Then the countryman, who had brought me thither, in a paroxysm of rage, seized the dog, and carrying him to a door, which opened into a small court, thrust him forth.

“The noise was suppressed and we were left plunged in a silence still more terrible. Then suddenly we all started. Some one was gliding along the outside wall toward the forest; then he seemed to be feeling of the door with a trembling hand; then for two minutes nothing was heard and we almost lost our minds. Then he returned, still feeling along the wall, and scratched lightly upon the door as a child might do with his finger nails. Suddenly a face appeared behind the glass of the peep-window, a white face with eyes shining like those of the cat tribe. A sound was heard, an indistinct plaintive murmur.

“Then there was a formidable burst of noise in the kitchen. The old gamekeeper had fired and the two sons at once rushed forward and barricaded the window with the great table, reinforcing it with the buffet.

“I swear to you that at the shock of the gun’s discharge, which I did not expect, such an anguish laid hold of my heart, my soul, and my very body that I felt myself about to fall, about to die from fear.

“We remained there until dawn, unable to move, in short, seized by an indescribable numbness of the brain.

“No one dared to remove the barricade until a thin ray of sunlight appeared through a crack in the back room.

“At the base of the wall and under the window, we found the old dog lying dead, his skull shattered by a ball.

“He had escaped from the little court by digging a hole under a fence.”

The dark-visaged man became silent, then he added:

“And yet on that night I incurred no danger, but I should rather again pass through all the hours in which I have confronted the most terrible perils than the one minute when that gun was discharged at the bearded head in the window.”

THE RELIC

"To the Abbe Louis d'Ennemare, at Soissons.

"My Dear Abbe.

"My marriage with your cousin is broken off in the most stupid way, all on account of an idiotic trick which I almost involuntarily played my intended. In my perplexity I turn to you, my old school chum, for you may be able to help me out of the difficulty. If you can, I shall be grateful to you until I die.

"You know Gilberte, or, rather, you think you know her, but do we ever understand women? All their opinions, their ideas, their creeds, are a surprise to us. They are all full of twists and turns, cf the unforeseen, of unintelligible arguments, of defective logic and of obstinate ideas, which seem final, but which they alter because a little bird came and perched on the window ledge.

"I need not tell you that your cousin is very religious, as she was brought up by the White (or was it the Black?) Ladies at Nancy. You know that better than I do, but what you perhaps do not know is, that she is just as excitable about other matters as she is about religion. Her head flies away, just as a leaf is whirled away by the wind; and she is a true woman, or, rather, girl, for she is moved or made angry in a moment, starting off at a gallop in affection, just as she does in hatred, and returning in the same manner; and she is pretty — as you know, and more charming than I can say — as you will never know.

"Well, we became engaged, and I adored her, as I adore her still, and she appeared to love me.

"One evening, I received a telegram summoning me to Cologne for a consultation, which might be followed by a serious and difficult operation, and as I had to start the next morning, I went to wish Gilberte good-by, and tell her why I could not dine with them on Wednesday, but would do so on

Friday, the day of my return. Ah! Beware of Fridays, for I assure you they are unlucky!

"When I told her that I had to go to Germany, I saw that her eyes filled with tears, but when I said I should be back very soon, she clapped her hands, and said:

"'I am very glad you are going, then! You must bring me back something; a mere trifle, just a souvenir, but a souvenir that you have chosen for me. You must guess what I should like best, do you hear? And then I shall see whether you have any imagination.'

"She thought for a few moments, and then added:

"'I forbid you to spend more than twenty francs on it. I want it for the intention, and for a remembrance of your penetration, and not for its intrinsic value:

"And then, after another moment's silence, she said, in a low voice, and with downcast eyes:

"'If it costs you nothing in money, but is something very ingenious and pretty, I will — I will kiss you.'

"The next day I was in Cologne. It was a case of a terrible accident, which had plunged a whole family into despair, and a difficult amputation was necessary. They lodged me in the house; I might say, they almost locked me up, and I saw nobody but people in tears, who almost deafened me with their lamentations; I operated on a man who appeared to be in a moribund state, and who nearly died under my hands, and with whom I remained two nights; and then, when I saw that there was a chance of his recovery, I drove to the station. I had, however, made a mistake in the trains, and I had an hour to wait, and so I wandered about the streets, still thinking of my poor patient, when a man accosted me. I do not know German, and he was totally ignorant of French, but at last I made out that he was offering me some relics. I thought of Gilberte, for I knew her fanatical devotion, and here was my present ready to hand, so I followed the man into a shop where religious objects were for sale, and I bought a small piece of a bone of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins.

"The pretended relic was inclosed in a charming old silver box, and that determined my choice, and, putting my purchase into my pocket, I went to the railway station, and so on to Paris.

"As soon as I got home, I wished to examine my purchase again, and on taking hold of it, I found that the box was open, and the relic missing! I searched in vain in my pocket, and turned it inside out; the small bit of bone, which was no bigger than half a pin, had disappeared.

“You know, my dear little Abbe, that my faith is not very fervent, but, as my friend, you are magnanimous enough to put up with my lukewarmness, and to leave me alone, and to wait for the future, so you say. But I absolutely disbelieve in the relics of secondhand dealers in piety, and you share my doubts in that respect. Therefore, the loss of that bit of sheep’s carcass did not grieve me, and I easily procured a similar fragment, which I carefully fastened inside my jewel-box, and then I went to see my intended.

“As soon as she saw me, she ran up to me, smiling and eager, and, said to me:

“‘What have you brought me?’

“I pretended to have forgotten, but she did not believe me, and I made her beg, and even beseech me. But when I saw that she was devoured by curiosity, I gave her the sacred silver box. She appeared overjoyed.

“‘A relic! Oh! A relic!’

“And she kissed the box passionately, so that I was ashamed of my deception. She was not quite satisfied, however, and her uneasiness soon turned to terrible fear, and looking straight into my eyes, she said:

“‘Are you sure-that it is genuine?’

“‘Absolutely certain.’

“‘How can you be so certain?’

“I was trapped; for to say that I had bought it of a man in the streets would be my destruction. What was I to say? A wild idea struck me, and I said, in a low, mysterious voice:

“‘I stole it for you.’

“She looked at me with astonishment and delight in her large eyes.

“‘Oh! You stole it? Where?’

“‘In the cathedral; in the very shrine of the Eleven Thousand Virgins.’

“Her heart beat with pleasure, and she murmured:

“‘Oh! Did you really do that-for me? Tell me-all about it!’

“That was the climax; I could not retract what I had said. I made up a fanciful story; with precise details: I had given the custodian of the building a hundred francs to be allowed to go about the building by myself; the shrine was being repaired, but I happened to be there at the breakfast hour of the workmen and clergy; by removing a small panel, I had been enabled to seize a small piece of bone (oh! so small), among a quantity of others (I said a quantity, as I thought of the amount that the remains of the skeletons of eleven thousand virgins must produce). Then I went to a goldsmith's and bought a casket worthy of the relic; and I was not sorry to let her know that the silver box cost me five hundred francs.

"But she did not think of that; she listened to me, trembling, in an ecstasy, and whispering: 'How I love you!' she threw herself into my arms.

"Just note this: I had committed sacrilege for her sake. I had committed a theft; I had violated a church; I had violated a shrine; violated and stolen holy relics, and for that she adored me, thought me perfect, tender, divine. Such is woman, my dear Abbe, every woman.

"For two months I was the most admirable of lovers. In her room, she had made a kind of magnificent chapel in which to keep this bit of mutton chop, which, as she thought, had made me commit that divine love-crime, and she worked up her religious enthusiasm in front of it every morning and evening. I had asked her to keep the matter secret, for fear, as I said, that I might be arrested, condemned, and given over to Germany, and she kept her promise.

"Well, at the beginning of the summer, she was seized with an irresistible desire to see the scene of my exploit, and she teased her father so persistently (without telling him her secret reason), that he took her to Cologne, but without telling me of their trip, according to his daughter's wish.

"I need not tell you that I had not seen the interior of the cathedral. I do not know where the tomb (if there be a tomb) of the Eleven Thousand Virgins is; and then, it appears, it is unapproachable, alas!

"A week afterward, I received ten lines, breaking off our engagement, and then an explanatory letter from her father, whom she had, somewhat late, taken into her confidence.

"At the sight of the shrine, she had suddenly seen through my trickery and my lie, and at the same time discovered my real innocence of any crime. Having asked the keeper of the relics whether any robbery had been committed, the man began to laugh, and pointed out to them how impossible such a crime was. But, from the moment that I had not plunged my profane hand into venerable relics, I was no longer worthy of my fair-haired, sensitive betrothed.

"I was forbidden the house; I begged and prayed in vain; nothing could move the fair devotee, and I became ill from grief. Well, last week, her cousin, Madame d'Arville, who is your cousin also, sent me word that she should like to see me, and when I called, she told me on what conditions I might obtain my pardon, and here they are. I must bring her a relic, a real, authentic relic of some virgin and martyr, certified to be such by our Holy Father, the Pope, and I am going mad from embarrassment and anxiety.

"I will go to Rome, if needful, but I cannot call on the Pope unexpectedly, to tell him my stupid misadventure; and, besides, I doubt whether they allow private individuals to have relics. Could not you give me an introduction to some cardinal, or even to some French prelate who possesses some remains of a female saint? Or, perhaps, you may have the precious object she wants in your collection?

"Help me out of my difficulty, my dear Abbe, and I promise you that I will be converted ten years sooner than I otherwise should be!

"Madame d'Arville, who takes the matter seriously, said to me the other day:

"'Poor Gilberte will never marry.'

"My dear old schoolmate, will you allow your cousin to die the victim of a stupid piece of subterfuge on my part? Pray prevent her from being virgin eleven thousand and one.

"Pardon me, I am unworthy, but I embrace you, and love you with all my heart.

"Your old friend,
"HENRI FONTAL."

THE MORIBUND

The warm autumn sun was beating down on the farmyard. Under the grass, which had been cropped close by the cows, the earth soaked by recent rains, was soft and sank in under the feet with a soggy noise, and the apple trees, loaded with apples, were dropping their pale green fruit in the dark green grass.

Four young heifers, tied in a line, were grazing and at times looking toward the house and lowing. The fowls made a colored patch on the dung-heap before the stable, scratching, moving about and cackling, while two roosters crowed continually, digging worms for their hens, whom they were calling with a loud clucking.

The wooden gate opened and a man entered. He might have been forty years old, but he looked at least sixty, wrinkled, bent, walking slowly, impeded by the weight of heavy wooden shoes full of straw. His long arms hung down on both sides of his body. When he got near the farm a yellow cur, tied at the foot of an enormous pear tree, beside a barrel which served as his kennel, began at first to wag his tail and then to bark for joy. The man cried:

“Down, Finot!”

The dog was quiet.

A peasant woman came out of the house. Her large, flat, bony body was outlined under a long woollen jacket drawn in at the waist. A gray skirt, too short, fell to the middle of her legs, which were encased in blue stockings. She, too, wore wooden shoes, filled with straw. The white cap, turned yellow, covered a few hairs which were plastered to the scalp, and her brown, thin, ugly, toothless face had that wild, animal expression which is often to be found on the faces of the peasants.

The man asked:

“How is he gettin’ along?”

The woman answered:

“The priest said it’s the end — that he will never live through the night.”

Both of them went into the house.

After passing through the kitchen, they entered a low, dark room, barely lighted by one window, in front of which a piece of calico was hanging. The big beams, turned brown with age and smoke, crossed the room from one side to the other, supporting the thin floor of the garret, where an army of rats ran about day and night.

The moist, lumpy earthen floor looked greasy, and, at the back of the room, the bed made an indistinct white spot. A harsh, regular noise, a difficult, hoarse, wheezing breathing, like the gurgling of water from a broken pump, came from the darkened couch where an old man, the father of the peasant woman, was dying.

The man and the woman approached the dying man and looked at him with calm, resigned eyes.

The son-in-law said:

“I guess it’s all up with him this time; he will not last the night.”

The woman answered:

“He’s been gurglin’ like that ever since midday.” They were silent. The father’s eyes were closed, his face was the color of the earth and so dry that it looked like wood. Through his open mouth came his harsh, rattling breath, and the gray linen sheet rose and fell with each respiration.

The son-in-law, after a long silence, said:

“There’s nothing more to do; I can’t help him. It’s a nuisance, just the same, because the weather is good and we’ve got a lot of work to do.”

His wife seemed annoyed at this idea. She reflected a few moments and then said:

“He won’t be buried till Saturday, and that will give you all day tomorrow.”

The peasant thought the matter over and answered:

“Yes, but to-morrow I’ll have to invite the people to the funeral. That means five or six hours to go round to Tourville and Manetot, and to see everybody.”

The woman, after meditating two or three minutes, declared:

“It isn’t three o’clock yet. You could begin this evening and go all round the country to Tourville. You can just as well say that he’s dead, seem’ as he’s as good as that now.”

The man stood perplexed for a while, weighing the pros and cons of the idea. At last he declared:

"Well, I'll go!"

He was leaving the room, but came back after a minute's hesitation:

"As you haven't got anythin' to do you might shake down some apples to bake and make four dozen dumplings for those who come to the funeral, for one must have something to cheer them. You can light the fire with the wood that's under the shed. It's dry."

He left the room, went back into the kitchen, opened the cupboard, took out a six-pound loaf of bread, cut off a slice, and carefully gathered the crumbs in the palm of his hand and threw them into his mouth, so as not to lose anything. Then, with the end of his knife, he scraped out a little salt butter from the bottom of an earthen jar, spread it on his bread and began to eat slowly, as he did everything.

He recrossed the farmyard, quieted the dog, which had started barking again, went out on the road bordering on his ditch, and disappeared in the direction of Tourville.

As soon as she was alone, the woman began to work. She uncovered the meal-bin and made the dough for the dumplings. She kneaded it a long time, turning it over and over again, punching, pressing, crushing it. Finally she made a big, round, yellow-white ball, which she placed on the corner of the table.

Then she went to get her apples, and, in order not to injure the tree with a pole, she climbed up into it by a ladder. She chose the fruit with care, only taking the ripe ones, and gathering them in her apron.

A voice called from the road:

"Hey, Madame Chicot!"

She turned round. It was a neighbor, Osime Favet, the mayor, on his way to fertilize his fields, seated on the manure-wagon, with his feet hanging over the side. She turned round and answered:

"What can I do for you, Maitre Osime?"

"And how is the father?"

She cried:

"He is as good as dead. The funeral is Saturday at seven, because there's lots of work to be done."

The neighbor answered:

"So! Good luck to you! Take care of yourself."

To his kind remarks she answered:”

“Thanks; the same to you.”

And she continued picking apples.

When she went back to the house, she went over to look at her father, expecting to find him dead. But as soon as she reached the door she heard his monotonous, noisy rattle, and, thinking it a waste of time to go over to him, she began to prepare her dumplings. She wrapped up the fruit, one by one, in a thin layer of paste, then she lined them up on the edge of the table. When she had made forty-eight dumplings, arranged in dozens, one in front of the other, she began to think of preparing supper, and she hung her kettle over the fire to cook potatoes, for she judged it useless to heat the oven that day, as she had all the next day in which to finish the preparations.

Her husband returned at about five. As soon as he had crossed the threshold he asked:

“Is it over?”

She answered:

“Not yet; he’s still gurglin’.”

They went to look at him. The old man was in exactly the same condition. His hoarse rattle, as regular as the ticking of a clock, was neither quicker nor slower. It returned every second, the tone varying a little, according as the air entered or left his chest.

His son-in-law looked at him and then said:

“He’ll pass away without our noticin’ it, just like a candle.”

They returned to the kitchen and started to eat without saying a word. When they had swallowed their soup, they ate another piece of bread and butter. Then, as soon as the dishes were washed, they returned to the dying man.

The woman, carrying a little lamp with a smoky wick, held it in front of her father’s face. If he had not been breathing, one would certainly have thought him dead.

The couple’s bed was hidden in a little recess at the other end of the room. Silently they retired, put out the light, closed their eyes, and soon two unequal snores, one deep and the other shriller, accompanied the uninterrupted rattle of the dying man.

The rats ran about in the garret.

The husband awoke at the first streaks of dawn. His father-in-law was still alive. He shook his wife, worried by the tenacity of the old man.

"Say, Phemie, he don't want to quit. What would you do?"

He knew that she gave good advice.

She answered:

"You needn't be afraid; he can't live through the day. And the mayor won't stop our burying him to-morrow, because he allowed it for Maitre Renard's father, who died just during the planting season."

He was convinced by this argument, and left for the fields.

His wife baked the dumplings and then attended to her housework.

At noon the old man was not dead. The people hired for the day's work came by groups to look at him. Each one had his say. Then they left again for the fields.

At six o'clock, when the work was over, the father was still breathing. At last his son-in-law was frightened.

"What would you do now, Phemie?"

She no longer knew how to solve the problem. They went to the mayor. He promised that he would close his eyes and authorize the funeral for the following day. They also went to the health officer, who likewise promised, in order to oblige Maitre Chicot, to antedate the death certificate. The man and the woman returned, feeling more at ease.

They went to bed and to sleep, just as they did the preceding day, their sonorous breathing blending with the feeble breathing of the old man.

When they awoke, he was not yet dead.

Then they began to be frightened. They stood by their father, watching him with distrust, as though he had wished to play them a mean trick, to deceive them, to annoy them on purpose, and they were vexed at him for the time which he was making them lose.

The son-in-law asked:

"What am I goin' to do?"

She did not know. She answered:

"It certainly is annoying!"

The guests who were expected could not be notified. They decided to wait and explain the case to them.

Toward a quarter to seven the first ones arrived. The women in black, their heads covered with large veils, looking very sad. Then men, ill at ease in their homespun coats, were coming forward more slowly, in couples, talking business.

Maitre Chicot and his wife, bewildered, received them sorrowfully, and suddenly both of them together began to cry as they approached the first group. They explained the matter, related their difficulty, offered chairs, bustled about, tried to make excuses, attempting to prove that everybody would have done as they did, talking continually and giving nobody a chance to answer.

They were going from one person to another:

"I never would have thought it; it's incredible how he can last this long!"

The guests, taken aback, a little disappointed, as though they had missed an expected entertainment, did not know what to do, some remaining seated others standing. Several wished to leave. Maitre Chicot held them back:

"You must take something, anyhow! We made some dumplings; might as well make use of 'em."

The faces brightened at this idea. The yard was filling little by little; the early arrivals were telling the news to those who had arrived later. Everybody was whispering. The idea of the dumplings seemed to cheer everyone up.

The women went in to take a look at the dying man. They crossed themselves beside the bed, muttered a prayer and went out again. The men, less anxious for this spectacle, cast a look through the window, which had been opened.

Madame Chicot explained her distress:

"That's how he's been for two days, neither better nor worse. Doesn't he sound like a pump that has gone dry?"

When everybody had had a look at the dying man, they thought of the refreshments; but as there were too many people for the kitchen to hold, the table was moved out in front of the door. The four dozen golden dumplings, tempting and appetizing, arranged in two big dishes, attracted the eyes of all. Each one reached out to take his, fearing that there would not be enough. But four remained over.

Maitre Chicot, his mouth full, said:

"Father would feel sad if he were to see this. He loved them so much when he was alive."

A big, jovial peasant declared:

"He won't eat any more now. Each one in his turn."

This remark, instead of making the guests sad, seemed to cheer them up. It was their turn now to eat dumplings.

Madame Chicot, distressed at the expense, kept running down to the cellar continually for cider. The pitchers were emptied in quick succession. The company was laughing and talking loud now. They were beginning to shout as they do at feasts.

Suddenly an old peasant woman who had stayed beside the dying man, held there by a morbid fear of what would soon happen to herself, appeared at the window and cried in a shrill voice:

“He’s dead! he’s dead!”

Everybody was silent. The women arose quickly to go and see. He was indeed dead. The rattle had ceased. The men looked at each other, looking down, ill at ease. They hadn’t finished eating the dumplings. Certainly the rascal had not chosen a propitious moment. The Chicots were no longer weeping. It was over; they were relieved.

They kept repeating:

“I knew it couldn’t ‘last. If he could only have done it last night, it would have saved us all this trouble.”

Well, anyhow, it was over. They would bury him on Monday, that was all, and they would eat some more dumplings for the occasion.

The guests went away, talking the matter over, pleased at having had the chance to see him and of getting something to eat.

And when the husband and wife were alone, face to face, she said, her face distorted with grief:

“We’ll have to bake four dozen more dumplings! Why couldn’t he have made up his mind last night?”

The husband, more resigned, answered:

“Well, we’ll not have to do this every day.”

THE GAMEKEEPER

It was after dinner, and we were talking about adventures and accidents which happened while out shooting.

An old friend, known to all of us, M. Boniface, a great sportsman and a connoisseur of wine, a man of wonderful physique, witty and gay, and endowed with an ironical and resigned philosophy, which manifested itself in caustic humor, and never in melancholy, suddenly exclaimed:

"I know a story, or rather a tragedy, which is somewhat peculiar. It is not at all like those which one hears of usually, and I have never told it, thinking that it would interest no one.

"It is not at all sympathetic. I mean by that, that it does not arouse the kind of interest which pleases or which moves one agreeably.

"Here is the story:

"I was then about thirty-five years of age, and a most enthusiastic sportsman.

"In those days I owned a lonely bit of property in the neighborhood of Jumieges, surrounded by forests and abounding in hares and rabbits. I was accustomed to spending four or five days alone there each year, there not being room enough to allow of my bringing a friend with me.

"I had placed there as gamekeeper, an old retired gendarme, a good man, hot-tempered, a severe disciplinarian, a terror to poachers and fearing nothing. He lived all alone, far from the village, in a little house, or rather hut, consisting of two rooms downstairs, with kitchen and store-room, and two upstairs. One of them, a kind of box just large enough to accommodate a bed, a cupboard and a chair, was reserved for my use.

"Old man Cavalier lived in the other one. When I said that he was alone in this place, I was wrong. He had taken his nephew with him, a young scamp about fourteen years old, who used to go to the village and run errands for the old man.

“This young scapegrace was long and lanky, with yellow hair, so light that it resembled the fluff of a plucked chicken, so thin that he seemed bald. Besides this, he had enormous feet and the hands of a giant.

“He was cross-eyed, and never looked at anyone. He struck me as being in the same relation to the human race as ill-smelling beasts are to the animal race. He reminded me of a polecat.

“He slept in a kind of hole at the top of the stairs which led to the two rooms.

“But during my short sojourns at the Pavilion — so I called the hut — Marius would give up his nook to an old woman from Ecorcheville, called Celeste, who used to come and cook for me, as old man Cavalier’s stews were not sufficient for my healthy appetite.

“You now know the characters and the locality. Here is the story:

“It was on the fifteenth of October, 1854 — I shall remember that date as long as I live.

“I left Rouen on horseback, followed by my dog Bock, a big Dalmatian hound from Poitou, full-chested and with a heavy jaw, which could retrieve among the bushes like a Pont-Andemer spaniel.

“I was carrying my satchel slung across my back and my gun diagonally across my chest. It was a cold, windy, gloomy day, with clouds scurrying across the sky.

“As I went up the hill at Canteleu, I looked over the broad valley of the Seine, the river winding in and out along its course as far as the eye could see. To the right the towers of Rouen stood out against the sky, and to the left the landscape was bounded by the distant slopes covered with trees. Then I crossed the forest of Roumare and, toward five o’clock, reached the Pavilion, where Cavalier and Celeste were expecting me.

“For ten years I had appeared there at the same time, in the same manner; and for ten years the same faces had greeted me with the same words:

“‘Welcome, master! We hope your health is good.’

“Cavalier had hardly changed. He withstood time like an old tree; but Celeste, especially in the past four years, had become unrecognizable.

“She was bent almost double, and, although still active, when she walked her body was almost at right angles to her legs.

“The old woman, who was very devoted to me, always seemed affected at seeing me again, and each time, as I left, she would say:

“‘This may be the last time, master.’

"The sad, timid farewell of this old servant, this hopeless resignation to the inevitable fate which was not far off for her, moved me strangely each year.

"I dismounted, and while Cavalier, whom I had greeted, was leading my horse to the little shed which served as a stable, I entered the kitchen, which also served as dining-room, followed by Celeste.

"Here the gamekeeper joined us. I saw at first glance that something was the matter. He seemed preoccupied, ill at ease, worried.

"I said to him:

"'Well, Cavalier, is everything all right?'

"He muttered:

"'Yes and no. There are things I don't like.'

"I asked:

"'What? Tell me about it.'

"But he shook his head.

"'No, not yet, monsieur. I do not wish to bother you with my little troubles so soon after your arrival.'

"I insisted, but he absolutely refused to give me any information before dinner. From his expression, I could tell that it was something very serious.

"Not knowing what to say to him, I asked:

"'How about game? Much of it this year?'

"'Oh, yes! You'll find all you want. Thank heaven, I looked out for that.'

"He said this with so much seriousness, with such sad solemnity, that it was really almost funny. His big gray mustache seemed almost ready to drop from his lips.

"Suddenly I remembered that I had not yet seen his nephew.

"'Where is Marius? Why does he not show himself?'

"The gamekeeper started, looking me suddenly in the face:

"Well, monsieur, I had rather tell you the whole business right away; it's on account of him that I am worrying.'

"'Ah! Well, where is he?'

"'Over in the stable, monsieur. I was waiting for the right time to bring him out.'

"'What has he done?'

"'Well, monsieur — — '

"The gamekeeper, however, hesitated, his voice altered and shaky, his face suddenly furrowed by the deep lines of an old man.

“He continued slowly:

“‘Well, I found out, last winter, that someone was poaching in the woods of Roseraies, but I couldn’t seem to catch the man. I spent night after night on the lookout for him. In vain. During that time they began poaching over by Ecorcheville. I was growing thin from vexation. But as for catching the trespasser, impossible! One might have thought that the rascal was forewarned of my plans.

“‘But one day, while I was brushing Marius’ Sunday trousers, I found forty cents in his pocket. Where did he get it?

“‘I thought the matter over for about a week, and I noticed that he used to go out; he would leave the house just as I was coming home to go to bed — yes, monsieur.

“‘Then I started to watch him, without the slightest suspicion of the real facts. One morning, just after I had gone to bed before him, I got right up again, and followed him. For shadowing a man, there is nobody like me, monsieur.

“‘And I caught him, Marius, poaching on your land, monsieur; he my nephew, I your keeper!

“‘The blood rushed to my head, and I almost killed him on the spot, I hit him so hard. Oh! yes, I thrashed him all right. And I promised him that he would get another beating from my hand, in your presence, as an example.

“‘There! I have grown thin from sorrow. You know how it is when one is worried like that. But tell me, what would you have done? The boy has no father or mother, and I am the last one of his blood; I kept him, I couldn’t drive him out, could I?

“‘I told him that if it happened again I would have no more pity for him, all would be over. There! Did I do right, monsieur?’

“I answered, holding out my hand:

“‘You did well, Cavalier; you are an honest man.’

“He rose.

“‘Thank you, monsieur. Now I am going to fetch him. I must give him his thrashing, as an example.’

“I knew that it was hopeless to try and turn the old man from his idea. I therefore let him have his own way.

“He got the rascal and brought him back by the ear.

“I was seated on a cane chair, with the solemn expression of a judge.

“Marius seemed to have grown; he was homelier even than the year before, with his evil, sneaking expression.

“His big hands seemed gigantic.

“His uncle pushed him up to me, and, in his soldierly voice, said:

“‘Beg the gentleman’s pardon.’

“The boy didn’t say a word.

“Then putting one arm round him, the former gendarme lifted him right off the ground, and began to whack him with such force that I rose to stop the blows.

“The boy was now howling: ‘Mercy! mercy! mercy! I promise — — ‘

“Cavalier put him back on the ground and forced him to his knees:

“‘Beg for pardon,’ he said.

“With eyes lowered, the scamp murmured:

“‘I ask for pardon!’

“Then his uncle lifted him to his feet, and dismissed him with a cuff which almost knocked him down again.

“He made his escape, and I did not see him again that evening.

“Cavalier appeared overwhelmed.’

“‘He is a bad egg,’ he said.

“And throughout the whole dinner, he kept repeating:

“‘Oh! that worries me, monsieur, that worries me.’

“I tried to comfort him, but in vain.

“I went to bed early, so that I might start out at daybreak.

“My dog was already asleep on the floor, at the foot of my bed, when I put out the light.

“I was awakened toward midnight by the furious barking of my dog Bock. I immediately noticed that my room was full of smoke. I jumped out of bed, struck a light, ran to the door and opened it. A cloud of flames burst in. The house was on fire.

“I quickly closed the heavy oak door and, drawing on my trousers, I first lowered the dog through the window, by means of a rope made of my sheets; then, having thrown out the rest of my clothes, my game-bag and my gun, I in turn escaped the same way.

“I began to shout with all my might: ‘Cavalier! Cavalier! Cavalier!’

“But the gamekeeper did not wake up. He slept soundly like an old gendarme.

“However, I could see through the lower windows that the whole ground-floor was nothing but a roaring furnace; I also noticed that it had been filled with straw to make it burn readily.

“Somebody must purposely have set fire to the place!

“I continued shrieking wildly: ‘Cavalier!’

“Then the thought struck me that the smoke might be suffocating him. An idea came to me. I slipped two cartridges into my gun, and shot straight at his window.

“The six panes of glass shattered into the room in a cloud of glass. This time the old man had heard me, and he appeared, dazed, in his nightshirt, bewildered by the glare which illumined the whole front of his ‘house.

“I cried to him:

“‘Your house is on fire! Escape through the window! Quick! Quick!’

“The flames were coming out through all the cracks downstairs, were licking along the wall, were creeping toward him and going to surround him. He jumped and landed on his feet, like a cat.

“It was none too soon. The thatched roof cracked in the middle, right over the staircase, which formed a kind of flue for the fire downstairs; and an immense red jet jumped up into the air, spreading like a stream of water and sprinkling a shower of sparks around the hut. In a few seconds it was nothing but a pool of flames.

“Cavalier, thunderstruck, asked:

“‘How did the fire start?’

“I answered:

“‘Somebody lit it in the kitchen.’

“He muttered:

“‘Who could have started the fire?’

“And I, suddenly guessing, answered:

“‘Marius!’

“The old man understood. He stammered:

“‘Good God! That is why he didn’t return.’

“A terrible thought flashed through my mind. I cried:

“‘And Celeste! Celeste!’

“He did not answer. The house caved in before us, forming only an enormous, bright, blinding brazier, an awe-inspiring funeral-pile, where the poor woman could no longer be anything but a glowing ember, a glowing ember of human flesh.

“We had not heard a single cry.

“As the fire crept toward the shed, I suddenly bethought me of my horse, and Cavalier ran to free it.

“Hardly had he opened the door of the stable, when a supple, nimble body darted between his legs, and threw him on his face. It was Marius, running for all he was worth.

“The man was up in a second. He tried to run after the wretch, but, seeing that he could not catch him, and maddened by an irresistible anger, yielding to one of those thoughtless impulses which we cannot foresee or prevent, he picked up my gun, which was lying on the ground. near him, put it to his shoulder, and, before I could make a motion, he pulled the trigger without even noticing whether or not the weapon was loaded.

“One of the cartridges which I had put in to announce the fire was still intact, and the charge caught the fugitive right in the back, — throwing him forward on the ground, bleeding profusely. He immediately began to claw the earth with his hands and with his knees, as though trying to run on all fours like a rabbit who has been mortally wounded, and sees the hunter approaching.

“I rushed forward to the boy, but I could already hear the death-rattle. He passed away before the fire was extinguished, without having said a word.

“Cavalier, still in his shirt, his legs bare, was standing near us, motionless, dazed.

“When the people from the village arrived, my gamekeeper was taken away, like an insane man.

“I appeared at the trial as witness, and related the facts in detail, without changing a thing. Cavalier was acquitted. He disappeared that very day, leaving the country.

“I have never seen him since.

“There, gentlemen, that is my story.”

THE STORY OF A FARM GIRL

PART I

As the weather was very fine, the people on the farm had hurried through their dinner and had returned to the fields.

The servant, Rose, remained alone in the large kitchen, where the fire was dying out on the hearth beneath the large boiler of hot water. From time to time she dipped out some water and slowly washed her dishes, stopping occasionally to look at the two streaks of light which the sun threw across the long table through the window, and which showed the defects in the glass.

Three venturesome hens were picking up the crumbs under the chairs, while the smell of the poultry yard and the warmth from the cow stall came in through the half-open door, and a cock was heard crowing in the distance.

When she had finished her work, wiped down the table, dusted the mantelpiece and put the plates on the high dresser close to the wooden clock with its loud tick-tock, she drew a long breath, as she felt rather oppressed, without exactly knowing why. She looked at the black clay walls, the rafters that were blackened with smoke and from which hung spiders' webs, smoked herrings and strings of onions, and then she sat down, rather overcome by the stale odor from the earthen floor, on which so many things had been continually spilled and which the heat brought out. With this there was mingled the sour smell of the pans of milk which were set out to raise the cream in the adjoining dairy.

She wanted to sew, as usual, but she did not feel strong enough, and so she went to the door to get a mouthful of fresh air, which seemed to do her good.

The fowls were lying on the steaming dunghill; some of them were scratching with one claw in search of worms, while the cock stood up proudly in their midst. When he crowed, the cocks in all the neighboring farmyards replied to him, as if they were uttering challenges from farm to farm.

The girl looked at them without thinking, and then she raised her eyes and was almost dazzled at the sight of the apple trees in blossom. Just then a colt, full of life and friskiness, jumped over the ditches and then stopped suddenly, as if surprised at being alone.

She also felt inclined to run; she felt inclined to move and to stretch her limbs and to repose in the warm, breathless air. She took a few undecided steps and closed her eyes, for she was seized with a feeling of animal comfort, and then she went to look for eggs in the hen loft. There were thirteen of them, which she took in and put into the storeroom; but the smell from the kitchen annoyed her again, and she went out to sit on the grass for a time.

The farmyard, which was surrounded by trees, seemed to be asleep. The tall grass, amid which the tall yellow dandelions rose up like streaks of yellow light, was of a vivid, fresh spring green. The apple trees cast their shade all round them, and the thatched roofs, on which grew blue and yellow irises, with their sword-like leaves, steamed as if the moisture of the stables and barns were coming through the straw. The girl went to the shed, where the carts and buggies were kept. Close to it, in a ditch, there was a large patch of violets, whose fragrance was spread abroad, while beyond the slope the open country could be seen, where grain was growing, with clumps of trees in places, and groups of laborers here and there, who looked as small as dolls, and white horses like toys, who were drawing a child's cart, driven by a man as tall as one's finger.

She took up a bundle of straw, threw it into the ditch and sat down upon it. Then, not feeling comfortable, she undid it, spread it out and lay down upon it at full length on her back, with both arms under her head and her legs stretched out.

Gradually her eyes closed, and she was falling into a state of delightful languor. She was, in fact, almost asleep when she felt two hands on her bosom, and she sprang up at a bound. It was Jacques, one of the farm laborers, a tall fellow from Picardy, who had been making love to her for a long time. He had been herding the sheep, and, seeing her lying down in the shade, had come up stealthily and holding his breath, with glistening eyes and bits of straw in his hair.

He tried to kiss her, but she gave him a smack in the face, for she was as strong as he, and he was shrewd enough to beg her pardon; so they sat down side by side and talked amicably. They spoke about the favorable weather, of their master, who was a good fellow, then of their neighbors, of all the people in the country round, of themselves, of their village, of their youthful days, of their recollections, of their relations, who had left them for a long time, and it might be forever. She grew sad as she thought of it, while he, with one fixed idea in his head, drew closer to her.

"I have not seen my mother for a long time," she said. "It is very hard to be separated like that," and she directed her looks into the distance, toward the village in the north which she had left.

Suddenly, however, he seized her by the neck and kissed her again, but she struck him so violently in the face with her clenched fist that his nose began to bleed, and he got up and laid his head against the stem of a tree. When she saw that, she was sorry, and going up to him, she said: "Have I hurt you?" He, however, only laughed. "No, it was a mere nothing; only she had hit him right on the middle of the nose. What a devil!" he said, and he looked at her with admiration, for she had inspired him with a feeling of respect and of a very different kind of admiration which was the beginning of a real love for that tall, strong wench. When the bleeding had stopped, he proposed a walk, as he was afraid of his neighbor's heavy hand, if they remained side by side like that much longer; but she took his arm of her own accord, in the avenue, as if they had been out for an evening's walk, and said: "It is not nice of you to despise me like that, Jacques." He protested, however. No, he did not despise her. He was in love with her, that was all.

"So you really want to marry me?" she asked.

He hesitated and then looked at her sideways, while she looked straight ahead of her. She had fat, red cheeks, a full bust beneath her cotton jacket; thick, red lips; and her neck, which was almost bare, was covered with small beads of perspiration. He felt a fresh access of desire, and, putting his lips to her ear, he murmured: "Yes, of course I do."

Then she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him till they were both out of breath. From that moment the eternal story of love began between them. They plagued one another in corners; they met in the moonlight beside the haystack and gave each other bruises on the legs, under the table, with their heavy nailed boots. By degrees, however, Jacques seemed to grow tired of her; he avoided her, scarcely spoke to her, and did not try any longer to meet her alone, which made her sad and anxious; and soon she found that she was enceinte.

At first she was in a state of consternation, but then she got angry, and her rage increased every day because she could not meet him, as he avoided her most carefully. At last, one night, when every one in the farmhouse was asleep, she went out noiselessly in her petticoat, with bare feet, crossed the yard and opened the door of the stable where Jacques was lying in a large box of straw above his horses. He pretended to snore when he heard her coming, but she knelt down by his side and shook him until he sat up.

“What do you want?” he then asked her. And with clenched teeth, and trembling with anger, she replied: “I want — I want you to marry me, as you promised.” But he only laughed and replied: “Oh! if a man were to marry all the girls with whom he has made a slip, he would have more than enough to do.”

Then she seized him by the throat, threw him or his back, so that he could not get away from her, and, half strangling him, she shouted into his face:

“I am enceinte, do you hear? I am enceinte!”

He gasped for breath, as he was almost choked, and so they remained, both of them, motionless and without speaking, in the dark silence, which was only broken by the noise made by a horse as he, pulled the hay out of the manger and then slowly munched it.

When Jacques found that she was the stronger, he stammered out: “Very well, I will marry you, as that is the case.” But she did not believe his promises. “It must be at once,” she said. “You must have the banns put up.” “At once,” he replied. “Swear solemnly that you will.” He hesitated for a few moments and then said: “I swear it, by Heaven!”

Then she released her grasp and went away without another word.

She had no chance of speaking to him for several days; and, as the stable was now always locked at night, she was afraid to make any noise, for fear of creating a scandal. One morning, however, she saw another man come in at dinner time, and she said: “Has Jacques left?” “Yes;” the man replied; “I have got his place.”

This made her tremble so violently that she could not take the saucepan off the fire; and later, when they were all at work, she went up into her room and cried, burying her head in the bolster, so that she might not be heard. During the day, however, she tried to obtain some information without exciting any suspicion, but she was so overwhelmed by the thoughts of her misfortune that she fancied that all the people whom she asked laughed maliciously. All she learned, however, was that he had left the neighborhood altogether.

PART II

Then a cloud of constant misery began for her. She worked mechanically, without thinking of what she was doing, with one fixed idea in her head:

"Suppose people were to know."

This continual feeling made her so incapable of reasoning that she did not even try to think of any means of avoiding the disgrace that she knew must ensue, which was irreparable and drawing nearer every day, and which was as sure as death itself. She got up every morning long before the others and persistently tried to look at her figure in a piece of broken looking-glass, before which she did her hair, as she was very anxious to know whether anybody would notice a change in her, and, during the day, she stopped working every few minutes to look at herself from top to toe, to see whether her apron did not look too short.

The months went on, and she scarcely spoke now, and when she was asked a question, did not appear to understand; but she had a frightened look, haggard eyes and trembling hands, which made her master say to her occasionally: "My poor girl, how stupid you have grown lately."

In church she hid behind a pillar, and no longer ventured to go to confession, as she feared to face the priest, to whom she attributed superhuman powers, which enabled him to read people's consciences; and at meal times the looks of her fellow servants almost made her faint with mental agony; and she was always fancying that she had been found out by the cowherd, a precocious and cunning little lad, whose bright eyes seemed always to be watching her.

One morning the postman brought her a letter, and as she had never received one in her life before she was so upset by it that she was obliged to sit down. Perhaps it was from him? But, as she could not read, she sat anxious and trembling with that piece of paper, covered with ink, in her hand. After a time, however, she put it into her pocket, as she did not venture to confide her secret to any one. She often stopped in her work to look at those lines written at regular intervals, and which terminated in a signature, imagining vaguely that she would suddenly discover their meaning, until at last, as she felt half mad with impatience and anxiety, she went to the schoolmaster, who told her to sit down and read to her as follows:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: I write to tell you that I am very ill. Our neighbor, Monsieur Dentu, begs you to come, if you can.

"From your affectionate mother,

"CESAIRE DENTU, Deputy Mayor."

She did not say a word and went away, but as soon as she was alone her legs gave way under her, and she fell down by the roadside and remained there till night.

When she got back, she told the farmer her bad news, and he allowed her to go home for as long as she liked, and promised to have her work done by a charwoman and to take her back when she returned.

Her mother died soon after she got there, and the next day Rose gave birth to a seven-months child, a miserable little skeleton, thin enough to make anybody shudder, and which seemed to be suffering continually, to judge from the painful manner in which it moved its poor little hands, which were as thin as a crab's legs; but it lived for all that. She said she was married, but could not be burdened with the child, so she left it with some neighbors, who promised to take great care of it, and she went back to the farm.

But now in her heart, which had been wounded so long, there arose something like brightness, an unknown love for that frail little creature which she had left behind her, though there was fresh suffering in that very love, suffering which she felt every hour and every minute, because she was parted from her child. What pained her most, however, was the mad longing to kiss it, to press it in her arms, to feel the warmth of its little body against her breast. She could not sleep at night; she thought of it the whole day long, and in the evening, when her work was done, she would sit in front of the fire and gaze at it intently, as people do whose thoughts are far away.

They began to talk about her and to tease-her about her lover. They asked her whether he was tall, handsome and rich. When was the wedding to be and the christening? And often she ran away to cry by herself, for these questions seemed to hurt her like the prick of a pin; and, in order to forget their jokes, she began to work still more energetically, and, still thinking of her child, she sought some way of saving up money for it, and determined to work so that her master would be obliged to raise her wages.

By degrees she almost monopolized the work and persuaded him to get rid of one servant girl, who had become useless since she had taken to working like two; she economized in the bread, oil and candles; in the corn, which they gave to the chickens too extravagantly, and in the fodder for the horses and cattle, which was rather wasted. She was as miserly about her master's money as if it had been her own; and, by dint of making good bargains, of getting high prices for all their produce, and by baffling the peasants' tricks when they offered anything for sale, he, at last, entrusted her with buying and selling everything, with the direction of all the laborers, and with the purchase of provisions necessary for the household; so that, in a short time, she became. indispensable to him. She kept such a strict eye on everything about her that, under her direction, the farm prospered wonderfully, and for five miles around people talked of "Master Vallin's servant," and the farmer himself said everywhere: "That girl is worth more than her weight in gold."

But time passed by, and her wages remained the same. Her hard work was accepted as something that was due from every good servant, and as a mere token of good will; and she began to think rather bitterly that if the farmer could put fifty or a hundred crowns extra into the bank every month, thanks to her, she was still only earning her two hundred francs a year, neither more nor less; and so she made up her mind to ask for an increase of wages. She went to see the schoolmaster three times about it, but when she got there, she spoke about something else. She felt a kind of modesty in asking for money, as if it were something disgraceful; but, at last, one day, when the farmer was having breakfast by himself in the kitchen, she said to him, with some embarrassment, that she wished to speak to him particularly. He raised his head in surprise, with both his hands on the table, holding his knife, with its point in the air, in one, and a piece of bread in the other, and he looked fixedly at, the girl, who felt uncomfortable under his gaze, but asked for a week's holiday, so that she might get away, as she was not very well. He acceded to her request immediately, and then added, in some embarrassment himself:

“When you come back, I shall have something to say to you myself.”

PART III

The child was nearly eight months old, and she did not recognize it. It had grown rosy and chubby all over, like a little roll of fat. She threw herself on it, as if it had been some prey, and kissed it so violently that it began to scream with terror; and then she began to cry herself, because it did not know her, and stretched out its arms to its nurse as soon as it saw her. But the next day it began to know her, and laughed when it saw her, and she took it into the fields, and ran about excitedly with it, and sat down under the shade of the trees; and then, for the first time in her life, she opened her heart to somebody, although he could not understand her, and told him her troubles; how hard her work was, her anxieties and her hopes, and she quite tired the child with the violence of her caresses.

She took the greatest pleasure in handling it, in washing and dressing it, for it seemed to her that all this was the confirmation of her maternity; and she would look at it, almost feeling surprised ‘that it was hers, and would say to herself in a low voice as she danced it in her arms: “It is my baby, it’s my baby.”

She cried all the way home as she returned to the farm and had scarcely got in before her master called her into his room; and she went, feeling astonished and nervous, without knowing why.

“Sit down there,” he said. She sat down, and for some moments they remained side by side, in some embarrassment, with their arms hanging at their sides, as if they did not know what to do with them, and looking each other in the face, after the manner of peasants.

The farmer, a stout, jovial, obstinate man of forty-five, who had lost two wives, evidently felt embarrassed, which was very unusual with him; but, at last, he made up his mind, and began to speak vaguely, hesitating a little, and looking out of the window as he talked. “How is it, Rose,” he said, “that you have never thought of settling in life?” She grew as pale as death, and, seeing that she gave him no answer, he went on: “You are a good, steady, active and economical girl; and a wife like you would make a man's fortune."

She did not move, but looked frightened; she did not even try to comprehend his meaning, for her thoughts were in a whirl, as if at the approach of some great danger; so, after waiting for a few seconds, he went on: "You see, a farm without a mistress can never succeed, even with a servant like you." Then he stopped, for he did not know what else to say, and Rose looked at him with the air of a person who thinks that he is face to face with a murderer and ready to flee at the slightest movement he may make; but, after waiting for about five minutes, he asked her: "Well, will it suit you?" "Will what suit me, master?" And he said quickly: "Why, to marry me, by Heaven!"

She jumped up, but fell back on her chair, as if she had been struck, and there she remained motionless, like a person who is overwhelmed by some great misfortune. At last the farmer grew impatient and said: "Come, what more do you want?" She looked at him, almost in terror, then suddenly the tears came into her eyes and she said twice in a choking voice: "I cannot, I cannot!" "Why not?" he asked. "Come, don't be silly; I will give you until tomorrow to think it over."

And he hurried out of the room, very glad to have got through with the matter, which had troubled him a good deal, for he had no doubt that she would the next morning accept a proposal which she could never have expected and which would be a capital bargain for him, as he thus bound a woman to his interests who would certainly bring him more than if she had the best dowry in the district.

Neither could there be any scruples about an unequal match between them, for in the country every one is very nearly equal; the farmer works with his laborers, who frequently become masters in their turn, and the female servants constantly become the mistresses of the establishments without its making any change in their life or habits.

Rose did not go to bed that night. She threw herself, dressed as she was, on her bed, and she had not even the strength to cry left in her, she was so thoroughly dumfounded. She remained quite inert, scarcely knowing that she had a body, and without being at all able to collect her thoughts, though, at moments, she remembered something of what had happened, and then she was frightened at the idea of what might happen. Her terror increased, and every time the great kitchen clock struck the hour she broke out in a perspiration from grief. She became bewildered, and had the nightmare; her candle went out, and then she began to imagine that some one bad cast a spell over her, as country people so often imagine, and she felt a mad inclination to run away, to escape and to flee before her misfortune, like a ship scudding before the wind. An owl hooted; she shivered, sat up, passed her hands over her face, her hair, and all over her body, and then she went downstairs, as if she were walking in her sleep. When she got into the yard she stooped down, so as not to be seen by any prowling scamp, for the moon, which was setting, shed a bright light over the fields. Instead of opening the gate she scrambled over the fence, and as soon as she was outside she started off. She went on straight before her, with a quick, springy trot, and from time to time she unconsciously uttered a piercing cry. Her long shadow accompanied her, and now and then some night bird flew over her head, while the dogs in the farmyards barked as they heard her pass; one even jumped over the ditch, and followed her and tried to bite her, but she turned round and gave such a terrible yell that the frightened animal ran back and cowered in silence in its kennel.

The stars grew dim, and the birds began to twitter; day was breaking. The girl was worn out and panting; and when the sun rose in the purple sky, she stopped, for her swollen feet refused to go any farther; but she saw a pond in the distance, a large pond whose stagnant water looked like blood under the reflection of this new day, and she limped on slowly with her hand on her heart, in order to dip both her feet in it. She sat down on a tuft of grass, took off her heavy shoes, which were full of dust, pulled off her stockings and plunged her legs into the still water, from which bubbles were rising here and there.

A feeling of delicious coolness pervaded her from head to foot, and suddenly, while she was looking fixedly at the deep pool, she was seized with dizziness, and with a mad longing to throw herself into it. All her sufferings would be over in there, over forever. She no longer thought of her child; she only wanted peace, complete rest, and to sleep forever, and she got up with raised arms and took two steps forward. She was in the water up to her thighs, and she was just about to throw her self in when sharp, pricking pains in her ankles made her jump back, and she uttered a cry of despair, for, from her knees to the tips of her feet, long black leeches were sucking her lifeblood, and were swelling as they adhered to her flesh. She did not dare to touch them, and screamed with horror, so that her cries of despair attracted a peasant, who was driving along at some distance, to the spot. He pulled off the leeches one by one, applied herbs to the wounds, and drove the girl to her master's farm in his gig.

She was in bed for a fortnight, and as she was sitting outside the door on the first morning that she got up, the farmer suddenly came and planted himself before her. "Well," he said, "I suppose the affair is settled isn't it?" She did not reply at first, and then, as he remained standing and looking at her intently with his piercing eyes, she said with difficulty: "No, master, I cannot." He immediately flew into a rage.

"You cannot, girl; you cannot? I should just like to know the reason why?" She began to cry, and repeated: "I cannot." He looked at her, and then exclaimed angrily: "Then I suppose you have a lover?" "Perhaps that is it," she replied, trembling with shame.

The man got as red as a poppy, and stammered out in a rage: "Ah! So you confess it, you slut! And pray who is the fellow? Some penniless, half-starved ragamuffin, without a roof to his head, I suppose? Who is it, I say?" And as she gave him no answer, he continued: "Ah! So you will not tell me. Then I will tell you; it is Jean Baudu?"— "No, not he," she exclaimed. "Then it is Pierre Martin?"— "Oh! no, master."

And he angrily mentioned all the young fellows in the neighborhood, while she denied that he had hit upon the right one, and every moment wiped her eyes with the corner of her blue apron. But he still tried to find it out, with his brutish obstinacy, and, as it were, scratching at her heart to discover her secret, just as a terrier scratches at a hole to try and get at the animal which he scents inside it. Suddenly, however, the man shouted: "By George! It is Jacques, the man who was here last year. They used to say that you were always talking together, and that you thought about getting married."

Rose was choking, and she grew scarlet, while her tears suddenly stopped and dried up on her cheeks, like drops of water on hot iron, and she exclaimed: "No, it is not he, it is not he!" "Is that really a fact?" asked the cunning peasant, who partly guessed the truth; and she replied, hastily: "I will swear it; I will swear it to you— " She tried to think of something by which to swear, as she did not venture to invoke sacred things, but he interrupted her: "At any rate, he used to follow you into every corner and devoured you with his eyes at meal times. Did you ever give him your promise, eh?"

This time she looked her master straight in the face. “No, never, never; I will solemnly swear to you that if he were to come to-day and ask me to marry him I would have nothing to do with him.” She spoke with such an air of sincerity that the farmer hesitated, and then he continued, as if speaking to himself: “What, then? You have not had a misfortune, as they call it, or it would have been known, and as it has no consequences, no girl would refuse her master on that account. There must be something at the bottom of it, however.”

She could say nothing; she had not the strength to speak, and he asked her again: “You will not?” “I cannot, master,” she said, with a sigh, and he turned on his heel.

She thought she had got rid of him altogether and spent the rest of the day almost tranquilly, but was as exhausted as if she had been turning the thrashing machine all day in the place of the old white horse, and she went to bed as soon as she could and fell asleep immediately. In the middle of the night, however, two hands touching the bed woke her. She trembled with fear, but immediately recognized the farmer’s voice, when he said to her: “Don’t be frightened, Rose; I have come to speak to you.” She was surprised at first, but when he tried to take liberties with her she understood and began to tremble violently, as she felt quite alone in the darkness, still heavy from sleep, and quite unprotected, with that man standing near her. She certainly did not consent, but she resisted carelessly struggling against that instinct which is always strong in simple natures and very imperfectly protected by the undecided will of inert and gentle races. She turned her head now to the wall, and now toward the room, in order to avoid the attentions which the farmer tried to press on her, but she was weakened by fatigue, while he became brutal, intoxicated by desire.

They lived together as man and wife, and one morning he said to her: “I have put up our banns, and we will get married next month.”

She did not reply, for what could she say? She did not resist, for what could she do?

PART IV

She married him. She felt as if she were in a pit with inaccessible sides from which she could never get out, and all kinds of misfortunes were hanging over her head, like huge rocks, which would fall on the first occasion. Her husband gave her the impression of a man whom she had robbed, and who would find it out some day or other. And then she thought of her child, who was the cause of her misfortunes, but who was also the cause of all her happiness on earth, and whom she went to see twice a year, though she came back more unhappy each time.

But she gradually grew accustomed to her life, her fears were allayed, her heart was at rest, and she lived with an easier mind, though still with some vague fear floating in it. And so years went on, until the child was six. She was almost happy now, when suddenly the farmer's temper grew very bad.

For two or three years he seemed to have been nursing some secret anxiety, to be troubled by some care, some mental disturbance, which was gradually increasing. He remained sitting at table after dinner, with his head in his hands, sad and devoured by sorrow. He always spoke hastily, sometimes even brutally, and it even seemed as if he had a grudge against his wife, for at times he answered her roughly, almost angrily.

One day, when a neighbor's boy came for some eggs, and she spoke rather crossly to him, as she was very busy, her husband suddenly came in and said to her in his unpleasant voice: "If that were your own child you would not treat him so." She was hurt and did not reply, and then she went back into the house, with all her grief awakened afresh; and at dinner the farmer neither spoke to her nor looked at her, and he seemed to hate her, to despise her, to know something about the affair at last. In consequence she lost her composure, and did not venture to remain alone with him after the meal was over, but left the room and hastened to the church.

It was getting dusk; the narrow nave was in total darkness, but she heard footsteps in the choir, for the sacristan was preparing the tabernacle lamp for the night. That spot of trembling light, which was lost in the darkness of the arches, looked to Rose like her last hope, and with her eyes fixed on it, she fell on her knees. The chain rattled as the little lamp swung up into the air, and almost immediately the small bell rang out the Angelus through the increasing mist. She went up to him, as he was going out.

"Is Monsieur le Cure at home?" she asked. "Of course he is; this is his dinnertime." She trembled as she rang the bell of the parsonage. The priest was just sitting down to dinner, and he made her sit down also. "Yes, yes, I know all about it; your husband has mentioned the matter to me that brings you here." The poor woman nearly fainted, and the priest continued: "What do you want, my child?" And he hastily swallowed several spoonfuls of soup, some of which dropped on to his greasy cassock. But Rose did not venture to say anything more, and she got up to go, but the priest said: "Courage."

And she went out and returned to the farm without knowing what she was doing. The farmer was waiting for her, as the laborers had gone away during her absence, and she fell heavily at his feet, and, shedding a flood of tears, she said to him: "What have you got against me?"

He began to shout and to swear: "What have I got against you? That I have no children, by — . When a man takes a wife it is not that they may live alone together to the end of their days. That is what I have against you. When a cow has no calves she is not worth anything, and when a woman has no children she is also not worth anything."

She began to cry, and said: "It is not my fault! It is not my fault!" He grew rather more gentle when he heard that, and added: "I do not say that it is, but it is very provoking, all the same."

PART V

From that day forward she had only one thought: to have a child another child; she confided her wish to everybody, and, in consequence of this, a neighbor told her of an infallible method. This was, to make her husband drink a glass of water with a pinch of ashes in it every evening. The farmer consented to try it, but without success; so they said to each other: "Perhaps there are some secret ways?" And they tried to find out. They were told of a shepherd who lived ten leagues off, and so Vallin one day drove off to consult him. The shepherd gave him a loaf on which he had made some marks; it was kneaded up with herbs, and each of them was to eat a piece of it, but they ate the whole loaf without obtaining any results from it.

Next, a schoolmaster unveiled mysteries and processes of love which were unknown in the country, but infallible, so he declared; but none of them had the desired effect. Then the priest advised them to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at Fecamp. Rose went with the crowd and prostrated herself in the abbey, and, mingling her prayers with the coarse desires of the peasants around her, she prayed that she might be fruitful a second time; but it was in vain, and then she thought that she was being punished for her first fault, and she was seized by terrible grief. She was wasting away with sorrow; her husband was also aging prematurely, and was wearing himself out in useless hopes.

Then war broke out between them; he called her names and beat her. They quarrelled all day long, and when they were in their room together at night he flung insults and obscenities at her, choking with rage, until one night, not being able to think of any means of making her suffer more he ordered her to get up and go and stand out of doors in the rain until daylight. As she did not obey him, he seized her by the neck and began to strike her in the face with his fists, but she said nothing and did not move. In his exasperation he knelt on her stomach, and with clenched teeth, and mad with rage, he began to beat her. Then in her despair she rebelled, and flinging him against the wall with a furious gesture, she sat up, and in an altered voice she hissed: “I have had a child, I have had one! I had it by Jacques; you know Jacques. He promised to marry me, but he left this neighborhood without keeping his word.”

The man was thunderstruck and could hardly speak, but at last he stammered out: “What are you saying? What are you saying?” Then she began to sob, and amid her tears she continued: “That was the reason why I did not want to marry you. I could not tell you, for you would have left me without any bread for my child. You have never had any children, so you cannot understand, you cannot understand!”

He said again, mechanically, with increasing surprise: “You have a child? You have a child?”

“You took me by force, as I suppose you know? I did not want to marry you,” she said, still sobbing.

Then he got up, lit the candle, and began to walk up and down, with his arms behind him. She was cowering on the bed and crying, and suddenly he stopped in front of her, and said: “Then it is my fault that you have no children?” She gave him no answer, and he began to walk up and down again, and then, stopping again, he continued: “How old is your child?” “Just six,” she whispered. “Why did you not tell me about it?” he asked. “How could I?” she replied, with a sigh.

He remained standing, motionless. “Come, get up,” he said. She got up with some difficulty, and then, when she was standing on the floor, he suddenly began to laugh with the hearty laugh of his good days, and, seeing how surprised she was, he added: “Very well, we will go and fetch the child, as you and I can have none together.”

She was so scared that if she had had the strength she would assuredly have run away, but the farmer rubbed his hands and said: “I wanted to adopt one, and now we have found one. I asked the cure about an orphan some time ago.”

Then, still laughing, he kissed his weeping and agitated wife on both cheeks, and shouted out, as though she could not hear him: “Come along, mother, we will go and see whether there is any soup left; I should not mind a plateful.”

She put on her petticoat and they went downstairs; and While she was kneeling in front of the fireplace and lighting the fire under the saucepan, he continued to walk up and down the kitchen with long strides, repeating:

“Well, I am really glad of this; I am not saying it for form’s sake, but I am glad, I am really very glad.”

THE WRECK

It was yesterday, the 31st of December.

I had just finished breakfast with my old friend Georges Garin when the servant handed him a letter covered with seals and foreign stamps.

Georges said:

“Will you excuse me?”

“Certainly.”

And so he began to read the letter, which was written in a large English handwriting, crossed and recrossed in every direction. He read them slowly, with serious attention and the interest which we only pay to things which touch our hearts.

Then he put the letter on the mantelpiece and said:

“That was a curious story! I’ve never told you about it, I think. Yet it was a sentimental adventure, and it really happened to me. That was a strange New Year’s Day, indeed! It must have been twenty years ago, for I was then thirty and am now fifty years old.

“I was then an inspector in the Maritime Insurance Company, of which I am now director. I had arranged to pass New Year’s Day in Paris — since it is customary to make that day a fete — when I received a letter from the manager, asking me to proceed at once to the island of Re, where a three-masted vessel from Saint-Nazaire, insured by us, had just been driven ashore. It was then eight o’clock in the morning. I arrived at the office at ten to get my advices, and that evening I took the express, which put me down in La Rochelle the next day, the 31st of December.

“I had two hours to wait before going aboard the boat for Re. So I made a tour of the town. It is certainly a queer city, La Rochelle, with strong characteristics of its own streets tangled like a labyrinth, sidewalks running under endless arcaded galleries like those of the Rue de Rivoli, but low, mysterious, built as if to form a suitable setting for conspirators and making a striking background for those old-time wars, the savage heroic wars of religion. It is indeed the typical old Huguenot city, conservative, discreet, with no fine art to show, with no wonderful monuments, such as make Rouen; but it is remarkable for its severe, somewhat sullen look; it is a city of obstinate fighters, a city where fanaticism might well blossom, where the faith of the Calvinists became enthusiastic and which gave birth to the plot of the 'Four Sergeants.'

"After I had wandered for some time about these curious streets, I went aboard the black, rotund little steamboat which was to take me to the island of Re. It was called the Jean Guiton. It started with angry puffings, passed between the two old towers which guard the harbor, crossed the roadstead and issued from the mole built by Richelieu, the great stones of which can be seen at the water's edge, enclosing the town like a great necklace. Then the steamboat turned to the right.

"It was one of those sad days which give one the blues, tighten the heart and take away all strength and energy and force-a gray, cold day, with a heavy mist which was as wet as rain, as cold as frost, as bad to breathe as the steam of a wash-tub.

"Under this low sky of dismal fog the shallow, yellow, sandy sea of all practically level beaches lay without a wrinkle, without a movement, without life, a sea of turbid water, of greasy water, of stagnant water. The Jean Guiton passed over it, rolling a little from habit, dividing the smooth, dark blue water and leaving behind a few waves, a little splashing, a slight swell, which soon calmed down.

"I began to talk to the captain, a little man with small feet, as round as his boat and rolling in the same manner. I wanted some details of the disaster on which I was to draw up a report. A great square-rigged three-master, the Marie Joseph, of Saint-Nazaire, had gone ashore one night in a hurricane on the sands of the island of Re.

"The owner wrote us that the storm had thrown the ship so far ashore that it was impossible to float her and that they had to remove everything which could be detached with the utmost possible haste. Nevertheless I must examine the situation of the wreck, estimate what must have been her condition before the disaster and decide whether all efforts had been used to get her afloat. I came as an agent of the company in order to give contradictory testimony, if necessary, at the trial.

"On receipt of my report, the manager would take what measures he might think necessary to protect our interests.

“The captain of the Jean Guiton knew all about the affair, having been summoned with his boat to assist in the attempts at salvage.

“He told me the story of the disaster. The Marie Joseph, driven by a furious gale lost her bearings completely in the night, and steering by chance over a heavy foaming sea— ‘a milk-soup sea,’ said the captain — had gone ashore on those immense sand banks which make the coasts of this country look like limitless Saharas when the tide is low.

“While talking I looked around and ahead. Between the ocean and the lowering sky lay an open space where the eye could see into the distance. We were following a coast. I asked:

“‘Is that the island of Re?’

“‘Yes, sir.’

“And suddenly the captain stretched his right hand out before us, pointed to something almost imperceptible in the open sea, and said:

“‘There’s your ship!’

“‘The Marie Joseph!’

“‘Yes.’

“I was amazed. This black, almost imperceptible speck, which looked to me like a rock, seemed at least three miles from land.

“I continued:

“‘But, captain, there must be a hundred fathoms of water in that place.’

“He began to laugh.

“‘A hundred fathoms, my child! Well, I should say about two!’

“He was from Bordeaux. He continued:

“‘It’s now nine-forty, just high tide. Go down along the beach with your hands in your pockets after you’ve had lunch at the Hotel du Dauphin, and I’ll wager that at ten minutes to three, or three o’clock, you’ll reach the wreck without wetting your feet, and have from an hour and three-quarters to two hours aboard of her; but not more, or you’ll be caught. The faster the sea goes out the faster it comes back. This coast is as flat as a turtle! But start away at ten minutes to five, as I tell you, and at half-past seven you will be again aboard of the Jean Guiton, which will put you down this same evening on the quay at La Rochelle.’

“I thanked the captain and I went and sat down in the bow of the steamer to get a good look at the little city of Saint-Martin, which we were now rapidly approaching.

"It was just like all small seaports which serve as capitals of the barren islands scattered along the coast — a large fishing village, one foot on sea and one on shore, subsisting on fish and wild fowl, vegetables and shell-fish, radishes and mussels. The island is very low and little cultivated, yet it seems to be thickly populated. However, I did not penetrate into the interior.

"After breakfast I climbed across a little promontory, and then, as the tide was rapidly falling, I started out across the sands toward a kind of black rock which I could just perceive above the surface of the water, out a considerable distance.

"I walked quickly over the yellow plain. It was elastic, like flesh and seemed to sweat beneath my tread. The sea had been there very lately. Now I perceived it at a distance, escaping out of sight, and I no longer could distinguish the line which separated the sands from ocean. I felt as though I were looking at a gigantic supernatural work of enchantment. The Atlantic had just now been before me, then it had disappeared into the sands, just as scenery disappears through a trap; and I was now walking in the midst of a desert. Only the feeling, the breath of the salt-water, remained in me. I perceived the smell of the wrack, the smell of the sea, the good strong smell of sea coasts. I walked fast; I was no longer cold. I looked at the stranded wreck, which grew in size as I approached, and came now to resemble an enormous shipwrecked whale.

"It seemed fairly to rise out of the ground, and on that great, flat, yellow stretch of sand assumed wonderful proportions. After an hour's walk I at last reached it. It lay upon its side, ruined and shattered, its broken bones showing as though it were an animal, its bones of tarred wood pierced with great bolts. The sand had already invaded it, entering it by all the crannies, and held it and refused to let it go. It seemed to have taken root in it. The bow had entered deep into this soft, treacherous beach, while the stern, high in air, seemed to cast at heaven, like a cry of despairing appeal, the two white words on the black planking, Marie Joseph.

"I climbed upon this carcass of a ship by the lowest side; then, having reached the deck, I went below. The daylight, which entered by the stove-in hatches and the cracks in the sides, showed me dimly long dark cavities full of demolished woodwork. They contained nothing but sand, which served as foot-soil in this cavern of planks.

"I began to take some notes about the condition of the ship. I was seated on a broken empty cask, writing by the light of a great crack, through which

I could perceive the boundless stretch of the strand. A strange shivering of cold and loneliness ran over my skin from time to time, and I would often stop writing for a moment to listen to the mysterious noises in the derelict: the noise of crabs scratching the planking with their crooked claws; the noise of a thousand little creatures of the sea already crawling over this dead body or else boring into the wood.

"Suddenly, very near me, I heard human voices. I started as though I had seen a ghost. For a second I really thought I was about to see drowned men rise from the sinister depths of the hold, who would tell me about their death. At any rate, it did not take me long to swing myself on deck. There, standing by the bows, was a tall Englishman with three young misses. Certainly they were a good deal more frightened at seeing this sudden apparition on the abandoned three-master than I was at seeing them. The youngest girl turned and ran, the two others threw their arms round their father. As for him, he opened his mouth — that was the only sign of emotion which he showed.

"Then, after several seconds, he spoke:

"'Mosieu, are you the owner of this ship?'

"'I am.'

"'May I go over it?'

"'You may.'

"Then he uttered a long sentence in English, in which I only distinguished the word 'gracious,' repeated several times.

"As he was looking for a place to climb up I showed him the easiest way, and gave him a hand. He climbed up. Then we helped up the three girls, who had now quite recovered their composure. They were charming, especially the oldest, a blonde of eighteen, fresh as a flower, and very dainty and pretty! Ah, yes! the pretty Englishwomen have indeed the look of tender sea fruit. One would have said of this one that she had just risen out of the sands and that her hair had kept their tint. They all, with their exquisite freshness, make you think of the delicate colors of pink sea-shells and of shining pearls hidden in the unknown depths of the ocean.

"She spoke French a little better than her father and acted as interpreter. I had to tell all about the shipwreck, and I romanced as though I had been present at the catastrophe. Then the whole family descended into the interior of the wreck. As soon as they had penetrated into this sombre, dimly lit cavity they uttered cries of astonishment and admiration. Suddenly the father and his three daughters were holding sketch-books in their hands, which they had doubtless carried hidden somewhere in their heavy weather-proof clothes, and were all beginning at once to make pencil sketches of this melancholy and weird place.

"They had seated themselves side by side on a projecting beam, and the four sketch-books on the eight knees were being rapidly covered with little black lines which were intended to represent the half-opened hulk of the Marie Joseph.

"I continued to inspect the skeleton of the ship, and the oldest girl talked to me while she worked.

"They had none of the usual English arrogance; they were simple honest hearts of that class of continuous travellers with which England covers the globe. The father was long and thin, with a red face framed in white whiskers, and looking like a living sandwich, a piece of ham carved like a face between two wads of hair. The daughters, who had long legs like young storks, were also thin-except the oldest. All three were pretty, especially the tallest.

"She had such a droll way of speaking, of laughing, of understanding and of not understanding, of raising her eyes to ask a question (eyes blue as the deep ocean), of stopping her drawing a moment to make a guess at what you meant, of returning once more to work, of saying 'yes' or 'no' — that I could have listened and looked indefinitely.

"Suddenly she murmured:

"'I hear a little sound on this boat.'

"I listened and I immediately distinguished a low, steady, curious sound. I rose and looked out of the crack and gave a scream. The sea had come up to us; it would soon surround us!

"We were on deck in an instant. It was too late. The water circled us about and was running toward the coast at tremendous speed. No, it did not run, it glided, crept, spread like an immense, limitless blot. The water was barely a few centimeters deep, but the rising flood had gone so far that we no longer saw the vanishing line of the imperceptible tide.

"The Englishman wanted to jump. I held him back. Flight was impossible because of the deep places which we had been obliged to go round on our way out and into which we should fall on our return.

"There was a minute of horrible anguish in our hearts. Then the little English girl began to smile and murmured:

"'It is we who are shipwrecked.'

"I tried to laugh, but fear held me, a fear which was cowardly and horrid and base and treacherous like the tide. All the danger which we ran appeared to me at once. I wanted to shriek: 'Help!' But to whom?

"The two younger girls were clinging to their father, who looked in consternation at the measureless sea which hedged us round about.

"The night fell as swiftly as the ocean rose — a lowering, wet, icy night.

"I said:

"'There's nothing to do but to stay on the ship:

"The Englishman answered:

"'Oh, yes!'

"And we waited there a quarter of an hour, half an hour, indeed I don't know how long, watching that creeping water growing deeper as it swirled around us, as though it were playing on the beach, which it had regained.

"One of the young girls was cold, and we went below to shelter ourselves from the light but freezing wind that made our skins tingle.

"I leaned over the hatchway. The ship was full of water. So we had to cower against the stern planking, which shielded us a little.

"Darkness was now coming on, and we remained huddled together. I felt the shoulder of the little English girl trembling against mine, her teeth chattering from time to time. But I also felt the gentle warmth of her body through her ulster, and that warmth was as delicious to me as a kiss. We no longer spoke; we sat motionless, mute, cowering down like animals in a ditch when a hurricane is raging. And, nevertheless, despite the night, despite the terrible and increasing danger, I began to feel happy that I was there, glad of the cold and the peril, glad of the long hours of darkness and anguish that I must pass on this plank so near this dainty, pretty little girl.

"I asked myself, 'Why this strange sensation of well-being and of joy?'

"Why! Does one know? Because she was there? Who? She, a little unknown English girl? I did not love her, I did not even know her. And for all that, I was touched and conquered. I wanted to save her, to sacrifice myself for her, to commit a thousand follies! Strange thing! How does it happen that the presence of a woman overwhelms us so? Is it the power of her grace which enfolds us? Is it the seduction of her beauty and youth, which intoxicates one like wine?

"Is it not rather the touch of Love, of Love the Mysterious, who seeks constantly to unite two beings, who tries his strength the instant he has put a man and a woman face to face?

“The silence of the darkness became terrible, the stillness of the sky dreadful, because we could hear vaguely about us a slight, continuous sound, the sound of the rising tide and the monotonous plashing of the water against the ship.

“Suddenly I heard the sound of sobs. The youngest of the girls was crying. Her father tried to console her, and they began to talk in their own tongue, which I did not understand. I guessed that he was reassuring her and that she was still afraid.

“I asked my neighbor:

“‘You are not too cold, are you, mademoiselle?’

“‘Oh, yes. I am very cold.’

“I offered to give her my cloak; she refused it.

“But I had taken it off and I covered her with it against her will. In the short struggle her hand touched mine. It made a delicious thrill run through my body.

“For some minutes the air had been growing brisker, the dashing of the water stronger against the flanks of the ship. I raised myself; a great gust of wind blew in my face. The wind was rising!

“The Englishman perceived this at the same time that I did and said simply:

“‘This is bad for us, this — — ‘

“Of course it was bad, it was certain death if any breakers, however feeble, should attack and shake the wreck, which was already so shattered and disconnected that the first big sea would carry it off.

“So our anguish increased momentarily as the squalls grew stronger and stronger. Now the sea broke a little, and I saw in the darkness white lines appearing and disappearing, lines of foam, while each wave struck the Marie Joseph and shook her with a short quiver which went to our hearts.

“The English girl was trembling. I felt her shiver against me. And I had a wild desire to take her in my arms.

“Down there, before and behind us, to the left and right, lighthouses were shining along the shore — lighthouses white, yellow and red, revolving like the enormous eyes of giants who were watching us, waiting eagerly for us to disappear. One of them in especial irritated me. It went out every thirty seconds and it lit up again immediately. It was indeed an eye, that one, with its lid incessantly lowered over its fiery glance.

"From time to time the Englishman struck a match to see the hour; then he put his watch back in his pocket. Suddenly he said to me, over the heads of his daughters, with tremendous gravity:

"'I wish you a happy New Year, Mosieu.'

"It was midnight. I held out my hand, which he pressed. Then he said something in English, and suddenly he and his daughters began to sing 'God Save the Queen,' which rose through the black and silent air and vanished into space.

"At first I felt a desire to laugh; then I was seized by a powerful, strange emotion.

"It was something sinister and superb, this chant of the shipwrecked, the condemned, something like a prayer and also like something grander, something comparable to the ancient 'Ave Caesar morituri te salutant.'

"When they had finished I asked my neighbor to sing a ballad alone, anything she liked, to make us forget our terrors. She consented, and immediately her clear young voice rang out into the night. She sang something which was doubtless sad, because the notes were long drawn out and hovered, like wounded birds, above the waves.

"The sea was rising now and beating upon our wreck. As for me, I thought only of that voice. And I thought also of the sirens. If a ship had passed near by us what would the sailors have said? My troubled spirit lost itself in the dream! A siren! Was she not really a siren, this daughter of the sea, who had kept me on this worm-eaten ship and who was soon about to go down with me deep into the waters?

"But suddenly we were all five rolling on the deck, because the Marie Joseph had sunk on her right side. The English girl had fallen upon me, and before I knew what I was doing, thinking that my last moment was come, I had caught her in my arms and kissed her cheek, her temple and her hair.

"The ship did not move again, and we, we also, remained motionless.

"The father said, 'Kate!' The one whom I was holding answered 'Yes' and made a movement to free herself. And at that moment I should have wished the ship to split in two and let me fall with her into the sea.

"The Englishman continued:

"'A little rocking; it's nothing. I have my three daughters safe.'

"Not having seen the oldest, he had thought she was lost overboard!

"I rose slowly, and suddenly I made out a light on the sea quite close to us. I shouted; they answered. It was a boat sent out in search of us by the hotelkeeper, who had guessed at our imprudence.

"We were saved. I was in despair. They picked us up off our raft and they brought us back to Saint-Martin.

"The Englishman began to rub his hand and murmur:

"'A good supper! A good supper!'

"We did sup. I was not gay. I regretted the Marie Joseph.

"We had to separate the next day after much handshaking and many promises to write. They departed for Biarritz. I wanted to follow them.

"I was hard hit. I wanted to ask this little girl to marry me. If we had passed eight days together, I should have done so! How weak and incomprehensible a man sometimes is!

"Two years passed without my hearing a word from them. Then I received a letter from New York. She was married and wrote to tell me. And since then we write to each other every year, on New Year's Day. She tells me about her life, talks of her children, her sisters, never of her husband! Why? Ah! why? And as for me, I only talk of the Marie Joseph. That was perhaps the only woman I have ever loved — no — that I ever should have loved. Ah, well! who can tell? Circumstances rule one. And then — and then — all passes. She must be old now; I should not know her. Ah! she of the bygone time, she of the wreck! What a creature! Divine! She writes me her hair is white. That caused me terrible pain. Ah! her yellow hair. No, my English girl exists no longer. How sad it all is!"

THEODULE SABOT'S CONFESSION

When Sabot entered the inn at Martinville it was a signal for laughter. What a rogue he was, this Sabot! There was a man who did not like priests, for instance! Oh, no, oh, no! He did not spare them, the scamp.

Sabot (Theodule), a master carpenter, represented liberal thought in Martinville. He was a tall, thin, than, with gray, cunning eyes, and thin lips, and wore his hair plastered down on his temples. When he said: "Our holy father, the pope" in a certain manner, everyone laughed. He made a point of working on Sunday during the hour of mass. He killed his pig each year on Monday in Holy Week in order to have enough black pudding to last till Easter, and when the priest passed by, he always said by way of a joke: "There goes one who has just swallowed his God off a salver."

The priest, a stout man and also very tall, dreaded him on account of his boastful talk which attracted followers. The Abbe Maritime was a politic man, and believed in being diplomatic. There had been a rivalry between them for ten years, a secret, intense, incessant rivalry. Sabot was municipal councillor, and they thought he would become mayor, which would inevitably mean the final overthrow of the church.

The elections were about to take place. The church party was shaking in its shoes in Martinville.

One morning the cure set out for Rouen, telling his servant that he was going to see the archbishop. He returned in two days with a joyous, triumphant air. And everyone knew the following day that the chancel of the church was going to be renovated. A sum of six hundred francs had been contributed by the archbishop out of his private fund. All the old pine pews were to be removed, and replaced by new pews made of oak. It would be a big carpentering job, and they talked about it that very evening in all the houses in the village.

Theodule Sabot was not laughing.

When he went through the village the following morning, the neighbors, friends and enemies, all asked him, jokingly:

“Are you going to do the work on the chancel of the church?”

He could find nothing to say, but he was furious, he was good and angry.

Ill-natured people added:

“It is a good piece of work; and will bring in not less than two or three per cent. profit.”

Two days later, they heard that the work of renovation had been entrusted to Celestin Chambrelan, the carpenter from Percheville. Then this was denied, and it was said that all the pews in the church were going to be changed. That would be well worth the two thousand francs that had been demanded of the church administration.

Theodule Sabot could not sleep for thinking about it. Never, in all the memory of man, had a country carpenter undertaken a similar piece of work. Then a rumor spread abroad that the cure felt very grieved that he had to give this work to a carpenter who was a stranger in the community, but that Sabot’s opinions were a barrier to his being entrusted with the job.

Sabot knew it well. He called at the parsonage just as it was growing dark. The servant told him that the cure was at church. He went to the church.

Two attendants on the altar of the Virgin, two soar old maids, were decorating the altar for the month of Mary, under the direction of the priest, who stood in the middle of the chancel with his portly paunch, directing the two women who, mounted on chairs, were placing flowers around the tabernacle.

Sabot felt ill at ease in there, as though he were in the house of his greatest enemy, but the greed of gain was gnawing at his heart. He drew nearer, holding his cap in his hand, and not paying any attention to the “demoiselles de la Vierge,” who remained standing startled, astonished, motionless on their chairs.

He faltered:

“Good morning, monsieur le cure.”

The priest replied without looking at him, all occupied as he was with the altar:

“Good morning, Mr. Carpenter.”

Sabot, nonplussed, knew not what to say next. But after a pause he remarked:

“You are making preparations?”

Abbe Maritime replied:

“Yes, we are near the month of Mary.”

“Why, why,” remarked Sabot and then was silent. He would have liked to retire now without saying anything, but a glance at the chancel held him back. He saw sixteen seats that had to be remade, six to the right and eight to the left, the door of the sacristy occupying the place of two. Sixteen oak seats, that would be worth at most three hundred francs, and by figuring carefully one might certainly make two hundred francs on the work if one were not clumsy.

Then he stammered out:

“I have come about the work.”

The cure appeared surprised. He asked:

“What work?”

“The work to be done,” murmured Sabot, in dismay.

Then the priest turned round and looking him straight in the eyes, said:

“Do you mean the repairs in the chancel of my church?”

At the tone of the abbe, Theodule Sabot felt a chill run down his back and he once more had a longing to take to his heels. However, he replied humbly:

“Why, yes, monsieur le cure.”

Then the abbe folded his arms across his large stomach and, as if filled with amazement, said:

“Is it you — you — you, Sabot — who have come to ask me for this . . . You — the only irreligious man in my parish! Why, it would be a scandal, a public scandal! The archbishop would give me a reprimand, perhaps transfer me.”

He stopped a few seconds, for breath, and then resumed in a calmer tone: “I can understand that it pains you to see a work of such importance entrusted to a carpenter from a neighboring parish. But I cannot do otherwise, unless — but no — it is impossible — you would not consent, and unless you did, never.”

Sabot now looked at the row of benches in line as far as the entrance door. Christopher, if they were going to change all those!

And he asked:

“What would you require of me? Tell me.”

The priest, in a firm tone replied:

"I must have an extraordinary token of your good intentions."

"I do not say — I do not say; perhaps we might come to an understanding," faltered Sabot.

"You will have to take communion publicly at high mass next Sunday," declared the cure.

The carpenter felt he was growing pale, and without replying, he asked:

"And the benches, are they going to be renovated?"

The abbe replied with confidence:

"Yes, but later on."

Sabot resumed:

"I do not say, I do not say. I am not calling it off, I am consenting to religion, for sure. But what rubs me the wrong way is, putting it in practice; but in this case I will not be refractory."

The attendants of the Virgin, having got off their chairs had concealed themselves behind the altar; and they listened pale with emotion.

The cure, seeing he had gained the victory, became all at once very friendly, quite familiar.

"That is good, that is good. That was wisely said, and not stupid, you understand. You will see, you will see."

Sabot smiled and asked with an awkward air:

"Would it not be possible to put off this communion just a trifle?"

But the priest replied, resuming his severe expression:

"From the moment that the work is put into your hands, I want to be assured of your conversion."

Then he continued more gently:

"You will come to confession to-morrow; for I must examine you at least twice."

"Twice?" repeated Sabot.

"Yes."

The priest smiled.

"You understand perfectly that you must have a general cleaning up, a thorough cleansing. So I will expect you to-morrow."

The carpenter, much agitated, asked:

"Where do you do that?"

"Why — in the confessional."

"In — that box, over there in the corner? The fact is — is — that it does not suit me, your box."

"How is that?"

"Seeing that — seeing that I am not accustomed to that, and also I am rather hard of hearing."

The cure was very affable and said:

"Well, then! you shall come to my house and into my parlor. We will have it just the two of us, tete-a-tete. Does that suit you?"

"Yes, that is all right, that will suit me, but your box, no."

"Well, then, to-morrow after the days work, at six o'clock."

"That is understood, that is all right, that is agreed on. To-morrow, monsieur le cure. Whoever draws back is a skunk!"

And he held out his great rough hand which the priest grasped heartily with a clap that resounded through the church.

Theodule Sabot was not easy in his mind all the following day. He had a feeling analogous to the apprehension one experiences when a tooth has to be drawn. The thought recurred to him at every moment: "I must go to confession this evening." And his troubled mind, the mind of an atheist only half convinced, was bewildered with a confused and overwhelming dread of the divine mystery.

As soon as he had finished his work, he betook himself to the parsonage. The cure was waiting for him in the garden, reading his breviary as he walked along a little path. He appeared radiant and greeted him with a good-natured laugh.

"Well, here we are! Come in, come in, Monsieur Sabot, no one will eat you."

And Sabot preceded him into the house. He faltered:

"If you do not mind I should like to get through with this little matter at once."

The cure replied:

"I am at your service. I have my surplice here. One minute and I will listen to you."

The carpenter, so disturbed that he had not two ideas in his head, watched him as he put on the white vestment with its pleated folds. The priest beckoned to him and said:

"Kneel down on this cushion."

Sabot remained standing, ashamed of having to kneel. He stuttered:

"Is it necessary?"

But the abbe had become dignified.

“You cannot approach the penitent bench except on your knees.”

And Sabot knelt down.

“Repeat the confiteor,” said the priest.

“What is that?” asked Sabot.

“The confiteor. If you do not remember it, repeat after me, one by one, the words I am going to say.” And the cure repeated the sacred prayer, in a slow tone, emphasizing the words which the carpenter repeated after him. Then he said:

“Now make your confession.”

But Sabot was silent, not knowing where to begin. The abbe then came to his aid.

“My child, I will ask you questions, since you don’t seem familiar with these things. We will take, one by one, the commandments of God. Listen to me and do not be disturbed. Speak very frankly and never fear that you may say too much.

“‘One God alone, thou shalt adore,
And love him perfectly.’

“Have you ever loved anything, or anybody, as well as you loved God? Have you loved him with all your soul, all your heart, all the strength of your love?”

Sabot was perspiring with the effort of thinking. He replied:

“No. Oh, no, m’sieu le cure. I love God as much as I can. That is — yes — I love him very much. To say that I do not love my children, no — I cannot say that. To say that if I had to choose between them and God, I could not be sure. To say that if I had to lose a hundred francs for the love of God, I could not say about that. But I love him well, for sure, I love him all the same.” The priest said gravely “You must love Him more than all besides.” And Sabot, meaning well, declared “I will do what I possibly can, m’sieu le cure.” The abbe resumed:

“‘God’s name in vain thou shalt not take
Nor swear by any other thing.’

“Did you ever swear?”

“No-oh, that, no! I never swear, never. Sometimes, in a moment of anger, I may say sacre nom de Dieu! But then, I never swear.”

“That is swearing,” cried the priest, and added seriously:

“Do not do it again.

“‘Thy Sundays thou shalt keep

In serving God devoutly.'

"What do you do on Sunday?"

This time Sabot scratched his ear.

"Why, I serve God as best I can, m'sieu le cure. I serve him — at home. I work on Sunday."

The cure interrupted him, saying magnanimously:

"I know, you will do better in future. I will pass over the following commandments, certain that you have not transgressed the two first. We will take from the sixth to the ninth. I will resume:

"'Others' goods thou shalt not take
Nor keep what is not thine.'

"Have you ever taken in any way what belonged to another?"

But Theodule Sabot became indignant.

"Of course not, of course not! I am an honest man, m'sieu le cure, I swear it, for sure. To say that I have not sometimes charged for a few more hours of work to customers who had means, I could not say that. To say that I never add a few centimes to bills, only a few, I would not say that. But to steal, no! Oh, not that, no!"

The priest resumed severely:

"To take one single centime constitutes a theft. Do not do it again.

'False witness thou shalt not bear,
Nor lie in any way.'

"Have you ever told a lie?"

"No, as to that, no. I am not a liar. That is my quality. To say that I have never told a big story, I would not like to say that. To say that I have never made people believe things that were not true when it was to my own interest, I would not like to say that. But as for lying, I am not a liar."

The priest simply said:

"Watch yourself more closely." Then he continued:

"'The works of the flesh thou shalt not desire
Except in marriage only.'

"Did you ever desire, or live with, any other woman than your wife?"

Sabot exclaimed with sincerity:

"As to that, no; oh, as to that, no, m'sieu le Cure. My poor wife, deceive her! No, no! Not so much as the tip of a finger, either in thought or in act. That is the truth."

They were silent a few seconds, then, in a lower tone, as though a doubt had arisen in his mind, he resumed:

"When I go to town, to say that I never go into a house, you know, one of the licensed houses, just to laugh and talk and see something different, I could not say that. But I always pay, monsieur le cure, I always pay. From the moment you pay, without anyone seeing or knowing you, no one can get you into trouble."

The cure did not insist, and gave him absolution.

Theodule Sabot did the work on the chancel, and goes to communion every month.

THE WRONG HOUSE

Quartermaster Varajou had obtained a week's leave to go and visit his sister, Madame Padoie. Varajou, who was in garrison at Rennes and was leading a pretty gay life, finding himself high and dry, wrote to his sister saying that he would devote a week to her. It was not that he cared particularly for Mme. Padoie, a little moralist, a devotee, and always cross; but he needed money, needed it very badly, and he remembered that, of all his relations, the Padoies were the only ones whom he had never approached on the subject.

Pere Varajou, formerly a horticulturist at Angers, but now retired from business, had closed his purse strings to his scapegrace son and had hardly seen him for two years. His daughter had married Padoie, a former treasury clerk, who had just been appointed tax collector at Vannes.

Varajou, on leaving the train, had some one direct him to the house of his brother-in-law, whom he found in his office arguing with the Breton peasants of the neighborhood. Padoie rose from his seat, held out his hand across the table littered with papers, murmured, "Take a chair. I will be at liberty in a moment," sat down again and resumed his discussion.

The peasants did not understand his explanations, the collector did not understand their line of argument. He spoke French, they spoke Breton, and the clerk who acted as interpreter appeared not to understand either.

It lasted a long time, a very long time. Varajou looked at his brother-in-law and thought: "What a fool!" Padoie must have been almost fifty. He was tall, thin, bony, slow, hairy, with heavy arched eyebrows. He wore a velvet skull cap with a gold cord vandyke design round it. His look was gentle, like his actions. His speech, his gestures, his thoughts, all were soft. Varajou said to himself, "What a fool!"

He, himself, was one of those noisy roysterers for whom the greatest pleasures in life are the cafe and abandoned women. He understood nothing outside of these conditions of existence.

A boisterous braggart, filled with contempt for the rest of the world, he despised the entire universe from the height of his ignorance. When he said: “Nom d’un chien, what a spree!” he expressed the highest degree of admiration of which his mind was capable.

Having finally got rid of his peasants, Padoie inquired:

“How are you?”

“Pretty well, as you see. And how are you?”

“Quite well, thank you. It is very kind of you to have thought of coming to see us.”

“Oh, I have been thinking of it for some time; but, you know, in the military profession one has not much freedom.”

“Oh, I know, I know. All the same, it is very kind of you.”

“And Josephine, is she well?”

“Yes, yes, thank you; you will see her presently.” “Where is she?”

“She is making some calls. We have a great many friends here; it is a very nice town.”

“I thought so.”

The door opened and Mme. Padoie appeared. She went over to her brother without any eagerness, held her cheek for him to kiss, and asked:

“Have you been here long?”

“No, hardly half an hour.”

“Oh, I thought the train would be late. Will you come into the parlor?”

They went into the adjoining room, leaving Padoie to his accounts and his taxpayers. As soon as they were alone, she said:

“I have heard nice things about you!”

“What have you heard?”

“It seems that you are behaving like a blackguard, getting drunk and contracting debts.”

He appeared very much astonished.

“I! never in the world!”

“Oh, do not deny it, I know it.”

He attempted to defend himself, but she gave him such a lecture that he could say nothing more.

She then resumed:

“We dine at six o’clock, and you can amuse yourself until then. I cannot entertain you, as I have so many things to do.”

When he was alone he hesitated as to whether he should sleep or take a walk. He looked first at the door leading to his room and then at the hall door, and decided to go out. He sauntered slowly through the quiet Breton town, so sleepy, so calm, so dead, on the shores of its inland bay that is called "le Morbihan." He looked at the little gray houses, the occasional pedestrians, the empty stores, and he murmured:

"Vannes is certainly not gay, not lively. It was a sad idea, my coming here."

He reached the harbor, the desolate harbor, walked back along a lonely, deserted boulevard, and got home before five o'clock. Then he threw himself on his bed to sleep till dinner time. The maid woke him, knocking at the door.

"Dinner is ready, sir:"

He went downstairs. In the damp dining-room with the paper peeling from the walls near the floor, he saw a soup tureen on a round table without any table cloth, on which were also three melancholy soup-plates.

M. and Mme. Padoie entered the room at the same time as Varajou. They all sat down to table, and the husband and wife crossed themselves over the pit of their stomachs, after which Padoie helped the soup, a meat soup. It was the day for pot-roast.

After the soup, they had the beef, which was done to rags, melted, greasy, like pap. The officer ate slowly, with disgust, weariness and rage.

Mme. Padoie said to her husband:

"Are you going to the judge's house this evening?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do not stay late. You always get so tired when you go out. You are not made for society, with your poor health."

She then talked about society in Vannes, of the excellent social circle in which the Padoies moved, thanks to their religious sentiments.

A puree of potatoes and a dish of pork were next served, in honor of the guest. Then some cheese, and that was all. No coffee.

When Varajou saw that he would have to spend the evening tete-a-tete with his sister, endure her reproaches, listen to her sermons, without even a glass of liqueur to help him to swallow these remonstrances, he felt that he could not stand the torture, and declared that he was obliged to go to the police station to have something attended to regarding his leave of absence. And he made his escape at seven o'clock.

He had scarcely reached the street before he gave himself a shake like a dog coming out of the water. He muttered:

"Heavens, heavens, heavens, what a galley slave's life!"

And he set out to look for a cafe, the best in the town. He found it on a public square, behind two gas lamps. Inside the cafe, five or six men, semi-gentlemen, and not noisy, were drinking and chatting quietly, leaning their elbows on the small tables, while two billiard players walked round the green baize, where the balls were hitting each other as they rolled.

One heard them counting:

"Eighteen-nineteen. No luck. Oh, that's a good stroke! Well played! Eleven. You should have played on the red. Twenty. Froze! Froze! Twelve. Ha! Wasn't I right?"

Varajou ordered:

"A demi-tasse and a small decanter of brandy, the best." Then he sat down and waited for it.

He was accustomed to spending his evenings off duty with his companions, amid noise and the smoke of pipes. This silence, this quiet, exasperated him. He began to drink; first the coffee, then the brandy, and asked for another decanter. He now wanted to laugh, to shout, to sing, to fight some one. He said to himself:

"Gee, I am half full. I must go and have a good time."

And he thought he would go and look for some girls to amuse him. He called the waiter:

"Hey, waiter."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, where does one amuse oneself here?"

The man looked stupid, and replied:

"I do not know, sir. Here, I suppose!"

"How do you mean here? What do you call amusing oneself, yourself?"

"I do not know, sir, drinking good beer or good wine."

"Ah, go away, dummy, how about the girls?"

"The girls, ah! ah!"

"Yes, the girls, where can one find any here?"

"Girls?"

"Why, yes, girls!"

The boy approached and lowering his voice, said: "You want to know where they live?"

"Why, yes, the devil!"

"You take the second street to the left and then the first to the right. It is number fifteen."

"Thank you, old man. There is something for you."

"Thank you, sir."

And Varajou went out of the cafe, repeating, "Second to the left, first to the right, number 15." But at the end of a few seconds he thought, "second to the left yes. But on leaving the cafe must I walk to the right or the left? Bah, it cannot be helped, we shall see."

And he walked on, turned down the second street to the left, then the first to the right and looked for number 15. It was a nice looking house, and one could see behind the closed blinds that the windows were lighted up on the first floor. The hall door was left partly open, and a lamp was burning in the vestibule. The non-commissioned officer thought to himself:

"This looks all right."

He went in and, as no one appeared, he called out:

"Hallo there, hallo!"

A little maid appeared and looked astonished at seeing a soldier. He said:

"Good-morning, my child. Are the ladies upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the parlor?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I go up?"

"Yes, sir."

"The door opposite the stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

He ascended the stairs, opened a door and saw sitting in a room well lighted up by two lamps, a chandelier, and two candelabras with candles in them, four ladies in evening dress, apparently expecting some one.

Three of them, the younger ones, remained seated, with rather a formal air, on some crimson velvet chairs; while the fourth, who was about forty-five, was arranging some flowers in a vase. She was very stout, and wore a green silk dress with low neck and short sleeves, allowing her red neck, covered with powder, to escape as a huge flower might from its corolla.

The officer saluted them, saying:

"Good-day, ladies."

The older woman turned round, appeared surprised, but bowed.

"Good-morning, sir."

He sat down. But seeing that they did not welcome him eagerly, he thought that possibly only commissioned officers were admitted to the house, and this made him uneasy. But he said:

"Bah, if one comes in, we can soon tell."

He then remarked:

"Are you all well?"

The large lady, no doubt the mistress of the house, replied:

"Very well, thank you!"

He could think of nothing else to say, and they were all silent. But at last, being ashamed of his bashfulness, and with an awkward laugh, he said:

"Do not people have any amusement in this country? I will pay for a bottle of wine."

He had not finished his sentence when the door opened, and in walked Padoie dressed in a black suit.

Varajou gave a shout of joy, and rising from his seat, he rushed at his brother-in-law, put his arms round him and waltzed him round the room, shouting:

"Here is Padoie! Here is Padoie! Here is Padoie!"

Then letting go of the tax collector he exclaimed as he looked him in the face:

"Oh, oh, oh, you scamp, you scamp! You are out for a good time, too. Oh, you scamp! And my sister! Are you tired of her, say?"

As he thought of all that he might gain through this unexpected situation, the forced loan, the inevitable blackmail, he flung himself on the lounge and laughed so heartily that the piece of furniture creaked all over.

The three young ladies, rising simultaneously, made their escape, while the older woman retreated to the door looking as though she were about to faint.

And then two gentlemen appeared in evening dress, and wearing the ribbon of an order. Padoie rushed up to them.

"Oh, judge — he is crazy, he is crazy. He was sent to us as a convalescent. You can see that he is crazy."

Varajou was sitting up now, and not being able to understand it all, he guessed that he had committed some monstrous folly. Then he rose, and turning to his brother-in-law, said:

"What house is this?"

But Padoie, becoming suddenly furious, stammered out:

“What house — what — what house is this? Wretch — scoundrel — villain — what house, indeed? The house of the judge — of the judge of the Supreme Court — of the Supreme Court — of the Supreme Court — Oh, oh — rascal! — rascal! — rascal!”

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

The girl was one of those pretty and charming young creatures who sometimes are born, as if by a slip of fate, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no way of being known, understood, loved, married by any rich and distinguished man; so she let herself be married to a little clerk of the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was unhappy as if she had really fallen from a higher station; since with women there is neither caste nor rank, for beauty, grace and charm take the place of family and birth. Natural ingenuity, instinct for what is elegant, a supple mind are their sole hierarchy, and often make of women of the people the equals of the very greatest ladies.

Mathilde suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born to enjoy all delicacies and all luxuries. She was distressed at the poverty of her dwelling, at the bareness of the walls, at the shabby chairs, the ugliness of the curtains. All those things, of which another woman of her rank would never even have been conscious, tortured her and made her angry. The sight of the little Breton peasant who did her humble housework aroused in her despairing regrets and bewildering dreams. She thought of silent antechambers hung with Oriental tapestry, illumined by tall bronze candelabra, and of two great footmen in knee breeches who sleep in the big armchairs, made drowsy by the oppressive heat of the stove. She thought of long reception halls hung with ancient silk, of the dainty cabinets containing priceless curiosities and of the little coquettish perfumed reception rooms made for chatting at five o'clock with intimate friends, with men famous and sought after, whom all women envy and whose attention they all desire.

When she sat down to dinner, before the round table covered with a tablecloth in use three days, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup tureen and declared with a delighted air, “Ah, the good soup! I don't know anything better than that,” she thought of dainty dinners, of shining silverware, of tapestry that peopled the walls with ancient personages and with strange birds flying in the midst of a fairy forest; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvellous plates and of the whispered gallantries to which you listen with a sphinxlike smile while you are eating the pink meat of a trout or the wings of a quail.

She had no gowns, no jewels, nothing. And she loved nothing but that. She felt made for that. She would have liked so much to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be sought after.

She had a friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, who was rich, and whom she did not like to go to see any more because she felt so sad when she came home.

But one evening her husband reached home with a triumphant air and holding a large envelope in his hand.

“There,” said he, “there is something for you.”

She tore the paper quickly and drew out a printed card which bore these words:

> The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame Georges Ramponneau request the honor of M. and Madame Loisel’s company at the palace of the Ministry on Monday evening, January 18th.

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation on the table crossly, muttering:

“What do you wish me to do with that?”

“Why, my dear, I thought you would be glad. You never go out, and this is such a fine opportunity. I had great trouble to get it. Every one wants to go; it is very select, and they are not giving many invitations to clerks. The whole official world will be there.”

She looked at him with an irritated glance and said impatiently:

“And what do you wish me to put on my back?”

He had not thought of that. He stammered:

“Why, the gown you go to the theatre in. It looks very well to me.”

He stopped, distracted, seeing that his wife was weeping. Two great tears ran slowly from the corners of her eyes toward the corners of her mouth.

“What’s the matter? What’s the matter?” he answered.

By a violent effort she conquered her grief and replied in a calm voice, while she wiped her wet cheeks:

“Nothing. Only I have no gown, and, therefore, I can’t go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better equipped than I am.”

He was in despair. He resumed:

"Come, let us see, Mathilde. How much would it cost, a suitable gown, which you could use on other occasions — something very simple?"

She reflected several seconds, making her calculations and wondering also what sum she could ask without drawing on herself an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she replied hesitating:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs."

He grew a little pale, because he was laying aside just that amount to buy a gun and treat himself to a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre, with several friends who went to shoot larks there of a Sunday.

But he said:

"Very well. I will give you four hundred francs. And try to have a pretty gown."

The day of the ball drew near and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy, anxious. Her frock was ready, however. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What is the matter? Come, you have seemed very queer these last three days."

And she answered:

"It annoys me not to have a single piece of jewelry, not a single ornament, nothing to put on. I shall look poverty-stricken. I would almost rather not go at all."

"You might wear natural flowers," said her husband. "They're very stylish at this time of year. For ten francs you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No; there's nothing more humiliating than to look poor among other women who are rich."

"How stupid you are!" her husband cried. "Go look up your friend, Madame Forestier, and ask her to lend you some jewels. You're intimate enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy:

"True! I never thought of it."

The next day she went to her friend and told her of her distress.

Madame Forestier went to a wardrobe with a mirror, took out a large jewel box, brought it back, opened it and said to Madame Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

She saw first some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian gold cross set with precious stones, of admirable workmanship. She tried on the ornaments before the mirror, hesitated and could not make up her mind to part with them, to give them back. She kept asking:

"Haven't you any more?"

"Why, yes. Look further; I don't know what you like."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb diamond necklace, and her heart throbbed with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it. She fastened it round her throat, outside her high-necked waist, and was lost in ecstasy at her reflection in the mirror.

Then she asked, hesitating, filled with anxious doubt:

"Will you lend me this, only this?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

She threw her arms round her friend's neck, kissed her passionately, then fled with her treasure.

The night of the ball arrived. Madame Loisel was a great success. She was prettier than any other woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling and wild with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, sought to be introduced. All the attaches of the Cabinet wished to waltz with her. She was remarked by the minister himself.

She danced with rapture, with passion, intoxicated by pleasure, forgetting all in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness comprised of all this homage, admiration, these awakened desires and of that sense of triumph which is so sweet to woman's heart.

She left the ball about four o'clock in the morning. Her husband had been sleeping since midnight in a little deserted anteroom with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying the ball.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps he had brought, the modest wraps of common life, the poverty of which contrasted with the elegance of the ball dress. She felt this and wished to escape so as not to be remarked by the other women, who were enveloping themselves in costly furs.

Loisel held her back, saying: "Wait a bit. You will catch cold outside. I will call a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the stairs. When they reached the street they could not find a carriage and began to look for one, shouting after the cabmen passing at a distance.

They went toward the Seine in despair, shivering with cold. At last they found on the quay one of those ancient night cabs which, as though they were ashamed to show their shabbiness during the day, are never seen round Paris until after dark.

It took them to their dwelling in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they mounted the stairs to their flat. All was ended for her. As to him, he reflected that he must be at the ministry at ten o'clock that morning.

She removed her wraps before the glass so as to see herself once more in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. She no longer had the necklace around her neck!

"What is the matter with you?" demanded her husband, already half undressed.

She turned distractedly toward him.

"I have — I have — I've lost Madame Forestier's necklace," she cried.

He stood up, bewildered.

"What! — how? Impossible!"

They looked among the folds of her skirt, of her cloak, in her pockets, everywhere, but did not find it.

"You're sure you had it on when you left the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule of the minister's house."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, probably. Did you take his number?"

"No. And you — didn't you notice it?"

"No."

They looked, thunderstruck, at each other. At last Loisel put on his clothes.

"I shall go back on foot," said he, "over the whole route, to see whether I can find it."

He went out. She sat waiting on a chair in her ball dress, without strength to go to bed, overwhelmed, without any fire, without a thought.

Her husband returned about seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to police headquarters, to the newspaper offices to offer a reward; he went to the cab companies — everywhere, in fact, whither he was urged by the least spark of hope.

She waited all day, in the same condition of mad fear before this terrible calamity.

Loisel returned at night with a hollow, pale face. He had discovered nothing.

“You must write to your friend,” said he, “that you have broken the clasp of her necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to turn round.”

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope. Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

“We must consider how to replace that ornament.”

The next day they took the box that had contained it and went to the jeweler whose name was found within. He consulted his books.

“It was not I, madame, who sold that necklace; I must simply have furnished the case.”

Then they went from jeweler to jeweler, searching for a necklace like the other, trying to recall it, both sick with chagrin and grief.

They found, in a shop at the Palais Royal, a string of diamonds that seemed to them exactly like the one they had lost. It was worth forty thousand francs. They could have it for thirty-six.

So they begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days yet. And they made a bargain that he should buy it back for thirty-four thousand francs, in case they should find the lost necklace before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He would borrow the rest.

He did borrow, asking a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes, took up ruinous obligations, dealt with usurers and all the race of lenders. He compromised all the rest of his life, risked signing a note without even knowing whether he could meet it; and, frightened by the trouble yet to come, by the black misery that was about to fall upon him, by the prospect of all the physical privations and moral tortures that he was to suffer, he went to get the new necklace, laying upon the jeweler’s counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace Madame Forestier said to her with a chilly manner:

“You should have returned it sooner; I might have needed it.”

She did not open the case, as her friend had so much feared. If she had detected the substitution, what would she have thought, what would she have said? Would she not have taken Madame Loisel for a thief?

Thereafter Madame Loisel knew the horrible existence of the needy. She bore her part, however, with sudden heroism. That dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings; they rented a garret under the roof.

She came to know what heavy housework meant and the odious cares of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her dainty fingers and rosy nails on greasy pots and pans. She washed the soiled linen, the shirts and the dishcloths, which she dried upon a line; she carried the slops down to the street every morning and carried up the water, stopping for breath at every landing. And dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the fruiterer, the grocer, the butcher, a basket on her arm, bargaining, meeting with impertinence, defending her miserable money, sou by sou.

Every month they had to meet some notes, renew others, obtain more time.

Her husband worked evenings, making up a tradesman’s accounts, and late at night he often copied manuscript for five sous a page.

This life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years they had paid everything, everything, with the rates of usury and the accumulations of the compound interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become the woman of impoverished households — strong and hard and rough. With frowsy hair, skirts askew and red hands, she talked loud while washing the floor with great swishes of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down near the window and she thought of that gay evening of long ago, of that ball where she had been so beautiful and so admired.

What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? who knows? How strange and changeful is life! How small a thing is needed to make or ruin us!

But one Sunday, having gone to take a walk in the Champs Elysees to refresh herself after the labors of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman who was leading a child. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still charming.

Madame Loisel felt moved. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all about it. Why not?

She went up.

"Good-day, Jeanne."

The other, astonished to be familiarly addressed by this plain good-wife, did not recognize her at all and stammered:

"But — madame! — I do not know — You must have mistaken."

"No. I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you are changed!"

"Yes, I have had a pretty hard life, since I last saw you, and great poverty — and that because of you!"

"Of me! How so?"

"Do you remember that diamond necklace you lent me to wear at the ministerial ball?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You brought it back."

"I brought you back another exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us, for us who had nothing. At last it is ended, and I am very glad."

Madame Forestier had stopped.

"You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never noticed it, then! They were very similar."

And she smiled with a joy that was at once proud and ingenuous.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste! It was worth at most only five hundred francs!"

THE MARQUIS DE FUMEROL

Roger de Tourneville was whiffing a cigar and blowing out small clouds of smoke every now and then, as he sat astride a chair amid a party of friends. He was talking.

"We were at dinner when a letter was brought in which my father opened. You know my father, who thinks that he is king of France ad interim. I call him Don Quixote, because for twelve years he has been running a tilt against the windmill of the Republic, without quite knowing whether it was in the cause of the Bourbons or the Orleanists. At present he is bearing the lance in the cause of the Orleanists alone, because there is no one else left. In any case, he thinks himself the first gentleman of France, the best known, the most influential, the head of the party; and as he is an irremovable senator, he thinks that the thrones of the neighboring kings are very insecure.

"As for my mother, she is my father's soul, she is the soul of the kingdom and of religion, and the scourge of all evil-thinkers.

"Well, a letter was brought in while we were at dinner, and my father opened and read it, and then he said to mother: 'Your brother is dying.' She grew very pale. My uncle was scarcely ever mentioned in the house, and I did not know him at all; all I knew from public talk was, that he had led, and was still leading, a gay life. After having spent his fortune in fast living, he was now in small apartments in the Rue des Martyrs.

"An ancient peer of France and former colonel of cavalry, it was said that he believed in neither God nor devil. Not believing, therefore, in a future life he had abused the present life in every way, and had become a live wound in my mother's heart.

"'Give me that letter, Paul,' she said, and when she read it, I asked for it in my turn. Here it is:

> 'Monsieur le Comte, I think I ought to let you know that your brother-in-law, the Comte Fumerol, is going to die. Perhaps you

would like to make some arrangements, and do not forget I told you.
Your servant,
'MELANIE.'

"'We must take counsel,' papa murmured. 'In my position, I ought to watch over your brother's last moments.'

"Mamma continued: 'I will send for Abbe Poivron and ask his advice, and then I will go to my brother with the abbe and Roger. Remain here, Paul, for you must not compromise yourself; but a woman can, and ought to do these things. For a politician in your position, it is another matter. It would be a fine thing for one of your opponents to be able to bring one of your most laudable actions up against you.' 'You are right,' my father said. 'Do as you think best, my dear wife.'

"A quarter of an hour, later, the Abbe Poivron came into the drawing-room, and the situation was explained to him, analyzed and discussed in all its bearings. If the Marquis de Fumerol, one of the greatest names in France, were to die without the ministrations of religion, it would assuredly be a terrible blow to the nobility in general, and to the Count de Tourneville in particular, and the freethinkers would be triumphant. The liberal newspapers would sing songs of victory for six months; my mother's name would be dragged through the mire and brought into the prose of Socialistic journals, and my father's name would be smirched. It was impossible that such a thing should be.

"A crusade was therefore immediately decided upon, which was to be led by the Abbe Poivron, a little, fat, clean, priest with a faint perfume about him, a true vicar of a large church in a noble and rich quarter.

"The landau was ordered and we all three set out, my mother, the cure and I, to administer the last sacraments to my uncle.

"It had been decided first of all we should see Madame Melanie who had written the letter, and who was most likely the porter's wife, or my uncle's servant, and I dismounted, as an advance guard, in front of a seven-story house and went into a dark passage, where I had great difficulty in finding the porter's den. He looked at me distrustfully, and I said:

"'Madame Melanie, if you please.' 'Don't know her!' 'But I have received a letter from her.' 'That may be, but I don't know her. Are you asking for a lodger?' 'No, a servant probably. She wrote me about a place.' 'A servant? — a servant? Perhaps it is the marquis'. Go and see, the fifth story on the left.'

“As soon as he found I was not asking for a doubtful character he became more friendly and came as far as the corridor with me. He was a tall, thin man with white whiskers, the manners of a beadle and majestic gestures.

“I climbed up a long spiral staircase, the railing of which I did not venture to touch, and I gave three discreet knocks at the left-hand door on the fifth story. It opened immediately, and an enormous dirty woman appeared before me. She barred the entrance with her extended arms which she placed against the two doorposts, and growled:

“‘What do you want?’ ‘Are you Madame Melanie?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘I am the Visconte de Tourneville.’ ‘Ah! All right! Come in.’ ‘Well, the fact is, my mother is downstairs with a priest.’ ‘Oh! All right; go and bring them up; but be careful of the porter.’

“I went downstairs and came up again with my mother, who was followed by the abbe, and I fancied that I heard other footsteps behind us. As soon as we were in the kitchen, Melanie offered us chairs, and we all four sat down to deliberate.

“‘Is he very ill?’ my mother asked. ‘Oh! yes, madame; he will not be here long.’ ‘Does he seem disposed to receive a visit from a priest?’ ‘Oh! I do not think so.’ ‘Can I see him?’ ‘Well — yes madame — only — only — those young ladies are with him.’ ‘What young ladies?’ ‘Why — why — his lady friends, of course.’ ‘Oh!’ Mamma had grown scarlet, and the Abbe Poivron had lowered his eyes.

“The affair began to amuse me, and I said: ‘Suppose I go in first? I shall see how he receives me, and perhaps I shall be able to prepare him to receive you.’

“My mother, who did not suspect any trick, replied: ‘Yes, go, my dear.’ But a woman’s voice cried out: ‘Melanie!’

“The servant ran out and said: ‘What do you want, Mademoiselle Claire?’ ‘The omelette; quickly.’ ‘In a minute, mademoiselle.’ And coming back to us, she explained this summons.

“They had ordered a cheese omelette at two o’clock as a slight collation. And she at once began to break the eggs into a salad bowl, and to whip them vigorously, while I went out on the landing and pulled the bell, so as to formally announce my arrival. Melanie opened the door to me, and made me sit down in an ante-room, while she went to tell my uncle that I had come; then she came back and asked me to go in, while the abbe hid behind the door, so that he might appear at the first signal.

“I was certainly very much surprised at the sight of my uncle, for he was very handsome, very solemn and very elegant, the old rake.

“Sitting, almost lying, in a large armchair, his legs wrapped in blankets, his hands, his long, white hands, over the arms of the chair, he was waiting for death with the dignity of a patriarch. His white beard fell on his chest, and his hair, which was also white, mingled with it on his cheeks.

“Standing behind his armchair, as if to defend him against me, were two young women, who looked at me with bold eyes. In their petticoats and morning wrappers, with bare arms, with coal black hair twisted in a knot on the nape of their neck, with embroidered, Oriental slippers, which showed their ankles and silk stockings, they looked like the figures in some symbolical painting, by the side of the dying man. Between the easy-chair and the bed, there was a table covered with a white cloth, on which two plates, two glasses, two forks and two knives, were waiting for the cheese omelette which had been ordered some time before of Melanie.

“My uncle said in a weak, almost breathless, but clear voice:

“‘Good-morning, my child; it is rather late in the day to come and see me; our acquaintanceship will not last long.’ I stammered out, ‘It was not my fault, uncle:’ ‘No; I know that,’ he replied. ‘It is your father and mother’s fault more than yours. How are they?’ ‘Pretty well, thank you. When they heard that you were ill, they sent me to ask after you.’ ‘Ah! Why did they not come themselves?’

“I looked up at the two girls and said gently: ‘It is not their fault if they could not come, uncle. But it would be difficult for my father, and impossible for my mother to come in here.’ The old man did not reply, but raised his hand toward mine, and I took the pale, cold hand and held it in my own.

“The door opened, Melanie came in with the omelette and put it on the table, and the two girls immediately sat down at the table, and began to eat without taking their eyes off me. Then I said: ‘Uncle, it would give great pleasure to my mother to embrace you.’ ‘I also,’ he murmured, ‘should like — — ‘ He said no more, and I could think of nothing to propose to him, and there was silence except for the noise of the plates and that vague sound of eating.

“Now, the abbe, who was listening behind the door, seeing our embarrassment, and thinking we had won the game, thought the time had come to interpose, and showed himself. My uncle was so stupefied at sight of him that at first he remained motionless; and then he opened his mouth as if he meant to swallow up the priest, and shouted to him in a strong, deep, furious voice: ‘What are you doing here?’

“The abbe, who was used to difficult situations, came forward into the room, murmuring: ‘I have come in your sister’s name, Monsieur le Marquis; she has sent me. She would be happy, monsieur— ‘

“But the marquis was not listening. Raising one hand, he pointed to the door with a proud, tragic gesture, and said angrily and breathing hard: ‘Leave this room — go out — robber of souls. Go out from here, you violator of consciences. Go out from here, you pick-lock of dying men’s doors!’

“The abbe retreated, and I also went to the door, beating a retreat with the priest; the two young women, who had the best of it, got up, leaving their omelette only half eaten, and went and stood on either side of my uncle’s easy-chair, putting their hands on his arms to calm him, and to protect him against the criminal enterprises of the Family, and of Religion.

“The abbe and I rejoined my mother in the kitchen, and Melanie again offered us chairs. ‘I knew quite well that this method would not work; we must try some other means, otherwise he will escape us.’ And they began deliberating afresh, my mother being of one opinion and the abbe of another, while I held a third.

“We had been discussing the matter in a low voice for half an hour, perhaps, when a great noise of furniture being moved and of cries uttered by my uncle, more vehement and terrible even than the former had been, made us all four jump up.

“Through the doors and walls we could hear him shouting: ‘Go out — out — rascals — humbugs, get out, scoundrels — get out — get out!’

“Melanie rushed in, but came back immediately to call me to help her, and I hastened in. Opposite to my uncle, who was terribly excited by anger, almost standing up and vociferating, stood two men, one behind the other, who seemed to be waiting till he should be dead with rage.

“By his ridiculous long coat, his long English shoes, his manners of a tutor out of a position, his high collar, white necktie and straight hair, his humble face of a false priest of a bastard religion, I immediately recognized the first as a Protestant minister.

“The second was the porter of the house, who belonged to the reformed religion and had followed us, and having seen our defeat, had gone to fetch his own pastor, in hopes that he might meet a better reception. My uncle seemed mad with rage! If the sight of the Catholic priest, of the priest of his ancestors, had irritated the Marquis de Fumerol, who had become a freethinker, the sight of his porter's minister made him altogether beside himself. I therefore took the two men by the arm and threw them out of the room so roughly that they bumped against each other twice, between the two doors which led to the staircase; and then I disappeared in my turn and returned to the kitchen, which was our headquarters in order to take counsel with my mother and the abbe.

"But Melanie came back in terror, sobbing out:

"'He is dying — he is dying — come immediately — he is dying.'

"My mother rushed out. My uncle had fallen to the ground, and lay full length along the floor, without moving. I fancy he was already dead. My mother was superb at that moment! She went straight up to the two girls who were kneeling by the body and trying to raise it up, and pointing to the door with irresistible authority, dignity and majesty, she said: 'Now it is time for you to leave the room.'

"And they went out without a word of protest. I must add, that I was getting ready to turn them out as unceremoniously as I had done the parson and the porter.

"Then the Abbe Poivron administered the last sacraments to my uncle with all the customary prayers, and remitted all his sins, while my mother sobbed as she knelt near her brother. Suddenly, however, she exclaimed: 'He recognized me; he pressed my hand; I am sure he recognized me!!! — and that he thanked me! Oh, God, what happiness!'

"Poor mamma! If she had known or guessed for whom those thanks were intended!

"They laid my uncle on his bed; he was certainly dead this time.

"'Madame,' Melanie said, 'we have no sheets to bury him in; all the linen belongs to these two young ladies,' and when I looked at the omelette which they had not finished, I felt inclined to laugh and to cry at the same time. There are some humorous moments and some humorous situations in life, occasionally!

"We gave my uncle a magnificent fungal, with five speeches at the grave. Baron de Croiselles, the senator, showed in admirable terms that God always returns victorious into well-born souls which have temporarily been led into error. All the members of the Royalist and Catholic party followed the funeral procession with the enthusiasm of victors, as they spoke of that beautiful death after a somewhat troublous life."

Viscount Roger ceased speaking; his audience was laughing. Then somebody said: "Bah! That is the story of all conversions in extremis."

THE TRIP OF LE HORLA

On the morning of July 8th I received the following telegram: “Fine day. Always my predictions. Belgian frontier. Baggage and servants left at noon at the social session. Beginning of manoeuvres at three. So I will wait for you at the works from five o’clock on. Jovis.”

At five o’clock sharp I entered the gas works of La Villette. It might have been mistaken for the colossal ruins of an old town inhabited by Cyclops. There were immense dark avenues separating heavy gasometers standing one behind another, like monstrous columns, unequally high and, undoubtedly, in the past the supports of some tremendous, some fearful iron edifice.

The balloon was lying in the courtyard and had the appearance of a cake made of yellow cloth, flattened on the ground under a rope. That is called placing a balloon in a sweep-net, and, in fact, it appeared like an enormous fish.

Two or three hundred people were looking at it, sitting or standing, and some were examining the basket, a nice little square basket for a human cargo, bearing on its side in gold letters on a mahogany plate the words: Le Horla.

Suddenly the people began to stand back, for the gas was beginning to enter into the balloon through a long tube of yellow cloth, which lay on the soil, swelling and undulating like an enormous worm. But another thought, another picture occurs to every mind. It is thus that nature itself nourishes beings until their birth. The creature that will rise soon begins to move, and the attendants of Captain Jovis, as Le Horla grew larger, spread and put in place the net which covers it, so that the pressure will be regular and equally distributed at every point.

The operation is very delicate and very important, for the resistance of the cotton cloth of which the balloon is made is figured not in proportion to the contact surface of this cloth with the net, but in proportion to the links of the basket.

Le Horla, moreover, has been designed by M. Mallet, constructed under his own eyes and made by himself. Everything had been made in the shops of M. Jovis by his own working staff and nothing was made outside.

We must add that everything was new in this balloon, from the varnish to the valve, those two essential parts of a balloon. Both must render the cloth gas-proof, as the sides of a ship are waterproof. The old varnishes, made with a base of linseed oil, sometimes fermented and thus burned the cloth, which in a short time would tear like a piece of paper.

The valves were apt to close imperfectly after being opened and when the covering called "cataplasme" was injured. The fall of M. L'Hoste in the open sea during the night proved the imperfection of the old system.

The two discoveries of Captain Jovis, the varnish principally, are of inestimable value in the art of ballooning.

The crowd has begun to talk, and some men, who appear to be specialists, affirm with authority that we shall come down before reaching the fortifications. Several other things have been criticized in this novel type of balloon with which we are about to experiment with so much pleasure and success.

It is growing slowly but surely. Some small holes and scratches made in transit have been discovered, and we cover them and plug them with a little piece of paper applied on the cloth while wet. This method of repairing alarms and mystifies the public.

While Captain Jovis and his assistants are busy with the last details, the travellers go to dine in the canteen of the gas-works, according to the established custom.

When we come out again the balloon is swaying, enormous and transparent, a prodigious golden fruit, a fantastic pear which is still ripening, covered by the last rays of the setting sun. Now the basket is attached, the barometers are brought, the siren, which we will blow to our hearts' content, is also brought, also the two trumpets, the eatables, the overcoats and raincoats, all the small articles that can go with the men in that flying basket.

As the wind pushes the balloon against the gasometers, it is necessary to steady it now and then, to avoid an accident at the start.

Captain Jovis is now ready and calls all the passengers.

Lieutenant Mallet jumps aboard, climbing first on the aerial net between the basket and the balloon, from which he will watch during the night the movements of Le Horla across the skies, as the officer on watch, standing on starboard, watches the course of a ship.

M. Etierine Beer gets in after him, then comes M. Paul Bessand, then M. Patrice Eyries and I get in last.

But the basket is too heavy for the balloon, considering the long trip to be taken, and M. Eyries has to get out, not without great regret.

M. Joliet, standing erect on the edge of the basket, begs the ladies, in very gallant terms, to stand aside a little, for he is afraid he might throw sand on their hats in rising. Then he commands:

"Let it loose," and, cutting with one stroke of his knife the ropes that hold the balloon to the ground, he gives Le Horla its liberty.

In one second we fly skyward. Nothing can be heard; we float, we rise, we fly, we glide. Our friends shout with glee and applaud, but we hardly hear them, we hardly see them. We are already so far, so high! What? Are we really leaving these people down there? Is it possible? Paris spreads out beneath us, a dark bluish patch, cut by its streets, from which rise, here and there, domes, towers, steeples, then around it the plain, the country, traversed by long roads, thin and white, amidst green fields of a tender or dark green, and woods almost black.

The Seine appears like a coiled snake, asleep, of which we see neither head nor tail; it crosses Paris, and the entire field resembles an immense basin of prairies and forests dotted here and there by mountains, hardly visible in the horizon.

The sun, which we could no longer see down below, now reappears as though it were about to rise again, and our balloon seems to be lighted; it must appear like a star to the people who are looking up. M. Mallet every few seconds throws a cigarette paper into-space and says quietly: "We are rising, always rising," while Captain Jovis, radiant with joy, rubs his hands together and repeats: "Eh? this varnish? Isn't it good?"

In fact, we can see whether we are rising or sinking only by throwing a cigarette paper out of the basket now and then. If this paper appears to fall down like a stone, it means that the balloon is rising; if it appears to shoot skyward the balloon is descending.

The two barometers mark about five hundred meters, and we gaze with enthusiastic admiration at the earth we are leaving and to which we are not attached in any way; it looks like a colored map, an immense plan of the country. All its noises, however, rise to our ears very distinctly, easily recognizable. We hear the sound of the wheels rolling in the streets, the snap of a whip, the cries of drivers, the rolling and whistling of trains and the laughter of small boys running after one another. Every time we pass over a village the noise of children's voices is heard above the rest and with the greatest distinctness. Some men are calling us; the locomotives whistle; we answer with the siren, which emits plaintive, fearfully shrill wails like the voice of a weird being wandering through the world.

We perceive lights here and there, some isolated fire in the farms, and lines of gas in the towns. We are going toward the northwest, after roaming for some time over the little lake of Enghien. Now we see a river; it is the Oise, and we begin to argue about the exact spot we are passing. Is that town Creil or Pontoise — the one with so many lights? But if we were over Pontoise we could see the junction of the Seine and the Oise; and that enormous fire to the left, isn't it the blast furnaces of Montataire? So then we are above Creil. The view is superb; it is dark on the earth, but we are still in the light, and it is now past ten o'clock. Now we begin to hear slight country noises, the double cry of the quail in particular, then the mewing of cats and the barking of dogs. Surely the dogs have scented the balloon; they have seen it and have given the alarm. We can hear them barking all over the plain and making the identical noise they make when baying at the moon. The cows also seem to wake up in the barns, for we can hear them lowing; all the beasts are scared and moved before the aerial monster that is passing.

The delicious odors of the soil rise toward us, the smell of hay, of flowers, of the moist, verdant earth, perfuming the air-a light air, in fact, so light, so sweet, so delightful that I realize I never was so fortunate as to breathe before. A profound sense of well-being, unknown to me heretofore, pervades me, a well-being of body and spirit, composed of supineness, of infinite rest, of forgetfulness, of indifference to everything and of this novel sensation of traversing space without any of the sensations that make motion unbearable, without noise, without shocks and without fear.

At times we rise and then descend. Every few minutes Lieutenant Mallet, suspended in his cobweb of netting, says to Captain Jovis: "We are descending; throw down half a handful." And the captain, who is talking and laughing with us, with a bag of ballast between his legs, takes a handful of sand out of the bag and throws it overboard.

Nothing is more amusing, more delicate, more interesting than the manoeuvring of a balloon. It is an enormous toy, free and docile, which obeys with surprising sensitiveness, but it is also, and before all, the slave of the wind, which we cannot control. A pinch of sand, half a sheet of paper, one or two drops of water, the bones of a chicken which we had just eaten, thrown overboard, makes it go up quickly.

A breath of cool, damp air rising from the river or the wood we are traversing makes the balloon descend two hundred metres. It does not vary when passing over fields of ripe grain, and it rises when it passes over towns.

The earth sleeps now, or, rather, men sleep on the earth, for the beasts awakened by the sight of our balloon announce our approach everywhere. Now and then the rolling of a train or the whistling of a locomotive is plainly distinguishable. We sound our siren as we pass over inhabited places; and the peasants, terrified in their beds, must surely tremble and ask themselves if the Angel Gabriel is not passing by.

A strong and continuous odor of gas can be plainly observed. We must have encountered a current of warm air, and the balloon expands, losing its invisible blood by the escape-valve, which is called the appendix, and which closes of itself as soon as the expansion ceases.

We are rising. The earth no longer gives back the echo of our trumpets; we have risen almost two thousand feet. It is not light enough for us to consult the instruments; we only know that the rice paper falls from us like dead butterflies, that we are rising, always rising. We can no longer see the earth; a light mist separates us from it; and above our head twinkles a world of stars.

A silvery light appears before us and makes the sky turn pale, and suddenly, as if it were rising from unknown depths behind the horizon below us rises the moon on the edge of a cloud. It seems to be coming from below, while we are looking down upon it from a great height, leaning on the edge of our basket like an audience on a balcony. Clear and round, it emerges from the clouds and slowly rises in the sky.

The earth no longer seems to exist, it is buried in milky vapors that resemble a sea. We are now alone in space with the moon, which looks like another balloon travelling opposite us; and our balloon, which shines in the air, appears like another, larger moon, a world wandering in the sky amid the stars, through infinity. We no longer speak, think nor live; we float along through space in delicious inertia. The air which is bearing us up has made of us all beings which resemble itself, silent, joyous, irresponsible beings, intoxicated by this stupendous flight, peculiarly alert, although motionless. One is no longer conscious of one's flesh or one's bones; one's heart seems to have ceased beating; we have become something indescribable, birds who do not even have to flap their wings.

All memory has disappeared from our minds, all trouble from our thoughts; we have no more regrets, plans nor hopes. We look, we feel, we wildly enjoy this fantastic journey; nothing in the sky but the moon and ourselves! We are a wandering, travelling world, like our sisters, the planets; and this little world carries five men who have left the earth and who have almost forgotten it. We can now see as plainly as in daylight; we look at each other, surprised at this brightness, for we have nothing to look at but ourselves and a few silvery clouds floating below us. The barometers mark twelve hundred metres, then thirteen, fourteen, fifteen hundred; and the little rice papers still fall about us.

Captain Jovis claims that the moon has often made balloons act thus, and that the upward journey will continue.

We are now at two thousand metres; we go up to two thousand three hundred and fifty; then the balloon stops: We blow the siren and are surprised that no one answers us from the stars.

We are now going down rapidly. M. Mallet keeps crying: "Throw out more ballast! throw out more ballast!" And the sand and stones that we throw over come back into our faces, as if they were going up, thrown from below toward the stars, so rapid is our descent.

Here is the earth! Where are we? It is now past midnight, and we are crossing a broad, dry, well-cultivated country, with many roads and well populated.

To the right is a large city and farther away to the left is another. But suddenly from the earth appears a bright fairy light; it disappears, reappears and once more disappears. Jovis, intoxicated by space, exclaims: "Look, look at this phenomenon of the moon in the water. One can see nothing more beautiful at night!"

Nothing indeed can give one an idea of the wonderful brightness of these spots of light which are not fire, which do not look like reflections, which appear quickly here or there and immediately go out again. These shining lights appear on the winding rivers at every turn, but one hardly has time to see them as the balloon passes as quickly as the wind.

We are now quite near the earth, and Beer exclaims:— “Look at that! What is that running over there in the fields? Isn’t it a dog?” Indeed, something is running along the ground with great speed, and this something seems to jump over ditches, roads, trees with such ease that we could not understand what it might be. The captain laughed: “It is the shadow of our balloon. It will grow as we descend.”

I distinctly hear a great noise of foundries in the distance. And, according to the polar star, which we have been observing all night, ‘and which I have so often watched and consulted from the bridge of my little yacht on the Mediterranean, we are heading straight for Belgium.

Our siren and our two horns are continually calling. A few cries from some truck driver or belated reveler answer us. We bellow: “Where are we?” But the balloon is going so rapidly that the bewildered man has not even time to answer us. The growing shadow of Le Horla, as large as a child’s ball, is fleeing before us over the fields, roads and woods. It goes along steadily, preceding us by about a quarter of a mile; and now I am leaning out of the basket, listening to the roaring of the wind in the trees and across the harvest fields. I say to Captain Jovis: “How the wind blows!”

He answers: “No, those are probably waterfalls.” I insist, sure of my ear that knows the sound of the wind, from hearing it so often whistle through the rigging. Then Jovis nudges me; he fears to frighten his happy, quiet passengers, for he knows full well that a storm is pursuing us.

At last a man manages to understand us; he answers: “Nord!” We get the same reply from another.

Suddenly the lights of a town, which seems to be of considerable size, appear before us. Perhaps it is Lille. As we approach it, such a wonderful flow of fire appears below us that I think myself transported into some fairyland where precious stones are manufactured for giants.

It seems that it is a brick factory. Here are others, two, three. The fusing material bubbles, sparkles, throws out blue, red, yellow, green sparks, reflections from giant diamonds, rubies, emeralds, turquoises, sapphires, topazes. And near by are great foundries roaring like apocalyptic lions; high chimneys belch forth their clouds of smoke and flame, and we can hear the noise of metal striking against metal.

"Where are we?"

The voice of some joker or of a crazy person answers: "In a balloon!"

"Where are we?"

"At Lille!"

We were not mistaken. We are already out of sight of the town, and we see Roubaix to the right, then some well-cultivated, rectangular fields, of different colors according to the crops, some yellow, some gray or brown. But the clouds are gathering behind us, hiding the moon, whereas toward the east the sky is growing lighter, becoming a clear blue tinged with red. It is dawn. It grows rapidly, now showing us all the little details of the earth, the trains, the brooks, the cows, the goats. And all this passes beneath us with surprising speed. One hardly has time to notice that other fields, other meadows, other houses have already disappeared. Cocks are crowing, but the voice of ducks drowns everything. One might think the world to be peopled, covered with them, they make so much noise.

The early rising peasants are waving their arms and crying to us: "Let yourselves drop!" But we go along steadily, neither rising nor falling, leaning over the edge of the basket and watching the world fleeing under our feet.

Jovis sights another city far off in the distance. It approaches; everywhere are old church spires. They are delightful, seen thus from above. Where are we? Is this Courtrai? Is it Ghent?

We are already very near it, and we see that it is surrounded by water and crossed in every direction by canals. One might think it a Venice of the north. Just as we are passing so near to a church tower that our long guy-rope almost touches it, the chimes begin to ring three o'clock. The sweet, clear sounds rise to us from this frail roof which we have almost touched in our wandering course. It is a charming greeting, a friendly welcome from Holland. We answer with our siren, whose raucous voice echoes throughout the streets.

It was Bruges. But we have hardly lost sight of it when my neighbor, Paul Bessand, asks me: "Don't you see something over there, to the right, in front of us? It looks like a river."

And, indeed, far ahead of us stretches a bright highway, in the light of the dawning day. Yes, it looks like a river, an immense river full of islands.

"Get ready for the descent," cried the captain. He makes M. Mallet leave his net and return to the basket; then we pack the barometers and everything that could be injured by possible shocks. M. Bessand exclaims: “Look at the masts over there to the left! We are at the sea!”

Fogs had hidden it from us until then. The sea was everywhere, to the left and opposite us, while to our right the Scheldt, which had joined the Moselle, extended as far as the sea, its mouths vaster than a lake.

It was necessary to descend within a minute or two. The rope to the escape-valve, which had been religiously enclosed in a little white bag and placed in sight of all so that no one would touch it, is unrolled, and M. Mallet holds it in his hand while Captain Jovis looks for a favorable landing.

Behind us the thunder was rumbling and not a single bird followed our mad flight.

“Pull!” cried Jovis.

We were passing over a canal. The basket trembled and tipped over slightly. The guy-rope touched the tall trees on both banks. But our speed is so great that the long rope now trailing does not seem to slow down, and we pass with frightful rapidity over a large farm, from which the bewildered chickens, pigeons and ducks fly away, while the cows, cats and dogs run, terrified, toward the house.

Just one-half bag of ballast is left. Jovis throws it overboard, and Le Horla flies lightly across the roof.

The captain once more cries: “The escape-valve!”

M. Mallet reaches for the rope and hangs to it, and we drop like an arrow. With a slash of a knife the cord which retains the anchor is cut, and we drag this grapple behind us, through a field of beets. Here are the trees.

“Take care! Hold fast! Look out for your heads!”

We pass over them. Then a strong shock shakes us. The anchor has taken hold.

“Look out! Take a good hold! Raise yourselves by your wrists. We are going to touch ground.”

The basket does indeed strike the earth. Then it flies up again. Once more it falls and bounds upward again, and at last it settles on the ground, while the balloon struggles madly, like a wounded beast.

Peasants run toward us, but they do not dare approach. They were a long time before they decided to come and deliver us, for one cannot set foot on the ground until the bag is almost completely deflated.

Then, almost at the same time as the bewildered men, some of whom showed their astonishment by jumping, with the wild gestures of savages, all the cows that were grazing along the coast came toward us, surrounding our balloon with a strange and comical circle of horns, big eyes and blowing nostrils.

With the help of the accommodating and hospitable Belgian peasants, we were able in a short time to pack up all our material and carry it to the station at Heyst, where at twenty minutes past eight we took the train for Paris.

The descent occurred at three-fifteen in the morning, preceding by only a few seconds the torrent of rain and the blinding lightning of the storm which had been chasing us before it.

Thanks to Captain Jovis, of whom I had heard much from my colleague, Paul Ginisty — for both of them had fallen together and voluntarily into the sea opposite Mentone — thanks to this brave man, we were able to see, in a single night, from far up in the sky, the setting of the sun, the rising of the moon and the dawn of day and to go from Paris to the mouth of the Scheldt through the skies.

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FAREWELL!

The two friends were getting near the end of their dinner. Through the cafe windows they could see the Boulevard, crowded with people. They could feel the gentle breezes which are wafted over Paris on warm summer evenings and make you feel like going out somewhere, you care not where, under the trees, and make you dream of moonlit rivers, of fireflies and of larks.

One of the two, Henri Simon, heaved a deep sigh and said:

“Ah! I am growing old. It’s sad. Formerly, on evenings like this, I felt full of life. Now, I only feel regrets. Life is short!”

He was perhaps forty-five years old, very bald and already growing stout.

The other, Pierre Carnier, a trifle older, but thin and lively, answered:

“Well, my boy, I have grown old without noticing it in the least. I have always been merry, healthy, vigorous and all the rest. As one sees oneself in the mirror every day, one does not realize the work of age, for it is slow, regular, and it modifies the countenance so gently that the changes are unnoticeable. It is for this reason alone that we do not die of sorrow after two or three years of excitement. For we cannot understand the alterations which time produces. In order to appreciate them one would have to remain six months without seeing one’s own face — then, oh, what a shock!

“And the women, my friend, how I pity the poor beings! All their joy, all their power, all their life, lies in their beauty, which lasts ten years.

“As I said, I aged without noticing it; I thought myself practically a youth, when I was almost fifty years old. Not feeling the slightest infirmity, I went about, happy and peaceful.

“The revelation of my decline came to me in a simple and terrible manner, which overwhelmed me for almost six months — then I became resigned.

“Like all men, I have often been in love, but most especially once.

"I met her at the seashore, at Etretat, about twelve years ago, shortly after the war. There is nothing prettier than this beach during the morning bathing hour. It is small, shaped like a horseshoe, framed by high while cliffs, which are pierced by strange holes called the 'Portes,' one stretching out into the ocean like the leg of a giant, the other short and dumpy. The women gather on the narrow strip of sand in this frame of high rocks, which they make into a gorgeous garden of beautiful gowns. The sun beats down on the shores, on the multicolored parasols, on the blue-green sea; and all is gay, delightful, smiling. You sit down at the edge of the water and you watch the bathers. The women come down, wrapped in long bath robes, which they throw off daintily when they reach the foamy edge of the rippling waves; and they run into the water with a rapid little step, stopping from time to time for a delightful little thrill from the cold water, a short gasp.

"Very few stand the test of the bath. It is there that they can be judged, from the ankle to the throat. Especially on leaving the water are the defects revealed, although water is a powerful aid to flabby skin.

"The first time that I saw this young woman in the water, I was delighted, entranced. She stood the test well. There are faces whose charms appeal to you at first glance and delight you instantly. You seem to have found the woman whom you were born to love. I had that feeling and that shock.

"I was introduced, and was soon smitten worse than I had ever been before. My heart longed for her. It is a terrible yet delightful thing thus to be dominated by a young woman. It is almost torture, and yet infinite delight. Her look, her smile, her hair fluttering in the wind, the little lines of her face, the slightest movement of her features, delighted me, upset me, entranced me. She had captured me, body and soul, by her gestures, her manners, even by her clothes, which seemed to take on a peculiar charm as soon as she wore them. I grew tender at the sight of her veil on some piece of furniture, her gloves thrown on a chair. Her gowns seemed to me inimitable. Nobody had hats like hers.

"She was married, but her husband came only on Saturday, and left on Monday. I didn't cencern myself about him, anyhow. I wasn't jealous of him, I don't know why; never did a creature seem to me to be of less importance in life, to attract my attention less than this man.

"But she! how I loved her! How beautiful, graceful and young she was! She was youth, elegance, freshness itself! Never before had I felt so strongly what a pretty, distinguished, delicate, charming, graceful being woman is. Never before had I appreciated the seductive beauty to be found in the curve of a cheek, the movement of a lip, the pinkness of an ear, the shape of that foolish organ called the nose.

"This lasted three months; then I left for America, overwhelmed with sadness. But her memory remained in me, persistent, triumphant. From far away I was as much hers as I had been when she was near me. Years passed by, and I did not forget her. The charming image of her person was ever before my eyes and in my heart. And my love remained true to her, a quiet tenderness now, something like the beloved memory of the most beautiful and the most enchanting thing I had ever met in my life.

"Twelve years are not much in a lifetime! One does not feel them slip by. The years follow each other gently and quickly, slowly yet rapidly, each one is long and yet so soon over! They add up so rapidly, they leave so few traces behind them, they disappear so completely, that, when one turns round to look back over bygone years, one sees nothing and yet one does not understand how one happens to be so old. It seemed to me, really, that hardly a few months separated me from that charming season on the sands of Etretat.

"Last spring I went to dine with some friends at Maisons-Laffitte.

"Just as the train was leaving, a big, fat lady, escorted by four little girls, got into my car. I hardly looked at this mother hen, very big, very round, with a face as full as the moon framed in an enormous, beribboned hat.

"She was puffing, out of breath from having been forced to walk quickly. The children began to chatter. I unfolded my paper and began to read.

"We had just passed Asnieres, when my neighbor suddenly turned to me and said:

"'Excuse me, sir, but are you not Monsieur Garnier?'

"'Yes, madame.'

"Then she began to laugh, the pleased laugh of a good woman; and yet it was sad.

"'You do not seem to recognize me.'

"I hesitated. It seemed to me that I had seen that face somewhere; but where? when? I answered:

"'Yes — and no. I certainly know you, and yet I cannot recall your name.'

"She blushed a little:

“‘Madame Julie Lefevre.’

“Never had I received such a shock. In a second it seemed to me as though it were all over with me! I felt that a veil had been torn from my eyes and that I was going to make a horrible and heartrending discovery.

“So that was she! That big, fat, common woman, she! She had become the mother of these four girls since I had last her. And these little beings surprised me as much as their mother. They were part of her; they were big girls, and already had a place in life. Whereas she no longer counted, she, that marvel of dainty and charming gracefulness. It seemed to me that I had seen her but yesterday, and this is how I found her again! Was it possible? A poignant grief seized my heart; and also a revolt against nature herself, an unreasoning indignation against this brutal, infarious act of destruction.

“I looked at her, bewildered. Then I took her hand in mine, and tears came to my eyes. I wept for her lost youth. For I did not know this fat lady.

“She was also excited, and stammered:

“‘I am greatly changed, am I not? What can you expect — everything has its time! You see, I have become a mother, nothing but a good mother. Farewell to the rest, that is over. Oh! I never expected you to recognize me if we met. You, too, have changed. It took me quite a while to be sure that I was not mistaken. Your hair is all white. Just think! Twelve years ago! Twelve years! My oldest girl is already ten.’

“I looked at the child. And I recognized in her something of her mother’s old charm, but something as yet unformed, something which promised for the future. And life seemed to me as swift as a passing train.

“We had reached. Maisons-Laffitte. I kissed my old friend’s hand. I had found nothing utter but the most commonplace remarks. I was too much upset to talk.

“At night, alone, at home, I stood in front of the mirror for a long time, a very long time. And I finally remembered what I had been, finally saw in my mind’s eye my brown mustache, my black hair and the youthful expression of my face. Now I was old. Farewell!”

THE WOLF

This is what the old Marquis d’Arville told us after St. Hubert’s dinner at the house of the Baron des Ravels.

We had killed a stag that day. The marquis was the only one of the guests who had not taken part in this chase. He never hunted.

During that long repast we had talked about hardly anything but the slaughter of animals. The ladies themselves were interested in bloody and exaggerated tales, and the orators imitated the attacks and the combats of men against beasts, raised their arms, romanced in a thundering voice.

M. d Arville talked well, in a certain flowery, high-sounding, but effective style. He must have told this story frequently, for he told it fluently, never hesitating for words, choosing them with skill to make his description vivid.

Gentlemen, I have never hunted, neither did my father, nor my grandfather, nor my great-grandfather. This last was the son of a man who hunted more than all of you put together. He died in 1764. I will tell you the story of his death.

His name was Jean. He was married, father of that child who became my great-grandfather, and he lived with his younger brother, Francois d’Arville, in our castle in Lorraine, in the midst of the forest.

Francois d’Arville had remained a bachelor for love of the chase.

They both hunted from one end of the year to the other, without stopping and seemingly without fatigue. They loved only hunting, understood nothing else, talked only of that, lived only for that.

They had at heart that one passion, which was terrible and inexorable. It consumed them, had completely absorbed them, leaving room for no other thought.

They had given orders that they should not be interrupted in the chase for any reason whatever. My great-grandfather was born while his father was following a fox, and Jean d'Arville did not stop the chase, but exclaimed: "The deuce! The rascal might have waited till after the view — halloo!"

His brother Franqois was still more infatuated. On rising he went to see the dogs, then the horses, then he shot little birds about the castle until the time came to hunt some large game.

In the countryside they were called M. le Marquis and M. le Cadet, the nobles then not being at all like the chance nobility of our time, which wishes to establish an hereditary hierarchy in titles; for the son of a marquis is no more a count, nor the son of a viscount a baron, than a son of a general is a colonel by birth. But the contemptible vanity of today finds profit in that arrangement.

My ancestors were unusually tall, bony, hairy, violent and vigorous. The younger, still taller than the older, had a voice so strong that, according to a legend of which he was proud, all the leaves of the forest shook when he shouted.

When they were both mounted to set out hunting, it must have been a superb sight to see those two giants straddling their huge horses.

Now, toward the midwinter of that year, 1764, the frosts were excessive, and the wolves became ferocious.

They even attacked belated peasants, roamed at night outside the houses, howled from sunset to sunrise, and robbed the stables.

And soon a rumor began to circulate. People talked of a colossal wolf with gray fur, almost white, who had eaten two children, gnawed off a woman's arm, strangled all the watch dogs in the district, and even come without fear into the farmyards. The people in the houses affirmed that they had felt his breath, and that it made the flame of the lights flicker. And soon a panic ran through all the province. No one dared go out any more after nightfall. The darkness seemed haunted by the image of the beast.

The brothers d'Arville determined to find and kill him, and several times they brought together all the gentlemen of the country to a great hunt.

They beat the forests and searched the coverts in vain; they never met him. They killed wolves, but not that one. And every night after a battue the beast, as if to avenge himself, attacked some traveller or killed some one's cattle, always far from the place where they had looked for him.

Finally, one night he stole into the pigpen of the Chateau d'Arville and ate the two fattest pigs.

The brothers were roused to anger, considering this attack as a direct insult and a defiance. They took their strong bloodhounds, used to pursue dangerous animals, and they set off to hunt, their hearts filled with rage.

From dawn until the hour when the empurpled sun descended behind the great naked trees, they beat the woods without finding anything.

At last, furious and disgusted, both were returning, walking their horses along a lane bordered with hedges, and they marvelled that their skill as huntsmen should be baffled by this wolf, and they were suddenly seized with a mysterious fear.

The elder said:

“That beast is not an ordinary one. You would say it had a mind like a man.”

The younger answered:

“Perhaps we should have a bullet blessed by our cousin, the bishop, or pray some priest to pronounce the words which are needed.”

Then they were silent.

Jean continued:

“Look how red the sun is. The great wolf will do some harm to-night.”

He had hardly finished speaking when his horse reared; that of Franqois began to kick. A large thicket covered with dead leaves opened before them, and a mammoth beast, entirely gray, jumped up and ran off through the wood.

Both uttered a kind of grunt of joy, and bending over the necks of their heavy horses, they threw them forward with an impulse from all their body, hurling them on at such a pace, urging them, hurrying them away, exciting them so with voice and with gesture and with spur that the experienced riders seemed to be carrying the heavy beasts between 4 their thighs and to bear them off as if they were flying.

Thus they went, plunging through the thickets, dashing across the beds of streams, climbing the hillsides, descending the gorges, and blowing the horn as loud as they could to attract their people and the dogs.

And now, suddenly, in that mad race, my ancestor struck his forehead against an enormous branch which split his skull; and he fell dead on the ground, while his frightened horse took himself off, disappearing in the gloom which enveloped the woods.

The younger d’Arville stopped quick, leaped to the earth, seized his brother in his arms, and saw that the brains were escaping from the wound with the blood.

Then he sat down beside the body, rested the head, disfigured and red, on his knees, and waited, regarding the immobile face of his elder brother. Little by little a fear possessed him, a strange fear which he had never felt before, the fear of the dark, the fear of loneliness, the fear of the deserted wood, and the fear also of the weird wolf who had just killed his brother to avenge himself upon them both.

The gloom thickened; the acute cold made the trees crack. Francois got up, shivering, unable to remain there longer, feeling himself growing faint. Nothing was to be heard, neither the voice of the dogs nor the sound of the horns-all was silent along the invisible horizon; and this mournful silence of the frozen night had something about it terrific and strange.

He seized in his immense hands the great body of Jean, straightened it, and laid it across the saddle to carry it back to the chateau; then he went on his way softly, his mind troubled as if he were in a stupor, pursued by horrible and fear-giving images.

And all at once, in the growing darkness a great shape crossed his path. It was the beast. A shock of terror shook the hunter; something cold, like a drop of water, seemed to glide down his back, and, like a monk haunted of the devil, he made a great sign of the cross, dismayed at this abrupt return of the horrible prowler. But his eyes fell again on the inert body before him, and passing abruptly from fear to anger, he shook with an indescribable rage.

Then he spurred his horse and rushed after the wolf.

He followed it through the copses, the ravines, and the tall trees, traversing woods which he no longer recognized, his eyes fixed on the white speck which fled before him through the night.

His horse also seemed animated by a force and strength hitherto unknown. It galloped straight ahead with outstretched neck, striking against trees, and rocks, the head and the feet of the dead man thrown across the saddle. The limbs tore out his hair; the brow, beating the huge trunks, spattered them with blood; the spurs tore their ragged coats of bark. Suddenly the beast and the horseman issued from the forest and rushed into a valley, just as the moon appeared above the mountains. The valley here was stony, inclosed by enormous rocks.

Francois then uttered a yell of joy which the echoes repeated like a peal of thunder, and he leaped from his horse, his cutlass in his hand.

The beast, with bristling hair, the back arched, awaited him, its eyes gleaming like two stars. But, before beginning battle, the strong hunter, seizing his brother, seated him on a rock, and, placing stones under his head, which was no more than a mass of blood, he shouted in the ears as if he was talking to a deaf man: “Look, Jean; look at this!”

Then he attacked the monster. He felt himself strong enough to overturn a mountain, to bruise stones in his hands. The beast tried to bite him, aiming for his stomach; but he had seized the fierce animal by the neck, without even using his weapon, and he strangled it gently, listening to the cessation of breathing in its throat and the beatings of its heart. He laughed, wild with joy, pressing closer and closer his formidable embrace, crying in a delirium of joy, “Look, Jean, look!” All resistance ceased; the body of the wolf became limp. He was dead.

Franqois took him up in his arms and carried him to the feet of the elder brother, where he laid him, repeating, in a tender voice: “There, there, there, my little Jean, see him!”

Then he replaced on the saddle the two bodies, one upon the other, and rode away.

He returned to the chateau, laughing and crying, like Gargantua at the birth of Pantagruel, uttering shouts of triumph, and boisterous with joy as he related the death of the beast, and grieving and tearing his beard in telling of that of his brother.

And often, later, when he talked again of that day, he would say, with tears in his eyes: “If only poor Jean could have seen me strangle the beast, he would have died content, that I am sure!”

The widow of my ancestor inspired her orphan son with that horror of the chase which has transmitted itself from father to son as far down as myself.

The Marquis d’Arville was silent. Some one asked:

“That story is a legend, isn’t it?”

And the story teller answered:

“I swear to you that it is true from beginning to end.”

Then a lady declared, in a little, soft voice

“All the same, it is fine to have passions like that.”

THE INN

Resembling in appearance all the wooden hostelries of the High Alps situated at the foot of glaciers in the barren rocky gorges that intersect the summits of the mountains, the Inn of Schwarenbach serves as a resting place for travellers crossing the Gemini Pass.

It remains open for six months in the year and is inhabited by the family of Jean Hauser; then, as soon as the snow begins to fall and to fill the valley so as to make the road down to Loeche impassable, the father and his three sons go away and leave the house in charge of the old guide, Gaspard Hari, with the young guide, Ulrich Kunsi, and Sam, the great mountain dog.

The two men and the dog remain till the spring in their snowy prison, with nothing before their eyes except the immense white slopes of the Balmhorn, surrounded by light, glistening summits, and are shut in, blocked up and buried by the snow which rises around them and which envelops, binds and crushes the little house, which lies piled on the roof, covering the windows and blocking up the door.

It was the day on which the Hauser family were going to return to Loeche, as winter was approaching, and the descent was becoming dangerous. Three mules started first, laden with baggage and led by the three sons. Then the mother, Jeanne Hauser, and her daughter Louise mounted a fourth mule and set off in their turn and the father followed them, accompanied by the two men in charge, who were to escort the family as far as the brow of the descent. First of all they passed round the small lake, which was now frozen over, at the bottom of the mass of rocks which stretched in front of the inn, and then they followed the valley, which was dominated on all sides by the snow-covered summits.

A ray of sunlight fell into that little white, glistening, frozen desert and illuminated it with a cold and dazzling flame. No living thing appeared among this ocean of mountains. There was no motion in this immeasurable solitude and no noise disturbed the profound silence.

By degrees the young guide, Ulrich Kunsi, a tall, long-legged Swiss, left old man Hauser and old Gaspard behind, in order to catch up the mule which bore the two women. The younger one looked at him as he approached and appeared to be calling him with her sad eyes. She was a young, fairhaired little peasant girl, whose milk-white cheeks and pale hair looked as if they had lost their color by their long abode amid the ice. When he had got up to the animal she was riding he put his hand on the crupper and relaxed his speed. Mother Hauser began to talk to him, enumerating with the minutest details all that he would have to attend to during the winter. It was the first time that he was going to stay up there, while old Hari had already spent fourteen winters amid the snow, at the inn of Schwarenbach.

Ulrich Kunsi listened, without appearing to understand and looked incessantly at the girl. From time to time he replied: “Yes, Madame Hauser,” but his thoughts seemed far away and his calm features remained unmoved.

They reached Lake Daube, whose broad, frozen surface extended to the end of the valley. On the right one saw the black, pointed, rocky summits of the Daubenhorn beside the enormous moraines of the Lommern glacier, above which rose the Wildstrubel. As they approached the Gemmi pass, where the descent of Loeche begins, they suddenly beheld the immense horizon of the Alps of the Valais, from which the broad, deep valley of the Rhone separated them.

In the distance there was a group of white, unequal, flat, or pointed mountain summits, which glistened in the sun; the Mischabel with its two peaks, the huge group of the Weisshorn, the heavy Brunegghorn, the lofty and formidable pyramid of Mount Cervin, that slayer of men, and the Dent-Blanche, that monstrous coquette.

Then beneath them, in a tremendous hole, at the bottom of a terrific abyss, they perceived Loeche, where houses looked as grains of sand which had been thrown into that enormous crevice that is ended and closed by the Gemmi and which opens, down below, on the Rhone.

The mule stopped at the edge of the path, which winds and turns continually, doubling backward, then, fantastically and strangely, along the side of the mountain as far as the almost invisible little village at its feet. The women jumped into the snow and the two old men joined them.

“Well,” father Hauser said, “good-by, and keep up your spirits till next year, my friends,” and old Hari replied: “Till next year.”

They embraced each other and then Madame Hauser in her turn offered her cheek, and the girl did the same.

When Ulrich Kunsi’s turn came, he whispered in Louise’s ear, “Do not forget those up yonder,” and she replied, “No,” in such a low voice that he guessed what she had said without hearing it. “Well, adieu,” Jean Hauser repeated, “and don’t fall ill.” And going before the two women, he commenced the descent, and soon all three disappeared at the first turn in the road, while the two men returned to the inn at Schwarenbach.

They walked slowly, side by side, without speaking. It was over, and they would be alone together for four or five months. Then Gaspard Hari began to relate his life last winter. He had remained with Michael Canol, who was too old now to stand it, for an accident might happen during that long solitude. They had not been dull, however; the only thing was to make up one’s mind to it from the first, and in the end one would find plenty of distraction, games and other means of whiling away the time.

Ulrich Kunsi listened to him with his eyes on the ground, for in his thoughts he was following those who were descending to the village. They soon came in sight of the inn, which was, however, scarcely visible, so small did it look, a black speck at the foot of that enormous billow of snow, and when they opened the door Sam, the great curly dog, began to romp round them.

“Come, my boy,” old Gaspard said, “we have no women now, so we must get our own dinner ready. Go and peel the potatoes.” And they both sat down on wooden stools and began to prepare the soup.

The next morning seemed very long to Kunsi. Old Hari smoked and spat on the hearth, while the young man looked out of the window at the snow-covered mountain opposite the house.

In the afternoon he went out, and going over yesterday’s ground again, he looked for the traces of the mule that had carried the two women. Then when he had reached the Gemmi Pass, he laid himself down on his stomach and looked at Loeche.

The village, in its rocky pit, was not yet buried under the snow, from which it was sheltered by the pine woods which protected it on all sides. Its low houses looked like paving stones in a large meadow from above. Hauser’s little daughter was there now in one of those gray-colored houses.

In which? Ulrich Kunsi was too far away to be able to make them out separately. How he would have liked to go down while he was yet able!

But the sun had disappeared behind the lofty crest of the Wildstrubel and the young man returned to the chalet. Daddy Hari was smoking, and when he saw his mate come in he proposed a game of cards to him, and they sat down opposite each other, on either side of the table. They played for a long time a simple game called brisque and then they had supper and went to bed.

The following days were like the first, bright and cold, without any fresh snow. Old Gaspard spent his afternoons in watching the eagles and other rare birds which ventured on those frozen heights, while Ulrich returned regularly to the Gemmi Pass to look at the village. Then they played cards, dice or dominoes and lost and won a trifle, just to create an interest in the game.

One morning Hari, who was up first, called his companion. A moving, deep and light cloud of white spray was falling on them noiselessly and was by degrees burying them under a thick, heavy coverlet of foam. That lasted four days and four nights. It was necessary to free the door and the windows, to dig out a passage and to cut steps to get over this frozen powder, which a twelve hours' frost had made as hard as the granite of the moraines.

They lived like prisoners and did not venture outside their abode. They had divided their duties, which they performed regularly. Ulrich Kunsi undertook the scouring, washing and everything that belonged to cleanliness. He also chopped up the wood while Gaspard Hari did the cooking and attended to the fire. Their regular and monotonous work was interrupted by long games at cards or dice, and they never quarrelled, but were always calm and placid. They were never seen impatient or ill-humored, nor did they ever use hard words, for they had laid in a stock of patience for their wintering on the top of the mountain.

Sometimes old Gaspard took his rifle and went after chamois, and occasionally he killed one. Then there was a feast in the inn at Schwarenbach and they revelled in fresh meat. One morning he went out as usual. The thermometer outside marked eighteen degrees of frost, and as the sun had not yet risen, the hunter hoped to surprise the animals at the approaches to the Wildstrubel, and Ulrich, being alone, remained in bed until ten o'clock. He was of a sleepy nature, but he would not have dared to give way like that to his inclination in the presence of the old guide, who was ever an early riser. He breakfasted leisurely with Sam, who also spent his days and nights in sleeping in front of the fire; then he felt low-spirited and even frightened at the solitude, and was-seized by a longing for his daily game of cards, as one is by the craving of a confirmed habit, and so he went out to meet his companion, who was to return at four o'clock.

The snow had levelled the whole deep valley, filled up the crevasses, obliterated all signs of the two lakes and covered the rocks, so that between the high summits there was nothing but an immense, white, regular, dazzling and frozen surface. For three weeks Ulrich had not been to the edge of the precipice from which he had looked down on the village, and he wanted to go there before climbing the slopes which led to Wildstrubel. Loeche was now also covered by the snow and the houses could scarcely be distinguished, covered as they were by that white cloak.

Then, turning to the right, he reached the Loemmern glacier. He went along with a mountaineer's long strides, striking the snow, which was as hard as a rock, with his iron-pointed stick, and with his piercing eyes he looked for the little black, moving speck in the distance, on that enormous, white expanse.

When he reached the end of the glacier he stopped and asked himself whether the old man had taken that road, and then he began to walk along the moraines with rapid and uneasy steps. The day was declining, the snow was assuming a rosy tint, and a dry, frozen wind blew in rough gusts over its crystal surface. Ulrich uttered a long, shrill, vibrating call. His voice sped through the deathlike silence in which the mountains were sleeping; it reached the distance, across profound and motionless waves of glacial foam, like the cry of a bird across the waves of the sea. Then it died away and nothing answered him.

He began to walk again. The sun had sunk yonder behind the mountain tops, which were still purple with the reflection from the sky, but the depths of the valley were becoming gray, and suddenly the young man felt frightened. It seemed to him as if the silence, the cold, the solitude, the winter death of these mountains were taking possession of him, were going to stop and to freeze his blood, to make his limbs grow stiff and to turn him into a motionless and frozen object, and he set off running, fleeing toward his dwelling. The old man, he thought, would have returned during his absence. He had taken another road; he would, no doubt, be sitting before the fire, with a dead chamois at his feet. He soon came in sight of the inn, but no smoke rose from it. Ulrich walked faster and opened the door. Sam ran up to him to greet him, but Gaspard Hari had not returned. Kunsi, in his alarm, turned round suddenly, as if he had expected to find his comrade hidden in a corner. Then he relighted the fire and made the soup, hoping every moment to see the old man come in. From time to time he went out to see if he were not coming. It was quite night now, that wan, livid night of the mountains, lighted by a thin, yellow crescent moon, just disappearing behind the mountain tops.

Then the young man went in and sat down to warm his hands and feet, while he pictured to himself every possible accident. Gaspard might have broken a leg, have fallen into a crevasse, taken a false step and dislocated his ankle. And, perhaps, he was lying on the snow, overcome and stiff with the cold, in agony of mind, lost and, perhaps, shouting for help, calling with all his might in the silence of the night.. But where? The mountain was so vast, so rugged, so dangerous in places, especially at that time of the year, that it would have required ten or twenty guides to walk for a week in all directions to find a man in that immense space. Ulrich Kunsi, however, made up his mind to set out with Sam if Gaspard did not return by one in the morning, and he made his preparations.

He put provisions for two days into a bag, took his steel climbing iron, tied a long, thin, strong rope round his waist, and looked to see that his iron-shod stick and his axe, which served to cut steps in the ice, were in order. Then he waited. The fire was burning on the hearth, the great dog was snoring in front of it, and the clock was ticking, as regularly as a heart beating, in its resounding wooden case. He waited, with his ears on the alert for distant sounds, and he shivered when the wind blew against the roof and the walls. It struck twelve and he trembled: Then, frightened and shivering, he put some water on the fire, so that he might have some hot coffee before starting, and when the clock struck one he got up, woke Sam, opened the door and went off in the direction of the Wildstrubel. For five hours he mounted, scaling the rocks by means of his climbing irons, cutting into the ice, advancing continually, and occasionally hauling up the dog, who remained below at the foot of some slope that was too steep for him, by means of the rope. It was about six o’clock when he reached one of the summits to which old Gaspard often came after chamois, and he waited till it should be daylight.

The sky was growing pale overhead, and a strange light, springing nobody could tell whence, suddenly illuminated the immense ocean of pale mountain summits, which extended for a hundred leagues around him. One might have said that this vague brightness arose from the snow itself and spread abroad in space. By degrees the highest distant summits assumed a delicate, pink flesh color, and the red sun appeared behind the ponderous giants of the Bernese Alps.

Ulrich Kunsi set off again, walking like a hunter, bent over, looking for tracks, and saying to his dog: “Seek, old fellow, seek!”

He was descending the mountain now, scanning the depths closely, and from time to time shouting, uttering aloud, prolonged cry, which soon died away in that silent vastness. Then he put his ear to the ground to listen. He thought he could distinguish a voice, and he began to run and shouted again, but he heard nothing more and sat down, exhausted and in despair. Toward midday he breakfasted and gave Sam, who was as tired as himself, something to eat also, and then he recommenced his search.

When evening came he was still walking, and he had walked more than thirty miles over the mountains. As he was too far away to return home and too tired to drag himself along any further, he dug a hole in the snow and crouched in it with his dog under a blanket which he had brought with him. And the man and the dog lay side by side, trying to keep warm, but frozen to the marrow nevertheless. Ulrich scarcely slept, his mind haunted by visions and his limbs shaking with cold.

Day was breaking when he got up. His legs were as stiff as iron bars and his spirits so low that he was ready to cry with anguish, while his heart was beating so that he almost fell over with agitation, when he thought he heard a noise.

Suddenly he imagined that he also was going to die of cold in the midst of this vast solitude, and the terror of such a death roused his energies and gave him renewed vigor. He was descending toward the inn, falling down and getting up again, and followed at a distance by Sam, who was limping on three legs, and they did not reach Schwarenbach until four o’clock in the afternoon. The house was empty and the young man made a fire, had something to eat and went to sleep, so worn out that he did not think of anything more.

He slept for a long time, for a very long time, an irresistible sleep. But suddenly a voice, a cry, a name, “Ulrich!” aroused him from his profound torpor and made him sit up in bed. Had he been dreaming? Was it one of those strange appeals which cross the dreams of disquieted minds? No, he heard it still, that reverberating cry-which had entered his ears and remained in his flesh-to the tips of his sinewy fingers. Certainly somebody had cried out and called “Ulrich!” There was somebody there near the house, there could be no doubt of that, and he opened the door and shouted, “Is it you, Gaspard?” with all the strength of his lungs. But there was no reply, no murmur, no groan, nothing. It was quite dark and the snow looked wan.

The wind had risen, that icy wind that cracks the rocks and leaves nothing alive on those deserted heights, and it came in sudden gusts, which were more parching and more deadly than the burning wind of the desert, and again Ulrich shouted: “Gaspard! Gaspard! Gaspard.” And then he waited again. Everything was silent on the mountain.

Then he shook with terror and with a bound he was inside the inn, when he shut and bolted the door, and then he fell into a chair trembling all over, for he felt certain that his comrade had called him at the moment he was expiring.

He was sure of that, as sure as one is of being alive or of eating a piece of bread. Old Gaspard Hari had been dying for two days and three nights somewhere, in some hole, in one of those deep, untrodden ravines whose whiteness is more sinister than subterranean darkness. He had been dying for two days and three nights and he had just then died, thinking of his comrade. His soul, almost before it was released, had taken its flight to the inn where Ulrich was sleeping, and it had called him by that terrible and mysterious power which the spirits of the dead have to haunt the living. That voiceless soul had cried to the worn-out soul of the sleeper; it had uttered its last farewell, or its reproach, or its curse on the man who had not searched carefully enough.

And Ulrich felt that it was there, quite close to him, behind the wall, behind the door which he had just fastened. It was wandering about, like a night bird which lightly touches a lighted window with his wings, and the terrified young man was ready to scream with horror. He wanted to run away, but did not dare to go out; he did not dare, and he should never dare to do it in the future, for that phantom would remain there day and night, round the inn, as long as the old man’s body was not recovered and had not been deposited in the consecrated earth of a churchyard.

When it was daylight Kunsi recovered some of his courage at the return of the bright sun. He prepared his meal, gave his dog some food and then remained motionless on a chair, tortured at heart as he thought of the old man lying on the snow, and then, as soon as night once more covered the mountains, new terrors assailed him. He now walked up and down the dark kitchen, which was scarcely lighted by the flame of one candle, and he walked from one end of it to the other with great strides, listening, listening whether the terrible cry of the other night would again break the dreary silence outside. He felt himself alone, unhappy man, as no man had ever been alone before! He was alone in this immense desert of Snow, alone five thousand feet above the inhabited earth, above human habitation, above that stirring, noisy, palpitating life, alone under an icy sky! A mad longing impelled him to run away, no matter where, to get down to Loeche by flinging himself over the precipice; but he did not even dare to open the door, as he felt sure that the other, the dead man, would bar his road, so that he might not be obliged to remain up there alone:

Toward midnight, tired with walking, worn out by grief and fear, he at last fell into a doze in his chair, for he was afraid of his bed as one is of a haunted spot. But suddenly the strident cry of the other evening pierced his ears, and it was so shrill that Ulrich stretched out his arms to repulse the ghost, and he fell backward with his chair.

Sam, who was awakened by the noise, began to howl as frightened dogs do howl, and he walked all about the house trying to find out where the danger came from. When he got to the door, he sniffed beneath it, smelling vigorously, with his coat bristling and his tail stiff, while he growled angrily. Kunsi, who was terrified, jumped up, and, holding his chair by one leg, he cried: “Don’t come in, don’t come in, or I shall kill you.” And the dog, excited by this threat, barked angrily at that invisible enemy who defied his master’s voice. By degrees, however, he quieted down and came back and stretched himself in front of the fire, but he was uneasy and kept his head up and growled between his teeth.

Ulrich, in turn, recovered his senses, but as he felt faint with terror, he went and got a bottle of brandy out of the sideboard, and he drank off several glasses, one after anther, at a gulp. His ideas became vague, his courage revived and a feverish glow ran through his veins.

He ate scarcely anything the next day and limited himself to alcohol, and so he lived for several days, like a drunken brute. As soon as he thought of

Gaspard Hari, he began to drink again, and went on drinking until he fell to the ground, overcome by intoxication. And there he remained lying on his face, dead drunk, his limbs benumbed, and snoring loudly. But scarcely had he digested the maddening and burning liquor than the same cry, “Ulrich!” woke him like a bullet piercing his brain, and he got up, still staggering, stretching out his hands to save himself from falling, and calling to Sam to help him. And the dog, who appeared to be going mad like his master, rushed to the door, scratched it with his claws and gnawed it with his long white teeth, while the young man, with his head thrown back drank the brandy in draughts, as if it had been cold water, so that it might by and by send his thoughts, his frantic terror, and his memory to sleep again.

In three weeks he had consumed all his stock of ardent spirits. But his continual drunkenness only lulled his terror, which awoke more furiously than ever as soon as it was impossible for him to calm it. His fixed idea then, which had been intensified by a month of drunkenness, and which was continually increasing in his absolute solitude, penetrated him like a gimlet. He now walked about the house like a wild beast in its cage, putting his ear to the door to listen if the other were there and defying him through the wall. Then, as soon as he dozed, overcome by fatigue, he heard the voice which made him leap to his feet.

At last one night, as cowards do when driven to extremities, he sprang to the door and opened it, to see who was calling him and to force him to keep quiet, but such a gust of cold wind blew into his face that it chilled him to the bone, and he closed and bolted the door again immediately, without noticing that Sam had rushed out. Then, as he was shivering with cold, he threw some wood on the fire and sat down in front of it to warm himself, but suddenly he started, for somebody was scratching at the wall and crying. In desperation he called out: “Go away!” but was answered by another long, sorrowful wail.

Then all his remaining senses forsook him from sheer fright. He repeated: “Go away!” and turned round to try to find some corner in which to hide, while the other person went round the house still crying and rubbing against the wall. Ulrich went to the oak sideboard, which was full of plates and dishes and of provisions, and lifting it up with superhuman strength, he dragged it to the door, so as to form a barricade. Then piling up all the rest of the furniture, the mattresses, palliasses and chairs, he stopped up the windows as one does when assailed by an enemy.

But the person outside now uttered long, plaintive, mournful groans, to which the young man replied by similar groans, and thus days and nights passed without their ceasing to howl at each other. The one was continually walking round the house and scraped the walls with his nails so vigorously that it seemed as if he wished to destroy them, while the other, inside, followed all his movements, stooping down and holding his ear to the walls and replying to all his appeals with terrible cries. One evening, however, Ulrich heard nothing more, and he sat down, so overcome by fatigue, that he went to sleep immediately and awoke in the morning without a thought, without any recollection of what had happened, just as if his head had been emptied during his heavy sleep, but he felt hungry, and he ate.

The winter was over and the Gemmi Pass was practicable again, so the Hauser family started off to return to their inn. As soon as they had reached the top of the ascent the women mounted their mule and spoke about the two men whom they would meet again shortly. They were, indeed, rather surprised that neither of them had come down a few days before, as soon as the road was open, in order to tell them all about their long winter sojourn. At last, however, they saw the inn, still covered with snow, like a quilt. The door and the window were closed, but a little smoke was coming out of the chimney, which reassured old Hauser. On going up to the door, however, he saw the skeleton of an animal which had been torn to pieces by the eagles, a large skeleton lying on its side.

They all looked close at it and the mother said:

“That must be Sam,” and then she shouted: “Hi, Gaspard!” A cry from the interior of the house answered her and a sharp cry that one might have thought some animal had uttered it. Old Hauser repeated, “Hi, Gaspard!” and they heard another cry similar to the first.

Then the three men, the father and the two sons, tried to open the door, but it resisted their efforts. From the empty cow-stall they took a beam to serve as a battering-ram and hurled it against the door with all their might. The wood gave way and the boards flew into splinters. Then the house was shaken by a loud voice, and inside, behind the side board which was overturned, they saw a man standing upright, with his hair falling on his shoulders and a beard descending to his breast, with shining eyes, and nothing but rags to cover him. They did not recognize him, but Louise Hauser exclaimed:

"It is Ulrich, mother." And her mother declared that it was Ulrich, although his hair was white.

He allowed them to go up to him and to touch him, but he did not reply to any of their questions, and they were obliged to take him to Loeche, where the doctors found that he was mad, and nobody ever found out what had become of his companion.

Little Louise Hauser nearly died that summer of decline, which the physicians attributed to the cold air of the mountains.

MONSIEUR PARENT

George's father was sitting in an iron chair, watching his little son with concentrated affection and attention, as little George piled up the sand into heaps during one of their walks. He would take up the sand with both hands, make a mound of it, and put a chestnut leaf on top. His father saw no one but him in that public park full of people.

The sun was just disappearing behind the roofs of the Rue Saint-Lazare, but still shed its rays obliquely on that little, overdressed crowd. The chestnut trees were lighted up by its yellow rays, and the three fountains before the lofty porch of the church had the appearance of liquid silver.

Monsieur Parent, accidentally looking up at the church clock, saw that he was five minutes late. He got up, took the child by the arm, shook his dress, which was covered with sand, wiped his hands, and led him in the direction of the Rue Blanche. He walked quickly, so as not to get in after his wife, and the child could not keep up with him. He took him up and carried him, though it made him pant when he had to walk up the steep street. He was a man of forty, already turning gray, and rather stout. At last he reached his house. An old servant who had brought him up, one of those trusted servants who are the tyrants of families, opened the door to him.

"Has madame come in yet?" he asked anxiously.

The servant shrugged her shoulders:

"When have you ever known madame to come home at half-past six, monsieur?"

"Very well; all the better; it will give me time to change my things, for I am very warm."

The servant looked at him with angry and contemptuous pity. "Oh, I can see that well enough," she grumbled. "You are covered with perspiration, monsieur. I suppose you walked quickly and carried the child, and only to have to wait until half-past seven, perhaps, for madame. I have made up my mind not to have dinner ready on time. I shall get it for eight o'clock, and if, you have to wait, I cannot help it; roast meat ought not to be burnt!"

Monsieur Parent pretended not to hear, but went into his own room, and as soon as he got in, locked the door, so as to be alone, quite alone. He was so used now to being abused and badly treated that he never thought himself safe except when he was locked in.

What could he do? To get rid of Julie seemed to him such a formidable thing to do that he hardly ventured to think of it, but it was just as impossible to uphold her against his wife, and before another month the situation would become unbearable between the two. He remained sitting there, with his arms hanging down, vaguely trying to discover some means to set matters straight, but without success. He said to himself: "It is lucky that I have George; without him I should-be very miserable."

Just then the clock struck seven, and he started up. Seven o'clock, and he had not even changed his clothes. Nervous and breathless, he undressed, put on a clean shirt, hastily finished his toilet, as if he had been expected in the next room for some event of extreme importance, and went into the drawing-room, happy at having nothing to fear. He glanced at the newspaper, went and looked out of the window, and then sat down again, when the door opened, and the boy came in, washed, brushed, and smiling. Parent took him up in his arms and kissed him passionately; then he tossed him into the air, and held him up to the ceiling, but soon sat down again, as he was tired with all his exertion. Then, taking George on his knee, he made him ride a-cock-horse. The child laughed and clapped his hands and shouted with pleasure, as did his father, who laughed until his big stomach shook, for it amused him almost more than it did the child.

Parent loved him with all the heart of a weak, resigned, ill-used man. He loved him with mad bursts of affection, with caresses and with all the bashful tenderness which was hidden in him, and which had never found an outlet, even at the early period of his married life, for his wife had always shown herself cold and reserved.

Just then Julie came to the door, with a pale face and glistening eyes, and said in a voice which trembled with exasperation: "It is half-past seven, monsieur."

Parent gave an uneasy and resigned look at the clock and replied: "Yes, it certainly is half-past seven."

"Well, my dinner is quite ready now."

Seeing the storm which was coming, he tried to turn it aside. “But did you not tell me when I came in that it would not be ready before eight?”

“Eight! what are you thinking about? You surely do not mean to let the child dine at eight o’clock? It would ruin his stomach. Just suppose that he only had his mother to look after him! She cares a great deal about her child. Oh, yes, we will speak about her; she is a mother! What a pity it is that there should be any mothers like her!”

Parent thought it was time to cut short a threatened scene. “Julie,” he said, “I will not allow you to speak like that of your mistress. You understand me, do you not? Do not forget it in the future.”

The old servant, who was nearly choked with surprise, turned and went out, slamming the door so violently after her that the lustres on the chandelier rattled, and for some seconds it sounded as if a number of little invisible bells were ringing in the drawing-room.

Eight o’clock struck, the door opened, and Julie came in again. She had lost her look of exasperation, but now she put on an air of cold and determined resolution, which was still more formidable.

“Monsieur,” she said, “I served your mother until the day of her death, and I have attended to you from your birth until now, and I think it may be said that I am devoted to the family.” She waited for a reply, and Parent stammered:

“Why, yes, certainly, my good Julie.”

“You know quite well,” she continued, “that I have never done anything for the sake of money, but always for your sake; that I have never deceived you nor lied to you, that you have never had to find fault with me— “

“Certainly, my good Julie.”

“Very well, then, monsieur; it cannot go on any longer like this. I have said nothing, and left you in your ignorance, out of respect and liking for you, but it is too much, and every one in the neighborhood is laughing at you. Everybody knows about it, and so I must tell you also, although I do not like to repeat it. The reason why madame comes in at any time she chooses is that she is doing abominable things.”

He seemed stupefied and not to understand, and could only stammer out:

“Hold your tongue; you know I have forbidden you — — “

But she interrupted him with irresistible resolution. “No, monsieur, I must tell you everything now. For a long time madame has been carrying on with Monsieur Limousin. I have seen them kiss scores of times behind the door. Ah! you may be sure that if Monsieur Limousin had been rich, madame would never have married Monsieur Parent. If you remember how the marriage was brought about, you would understand the matter from beginning to end."

Parent had risen, and stammered out, his face livid: "Hold your tongue — hold your tongue, or — — "

She went on, however: "No, I mean to tell you everything. She married you from interest, and she deceived you from the very first day. It was all settled between them beforehand. You need only reflect for a few moments to understand it, and then, as she was not satisfied with having married you, as she did not love you, she has made your life miserable, so miserable that it has almost broken my heart when I have seen it."

He walked up and down the room with hands clenched, repeating: "Hold your tongue — hold your tongue — — " For he could find nothing else to say. The old servant, however, would not yield; she seemed resolved on everything.

George, who had been at first astonished and then frightened at those angry voices, began to utter shrill screams, and remained behind his father, with his face puckered up and his mouth open, roaring.

His son's screams exasperated Parent, and filled him with rage and courage. He rushed at Julie with both arms raised, ready to strike her, exclaiming: "Ah! you wretch. You will drive the child out of his senses." He already had his hand on her, when she screamed in his face:

"Monsieur, you may beat me if you like, me who reared you, but that will not prevent your wife from deceiving you, or alter the fact that your child is not yours — — "

He stopped suddenly, let his arms fall, and remained standing opposite to her, so overwhelmed that he could understand nothing more.

"You need only to look at the child," she added, "to know who is its father! He is the very image of Monsieur Limousin. You need only look at his eyes and forehead. Why, a blind man could not be mistaken in him."

He had taken her by the shoulders, and was now shaking her with all his might. "Viper, viper!" he said. "Go out the room, viper! Go out, or I shall kill you! Go out! Go out!"

And with a desperate effort he threw her into the next room. She fell across the table, which was laid for dinner, breaking the glasses. Then, rising to her feet, she put the table between her master and herself. While he was pursuing her, in order to take hold of her again, she flung terrible words at him.

"You need only go out this evening after dinner, and come in again immediately, and you will see! You will see whether I have been lying! Just try it, and you will see." She had reached the kitchen door and escaped, but he ran after her, up the back stairs to her bedroom, into which she had locked herself, and knocking at the door, he said:

"You will leave my house this very instant!"

"You may be certain of that, monsieur," was her reply. "In an hour's time I shall not be here any longer."

He then went slowly downstairs again, holding on to the banister so as not to fall, and went back to the drawing-room, where little George was sitting on the floor, crying. He fell into a chair, and looked at the child with dull eyes. He understood nothing, knew nothing more; he felt dazed, stupefied, mad, as if he had just fallen on his head, and he scarcely even remembered the dreadful things the servant had told him. Then, by degrees, his mind, like muddy water, became calmer and clearer, and the abominable revelations began to work in his heart.

He was no longer thinking of George. The child was quiet now and sitting on the carpet; but, seeing that no notice was being taken of him, he began to cry. His father ran to him, took him in his arms, and covered him with kisses. His child remained to him, at any rate! What did the rest matter? He held him in his arms and pressed his lips to his light hair, and, relieved and composed, he whispered:

"George — my little George — my dear little George — — " But he suddenly remembered what Julie had said! Yes, she had said that he was Limousin's child. Oh! it could not be possible, surely. He could not believe it, could not doubt, even for a moment, that he was his own child. It was one of those low scandals which spring from servants' brains! And he repeated: "George — my dear little George." The youngster was quiet again, now that his father was fondling him.

Parent felt the warmth of the little chest penetrate through his clothes, and it filled him with love, courage, and happiness; that gentle warmth soothed him, fortified him and saved him. Then he put the small, curly head away from him a little, and looked at it affectionately, still repeating: "George! Oh, my little George!" But suddenly he thought:

"Suppose he were to resemble Limousin, after all!" He looked at him with haggard, troubled eyes, and tried to discover whether there was any likeness in his forehead, in his nose, mouth, or cheeks. His thoughts wandered as they do when a person is going mad, and his child's face changed in his eyes, and assumed a strange look and improbable resemblances.

The hall bell rang. Parent gave a bound as if a bullet had gone through him. "There she is," he said. "What shall I do?" And he ran and locked himself up in his room, to have time to bathe his eyes. But in a few moments another ring at the bell made him jump again, and then he remembered that Julie had left, without the housemaid knowing it, and so nobody would go to open the door. What was he to do? He went himself, and suddenly he felt brave, resolute, ready for dissimulation and the struggle. The terrible blow had matured him in a few moments. He wished to know the truth, he desired it with the rage of a timid man, and with the tenacity of an easy-going man who has been exasperated.

Nevertheless, he trembled. Does one know how much excited cowardice there often is in boldness? He went to the door with furtive steps, and stopped to listen; his heart beat furiously. Suddenly, however, the noise of the bell over his head startled him like an explosion. He seized the lock, turned the key, and opening the door, saw his wife and Limousin standing before him on the stairs.

With an air of astonishment, which also betrayed a little irritation, she said:

"So you open the door now? Where is Julie?"

His throat felt tight and his breathing was labored as he tried to. reply, without being able to utter a word.

"Are you dumb?" she continued. "I asked you where Julie is?"

"She — she — has — gone — — " he managed to stammer.

His wife began to get angry. "What do you mean by gone? Where has she gone? Why?"

By degrees he regained his coolness. He felt an intense hatred rise up in him for that insolent woman who was standing before him.

"Yes, she has gone altogether. I sent her away."

"You have sent away Julie? Why, you must be mad."

"Yes, I sent her away because she was insolent, and because — because she was ill-using the child."

"Julie?"

"Yes — Julie."

"What was she insolent about?"

"About you."

"About me?"

"Yes, because the dinner was burnt, and you did not come in."

"And she said — — "

"She said — offensive things about you — which I ought not — which I could not listen to — — "

"What did she, say?"

"It is no good repeating them."

"I want to hear them."

"She said it was unfortunate for a man like me to be married to a woman like you, unpunctual, careless, disorderly, a bad mother, and a bad wife."

The young woman had gone into the anteroom, followed by Limousin, who did not say a word at this unexpected condition of things. She shut the door quickly, threw her cloak on a chair, and going straight up to her husband, she stammered out:

"You say? You say? That I am — — "

Very pale and calm, he replied: "I say nothing, my dear. I am simply repeating what Julie said to me, as you wanted to know what it was, and I wish you to remark that I turned her off just on account of what she said."

She trembled with a violent longing to tear out his beard and scratch his face. In his voice and manner she felt that he was asserting his position as master. Although she had nothing to say by way of reply, she tried to assume the offensive by saying something unpleasant. "I suppose you have had dinner?" she asked.

"No, I waited for you."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "It is very stupid of you to wait after half-past seven," she said. "You might have guessed that I was detained, that I had a good many things to do, visits and shopping,"

And then, suddenly, she felt that she wanted to explain how she had spent her time, and told him in abrupt, haughty words that, having to buy some furniture in a shop a long distance off, very far off, in the Rue de Rennes, she had met Limousin at past seven o'clock on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and that then she had gone with him to have something to eat in a restaurant, as she did not like to go to one by herself, although she was faint with hunger. That was how she had dined with Limousin, if it could be called dining, for they had only some soup and half a chicken, as they were in a great hurry to get back.

Parent replied simply: "Well, you were quite right. I am not finding fault with you."

Then Limousin, who, had not spoken till then, and who had been half hidden behind Henriette, came forward and put out his hand, saying: "Are you very well?"

Parent took his hand, and shaking it gently, replied: "Yes, I am very well."

But the young woman had felt a reproach in her husband's last words. "Finding fault! Why do you speak of finding fault? One might think that you meant to imply something."

"Not at all," he replied, by way of excuse. "I simply meant that I was not at all anxious although you were late, and that I did not find fault with you for it."

She, however, took the high hand, and tried to find a pretext for a quarrel. "Although I was late? One might really think that it was one o'clock in the morning, and that I spent my nights away from home."

"Certainly not, my dear. I said late because I could find no other word. You said you should be back at half-past six, and you returned at half-past eight. That was surely being late. I understand it perfectly well. I am not at all surprised, even. But — but — I can hardly use any other word."

"But you pronounce them as if I had been out all night."

"Oh, no-oh, no!"

She saw that he would yield on every point, and she was going into her own room, when at last she noticed that George was screaming, and then she asked, with some feeling: "What is the matter with the child?"

"I told you that Julie had been rather unkind to him."

"What has the wretch been doing to him?"

"Oh nothing much. She gave him a push, and he fell down."

She wanted to see her child, and ran into the dining room, but stopped short at the sight of the table covered with spilt wine, with broken decanters and glasses and overturned saltcellars. "Who did all that mischief?" she asked.

"It was Julie, who — — " But she interrupted him furiously:

"That is too much, really! Julie speaks of me as if I were a shameless woman, beats my child, breaks my plates and dishes, turns my house upside down, and it appears that you think it all quite natural."

"Certainly not, as I have got rid of her."

"Really! You have got rid of her! But you ought to have given her in charge. In such cases, one ought to call in the Commissary of Police!"

"But — my dear — I really could not. There was no reason. It would have been very difficult — — "

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "There! you will never be anything but a poor, wretched fellow, a man without a will, without any firmness or energy. Ah! she must have said some nice things to you, your Julie, to make you turn her off like that. I should like to have been here for a minute, only for a minute." Then she opened the drawing-room door and ran to George, took him into her arms and kissed him, and said: "Georgie, what is it, my darling, my pretty one, my treasure?"

Then, suddenly turning to another idea, she said: "But the child has had no dinner? You have had nothing to eat, my pet?"

"No, mamma."

Then she again turned furiously upon her husband. "Why, you must be mad, utterly mad! It is half-past eight, and George has had no dinner!"

He excused himself as best he could, for he had nearly lost his wits through the overwhelming scene and the explanation, and felt crushed by this ruin of his life. "But, my dear, we were waiting for you, as I did not wish to dine without you. As you come home late every day, I expected you every moment."

She threw her bonnet, which she had kept on till then, into an easy-chair, and in an angry voice she said: "It is really intolerable to have to do with people who can understand nothing, who can divine nothing and do nothing by themselves. So, I suppose, if I were to come in at twelve o'clock at night, the child would have had nothing to eat? Just as if you could not have understood that, as it was after half-past seven, I was prevented from coming home, that I had met with some hindrance!"

Parent trembled, for he felt that his anger was getting the upper hand, but Limousin interposed, and turning toward the young woman, said:

"My dear friend, you, are altogether unjust. Parent could not guess that you would come here so late, as you never do so, and then, how could you expect him to get over the difficulty all by himself, after having sent away Julie?"

But Henriette was very angry, and replied:

"Well, at any rate, he must get over the difficulty himself, for I will not help him," she replied. "Let him settle it!" And she went into her own room, quite forgetting that her child had not had anything to eat.

Limousin immediately set to work to help his friend. He picked up the broken glasses which strewed the table and took them out, replaced the plates and knives and forks, and put the child into his high chair, while Parent went to look for the chambermaid to wait at table. The girl came in, in great astonishment, as she had heard nothing in George's room, where she had been working. She soon, however, brought in the soup, a burnt leg of mutton, and mashed potatoes.

Parent sat by the side of the child, very much upset and distressed at all that had happened. He gave the boy his dinner, and endeavored to eat something himself, but he could only swallow with an effort, as his throat felt paralyzed. By degrees he was seized with an insane desire to look at Limousin, who was sitting opposite to him, making bread pellets, to see whether George was like him, but he did not venture to raise his eyes for some time. At last, however, he made up his mind to do so, and gave a quick, sharp look at the face which he knew so well, although he almost fancied that he had never examined it carefully. It looked so different to what he had imagined. From time to time he looked at Limousin, trying to recognize a likeness in the smallest lines of his face, in the slightest features, and then he looked at his son, under the pretext of feeding him.

Two words were sounding in his ears: "His father! his father! his father!" They buzzed in his temples at every beat of his heart. Yes, that man, that tranquil man who was sitting on the other side of the table, was, perhaps, the father of his son, of George, of his little George. Parent left off eating; he could not swallow any more. A terrible pain, one of those attacks of pain which make men scream, roll on the ground, and bite the furniture, was tearing at his entrails, and he felt inclined to take a knife and plunge it into his stomach. He started when he heard the door open. His wife came in. "I am hungry," she said; "are not you, Limousin?"

He hesitated a little, and then said: "Yes, I am, upon my word." She had the leg of mutton brought in again. Parent asked himself "Have they had dinner? Or are they late because they have had a lovers' meeting?"

They both ate with a very good appetite. Henriette was very calm, but laughed and joked. Her husband watched her furtively. She had on a pink teagown trimmed with white lace, and her fair head, her white neck and her plump hands stood out from that coquettish and perfumed dress as though it were a sea shell edged with foam.

What fun they must be making of him, if he had been their dupe since the first day! Was it possible to make a fool of a man, of a worthy man, because his father had left him a little money? Why could one not see into people's souls? How was it that nothing revealed to upright hearts the deceits of infamous hearts? How was it that voices had the same sound for adoring as for lying? Why was a false, deceptive look the same as a sincere one? And he watched them, waiting to catch a gesture, a word, an intonation. Then suddenly he thought: "I will surprise them this evening," and he said:

"My dear, as I have dismissed Julie, I will see about getting another girl this very day. I will go at once to procure one by to-morrow morning, so I may not be in until late."

"Very well," she replied; "go. I shall not stir from here. Limousin will keep me company. We will wait for you." Then, turning to the maid, she said: "You had better put George to bed, and then you can clear away and go up to your room."

Parent had got up; he was unsteady on his legs, dazed and bewildered, and saying, "I shall see you again later on," he went out, holding on to the wall, for the floor seemed to roll like a ship. George had been carried out by his nurse, while Henriette and Limousin went into the drawing-room.

As soon as the door was shut, he said: "You must be mad, surely, to torment your husband as you do?"

She immediately turned on him: "Ah! Do you know that I think the habit you have got into lately, of looking upon Parent as a martyr, is very unpleasant?"

Limousin threw himself into an easy-chair and crossed his legs. "I am not setting him up as a martyr in the least, but I think that, situated as we are, it is ridiculous to defy this man as you do, from morning till night."

She took a cigarette from the mantelpiece, lighted it, and replied: "But I do not defy him; quite the contrary. Only he irritates me by his stupidity, and I treat him as he deserves."

Limousin continued impatiently: "What you are doing is very foolish! I am only asking you to treat your husband gently, because we both of us require him to trust us. I think that you ought to see that."

They were close together: he, tall, dark, with long whiskers and the rather vulgar manners of a good-looking man who is very well satisfied with himself; she, small, fair, and pink, a little Parisian, born in the back room of a shop, half cocotte and half bourgeoise, brought up to entice customers to the store by her glances, and married, in consequence, to a simple, unsophisticated man, who saw her outside the door every morning when he went out and every evening when he came home.

"But do you not understand; you great booby," she said, "that I hate him just because he married me, because he bought me, in fact; because everything that he says and does, everything that he thinks, acts on my nerves? He exasperates me every moment by his stupidity, which you call his kindness; by his dullness, which you call his confidence, and then, above all, because he is my husband, instead of you. I feel him between us, although he does not interfere with us much. And then — and then! No, it is, after all, too idiotic of him not to guess anything! I wish he would, at any rate, be a little jealous. There are moments when I feel inclined to say to him: 'Do you not see, you stupid creature, that Paul is my lover?'

"It is quite incomprehensible that you cannot understand how hateful he is to me, how he irritates me. You always seem to like him, and you shake hands with him cordially. Men are very extraordinary at times."

"One must know how to dissimulate, my dear."

"It is no question of dissimulation, but of feeling. One might think that, when you men deceive one another, you like each other better on that account, while we women hate a man from the moment that we have betrayed him."

"I do not see why one should hate an excellent fellow because one is friendly with his wife."

"You do not see it? You do not see it? You all of you are wanting in refinement of feeling. However, that is one of those things which one feels and cannot express. And then, moreover, one ought not. No, you would not understand; it is quite useless! You men have no delicacy of feeling."

And smiling, with the gentle contempt of an impure woman, she put both her hands on his shoulders and held up her lips to him. He stooped down and clasped her closely in his arms, and their lips met. And as they stood in front of the mantel mirror, another couple exactly like them embraced behind the clock.

They had heard nothing, neither the noise of the key nor the creaking of the door, but suddenly Henriette, with a loud cry, pushed Limousin away with both her arms, and they saw Parent looking at them, livid with rage, without his shoes on and his hat over his forehead. He looked at each, one after the other, with a quick glance of his eyes and without moving his head. He appeared beside himself. Then, without saying a word, he threw himself on Limousin, seized him as if he were going to strangle him, and flung him into the opposite corner of the room so violently that the other lost his balance, and, beating the air with his hand, struck his head violently against the wall.

When Henriette saw that her husband was going to murder her lover, she threw herself on Parent, seized him by the neck, and digging her ten delicate, rosy fingers into his neck, she squeezed him so tightly, with all the vigor of a desperate woman, that the blood spurted out under her nails, and she bit his shoulder, as if she wished to tear it with her teeth. Parent, half-strangled and choking, loosened his hold on Limousin, in order to shake off his wife, who was hanging to his neck. Putting his arms round her waist, he flung her also to the other end of the drawing-room.

Then, as his passion was short-lived, like that of most good-tempered men, and his strength was soon exhausted, he remained standing between the two, panting, worn out, not knowing what to do next. His brutal fury had expended itself in that effort, like the froth of a bottle of champagne, and his unwonted energy ended in a gasping for breath. As soon as he could speak, however, he said:

"Go away — both of you — immediately! Go away!"

Limousin remained motionless in his corner, against the wall, too startled to understand anything as yet, too frightened to move a finger; while Henriette, with her hands resting on a small, round table, her head bent forward, her hair hanging down, the bodice of her dress unfastened, waited like a wild animal which is about to spring. Parent continued in a stronger voice: "Go away immediately. Get out of the house!"

His wife, however, seeing that he had got over his first exasperation grew bolder, drew herself up, took two steps toward him, and, grown almost insolent, she said: "Have you lost your head? What is the matter with you? What is the meaning of this unjustifiable violence?"

But he turned toward her, and raising his fist to strike her, he stammered out: "Oh — oh — this is too much, too much! I heard everything!

Everything — do you understand? Everything! You wretch — you wretch! You are two wretches! Get out of the house, both of you! Immediately, or I shall kill you! Leave the house!”

She saw that it was all over, and that he knew everything; that she could not prove her innocence, and that she must comply. But all her impudence had returned to her, and her hatred for the man, which was aggravated now, drove her to audacity, made her feel the need of bravado, and of defying him, and she said in a clear voice: “Come, Limousin; as he is going to turn me out of doors, I will go to your lodgings with you.”

But Limousin did not move, and Parent, in a fresh access of rage, cried out: “Go, will you? Go, you wretches! Or else — or else — — “ He seized a chair and whirled it over his head.

Henriette walked quickly across the room, took her lover by the arm, dragged him from the wall, to which he appeared fixed, and led him toward the door, saying: “Do come, my friend — you see that the man is mad. Do come!”

As she went out she turned round to her husband, trying to think of something that she could do, something that she could invent to wound him to the heart as she left the house, and an idea struck her, one of those venomous, deadly ideas in which all a woman’s perfidy shows itself, and she said resolutely: “I am going to take my child with me.”

Parent was stupefied, and stammered: “Your — your — child? You dare to talk of your child? You venture — you venture to ask for your child — after-after — Oh, oh, that is too much! Go, you vile creature! Go!”

She went up to him again, almost smiling, almost avenged already, and defying him, standing close to him, and face to face, she said: “I want my child, and you have no right to keep him, because he is not yours — do you understand? He is not yours! He is Limousin’s!”

And Parent cried out in bewilderment: “You lie — you lie — worthless woman!”

But she continued: “You fool! Everybody knows it except you. I tell you, this is his father. You need only look at him to see it.”

Parent staggered backward, and then he suddenly turned round, took a candle, and rushed into the next room; returning almost immediately, carrying little George wrapped up in his bedclothes. The child, who had been suddenly awakened, was crying from fright. Parent threw him into his wife's arms, and then, without speaking, he pushed her roughly out toward the stairs, where Limousin was waiting, from motives of prudence.

Then he shut the door again, double-locked and bolted it, but had scarcely got back into the drawing-room when he fell to the floor at full length.

Parent lived alone, quite alone. During the five weeks that followed their separation, the feeling of surprise at his new life prevented him from thinking much. He had resumed his bachelor life, his habits of lounging, about, and took his meals at a restaurant, as he had done formerly. As he wished to avoid any scandal, he made his wife an allowance, which was arranged by their lawyers. By degrees, however, the thought of the child began to haunt him. Often, when he was at home alone at night, he suddenly thought he heard George calling out "Papa," and his heart would begin to beat, and he would get up quickly and open the door, to see whether, by chance, the child might have returned, as dogs or pigeons do. Why should a child have less instinct than an animal? On finding that he was mistaken, he would sit down in his armchair again and think of the boy. He would think of him for hours and whole days. It was not only a moral, but still more a physical obsession, a nervous longing to kiss him, to hold and fondle him, to take him on his knees and dance him. He felt the child's little arms around his neck, his little mouth pressing a kiss on his beard, his soft hair tickling his cheeks, and the remembrance of all those childish ways made him suffer as a man might for some beloved woman who has left him. Twenty or a hundred times a day he asked himself the question whether he was or was not George's father, and almost before he was in bed every night he recommenced the same series of despairing questionings.

He especially dreaded the darkness of the evening, the melancholy feeling of the twilight. Then a flood of sorrow invaded his heart, a torrent of despair which seemed to overwhelm him and drive him mad. He was as afraid of his own thoughts as men are of criminals, and he fled before them as one does from wild beasts. Above all things, he feared his empty, dark, horrible dwelling and the deserted streets, in which, here and there, a gas lamp flickered, where the isolated foot passenger whom one hears in the distance seems to be a night prowler, and makes one walk faster or slower, according to whether he is coming toward you or following you.

And in spite of himself, and by instinct, Parent went in the direction of the broad, well-lighted, populous streets. The light and the crowd attracted him, occupied his mind and distracted his thoughts, and when he was tired of walking aimlessly about among the moving crowd, when he saw the foot passengers becoming more scarce and the pavements less crowded, the fear of solitude and silence drove him into some large cafe full of drinkers and of light. He went there as flies go to a candle, and he would sit down at one of the little round tables and ask for a "bock," which he would drink slowly, feeling uneasy every time a customer got up to go. He would have liked to take him by the arm, hold him back, and beg him to stay a little longer, so much did he dread the time when the waiter should come up to him and say sharply: "Come, monsieur, it is closing time!"

He thus got into the habit of going to the beer houses, where the continual elbowing of the drinkers brings you in contact with a familiar and silent public, where the heavy clouds of tobacco smoke lull disquietude, while the heavy beer dulls the mind and calms the heart. He almost lived there. He was scarcely up before he went there to find people to distract his glances and his thoughts, and soon, as he felt too lazy to move, he took his meals there.

After every meal, during more than an hour, he sipped three or four small glasses of brandy, which stupefied him by degrees, and then his head drooped on his chest, he shut his eyes, and went to sleep. Then, awaking, he raised himself on the red velvet seat, straightened his waistcoat, pulled down his cuffs, and took up the newspapers again, though he had already seen them in the morning, and read them all through again, from beginning to end. Between four and five o'clock he went for a walk on the boulevards, to get a little fresh air, as he used to say, and then came back to the seat which had been reserved for him, and asked for his absinthe. He would talk to the regular customers whose acquaintance he had made. They discussed the news of the day and political events, and that carried him on till dinner time; and he spent the evening as he had the afternoon, until it was time to close. That was a terrible moment for him when he was obliged to go out into the dark, into his empty room full of dreadful recollections, of horrible thoughts, and of mental agony. He no longer saw any of his old friends, none of his relatives, nobody who might remind him of his past life. But as his apartments were a hell to him, he took a room in a large hotel, a good room on the ground floor, so as to see the passers-by. He was no longer alone in that great building. He felt people swarming round him, he heard voices in the adjoining rooms, and when his former sufferings tormented him too much at the sight of his bed, which was turned down, and of his solitary fireplace, he went out into the wide passages and walked up and down them like a sentinel, before all the closed doors, and looked sadly at the shoes standing in couples outside them, women's little boots by the side of men's thick ones, and he thought that, no doubt, all these people were happy, and were sleeping in their warm beds. Five years passed thus; five miserable years. But one day, when he was taking his usual walk between the Madeleine and the Rue Drouot, he suddenly saw a lady whose bearing struck him. A tall gentleman and a child were with her, and all three were walking in front of him. He asked himself where he had seen them before, when suddenly he recognized a movement of her hand; it was his wife, his wife with Limousin and his child, his little George.

His heart beat as if it would suffocate him, but he did not stop, for he wished to see them, and he followed them. They looked like a family of the better middle class. Henriette was leaning on Paul's arm, and speaking to him in a low voice, and looking at him sideways occasionally. Parent got a side view of her and recognized her pretty features, the movements of her lips, her smile, and her coaxing glances. But the child chiefly took up his attention. How tall and strong he was! Parent could not see his face, but only his long, fair curls. That tall boy with bare legs, who was walking by his mother's side like a little man, was George. He saw them suddenly, all three, as they stopped in front of a shop. Limousin had grown very gray, had aged and was thinner; his wife, on the contrary, was as young looking as ever, and had grown stouter. George he would not have recognized, he was so different from what he had been formerly.

They went on again and Parent followed them. He walked on quickly, passed them, and then turned round, so as to meet them face to face. As he passed the child he felt a mad longing to take him into his arms and run off with him, and he knocked against him as if by accident. The boy turned round and looked at the clumsy man angrily, and Parent hurried away, shocked, hurt, and pursued by that look. He went off like a thief, seized with a horrible fear lest he should have been seen and recognized by his wife and her lover. He went to his cafe without stopping, and fell breathless into his chair. That evening he drank three absinthes. For four months he felt the pain of that meeting in his heart. Every night he saw the three again, happy and tranquil, father, mother, and child walking on the boulevard before going in to dinner, and that new vision effaced the old one. It was another matter, another hallucination now, and also a fresh pain. Little George, his little George, the child he had so much loved and so often kissed, disappeared in the far distance, and he saw a new one, like a brother of the first, a little boy with bare legs, who did not know him! He suffered terribly at that thought. The child's love was dead; there was no bond between them; the child would not have held out his arms when he saw him. He had even looked at him angrily.

Then, by degrees he grew calmer, his mental torture diminished, the image that had appeared to his eyes and which haunted his nights became more indistinct and less frequent. He began once more to live nearly like everybody else, like all those idle people who drink beer off marble-topped tables and wear out their clothes on the threadbare velvet of the couches.

He grew old amid the smoke from pipes, lost his hair under the gas lights, looked upon his weekly bath, on his fortnightly visit to the barber's to have his hair cut, and on the purchase of a new coat or hat as an event. When he got to his cafe in a new hat he would look at himself in the glass for a long time before sitting down, and take it off and put it on again several times, and at last ask his friend, the lady at the bar, who was watching him with interest, whether she thought it suited him.

Two or three times a year he went to the theatre, and in the summer he sometimes spent his evenings at one of the open-air concerts in the Champs Elysees. And so the years followed each other slow, monotonous, and short, because they were quite uneventful.

He very rarely now thought of the dreadful drama which had wrecked his life; for twenty years had passed since that terrible evening. But the life he had led since then had worn him out. The landlord of his cafe would often say to him: "You ought to pull yourself together a little, Monsieur Parent; you should get some fresh air and go into the country. I assure you that you have changed very much within the last few months." And when his customer had gone out be used to say to the barmaid: "That poor Monsieur Parent is booked for another world; it is bad never to get out of Paris. Advise him to go out of town for a day occasionally; he has confidence in you. Summer will soon be here; that will put him straight."

And she, full of pity and kindness for such a regular customer, said to Parent every day: "Come, monsieur, make up your mind to get a little fresh air. It is so charming in the country when the weather is fine. Oh, if I could, I would spend my life there!"

By degrees he was seized with a vague desire to go just once and see whether it was really as pleasant there as she said, outside the walls of the great city. One morning he said to her:

“Do you know where one can get a good luncheon in the neighborhood of Paris?”

“Go to the Terrace at Saint-Germain; it is delightful there!”

He had been there formerly, just when he became engaged. He made up his mind to go there again, and he chose a Sunday, for no special reason, but merely because people generally do go out on Sundays, even when they have nothing to do all the week; and so one Sunday morning he went to Saint-Germain. He felt low-spirited and vexed at having yielded to that new longing, and at having broken through his usual habits. He was thirsty; he would have liked to get out at every station and sit down in the cafe which he saw outside and drink a “bock” or two, and then take the first train back to Paris. The journey seemed very long to him. He could remain sitting for whole days, as long as he had the same motionless objects before his eyes, but he found it very trying and fatiguing to remain sitting while he was being whirled along, and to see the whole country fly by, while he himself was motionless.

However, he found the Seine interesting every time he crossed it. Under the bridge at Chatou he saw some small boats going at great speed under the vigorous strokes of the bare-armed oarsmen, and he thought: “There are some fellows who are certainly enjoying themselves!” The train entered the tunnel just before you get to the station at Saint-Germain, and presently stopped at the platform. Parent got out, and walked slowly, for he already felt tired, toward the Terrace, with his hands behind his back, and when he got to the iron balustrade, stopped to look at the distant horizon. The immense plain spread out before him vast as the sea, green and studded with large villages, almost as populous as towns. The sun bathed the whole landscape in its full, warm light. The Seine wound like an endless serpent through the plain, flowed round the villages and along the slopes. Parent inhaled the warm breeze, which seemed to make his heart young again, to enliven his spirits, and to vivify his blood, and said to himself:

“Why, it is delightful here.”

Then he went on a few steps, and stopped again to look about him. The utter misery of his existence seemed to be brought into full relief by the intense light which inundated the landscape. He saw his twenty years of cafe life — dull, monotonous, heartbreaking. He might have traveled as others did, have gone among foreigners, to unknown countries beyond the sea, have interested himself somewhat in everything which other men are passionately devoted to, in arts and science; he might have enjoyed life in a thousand forms, that mysterious life which is either charming or painful, constantly changing, always inexplicable and strange. Now, however, it was too late. He would go on drinking "bock" after "bock" until he died, without any family, without friends, without hope, without any curiosity about anything, and he was seized with a feeling of misery and a wish to run away, to hide himself in Paris, in his cafe and his lethargy! All the thoughts, all the dreams, all the desires which are dormant in the slough of stagnating hearts had reawakened, brought to life by those rays of sunlight on the plain.

Parent felt that if he were to remain there any longer he should lose his reason, and he made haste to get to the Pavilion Henri IV for lunch, to try and forget his troubles under — the influence of wine and alcohol, and at any rate to have some one to speak to.

He took a small table in one of the arbors, from which one can see all the surrounding country, ordered his lunch, and asked to be served at once. Then some more people arrived and sat down at tables near him. He felt more comfortable; he was no longer alone. Three persons were eating luncheon near him. He looked at them two or three times without seeing them clearly, as one looks at total strangers. Suddenly a woman's voice sent a shiver through him which seemed to penetrate to his very marrow. "George," it said, "will you carve the chicken?"

And another voice replied: "Yes, mamma."

Parent looked up, and he understood; he guessed immediately who those people were! He should certainly not have known them again. His wife had grown quite white and very stout, an elderly, serious, respectable lady, and she held her head forward as she ate for fear of spotting her dress, although she had a table napkin tucked under her chin. George had become a man. He had a slight beard, that uneven and almost colorless beard which adorns the cheeks of youths. He wore a high hat, a white waistcoat, and a monocle, because it looked swell, no doubt. Parent looked at him in astonishment. Was that George, his son? No, he did not know that young man; there could be nothing in common between them. Limousin had his back to him, and was eating; with his shoulders rather bent.

All three of them seemed happy and satisfied; they came and took luncheon in the country at well-known restaurants. They had had a calm and pleasant existence, a family existence in a warm and comfortable house, filled with all those trifles which make life agreeable, with affection, with all those tender words which people exchange continually when they love each other. They had lived thus, thanks to him, Parent, on his money, after having deceived him, robbed him, ruined him! They had condemned him, the innocent, simple-minded, jovial man, to all the miseries of solitude, to that abominable life which he had led, between the pavement and a bar-room, to every mental torture and every physical misery! They had made him a useless, aimless being, a waif in the world, a poor old man without any pleasures, any prospects, expecting nothing from anybody or anything. For him, the world was empty, because he loved nothing in the world. He might go among other nations, or go about the streets, go into all the houses in Paris, open every room, but he would not find inside any door the beloved face, the face of wife or child which smiles when it sees you. This idea worked upon him more than any other, the idea of a door which one opens, to see and to embrace somebody behind it.

And that was the fault of those three wretches! The fault of that worthless woman, of that infamous friend, and of that tall, light-haired lad who put on insolent airs. Now he felt as angry with the child as he did with the other two. Was he not Limousin's son? Would Limousin have kept him and loved him otherwise? Would not Limousin very quickly have got rid of the mother and of the child if he had not felt sure that it was his, positively his? Does anybody bring up other people's children? And now they were there, quite close to him, those three who had made him suffer so much.

Parent looked at them, irritated and excited at the recollection of all his sufferings and of his despair, and was especially exasperated at their placid and satisfied looks. He felt inclined to kill them, to throw his siphon of Seltzer water at them, to split open Limousin's head as he every moment bent it over his plate, raising it again immediately.

He would have his revenge now, on the spot, as he had them under his hand. But how? He tried to think of some means, he pictured such dreadful things as one reads of in the newspapers occasionally, but could not hit on anything practical. And he went on drinking to excite himself, to give himself courage not to allow such an opportunity to escape him, as he might never have another.

Suddenly an idea struck him, a terrible idea; and he left off drinking to mature it. He smiled as he murmured: “I have them, I have them! We will see; we will see!”

They finished their luncheon slowly, conversing with perfect unconcern. Parent could not hear what they were saying, but he saw their quiet gestures. His wife’s face especially exasperated him. She had assumed a haughty air, the air of a comfortable, devout woman, of an unapproachable, devout woman, sheathed in principles, iron-clad in virtue. They paid their bill and got up from table. Parent then noticed Limousin. He might have been taken for a retired diplomat, for he looked a man of great importance, with his soft white whiskers, the tips of which touched his coat collar.

They walked away. Parent rose and followed them. First they went up and down the terrace, and calmly admired the landscape, and then they went. into the forest. Parent followed them at a distance, hiding himself so as not to excite their suspicion too soon.

Parent came up to them by degrees, breathing hard with emotion and fatigue, for he was unused to walking now. He soon came up to them, but was seized with fear, an inexplicable fear, and he passed them, so as to turn round and meet them face to face. He walked on, his heart beating, feeling that they were just behind him now, and he said to himself: “Come, now is the time. Courage! courage! Now is the moment!”

He turned round. They were all three sitting on the grass, at the foot of a huge tree, and were still chatting. He made up his mind, and walked back rapidly; stopping in front of them in the middle of the road, he said abruptly, in a voice broken by emotion:

“It is I! Here I am! I suppose you did not expect me?”

They all three stared at this man, who seemed to be insane. He continued:

“One would suppose that you did not know me again. Just look at me! I am Parent, Henri Parent. You thought it was all over, and that you would never see me again. Ah! but here I am once more, you see, and now we will have an explanation.”

Henriette, terrified, hid her face in her hands, murmuring: “Oh! Good heavens!”

Seeing this stranger, who seemed to be threatening his mother, George sprang up, ready to seize him by the collar. Limousin, thunderstruck, looked in horror at this apparition, who, after gasping for breath, continued:

"So now we will have an explanation; the proper moment has come! Ah! you deceived me, you condemned me to the life of a convict, and you thought that I should never catch you!"

The young man took him by the shoulders and pushed him back.

"Are you mad?" he asked. "What do you want? Go on your way immediately, or I shall give you a thrashing!"

"What do I want?" replied Parent. "I want to tell you who these people are."

George, however, was in a rage, and shook him; and was even going to strike him.

"Let me go," said Parent. "I am your father. There, see whether they recognize me now, the wretches!"

The young man, thunderstruck, unclenched his fists and turned toward his mother. Parent, as soon as he was released, approached her.

"Well," he said, "tell him yourself who I am! Tell him that my name is Henri Parent, that I am his father because his name is George Parent, because you are my wife, because you are all three living on my money, on the allowance of ten thousand francs which I have made you since I drove you out of my house. Will you tell him also why I drove you out? Because I surprised you with this beggar, this wretch, your lover! Tell him what I was, an honorable man, whom you married for money, and whom you deceived from the very first day. Tell him who you are, and who I am — — "

He stammered and gasped for breath in his rage. The woman exclaimed in a heartrending voice:

"Paul, Paul, stop him; make him be quiet! Do not let him say this before my son!"

Limousin had also risen to his feet. He said in a very low voice: "Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! Do you understand what you are doing?"

"I quite know what I am doing," resumed Parent, "and that is not all. There is one thing that I will know, something that has tormented me for twenty years." Then, turning to George, who was leaning against a tree in consternation, he said:

"Listen to me. When she left my house she thought it was not enough to have deceived me, but she also wanted to drive me to despair. You were my only consolation, and she took you with her, swearing that I was not your father, but, that he was your father. Was she lying? I do not know. I have been asking myself the question for the last twenty years." He went close up to her, tragic and terrible, and, pulling away her hands, with which she had covered her face, he continued:

"Well, now! I call upon you to tell me which of us two is the father of this young man; he or I, your husband or your lover. Come! Come! tell us."

Limousin rushed at him. Parent pushed him back, and, sneering in his fury, he said: "Ah! you are brave now! You are braver than you were that day when you ran downstairs because you thought I was going to murder you. Very well! If she will not reply, tell me yourself. You ought to know as well as she. Tell me, are you this young fellow's father? Come! Come! Tell me!"

He turned to his wife again. "If you will not tell me, at any rate tell your son. He is a man, now, and he has the right to know who his father is. I do not know, and I never did know, never, never! I cannot tell you, my boy."

He seemed to be losing his senses; his voice grew shrill and he worked his arms about as if he had an epileptic 'fit.

"Come! . . . Give me an answer. She does not know . . . I will make a bet that she does not know . . . No . . . she does not know, by Jove! Ha! ha! ha! Nobody knows . . . nobody . . . How can one know such things?

"You will not know either, my boy, you will not know any more than I do . . . never. . . . Look here . . . Ask her you will find that she does not know . . . I do not know either . . . nor does he, nor do you, nobody knows. You can choose . . . You can choose . . . yes, you can choose him or me. . . Choose.

"Good evening . . . It is all over. If she makes up her mind to tell you, you will come and let me know, will you not? I am living at the Hotel des Continents . . . I should be glad to know . . . Good evening . . . I hope you will enjoy yourselves very much . . ."

And he went away gesticulating, talking to himself under the tall trees, in the quiet, the cool air, which was full of the fragrance of growing plants. He did not turn round to look at them, but went straight on, walking under the stimulus of his rage, under a storm of passion, with that one fixed idea in his mind. All at once he found himself outside the station. A train was about to start and he got in. During the journey his anger calmed down, he regained his senses and returned to Paris, astonished at his own boldness, full of aches and pains as if he had broken some bones. Nevertheless, he went to have a "bock" at his brewery.

When she saw him come in, Mademoiselle Zoe asked in surprise: "What! back already? are you tired?"

“Yes — yes, I am tired . . . very tired . . . You know, when one is not used to going out. . . I’ve had enough of it. I shall not go into the country again. It would have been better to have stayed here. For the future, I shall not stir out.”

She could not persuade him to tell her about his little excursion, much as she wished to.

For the first time in his life he got thoroughly drunk that night, and had to be carried home.

QUEEN HORTENSE

In Argenteuil she was called Queen Hortense. No one knew why. Perhaps it was because she had a commanding tone of voice; perhaps because she was tall, bony, imperious; perhaps because she governed a kingdom of servants, chickens, dogs, cats, canaries, parrots, all so dear to an old maid's heart. But she did not spoil these familiar friends; she had for them none of those endearing names, none of the foolish tenderness which women seem to lavish on the soft fur of a purring cat. She governed these beasts with authority; she reigned.

She was indeed an old maid — one of those old maids with a harsh voice and angular motions, whose very soul seems to be hard. She never would stand contradiction, argument, hesitation, indifference, laziness nor fatigue. She had never been heard to complain, to regret anything, to envy anyone. She would say: "Everyone has his share," with the conviction of a fatalist. She did not go to church, she had no use for priests, she hardly believed in God, calling all religious things "weeper's wares."

For thirty years she had lived in her little house, with its tiny garden running along the street; she had never changed her habits, only changing her servants pitilessly, as soon as they reached twenty-one years of age.

When her dogs, cats and birds would die of old age, or from an accident, she would replace them without tears and without regret; with a little spade she would bury the dead animal in a strip of ground, throwing a few shovelfuls of earth over it and stamping it down with her feet in an indifferent manner.

She had a few friends in town, families of clerks who went to Paris every day. Once in a while she would be invited out, in the evening, to tea. She would inevitably fall asleep, and she would have to be awakened, when it was time for her to go home. She never allowed anyone to accompany her, fearing neither light nor darkness. She did not appear to like children.

She kept herself busy doing countless masculine tasks — carpentering, gardening, sawing or chopping wood, even laying bricks when it was necessary.

She had relatives who came to see her twice a year, the Cimmes and the Colombels, her two sisters having married, one of them a florist and the other a retired merchant. The Cimmes had no children; the Colombels had three: Henri, Pauline and Joseph. Henri was twenty, Pauline seventeen and Joseph only three.

There was no love lost between the old maid and her relatives.

In the spring of the year 1882 Queen Hortense suddenly fell sick. The neighbors called in a physician, whom she immediately drove out. A priest then having presented himself, she jumped out of bed, in order to throw him out of the house.

The young servant, in despair, was brewing her some tea.

After lying in bed for three days the situation appeared so serious that the barrel-maker, who lived next door, to the right, acting on advice from the doctor, who had forcibly returned to the house, took it upon himself to call together the two families.

They arrived by the same train, towards ten in the morning, the Colombels bringing little Joseph with them.

When they got to the garden gate, they saw the servant seated in the chair against the wall, crying.

The dog was sleeping on the door mat in the broiling sun; two cats, which looked as though they might be dead, were stretched out in front of the two windows, their eyes closed, their paws and tails stretched out at full length.

A big clucking hen was parading through the garden with a whole regiment of yellow, downy chicks, and a big cage hanging from the wall and covered with pimpernel, contained a population of birds which were chirping away in the warmth of this beautiful spring morning.

In another cage, shaped like a chalet, two lovebirds sat motionless side by side on their perch.

M. Cimme, a fat, puffing person, who always entered first everywhere, pushing aside everyone else, whether man or woman, when it was necessary, asked:

“Well, Celeste, aren’t things going well?”

The little servant moaned through her tears:

“She doesn’t even recognize me any more. The doctor says it’s the end.”

Everybody looked around.

Mme. Cimme and Mme. Colombel immediately embraced each other, without saying a word. They locked very much alike, having always worn their hair in Madonna bands, and loud red French cashmere shawls.

Cimme turned to his brother-in-law, a pale, sal, low-complexioned, thin man, wasted by stomach complaints, who limped badly, and said in a serious tone of voice:

"Gad! It was high time."

But no one dared to enter the dying woman's room on the ground floor. Even Cimme made way for the others. Colombel was the first to make up his mind, and, swaying from side to side like the mast of a ship, the iron ferule of his cane clattering on the paved hall, he entered.

The two women were the next to venture, and M. Cimmes closed the procession.

Little Joseph had remained outside, pleased at the sight of the dog.

A ray of sunlight seemed to cut the bed in two, shining just on the hands, which were moving nervously, continually opening and closing. The fingers were twitching as though moved by some thought, as though trying to point out a meaning or idea, as though obeying the dictates of a will. The rest of the body lay motionless under the sheets. The angular frame showed not a single movement. The eyes remained closed.

The family spread out in a semi-circle and, without a word, they began to watch the contracted chest and the short, gasping breathing. The little servant had followed them and was still crying.

At last Cimme asked:

"Exactly what did the doctor say?"

The girl stammered:

"He said to leave her alone, that nothing more could be done for her."

But suddenly the old woman's lips began to move. She seemed to be uttering silent words, words hidden in the brain of this dying being, and her hands quickened their peculiar movements.

Then she began to speak in a thin, high voice, which no one had ever heard, a voice which seemed to come from the distance, perhaps from the depths of this heart which had always been closed.

Cimme, finding this scene painful, walked away on tiptoe. Colombel, whose crippled leg was growing tired, sat down.

The two women remained standing.

Queen Hortense was now babbling away, and no one could understand a word. She was pronouncing names, many names, tenderly calling imaginary people.

“Come here, Philippe, kiss your mother. Tell me, child, do you love your mamma? You, Rose, take care of your little sister while I am away. And don’t leave her alone. Don’t play with matches!”

She stopped for a while, then, in a louder voice, as though she were calling someone: “Henriette!” then waited a moment and continued:

“Tell your father that I wish to speak to him before he goes to business.” And suddenly: “I am not feeling very well to-day, darling; promise not to come home late. Tell your employer that I am sick. You know, it isn’t safe to leave the children alone when I am in bed. For dinner I will fix you up a nice dish of rice. The little ones like that very much. Won’t Claire be happy?”

And she broke into a happy, joyous laugh, such as they had never heard: “Look at Jean, how funny he looks! He has smeared jam all over his face, the little pig! Look, sweetheart, look; isn’t he funny?”

Colombel, who was continually lifting his tired leg from place to place, muttered:

“She is dreaming that she has children and a husband; it is the beginning of the death agony.”

The two sisters had not yet moved, surprised, astounded.

The little maid exclaimed:

“You must take off your shawls and your hits! Would you like to go into the parlor?”

They went out without having said a word. And Colombel followed them, limping, once more leaving the dying woman alone.

When they were relieved of their travelling garments, the women finally sat down. Then one of the cats left its window, stretched, jumped into the room and on to Mme. Cimme’s knees. She began to pet it.

In the next room could be heard the voice of the dying woman, living, in this last hour, the life for which she had doubtless hoped, living her dreams themselves just when all was over for her.

Cimme, in the garden, was playing with little Joseph and the dog, enjoying himself in the whole hearted manner of a countryman, having completely forgotten the dying woman.

But suddenly he entered the house and said to the girl:

"I say, my girl, are we not going to have luncheon? What do you ladies wish to eat?"

They finally agreed on an omelet, a piece of steak with new potatoes, cheese and coffee.

As Mme. Colombel was fumbling in her pocket for her purse, Cimme stopped her, and, turning to the maid: "Have you got any money?"

She answered:

"Yes, monsieur."

"How much?"

"Fifteen francs."

"That's enough. Hustle, my girl, because I am beginning to get very hungry:"

Mme. Cimme, looking out over the climbing vines bathed in sunlight, and at the two turtle-doves on the roof opposite, said in an annoyed tone of voice:

"What a pity to have had to come for such a sad occasion. It is so nice in the country to-day."

Her sister sighed without answering, and Colombel mumbled, thinking perhaps of the walk ahead of him:

"My leg certainly is bothering me to-day:"

Little Joseph and the dog were making a terrible noise; one was shrieking with pleasure, the other was barking wildly. They were playing hide-and-seek around the three flower beds, running after each other like mad.

The dying woman continued to call her children, talking with each one, imagining that she was dressing them, fondling them, teaching them how to read: "Come on! Simon repeat: A, B, C, D. You are not paying attention, listen — D, D, D; do you hear me? Now repeat— "

Cimme exclaimed: "Funny what people say when in that condition."

Mme. Colombel then asked:

"Wouldn't it be better if we were to return to her?"

But Cimme dissuaded her from the idea:

"What's the use? You can't change anything. We are just as comfortable here."

Nobody insisted. Mme. Cimme observed the two green birds called love-birds. In a few words she praised this singular faithfulness and blamed the men for not imitating these animals. Cimme began to laugh, looked at his wife and hummed in a teasing way: “Tra-la-la, tra-la-la” as though to cast a good deal of doubt on his own, Cimme’s, faithfulness:

Colombel was suffering from cramps and was rapping the floor with his cane.

The other cat, its tail pointing upright to the sky, now came in.

They sat down to luncheon at one o’clock.

As soon as he had tasted the wine, Colombel, for whom only the best of Bordeaux had been prescribed, called the servant back:

“I say, my girl, is this the best stuff that you have in the cellar?”

“No, monsieur; there is some better wine, which was only brought out when you came.”

“Well, bring us three bottles of it.”

They tasted the wine and found it excellent, not because it was of a remarkable vintage, but because it had been in the cellar fifteen years. Cimme declared:

“That is regular invalid’s wine.”

Colombel, filled with an ardent desire to gain possession of this Bordeaux, once more questioned the girl:

“How much of it is left?”

“Oh! Almost all, monsieur; mamz’elle never touched it. It’s in the bottom stack.”

Then he turned to his brother-in-law:

“If you wish, Cimme, I would be willing to exchange something else for this wine; it suits my stomach marvellously.”

The chicken had now appeared with its regiment of young ones. The two women were enjoying themselves throwing crumbs to them.

Joseph and the dog, who had eaten enough, were sent back to the garden.

Queen Hortense was still talking, but in a low, hushed voice, so that the words could no longer be distinguished.

When they had finished their coffee all went in to observe the condition of the sick woman. She seemed calm.

They went outside again and seated themselves in a circle in the garden, in order to complete their digestion.

Suddenly the dog, who was carrying something in his mouth, began to run around the chairs at full speed. The child was chasing him wildly. Both disappeared into the house.

Cimme fell asleep, his well-rounded paunch bathed in the glow of the shining sun.

The dying woman once more began to talk in a loud voice. Then suddenly she shrieked.

The two women and Colombel rushed in to see what was the matter. Cimme, waking up, did not budge, because, he did not wish to witness such a scene.

She was sitting up, with haggard eyes. Her dog, in order to escape being pursued by little Joseph, had jumped up on the bed, run over the sick woman, and entrenched behind the pillow, was looking down at his playmate with snapping eyes, ready to jump down and begin the game again. He was holding in his mouth one of his mistress' slippers, which he had torn to pieces and with which he had been playing for the last hour.

The child, frightened by this woman who had suddenly risen in front of him, stood motionless before the bed.

The hen had also come in, and frightened by the noise, had jumped up on a chair and was wildly calling her chicks, who were chirping distractedly around the four legs of the chair.

Queen Hortense was shrieking:

“No, no, I don’t want to die, I don’t want to! I don’t want to! Who will bring up my children? Who will take care of them? Who will love them? No, I don’t want to! — I don’t — — “

She fell back. All was over.

The dog, wild with excitement, jumped about the room, barking.

Colombel ran to the window, calling his brother-in-law:

“Hurry up, hurry up! I think that she has just gone.”

Then Cimme, resigned, arose and entered the room, mumbling

“It didn’t take as long as I thought it would!”

MADEMOISELLE PEARL

I

What a strange idea it was for me to choose Mademoiselle Pearl for queen that evening!

Every year I celebrate Twelfth Night with my old friend Chantal. My father, who was his most intimate friend, used to take me round there when I was a child. I continued the custom, and I doubtless shall continue it as long as I live and as long as there is a Chantal in this world.

The Chantals lead a peculiar existence; they live in Paris as though they were in Grasse, Evetot, or Pont-a-Mousson.

They have a house with a little garden near the observatory. They live there as though they were in the country. Of Paris, the real Paris, they know nothing at all, they suspect nothing; they are so far, so far away! However, from time to time, they take a trip into it. Mademoiselle Chantal goes to lay in her provisions, as it is called in the family. This is how they go to purchase their provisions:

Mademoiselle Pearl, who has the keys to the kitchen closet (for the linen closets are administered by the mistress herself), Mademoiselle Pearl gives warning that the supply of sugar is low, that the preserves are giving out, that there is not much left in the bottom of the coffee bag. Thus warned against famine, Mademoiselle Chantal passes everything in review, taking notes on a pad. Then she puts down a lot of figures and goes through lengthy calculations and long discussions with Mademoiselle Pearl. At last they manage to agree, and they decide upon the quantity of each thing of which they will lay in a three months' provision; sugar, rice, prunes, coffee, preserves, cans of peas, beans, lobster, salt or smoked fish, etc., etc. After which the day for the purchasing is determined on and they go in a cab with a railing round the top and drive to a large grocery store on the other side of the river in the new sections of the town.

Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Pearl make this trip together, mysteriously, and only return at dinner time, tired out, although still excited, and shaken up by the cab, the roof of which is covered with bundles and bags, like an express wagon.

For the Chantals all that part of Paris situated on the other side of the Seine constitutes the new quarter, a section inhabited by a strange, noisy population, which cares little for honor, spends its days in dissipation, its nights in revelry, and which throws money out of the windows. From time to time, however, the young girls are taken to the Opera-Comique or the Theatre Francais, when the play is recommended by the paper which is read by M. Chantal.

At present the young ladies are respectively nineteen and seventeen. They are two pretty girls, tall and fresh, very well brought up, in fact, too well brought up, so much so that they pass by unperceived like two pretty dolls. Never would the idea come to me to pay the slightest attention or to pay court to one of the young Chantal ladies; they are so immaculate that one hardly dares speak to them; one almost feels indecent when bowing to them.

As for the father, he is a charming man, well educated, frank, cordial, but he likes calm and quiet above all else, and has thus contributed greatly to the mummifying of his family in order to live as he pleased in stagnant quiescence. He reads a lot, loves to talk and is readily affected. Lack of contact and of elbowing with the world has made his moral skin very tender and sensitive. The slightest thing moves him, excites him, and makes him suffer.

The Chantals have limited connections carefully chosen in the neighborhood. They also exchange two or three yearly visits with relatives who live in the distance.

As for me, I take dinner with them on the fifteenth of August and on Twelfth Night. That is as much one of my duties as Easter communion is for a Catholic.

On the fifteenth of August a few friends are invited, but on Twelfth Night I am the only stranger.

Well, this year, as every former year, I went to the Chantals' for my Epiphany dinner.

According to my usual custom, I kissed M. Chantal, Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Pearl, and I made a deep bow to the Misses Louise and

Pauline. I was questioned about a thousand and one things, about what had happened on the boulevards, about politics, about how matters stood in Tong-King, and about our representatives in Parliament. Madame Chantal, a fat lady, whose ideas always gave me the impression of being carved out square like building stones, was accustomed to exclaiming at the end of every political discussion: “All that is seed which does not promise much for the future!” Why have I always imagined that Madame Chantal’s ideas are square? I don’t know; but everything that she says takes that shape in my head: a big square, with four symmetrical angles. There are other people whose ideas always strike me as being round and rolling like a hoop. As soon as they begin a sentence on any subject it rolls on and on, coming out in ten, twenty, fifty round ideas, large and small, which I see rolling along, one behind the other, to the end of the horizon. Other people have pointed ideas — but enough of this.

We sat down as usual and finished our dinner without anything out of the ordinary being said. At dessert the Twelfth Night cake was brought on. Now, M. Chantal had been king every year. I don’t know whether this was the result of continued chance or a family convention, but he unfailingly found the bean in his piece of cake, and he would proclaim Madame Chantal to be queen. Therefore, I was greatly surprised to find something very hard, which almost made me break a tooth, in a mouthful of cake. Gently I took this thing from my mouth and I saw that it was a little porcelain doll, no bigger than a bean. Surprise caused me to exclaim:

“Ah!” All looked at me, and Chantal clapped his hands and cried: “It’s Gaston! It’s Gaston! Long live the king! Long live the king!”

All took up the chorus: “Long live the king!” And I blushed to the tip of my ears, as one often does, without any reason at all, in situations which are a little foolish. I sat there looking at my plate, with this absurd little bit of pottery in my fingers, forcing myself to laugh and not knowing what to do or say, when Chantal once more cried out: “Now, you must choose a queen!”

Then I was thunderstruck. In a second a thousand thoughts and suppositions flashed through my mind. Did they expect me to pick out one of the young Chantal ladies? Was that a trick to make me say which one I prefer? Was it a gentle, light, direct hint of the parents toward a possible marriage? The idea of marriage roams continually in houses with grown-up girls, and takes every shape and disguise, and employs every subterfuge. A dread of compromising myself took hold of me as well as an extreme timidity before the obstinately correct and reserved attitude of the Misses Louise and Pauline. To choose one of them in preference to the other seemed to me as difficult as choosing between two drops of water; and then the fear of launching myself into an affair which might, in spite of me, lead me gently into matrimonial ties, by means as wary and imperceptible and as calm as this insignificant royalty — the fear of all this haunted me.

Suddenly I had an inspiration, and I held out to Mademoiselle Pearl the symbolical emblem. At first every one was surprised, then they doubtless appreciated my delicacy and discretion, for they applauded furiously. Everybody was crying: “Long live the queen! Long live the queen!”

As for herself, poor old maid, she was so amazed that she completely lost control of herself; she was trembling and stammering: “No — no — oh! no — not me — please — not me — I beg of you — — “

Then for the first time in my life I looked at Mademoiselle Pearl and wondered what she was.

I was accustomed to seeing her in this house, just as one sees old upholstered armchairs on which one has been sitting since childhood without ever noticing them. One day, with no reason at all, because a ray of sunshine happens to strike the seat, you suddenly think: “Why, that chair is very curious”; and then you discover that the wood has been worked by a real artist and that the material is remarkable. I had never taken any notice of Mademoiselle Pearl.

She was a part of the Chantal family, that was all. But how? By what right? She was a tall, thin person who tried to remain in the background, but who was by no means insignificant. She was treated in a friendly manner, better than a housekeeper, not so well as a relative. I suddenly observed several shades of distinction which I had never noticed before. Madame Chantal said: “Pearl.” The young ladies: “Mademoiselle Pearl,” and Chantal only addressed her as “Mademoiselle,” with an air of greater respect, perhaps.

I began to observe her. How old could she be? Forty? Yes, forty. She was not old, she made herself old. I was suddenly struck by this fact. She fixed her hair and dressed in a ridiculous manner, and, notwithstanding all that, she was not in the least ridiculous, she had such simple, natural gracefulness, veiled and hidden. Truly, what a strange creature! How was it I had never observed her before? She dressed her hair in a grotesque manner with little old maid curls, most absurd; but beneath this one could see a large, calm brow, cut by two deep lines, two wrinkles of long sadness, then two blue eyes, large and tender, so timid, so bashful, so humble, two beautiful eyes which had kept the expression of naive wonder of a young girl, of youthful sensations, and also of sorrow, which had softened without spoiling them.

Her whole face was refined and discreet, a face the expression of which seemed to have gone out without being used up or faded by the fatigues and great emotions of life.

What a dainty mouth! and such pretty teeth! But one would have thought that she did not dare smile.

Suddenly I compared her to Madame Chantal! Undoubtedly Mademoiselle Pearl was the better of the two, a hundred times better, daintier, prouder, more noble. I was surprised at my observation. They were pouring out champagne. I held my glass up to the queen and, with a well-turned compliment, I drank to her health. I could see that she felt inclined to hide her head in her napkin. Then, as she was dipping her lips in the clear wine, everybody cried: “The queen drinks! the queen drinks!” She almost turned purple and choked. Everybody was laughing; but I could see that all loved her.

As soon as dinner was over Chantal took me by the arm. It was time for his cigar, a sacred hour. When alone he would smoke it out in the street; when guests came to dinner he would take them to the billiard room and smoke while playing. That evening they had built a fire to celebrate Twelfth Night; my old friend took his cue, a very fine one, and chalked it with great care; then he said:

“You break, my boy!”

He called me “my boy,” although I was twenty-five, but he had known me as a young child.

I started the game and made a few carroms. I missed some others, but as the thought of Mademoiselle Pearl kept returning to my mind, I suddenly asked:

“By the way, Monsieur Chantal, is Mademoiselle Pearl a relative of yours?”

Greatly surprised, he stopped playing and looked at me:

“What! Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard about Mademoiselle Pearl?”

“No.”

"Didn't your father ever tell you?"

"No."

"Well, well, that's funny! That certainly is funny! Why, it's a regular romance!"

He paused, and then continued:

"And if you only knew how peculiar it is that you should ask me that to-day, on Twelfth Night!"

"Why?"

"Why? Well, listen. Forty-one years ago to day, the day of the Epiphany, the following events occurred: We were then living at Roily-le-Tors, on the ramparts; but in order that you may understand, I must first explain the house. Roily is built on a hill, or, rather, on a mound which overlooks a great stretch of prairie. We had a house there with a beautiful hanging garden supported by the old battlemented wall; so that the house was in the town on the streets, while the garden overlooked the plain. There was a door leading from the garden to the open country, at the bottom of a secret stairway in the thick wall — the kind you read about in novels. A road passed in front of this door, which was provided with a big bell; for the peasants, in order to avoid the roundabout way, would bring their provisions up this way.

"You now understand the place, don't you? Well, this year, at Epiphany, it had been snowing for a week. One might have thought that the world was coming to an end. When we went to the ramparts to look over the plain, this immense white, frozen country, which shone like varnish, would chill our very souls. One might have thought that the Lord had packed the world in cotton to put it away in the storeroom for old worlds. I can assure you that it was dreary looking.

"We were a very numerous family at that time my father, my mother, my uncle and aunt, my two brothers and four cousins; they were pretty little girls; I married the youngest. Of all that crowd, there are only three of us left: my wife, I, and my sister-in-law, who lives in Marseilles. Zounds! how quickly a family like that dwindles away! I tremble when I think of it! I was fifteen years old then, since I am fifty-six now.

"We were going to celebrate the Epiphany, and we were all happy, very happy! Everybody was in the parlor, awaiting dinner, and my oldest brother, Jacques, said: 'There has been a dog howling out in the plain for about ten minutes; the poor beast must be lost.'

"He had hardly stopped talking when the garden bell began to ring. It had the deep sound of a church bell, which made one think of death. A shiver ran through everybody. My father called the servant and told him to go outside and look. We waited in complete silence; we were thinking of the snow which covered the ground. When the man returned he declared that he had seen nothing. The dog kept up its ceaseless howling, and always from the same spot.

"We sat down to dinner; but we were all uneasy, especially the young people. Everything went well up to the roast, then the bell began to ring again, three times in succession, three heavy, long strokes which vibrated to the tips of our fingers and which stopped our conversation short. We sat there looking at each other, fork in the air, still listening, and shaken by a kind of supernatural fear.

"At last my mother spoke: 'It's surprising that they should have waited so long to come back. Do not go alone, Baptiste; one of these gentlemen will accompany you.'

"My Uncle Francois arose. He was a kind of Hercules, very proud of his strength, and feared nothing in the world. My father said to him: 'Take a gun. There is no telling what it might be.'

"But my uncle only took a cane and went out with the servant.

"We others remained there trembling with fear and apprehension, without eating or speaking. My father tried to reassure us: 'Just wait and see,' he said; 'it will be some beggar or some traveller lost in the snow. After ringing once, seeing that the door was not immediately opened, he attempted again to find his way, and being unable to, he has returned to our door.'

"Our uncle seemed to stay away an hour. At last he came back, furious, swearing: 'Nothing at all; it's some practical joker! There is nothing but that damned dog howling away at about a hundred yards from the walls. If I had taken a gun I would have killed him to make him keep quiet.'

"We sat down to dinner again, but every one was excited; we felt that all was not over, that something was going to happen, that the bell would soon ring again.

"It rang just as the Twelfth Night cake was being cut. All the men jumped up together. My Uncle, Francois, who had been drinking champagne, swore so furiously that he would murder it, whatever it might be, that my mother and my aunt threw themselves on him to prevent his going. My father, although very calm and a little helpless (he limped ever since he had broken his leg when thrown by a horse), declared, in turn, that he wished to find out what was the matter and that he was going. My brothers, aged eighteen and twenty, ran to get their guns; and as no one was paying any attention to me I snatched up a little rifle that was used in the garden and got ready to accompany the expedition.

"It started out immediately. My father and uncle were walking ahead with Baptiste, who was carrying a lantern. My brothers, Jacques and Paul, followed, and I trailed on behind in spite of the prayers of my mother, who stood in front of the house with her sister and my cousins.

"It had been snowing again for the last hour, and the trees were weighted down. The pines were bending under this heavy, white garment, and looked like white pyramids or enormous sugar cones, and through the gray curtains of small hurrying flakes could be seen the lighter bushes which stood out pale in the shadow. The snow was falling so thick that we could hardly see ten feet ahead of us. But the lantern threw a bright light around us. When we began to go down the winding stairway in the wall I really grew frightened. I felt as though some one were walking behind me, were going to grab me by the shoulders and carry me away, and I felt a strong desire to return; but, as I would have had to cross the garden all alone, I did not dare. I heard some one opening the door leading to the plain; my uncle began to swear again, exclaiming: 'By — ! He has gone again! If I can catch sight of even his shadow, I'll take care not to miss him, the swine!'

"It was a discouraging thing to see this great expanse of plain, or, rather, to feel it before us, for we could not see it; we could only see a thick, endless veil of snow, above, below, opposite us, to the right, to the left, everywhere. My uncle continued:

"'Listen! There is the dog howling again; I will teach him how I shoot. That will be something gained, anyhow.'

"But my father, who was kind-hearted, went on:

"'It will be much better to go on and get the poor animal, who is crying for hunger. The poor fellow is barking for help; he is calling like a man in distress. Let us go to him.'

"So we started out through this mist, through this thick continuous fall of snow, which filled the air, which moved, floated, fell, and chilled the skin with a burning sensation like a sharp, rapid pain as each flake melted. We were sinking in up to our knees in this soft, cold mass, and we had to lift our feet very high in order to walk. As we advanced the dog's voice became clearer and stronger. My uncle cried: 'Here he is!' We stopped to observe him as one does when he meets an enemy at night.

"I could see nothing, so I ran up to the others, and I caught sight of him; he was frightful and weird-looking; he was a big black shepherd's dog with long hair and a wolf's head, standing just within the gleam of light cast by our lantern on the snow. He did not move; he was silently watching us.

"My uncle said: 'That's peculiar, he is neither advancing nor retreating. I feel like taking a shot at him.'

"My father answered in a firm voice: 'No, we must capture him.'

"Then my brother Jacques added: 'But he is not alone. There is something behind him."

"There was indeed something behind him, something gray, impossible to distinguish. We started out again cautiously. When he saw us approaching the dog sat down. He did not look wicked. Instead, he seemed pleased at having been able to attract the attention of some one.

"My father went straight to him and petted him. The dog licked his hands. We saw that he was tied to the wheel of a little carriage, a sort of toy carriage entirely wrapped up in three or four woolen blankets. We carefully took off these coverings, and as Baptiste approached his lantern to the front of this little vehicle, which looked like a rolling kennel, we saw in it a little baby sleeping peacefully.

"We were so astonished that we couldn't speak.

"My father was the first to collect his wits, and as he had a warm heart and a broad mind, he stretched his hand over the roof of the carriage and said: 'Poor little waif, you shall be one of us!' And he ordered my brother Jacques to roll the foundling ahead of us. Thinking out loud, my father continued:

"'Some child of love whose poor mother rang at my door on this night of Epiphany in memory of the Child of God.'

"He once more stopped and called at the top of his lungs through the night to the four corners of the heavens: 'We have found it!' Then, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder, he murmured: 'What if you had shot the dog, Francois?'

"My uncle did not answer, but in the darkness he crossed himself, for, notwithstanding his blustering manner, he was very religious.

"The dog, which had been untied, was following us.

"Ah! But you should have seen us when we got to the house! At first we had a lot of trouble in getting the carriage up through the winding stairway; but we succeeded and even rolled it into the vestibule.

"How funny mamma was! How happy and astonished! And my four little cousins (the youngest was only six), they looked like four chickens around a nest. At last we took the child from the carriage. It was still sleeping. It was a girl about six weeks old. In its clothes we found ten thousand francs in gold, yes, my boy, ten thousand francs! — which papa saved for her dowry. Therefore, it was not a child of poor people, but, perhaps, the child of some nobleman and a little bourgeoise of the town — or again — we made a thousand suppositions, but we never found out anything-never the slightest clue. The dog himself was recognized by no one. He was a stranger in the country. At any rate, the person who rang three times at our door must have known my parents well, to have chosen them thus.

"That is how, at the age of six weeks, Mademoiselle Pearl entered the Chantal household.

"It was not until later that she was called Mademoiselle Pearl. She was at first baptized 'Marie Simonne Claire,' Claire being intended, for her family name.

"I can assure you that our return to the diningroom was amusing, with this baby now awake and looking round her at these people and these lights with her vague blue questioning eyes.

"We sat down to dinner again and the cake was cut. I was king, and for queen I took Mademoiselle Pearl, just as you did to-day. On that day she did not appreciate the honor that was being shown her.

"Well, the child was adopted and brought up in the family. She grew, and the years flew by. She was so gentle and loving and minded so well that every one would have spoiled her abominably had not my mother prevented it.

"My mother was an orderly woman with a great respect for class distinctions. She consented to treat little Claire as she did her own sons, but, nevertheless, she wished the distance which separated us to be well marked, and our positions well established. Therefore, as soon as the child could understand, she acquainted her with her story and gently, even tenderly, impressed on the little one's mind that, for the Chantals, she was an adopted daughter, taken in, but, nevertheless, a stranger. Claire understood the situation with peculiar intelligence and with surprising instinct; she knew how to take the place which was allotted her, and to keep it with so much tact, gracefulness and gentleness that she often brought tears to my father's eyes. My mother herself was often moved by the passionate gratitude and timid devotion of this dainty and loving little creature that she began calling her: 'My daughter.' At times, when the little one had done something kind and good, my mother would raise her spectacles on her forehead, a thing which always indicated emotion with her, and she would repeat: 'This child is a pearl, a perfect pearl!' This name stuck to the little Claire, who became and remained for us Mademoiselle Pearl."

II

M. Chantal stopped. He was sitting on the edge of the billiard table, his feet hanging, and was playing with a ball with his left hand, while with his right he crumpled a rag which served to rub the chalk marks from the slate. A little red in the face, his voice thick, he was talking away to himself now, lost in his memories, gently drifting through the old scenes and events which awoke in his mind, just as we walk through old family gardens where we were brought up and where each tree, each walk, each hedge reminds us of some occurrence.

I stood opposite him leaning against the wall, my hands resting on my idle cue.

After a slight pause he continued:

"By Jove! She was pretty at eighteen — and graceful — and perfect. Ah! She was so sweet — and good and true — and charming! She had such eyes — blue-transparent — clear — such eyes as I have never seen since!"

He was once more silent. I asked: "Why did she never marry?"

He answered, not to me, but to the word "marry" which had caught his ear: "Why? why? She never would — she never would! She had a dowry of thirty thousand francs, and she received several offers — but she never would! She seemed sad at that time. That was when I married my cousin, little Charlotte, my wife, to whom I had been engaged for six years."

I looked at M. Chantal, and it seemed to me that I was looking into his very soul, and I was suddenly witnessing one of those humble and cruel tragedies of honest, straightforward, blameless hearts, one of those secret tragedies known to no one, not even the silent and resigned victims. A rash curiosity suddenly impelled me to exclaim:

"You should have married her, Monsieur Chantal!"

He started, looked at me, and said:

“I? Marry whom?”

“Mademoiselle Pearl.”

“Why?”

“Because you loved her more than your cousin.”

He stared at me with strange, round, bewildered eyes and stammered:

“I loved her — I? How? Who told you that?”

“Why, anyone can see that — and it’s even on account of her that you delayed for so long your marriage to your cousin who had been waiting for you for six years.”

He dropped the ball which he was holding in his left hand, and, seizing the chalk rag in both hands, he buried his face in it and began to sob. He was weeping with his eyes, nose and mouth in a heartbreaking yet ridiculous manner, like a sponge which one squeezes. He was coughing, spitting and blowing his nose in the chalk rag, wiping his eyes and sneezing; then the tears would again begin to flow down the wrinkles on his face and he would make a strange gurgling noise in his throat. I felt bewildered, ashamed; I wanted to run away, and I no longer knew what to say, do, or attempt.

Suddenly Madame Chantal’s voice sounded on the stairs. “Haven’t you men almost finished smoking your cigars?”

I opened the door and cried: “Yes, madame, we are coming right down.”

Then I rushed to her husband, and, seizing him by the shoulders, I cried: “Monsieur Chantal, my friend Chantal, listen to me; your wife is calling; pull yourself together, we must go downstairs.”

He stammered: “Yes — yes — I am coming — poor girl! I am coming — tell her that I am coming.”

He began conscientiously to wipe his face on the cloth which, for the last two or three years, had been used for marking off the chalk from the slate; then he appeared, half white and half red, his forehead, nose, cheeks and chin covered with chalk, and his eyes swollen, still full of tears.

I caught him by the hands and dragged him into his bedroom, muttering: “I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, Monsieur Chantal, for having caused you such sorrow — but — I did not know — you — you understand.”

He squeezed my hand, saying: “Yes — yes — there are difficult moments.”

Then he plunged his face into a bowl of water. When he emerged from it he did not yet seem to me to be presentable; but I thought of a little stratagem. As he was growing worried, looking at himself in the mirror, I said to him: “All you have to do is to say that a little dust flew into your eye and you can cry before everybody to your heart’s content.”

He went downstairs rubbing his eyes with his handkerchief. All were worried; each one wished to look for the speck, which could not be found; and stories were told of similar cases where it had been necessary to call in a physician.

I went over to Mademoiselle Pearl and watched her, tormented by an ardent curiosity, which was turning to positive suffering. She must indeed have been pretty, with her gentle, calm eyes, so large that it looked as though she never closed them like other mortals. Her gown was a little ridiculous, a real old maid’s gown, which was unbecoming without appearing clumsy.

It seemed to me as though I were looking into her soul, just as I had into Monsieur Chantal’s; that I was looking right from one end to the other of this humble life, so simple and devoted. I felt an irresistible longing to question her, to find out whether she, too, had loved him; whether she also had suffered, as he had, from this long, secret, poignant grief, which one cannot see, know, or guess, but which breaks forth at night in the loneliness of the dark room. I was watching her, and I could observe her heart beating under her waist, and I wondered whether this sweet, candid face had wept on the soft pillow and she had sobbed, her whole body shaken by the violence of her anguish.

I said to her in a low voice, like a child who is breaking a toy to see what is inside: “If you could have seen Monsieur Chantal crying a while ago it would have moved you.”

She started, asking: “What? He was weeping?”

“Ah, yes, he was indeed weeping!”

“Why?”

She seemed deeply moved. I answered:

“On your account.”

“On my account?”

“Yes. He was telling me how much he had loved you in the days gone by; and what a pang it had given him to marry his cousin instead of you.”

Her pale face seemed to grow a little longer; her calm eyes, which always remained open, suddenly closed so quickly that they seemed shut forever. She slipped from her chair to the floor, and slowly, gently sank down as would a fallen garment.

I cried: “Help! help! Mademoiselle Pearl is ill.”

Madame Chantal and her daughters rushed forward, and while they were looking for towels, water and vinegar, I grabbed my hat and ran away.

I walked away with rapid strides, my heart heavy, my mind full of remorse and regret. And yet sometimes I felt pleased; I felt as though I had done a praiseworthy and necessary act. I was asking myself: “Did I do wrong or right?” They had that shut up in their hearts, just as some people carry a bullet in a closed wound. Will they not be happier now? It was too late for their torture to begin over again and early enough for them to remember it with tenderness.

And perhaps some evening next spring, moved by a beam of moonlight falling through the branches on the grass at their feet, they will join and press their hands in memory of all this cruel and suppressed suffering; and, perhaps, also this short embrace may infuse in their veins a little of this thrill which they would not have known without it, and will give to those two dead souls, brought to life in a second, the rapid and divine sensation of this intoxication, of this madness which gives to lovers more happiness in an instant than other men can gather during a whole lifetime!

THE THIEF

While apparently thinking of something else, Dr. Sorbier had been listening quietly to those amazing accounts of burglaries and daring deeds that might have been taken from the trial of Cartouche. “Assuredly,” he exclaimed, “assuredly, I know of no viler fault nor any meaner action than to attack a girl’s innocence, to corrupt her, to profit by a moment of unconscious weakness and of madness, when her heart is beating like that of a frightened fawn, and her pure lips seek those of her tempter; when she abandons herself without thinking of the irremediable stain, nor of her fall, nor of the morrow.

“The man who has brought this about slowly, viciously, who can tell with what science of evil, and who, in such a case, has not steadiness and self-restraint enough to quench that flame by some icy words, who has not sense enough for two, who cannot recover his self-possession and master the runaway brute within him, and who loses his head on the edge of the precipice over which she is going to fall, is as contemptible as any man who breaks open a lock, or as any rascal on the lookout for a house left defenceless and unprotected or for some easy and dishonest stroke of business, or as that thief whose various exploits you have just related to us.

“I, for my part, utterly refuse to absolve him, even when extenuating circumstances plead in his favor, even when he is carrying on a dangerous flirtation, in which a man tries in vain to keep his balance, not to exceed the limits of the game, any more than at lawn tennis; even when the parts are inverted and a man’s adversary is some precocious, curious, seductive girl, who shows you immediately that she has nothing to learn and nothing to experience, except the last chapter of love, one of those girls from whom may fate always preserve our sons, and whom a psychological novel writer has christened ‘The Semi-Virgins.’

“It is, of course, difficult and painful for that coarse and unfathomable vanity which is characteristic of every man, and which might be called ‘malism’, not to stir such a charming fire, difficult to act the Joseph and the fool, to turn away his eyes, and, as it were, to put wax into his ears, like the companions of Ulysses when they were attracted by the divine, seductive songs of the Sirens, difficult only to touch that pretty table covered with a perfectly new cloth, at which you are invited to take a seat before any one else, in such a suggestive voice, and are requested to quench your thirst and to taste that new wine, whose fresh and strange flavor you will never forget. But who would hesitate to exercise such self-restraint if, when he rapidly examines his conscience, in one of those instinctive returns to his sober self in which a man thinks clearly and recovers his head, he were to measure the gravity of his fault, consider it, think of its consequences, of the reprisals, of the uneasiness which he would always feel in the future, and which would destroy the repose and happiness of his life?

“You may guess that behind all these moral reflections, such as a graybeard like myself may indulge in, there is a story hidden, and, sad as it is, I am sure it will interest you on account of the strange heroism it shows.”

He was silent for a few moments, as if to classify his recollections, and, with his elbows resting on the arms of his easy-chair and his eyes looking into space, he continued in the slow voice of a hospital professor who is explaining a case to his class of medical students, at a bedside:

“He was one of those men who, as our grandfathers used to say, never met with a cruel woman, the type of the adventurous knight who was always foraging, who had something of the scamp about him, but who despised danger and was bold even to rashness. He was ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, and had an irresistible charm about him, one of those men in whom we excuse the greatest excesses as the most natural things in the world. He had run through all his money at gambling and with pretty girls, and so became, as it were, a soldier of fortune. He amused himself whenever and however he could, and was at that time quartered at Versailles.

“I knew him to the very depths of his childlike heart, which was only too easily seen through and sounded, and I loved him as some old bachelor uncle loves a nephew who plays him tricks, but who knows how to coax him. He had made me his confidant rather than his adviser, kept me informed of his slightest pranks, though he always pretended to be speaking about one of his friends, and not about himself; and I must confess that his youthful impetuosity, his careless gaiety, and his amorous ardor sometimes distracted my thoughts and made me envy the handsome, vigorous young fellow who was so happy at being alive, that I had not the courage to check him, to show him the right road, and to call out to him: ‘Take care!’ as children do at blind man’s buff.

“And one day, after one of those interminable cotillons, where the couples do not leave each other for hours, and can disappear together without anybody thinking of noticing them, the poor fellow at last discovered what love was, that real love which takes up its abode in the very centre of the heart and in the brain, and is proud of being there, and which rules like a sovereign and a tyrannous master, and he became desperately enamored of a pretty but badly brought up girl, who was as disquieting and wayward as she was pretty.

“She loved him, however, or rather she idolized him despotically, madly, with all her enraptured soul and all her being. Left to do as she pleased by imprudent and frivolous parents, suffering from neurosis, in consequence of the unwholesome friendships which she contracted at the convent school, instructed by what she saw and heard and knew was going on around her, in spite of her deceitful and artificial conduct, knowing that neither her father nor her mother, who were very proud of their race as well as avaricious, would ever agree to let her marry the man whom she had taken a liking to, that handsome fellow who had little besides vision, ideas and debts, and who belonged to the middle-class, she laid aside all scruples, thought of nothing but of becoming his, no matter what might be the cost.

“By degrees, the unfortunate man’s strength gave way, his heart softened, and he allowed himself to be carried away by that current which buffeted him, surrounded him, and left him on the shore like a waif and a stray.

“They wrote letters full of madness to each other, and not a day passed without their meeting, either accidentally, as it seemed, or at parties and balls. She had yielded her lips to him in long, ardent caresses, which had sealed their compact of mutual passion.”

The doctor stopped, and his eyes suddenly filled with tears, as these former troubles came back to his mind; and then, in a hoarse voice, he went on, full of the horror of what he was going to relate:

“For months he scaled the garden wall, and, holding his breath and listening for the slightest noise, like a burglar who is going to break into a house, he went in by the servants’ entrance, which she had left open, slunk barefoot down a long passage and up the broad staircase, which creaked occasionally, to the second story, where his sweetheart's room was, and stayed there for hours.

"One night, when it was darker than usual, and he was hurrying lest he should be later than the time agreed on, he knocked up against a piece of furniture in the anteroom and upset it. It so happened that the girl's mother had not gone to sleep, either because she had a sick headache, or else because she had sat up late over some novel, and, frightened at that unusual noise which disturbed the silence of the house, she jumped out of bed, opened the door, saw some one indistinctly running away and keeping close to the wall, and, immediately thinking that there were burglars in the house, she aroused her husband and the servants by her frantic screams. The unfortunate man understood the situation; and, seeing what a terrible fix he was in, and preferring to be taken for a common thief to dishonoring his adored one's name, he ran into the drawing-room, felt on the tables and what-nots, filled his pockets at random with valuable bric-a-brac, and then cowered down behind the grand piano, which barred the corner of a large room.

"The servants, who had run in with lighted candles, found him, and, overwhelming him with abuse, seized him by the collar and dragged him, panting and apparently half dead with shame and terror, to the nearest police station. He defended himself with intentional awkwardness when he was brought up for trial, kept up his part with the most perfect self-possession and without any signs of the despair and anguish that he felt in his heart, and, condemned and degraded and made to suffer martyrdom in his honor as a man and a soldier — he was an officer — he did not protest, but went to prison as one of those criminals whom society gets rid of like noxious vermin.

"He died there of misery and of bitterness of spirit, with the name of the fair-haired idol, for whom he had sacrificed himself, on his lips, as if it had been an ecstatic prayer, and he intrusted his will 'to the priest who administered extreme unction to him, and requested him to give it to me. In it, without mentioning anybody, and without in the least lifting the veil, he at last explained the enigma, and cleared himself of those accusations the terrible burden of which he had borne until his last breath.

"I have always thought myself, though I do not know why, that the girl married and had several charming children, whom she brought up with the austere strictness and in the serious piety of former days!"

CLAIR DE LUNE

Abbe Marignan’s martial name suited him well. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatic, excitable, yet upright. All his beliefs were fixed, never varying. He believed sincerely that he knew his God, understood His plans, desires and intentions.

When he walked with long strides along the garden walk of his little country parsonage, he would sometimes ask himself the question: “Why has God done this?” And he would dwell on this continually, putting himself in the place of God, and he almost invariably found an answer. He would never have cried out in an outburst of pious humility: “Thy ways, O Lord, are past finding out.”

He said to himself: “I am the servant of God; it is right for me to know the reason of His deeds, or to guess it if I do not know it.”

Everything in nature seemed to him to have been created in accordance with an admirable and absolute logic. The “whys” and “becauses” always balanced. Dawn was given to make our awakening pleasant, the days to ripen the harvest, the rains to moisten it, the evenings for preparation for slumber, and the dark nights for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to the needs of agriculture, and no suspicion had ever come to the priest of the fact that nature has no intentions; that, on the contrary, everything which exists must conform to the hard demands of seasons, climates and matter.

But he hated woman — hated her unconsciously, and despised her by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ: “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” and he would add: “It seems as though God, Himself, were dissatisfied with this work of His.” She was the tempter who led the first man astray, and who since then had ever been busy with her work of damnation, the feeble creature, dangerous and mysteriously affecting one. And even more than their sinful bodies, he hated their loving hearts.

He had often felt their tenderness directed toward himself, and though he knew that he was invulnerable, he grew angry at this need of love that is always vibrating in them.

According to his belief, God had created woman for the sole purpose of tempting and testing man. One must not approach her without defensive precautions and fear of possible snares. She was, indeed, just like a snare, with her lips open and her arms stretched out to man.

He had no indulgence except for nuns, whom their vows had rendered inoffensive; but he was stern with them, nevertheless, because he felt that at the bottom of their fettered and humble hearts the everlasting tenderness was burning brightly — that tenderness which was shown even to him, a priest.

He felt this cursed tenderness, even in their docility, in the low tones of their voices when speaking to him, in their lowered eyes, and in their resigned tears when he reproved them roughly. And he would shake his cassock on leaving the convent doors, and walk off, lengthening his stride as though flying from danger.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near him. He was bent upon making a sister of charity of her.

She was a pretty, brainless madcap. When the abbe preached she laughed, and when he was angry with her she would give him a hug, drawing him to her heart, while he sought unconsciously to release himself from this embrace which nevertheless filled him with a sweet pleasure, awakening in his depths the sensation of paternity which slumbers in every man.

Often, when walking by her side, along the country road, he would speak to her of God, of his God. She never listened to him, but looked about her at the sky, the grass and flowers, and one could see the joy of life sparkling in her eyes. Sometimes she would dart forward to catch some flying creature, crying out as she brought it back: “Look, uncle, how pretty it is! I want to hug it!” And this desire to “hug” flies or lilac blossoms disquieted, angered, and roused the priest, who saw, even in this, the ineradicable tenderness that is always budding in women’s hearts.

Then there came a day when the sexton’s wife, who kept house for Abbe Marignan, told him, with caution, that his niece had a lover.

Almost suffocated by the fearful emotion this news roused in him, he stood there, his face covered with soap, for he was in the act of shaving.

When he had sufficiently recovered to think and speak he cried: “It is not true; you lie, Melanie!”

But the peasant woman put her hand on her heart, saying: “May our Lord judge me if I lie, Monsieur le Cure! I tell you, she goes there every night when your sister has gone to bed. They meet by the river side; you have only to go there and see, between ten o’clock and midnight.”

He ceased scraping his chin, and began to walk up and down impetuously, as he always did when he was in deep thought. When he began shaving again he cut himself three times from his nose to his ear.

All day long he was silent, full of anger and indignation. To his priestly hatred of this invincible love was added the exasperation of her spiritual father, of her guardian and pastor, deceived and tricked by a child, and the selfish emotion shown by parents when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them, and in spite of them.

After dinner he tried to read a little, but could not, growing more and, more angry. When ten o’clock struck he seized his cane, a formidable oak stick, which he was accustomed to carry in his nocturnal walks when visiting the sick. And he smiled at the enormous club which he twirled in a threatening manner in his strong, country fist. Then he raised it suddenly and, gritting his teeth, brought it down on a chair, the broken back of which fell over on the floor.

He opened the door to go out, but stopped on the sill, surprised by the splendid moonlight, of such brilliance as is seldom seen.

And, as he was gifted with an emotional nature, one such as had all those poetic dreamers, the Fathers of the Church, he felt suddenly distracted and moved by all the grand and serene beauty of this pale night.

In his little garden, all bathed in soft light, his fruit trees in a row cast on the ground the shadow of their slender branches, scarcely in full leaf, while the giant honeysuckle, clinging to the wall of his house, exhaled a delicious sweetness, filling the warm moonlit atmosphere with a kind of perfumed soul.

He began to take long breaths, drinking in the air as drunkards drink wine, and he walked along slowly, delighted, marveling, almost forgetting his niece.

As soon as he was outside of the garden, he stopped to gaze upon the plain all flooded with the caressing light, bathed in that tender, languishing charm of serene nights. At each moment was heard the short, metallic note of the cricket, and distant nightingales shook out their scattered notes — their light, vibrant music that sets one dreaming, without thinking, a music made for kisses, for the seduction of moonlight.

The abbe walked on again, his heart failing, though he knew not why. He seemed weakened, suddenly exhausted; he wanted to sit down, to rest there, to think, to admire God in His works.

Down yonder, following the undulations of the little river, a great line of poplars wound in and out. A fine mist, a white haze through which the moonbeams passed, silvering it and making it gleam, hung around and above the mountains, covering all the tortuous course of the water with a kind of light and transparent cotton.

The priest stopped once again, his soul filled with a growing and irresistible tenderness.

And a doubt, a vague feeling of disquiet came over him; he was asking one of those questions that he sometimes put to himself.

“Why did God make this? Since the night is destined for sleep, unconsciousness, repose, forgetfulness of everything, why make it more charming than day, softer than dawn or evening? And does why this seductive planet, more poetic than the sun, that seems destined, so discreet is it, to illuminate things too delicate and mysterious for the light of day, make the darkness so transparent?

“Why does not the greatest of feathered songsters sleep like the others? Why does it pour forth its voice in the mysterious night?

“Why this half-veil cast over the world? Why these tremblings of the heart, this emotion of the spirit, this enervation of the body? Why this display of enchantments that human beings do not see, since they are lying in their beds? For whom is destined this sublime spectacle, this abundance of poetry cast from heaven to earth?”

And the abbe could not understand.

But see, out there, on the edge of the meadow, under the arch of trees bathed in a shining mist, two figures are walking side by side.

The man was the taller, and held his arm about his sweetheart’s neck and kissed her brow every little while. They imparted life, all at once, to the placid landscape in which they were framed as by a heavenly hand. The two seemed but a single being, the being for whom was destined this calm and silent night, and they came toward the priest as a living answer, the response his Master sent to his questionings.

He stood still, his heart beating, all upset; and it seemed to him that he saw before him some biblical scene, like the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord, in some of those glorious stories of which the sacred books tell. The verses of the Song of Songs began to ring in his ears, the appeal of passion, all the poetry of this poem replete with tenderness.

And he said unto himself: “Perhaps God has made such nights as these to idealize the love of men.”

He shrank back from this couple that still advanced with arms intertwined. Yet it was his niece. But he asked himself now if he would not be disobeying God. And does not God permit love, since He surrounds it with such visible splendor?

And he went back musing, almost ashamed, as if he had intruded into a temple where he had, no right to enter.

WAITER, A “BOCK”

Why did I go into that beer hall on that particular evening? I do not know. It was cold; a fine rain, a flying mist, veiled the gas lamps with a transparent fog, made the side walks reflect the light that streamed from the shop windows — lighting up the soft slush and the muddy feet of the passers-by.

I was going nowhere in particular; was simply having a short walk after dinner. I had passed the Credit Lyonnais, the Rue Vivienne, and several other streets. I suddenly descried a large beer hall which was more than half full. I walked inside, with no object in view. I was not the least thirsty.

I glanced round to find a place that was not too crowded, and went and sat down by the side of a man who seemed to me to be old, and who was smoking a two-sous clay pipe, which was as black as coal. From six to eight glasses piled up on the table in front of him indicated the number of “bocks” he had already absorbed. At a glance I recognized a “regular,” one of those frequenters of beer houses who come in the morning when the place opens, and do not leave till evening when it is about to close. He was dirty, bald on top of his head, with a fringe of iron-gray hair falling on the collar of his frock coat. His clothes, much too large for him, appeared to have been made for him at a time when he was corpulent. One could guess that he did not wear suspenders, for he could not take ten steps without having to stop to pull up his trousers. Did he wear a vest? The mere thought of his boots and of that which they covered filled me with horror. The frayed cuffs were perfectly black at the edges, as were his nails.

As soon as I had seated myself beside him, this individual said to me in a quiet tone of voice:

“How goes it?”

I turned sharply round and closely scanned his features, whereupon he continued:

“I see you do not recognize me.”

“No, I do not.”

“Des Barrets.”

I was stupefied. It was Count Jean des Barrets, my old college chum.

I seized him by the hand, and was so dumbfounded that I could find nothing to say. At length I managed to stammer out:

"And you, how goes it with you?"

He responded placidly:

"I get along as I can."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"You see what I am doing," he answered quit resignedly.

I felt my face getting red. I insisted:

"But every day?"

"Every day it is the same thing," was his reply, accompanied with a thick puff of tobacco smoke.

He then tapped with a sou on the top of the marble table, to attract the attention of the waiter, and called out:

"Waiter, two 'bocks.'"

A voice in the distance repeated:

"Two bocks for the fourth table."

Another voice, more distant still, shouted out:

"Here they are!"

Immediately a man with a white apron appeared, carrying two "bocks," which he set down, foaming, on the table, spilling some of the yellow liquid on the sandy floor in his haste.

Des Barrets emptied his glass at a single draught and replaced it on the table, while he sucked in the foam that had been left on his mustache. He next asked:

"What is there new?"

I really had nothing new to tell him. I stammered:

"Nothing, old man. I am a business man."

In his monotonous tone of voice he said:

"Indeed, does it amuse you?"

"No, but what can I do? One must do something!"

"Why should one?"

"So as to have occupation."

"What's the use of an occupation? For my part, I do nothing at all, as you see, never anything. When one has not a sou I can understand why one should work. But when one has enough to live on, what's the use? What is the good of working? Do you work for yourself, or for others? If you work for yourself, you do it for your own amusement, which is all right; if you work for others, you are a fool."

Then, laying his pipe on the marble table, he called out anew:

“Waiter, a ‘bock.’” And continued: “It makes me thirsty to keep calling so. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. Yes, yes, I do nothing. I let things slide, and I am growing old. In dying I shall have nothing to regret. My only remembrance will be this beer hall. No wife, no children, no cares, no sorrows, nothing. That is best.”

He then emptied the glass which had been brought him, passed his tongue over his lips, and resumed his pipe.

I looked at him in astonishment, and said:

“But you have not always been like that?”

“Pardon me; ever since I left college.”

“That is not a proper life to lead, my dear fellow; it is simply horrible. Come, you must have something to do, you must love something, you must have friends.”

“No, I get up at noon, I come here, I have my breakfast, I drink my beer, I remain until the evening, I have my dinner, I drink beer. Then about half-past one in the morning, I go home to bed, because the place closes up; that annoys me more than anything. In the last ten years I have passed fully six years on this bench, in my corner; and the other four in my bed, nowhere else. I sometimes chat with the regular customers.”

“But when you came to Paris what did you do at first?”

“I paid my devoirs to the Cafe de Medicis.”

“What next?”

“Next I crossed the water and came here.”

“Why did you take that trouble?”

“What do you mean? One cannot remain all one’s life in the Latin Quarter. The students make too much noise. Now I shall not move again. Waiter, a ‘bock.’”

I began to think that he was making fun of me, and I continued:

“Come now, be frank. You have been the victim of some great sorrow; some disappointment in love, no doubt! It is easy to see that you are a man who has had some trouble. What age are you?”

“I am thirty, but I look forty-five, at least.”

I looked him straight in the face. His wrinkled, ill-shaven face gave one the impression that he was an old man. On the top of his head a few long hairs waved over a skin of doubtful cleanliness. He had enormous eyelashes, a heavy mustache, and a thick beard. Suddenly I had a kind of vision, I know not why, of a basin filled with dirty water in which all that hair had been washed. I said to him:

"You certainly look older than your age. You surely must have experienced some great sorrow."

He replied:

"I tell you that I have not. I am old because I never go out into the air. Nothing makes a man deteriorate more than the life of a cafe."

I still could not believe him.

"You must surely also have been married? One could not get as bald-headed as you are without having been in love."

He shook his head, shaking dandruff down on his coat as he did so.

"No, I have always been virtuous."

And, raising his eyes toward the chandelier which heated our heads, he said:

"If I am bald, it is the fault of the gas. It destroys the hair. Waiter, a 'bock.' Are you not thirsty?"

"No, thank you. But you really interest me. Since when have you been so morbid? Your life is not normal, it is not natural. There is something beneath it all."

"Yes, and it dates from my infancy. I received a great shock when I was very young, and that turned my life into darkness which will last to the end."

"What was it?"

"You wish to know about it? Well, then, listen. You recall, of course, the castle in which I was brought up, for you used to spend five or six months there during vacation. You remember that large gray building, in the middle of a great park, and the long avenues of oaks which opened to the four points of the compass. You remember my father and mother, both of whom were ceremonious, solemn, and severe.

"I worshipped my mother; I was afraid of my father; but I respected both, accustomed always as I was to see every one bow before them. They were Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse to all the country round, and our neighbors, the Tannemares, the Ravelets, the Brennevilles, showed them the utmost consideration.

"I was then thirteen years old. I was happy, pleased with everything, as one is at that age, full of the joy of life.

“Well, toward the end of September, a few days before returning to college, as I was playing about in the shrubbery of the park, among the branches and leaves, as I was crossing a path, I saw my father and mother, who were walking along.

“I recall it as though it were yesterday. It was a very windy day. The whole line of trees swayed beneath the gusts of wind, groaning, and seeming to utter cries-those dull, deep cries that forests give out during a tempest.

“The falling leaves, turning yellow, flew away like birds, circling and falling, and then running along the path like swift animals.

“Evening came on. It was dark in the thickets. The motion of the wind and of the branches excited me, made me tear about as if I were crazy, and howl in imitation of the wolves.

“As soon as I perceived my parents, I crept furtively toward them, under the branches, in order to surprise them, as though I had been a veritable prowler. But I stopped in fear a few paces from them. My father, who was in a terrible passion, cried:

“‘Your mother is a fool; moreover, it is not a question of your mother. It is you. I tell you that I need this money, and I want you to sign this.’

“My mother replied in a firm voice:

“‘I will not sign it. It is Jean’s fortune. I shall guard it for him and I will not allow you to squander it with strange women, as you have your own heritage.’

“Then my father, trembling with rage, wheeled round and, seizing his wife by the throat, began to slap her with all his might full in the face with his disengaged hand.

“My mother’s hat fell off, her hair became loosened and fell over her shoulders; she tried to parry the blows, but she could not do so. And my father, like a madman, kept on striking her. My mother rolled over on the ground, covering her face with her hands. Then he turned her over on her back in order to slap her still more, pulling away her hands, which were covering her face.

“As for me, my friend, it seemed as though the world was coming to an end, that the eternal laws had changed. I experienced the overwhelming dread that one has in presence of things supernatural, in presence of irreparable disasters. My childish mind was bewildered, distracted. I began to cry with all my might, without knowing why; a prey to a fearful dread, sorrow, and astonishment. My father heard me, turned round, and, on seeing me, started toward me. I believe that he wanted to kill me, and I fled like a hunted animal, running straight ahead into the thicket.

"I ran perhaps for an hour, perhaps for two. I know not. Darkness set in. I sank on the grass, exhausted, and lay there dismayed, frantic with fear, and devoured by a sorrow capable of breaking forever the heart of a poor child. I was cold, hungry, perhaps. At length day broke. I was afraid to get up, to walk, to return home, to run farther, fearing to encounter my father, whom I did not wish to see again.

"I should probably have died of misery and of hunger at the foot of a tree if the park guard had not discovered me and led me home by force.

"I found my parents looking as usual. My mother alone spoke to me "'How you frightened me, you naughty boy. I lay awake the whole night.'

"I did not answer, but began to weep. My father did not utter a single word.

"Eight days later I returned to school.

"Well, my friend, it was all over with me. I had witnessed the other side of things, the bad side. I have not been able to perceive the good side since that day. What has taken place in my mind, what strange phenomenon has warped my ideas, I do not know. But I no longer had a taste for anything, a wish for anything, a love for anybody, a desire for anything whatever, any ambition, or any hope. And I always see my poor mother on the ground, in the park, my father beating her. My mother died some years later; my, father still lives. I have not seen him since. Waiter, a 'bock.'"

A waiter brought him his "bock," which he swallowed at a gulp. But, in taking up his pipe again, trembling as he was, he broke it. "Confound it!" he said, with a gesture of annoyance. "That is a real sorrow. It will take me a month to color another!"

And he called out across the vast hall, now reeking with smoke and full of men drinking, his everlasting: "Garcon, un 'bock' — and a new pipe."

FORGIVENESS

She had been brought up in one of those families who live entirely to themselves, apart from all the rest of the world. Such families know nothing of political events, although they are discussed at table; for changes in the Government take place at such a distance from them that they are spoken of as one speaks of a historical event, such as the death of Louis XVI or the landing of Napoleon.

Customs are modified in course of time, fashions succeed one another, but such variations are taken no account of in the placid family circle where traditional usages prevail year after year. And if some scandalous episode or other occurs in the neighborhood, the disreputable story dies a natural death when it reaches the threshold of the house. The father and mother may, perhaps, exchange a few words on the subject when alone together some evening, but they speak in hushed tones — for even walls have ears. The father says, with bated breath:

“You’ve heard of that terrible affair in the Rivoil family?”

And the mother answers:

“Who would have dreamed of such a thing? It’s dreadful.”

The children suspected nothing, and arrive in their turn at years of discretion with eyes and mind blindfolded, ignorant of the real side of life, not knowing that people do not think as they speak, and do not speak as they act; or aware that they should live at war, or at all events, in a state of armed peace, with the rest of mankind; not suspecting the fact that the simple are always deceived, the sincere made sport of, the good maltreated.

Some go on till the day of their death in this blind probity and loyalty and honor, so pure-minded that nothing can open their eyes.

Others, undeceived, but without fully understanding, make mistakes, are dismayed, and become desperate, believing themselves the playthings of a cruel fate, the wretched victims of adverse circumstances, and exceptionally wicked men.

The Savignols married their daughter Bertha at the age of eighteen. She wedded a young Parisian, George Baron by name, who had dealings on the Stock Exchange. He was handsome, well-mannered, and apparently all that could be desired. But in the depths of his heart he somewhat despised his old-fashioned parents-in-law, whom he spoke of among his intimates as "my dear old fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the girl was rich. They settled down in Paris.

She became one of those provincial Parisians whose name is legion. She remained in complete ignorance of the great city, of its social side, its pleasures and its customs — just as she remained ignorant also of life, its perfidy and its mysteries.

Devoted to her house, she knew scarcely anything beyond her own street; and when she ventured into another part of Paris it seemed to her that she had accomplished a long and arduous journey into some unknown, unexplored city. She would then say to her husband in the evening:

"I have been through the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year her husband took her to the theatre. These were events the remembrance of which never grew dim; they provided subjects of conversation for long afterward.

Sometimes three months afterward she would suddenly burst into laughter, and exclaim:

"Do you remember that actor dressed up as a general, who crowed like a cock?"

Her friends were limited to two families related to her own. She spoke of them as "the Martinets" and "the Michelins."

Her husband lived as he pleased, coming home when it suited him — sometimes not until dawn — alleging business, but not putting himself out overmuch to account for his movements, well aware that no suspicion would ever enter his wife's guileless soul.

But one morning she received an anonymous letter.

She was thunderstruck — too simple-minded to understand the infamy of unsigned information and to despise the letter, the writer of which declared himself inspired by interest in her happiness, hatred of evil, and love of truth.

This missive told her that her husband had had for two years past, a sweetheart, a young widow named Madame Rosset, with whom he spent all his evenings.

Bertha knew neither how to dissemble her grief nor how to spy on her husband. When he came in for lunch she threw the letter down before him, burst into tears, and fled to her room.

He had time to take in the situation and to prepare his reply. He knocked at his wife's door. She opened it at once, but dared not look at him. He smiled, sat down, drew her to his knee, and in a tone of light raillery began:

"My dear child, as a matter of fact, I have a friend named Madame Rosset, whom I have known for the last ten years, and of whom I have a very high opinion. I may add that I know scores of other people whose names I have never mentioned to you, seeing that you do not care for society, or fresh acquaintances, or functions of any sort. But, to make short work of such vile accusations as this, I want you to put on your things after lunch, and we'll go together and call on this lady, who will very soon become a friend of yours, too, I am quite sure."

She embraced her husband warmly, and, moved by that feminine spirit of curiosity which will not be lulled once it is aroused, consented to go and see this unknown widow, of whom she was, in spite of everything, just the least bit jealous. She felt instinctively that to know a danger is to be already armed against it.

She entered a small, tastefully furnished flat on the fourth floor of an attractive house. After waiting five minutes in a drawing-room rendered somewhat dark by its many curtains and hangings, a door opened, and a very dark, short, rather plump young woman appeared, surprised and smiling.

George introduced them:

"My wife — Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a half-suppressed cry of astonishment and joy, and ran forward with hands outstretched. She had not hoped, she said, to have this pleasure, knowing that Madame Baron never saw any one, but she was delighted to make her acquaintance. She was so fond of George (she said "George" in a familiar, sisterly sort of way) that, she had been most anxious to know his young wife and to make friends with her, too.

By the end of a month the two new friends were inseparable. They saw each other every day, sometimes twice a day, and dined together every evening, sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. George no longer deserted his home, no longer talked of pressing business. He adored his own fireside, he said.

When, after a time, a flat in the house where Madame Rosset lived became vacant Madame Baron hastened to take it, in order to be near her friend and spend even more time with her than hitherto.

And for two whole years their friendship was without a cloud, a friendship of heart and mind — absolute, tender, devoted. Bertha could hardly speak without bringing in Julie's name. To her Madame Rosset represented perfection.

She was utterly happy, calm and contented.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Bertha hardly left her side. She spent her nights with her, distracted with grief; even her husband seemed inconsolable.

One morning the doctor, after leaving the invalid's bedside, took George and his wife aside, and told them that he considered Julie's condition very grave.

As soon as he had gone the grief-stricken husband and wife sat down opposite each other and gave way to tears. That night they both sat up with the patient. Bertha tenderly kissed her friend from time to time, while George stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes gazing steadfastly on the invalid's face.

The next day she was worse.

But toward evening she declared she felt better, and insisted that her friends should go back to their own apartment to dinner.

They were sitting sadly in the dining-room, scarcely even attempting to eat, when the maid gave George a note. He opened it, turned pale as death, and, rising from the table, said to his wife in a constrained voice:

"Wait for me. I must leave you a moment. I shall be back in ten minutes. Don't go away on any account."

And he hurried to his room to get his hat.

Bertha waited for him, a prey to fresh anxiety. But, docile in everything, she would not go back to her friend till he returned.

At length, as he did not reappear, it occurred to her to visit his room and see if he had taken his gloves. This would show whether or not he had had a call to make.

She saw them at the first glance. Beside them lay a crumpled paper, evidently thrown down in haste.

She recognized it at once as the note George had received.

And a burning temptation, the first that had ever assailed her urged her to read it and discover the cause of her husband's abrupt departure. Her rebellious conscience protester' but a devouring and fearful curiosity prevailed. She seized the paper, smoothed it out, recognized the tremulous, penciled writing as Julie's, and read:

"Come alone and kiss me, my poor dear. I am dying."

At first she did not understand, the idea of Julie's death being her uppermost thought. But all at once the true meaning of what she read burst in a flash upon her; this penciled note threw a lurid light upon her whole existence, revealed the whole infamous truth, all the treachery and perfidy of which she had been the victim. She understood the long years of deceit, the way in which she had been made their puppet. She saw them again, sitting side by side in the evening, reading by lamplight out of the same book, glancing at each other at the end of each page.

And her poor, indignant, suffering, bleeding heart was cast into the depths of a despair which knew no bounds.

Footsteps drew near; she fled, and shut herself in her own room.

Presently her husband called her:

"Come quickly! Madame Rosset is dying."

Bertha appeared at her door, and with trembling lips replied:

"Go back to her alone; she does not need me."

He looked at her stupidly, dazed with grief, and repeated:

"Come at once! She's dying, I tell you!"

Bertha answered:

"You would rather it were I."

Then at last he understood, and returned alone to the dying woman's bedside.

He mourned her openly, shamelessly, indifferent to the sorrow of the wife who no longer spoke to him, no longer looked at him; who passed her life in solitude, hedged round with disgust, with indignant anger, and praying night and day to God.

They still lived in the same house, however, and sat opposite each other at table, in silence and despair.

Gradually his sorrow grew less acute; but she did not forgive him.

And so their life went on, hard and bitter for them both.

For a whole year they remained as complete strangers to each other as if they had never met. Bertha nearly lost her reason.

At last one morning she went out very early, and returned about eight o'clock bearing in her hands an enormous bouquet of white roses. And she sent word to her husband that she wanted to speak to him. He came-anxious and uneasy.

"We are going out together," she said. "Please carry these flowers; they are too heavy for me."

A carriage took them to the gate of the cemetery, where they alighted. Then, her eyes filling with tears, she said to George:

"Take me to her grave."

He trembled, and could not understand her motive; but he led the way, still carrying the flowers. At last he stopped before a white marble slab, to which he pointed without a word.

She took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling down, placed it on the grave. Then she offered up a silent, heartfelt prayer.

Behind her stood her husband, overcome by recollections of the past.

She rose, and held out her hands to him.

"If you wish it, we will be friends," she said.

A QUEER NIGHT IN PARIS

Mattre Saval, notary at Vernon, was passionately fond of music. Although still young he was already bald; he was always carefully shaven, was somewhat corpulent as was suitable, and wore a gold pince-nez instead of spectacles. He was active, gallant and cheerful and was considered quite an artist in Vernon. He played the piano and the violin, and gave musicals where the new operas were interpreted.

He had even what is called a bit of a voice; nothing but a bit, very little bit of a voice; but he managed it with so much taste that cries of “Bravo!” “Exquisite!” “Surprising!” “Adorable!” issued from every throat as soon as he had murmured the last note.

He subscribed to a music publishing house in Paris, and they sent him the latest music, and from time to time he sent invitations after this fashion to the elite of the town:

“You are invited to be present on Monday evening at the house of M. Saval, notary, Vernon, at the first rendering of ‘Sais.’”

A few officers, gifted with good voices, formed the chorus. Two or three lady amateurs also sang. The notary filled the part of leader of the orchestra with so much correctness that the bandmaster of the 190th regiment of the line said of him, one day, at the Cafe de l’Europe.

“Oh! M. Saval is a master. It is a great pity that he did not adopt the career of an artist.”

When his name was mentioned in a drawing-room, there was always somebody found to declare: “He is not an amateur; he is an artist, a genuine artist.”

And two or three persons repeated, in a tone of profound conviction:

“Oh! yes, a genuine artist,” laying particular stress on the word “genuine.”

Every time that a new work was interpreted at a big Parisian theatre M. Saval paid a visit to the capital.

Now, last year, according to his custom, he went to hear Henri VIII. He then took the express which arrives in Paris at 4:30 P.M., intending to return by the 12:35 A.M. train, so as not to have to sleep at a hotel. He had put on evening dress, a black coat and white tie, which he concealed under his overcoat with the collar turned up.

As soon as he set foot on the Rue d'Amsterdam, he felt himself in quite jovial mood. He said to himself:

"Decidedly, the air of Paris does not resemble any other air. It has in it something indescribably stimulating, exciting, intoxicating, which fills you with a strange longing to dance about and to do many other things. As soon as I arrive here, it seems to me, all of a sudden, that I have taken a bottle of champagne. What a life one can lead in this city in the midst of artists! Happy are the elect, the great men who make themselves a reputation in such a city! What an existence is theirs!"

And he made plans; he would have liked to know some of these celebrated men, to talk about them in Vernon, and to spend an evening with them from time to time in Paris.

But suddenly an idea struck him. He had heard allusions to little cafes in the outer boulevards at which well-known painters, men of letters, and even musicians gathered, and he proceeded to go up to Montmartre at a slow pace.

He had two hours before him. He wanted to look about him. He passed in front of taverns frequented by belated bohemians, gazing at the different faces, seeking to discover the artists. Finally, he came to the sign of "The Dead Rat," and, allured by the name, he entered.

Five or six women, with their elbows resting on the marble tables, were talking in low tones about their love affairs, the quarrels of Lucie and Hortense, and the scoundrelism of Octave. They were no longer young, were too fat or too thin, tired out, used up. You could see that they were almost bald; and they drank beer like men.

M. Saval sat down at some distance from them and waited, for the hour for taking absinthe was at hand.

A tall young man soon came in and took a seat beside him. The landlady called him M. "Romantin." The notary quivered. Was this the Romantin who had taken a medal at the last Salon?

The young man made a sign to the waiter.

"You will bring up my dinner at once, and then carry to my new studio, 15 Boulevard de Clichy, thirty bottles of beer, and the ham I ordered this morning. We are going to have a housewarming."

M. Saval immediately ordered dinner. Then, he took off his overcoat, so that his dress suit and his white tie could be seen. His neighbor did not seem to notice him. He had taken up a newspaper, and was reading it. M. Saval glanced sideways at him, burning with the desire to speak to him.

Two young men entered, in red vests and with peaked beards, in the fashion of Henry III. They sat down opposite Romantin.

The first of the pair said:

"Is it for this evening?"

Romantin pressed his hand.

"I believe you, old chap, and everyone will be there. I have Bonnat, Guillemet, Gervex, Beraud, Hebert, Duez, Clairin, and Jean-Paul Laurens. It will be a stunning affair! And women, too! Wait till you see! Every actress without exception — of course I mean, you know, all those who have nothing to do this evening."

The landlord of the establishment came across.

"Do you often have this housewarming?"

The painter replied:

"I believe you, every three months, each quarter."

M. Saval could not restrain himself any longer, and in a hesitating voice said:

"I beg your pardon for intruding on you, monsieur, but I heard your name mentioned, and I would be very glad to know if you really are M. Romantin, whose work in the last Salon I have so much admired?"

The painter answered:

"I am the very person, monsieur."

The notary then paid the artist a very well-turned compliment, showing that he was a man of culture.

The painter, gratified, thanked him politely in reply.

Then they chattered. Romantin returned to the subject of his housewarming, going into details as to the magnificence of the forthcoming entertainment.

M. Saval questioned him as to all the men he was going to receive, adding:

“It would be an extraordinary piece of good fortune for a stranger to meet at one time so many celebrities assembled in the studio of an artist of your rank.”

Romantin, vanquished, replied:

“If it would be agreeable to you, come.”

M. Saval accepted the invitation with enthusiasm, reflecting:

“I shall have time enough to see Henri VIII.”

Both of them had finished their meal. The notary insisted on paying the two bills, wishing to repay his neighbor’s civilities. He also paid for the drinks of the young fellows in red velvet; then he left the establishment with the painter.

They stopped in front of a very long, low house, the first story having the appearance of an interminable conservatory. Six studios stood in a row with their fronts facing the boulevards.

Romantin was the first to enter, and, ascending the stairs, he opened a door, and lighted a match and then a candle.

They found themselves in an immense apartment, the furniture of which consisted of three chairs, two easels, and a few sketches standing on the ground along the walls. M. Saval remained standing at the door somewhat astonished.

The painter remarked:

“Here you are! we’ve got to the spot; but everything has yet to be done.”

Then, examining the high, bare apartment, its ceiling disappearing in the darkness, he said:

“We might make a great deal out of this studio.”

He walked round it, surveying it with the utmost attention, then went on:

“I know someone who might easily give a helping hand. Women are incomparable for hanging drapery. But I sent her to the country for to-day in order to get her off my hands this evening. It is not that she bores me, but she is too much lacking in the ways of good society. It would be embarrassing to my guests.”

He reflected for a few seconds, and then added:

“She is a good girl, but not easy to deal with. If she knew that I was holding a reception, she would tear out my eyes.”

M. Saval had not even moved; he did not understand.

The artist came over to him.

“Since I have invited you, you will assist ma about something.”

The notary said emphatically:

“Make any use of me you please. I am at your disposal.”

Romantin took off his jacket.

“Well, citizen, to work!’ We are first going to clean up.”

He went to the back of the easel, on which there was a canvas representing a cat, and seized a very worn-out broom.

“I say! Just brush up while I look after the lighting.”

M. Saval took the broom, inspected it, and then began to sweep the floor very awkwardly, raising a whirlwind of dust.

Romantin, disgusted, stopped him: “Deuce take it! you don’t know how to sweep the floor! Look at me!”

And he began to roll before him a heap of grayish sweepings, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Then, he gave bark the broom to the notary, who imitated him.

In five minutes, such a cloud of dust filled the studio that Rormantin asked:

“Where are you? I can’t see you any longer.”

M. Saval, who was coughing, came near to him. The painter said:

“How would you set about making a chandelier?”

The other, surprised, asked:

“What chandelier?”

“Why, a chandelier to light the room — a chandelier with wax-candles.”

The notary did not understand.

He answered: “I don’t know.”

The painter began to jump about, cracking his fingers.

“Well, monseigneur, I have found out a way.”

Then he went on more calmly:

“Have you got five francs about you?”

M. Saval replied:

“Why, yes.”

The artist said: “Well! you’ll go out and buy for me five francs’ worth of wax-candles while I go and see the cooper.”

And he pushed the notary in his evening coat into the street. At the end of five minutes, they had returned, one of them with the wax-candles and the other with the hoop of a cask. Then Romantin plunged his hand into a cupboard, and drew forth twenty empty bottles, which he fixed in the form of a crown around the hoop.

He then went downstairs to borrow a ladder from the janitress, after having explained that he had made interest with the old woman by painting the portrait of her cat, exhibited on the easel.

When he returned with the ladder, he said to M. Saval:

"Are you active?"

The other, without understanding, answered:

"Why, yes."

"Well, you just climb up there, and fasten this chandelier for me to the ring of the ceiling. Then, you put a wax-candle in each bottle, and light it. I tell you I have a genius for lighting up. But off with your coat, damn it! You are just like a Jeames."

The door was opened brusquely. A woman appeared, her eyes flashing, and remained standing on the threshold.

Romantin gazed at her with a look of terror.

She waited some seconds, crossing her arms over her breast, and then in a shrill, vibrating, exasperated voice said:

"Ha! you dirty scoundrel, is this the way you leave me?"

Romantin made no reply. She went on:

"Ha! you scoundrel! You did a nice thing in parking me off to the country. You'll soon see the way I'll settle your jollification. Yes, I'm going to receive your friends."

She grew warmer.

"I'm going to slap their faces with the bottles and the wax-candles — — "

Romantin said in a soft tone:

"Mathilde — — "

But she did not pay any attention to him; she went on:

"Wait a little, my fine fellow! wait a little!"

Romantin went over to her, and tried to take her by the hands.

"Mathilde — — "

But she was now fairly under way; and on she went, emptying the vials of her wrath with strong words and reproaches. They flowed out of her mouth like, a stream sweeping a heap of filth along with it. The words pouring forth seemed struggling for exit. She stuttered, stammered, yelled, suddenly recovering her voice to cast forth an insult or a curse.

He seized her hands without her having noticed it. She did not seem to see anything, so taken up was she in scolding and relieving her feelings.

And suddenly she began to weep. The tears flowed from her eyes, but this did not stop her complaints. But her words were uttered in a screaming falsetto voice with tears in it and interrupted by sobs. She commenced afresh twice or three times, till she stopped as if something were choking her, and at last she ceased with a regular flood of tears.

Then he clasped her in his arms and kissed her hair, affected himself.

"Mathilde, my little Mathilde, listen. You must be reasonable. You know, if I give a supper-party to my friends, it is to thank these gentlemen for the medal I got at the Salon. I cannot receive women. You ought to understand that. It is not the same with artists as with other people."

She stammered, in the midst of her tears:

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

He replied:

"It was in order not to annoy you, not to give you pain. Listen, I'm going to see you home. You will be very sensible, very nice; you will remain quietly waiting for me in bed, and I'll come back as soon as it's over."

She murmured:

"Yes, but you will not begin over again?"

"No, I swear to you!"

He turned towards M. Saval, who had at last hooked on the chandelier:

"My dear friend, I am coming back in five minutes. If anyone arrives in my absence, do the honors for me, will you not?"

And he carried off Mathilde, who kept drying her eyes with her handkerchief as she went along.

Left to himself, M. Saval succeeded in putting everything around him in order. Then he lighted the wax-candles, and waited.

He waited for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour. Romantin did not return. Then, suddenly there was a dreadful noise on the stairs, a song shouted out in chorus by twenty mouths and a regular march like that of a Prussian regiment. The whole house was shaken by the steady tramp of feet. The door flew open, and a motley throng appeared — men and women in file, two and two holding each other by the arm and stamping their heels on the ground to mark time, advanced into the studio like a snake uncoiling itself. They howled:

"Come, and let us all be merry,
Pretty maids and soldiers gay!"

M. Saval, thunderstruck, remained standing in evening dress under the chandelier. The procession of revellers caught sight of him, and uttered a shout:

“A Jeames! A Jeames!”

And they began whirling round him, surrounding him with a circle of vociferations. Then they took each other by the hand and went dancing about madly.

He attempted to explain:

“Messieurs — messieurs — mesdames — — “

But they did not listen to him. They whirled about, they jumped, they brawled.

At last, the dancing ceased. M. Saval said:

“Gentlemen — — “

A tall young fellow, fair-haired and bearded to the nose, interrupted him:

“What’s your name, my friend?”

The notary, quite scared, said:

“I am M. Saval.”

A voice exclaimed:

“You mean Baptiste.”

A woman said:

“Let the poor waiter alone! You’ll end by making him get angry. He’s paid to wait on us, and not to be laughed at by us.”

Then, M. Saval noticed that each guest had brought his own provisions. One held a bottle of wine, and the other a pie. This one had a loaf of bread, and one a ham.

The tall, fair young fellow placed in his hands an enormous sausage, and gave orders:

“Here, go and arrange the sideboard in the corner over there. Put the bottles at the left and the provisions at the right.”

Saval, getting quite distracted, exclaimed: “But, messieurs, I am a notary!”

There was a moment’s silence and then a wild outburst of laughter. One suspicious gentleman asked:

“How came you to be here?”

He explained, telling about his project of going to the opera, his departure from Vernon, his arrival in Paris, and the way in which he had spent the evening.

They sat around him to listen to him; they greeted him with words of applause, and called him Scheherazade.

Romantin did not return. Other guests arrived. M. Saval was presented to them so that he might begin his story over again. He declined; they forced him to relate it. They seated and tied him on one of three chairs between two women who kept constantly filling his glass. He drank; he laughed; he talked; he sang, too. He tried to waltz with his chair, and fell on the ground.

From that moment, he forgot everything. It seemed to him, however, that they undressed him, put him to bed, and that he was nauseated.

When he awoke, it was broad daylight, and he lay stretched with his feet against a cupboard, in a strange bed.

An old woman with a broom in her hand was glaring angrily at him. At last, she said:

“Clear out, you blackguard! Clear out! What right has anyone to get drunk like this?”

He sat up in bed, feeling very ill at ease. He asked:

“Where am I?”

“Where are you, you dirty scamp? You are drunk. Take your rotten carcass out of here as quick as you can — and lose no time about it!”

He wanted to get up. He found that he was in no condition to do so. His clothes had disappeared. He blurted out:

“Madame, I —— Then he remembered. What was he to do? He asked:

“Did Monsieur Romantin come back?”

The doorkeeper shouted:

“Will you take your dirty carcass out of this, so that he at any rate may not catch you here?”

M. Saval said, in a state of confusion:

“I haven’t got my clothes; they have been taken away from me.”

He had to wait, to explain his situation, give notice to his friends, and borrow some money to buy clothes. He did not leave Paris till evening. And when people talk about music to him in his beautiful drawing-room in Vernon, he declares with an air of authority that painting is a very inferior art.

THAT COSTLY RIDE

The household lived frugally on the meager income derived from the husband’s insignificant appointments. Two children had been born of the marriage, and the earlier condition of the strictest economy had become one of quiet, concealed, shamefaced misery, the poverty of a noble family — which in spite of misfortune never forgets its rank.

Hector de Gribelin had been educated in the provinces, under the paternal roof, by an aged priest. His people were not rich, but they managed to live and to keep up appearances.

At twenty years of age they tried to find him a position, and he entered the Ministry of Marine as a clerk at sixty pounds a year. He foundered on the rock of life like all those who have not been early prepared for its rude struggles, who look at life through a mist, who do not know how to protect themselves, whose special aptitudes and faculties have not been developed from childhood, whose early training has not developed the rough energy needed for the battle of life or furnished them with tool or weapon.

His first three years of office work were a martyrdom.

He had, however, renewed the acquaintance of a few friends of his family — elderly people, far behind the times, and poor like himself, who lived in aristocratic streets, the gloomy thoroughfares of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; and he had created a social circle for himself.

Strangers to modern life, humble yet proud, these needy aristocrats lived in the upper stories of sleepy, old-world houses. From top to bottom of their dwellings the tenants were titled, but money seemed just as scarce on the ground floor as in the attics.

Their eternal prejudices, absorption in their rank, anxiety lest they should lose caste, filled the minds and thoughts of these families once so brilliant, now ruined by the idleness of the men of the family. Hector de Gribelin met in this circle a young girl as well born and as poor as himself and married her.

They had two children in four years.

For four years more the husband and wife, harassed by poverty, knew no other distraction than the Sunday walk in the Champs-Elysees and a few evenings at the theatre (amounting in all to one or two in the course of the winter) which they owed to free passes presented by some comrade or other.

But in the spring of the following year some overtime work was entrusted to Hector de Gribelin by his chief, for which he received the large sum of three hundred francs.

The day he brought the money home he said to his wife:

“My dear Henrietta, we must indulge in some sort of festivity — say an outing for the children.”

And after a long discussion it was decided that they should go and lunch one day in the country.

“Well,” cried Hector, “once will not break us, so we’ll hire a wagonette for you, the children and the maid. And I’ll have a saddle horse; the exercise will do me good.”

The whole week long they talked of nothing but the projected excursion.

Every evening, on his return from the office, Hector caught up his elder son, put him astride his leg, and, making him bounce up and down as hard as he could, said:

“That’s how daddy will gallop next Sunday.”

And the youngster amused himself all day long by bestriding chairs, dragging them round the room and shouting:

“This is daddy on horseback!”

The servant herself gazed at her master with awestruck eyes as she thought of him riding alongside the carriage, and at meal-times she listened with all her ears while he spoke of riding and recounted the exploits of his youth, when he lived at home with his father. Oh, he had learned in a good school, and once he felt his steed between his legs he feared nothing — nothing whatever!

Rubbing his hands, he repeated gaily to his wife:

“If only they would give me a restive animal I should be all the better pleased. You’ll see how well I can ride; and if you like we’ll come back by the Champs-Elysees just as all the people are returning from the Bois. As we shall make a good appearance, I shouldn’t at all object to meeting some one from the ministry. That is all that is necessary to insure the respect of one's chiefs."

On the day appointed the carriage and the riding horse arrived at the same moment before the door. Hector went down immediately to examine his mount. He had had straps sewn to his trousers and flourished in his hand a whip he had bought the evening before.

He raised the horse's legs and felt them one after another, passed his hand over the animal's neck, flank and hocks, opened his mouth, examined his teeth, declared his age; and then, the whole household having collected round him, he delivered a discourse on the horse in general and the specimen before him in particular, pronouncing the latter excellent in every respect.

When the rest of the party had taken their seats in the carriage he examined the saddle-girth; then, putting his foot in the stirrup, he sprang to the saddle. The animal began to curvet and nearly threw his rider.

Hector, not altogether at his ease, tried to soothe him:

"Come, come, good horse, gently now!"

Then, when the horse had recovered his equanimity and the rider his nerve, the latter asked:

"Are you ready?"

The occupants of the carriage replied with one voice:

"Yes."

"Forward!" he commanded.

And the cavalcade set out.

All looks were centered on him. He trotted in the English style, rising unnecessarily high in the saddle; looking at times as if he were mounting into space. Sometimes he seemed on the point of falling forward on the horse's mane; his eyes were fixed, his face drawn, his cheeks pale.

His wife, holding one of the children on her knees, and the servant, who was carrying the other, continually cried out:

"Look at papa! look at papa!"

And the two boys, intoxicated by the motion of the carriage, by their delight and by the keen air, uttered shrill cries. The horse, frightened by the noise they made, started off at a gallop, and while Hector was trying to control his steed his hat fell off, and the driver had to get down and pick it up. When the equestrian had recovered it he called to his wife from a distance:

“Don’t let the children shout like that! They’ll make the horse bolt!”

They lunched on the grass in the Vesinet woods, having brought provisions with them in the carriage.

Although the driver was looking after the three horses, Hector rose every minute to see if his own lacked anything; he patted him on the neck and fed him with bread, cakes and sugar.

“He’s an unequal trotter,” he declared. “He certainly shook me up a little at first, but, as you saw, I soon got used to it. He knows his master now and won’t give any more trouble.”

As had been decided, they returned by the Champs-Elysees.

That spacious thoroughfare literally swarmed with vehicles of every kind, and on the sidewalks the pedestrians were so numerous that they looked like two indeterminate black ribbons unfurling their length from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde. A flood of sunlight played on this gay scene, making the varnish of the carriages, the steel of the harness and the handles of the carriage doors shine with dazzling brilliancy.

An intoxication of life and motion seemed to have invaded this assemblage of human beings, carriages and horses. In the distance the outlines of the Obelisk could be discerned in a cloud of golden vapor.

As soon as Hector’s horse had passed the Arc de Triomphe he became suddenly imbued with fresh energy, and, realizing that his stable was not far off, began to trot rapidly through the maze of wheels, despite all his rider’s efforts to restrain him.

The carriage was now far behind. When the horse arrived opposite the Palais de l’Industrie he saw a clear field before him, and, turning to the right, set off at a gallop.

An old woman wearing an apron was crossing the road in leisurely fashion. She happened to be just in Hector’s way as he arrived on the scene riding at full speed. Powerless to control his mount, he shouted at the top of his voice:

“Hi! Look out there! Hi!”

She must have been deaf, for she continued peacefully on her way until the awful moment when, struck by the horse’s chest as by a locomotive under full steam, she rolled ten paces off, turning three somersaults on the way.

Voices yelled:

“Stop him!”

Hector, frantic with terror, clung to the horse's mane and shouted:

"Help! help!"

A terrible jolt hurled him, as if shot from a gun, over his horse's ears and cast him into the arms of a policeman who was running up to stop him.

In the space of a second a furious, gesticulating, vociferating group had gathered round him. An old gentleman with a white mustache, wearing a large round decoration, seemed particularly exasperated. He repeated:

"Confound it! When a man is as awkward as all that he should remain at home and not come killing people in the streets, if he doesn't know how to handle a horse."

Four men arrived on the scene, carrying the old woman. She appeared to be dead. Her skin was like parchment, her cap on one side and she was covered with dust.

"Take her to a druggist's," ordered the old gentleman, "and let us go to the commissary of police."

Hector started on his way with a policeman on either side of him, a third was leading his horse. A crowd followed them — and suddenly the wagonette appeared in sight. His wife alighted in consternation, the servant lost her head, the children whimpered. He explained that he would soon be at home, that he had knocked a woman down and that there was not much the matter. And his family, distracted with anxiety, went on their way.

When they arrived before the commissary the explanation took place in few words. He gave his name — Hector de Gribelin, employed at the Ministry of Marine; and then they awaited news of the injured woman. A policeman who had been sent to obtain information returned, saying that she had recovered consciousness, but was complaining of frightful internal pain. She was a charwoman, sixty-five years of age, named Madame Simon.

When he heard that she was not dead Hector regained hope and promised to defray her doctor's bill. Then he hastened to the druggist's. The door way was thronged; the injured woman, huddled in an armchair, was groaning. Her arms hung at her sides, her face was drawn. Two doctors were still engaged in examining her. No bones were broken, but they feared some internal lesion.

Hector addressed her:

"Do you suffer much?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Where is the pain?"

"I feel as if my stomach were on fire."

A doctor approached.

"Are you the gentleman who caused the accident?"

"I am."

"This woman ought to be sent to a home. I know one where they would take her at six francs a day. Would you like me to send her there?"

Hector was delighted at the idea, thanked him and returned home much relieved.

His wife, dissolved in tears, was awaiting him. He reassured her.

"It's all right. This Madame Simon is better already and will be quite well in two or three days. I have sent her to a home. It's all right."

When he left his office the next day he went to inquire for Madame Simon. He found her eating rich soup with an air of great satisfaction.

"Well?" said he.

"Oh, sir," she replied, "I'm just the same. I feel sort of crushed — not a bit better."

The doctor declared they must wait and see; some complication or other might arise.

Hector waited three days, then he returned. The old woman, fresh-faced and clear-eyed, began to whine when she saw him:

"I can't move, sir; I can't move a bit. I shall be like this for the rest of my days."

A shudder passed through Hector's frame. He asked for the doctor, who merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"What can I do? I can't tell what's wrong with her. She shrieks when they try to raise her. They can't even move her chair from one place to another without her uttering the most distressing cries. I am bound to believe what she tells me; I can't look into her inside. So long as I have no chance of seeing her walk I am not justified in supposing her to be telling lies about herself."

The old woman listened, motionless, a malicious gleam in her eyes.

A week passed, then a fortnight, then a month. Madame Simon did not leave her armchair. She ate from morning to night, grew fat, chatted gaily with the other patients and seemed to enjoy her immobility as if it were the rest to which she was entitled after fifty years of going up and down stairs, of turning mattresses, of carrying coal from one story to another, of sweeping and dusting.

Hector, at his wits' end, came to see her every day. Every day he found her calm and serene, declaring:

"I can't move, sir; I shall never be able to move again."

Every evening Madame de Gribelin, devoured with anxiety, said:

"How is Madame Simon?"

And every time he replied with a resignation born of despair:

"Just the same; no change whatever."

They dismissed the servant, whose wages they could no longer afford. They economized more rigidly than ever. The whole of the extra pay had been swallowed up.

Then Hector summoned four noted doctors, who met in consultation over the old woman. She let them examine her, feel her, sound her, watching them the while with a cunning eye.

"We must make her walk," said one.

"But, sirs, I can't!" she cried. "I can't move!"

Then they took hold of her, raised her and dragged her a short distance, but she slipped from their grasp and fell to the floor, groaning and giving vent to such heartrending cries that they carried her back to her seat with infinite care and precaution.

They pronounced a guarded opinion — agreeing, however, that work was an impossibility to her.

And when Hector brought this news to his wife she sank on a chair, murmuring:

"It would be better to bring her here; it would cost us less."

He started in amazement.

"Here? In our own house? How can you think of such a thing?"

But she, resigned now to anything, replied with tears in her eyes:

"But what can we do, my love? It's not my fault!"

USELESS BEAUTY

I

About half-past five one afternoon at the end of June when the sun was shining warm and bright into the large courtyard, a very elegant victoria with two beautiful black horses drew up in front of the mansion.

The Comtesse de Mascaret came down the steps just as her husband, who was coming home, appeared in the carriage entrance. He stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and turned rather pale. The countess was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking, with her long oval face, her complexion like yellow ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair; and she got into her carriage without looking at him, without even seeming to have noticed him, with such a particularly high-bred air, that the furious jealousy by which he had been devoured for so long again gnawed at his heart. He went up to her and said: “You are going for a drive?”

She merely replied disdainfully: “You see I am!”

“In the Bois de Boulogne?”

“Most probably.”

“May I come with you?”

“The carriage belongs to you.”

Without being surprised at the tone in which she answered him, he got in and sat down by his wife’s side and said: “Bois de Boulogne.” The footman jumped up beside the coachman, and the horses as usual pranced and tossed their heads until they were in the street. Husband and wife sat side by side without speaking. He was thinking how to begin a conversation, but she maintained such an obstinately hard look that he did not venture to make the attempt. At last, however, he cunningly, accidentally as it were, touched the countess’ gloved hand with his own, but she drew her arm away with a movement which was so expressive of disgust that he remained thoughtful, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, and he said: “Gabrielle!”

“What do you want?”

“I think you are looking adorable.”

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen. By that time they were driving up the Champs Elysees, toward the Arc de Triomphe. That immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky and the sun seemed to be descending on it, showering fiery dust on it from the sky.

The stream of carriages, with dashes of sunlight reflected in the silver trappings of the harness and the glass of the lamps, flowed on in a double current toward the town and toward the Bois, and the Comte de Mascaret continued: “My dear Gabrielle!”

Unable to control herself any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice: “Oh! do leave me in peace, pray! I am not even allowed to have my carriage to myself now.” He pretended not to hear her and continued: “You never have looked so pretty as you do to-day.”

Her patience had come to an end, and she replied with irrepressible anger: “You are wrong to notice it, for I swear to you that I will never have anything to do with you in that way again.”

The count was decidedly stupefied and upset, and, his violent nature gaining the upper hand, he exclaimed: “What do you mean by that?” in a tone that betrayed rather the brutal master than the lover. She replied in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear amid the deafening noise of the wheels: “Ah! What do I mean by that? What do I mean by that? Now I recognize you again! Do you want me to tell everything?”

“Yes.”

“Everything that has weighed on my heart since I have been the victim of your terrible selfishness?”

He had grown red with surprise and anger and he growled between his closed teeth: “Yes, tell me everything.”

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a big red beard, a handsome man, a nobleman, a man of the world, who passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father, and now, for the first time since they had started, she turned toward him and looked him full in the face: “Ah! You will hear some disagreeable things, but you must know that I am prepared for everything, that I fear nothing, and you less than any one to-day.”

He also was looking into her eyes and was already shaking with rage as he said in a low voice: “You are mad.”

“No, but I will no longer be the victim of the hateful penalty of maternity, which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! I wish to take my place in society as I have the right to do, as all women have the right to do.”

He suddenly grew pale again and stammered: “I do not understand you.”

“Oh! yes; you understand me well enough. It is now three months since I had my last child, and as I am still very beautiful, and as, in spite of all your efforts you cannot spoil my figure, as you just now perceived, when you saw me on the doorstep, you think it is time that I should think of having another child.”

“But you are talking nonsense!”

“No, I am not, I am thirty, and I have had seven children, and we have been married eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for ten years longer, after which you will leave off being jealous.”

He seized her arm and squeezed it, saying: “I will not allow you to talk to me like that much longer.”

“And I shall talk to you till the end, until I have finished all I have to say to you, and if you try to prevent me, I shall raise my voice so that the two servants, who are on the box, may hear. I only allowed you to come with me for that object, for I have these witnesses who will oblige you to listen to me and to contain yourself, so now pay attention to what I say. I have always felt an antipathy to you, and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied, monsieur. You married me in spite of myself; you forced my parents, who were in embarrassed circumstances, to give me to you, because you were rich, and they obliged me to marry you in spite of my tears.

“So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I had become your companion, ready to attach myself to you, to forget your coercive and threatening proceedings, in order that I might only remember that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it might be possible for me to love you, you became jealous, you, as no man has ever been before, with the base, ignoble jealousy of a spy, which was as degrading to you as it was to me. I had not been married eight months when you suspected me of every perfidiousness, and you even told me so. What a disgrace! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful and from pleasing people, from being called in drawing-rooms and also in the newspapers one of the most beautiful women in Paris, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me, and you hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of motherhood, until the time should come when I should disgust every man. Oh, do not deny it. I did not understand it for some time, but then I guessed it. You even boasted about it to your sister, who told me of it, for she is fond of me and was disgusted at your boorish coarseness.

"Ah! Remember how you have behaved in the past! How for eleven years you have compelled me to give up all society and simply be a mother to your children. And then you would grow disgusted with me and I was sent into the country, the family chateau, among fields and meadows. And when I reappeared, fresh, pretty and unspoiled, still seductive and constantly surrounded by admirers, hoping that at last I should live a little more like a rich young society woman, you were seized with jealousy again, and you began once more to persecute me with that infamous and hateful desire from which you are suffering at this moment by my side. And it is not the desire of possessing me — for I should never have refused myself to you, but it is the wish to make me unsightly.

"And then that abominable and mysterious thing occurred which I was a long time in understanding (but I grew sharp by dint of watching your thoughts and actions): You attached yourself to your children with all the security which they gave you while I bore them. You felt affection for them, with all your aversion to me, and in spite of your ignoble fears, which were momentarily allayed by your pleasure in seeing me lose my symmetry.

"Oh! how often have I noticed that joy in you! I have seen it in your eyes and guessed it. You loved your children as victories, and not because they were of your own blood. They were victories over me, over my youth, over my beauty, over my charms, over the compliments which were paid me and over those that were whispered around me without being paid to me personally. And you are proud of them, you make a parade of them, you take them out for drives in your break in the Bois de Boulogne and you give them donkey rides at Montmorency. You take them to theatrical matinees so that you may be seen in the midst of them, so that the people may say: 'What a kind father' and that it may be repeated — — "

He had seized her wrist with savage brutality, and he squeezed it so violently that she was quiet and nearly cried out with the pain and he said to her in a whisper:

"I love my children, do you hear? What you have just told me is disgraceful in a mother. But you belong to me; I am master — your master — I can exact from you what I like and when I like — and I have the law-on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong grip of his large, muscular hand, and she, livid with pain, tried in vain to free them from that vise which was crushing them. The agony made her breathe hard and the tears came into her eyes. "You see that I am the master and the stronger," he said. When he somewhat loosened his grip, she asked him: "Do you think that I am a religious woman?"

He was surprised and stammered "Yes."

"Do you think that I could lie if I swore to the truth of anything to you before an altar on which Christ's body is?"

"No."

"Will you go with me to some church?"

"What for?"

"You shall see. Will you?"

"If you absolutely wish it, yes."

She raised her voice and said: "Philippe!" And the coachman, bending down a little, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone toward his mistress, who continued: "Drive to St. Philippe-du-Roule." And the-victoria, which had reached the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne returned to Paris.

Husband and wife did not exchange a word further during the drive, and when the carriage stopped before the church Madame de Mascaret jumped out and entered it, followed by the count, a few yards distant. She went, without stopping, as far as the choir-screen, and falling on her knees at a chair, she buried her face in her hands. She prayed for a long time, and he, standing behind her could see that she was crying. She wept noiselessly, as women weep when they are in great, poignant grief. There was a kind of undulation in her body, which ended in a little sob, which was hidden and stifled by her fingers.

But the Comte de Mascaret thought that the situation was lasting too long, and he touched her on the shoulder. That contact recalled her to herself, as if she had been burned, and getting up, she looked straight into his eyes. "This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing, whatever you may do to me. You may kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours, and one only; that I swear to you before God, who hears me here. That was the only revenge that was possible for me in return for all your abominable masculine tyrannies, in return for the penal servitude of childbearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? That you never will know! You may suspect every one, but you never will find out. I gave myself to him, without love and without pleasure, only for the sake of betraying you, and he also made me a mother. Which is the child? That also you never will know. I have seven; try to find out! I intended to tell you this later, for one has not avenged oneself on a man by deceiving him, unless he knows it. You have driven me to confess it today. I have now finished."

She hurried through the church toward the open door, expecting to hear behind her the quick step: of her husband whom she had defied and to be knocked to the ground by a blow of his fist, but she heard nothing and reached her carriage. She jumped into it at a bound, overwhelmed with anguish and breathless with fear. So she called out to the coachman: "Home!" and the horses set off at a quick trot.

II

The Comtesse de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner time as a criminal sentenced to death awaits the hour of his execution. What was her husband going to do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every moment she looked at the clock. Her lady's maid had come and dressed her for the evening and had then left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and announced dinner.

"Has the count come in?"

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse. He is in the diningroom."

For a little moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time before, foreseeing the tragedy which was being rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a bottle of smelling salts. He rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow and sat down. The three boys with their tutor, Abbe Martin, were on her right and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The abbe said grace as usual when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when guests were present. Then they began dinner. The countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the count scrutinized now the three boys and now the three girls with an uncertain, unhappy expression, which travelled from one to the other. Suddenly pushing his wineglass from him, it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth, and at the slight noise caused by this little accident the countess started up from her chair; and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they continued to exchange looks, rapid as pistol shots.

The abbe, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, attempted to begin a conversation and tried various subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, attempted to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly her husband said to her, bending forward: “Here, amid your children, will you swear to me that what you told me just now is true?”

The hatred which was fermenting in her veins suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing toward the boys and the left toward the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice and without any hesitation: “On the head of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth.”

He got up and throwing his table napkin on the table with a movement of exasperation, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall, and then went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: “You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be all right again in a few days.”

Then she talked with the abbe and Miss Smith and had tender, pretty words for all her children, those sweet, tender mother’s ways which unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over she went into the drawing-room, all her children following her. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them for a long time and then went alone into her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that the count would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to protect herself as a woman of the world as she would protect her life, and in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver which she had bought a few days previously. The hours went by, the hours struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs, continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was only heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, full of nervous energy, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually during every moment of his life.

But the first gleam of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtain without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, with much amazement, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last and remained there, with her eyes open, thinking and barely understanding it all, without being able to guess what he was going to do.

When her maid brought her tea she at the same time handed her a letter from her husband. He told her that he was going to undertake a longish journey and in a postscript added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

III

It was at the opera, between two acts of “Robert the Devil.” In the stalls the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large amount of white shirt front, in which gold and jewelled studs glistened, and were looking at the boxes full of ladies in low dresses covered with diamonds and pearls, who were expanding like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of their faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be gazed at, amid the sound of the music and of human voices.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra, were scanning those rows of elegance, that exhibition of real or false charms, of jewels, of luxury and of pretension which displayed itself in all parts of the Grand Theatre, and one of them, Roger de Salnis, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin:

"Just look how beautiful the Comtesse de Mascaret still is."

The older man in turn looked through his opera glasses at a tall lady in a box opposite. She appeared to be still very young, and her striking beauty seemed to attract all eyes in every corner of the house. Her pale complexion, of an ivory tint, gave her the appearance of a statue, while a small diamond coronet glistened on her black hair like a streak of light.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful!"

"How old do you think she is?"

"Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child and I saw her make her debut into society when she was quite a girl. She is — she is — thirty — thirty-six."

"Impossible!"

"I am sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"She has had seven children."

"It is incredible."

"And what is more, they are all seven alive, as she is a very good mother. I occasionally go to the house, which is a very quiet and pleasant one, where one may see the phenomenon of the family in the midst of society."

"How very strange! And have there never been any reports about her?"

"Never."

"But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes and no. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic dramas which one suspects, never finds out exactly, but guesses at pretty closely."

"What is it?"

"I do not know anything about it. Mascaret leads a very fast life now, after being a model husband. As long as he remained a good spouse he had a shocking temper, was crabbed and easily took offence, but since he has been leading his present wild life he has become quite different, But one might surmise that he has some trouble, a worm gnawing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

Thereupon the two friends talked philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknowable troubles which differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, which were not perceived at first, give rise to in families, and then Roger de Salnis, who was still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera glasses, said: “It is almost incredible that that woman can have had seven children!”

“Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she refused to have any more, in order to take her place in society, which she seems likely to do for many years.”

“Poor women!”

“Why do you pity them?”

“Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! Eleven years in a condition of motherhood for such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, every hope of success, every poetical ideal of a brilliant life sacrificed to that abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for bringing children into the world.”

“What would you have? It is only Nature!”

“Yes, but I say that Nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against Nature, for she is continually bringing us back to an animal state. You may be sure that God has not put anything on this earth that is clean, pretty, elegant or accessory to our ideal; the human brain has done it. It is man who has introduced a little grace, beauty, unknown charm and mystery into creation by singing about it, interpreting it, by admiring it as a poet, idealizing it as an artist and by explaining it through science, doubtless making mistakes, but finding ingenious reasons, hidden grace and beauty, unknown charm and mystery in the various phenomena of Nature. God created only coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, who, after a few years of bestial enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the want of power of human decrepitude. He seems to have made them only in order that they may reproduce their species in an ignoble manner and then die like ephemeral insects. I said reproduce their species in an ignoble manner and I adhere to that expression. What is there as a matter of fact more ignoble and more repugnant than that act of reproduction of living beings, against which all delicate minds always have revolted and always will revolt? Since all the organs which have been invented by this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did He not choose another method of performing that sacred mission, which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by means of material food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh renews itself of its own accord, while we are thinking about it. The olfactory organs, through which the vital air reaches the lungs, communicate all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The ear, which enables us to communicate with our fellow men, has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, infinite and even physical pleasure by means of sound! But one might say that the cynical and cunning Creator wished to prohibit man from ever ennobling and idealizing his intercourse with women. Nevertheless man has found love, which is not a bad reply to that sly Deity, and he has adorned it with so much poetry that woman often forgets the sensual part of it. Those among us who are unable to deceive themselves have invented vice and refined debauchery, which is another way of laughing at God and paying homage, immodest homage, to beauty.

"But the normal man begets children just like an animal coupled with another by law.

"Look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that such a jewel, such a pearl, born to be beautiful, admired, feted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in providing heirs for the Comte de Mascaret?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh: "There is a great deal of truth in all that, but very few people would understand you."

Salnis became more and more animated. "Do you know how I picture God myself?" he said. "As an enormous, creative organ beyond our ken, who scatters millions of worlds into space, just as one single fish would deposit its spawn in the sea. He creates because it is His function as God to do so, but He does not know what He is doing and is stupidly prolific in His work and is ignorant of the combinations of all kinds which are produced by His scattered germs. The human mind is a lucky little local, passing accident which was totally unforeseen, and condemned to disappear with this earth and to recommence perhaps here or elsewhere the same or different with fresh combinations of eternally new beginnings. We owe it to this little lapse of intelligence on His part that we are very uncomfortable in this world which was not made for us, which had not been prepared to receive us, to lodge and feed us or to satisfy reflecting beings, and we owe it to Him also that we have to struggle without ceasing against what are still called the designs of Providence, when we are really refined and civilized beings."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively as he had long known the surprising outbursts of his imagination, asked him: “Then you believe that human thought is the spontaneous product of blind divine generation?”

“Naturally! A fortuitous function of the nerve centres of our brain, like the unforeseen chemical action due to new mixtures and similar also to a charge of electricity, caused by friction or the unexpected proximity of some substance, similar to all phenomena caused by the infinite and fruitful fermentation of living matter.

“But, my dear fellow, the truth of this must be evident to any one who looks about him. If the human mind, ordained by an omniscient Creator, had been intended to be what it has become, exacting, inquiring, agitated, tormented — so different from mere animal thought and resignation — would the world which was created to receive the beings which we now are have been this unpleasant little park for small game, this salad patch, this wooded, rocky and spherical kitchen garden where your improvident Providence had destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished on the flesh of slaughtered animals, our brethren, or on raw vegetables nourished by the sun and the rain?

“But it is sufficient to reflect for a moment, in order to understand that this world was not made for such creatures as we are. Thought, which is developed by a miracle in the nerves of the cells in our brain, powerless, ignorant and confused as it is, and as it will always remain, makes all of us who are intellectual beings eternal and wretched exiles on earth.

“Look at this earth, as God has given it to those who inhabit it. Is it not visibly and solely made, planted and covered with forests for the sake of animals? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, everything, and they have nothing to do but to eat or go hunting and eat each other, according to their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceable manners; He only foresaw the death of creatures which were bent on destroying and devouring each other. Are not the quail, the pigeon and the partridge the natural prey of the hawk? the sheep, the stag and the ox that of the great flesh-eating animals, rather than meat to be fattened and served up to us with truffles, which have been unearthed by pigs for our special benefit?

“As to ourselves, the more civilized, intellectual and refined we are, the more we ought to conquer and subdue that animal instinct, which represents the will of God in us. And so, in order to mitigate our lot as brutes, we have discovered and made everything, beginning with houses, then exquisite food, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, drink, stuffs, clothes, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways and innumerable machines, besides arts and sciences, writing and poetry. Every ideal comes from us as do all the amenities of life, in order to make our existence as simple reproducers, for which divine Providence solely intended us, less monotonous and less hard.

"Look at this theatre. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen and unknown to eternal fate, intelligible to our minds alone, a sensual and intellectual distraction, which has been invented solely by and for that discontented and restless little animal, man?

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God intended her to live in a cave, naked or wrapped up in the skins of wild animals. But is she not better as she is? But, speaking of her, does any one know why and how her brute of a husband, having such a companion by his side, and especially after having been boorish enough to make her a mother seven times, has suddenly left her, to run after bad women?"

Grandin replied: "Oh! my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason. He found that raising a family was becoming too expensive, and from reasons of domestic economy he has arrived at the same principles which you lay down as a philosopher."

Just then the curtain rose for the third act, and they turned round, took off their hats and sat down.

IV

The Comte and Comtesse Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them home from the Opera, without speaking but suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years?"

"What do you want? I cannot help it."

"Then tell me which of them it is."

"Never."

"Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you and treat it like the others."

"I have not the right to do so."

"Do you not see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am constantly asking myself, this question which tortures me each time I look at them? It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize and who prevents me from loving the others?"

"Then you have really suffered very much?" she repeated.

And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture to me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably toward me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh! I shall never forget the things you said to me, but from that day I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our — of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them on my knee without asking myself, 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior toward you for six years, and even kind and complaisant. Tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved, and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me" he said.

"I have been more guilty than you think perhaps," she replied, "but I could no longer endure that life of continual motherhood, and I had only one means of driving you from me. I lied before God and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's head, for I never have wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered:

“Is that true?”

“It is true.”

But, wild with grief, he said with a groan: “I shall have fresh doubts that will never end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me, ‘It is Jacques or it is Jeanne.’”

The carriage drove into the courtyard of the house and when it had drawn up in front of the steps the count alighted first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm to mount the stairs. As soon as they reached the first floor he said: “May I speak to you for a few moments longer?” And she replied, “I am quite willing.”

They went into a small drawing-room and a footman, in some surprise, lighted the wax candles. As soon as he had left the room and they were alone the count continued: “How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have remained dumb, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now to-day you tell me that you have been lying. For six years you have actually allowed me to believe such a thing! No, you are lying now, I do not know why, but out of pity for me, perhaps?”

She replied in a sincere and convincing manner: “If I had not done so, I should have had four more children in the last six years!”

“Can a mother speak like that?”

“Oh!” she replied, “I do not feel that I am the mother of children who never have been born; it is enough for me to be the mother of those that I have and to love them with all my heart. I am a woman of the civilized world, monsieur — we all are — and we are no longer, and we refuse to be, mere females to restock the earth.”

She got up, but he seized her hands. “Only one word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth!”

“I have just told you. I never have dishonored you.”

He looked her full in the face, and how beautiful she was, with her gray eyes, like the cold sky. In her dark hair sparkled the diamond coronet, like a radiance. He suddenly felt, felt by a kind of intuition, that this grand creature was not merely a being destined to perpetuate the race, but the strange and mysterious product of all our complicated desires which have been accumulating in us for centuries but which have been turned aside from their primitive and divine object and have wandered after a mystic, imperfectly perceived and intangible beauty. There are some women like that, who blossom only for our dreams, adorned with every poetical attribute of civilization, with that ideal luxury, coquetry and esthetic charm which surround woman, a living statue that brightens our life.

Her husband remained standing before her, stupefied at his tardy and obscure discovery, confusedly hitting on the cause of his former jealousy and understanding it all very imperfectly, and at last lie said: “I believe you, for I feel at this moment that you are not lying, and before I really thought that you were.”

She put out her hand to him: “We are friends then?”

He took her hand and kissed it and replied: “We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle.”

Then he went out, still looking at her, and surprised that she was still so beautiful and feeling a strange emotion arising in him.

THE FATHER

I

He was a clerk in the Bureau of Public Education and lived at Batignolles. He took the omnibus to Paris every morning and always sat opposite a girl, with whom he fell in love.

She was employed in a shop and went in at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those girls whose eyes are so dark that they look like black spots, on a complexion like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street, and she generally had to run to catch the heavy vehicle, and sprang upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then she got inside, out of breath, and, sitting down, looked round her.

The first time that he saw her, Francois Tessier liked the face. One sometimes meets a woman whom one longs to clasp in one's arms without even knowing her. That girl seemed to respond to some chord in his being, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart, without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, not meaning to be rude, and she became embarrassed and blushed. He noticed it, and tried to turn away his eyes; but he involuntarily fixed them upon her again every moment, although he tried to look in another direction; and, in a few days, they seemed to know each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full, and got outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time she had got so far as to greet him with a little smile; and, although she always dropped her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid friendship had become established between them, a daily freemasonry of half an hour, and that was certainly one of the most charming half hours in his life to him. He thought of her all the rest of the day, saw her image continually during the long office hours. He was haunted and bewitched by that floating and yet tenacious recollection which the form of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that if he could win that little person it would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning she now shook hands with him, and he preserved the sense of that touch and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers until the next day, and he almost fancied that he preserved the imprint on his palm. He anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride, while Sundays seemed to him heartbreaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him, for one Saturday, in spring, she promised to go and lunch with him at Maisons-Laffitte the next day.

II

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: “Before going, I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes, and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say.”

She trembled as she hung on his arm, and looked down, her cheeks pale, as she continued: “I do not want you to be deceived in me, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear — not to do — not to do anything — that is at all improper.”

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy, and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious to have a little flirtation.

As he did not say anything, she began to speak again in an agitated voice and with tears in her eyes. “If you do not promise to respect me altogether, I shall return home.” And so he squeezed her arm tenderly and replied: “I promise, you shall only do what you like.” She appeared relieved in mind, and asked, with a smile: “Do you really mean it?” And he looked into her eyes and replied: “I swear it” “Now you may take the tickets,” she said.

During the journey they could hardly speak, as the carriage was full, and when they reached Maisons-Laffite they went toward the Seine. The sun, which shone full on the river, on the leaves and the grass, seemed to be reflected in their hearts, and they went, hand in hand, along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank, and they walked on, brimming over with happiness, as if they were walking on air.

At last she said: “How foolish you must think me!”

“Why?” he asked. “To come out like this, all alone with you.”

“Certainly not; it is quite natural.” “No, no; it is not natural for me — because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month and every month in the year. I live quite alone with mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can, and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do not always succeed. But, all the same, it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry.”

By way of an answer, he kissed her ardently on the ear that was nearest him, but she moved from him with an abrupt movement, and, getting suddenly angry, exclaimed: “Oh! Monsieur Francois, after what you swore to me!” And they went back to Maisons-Laffitte.

They had lunch at the Petit-Havre, a low house, buried under four enormous poplar trees, by the side of the river. The air, the heat, the weak white wine and the sensation of being so close together made them silent; their faces were flushed and they had a feeling of oppression; but, after the coffee, they regained their high spirits, and, having crossed the Seine, started off along the bank, toward the village of La Frette. Suddenly he asked: “What-is your name?”

“Louise.”

“Louise,” he repeated and said nothing more.

The girl picked daisies and made them into a great bunch, while he sang vigorously, as unrestrained as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left a vine-covered slope followed the river. Francois stopped motionless with astonishment: “Oh, look there!” he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a purple wood! A kind of great carpet of flowers stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles off. She also stood, surprised and delighted, and murmured: “Oh! how pretty!” And, crossing a meadow, they ran toward that curious low hill, which, every year, furnishes all the lilac that is drawn through Paris on the carts of the flower venders.

There was a narrow path beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing, sat down.

Swarms of flies were buzzing around them and making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the bright slopes and from that forest of blossoms a powerful fragrance was borne toward them, a breath of perfume, the breath of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance, and they embraced gently, then, without the knowledge of anything but that kiss, lay down on the grass. But she soon came to herself with the feeling of a great misfortune, and began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to start to return and to go home immediately; and she kept saying, as she walked along quickly: “Good heavens! good heavens!”

He said to her: “Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here.” But now her cheeks were red and her eyes hollow, and, as soon as they got to the railway station in Paris, she left him without even saying good-by. III

When he met her in the omnibus, next day, she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: “I want to speak to you; we will get down at the Boulevard.”

As soon as they were on the pavement, she said:

“We must bid each other good-by; I cannot meet you again.” “But why?” he asked. “Because I cannot; I have been culpable, and I will not be so again.”

Then he implored her, tortured by his love, but she replied firmly: “No, I cannot, I cannot.” He, however, only grew all the more excited and promised to marry her, but she said again: “No,” and left him.

For a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and, as he did not know her address, he thought that he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened the door, she was there. She threw herself into his arms and did not resist any longer, and for three months they were close friends. He was beginning to grow tired of her, when she whispered something to him, and then he had one idea and wish: to break with her at any price. As, however, he could not do that, not knowing how to begin, or what to say, full of anxiety through fear of the consequences of his rash indiscretion, he took a decisive step: one night he changed his lodgings and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look, for the man who had abandoned her, but threw herself at her mother’s knees and confessed her misfortune, and, some months after, gave birth to a boy. IV

Years passed, and Francois Tessier grew old, without there having been any alteration in his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of an office clerk, without hope and without expectation. Every day he got up at the same time, went through the same streets, went through the same door, past the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair, and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone during the day in the midst of his different colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings, and he laid by a hundred francs a month against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the Champs-Elysees, to watch the elegant people, the carriages and the pretty women, and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the Bois du Boulogne was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the Parc Monceau, where the mothers and nurses, sitting on the sides of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly Francois Tessier started. A woman passed by, holding two children by the hand, a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she!

He walked another hundred yards anti then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting down now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she, it was certainly she, but she had the reserved appearance of a lady, was dressed simply, and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to go near; but the little boy raised his head, and Francois Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son, there could be no doubt of that. And, as he looked at him, he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially tormented him. His son! Oh, if he could only have known, have been sure! But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she lived and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her, and had even recognized the child, his, Francois Tessier's child, as his own.

He returned to the Parc Monceau every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, an irresistible longing to take his son into his arms, to cover him with kisses and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor, with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, longing and jealousy and from that need of loving one's own children which nature has implanted in all. At last he determined to make a despairing attempt, and, going up to her, as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me." She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror, and, taking the two children by the hand, she rushed away, dragging them after her, while he went home and wept inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again, but he suffered, day and night, for he was a prey to his paternal love. He would gladly have died, if he could only have kissed his son; he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and, after writing her some twenty letters, he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination, and then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver, if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

"Monsieur: You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so wretched, so overcome by misery that my only hope is in you, and, therefore, I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes.

"I have the honor, etc."

The next day he received the reply:

"Monsieur: I shall expect you to-morrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock."

As he went up the staircase, Francois Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent thumping noise in his breast, as of some animal galloping; and he could breathe only with difficulty, and had to hold on to the banisters, in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maid servant had opened the door, he asked: "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?" "Yes, monsieur. Kindly come in."

He was shown into the drawing-room; he was alone, and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened, and a man came in. He was tall, serious and rather stout, and wore a black frock coat, and pointed to a chair with his hand. Francois Tessier sat down, and then said, with choking breath: “Monsieur — monsieur — I do not know whether you know my name — whether you know — — “

Monsieur Flamel interrupted him. “You need not tell it me, monsieur, I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you.” He spoke in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, and with the commonplace stateliness of an honorable man, and Francois Tessier continued:

“Well, monsieur, I want to say this: I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once to kiss the child.”

Monsieur Flamel got up and rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he said: “Will you bring Louis here?” When she had gone out, they remained face to face, without speaking, as they had nothing more to say to one another, and waited. Then, suddenly, a little boy of ten rushed into the room and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father, but he stopped when he saw the stranger, and Monsieur Flamel kissed him and said: “Now, go and kiss that gentleman, my dear.” And the child went up to the stranger and looked at him.

Francois Tessier had risen. He let his hat fall, and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while Monsieur Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise; but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then Francois, taking the child up in his arms, began to kiss him wildly all over his face; on his eyes, his cheeks, his mouth, his hair; and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses, tried to avoid them, turned away his head, and pushed away the man’s face with his little hands. But suddenly Francois Tessier put him down and cried: “Good-by! good-by!” And he rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

MY UNCLE SOSTHENES

Some people are Freethinkers from sheer stupidity. My Uncle Sosthenes was one of these. Some people are often religious for the same reason. The very sight of a priest threw my uncle into a violent rage. He would shake his fist and make grimaces at him, and would then touch a piece of iron when the priest's back was turned, forgetting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye. Now, when beliefs are unreasonable, one should have all or none at all. I myself am a Freethinker; I revolt at all dogmas, but feel no anger toward places of worship, be they Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, Protestant, Greek, Russian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that they are stupider than old women devotees. That is my opinion, and I maintain it; if we must have any religion at all, the old one is good enough for me.

What is their object? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I see no harm in it, for they put into practice the Christian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about lending a poor devil half a crown.

To all my arguments my uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion; Free Thought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the stronghold, of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, my dear uncle," I would reply — in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot! it is just that which I am blaming you for. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition; it is only a case of lowering prices. And then, if you admitted only Freethinkers among you, I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have a number of Catholics among you, even the leaders of the party. Pius IX is said to have been one of you before he became pope. If you call a society with such an organization a bulwark against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one.”

“My dear boy,” my uncle would reply, with a wink, “we are most to be dreaded in politics; slowly and surely we are everywhere undermining the monarchical spirit.”

Then I broke out: “Yes, you are very clever! If you tell me that Freemasonry is an election machine, I will grant it. I will never deny that it is used as a machine to control candidates of all shades; if you say that it is only used to hoodwink people, to drill them to go to the polls as soldiers are sent under fire, I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political ambitions because it changes all its members into electoral agents, I should say to you: ‘That is as clear as the sun.’ But when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face.

“Just consider that gigantic and secret democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its grand master under the Empire; which has the Crown Prince for its grand master in Germany, the Czar’s brother in Russia, and to which the Prince of Wales and King Humbert, and nearly all the crowned heads of the globe belong.”

“You are quite right,” my uncle said; “but all these persons are serving our projects without guessing it.”

I felt inclined to tell him he was talking a pack of nonsense.

It was, however, indeed a sight to see my uncle when he had a Freemason to dinner.

On meeting they shook hands in a manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a series of secret, mysterious signs.

Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and at dinner they had a peculiar way of looking at each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: “We know all about it, don’t we?”

And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are amused at such monkey tricks! I would sooner be a Jesuit.

Now, in our town there really was an old Jesuit who was my uncle’s detestation. Every time he met him, or if he only saw him at a distance, he used to say: “Get away, you toad.” And then, taking my arm, he would whisper to me:

“See here, that fellow will play me a trick some day or other, I feel sure of it.”

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was how it happened, and through my fault.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, a real dinner, with his favorite chitterlings and black puddings. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

“I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, quite by myself. Your manifestation, as you call it, is an idiotic idea. Why should you manifest? What does it matter to you if people do not eat any meat?”

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He asked three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and as he was going to pay the bill I had certainly, after all, no scruples about manifesting.

At four o’clock we took a conspicuous place in the most frequented restaurant in the town, and my uncle ordered dinner in a loud voice for six o’clock.

We sat down punctually, and at ten o’clock we had not yet finished. Five of us had drunk eighteen bottles of choice, still wine and four of champagne. Then my uncle proposed what he was in the habit of calling “the archbishop’s circuit.” Each man put six small glasses in front of him, each of them filled with a different liqueur, and they had all to be emptied at one gulp, one after another, while one of the waiters counted twenty. It was very stupid, but my uncle thought it was very suitable to the occasion.

At eleven o’clock he was as drunk as a fly. So we had to take him home in a cab and put him to bed, and one could easily foresee that his anti-clerical demonstration would end in a terrible fit of indigestion.

As I was going back to my lodgings, being rather drunk myself, with a cheerful drunkenness, a Machiavellian idea struck me which satisfied all my sceptical instincts.

I arranged my necktie, put on a look of great distress, and went and, rang loudly at the old Jesuit’s door. As he was deaf he made me wait a longish while, but at length appeared at his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted out at the top of my voice:

“Make haste, reverend sir, and open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations.”

The good, kind man put on his trousers as quickly as he could, and came down without his cassock. I told him in a breathless voice that my uncle, the Freethinker, had been taken suddenly ill, and fearing it was going to be something serious, he had been seized with a sudden dread of death, and wished to see the priest and talk to him; to have his advice and comfort, to make his peace with the Church, and to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold at peace with himself; and I added in a mocking tone:

"At any rate, he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was startled, delighted, and almost trembling, said to me:

"Wait a moment, my son; I will come with you." But I replied: "Pardon me, reverend father, if I do not go with you; but my convictions will not allow me to do so. I even refused to come and fetch you, so I beg you not to say that you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment — a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented and went off quickly; knocked at my uncle's door, and was soon let in; and I saw the black cassock disappear within that stronghold of Free Thought.

I hid under a neighboring gateway to wait results. Had he been well, my uncle would have half-murdered the Jesuit, but I knew that he would scarcely be able to move an arm, and I asked myself gleefully what sort of a scene would take place between these antagonists, what disputes, what arguments, what a hubbub, and what would be the issue of the situation, which my uncle's indignation would render still more tragic?

I laughed till my sides ached, and said half aloud: "Oh, what a joke, what a joke!"

Meanwhile it was getting very cold, and I noticed that the Jesuit stayed a long time, and I thought: "They are having an argument, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the cassocked gentleman? Perhaps they had mutually devoured each other? This last supposition appeared very unlikely, for I fancied that my uncle was quite incapable of swallowing a grain more nourishment at that moment.

At last the day broke.

I was very uneasy, and, not venturing to go into the house myself, went to one of my friends who lived opposite. I woke him up, explained matters to him, much to his amusement and astonishment, and took possession of his window.

At nine o’clock he relieved me, and I got a little sleep. At two o’clock I, in my turn, replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o’clock the Jesuit left, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, timid and ashamed, I went and knocked at the door of my uncle’s house; and when the servant opened it I did not dare to ask her any questions, but went upstairs without saying a word.

My uncle was lying, pale and exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious picture was fastened to one of the bed curtains with a pin.

“Why, uncle,” I said, “in bed still? Are you not well?”

He replied in a feeble voice:

“Oh, my dear boy, I have been very ill, nearly dead.”

“How was that, uncle?”

“I don’t know; it was most surprising. But what is stranger still is that the Jesuit priest who has just left — you know, that excellent man whom I have made such fun of — had a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me.”

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: “Oh, really!”

“Yes, he came. He heard a voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. I was a revelation.”

I pretended to sneeze, so as not to burst out laughing; I felt inclined to roll on the ground with amusement.

In about a minute I managed to say indignantly:

“And you received him, uncle? You, a Freethinker, a Freemason? You did not have him thrown out of doors?”

He seemed confused, and stammered:

“Listen a moment, it is so astonishing — so astonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father; it seems he knew him formerly.”

“Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for receiving a Jesuit.”

“I know that, but I was very ill, and he looked after me most devotedly all night long. He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life; those men all know a little of medicine.”

“Oh! he looked after you all night? But you said just now that he had only been gone a very short time.”

“That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after all his kindness. He had it at a table by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea.”

“And he ate meat?”

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very uncalled for, and then added:

“Don’t joke, Gaston; such things are out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than many a relation would have done, and I expect to have his convictions respected.”

This rather upset me, but I answered, nevertheless: “Very well, uncle; and what did you do after breakfast?”

“We played a game of bezique, and then he repeated his breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have in his pocket, and which was not by any means badly written.”

“A religious book, uncle?”

“Yes, and no, or, rather — no. It is the history of their missions in Central Africa, and is rather a book of travels and adventures. What these men have done is very grand.”

I began to feel that matters were going badly, so I got up. “Well, good-by, uncle,” I said, “I see you are going to give up Freemasonry for religion; you are a renegade.”

He was still rather confused, and stammered:

“Well, but religion is a sort of Freemasonry.”

“When is your Jesuit coming back?” I asked.

“I don’t — I don’t know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps; but it is not certain.”

I went out, altogether overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became thoroughly converted, and if that had been all I should not have cared so much. Clerical or Freemason, to me it is all the same; six of one and half a dozen of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will — yes, made his will — and he has disinherited me in favor of that rascally Jesuit!

THE BARONESS

“Come with me,” said my friend Boisrene, “you will see some very interesting bric-a-brac and works of art there.”

He conducted me to the first floor of an elegant house in one of the big streets of Paris. We were welcomed by a very pleasing man, with excellent manners, who led us from room to room, showing us rare things, the price of which he mentioned carelessly. Large sums, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty thousand francs, dropped from his lips with such grace and ease that one could not doubt that this gentleman-merchant had millions shut up in his safe.

I had known him by reputation for a long time Very bright, clever, intelligent, he acted as intermediary in all sorts of transactions. He kept in touch with all the richest art amateurs in Paris, and even of Europe and America, knowing their tastes and preferences; he apprised them by letter, or by wire if they lived in a distant city, as soon as he knew of some work of art which might suit them.

Men of the best society had had recourse to him in times of difficulty, either to find money for gambling, or to pay off a debt, or to sell a picture, a family jewel, or a tapestry.

It was said that he never refused his services when he saw a chance of gain.

Boisrene seemed very intimate with this strange merchant. They must have worked together in many a deal. I observed the man with great interest.

He was tall, thin, bald, and very elegant. His soft, insinuating voice had a peculiar, tempting charm which seemed to give the objects a special value. When he held anything in his hands, he turned it round and round, looking at it with such skill, refinement, and sympathy that the object seemed immediately to be beautiful and transformed by his look and touch. And its value increased in one’s estimation, after the object had passed from the showcase into his hands.

“And your Crucifix,” said Boisrene, “that beautiful Renaissance Crucifix which you showed me last year?”

The man smiled and answered:

“It has been sold, and in a very peculiar manner. There is a real Parisian story for you! Would you like to hear it?”

“With pleasure.”

“Do you know the Baroness Samoris?”

“Yes and no. I have seen her once, but I know what she is!”

“You know — everything?”

“Yes.”

“Would you mind telling me, so that I can see whether you are not mistaken?”

“Certainly. Mme. Samoris is a woman of the world who has a daughter, without anyone having known her husband. At any rate, she is received in a certain tolerant, or blind society. She goes to church and devoutly partakes of Communion, so that everyone may know it, and she never compromises herself. She expects her daughter to marry well. Is that correct?”

“Yes, but I will complete your information. She is a woman who makes herself respected by her admirers in spite of everything. That is a rare quality, for in this manner she can get what she wishes from a man. The man whom she has chosen without his suspecting it courts her for a long time, longs for her timidly, wins her with astonishment and possesses her with consideration. He does not notice that he is paying, she is so tactful; and she maintains her relations on such a footing of reserve and dignity that he would slap the first man who dared doubt her in the least. And all this in the best of faith.

“Several times I have been able to render little services to this woman. She has no secrets from me.

“Toward the beginning of January she came to me in order to borrow thirty thousand francs. Naturally, I did not lend them to her; but, as I wished to oblige her, I told her to explain her situation to me completely, so that I might see whether there was not something I could do for her.

“She told me her troubles in such cautious language that she could not have spoken more delicately of her child’s first communion. I finally managed to understand that times were hard, and that she was penniless.

"The commercial crisis, political unrest, rumors of war, had made money scarce even in the hands of her clients. And then, of course, she was very particular.

"She would associate only with a man in the best of society, who could strengthen her reputation as well as help her financially. A reveller, no matter how rich, would have compromised her forever, and would have made the marriage of her daughter quite doubtful.

"She had to maintain her household expenses and continue to entertain, in order not to lose the opportunity of finding, among her numerous visitors, the discreet and distinguished friend for whom she was waiting, and whom she would choose.

"I showed her that my thirty thousand francs would have but little likelihood of returning to me; for, after spending them all, she would have to find at least sixty thousand more, in a lump, to pay me back.

"She seemed very disheartened when she heard this. I did not know just what to do, when an idea, a really fine idea, struck me.

"I had just bought this Renaissance Crucifix which I showed you, an admirable piece of workmanship, one of the finest of its land that I have ever seen.

"'My dear friend,' I said to her, 'I am going to send you that piece of ivory. You will invent some ingenious, touching, poetic story, anything that you wish, to explain your desire for parting with it. It is, of course, a family heirloom left you by your father.

"'I myself will send you amateurs, or will bring them to you. The rest concerns you. Before they come I will drop you a line about their position, both social and financial. This Crucifix is worth fifty thousand francs; but I will let it go for thirty thousand. The difference will belong to you.'

"She considered the matter seriously for several minutes, and then answered: 'Yes, it is, perhaps, a good idea. I thank you very-much.'

"The next day I sent her my Crucifix, and the same evening the Baron de Saint-Hospital.

"For three months I sent her my best clients, from a business point of view. But I heard nothing more from her.

"One day I received a visit from a foreigner who spoke very little French. I decided to introduce him personally to the baroness, in order to see how she was getting along.

"A footman in black livery received us and ushered us into a quiet little parlor, furnished with taste, where we waited for several minutes. She appeared, charming as usual, extended her hand to me and invited us to be seated; and when I had explained the reason of my visit, she rang.

"The footman appeared.

"'See if Mlle. Isabelle can let us go into her oratory.' The young girl herself brought the answer. She was about fifteen years of age, modest and good to look upon in the sweet freshness of her youth. She wished to conduct us herself to her chapel.

"It was a kind of religious boudoir where a silver lamp was burning before the Crucifix, my Crucifix, on a background of black velvet. The setting was charming and very clever. The child crossed herself and then said:

"'Look, gentlemen. Isn't it beautiful?'

"I took the object, examined it and declared it to be remarkable. The foreigner also examined it, but he seemed much more interested in the two women than in the crucifix.

"A delicate odor of incense, flowers and perfume pervaded the whole house. One felt at home there. This really was a comfortable home, where one would have liked to linger.

"When we had returned to the parlor I delicately broached the subject of the price. Mme. Samoris, lowering her eyes, asked fifty thousand francs.

"Then she added: 'If you wish to see it again, monsieur, I very seldom go out before three o'clock; and I can be found at home every day.'

"In the street the stranger asked me for some details about the baroness, whom he had found charming. But I did not hear anything more from either of them.

"Three months passed by.

"One morning, hardly two weeks ago, she came here at about lunch time, and, placing a roll of bills in my hand, said: 'My dear, you are an angel! Here are fifty thousand francs; I am buying your crucifix, and I am paying twenty thousand francs more for it than the price agreed upon, on condition that you always — always send your clients to me — for it is sill for sale.'"

MOTHER AND SON

A party of men were chatting in the smoking room after dinner. We were talking of unexpected legacies, strange inheritances. Then M. le Brument, who was sometimes called "the illustrious judge" and at other times "the illustrious lawyer," went and stood with his back to the fire.

"I have," said he, "to search for an heir who disappeared under peculiarly distressing circumstances. It is one of those simple and terrible dramas of ordinary life, a thing which possibly happens every day, and which is nevertheless one of the most dreadful things I know. Here are the facts:

"Nearly six months ago I was called to the bedside of a dying woman. She said to me:

"'Monsieur, I want to intrust to you the most delicate, the most difficult, and the most wearisome mission that can be conceived. Be good enough to notice my will, which is there on the table. A sum of five thousand francs is left to you as a fee if you do not succeed, and of a hundred thousand francs if you do succeed. I want you to find my son after my death.'

"She asked me to assist her to sit up in bed, in order that she might talk with greater ease, for her voice, broken and gasping, was whistling in her throat.

"It was a very wealthy establishment. The luxurious apartment, of an elegant simplicity, was upholstered with materials as thick as walls, with a soft inviting surface.

"The dying woman continued:

"'You are the first to hear my horrible story. I will try to have strength enough to finish it. You must know all, in order that you, whom I know to be a kind-hearted man as well as a man of the world, may have a sincere desire to aid me with all your power.

"'Listen to me:

"'Before my marriage, I loved a young man, whose suit was rejected by my family because he was not rich enough. Not long afterward, I married a man of great wealth. I married him through ignorance, through obedience, through indifference, as young girls do marry.

"'I had a child, a boy. My husband died in the course of a few years.

"'He whom I had loved had married, in his turn. When he saw that I was a widow, he was crushed by grief at knowing he was not free. He came to see me; he wept and sobbed so bitterly, that it was enough to break my heart. He came to see me at first as a friend. Perhaps I ought not to have received him. What could I do? I was alone, so sad, so solitary, so hopeless! And I loved him still. What sufferings we women have sometimes to endure!

"'I had only him in the world, my parents being dead. He came frequently; he spent whole evenings with me. I should not have let him come so often, seeing that he was married. But I had not enough will-power to prevent him from coming.

"'How can I tell it? — he became my lover. How did this come about? Can I explain it? Can any one explain such things? Do you think it could be otherwise when two human beings are drawn to each other by the irresistible force of mutual affection? Do you believe, monsieur, that it is always in our power to resist, that we can keep up the struggle forever, and refuse to yield to the prayers, the supplications, the tears, the frenzied words, the appeals on bended knees, the transports of passion, with which we are pursued by the man we adore, whom we want to gratify even in his slightest wishes, whom we desire to crown with every possible happiness, and whom, if we are to be guided by a worldly code of honor, we must drive to despair? What strength would it not require? What a renunciation of happiness? what self-denial? and even what virtuous selfishness?

"'In short, monsieur, I was his mistress; and I was happy. I became — and this was my greatest weakness and my greatest piece of cowardice-I became his wife's friend.

"'We brought up my son together; we made a man of him, a thorough man, intelligent, full of sense and resolution, of large and generous ideas. The boy reached the age of seventeen.

"'He, the young man, was fond of my — my lover, almost as fond of him as I was myself, for he had been equally cherished and cared for by both of us. He used to call him his 'dear friend,' and respected him immensely, having never received from him anything but wise counsels and an example of integrity, honor, and probity. He looked upon him as an old loyal and devoted comrade of his mother, as a sort of moral father, guardian, protector — how am I to describe it?

"'Perhaps the reason why he never asked any questions was that he had been accustomed from his earliest years to see this man in my house, at my side, and at his side, always concerned about us both.

"'One evening the three of us were to dine together — this was my chief amusement — and I waited for the two men, asking myself which of them would be the first to arrive. The door opened; it was my old friend. I went toward him, with outstretched arms; and he pressed my lips in a long, delicious kiss.

"'All of a sudden, a slight sound, a faint rustling, that mysterious sensation which indicates the presence of another person, made us start and turn round abruptly. Jean, my son, stood there, livid, staring at us.

"'There was a moment of atrocious confusion. I drew back, holding out my hand toward my son as if in supplication; but I could not see him. He had gone.

"'We remained facing each other — my lover and I — crushed, unable to utter a word. I sank into an armchair, and I felt a desire, a vague, powerful desire, to flee, to go out into the night, and to disappear forever. Then convulsive sobs rose in my throat, and I wept, shaken with spasms, my heart breaking, all my nerves writhing with the horrible sensation of an irreparable, misfortune, and with that dreadful sense of shame which, in such moments as this, fills a mother's heart.

"'He looked at me in a terrified manner, not venturing to approach, to speak to me, or to touch me, for fear of the boy's return. At last he said:

"'I am going to follow him-to talk to him — to explain matters to him. In short, I must see him and let him know — — "

"'And he hurried away.

"'I waited — waited in a distracted frame of mind, trembling at the least sound, starting with fear and with some unutterably strange and intolerable emotion at every slight crackling of the fire in the grate.

"'I waited an hour, two hours, feeling my heart swell with a dread I had never before experienced, such anguish that I would not wish the greatest criminal to endure ten minutes of such misery. Where was my son? What was he doing?

"'About midnight, a messenger brought me a note from my lover. I still know its contents by heart:

"'Has your son returned? I did not find him. I am down here. I do not want to go up at this hour."

"'I wrote in pencil on the same slip of paper:

"'Jean has not returned. You must find him."

"'And I 'remained all night in the armchair, waiting for him.

"'I felt as if I were going mad. I longed to run wildly about, to roll on the ground. And yet I did not even stir, but kept waiting hour after hour. What was going to happen? I tried to imagine, to guess. But I could form no conception, in spite of my efforts, in spite of the tortures of my soul!

"'And now I feared that they might meet. What would they do in that case? What would my son do? My mind was torn with fearful doubts, with terrible suppositions.

"'You can understand my feelings, can you not, monsieur? "'My chambermaid, who knew nothing, who understood nothing, came into the room every moment, believing, naturally, that I had lost my reason. I sent her away with a word or a movement of the hand. She went for the doctor, who found me in the throes of a nervous attack.

"'I was put to bed. I had brain fever.

"'When I regained consciousness, after a long illness, I saw beside my bed my — lover — alone.

"'I exclaimed:

"'My son? Where is my son?

"'He made no reply. I stammered:

"'Dead-dead. Has he committed suicide?

"'No, no, I swear it. But we have not found him in spite of all my efforts.

"'Then, becoming suddenly exasperated and even indignant — for women are subject to such outbursts of unaccountable and unreasoning anger — I said:

"'I forbid you to come near me or to see me again unless you find him. Go away!

"He did go away.

"'I have never seen one or the other of them since, monsieur, and thus I have lived for the last twenty years.

"'Can you imagine what all this meant to me? Can you understand this monstrous punishment, this slow, perpetual laceration of a mother's heart, this abominable, endless waiting? Endless, did I say? No; it is about to end, for I am dying. I am dying without ever again seeing either of them — either one or the other!

"'He — the man I loved — has written to me every day for the last twenty years; and I — I have never consented to see him, even for one second; for I had a strange feeling that, if he were to come back here, my son would make his appearance at the same moment. Oh! my son! my son! Is he dead? Is he living? Where is he hiding? Over there, perhaps, beyond the great ocean, in some country so far away that even its very name is unknown to me! Does he ever think of me? Ah! if he only knew! How cruel one's children are! Did he understand to what frightful suffering he condemned me, into what depths of despair, into what tortures, he cast me while I was still in the prime of life, leaving me to suffer until this moment, when I am about to die — me, his mother, who loved him with all the intensity of a mother's love? Oh! isn't it cruel, cruel?

"'You will tell him all this, monsieur — will you not? You will repeat to him my last words:

"'My child, my dear, dear child, be less harsh toward poor women! Life is already brutal and savage enough in its dealings with them. My dear son, think of what the existence of your poor mother has been ever since the day you left her. My dear child, forgive her, and love her, now that she is dead, for she has had to endure the most frightful penance ever inflicted on a woman."

"She gasped for breath, trembling, as if she had addressed the last words to her son and as if he stood by her bedside.

"Then she added:

"'You will tell him also, monsieur, that I never again saw-the other.'

"Once more she ceased speaking, then, in a broken voice, she said:

"'Leave me now, I beg of you. I want to die all alone, since they are not with me.'"

Maitre Le Brument added:

"And I left the house, monsieurs, crying like a fool, so bitterly, indeed, that my coachman turned round to stare at me.

"And to think that, every day, dramas like this are being enacted all around us!

"I have not found the son — that son — well, say what you like about him, but I call him that criminal son!"

THE HAND

All were crowding around M. Bermutier, the judge, who was giving his opinion about the Saint-Cloud mystery. For a month this in explicable crime had been the talk of Paris. Nobody could make head or tail of it.

M. Bermutier, standing with his back to the fireplace, was talking, citing the evidence, discussing the various theories, but arriving at no conclusion.

Some women had risen, in order to get nearer to him, and were standing with their eyes fastened on the clean-shaven face of the judge, who was saying such weighty things. They, were shaking and trembling, moved by fear and curiosity, and by the eager and insatiable desire for the horrible, which haunts the soul of every woman. One of them, paler than the others, said during a pause:

"It's terrible. It verges on the supernatural. The truth will never be known."

The judge turned to her:

"True, madame, it is likely that the actual facts will never be discovered. As for the word 'supernatural' which you have just used, it has nothing to do with the matter. We are in the presence of a very cleverly conceived and executed crime, so well enshrouded in mystery that we cannot disentangle it from the involved circumstances which surround it. But once I had to take charge of an affair in which the uncanny seemed to play a part. In fact, the case became so confused that it had to be given up."

Several women exclaimed at once:

"Oh! Tell us about it!"

M. Bermutier smiled in a dignified manner, as a judge should, and went on:

"Do not think, however, that I, for one minute, ascribed anything in the case to supernatural influences. I believe only in normal causes. But if, instead of using the word 'supernatural' to express what we do not understand, we were simply to make use of the word 'inexplicable,' it would be much better. At any rate, in the affair of which I am about to tell you, it is especially the surrounding, preliminary circumstances which impressed me. Here are the facts:

"I was, at that time, a judge at Ajaccio, a little white city on the edge of a bay which is surrounded by high mountains.

"The majority of the cases which came up before me concerned vendettas. There are some that are superb, dramatic, ferocious, heroic. We find there the most beautiful causes for revenge of which one could dream, enmities hundreds of years old, quieted for a time but never extinguished; abominable stratagems, murders becoming massacres and almost deeds of glory. For two years I heard of nothing but the price of blood, of this terrible Corsican prejudice which compels revenge for insults meted out to the offending person and all his descendants and relatives. I had seen old men, children, cousins murdered; my head was full of these stories.

"One day I learned that an Englishman had just hired a little villa at the end of the bay for several years. He had brought with him a French servant, whom he had engaged on the way at Marseilles.

"Soon this peculiar person, living alone, only going out to hunt and fish, aroused a widespread interest. He never spoke to any one, never went to the town, and every morning he would practice for an hour or so with his revolver and rifle.

"Legends were built up around him. It was said that he was some high personage, fleeing from his fatherland for political reasons; then it was affirmed that he was in hiding after having committed some abominable crime. Some particularly horrible circumstances were even mentioned.

"In my judicial position I thought it necessary to get some information about this man, but it was impossible to learn anything. He called himself Sir John Rowell.

"I therefore had to be satisfied with watching him as closely as I could, but I could see nothing suspicious about his actions.

"However, as rumors about him were growing and becoming more widespread, I decided to try to see this stranger myself, and I began to hunt regularly in the neighborhood of his grounds.

"For a long time I watched without finding an opportunity. At last it came to me in the shape of a partridge which I shot and killed right in front of the Englishman. My dog fetched it for me, but, taking the bird, I went at once to Sir John Rowell and, begging his pardon, asked him to accept it.

“He was a big man, with red hair and beard, very tall, very broad, a kind of calm and polite Hercules. He had nothing of the so-called British stiffness, and in a broad English accent he thanked me warmly for my attention. At the end of a month we had had five or six conversations.

“One night, at last, as I was passing before his door, I saw him in the garden, seated astride a chair, smoking his pipe. I bowed and he invited me to come in and have a glass of beer. I needed no urging.

“He received me with the most punctilious English courtesy, sang the praises of France and of Corsica, and declared that he was quite in love with this country.

“Then, with great caution and under the guise of a vivid interest, I asked him a few questions about his life and his plans. He answered without embarrassment, telling me that he had travelled a great deal in Africa, in the Indies, in America. He added, laughing:

“‘I have had many adventures.’

“Then I turned the conversation on hunting, and he gave me the most curious details on hunting the hippopotamus, the tiger, the elephant and even the gorilla.

“I said:

“‘Are all these animals dangerous?’

“He smiled:

“‘Oh, no! Man is the worst.’

“And he laughed a good broad laugh, the wholesome laugh of a contented Englishman.

“‘I have also frequently been man-hunting.’

“Then he began to talk about weapons, and he invited me to come in and see different makes of guns.

“His parlor was draped in black, black silk embroidered in gold. Big yellow flowers, as brilliant as fire, were worked on the dark material.

“He said:

“‘It is a Japanese material.’

“But in the middle of the widest panel a strange thing attracted my attention. A black object stood out against a square of red velvet. I went up to it; it was a hand, a human hand. Not the clean white hand of a skeleton, but a dried black hand, with yellow nails, the muscles exposed and traces of old blood on the bones, which were cut off as clean as though it had been chopped off with an axe, near the middle of the forearm.

"Around the wrist, an enormous iron chain, riveted and soldered to this unclean member, fastened it to the wall by a ring, strong enough to hold an elephant in leash.

"I asked:

"'What is that?'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

"'That is my best enemy. It comes from America, too. The bones were severed by a sword and the skin cut off with a sharp stone and dried in the sun for a week.'

"I touched these human remains, which must have belonged to a giant. The uncommonly long fingers were attached by enormous tendons which still had pieces of skin hanging to them in places. This hand was terrible to see; it made one think of some savage vengeance.

"I said:

"'This man must have been very strong.'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

"'Yes, but I was stronger than he. I put on this chain to hold him.'

"I thought that he was joking. I said:

"'This chain is useless now, the hand won't run away.'

"Sir John Rowell answered seriously:

"'It always wants to go away. This chain is needed.'

"I glanced at him quickly, questioning his face, and I asked myself:

"'Is he an insane man or a practical joker?'

"But his face remained inscrutable, calm and friendly. I turned to other subjects, and admired his rifles.

"However, I noticed that he kept three loaded revolvers in the room, as though constantly in fear of some attack.

"I paid him several calls. Then I did not go any more. People had become used to his presence; everybody had lost interest in him.

"A whole year rolled by. One morning, toward the end of November, my servant awoke me and announced that Sir John Rowell had been murdered during the night.

"Half an hour later I entered the Englishman's house, together with the police commissioner and the captain of the gendarmes. The servant, bewildered and in despair, was crying before the door. At first I suspected this man, but he was innocent.

"The guilty party could never be found.

“On entering Sir John’s parlor, I noticed the body, stretched out on its back, in the middle of the room.

“His vest was torn, the sleeve of his jacket had been pulled off, everything pointed to, a violent struggle.

“The Englishman had been strangled! His face was black, swollen and frightful, and seemed to express a terrible fear. He held something between his teeth, and his neck, pierced by five or six holes which looked as though they had been made by some iron instrument, was covered with blood.

“A physician joined us. He examined the finger marks on the neck for a long time and then made this strange announcement:

“‘It looks as though he had been strangled by a skeleton.’

“A cold chill seemed to run down my back, and I looked over to where I had formerly seen the terrible hand. It was no longer there. The chain was hanging down, broken.

“I bent over the dead man and, in his contracted mouth, I found one of the fingers of this vanished hand, cut — or rather sawed off by the teeth down to the second knuckle.

“Then the investigation began. Nothing could be discovered. No door, window or piece of furniture had been forced. The two watch dogs had not been aroused from their sleep.

“Here, in a few words, is the testimony of the servant:

“For a month his master had seemed excited. He had received many letters, which he would immediately burn.

“Often, in a fit of passion which approached madness, he had taken a switch and struck wildly at this dried hand riveted to the wall, and which had disappeared, no one knows how, at the very hour of the crime.

“He would go to bed very late and carefully lock himself in. He always kept weapons within reach. Often at night he would talk loudly, as though he were quarrelling with some one.

“That night, somehow, he had made no noise, and it was only on going to open the windows that the servant had found Sir John murdered. He suspected no one.

“I communicated what I knew of the dead man to the judges and public officials. Throughout the whole island a minute investigation was carried on. Nothing could be found out.

“One night, about three months after the crime, I had a terrible nightmare. I seemed to see the horrible hand running over my curtains and walls like an immense scorpion or spider. Three times I awoke, three times I went to sleep again; three times I saw the hideous object galloping round my room and moving its fingers like legs.

"The following day the hand was brought me, found in the cemetery, on the grave of Sir John Rowell, who had been buried there because we had been unable to find his family. The first finger was missing.

"Ladies, there is my story. I know nothing more."

The women, deeply stirred, were pale and trembling. One of them exclaimed:

"But that is neither a climax nor an explanation! We will be unable to sleep unless you give us your opinion of what had occurred."

The judge smiled severely:

"Oh! Ladies, I shall certainly spoil your terrible dreams. I simply believe that the legitimate owner of the hand was not dead, that he came to get it with his remaining one. But I don't know how. It was a kind of vendetta."

One of the women murmured:

"No, it can't be that."

And the judge, still smiling, said:

"Didn't I tell you that my explanation would not satisfy you?"

A TRESS OF HAIR

OR

THE HEAD OF HAIR

The walls of the cell were bare and white washed. A narrow grated window, placed so high that one could not reach it, lighted this sinister little room. The mad inmate, seated on a straw chair, looked at us with a fixed, vacant and haunted expression. He was very thin, with hollow cheeks and hair almost white, which one guessed might have turned gray in a few months. His clothes appeared to be too large for his shrunken limbs, his sunken chest and empty paunch. One felt that this man's mind was destroyed, eaten by his thoughts, by one thought, just as a fruit is eaten by a worm. His craze, his idea was there in his brain, insistent, harassing, destructive. It wasted his frame little by little. It — the invisible, impalpable, intangible, immaterial idea — was mining his health, drinking his blood, snuffing out his life.

What a mystery was this man, being killed by an ideal! He aroused sorrow, fear and pity, this madman. What strange, tremendous and deadly thoughts dwelt within this forehead which they creased with deep wrinkles which were never still?

"He has terrible attacks of rage," said the doctor to me. "His is one of the most peculiar cases I have ever seen. He has seizures of erotic and macaberesque madness. He is a sort of necrophile. He has kept a journal in which he sets forth his disease with the utmost clearness. In it you can, as it were, put your finger on it. If it would interest you, you may go over this document."

I followed the doctor into his office, where he handed me this wretched man's diary, saying: "Read it and tell me what you think of it." I read as follows:

“Until the age of thirty-two I lived peacefully, without knowing love. Life appeared very simple, very pleasant and very easy. I was rich. I enjoyed so many things that I had no passion for anything in particular. It was good to be alive! I awoke happy every morning and did those things that pleased me during the day and went to bed at night contented, in the expectation of a peaceful tomorrow and a future without anxiety.

“I had had a few flirtations without my heart being touched by any true passion or wounded by any of the sensations of true love. It is good to live like that. It is better to love, but it is terrible. And yet those who love in the ordinary way must experience ardent happiness, though less than mine possibly, for love came to me in a remarkable manner.

“As I was wealthy, I bought all kinds of old furniture and old curiosities, and I often thought of the unknown hands that had touched these objects, of the eyes that had admired them, of the hearts that had loved them; for one does love things! I sometimes remained hours and hours looking at a little watch of the last century. It was so tiny, so pretty with its enamel and gold chasing. And it kept time as on the day when a woman first bought it, enraptured at owning this dainty trinket. It had not ceased to vibrate, to live its mechanical life, and it had kept up its regular tick-tock since the last century. Who had first worn it on her bosom amid the warmth of her clothing, the heart of the watch beating beside the heart of the woman? What hand had held it in its warm fingers, had turned it over and then wiped the enamelled shepherds on the case to remove the slight moisture from her fingers? What eyes had watched the hands on its ornamental face for the expected, the beloved, the sacred hour?

“How I wished I had known her, seen her, the woman who had selected this exquisite and rare object! She is dead! I am possessed with a longing for women of former days. I love, from afar, all those who have loved. The story of those dead and gone loves fills my heart with regrets. Oh, the beauty, the smiles, the youthful caresses, the hopes! Should not all that be eternal?

“How I have wept whole nights-thinking of those poor women of former days, so beautiful, so loving, so sweet, whose arms were extended in an embrace, and who now are dead! A kiss is immortal! It goes from lips to lips, from century to century, from age to age. Men receive them, give them and die.

“The past attracts me, the present terrifies me because the future means death. I regret all that has gone by. I mourn all who have lived; I should like to check time, to stop the clock. But time goes, it goes, it passes, it takes from me each second a little of myself for the annihilation of to-morrow. And I shall never live again.

“Farewell, ye women of yesterday. I love you!

“But I am not to be pitied. I found her, the one I was waiting for, and through her I enjoyed inestimable pleasure.

“I was sauntering in Paris on a bright, sunny morning, with a happy heart and a high step, looking in at the shop windows with the vague interest of an idler. All at once I noticed in the shop of a dealer in antiques a piece of Italian furniture of the seventeenth century. It was very handsome, very rare. I set it down as being the work of a Venetian artist named Vitelli, who was celebrated in his day.

“I went on my way.

“Why did the remembrance of that piece of furniture haunt me with such insistence that I retraced my steps? I again stopped before the shop, in order to take another look at it, and I felt that it tempted me.

“What a singular thing temptation is! One gazes at an object, and, little by little, it charms you, it disturbs you, it fills your thoughts as a woman’s face might do. The enchantment of it penetrates your being, a strange enchantment of form, color and appearance of an inanimate object. And one loves it, one desires it, one wishes to have it. A longing to own it takes possession of you, gently at first, as though it were timid, but growing, becoming intense, irresistible.

“And the dealers seem to guess, from your ardent gaze, your secret and increasing longing.

“I bought this piece of furniture and had it sent home at once. I placed it in my room.

“Oh, I am sorry for those who do not know the honeymoon of the collector with the antique he has just purchased. One looks at it tenderly and passes one’s hand over it as if it were human flesh; one comes back to it every moment, one is always thinking of it, wherever ore goes, whatever one does. The dear recollection of it pursues you in the street, in society, everywhere; and when you return home at night, before taking off your gloves or your hat; you go and look at it with the tenderness of a lover.

“Truly, for eight days I worshipped this piece of furniture. I opened its doors and pulled out the drawers every few moments. I handled it with rapture, with all the intense joy of possession.

“But one evening I surmised, while I was feeling the thickness of one of the panels, that there must be a secret drawer in it: My heart began to beat, and I spent the night trying to discover this secret cavity.

“I succeeded on the following day by driving a knife into a slit in the wood. A panel slid back and I saw, spread out on a piece of black velvet, a magnificent tress of hair.

“Yes, a woman’s hair, an immense coil of fair hair, almost red, which must have been cut off close to the head, tied with a golden cord.

“I stood amazed, trembling, confused. An almost imperceptible perfume, so ancient that it seemed to be the spirit of a perfume, issued from this mysterious drawer and this remarkable relic.

“I lifted it gently, almost reverently, and took it out of its hiding place. It at once unwound in a golden shower that reached to the floor, dense but light; soft and gleaming like the tail of a comet.

“A strange emotion filled me. What was this? When, how, why had this hair been shut up in this drawer? What adventure, what tragedy did this souvenir conceal? Who had cut it off? A lover on a day of farewell, a husband on a day of revenge, or the one whose head it had graced on the day of despair?

“Was it as she was about to take the veil that they had cast thither that love dowry as a pledge to the world of the living? Was it when they were going to nail down the coffin of the beautiful young corpse that the one who had adored her had cut off her tresses, the only thing that he could retain of her, the only living part of her body that would not suffer decay, the only thing he could still love, and caress, and kiss in his paroxysms of grief?

“Was it not strange that this tress should have remained as it was in life, when not an atom of the body on which it grew was in existence?

“It fell over my fingers, tickled the skin with a singular caress, the caress of a dead woman. It affected me so that I felt as though I should weep.

“I held it in my hands for a long time, then it seemed as if it disturbed me, as though something of the soul had remained in it. And I put it back on the velvet, rusty from age, and pushed in the drawer, closed the doors of the antique cabinet and went out for a walk to meditate.

“I walked along, filled with sadness and also with unrest, that unrest that one feels when in love. I felt as though I must have lived before, as though I must have known this woman.

“And Villon’s lines came to my mind like a sob:

Tell me where, and in what place
Is Flora, the beautiful Roman,
Hipparchia and Thais
Who was her cousin-german?

Echo answers in the breeze
O’er river and lake that blows,
Their beauty was above all praise,
But where are last year’s snows?

The queen, white as lilies,
Who sang as sing the birds,
Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,
Ermengarde, princess of Maine,
And Joan, the good Lorraine,
Burned by the English at Rouen,
Where are they, Virgin Queen?
And where are last year’s snows?

“When I got home again I felt an irresistible longing to see my singular treasure, and I took it out and, as I touched it, I felt a shiver go all through me.

“For some days, however, I was in my ordinary condition, although the thought of that tress of hair was always present to my mind.

“Whenever I came into the house I had to see it and take it in my, hands. I turned the key of the cabinet with the same hesitation that one opens the door leading to one’s beloved, for in my hands and my heart I felt a confused, singular, constant sensual longing to plunge my hands in the enchanting golden flood of those dead tresses.

“Then, after I had finished caressing it and had locked the cabinet I felt as if it were a living thing, shut up in there, imprisoned; and I longed to see it again. I felt again the imperious desire to take it in my hands, to touch it, to even feel uncomfortable at the cold, slippery, irritating, bewildering contact.

"I lived thus for a month or two, I forget how long. It obsessed me, haunted me. I was happy and tormented by turns, as when one falls in love, and after the first vows have been exchanged.

"I shut myself in the room with it to feel it on my skin, to bury my lips in it, to kiss it. I wound it round my face, covered my eyes with the golden flood so as to see the day gleam through its gold.

"I loved it! Yes, I loved it. I could not be without it nor pass an hour without looking at it.

"And I waited — I waited — for what? I do not know — For her!

"One night I woke up suddenly, feeling as though I were not alone in my room.

"I was alone, nevertheless, but I could not go to sleep again, and, as I was tossing about feverishly, I got up to look at the golden tress. It seemed softer than usual, more life-like. Do the dead come back? I almost lost consciousness as I kissed it. I took it back with me to bed and pressed it to my lips as if it were my sweetheart.

"Do the dead come back? She came back. Yes, I saw her; I held her in my arms, just as she was in life, tall, fair and round. She came back every evening — the dead woman, the beautiful, adorable, mysterious unknown.

"My happiness was so great that I could not conceal it. No lover ever tasted such intense, terrible enjoyment. I loved her so well that I could not be separated from her. I took her with me always and everywhere. I walked about the town with her as if she were my wife, and took her to the theatre, always to a private box. But they saw her — they guessed — they arrested me. They put me in prison like a criminal. They took her. Oh, misery!"

Here the manuscript stopped. And as I suddenly raised my astonished eyes to the doctor a terrific cry, a howl of impotent rage and of exasperated longing resounded through the asylum.

"Listen," said the doctor. "We have to douse the obscene madman with water five times a day. Sergeant Bertrand was the only one who was in love with the dead."

Filled with astonishment, horror and pity, I stammered out:

"But — that tress — did it really exist?"

The doctor rose, opened a cabinet full of phials and instruments and tossed over a long tress of fair hair which flew toward me like a golden bird.

I shivered at feeling its soft, light touch on my hands. And I sat there, my heart beating with disgust and desire, disgust as at the contact of anything accessory to a crime and desire as at the temptation of some infamous and mysterious thing.

The doctor said as he shrugged his shoulders:

“The mind of man is capable of anything.”

THE CRIPPLE

The following adventure happened to me about 1882. I had just taken the train and settled down in a corner, hoping that I should be left alone, when the door suddenly opened again and I heard a voice say: “Take care, monsieur, we are just at a crossing; the step is very high.”

Another voice answered: “That’s all right, Laurent, I have a firm hold on the handle.”

Then a head appeared, and two hands seized the leather straps hanging on either side of the door and slowly pulled up an enormous body, whose feet striking on the step, sounded like two canes. When the man had hoisted his torso into the compartment I noticed, at the loose edge of his trousers, the end of a wooden leg, which was soon followed by its mate. A head appeared behind this traveller and asked; “Are you all right, monsieur?”

“Yes, my boy.”

“Then here are your packages and crutches.”

And a servant, who looked like an old soldier, climbed in, carrying in his arms a stack of bundles wrapped in black and yellow papers and carefully tied; he placed one after the other in the net over his master’s head. Then he said: “There, monsieur, that is all. There are five of them — the candy, the doll the drum, the gun, and the pate de foies gras.”

“Very well, my boy.”

“Thank you, Laurent; good health!”

The man closed the door and walked away, and I looked at my neighbor. He was about thirty-five, although his hair was almost white; he wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor; he had a heavy mustache and was quite stout, with the stoutness of a strong and active man who is kept motionless on account of some infirmity. He wiped his brow, sighed, and, looking me full in the face, he asked: “Does smoking annoy you, monsieur?”

“No, monsieur.”

Surely I knew that eye, that voice, that face. But when and where had I seen them? I had certainly met that man, spoken to him, shaken his hand. That was a long, long time ago. It was lost in the haze wherein the mind seems to feel around blindly for memories and pursues them like fleeing phantoms without being able to seize them. He, too, was observing me, staring me out of countenance, with the persistence of a man who remembers slightly but not completely. Our eyes, embarrassed by this persistent contact, turned away; then, after a few minutes, drawn together again by the obscure and tenacious will of working memory, they met once more, and I said: "Monsieur, instead of staring at each other for an hour or so, would it not be better to try to discover where we have known each other?"

My neighbor answered graciously: "You are quite right, monsieur."

I named myself: "I am Henri Bonclair, a magistrate."

He hesitated for a few minutes; then, with the vague look and voice which accompany great mental tension, he said: "Oh, I remember perfectly. I met you twelve years ago, before the war, at the Poincels!"

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! Ah! You are Lieutenant Revaliere?"

"Yes. I was Captain Revaliere even up to the time when I lost my feet — both of them together from one cannon ball."

Now that we knew each other's identity we looked at each other again. I remembered perfectly the handsome, slender youth who led the cotillons with such frenzied agility and gracefulness that he had been nicknamed "the fury." Going back into the dim, distant past, I recalled a story which I had heard and forgotten, one of those stories to which one listens but forgets, and which leave but a faint impression upon the memory.

There was something about love in it. Little by little the shadows cleared up, and the face of a young girl appeared before my eyes. Then her name struck me with the force of an explosion: Mademoiselle de Mandel. I remembered everything now. It was indeed a love story, but quite commonplace. The young girl loved this young man, and when I had met them there was already talk of the approaching wedding. The youth seemed to be very much in love, very happy.

I raised my eye to the net, where all the packages which had been brought in by the servant were trembling from the motion of the train, and the voice of the servant came back to me, as if he had just finished speaking. He had said: “There, monsieur, that is all. There are five of them: the candy, the doll, the drum, the gun, and the pate de foies gras.”

Then, in a second, a whole romance unfolded itself in my head. It was like all those which I had already read, where the young lady married notwithstanding the catastrophe, whether physical or financial; therefore, this officer who had been maimed in the war had returned, after the campaign, to the young girl who had given him her promise, and she had kept her word.

I considered that very beautiful, but simple, just as one, considers simple all devotions and climaxes in books or in plays. It always seems, when one reads or listens to these stories of magnanimity, that one could sacrifice one’s self with enthusiastic pleasure and overwhelming joy. But the following day, when an unfortunate friend comes to borrow some money, there is a strange revulsion of feeling.

But, suddenly, another supposition, less poetic and more realistic, replaced the first one. Perhaps he had married before the war, before this frightful accident, and she, in despair and resignation, had been forced to receive, care for, cheer, and support this husband, who had departed, a handsome man, and had returned without his feet, a frightful wreck, forced into immobility, powerless anger, and fatal obesity.

Was he happy or in torture? I was seized with an irresistible desire to know his story, or, at least, the principal points, which would permit me to guess that which he could not or would not tell me. Still thinking the matter over, I began talking to him. We had exchanged a few commonplace words; and I raised my eyes to the net, and thought: “He must have three children: the bonbons are for his wife, the doll for his little girl, the drum and the gun for his sons, and this pate de foies gras for himself.”

Suddenly I asked him: “Are you a father, monsieur?”

He answered: “No, monsieur.”

I suddenly felt confused, as if I had been guilty of some breach of etiquette, and I continued: “I beg your pardon. I had thought that you were when I heard your servant speaking about the toys. One listens and draws conclusions unconsciously.”

He smiled and then murmured: “No, I am not even married. I am still at the preliminary stage.”

I pretended suddenly to remember, and said:

"Oh! that's true! When I knew you, you were engaged to Mademoiselle de Mandel, I believe."

"Yes, monsieur, your memory is excellent."

I grew very bold and added: "I also seem to remember hearing that Mademoiselle de Mandel married Monsieur — Monsieur— "

He calmly mentioned the name: "Monsieur de Fleurel."

"Yes, that's it! I remember it was on that occasion that I heard of your wound."

I looked him full in the face, and he blushed. His full face, which was already red from the oversupply of blood, turned crimson. He answered quickly, with a sudden ardor of a man who is pleading a cause which is lost in his mind and in his heart, but which he does not wish to admit.

"It is wrong, monsieur, to couple my name with that of Madame de Fleurel. When I returned from the war-without my feet, alas! I never would have permitted her to become my wife. Was it possible? When one marries, monsieur, it is not in order to parade one's generosity; it is in order to live every day, every hour, every minute, every second beside a man; and if this man is disfigured, as I am, it is a death sentence to marry him! Oh, I understand, I admire all sacrifices and devotions when they have a limit, but I do not admit that a woman should give up her whole life, all joy, all her dreams, in order to satisfy the admiration of the gallery. When I hear, on the floor of my room, the tapping of my wooden legs and of my crutches, I grow angry enough to strangle my servant. Do you think that I would permit a woman to do what I myself am unable to tolerate? And, then, do you think that my stumps are pretty?"

He was silent. What could I say? He certainly was right. Could I blame her, hold her in contempt, even say that she was wrong? No. However, the end which conformed to the rule, to the truth, did not satisfy my poetic appetite. These heroic deeds demand a beautiful sacrifice, which seemed to be lacking, and I felt a certain disappointment. I suddenly asked: "Has Madame de Fleurel any children?"

"Yes, one girl and two boys. It is for them that I am bringing these toys. She and her husband are very kind to me."

The train was going up the incline to Saint-Germain. It passed through the tunnels, entered the station, and stopped. I was about to offer my arm to the wounded officer, in order to help him descend, when two hands were stretched up to him through the open door.

"Hello! my dear Revaliere!"

"Ah! Hello, Fleurel!"

Standing behind the man, the woman, still beautiful, was smiling and waving her hands to him. A little girl, standing beside her, was jumping for joy, and two young boys were eagerly watching the drum and the gun, which were passing from the car into their father's hands.

When the cripple was on the ground, all the children kissed him. Then they set off, the little girl holding in her hand the small varnished rung of a crutch, just as she might walk beside her big friend and hold his thumb.

A STROLL

When Old Man Leras, bookkeeper for Messieurs Labuze and Company, left the store, he stood for a minute bewildered at the glory of the setting sun. He had worked all day in the yellow light of a small jet of gas, far in the back of the store, on a narrow court, as deep as a well. The little room where he had been spending his days for forty years was so dark that even in the middle of summer one could hardly see without gaslight from eleven until three.

It was always damp and cold, and from this hole on which his window opened came the musty odor of a sewer.

For forty years Monsieur Leras had been arriving every morning in this prison at eight o'clock, and he would remain there until seven at night, bending over his books, writing with the industry of a good clerk.

He was now making three thousand francs a year, having started at fifteen hundred. He had remained a bachelor, as his means did not allow him the luxury of a wife, and as he had never enjoyed anything, he desired nothing. From time to time, however, tired of this continuous and monotonous work, he formed a platonic wish: "Gad! If I only had an income of fifteen thousand francs, I would take life easy."

He had never taken life easy, as he had never had anything but his monthly salary. His life had been uneventful, without emotions, without hopes. The faculty of dreaming with which every one is blessed had never developed in the mediocrity of his ambitions.

When he was twenty-one he entered the employ of Messieurs Labuze and Company. And he had never left them.

In 1856 he had lost his father and then his mother in 1859. Since then the only incident in his life was when he moved, in 1868, because his landlord had tried to raise his rent.

Every day his alarm clock, with a frightful noise of rattling chains, made him spring out of bed at 6 o'clock precisely.

Twice, however, this piece of mechanism had been out of order — once in 1866 and again in 1874; he had never been able to find out the reason why. He would dress, make his bed, sweep his room, dust his chair and the top of his bureau. All this took him an hour and a half.

Then he would go out, buy a roll at the Lahure Bakery, in which he had seen eleven different owners without the name ever changing, and he would eat this roll on the way to the office.

His entire existence had been spent in the narrow, dark office, which was still decorated with the same wall paper. He had entered there as a young man, as assistant to Monsieur Brument, and with the desire to replace him.

He had taken his place and wished for nothing more.

The whole harvest of memories which other men reap in their span of years, the unexpected events, sweet or tragic loves, adventurous journeys, all the occurrences of a free existence, all these things had remained unknown to him.

Days, weeks, months, seasons, years, all were alike to him. He got up every day at the same hour, started out, arrived at the office, ate luncheon, went away, had dinner and went to bed without ever interrupting the regular monotony of similar actions, deeds and thoughts.

Formerly he used to look at his blond mustache and wavy hair in the little round mirror left by his predecessor. Now, every evening before leaving, he would look at his white mustache and bald head in the same mirror. Forty years had rolled by, long and rapid, dreary as a day of sadness and as similar as the hours of a sleepless night. Forty years of which nothing remained, not even a memory, not even a misfortune, since the death of his parents. Nothing.

That day Monsieur Leras stood by the door, dazzled at the brilliancy of the setting sun; and instead of returning home he decided to take a little stroll before dinner, a thing which happened to him four or five times a year.

He reached the boulevards, where people were streaming along under the green trees. It was a spring evening, one of those first warm and pleasant evenings which fill the heart with the joy of life.

Monsieur Leras went along with his mincing old man’s step; he was going along with joy in his heart, at peace with the world. He reached the Champs-Elysees, and he continued to walk, enlivened by the sight of the young people trotting along.

The whole sky was aflame; the Arc de Triomphe stood out against the brilliant background of the horizon, like a giant surrounded by fire. As he approached the immense monument, the old bookkeeper noticed that he was hungry, and he went into a wine dealer's for dinner.

The meal was served in front of the store, on the sidewalk. It consisted of some mutton, salad and asparagus. It was the best dinner that Monsieur Leras had had in a long time. He washed down his cheese with a small bottle of burgundy, had his after-dinner cup of coffee, a thing which he rarely took, and finally a little pony of brandy.

When he had paid he felt quite youthful, even a little moved. And he said to himself: "What a fine evening! I will continue my stroll as far as the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne. It will do me good." He set out. An old tune which one of his neighbors used to sing kept returning to his mind. He kept on humming it over and over again. A hot, still night had fallen over Paris. Monsieur Leras walked along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne and watched the cabs drive by. They kept coming with their shining lights, one behind the other, giving horn a glimpse of the couples inside, the women in their light dresses and the men dressed in black.

It was one long procession of lovers, riding under the warm, starlit sky. They kept on coming in rapid succession. They passed by in the carriages, silent, side by side, lost in their dreams, in the emotion of desire, in the anticipation of the approaching embrace. The warm shadows seemed to be full of floating kisses. A sensation of tenderness filled the air. All these carriages full of tender couples, all these people intoxicated with the same idea, with the same thought, seemed to give out a disturbing, subtle emanation.

At last Monsieur Leras grew a little tired of walking, and he sat down on a bench to watch these carriages pass by with their burdens of love. Almost immediately a woman walked up to him and sat down beside him. "Good-evening, papa," she said.

He answered: "Madame, you are mistaken."

She slipped her arm through his, saying: "Come along, now; don't be foolish. Listen — — "

He arose and walked away, with sadness in his heart. A few yards away another woman walked up to him and asked: "Won't you sit down beside me?" He said: "What makes you take up this life?"

She stood before him and in an altered, hoarse, angry voice exclaimed:

"Well, it isn't for the fun of it, anyhow!"

He insisted in a gentle voice: "Then what makes you?"

She grumbled: "I've got to live! Foolish question!" And she walked away, humming.

Monsieur Leras stood there bewildered. Other women were passing near him, speaking to him and calling to him. He felt as though he were enveloped in darkness by something disagreeable.

He sat down again on a bench. The carriages were still rolling by. He thought: "I should have done better not to come here; I feel all upset." He began to think of all this venal or passionate love, of all these kisses, sold or given, which were passing by it front of him. Love! He scarcely knew it. In his lifetime he had only known two or three women, his means forcing him to live a quiet life, and he looked back at the life which he had led, so different from everybody else, so dreary, so mournful, so empty.

Some people are really unfortunate. And suddenly, as though a veil had been torn from his eyes, he perceived the infinite misery, the monotony of his existence: the past, present and future misery; his last day similar to his first one, with nothing before him, behind him or about him, nothing in his heart or any place.

The stream of carriages was still going by. In the rapid passage of the open carriage he still saw the two silent, loving creatures. It seemed to him that the whole of humanity was flowing on before him, intoxicated with joy, pleasure and happiness. He alone was looking on. To-morrow he would again be alone, always alone, more so than any one else. He stood up, took a few steps, and suddenly he felt as tired as though he had taken a long journey on foot, and he sat down on the next bench.

What was he waiting for? What was he hoping for? Nothing. He was thinking of how pleasant it must be in old age to return home and find the little children. It is pleasant to grow old when one is surrounded by those beings who owe their life to you, who love you, who caress you, who tell you charming and foolish little things which warm your heart and console you for everything.

And, thinking of his empty room, clean and sad, where no one but himself ever entered, a feeling of distress filled his soul; and the place seemed to him more mournful even than his little office. Nobody ever came there; no one ever spoke in it. It was dead, silent, without the echo of a human voice. It seems as though walls retain something of the people who live within them, something of their manner, face and voice. The very houses inhabited by happy families are gayer than the dwellings of the unhappy. His room was as barren of memories as his life. And the thought of returning to this place, all alone, of getting into his bed, of again repeating all the duties and actions of every evening, this thought terrified him. As though to escape farther from this sinister home, and from the time when he would have to return to it, he arose and walked along a path to a wooded corner, where he sat down on the grass.

About him, above him, everywhere, he heard a continuous, tremendous, confused rumble, composed of countless and different noises, a vague and throbbing pulsation of life: the life breath of Paris, breathing like a giant.

The sun was already high and shed a flood of light on the Bois de Boulogne. A few carriages were beginning to drive about and people were appearing on horseback.

A couple was walking through a deserted alley.

Suddenly the young woman raised her eyes and saw something brown in the branches. Surprised and anxious, she raised her hand, exclaiming: "Look! what is that?"

Then she shrieked and fell into the arms of her companion, who was forced to lay her on the ground.

The policeman who had been called cut down an old man who had hung himself with his suspenders.

Examination showed that he had died the evening before. Papers found on him showed that he was a bookkeeper for Messieurs Labuze and Company and that his name was Leras.

His death was attributed to suicide, the cause of which could not be suspected. Perhaps a sudden access of madness!

ALEXANDRE

At four o'clock that day, as on every other day, Alexandre rolled the three-wheeled chair for cripples up to the door of the little house; then, in obedience to the doctor's orders, he would push his old and infirm mistress about until six o'clock.

When he had placed the light vehicle against the step, just at the place where the old lady could most easily enter it, he went into the house; and soon a furious, hoarse old soldier's voice was heard cursing inside the house: it issued from the master, the retired ex-captain of infantry, Joseph Maramballe.

Then could be heard the noise of doors being slammed, chairs being pushed about, and hasty footsteps; then nothing more. After a few seconds, Alexandre reappeared on the threshold, supporting with all his strength Madame Maramballe, who was exhausted from the exertion of descending the stairs. When she was at last settled in the rolling chair, Alexandre passed behind it, grasped the handle, and set out toward the river.

Thus they crossed the little town every day amid the respectful greeting, of all. These bows were perhaps meant as much for the servant as for the mistress, for if she was loved and esteemed by all, this old trooper, with his long, white, patriarchal beard, was considered a model domestic.

The July sun was beating down unmercifully on the street, bathing the low houses in its crude and burning light. Dogs were sleeping on the sidewalk in the shade of the houses, and Alexandre, a little out of breath, hastened his footsteps in order sooner to arrive at the avenue which leads to the water.

Madame Maramballe was already slumbering under her white parasol, the point of which sometimes grazed along the man's impassive face. As soon as they had reached the Allee des Tilleuls, she awoke in the shade of the trees, and she said in a kindly voice: "Go more slowly, my poor boy; you will kill yourself in this heat."

Along this path, completely covered by arched linden trees, the Mavettek flowed in its winding bed bordered by willows.

The gurgling of the eddies and the splashing of the little waves against the rocks lent to the walk the charming music of babbling water and the freshness of damp air. Madame Maramballe inhaled with deep delight the humid charm of this spot and then murmured: “Ah! I feel better now! But he wasn’t in a good humor to-day.”

Alexandre answered: “No, madame.”

For thirty-five years he had been in the service of this couple, first as officer’s orderly, then as simple valet who did not wish to leave his masters; and for the last six years, every afternoon, he had been wheeling his mistress about through the narrow streets of the town. From this long and devoted service, and then from this daily tete-a-tete, a kind of familiarity arose between the old lady and the devoted servant, affectionate on her part, deferential on his.

They talked over the affairs of the house exactly as if they were equals. Their principal subject of conversation and of worry was the bad disposition of the captain, soured by a long career which had begun with promise, run along without promotion, end ended without glory.

Madame Maramballe continued: “He certainly was not in a good humor today. This happens too often since he has left the service.”

And Alexandre, with a sigh, completed his mistress’s thoughts, “Oh, madame might say that it happens every day and that it also happened before leaving the army.”

“That is true. But the poor man has been so unfortunate. He began with a brave deed, which obtained for him the Legion of Honor at the age of twenty; and then from twenty to fifty he was not able to rise higher than captain, whereas at the beginning he expected to retire with at least the rank of colonel.”

“Madame might also admit that it was his fault. If he had not always been as cutting as a whip, his superiors would have loved and protected him better. Harshness is of no use; one should try to please if one wishes to advance. As far as his treatment of us is concerned, it is also our fault, since we are willing to remain with him, but with others it’s different.”

Madame Maramballe was thinking. Oh, for how many years had she thus been thinking of the brutality of her husband, whom she had married long ago because he was a handsome officer, decorated quite young, and full of promise, so they said! What mistakes one makes in life!

She murmured: “Let us stop a while, my poor Alexandre, and you rest on that bench:”

It was a little worm-eaten bench, placed at a turn in the alley. Every time they came in this direction Alexandre was accustomed to making a short pause on this seat.

He sat down and with a proud and familiar gesture he took his beautiful white beard in his hand, and, closing his, fingers over it, ran them down to the point, which he held for a minute at the pit of his stomach, as if once more to verify the length of this growth.

Madame Maramballe continued: “I married him; it is only just and natural that I should bear his injustice; but what I do not understand is why you also should have supported it, my good Alexandre!”

He merely shrugged his shoulders and answered: “Oh! I — madame.”

She added: “Really. I have often wondered. When I married him you were his orderly and you could hardly do otherwise than endure him. But why did you remain with us, who pay you so little and who treat you so badly, when you could have done as every one else does, settle down, marry, have a family?”

He answered: “Oh, madame! with me it’s different.”

Then he was silent; but he kept pulling his beard as if he were ringing a bell within him, as if he were trying to pull it out, and he rolled his eyes like a man who is greatly embarrassed.

Madame Maramballe was following her own train of thought: “You are not a peasant. You have an education— “

He interrupted her proudly: “I studied surveying, madame.”

“Then why did you stay with us, and blast your prospects?”

He stammered: “That’s it! that’s it! it’s the fault of my dispositton.”

“How so, of your disposition?”

“Yes, when I become attached to a person I become attached to him, that’s all.”

She began to laugh: “You are not going to try to tell me that Maramballe’s sweet disposition caused you to become attached to him for life.”

He was fidgeting about on his bench visibly embarrassed, and he muttered behind his long beard:

"It was not he, it was you!"

The old lady, who had a sweet face, with a snowy line of curly white hair between her forehead and her bonnet, turned around in her chair and observed her servant with a surprised look, exclaiming: "I, my poor Alexandre! How so?"

He began to look up in the air, then to one side, then toward the distance, turning his head as do timid people when forced to admit shameful secrets. At last he exclaimed, with the courage of a trooper who is ordered to the line of fire: "You see, it's this way — the first time I brought a letter to mademoiselle from the lieutenant, mademoiselle gave me a franc and a smile, and that settled it."

Not understanding well, she questioned him "Explain yourself."

Then he cried out, like a malefactor who is admitting a fatal crime: "I had a sentiment for madame! There!"

She answered nothing, stopped looking at him, hung her head, and thought. She was good, full of justice, gentleness, reason, and tenderness. In a second she saw the immense devotion of this poor creature, who had given up everything in order to live beside her, without saying anything. And she felt as if she could cry. Then, with a sad but not angry expression, she said: "Let us return home."

He rose and began to push the wheeled chair.

As they approached the village they saw Captain Maramballe coming toward them. As soon as he joined them he asked his wife, with a visible desire of getting angry: "What have we for dinner?"

"Some chicken with flageolets."

He lost his temper: "Chicken! chicken! always chicken! By all that's holy, I've had enough chicken! Have you no ideas in your head, that you make me eat chicken every day?"

She answered, in a resigned tone: "But, my dear, you know that the doctor has ordered it for you. It's the best thing for your stomach. If your stomach were well, I could give you many things which I do not dare set before you now."

Then, exasperated, he planted himself in front of Alexandre, exclaiming: "Well, if my stomach is out of order it's the fault of that brute. For thirty-five years he has been poisoning me with his abominable cooking."

Madame Maramballe suddenly turned about completely, in order to see the old domestic. Their eyes met, and in this single glance they both said

“Thank you!” to each other.

THE LOG

The drawing-room was small, full of heavy draperies and discreetly fragrant. A large fire burned in the grate and a solitary lamp at one end of the mantelpiece threw a soft light on the two persons who were talking.

She, the mistress of the house, was an old lady with white hair, but one of those old ladies whose unwrinkled skin is as smooth as the finest paper, and scented, impregnated with perfume, with the delicate essences which she had used in her bath for so many years.

He was a very old friend, who had never married, a constant friend, a companion in the journey of life, but nothing more.

They had not spoken for about a minute, and were both looking at the fire, dreaming of no matter what, in one of those moments of friendly silence between people who have no need to be constantly talking in order to be happy together, when suddenly a large log, a stump covered with burning roots, fell out. It fell over the firedogs into the drawing-room and rolled on to the carpet, scattering great sparks around it. The old lady, with a little scream, sprang to her feet to run away, while he kicked the log back on to the hearth and stamped out all the burning sparks with his boots.

When the disaster was remedied, there was a strong smell of burning, and, sitting down opposite to his friend, the man looked at her with a smile and said, as he pointed to the log:

“That is the reason why I never married.”

She looked at him in astonishment, with the inquisitive gaze of women who wish to know everything, that eye which women have who are no longer very young, — in which a complex, and often roguish, curiosity is reflected, and she asked:

“How so?”

“Oh, it is a long story,” he replied; “a rather sad and unpleasant story.

“My old friends were often surprised at the coldness which suddenly sprang up between one of my best friends whose Christian name was Julien, and myself. They could not understand how two such intimate and inseparable friends, as we had been, could suddenly become almost strangers to one another, and I will tell you the reason of it.

"He and I used to live together at one time. We were never apart, and the friendship that united us seemed so strong that nothing could break it.

"One evening when he came home, he told me that he was going to get married, and it gave me a shock as if he had robbed me or betrayed me. When a man's friend marries, it is all over between them. The jealous affection of a woman, that suspicious, uneasy and carnal affection, will not tolerate the sturdy and frank attachment, that attachment of the mind, of the heart, and that mutual confidence which exists between two men.

"You see, however great the love may be that unites them a man and a woman are always strangers in mind and intellect; they remain belligerents, they belong to different races. There must always be a conqueror and a conquered, a master and a slave; now the one, now the other — they are never two equals. They press each other's hands, those hands trembling with amorous passion; but they never press them with a long, strong, loyal pressure, with that pressure which seems to open hearts and to lay them bare in a burst of sincere, strong, manly affection. Philosophers of old, instead of marrying, and procreating as a consolation for their old age children, who would abandon them, sought for a good, reliable friend, and grew old with him in that communion of thought which can only exist between men.

"Well, my friend Julien married. His wife was pretty, charming, a little, curly-haired blonde, plump and lively, who seemed to worship him. At first I went but rarely to their house, feeling myself de trop. But, somehow, they attracted me to their home; they were constantly inviting me, and seemed very fond of me. Consequently, by degrees, I allowed myself to be allured by the charm of their life. I often dined with them, and frequently, when I returned home at night, thought that I would do as he had done, and get married, as my empty house now seemed very dull.

"They appeared to be very much in love, and were never apart.

"Well, one evening Julien wrote and asked me to go to dinner, and I naturally went.

"'My dear fellow,' he said, 'I must go out directly afterward on business, and I shall not be back until eleven o'clock; but I shall be back at eleven precisely, and I reckon on you to keep Bertha company.'

"The young woman smiled.

"'It was my idea,' she said, 'to send for you.'

"I held out my hand to her.

"'You are as nice as ever, I said, and I felt a long, friendly pressure of my fingers, but I paid no attention to it; so we sat down to dinner, and at eight o'clock Julien went out.

"As soon as he had gone, a kind of strange embarrassment immediately seemed to arise between his wife and me. We had never been alone together yet, and in spite of our daily increasing intimacy, this tete-a-tete placed us in a new position. At first I spoke vaguely of those indifferent matters with which one fills up an embarrassing silence, but she did not reply, and remained opposite to me with her head down in an undecided manner, as if she were thinking over some difficult subject, and as I was at a loss for small talk, I held my tongue. It is surprising how hard it is at times to find anything to say.

"And then also I felt something in the air, something I could not express, one of those mysterious premonitions that warn one of another person's secret intentions in regard to yourself, whether they be good or evil.

"That painful silence lasted some time, and then Bertha said to me:

"'Will you kindly put a log on the fire for it is going out.'

"So I opened the box where the wood was kept, which was placed just where yours is, took out the largest log and put it on top of the others, which were three parts burned, and then silence again reigned in the room.

"In a few minutes the log was burning so brightly that it scorched our faces, and the young woman raised her eyes to mine — eyes that had a strange look to me.

"'It is too hot now,' she said; 'let us go and sit on the sofa over there.'

"So we went and sat on the sofa, and then she said suddenly, looking me full in the face:

"'What would you do if a woman were to tell you that she was in love with you?'

"'Upon my word,' I replied, very much at a loss for an answer, 'I cannot foresee such a case; but it would depend very much upon the woman.'

"She gave a hard, nervous, vibrating laugh; one of those false laughs which seem as if they must break thin glass, and then she added: 'Men are never either venturesome or spiteful.' And, after a moment's silence, she continued: 'Have you ever been in love, Monsieur Paul?' I was obliged to acknowledge that I certainly had, and she asked me to tell her all about it. Whereupon I made up some story or other. She listened to me attentively, with frequent signs of disapproval and contempt, and then suddenly she said:

"'No, you understand nothing about the subject. It seems to me that real love must unsettle the mind, upset the nerves and distract the head; that it must — how shall I express it? — be dangerous, even terrible, almost criminal and sacrilegious; that it must be a kind of treason; I mean to say that it is bound to break laws, fraternal bonds, sacred obligations; when love is tranquil, easy, lawful and without dangers, is it really love?'

"I did not know what answer to give her, and I made this philosophical reflection to myself: 'Oh! female brain, here; indeed, you show yourself!'

"While speaking, she had assumed a demure saintly air; and, resting on the cushions, she stretched herself out at full length, with her head on my shoulder, and her dress pulled up a little so as to show her red stockings, which the firelight made look still brighter. In a minute or two she continued:

"'I suppose I have frightened you?' I protested against such a notion, and she leaned against my breast altogether, and without looking at me, she said: 'If I were to tell you that I love you, what would you do?'

"And before I could think of an answer, she had thrown her arms around my neck, had quickly drawn my head down, and put her lips to mine.

"Oh! My dear friend, I can tell you that I did not feel at all happy! What! deceive Julien? become the lover of this little, silly, wrong-headed, deceitful woman, who was, no doubt, terribly sensual, and whom her husband no longer satisfied.

"To betray him continually, to deceive him, to play at being in love merely because I was attracted by forbidden fruit, by the danger incurred and the friendship betrayed! No, that did not suit me, but what was I to do? To imitate Joseph would be acting a very stupid and, moreover, difficult part, for this woman was enchanting in her perfidy, inflamed by audacity, palpitating and excited. Let the man who has never felt on his lips the warm kiss of a woman who is ready to give herself to him throw the first stone at me.

"Well, a minute more — you understand what I mean? A minute more, and — I should have been — no, she would have been! — I beg your pardon, he would have been — when a loud noise made us both jump up.

The log had fallen into the room, knocking over the fire irons and the fender, and on to the carpet, which it had scorched, and had rolled under an armchair, which it would certainly set alight.

"I jumped up like a madman, and, as I was replacing on the fire that log which had saved me, the door opened hastily, and Julien came in.

"'I am free,' he said, with evident pleasure. 'The business was over two hours sooner than I expected!'

"Yes, my dear friend, without that log, I should have been caught in the very act, and you know what the consequences would have been!

"You may be sure that I took good care never to be found in a similar situation again, never, never. Soon afterward I saw that Julien was giving me the 'cold shoulder,' as they say. His wife was evidently undermining our friendship. By degrees he got rid of me, and we have altogether ceased to meet.

"I never married, which ought not to surprise you, I think."

JULIE ROMAIN

Two years ago this spring I was making a walking tour along the shore of the Mediterranean. Is there anything more pleasant than to meditate while walking at a good pace along a highway? One walks in the sunlight, through the caressing breeze, at the foot of the mountains, along the coast of the sea. And one dreams! What a flood of illusions, loves, adventures pass through a pedestrian's mind during a two hours' march! What a crowd of confused and joyous hopes enter into you with the mild, light air! You drink them in with the breeze, and they awaken in your heart a longing for happiness which increases with the hun ger induced by walking. The fleeting, charming ideas fly and sing like birds.

I was following that long road which goes from Saint Raphael to Italy, or, rather, that long, splendid panoramic highway which seems made for the representation of all the love-poems of earth. And I thought that from Cannes, where one poses, to Monaco, where one gambles, people come to this spot of the earth for hardly any other purpose than to get embroiled or to throw away money on chance games, displaying under this delicious sky and in this garden of roses and oranges all base vanities and foolish pretensions and vile lusts, showing up the human mind such as it is, servile, ignorant, arrogant and full of cupidity.

Suddenly I saw some villas in one of those ravishing bays that one meets at every turn of the mountain; there were only four or five fronting the sea at the foot of the mountains, and behind them a wild fir wood slopes into two great valleys, that were untraversed by roads. I stopped short before one of these chalets, it was so pretty: a small white house with brown trimmings, overrun with rambler roses up to the top.

The garden was a mass of flowers, of all colors and all kinds, mixed in a coquettish, well-planned disorder. The lawn was full of them, big pots flanked each side of every step of the porch, pink or yellow clusters framed each window, and the terrace with the stone balustrade, which enclosed this pretty little dwelling, had a garland of enormous red bells, like drops of blood. Behind the house I saw a long avenue of orange trees in blossom, which went up to the foot of the mountain.

Over the door appeared the name, “Villa d’Antan,” in small gold letters.

I asked myself what poet or what fairy was living there, what inspired, solitary being had discovered this spot and created this dream house, which seemed to nestle in a nosegay.

A workman was breaking stones up the street, and I went to him to ask the name of the proprietor of this jewel.

“It is Madame Julie Romain,” he replied.

Julie Romain! In my childhood, long ago, I had heard them speak of this great actress, the rival of Rachel.

No woman ever was more applauded and more loved — especially more loved! What duets and suicides on her account and what sensational adventures! How old was this seductive woman now? Sixty, seventy, seventy-five! Julie Romain here, in this house! The woman who had been adored by the greatest musician and the most exquisite poet of our land! I still remember the sensation (I was then twelve years of age) which her flight to Sicily with the latter, after her rupture with the former, caused throughout France.

She had left one evening, after a premiere, where the audience had applauded her for a whole half hour, and had recalled her eleven times in succession. She had gone away with the poet, in a post-chaise, as was the fashion then; they had crossed the sea, to love each other in that antique island, the daughter of Greece, in that immense orange wood which surrounds Palermo, and which is called the “Shell of Gold.”

People told of their ascension of Mount Etna and how they had leaned over the immense crater, arm in arm, cheek to cheek, as if to throw themselves into the very abyss.

Now he was dead, that maker of verses so touching and so profound that they turned, the heads of a whole generation, so subtle and so mysterious that they opened a new world to the younger poets.

The other one also was dead — the deserted one, who had attained through her musical periods that are alive in the memories of all, periods of triumph and of despair, intoxicating triumph and heartrending despair.

And she was there, in that house veiled by flowers.

I did not hesitate, but rang the bell.

A small servant answered, a boy of eighteen with awkward mien and clumsy hands. I wrote in pencil on my card a gallant compliment to the actress, begging her to receive me. Perhaps, if she knew my name, she would open her door to me.

The little valet took it in, and then came back, asking me to follow him. He led me to a neat and decorous salon, furnished in the Louis-Philippe style, with stiff and heavy furniture, from which a little maid of sixteen, slender but not pretty, took off the covers in my honor.

Then I was left alone.

On the walls hung three portraits, that of the actress in one of her roles, that of the poet in his close-fitting greatcoat and the ruffled shirt then in style, and that of the musician seated at a piano.

She, blond, charming, but affected, according to the fashion of her day, was smiling, with her pretty mouth and blue eyes; the painting was careful, fine, elegant, but lifeless.

Those faces seemed to be already looking upon posterity.

The whole place had the air of a bygone time, of days that were done and men who had vanished.

A door opened and a little woman entered, old, very old, very small, with white hair and white eyebrows, a veritable white mouse, and as quick and furtive of movement.

She held out her hand to me, saying in a voice still fresh, sonorous and vibrant:

“Thank you, monsieur. How kind it is of the men of to-day to remember the women of yesterday! Sit down.”

I told her that her house had attracted me, that I had inquired for the proprietor’s name, and that, on learning it, I could not resist the desire to ring her bell.

“This gives me all the more pleasure, monsieur,” she replied, “as it is the first time that such a thing has happened. When I received your card, with the gracious note, I trembled as if an old friend who had disappeared for twenty years had been announced to me. I am like a dead body, whom no one remembers, of whom no one will think until the day when I shall actually die; then the newspapers will mention Julie Romain for three days, relating anecdotes and details of my life, reviving memories, and praising me greatly. Then all will be over with me.”

After a few moments of silence, she continued:

“And this will not be so very long now. In a few months, in a few days, nothing will remain but a little skeleton of this little woman who is now alive.”

She raised her eyes toward her portrait, which smiled down upon this caricature of herself; then she looked at those of the two men, the disdainful poet and the inspired musician, who seemed to say: “What does this ruin want of us?”

An indefinable, poignant, irresistible sadness overwhelmed my heart, the sadness of existences that have had their day, but who are still debating with their memories, like a person drowning in deep water.

From my seat I could see on the highroad the handsome carriages that were whirling from Nice to Monaco; inside them I saw young, pretty, rich and happy women and smiling, satisfied men. Following my eye, she understood my thought and murmured with a smile of resignation:

“One cannot both be and have been.”

“How beautiful life must have been for you!” I said.

She heaved a great sigh.

“Beautiful and sweet! And for that reason I regret it so much.”

I saw that she was disposed to talk of herself, so I began to question her, gently and discreetly, as one might touch bruised flesh.

She spoke of her successes, her intoxications and her friends, of her whole triumphant existence.

“Was it on the stage that you found your most intense joys, your true happiness?” I asked.

“Oh, no!” she replied quickly.

I smiled; then, raising her eyes to the two portraits, she said, with a sad glance:

“It was with them.”

“Which one?” I could not help asking.

“Both. I even confuse them up a little now in my old woman’s memory, and then I feel remorse.”

“Then, madame, your acknowledgment is not to them, but to Love itself. They were merely its interpreters.”

“That is possible. But what interpreters!”

“Are you sure that you have not been, or that you might not have been, loved as well or better by a simple man, but not a great man, who would have offered to you his whole life and heart, all his thoughts, all his days, his whole being, while these gave you two redoubtable rivals, Music and Poetry?"

"No, monsieur, no!" she exclaimed emphatically, with that still youthful voice, which caused the soul to vibrate. "Another one might perhaps have loved me more, but he would not have loved me as these did. Ah! those two sang to me of the music of love as no one else in the world could have sung of it. How they intoxicated me! Could any other man express what they knew so well how to express in tones and in words? Is it enough merely to love if one cannot put all the poetry and all the music of heaven and earth into love? And they knew how to make a woman delirious with songs and with words. Yes, perhaps there was more of illusion than of reality in our passion; but these illusions lift you into the clouds, while realities always leave you trailing in the dust. If others have loved me more, through these two I have understood, felt and worshipped love."

Suddenly she began to weep.

She wept silently, shedding tears of despair.

I pretended not to see, looking off into the distance. She resumed, after a few minutes:

"You see, monsieur, with nearly every one the heart ages with the body. But this has not happened with me. My body is sixty-nine years old, while my poor heart is only twenty. And that is the reason why I live all alone, with my flowers and my dreams."

There was a long silence between us. She grew calmer and continued, smiling:

"How you would laugh at me, if you knew, if you knew how I pass my evenings, when the weather is fine. I am ashamed and I pity myself at the same time."

Beg as I might, she would not tell me what she did. Then I rose to leave.

"Already!" she exclaimed.

And as I said that I wished to dine at Monte Carlo, she asked timidly:

"Will you not dine with me? It would give me a great deal of pleasure."

I accepted at once. She rang, delighted, and after giving some orders to the little maid she took me over her house.

A kind of glass-enclosed veranda, filled with shrubs, opened into the dining-room, revealing at the farther end the long avenue of orange trees extending to the foot of the mountain. A low seat, hidden by plants, indicated that the old actress often came there to sit down.

Then we went into the garden, to look at the flowers. Evening fell softly, one of those calm, moist evenings when the earth breathes forth all her perfumes. Daylight was almost gone when we sat down at table. The dinner was good and it lasted a long time, and we became intimate friends, she and I, when she understood what a profound sympathy she had aroused in my heart. She had taken two thimblefuls of wine, as the phrase goes, and had grown more confiding and expansive.

“Come, let us look at the moon,” she said. “I adore the good moon. She has been the witness of my most intense joys. It seems to me that all my memories are there, and that I need only look at her to bring them all back to me. And even — some times — in the evening — I offer to myself a pretty play — yes, pretty — if you only knew! But no, you would laugh at me. I cannot — I dare not — no, no — really — no.”

I implored her to tell me what it was.

“Come, now! come, tell me; I promise you that I will not laugh. I swear it to you — come, now!”

She hesitated. I took her hands — those poor little hands, so thin and so cold! — and I kissed them one after the other, several times, as her lovers had once kissed them. She was moved and hesitated.

“You promise me not to laugh?”

“Yes, I swear it to you.”

“Well, then, come.”

She rose, and as the little domestic, awkward in his green livery, removed the chair behind her, she whispered quickly a few words into his ear.

“Yes, madame, at once,” he replied.

She took my arm and led me to the veranda.

The avenue of oranges was really splendid to see. The full moon made a narrow path of silver, a long bright line, which fell on the yellow sand, between the round, opaque crowns of the dark trees.

As these trees were in bloom, their strong, sweet perfume filled the night, and swarming among their dark foliage I saw thousands of fireflies, which looked like seeds fallen from the stars.

“Oh, what a setting for a love scene!” I exclaimed.

She smiled.

“Is it not true? Is it not true? You will see!”

And she made me sit down beside her.

“This is what makes one long for more life. But you hardly think of these things, you men of to-day. You are speculators, merchants and men of affairs.

“You no longer even know how to talk to us. When I say ‘you,’ I mean young men in general. Love has been turned into a liaison which very often begins with an unpaid dressmaker’s bill. If you think the bill is dearer than the woman, you disappear; but if you hold the woman more highly, you pay it. Nice morals — and a nice kind of love!”

She took my hand.

“Look!”

I looked, astonished and delighted. Down there at the end of the avenue, in the moonlight, were two young people, with their arms around each other’s waist. They were walking along, interlaced, charming, with short, little steps, crossing the flakes of light; which illuminated them momentarily, and then sinking back into the shadow. The youth was dressed in a suit of white satin, such as men wore in the eighteenth century, and had on a hat with an ostrich plume. The girl was arrayed in a gown with panniers, and the high, powdered coiffure of the handsome dames of the time of the Regency.

They stopped a hundred paces from us, and standing in the middle of the avenue, they kissed each other with graceful gestures.

Suddenly I recognized the two little servants. Then one of those dreadful fits of laughter that convulse you made me writhe in my chair. But I did not laugh aloud. I resisted, convulsed and feeling almost ill, as a man whose leg is cut off resists the impulse to cry out.

As the young pair turned toward the farther end of the avenue they again became delightful. They went farther and farther away, finally disappearing as a dream disappears. I no longer saw them. The avenue seemed a sad place.

I took my leave at once, so as not to see them again, for I guessed that this little play would last a long time, awakening, as it did, a whole past of love and of stage scenery; the artificial past, deceitful and seductive, false but charming, which still stirred the heart of this amorous old comedienne.

THE RONDOLI SISTERS

I

I set out to see Italy thoroughly on two occasions, and each time I was stopped at the frontier and could not get any further. So I do not know Italy, said my friend, Charles Jouvent. And yet my two attempts gave me a charming idea of the manners of that beautiful country. Some time, however, I must visit its cities, as well as the museums and works of art with which it abounds. I will make another attempt to penetrate into the interior, which I have not yet succeeded in doing.

You don't understand me, so I will explain: In the spring of 1874 I was seized with an irresistible desire to see Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples. I am, as you know, not a great traveller; it appears to me a useless and fatiguing business. Nights spent in a train, the disturbed slumbers of the railway carriage, with the attendant headache, and stiffness in every limb, the sudden waking in that rolling box, the unwashed feeling, with your eyes and hair full of dust, the smell of the coal on which one's lungs feed, those bad dinners in the draughty refreshment rooms are, according to my ideas, a horrible way of beginning a pleasure trip.

After this introduction, we have the miseries of the hotel; of some great hotel full of people, and yet so empty; the strange room and the doubtful bed!

I am most particular about my bed; it is the sanctuary of life. We entrust our almost naked and fatigued bodies to it so that they may be reanimated by reposing between soft sheets and feathers.

There we find the most delightful hours of our existence, the hours of love and of sleep. The bed is sacred, and should be respected, venerated and loved by us as the best and most delightful of our earthly possessions.

I cannot lift up the sheets of a hotel bed without a shudder of disgust. Who has occupied it the night before? Perhaps dirty, revolting people have slept in it. I begin, then, to think of all the horrible people with whom one rubs shoulders every day, people with suspicious-looking skin which makes one think of the feet and all the rest! I call to mind those who carry about with them the sickening smell of garlic or of humanity. I think of those who are deformed and unhealthy, of the perspiration emanating from the sick, of everything that is ugly and filthy in man.

And all this, perhaps, in the bed in which I am about to sleep! The mere idea of it makes me feel ill as I get into it.

And then the hotel dinners — those dreary table d'hote dinners in the midst of all sorts of extraordinary people, or else those terrible solitary dinners at a small table in a restaurant, feebly lighted by a wretched composite candle under a shade.

Again, those terribly dull evenings in some unknown town! Do you know anything more wretched than the approach of dusk on such an occasion? One goes about as if almost in a dream, looking at faces that one never has seen before and never will see again; listening to people talking about matters which are quite indifferent to you in a language that perhaps you do not understand. You have a terrible feeling, almost as if you were lost, and you continue to walk on so as not to be obliged to return to the hotel, where you would feel more lost still because you are at home, in a home which belongs to anyone who can pay for it; and at last you sink into a chair of some well-lighted cafe, whose gilding and lights oppress you a thousand times more than the shadows in the streets. Then you feel so abominably lonely sitting in front of the glass of flat bock beer that a kind of madness seizes you, the longing to go somewhere or other, no matter where, as long as you need not remain in front of that marble table amid those dazzling lights.

And then, suddenly, you are aware that you are really alone in the world, always and everywhere, and that in places which we know, the familiar jostlings give us the illusion only of human fraternity. At such moments of self-abandonment and sombre isolation in distant cities one thinks broadly, clearly and profoundly. Then one suddenly sees the whole of life outside the vision of eternal hope, apart from the deceptions of our innate habits, and of our expectations of happiness, which we indulge in dreams never to be realized.

It is only by going a long distance from home that we can fully understand how short-lived and empty everything near at hand is; by searching for the unknown, we perceive how commonplace and evanescent everything is; only by wandering over the face of the earth can we understand how small the world is, and how very much alike it is everywhere.

How well I know, and how I hate and almost fear, those haphazard walks through unknown streets; and this was the reason why, as nothing would induce me to undertake a tour in Italy by myself, I made up my mind to accompany my friend Paul Pavilly.

You know Paul, and how he idealizes women. To him the earth is habitable only because they are there; the sun gives light and is warm because it shines upon them; the air is soft and balmy because it blows upon their skin and ruffles the soft hair on their temples; and the moon is charming because it makes them dream and imparts a languorous charm to love. Every act and action of Paul's has woman for its motive; all his thoughts, all his efforts and hopes are centered in them.

When I mentioned Italy to Paul he at first absolutely refused to leave Paris. I, however, began to tell him of the adventures I had on my travels. I assured him that all Italian women are charming, and I made him hope for the most refined pleasures at Naples, thanks to certain letters of introduction which I had; and so at last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

II

We took the express one Thursday evening, Paul and I. Hardly anyone goes south at that time of the year, so that we had the carriages to ourselves, and both of us were in a bad temper on leaving Paris, sorry for having yielded to the temptation of this journey, and regretting Marly, the Seine, and our lazy boating excursions, and all those pleasures in and near Paris which are so dear to every true Parisian.

As soon as the train started Paul stuck himself in his corner, and said, “It is most idiotic to go all that distance,” and as it was too late for him to change his mind then, I said, “Well, you should not have come.”

He made no answer, and I felt very much inclined to laugh when I saw how furious he looked. He is certainly always rather like a squirrel, but then every one of us has retained the type of some animal or other as the mark of his primitive origin. How many people have jaws like a bulldog, or heads like goats, rabbits, foxes, horses, or oxen. Paul is a squirrel turned into a man. He has its bright, quick eyes, its hair, its pointed nose, its small, fine, supple, active body, and a certain mysterious resemblance in his general bearing; in fact, a similarity of movement, of gesture, and of bearing which might almost be taken for a recollection.

At last we both went to sleep with that uncomfortable slumber of the railway carriage, which is interrupted by horrible cramps in the arms and neck, and by the sudden stoppages of the train.

We woke up as we were passing along the Rhone. Soon the continued noise of crickets came in through the windows, that cry which seems to be the voice of the warm earth, the song of Provence; and seemed to instill into our looks, our breasts, and our souls the light and happy feeling of the south, that odor of the parched earth, of the stony and light soil of the olive with its gray-green foliage.

When the train stopped again a railway guard ran along the train calling out "Valence" in a sonorous voice, with an accent that again gave us a taste of that Provence which the shrill note of the crickets had already imparted to us.

Nothing fresh happened till we got to Marseilles, where we alighted for breakfast, but when we returned to our carriage we found a woman installed there.

Paul, with a delighted glance at me, gave his short mustache a mechanical twirl, and passed his fingers through his, hair, which had become slightly out of order with the night's journey. Then he sat down opposite the newcomer.

Whenever I happen to see a striking new face, either in travelling or in society, I always have the strongest inclination to find out what character, mind, and intellectual capacities are hidden beneath those features.

She was a young and pretty woman, certainly a native of the south of France, with splendid eyes, beautiful wavy black hair, which was so thick and long that it seemed almost too heavy for her head. She was dressed with a certain southern bad taste which made her look a little vulgar. Her regular features had none of the grace and finish of the refined races, of that slight delicacy which members of the aristocracy inherit from their birth, and which is the hereditary mark of thinner blood.

Her bracelets were too big to be of gold; she wore earrings with large white stones that were certainly not diamonds, and she belonged unmistakably to the People. One surmised that she would talk too loud, and shout on every occasion with exaggerated gestures.

When the train started she remained motionless in her place, in the attitude of a woman who was indignant, without even looking at us.

Paul began to talk to me, evidently with an eye to effect, trying to attract her attention, as shopkeepers expose their choice wares to catch the notice of passersby.

She, however, did not appear to be paying the least attention.

“Toulon! Ten minutes to wait! Refreshment room!” the porters shouted.

Paul motioned to me to get out, and as soon as we had done so, he said:

“I wonder who on earth she can be?”

I began to laugh. “I am sure I don’t know, and I don’t in the least care.”

He was quite excited.

“She is an uncommonly fresh and pretty girl. What eyes she has, and how cross she looks. She must have been dreadfully worried, for she takes no notice of anything.”

“You will have all your trouble for nothing,” I growled.

He began to lose his temper.

“I am not taking any trouble, my dear fellow. I think her an extremely pretty woman, that is all. If one could only speak to her! But I don’t know how to begin. Cannot you give me an idea? Can’t you guess who she is?”

“Upon my word, I cannot. However, I should rather think she is some strolling actress who is going to rejoin her company after a love adventure.”

He seemed quite upset, as if I had said something insulting.

“What makes you think that? On the contrary, I think she looks most respectable.”

“Just look at her bracelets,” I said, “her earrings and her whole dress. I should not be the least surprised if she were a dancer or a circus rider, but most likely a dancer. Her whole style smacks very much of the theatre.”

He evidently did not like the idea.

“She is much too young, I am sure; why, she is hardly twenty.”

“Well,” I replied, “there are many things which one can do before one is twenty; dancing and elocution are among them.”

“Take your seats for Nice, Vintimiglia,” the guards and porters called.

We got in; our fellow passenger was eating an orange, and certainly she did not do it elegantly. She had spread her pocket-handkerchief on her knees, and the way in which she tore off the peel and opened her mouth to put in the pieces, and then spat the pips out of the window, showed that her training had been decidedly vulgar.

She seemed, also, more put out than ever, and swallowed the fruit with an exceedingly comic air of rage.

Paul devoured her with his eyes, and tried to attract her attention and excite her curiosity; but in spite of his talk, and of the manner in which he brought in well-known names, she did not pay the least attention to him.

After passing Frejus and St. Raphael, the train passed through a veritable garden, a paradise of roses, and groves of oranges and lemons covered with fruits and flowers at the same time. That delightful coast from Marseilles to Genoa is a kingdom of perfumes in a home of flowers.

June is the time to see it in all its beauty, when in every narrow valley and on every slope, the most exquisite flowers are growing luxuriantly. And the roses! fields, hedges, groves of roses. They climb up the walls, blossom on the roofs, hang from the trees, peep out from among the bushes; they are white, red, yellow, large and small, single, with a simple self-colored dress, or full and heavy in brilliant toilettes.

Their breath makes the air heavy and relaxing, and the still more penetrating odor of the orange blossoms sweetens the atmosphere till it might almost be called the refinement of odor.

The shore, with its brown rocks, was bathed by the motionless Mediterranean. The hot summer sun stretched like a fiery cloth over the mountains, over the long expanses of sand, and over the motionless, apparently solid blue sea. The train went on through the tunnels, along the slopes, above the water, on straight, wall-like viaducts, and a soft, vague, saltish smell, a smell of drying seaweed, mingled at times with the strong, heavy perfume of the flowers.

But Paul neither saw, looked at, nor smelled anything, for our fellow traveller engrossed all his attention.

When we reached Cannes, as he wished to speak to me he signed to me to get out, and as soon as I did so, he took me by the arm.

“Do you know, she is really charming. Just look at her eyes; and I never saw anything like her hair.”

“Don’t excite yourself,” I replied, “or else address her, if you have any intentions that way. She does not look unapproachable; I fancy, although she appear to be a little bit grumpy.”

“Why don’t you speak to her?” he said.

“I don’t know what to say, for I am always terribly stupid at first; I can never make advances to a woman in the street. I follow them, go round and round them, and quite close to them, but never know what to say at first. I only once tried to enter into conversation with a woman in that way. As I clearly saw that she was waiting for me to make overtures, and as I felt bound to say something, I stammered out, ‘I hope you are quite well, madame?’ She laughed in my face, and I made my escape.”

I promised Paul to do all I could to bring about a conversation, and when we had taken our places again, I politely asked our neighbor:

“Have you any objection to the smell of tobacco, madame?”

She merely replied, “Non capisco.”

So she was an Italian! I felt an absurd inclination to laugh. As Paul did not understand a word of that language, I was obliged to act as his interpreter, so I said in Italian:

“I asked you, madame, whether you had any objection to tobacco smoke?”

With an angry look she replied, “Che mi fa!”

She had neither turned her head nor looked at me, and I really did not know whether to take this “What do I care” for an authorization, a refusal, a real sign of indifference, or for a mere “Let me alone.”

“Madame,” I replied, “if you mind the smell of tobacco in the least— “

She again said, “Mica,” in a tone which seemed to mean, “I wish to goodness you would leave me alone!” It was, however, a kind of permission, so I said to Paul:

“You may smoke.”

He looked at me in that curious sort of way that people have when they try to understand others who are talking in a strange language before them, and asked me:

“What did you say to her?”

“I asked whether we might smoke, and she said we might do whatever we liked.”

Whereupon I lighted my cigar.

“Did she say anything more?”

“If you had counted her words you would have noticed that she used exactly six, two of which gave me to understand that she knew no French, so four remained, and much can be said in four words.”

Paul seemed quite unhappy, disappointed, and at sea, so to speak.

But suddenly the Italian asked me, in that tone of discontent which seemed habitual to her, “Do you know at what time we shall get to Genoa?”

"At eleven o'clock," I replied. Then after a moment I went on:

"My friend and I are also going to Genoa, and if we can be of any service to you, we shall be very happy, as you are quite alone." But she interrupted with such a "Mica!" that I did not venture on another word.

"What did she say?" Paul asked.

"She said she thought you were charming."

But he was in no humor for joking, and begged me dryly not to make fun of him; so I translated her question and my polite offer, which had been so rudely rejected.

Then he really became as restless as a caged squirrel.

"If we only knew," he said, "what hotel she was going to, we would go to the same. Try to find out so as to have another opportunity to make her talk."

It was not particularly easy, and I did not know what pretext to invent, desirous as I was to make the acquaintance of this unapproachable person.

We passed Nice, Monaco, Mentone, and the train stopped at the frontier for the examination of luggage.

Although I hate those ill-bred people who breakfast and dine in railway-carriages, I went and bought a quantity of good things to make one last attack on her by their means. I felt sure that this girl must, ordinarily, be by no means inaccessible. Something had put her out and made her irritable, but very little would suffice, a mere word or some agreeable offer, to decide her and vanquish her.

We started again, and we three were still alone. I spread my eatables on the seat. I cut up the fowl, put the slices of ham neatly on a piece of paper, and then carefully laid out our dessert, strawberries, plums, cherries and cakes, close to the girl.

When she saw that we were about to eat she took a piece of chocolate and two little crisp cakes out of her pocket and began to munch them.

"Ask her to have some of ours," Paul said in a whisper.

"That is exactly what I wish to do, but it is rather a difficult matter."

As she, however, glanced from time to time at our provisions, I felt sure that she would still be hungry when she had finished what she had with her; so, as soon as her frugal meal was over, I said to her:

"It would be very kind of you if you would take some of this fruit."

Again she said "Mica!" but less crossly than before.

“Well, then,” I said, “may I offer you a little wine? I see you have not drunk anything. It is Italian wine, and as we are now in your own country, we should be very pleased to see such a pretty Italian mouth accept the offer of its French neighbors.”

She shook her head slightly, evidently wishing to refuse, but very desirous of accepting, and her mica this time was almost polite. I took the flask, which was covered with straw in the Italian fashion, and filling the glass, I offered it to her.

“Please drink it,” I said, “to bid us welcome to your country.”

She took the glass with her usual look, and emptied it at a draught, like a woman consumed with thirst, and then gave it back to me without even saying “Thank you.”

I then offered her the cherries. “Please take some,” I said; “we shall be so glad if you will.”

Out of her corner she looked at all the fruit spread out beside her, and said so rapidly that I could scarcely follow her: “A me non piacciono ne le ciriegie ne le susine; amo soltano le fragole.”

“What does she say?” Paul asked.

“That she does riot care for cherries or plums, but only for strawberries.”

I put a newspaper full of wild strawberries on her lap, and she ate them quickly, tossing them into her mouth from some distance in a coquettish and charming manner.

When she had finished the little red heap, which soon disappeared under the rapid action of her hands, I asked her:

“What may I offer you now?”

“I will take a little chicken,” she replied.

She certainly devoured half of it, tearing it to pieces with the rapid movements of her jaws like some carnivorous animal. Then she made up her mind to have some cherries, which she “did not like,” and then some plums, then some little cakes. Then she said, “I have had enough,” and sat back in her corner.

I was much amused, and tried to make her eat more, insisting, in fact, till she suddenly flew into a rage, and flung such a furious mica at me, that I would no longer run the risk of spoiling her digestion.

I turned to my friend. “My poor Paul,” I said, “I am afraid we have had our trouble for nothing.”

The night came on, one of those hot summer nights which extend their warm shade over the burning and exhausted earth. Here and there, in the distance, by the sea, on capes and promontories, bright stars, which I was, at times, almost inclined to confound with lighthouses, began to shine on the dark horizon:

The scent of the orange trees became more penetrating, and we breathed with delight, distending our lungs to inhale it more deeply. The balmy air was soft, delicious, almost divine.

Suddenly I noticed something like a shower of stars under the dense shade of the trees along the line, where it was quite dark. It might have been taken for drops of light, leaping, flying, playing and running among the leaves, or for small stars fallen from the skies in order to have an excursion on the earth; but they were only fireflies dancing a strange fiery ballet in the perfumed air.

One of them happened to come into our carriage, and shed its intermittent light, which seemed to be extinguished one moment and to be burning the next. I covered the carriage-lamp with its blue shade and watched the strange fly careering about in its fiery flight. Suddenly it settled on the dark hair of our neighbor, who was half dozing after dinner. Paul seemed delighted, with his eyes fixed on the bright, sparkling spot, which looked like a living jewel on the forehead of the sleeping woman.

The Italian woke up about eleven o’clock, with the bright insect still in her hair. When I saw her move, I said: “We are just getting to Genoa, madame,” and she murmured, without answering me, as if possessed by some obstinate and embarrassing thought:

“What am I going to do, I wonder?”

And then she suddenly asked:

“Would you like me to come with you?”

I was so taken aback that I really did not understand her.

“With us? How do you mean?”

She repeated, looking more and more furious:

“Would you like me to be your guide now, as soon as we get out of the train?”

“I am quite willing; but where do you want to go.”

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of supreme indifference.

“Wherever you like; what does it matter to me?” She repeated her “Che mi fa” twice.

"But we are going to the hotel."

"Very well, let us all go to the hotel," she said, in a contemptuous voice.

I turned to Paul, and said:

"She wishes to know whether we should like her to come with us."

My friend's utter surprise restored my self-possession. He stammered:

"With us? Where to? What for? How?"

"I don't know, but she made this strange proposal to me in a most irritated voice. I told her that we were going to the hotel, and she said: 'Very well, let us all go there!' I suppose she is without a penny. She certainly has a very strange way of making acquaintances."

Paul, who 'was very much excited, exclaimed:

"I am quite agreeable. Tell her that we will go wherever she likes." Then, after a moment's hesitation, he said uneasily:

"We must know, however, with whom she wishes to go — with you or with me?"

I turned to the Italian, who did not even seem to be listening to us, and said:

"We shall be very happy to have you with us, but my friend wishes to know whether you will take my arm or his?"

She opened her black eyes wide with vague surprise, and said, "Che ni fa?"

I was obliged to explain myself. "In Italy, I believe, when a man looks after a woman, fulfils all her wishes, and satisfies all her caprices, he is called a patito. Which of us two will you take for your patito?"

Without the slightest hesitation she replied:

"You!"

I turned to Paul. "You see, my friend, she chooses me; you have no chance."

"All the better for you," he replied in a rage. Then, after thinking for a few moments, he went on:

"Do you really care about taking this creature with you? She will spoil our journey. What are we to do with this woman, who looks like I don't know what? They will not take us in at any decent hotel."

I, however, just began to find the Italian much nicer than I had thought her at first, and I was now very desirous to take her with us. The idea delighted me.

I replied, “My dear fellow, we have accepted, and it is too late to recede. You were the first to advise me to say ‘Yes.’”

“It is very stupid,” he growled, “but do as you please.”

The train whistled, slackened speed, and we ran into the station.

I got out of the carriage, and offered my new companion my hand. She jumped out lightly, and I gave her my arm, which she took with an air of seeming repugnance. As soon as we had claimed our luggage we set off into the town, Paul walking in utter silence.

“To what hotel shall we go?” I asked him. “It may be difficult to get into the City of Paris with a woman, especially with this Italian.”

Paul interrupted me. “Yes, with an Italian who looks more like a dancer than a duchess. However, that is no business of mine. Do just as you please.”

I was in a state of perplexity. I had written to the City of Paris to retain our rooms, and now I did not know what to do.

Two commissionaires followed us with our luggage. I continued: “You might as well go on first, and say that we are coming; and give the landlord to understand that I have a — a friend with me and that we should like rooms quite by themselves for us three, so as not to be brought in contact with other travellers. He will understand, and we will decide according to his answer.”

But Paul growled, “Thank you, such commissions and such parts do not suit me, by any means. I did not come here to select your apartments or to minister to your pleasures.”

But I was urgent: “Look here, don’t be angry. It is surely far better to go to a good hotel than to a bad one, and it is not difficult to ask the landlord for three separate bedrooms and a dining-room.”

I put a stress on three, and that decided him.

He went on first, and I saw him go into a large hotel while I remained on the other side of the street, with my fair Italian, who did not say a word, and followed the porters with the luggage.

Paul came back at last, looking as dissatisfied as my companion.

“That is settled,” he said, “and they will take us in; but here are only two bedrooms. You must settle it as you can.”

I followed him, rather ashamed of going in with such a strange companion.

There were two bedrooms separated by a small sitting-room. I ordered a cold supper, and then I turned to the Italian with a perplexed look.

“We have only been able to get two rooms, so you must choose which you like.”

She replied with her eternal “Che mi fa!” I thereupon took up her little black wooden trunk, such as servants use, and took it into the room on the right, which I had chosen for her. A bit of paper was fastened to the box, on which was written, Mademoiselle Francesca Rondoli, Genoa.

“Your name is Francesca?” I asked, and she nodded her head, without replying.

“We shall have supper directly,” I continued. “Meanwhile, I dare say you would like to arrange your toilette a little?”

She answered with a ‘mica’, a word which she employed just as frequently as ‘Che me fa’, but I went on: “It is always pleasant after a journey.”

Then I suddenly remembered that she had not, perhaps, the necessary requisites, for she appeared to me in a very singular position, as if she had just escaped from some disagreeable adventure, and I brought her my dressing-case.

I put out all the little instruments for cleanliness and comfort which it contained: a nail-brush, a new toothbrush — I always carry a selection of them about with me — my nail-scissors, a nail-file, and sponges. I uncorked a bottle of eau de cologne, one of lavender-water, and a little bottle of new-mown hay, so that she might have a choice. Then I opened my powder-box, and put out the powder-puff, placed my fine towels over the water-jug, and a piece of new soap near the basin.

She watched my movements with a look of annoyance in her wide-open eyes, without appearing either astonished or pleased at my forethought.

“Here is all that you require,” I then said; “I will tell you when supper is ready.”

When I returned to the sitting-room I found that Paul had shut himself in the other room, so I sat down to wait.

A waiter went to and fro, bringing plates and glasses. He laid the table slowly, then put a cold chicken on it, and told me that all was ready.

I knocked gently at Mademoiselle Rondoli’s door. “Come in,” she said, and when I did so I was struck by a strong, heavy smell of perfumes, as if I were in a hairdresser’s shop.

The Italian was sitting on her trunk in an attitude either of thoughtful discontent or absent-mindedness. The towel was still folded over the waterjug that was full of water, and the soap, untouched and dry, was lying beside the empty basin; but one would have thought that the young woman had used half the contents of the bottles of perfume. The eau de cologne, however, had been spared, as only about a third of it had gone; but to make up for that she had used a surprising amount of lavender-water and new-mown hay. A cloud of violet powder, a vague white mist, seemed still to be floating in the air, from the effects of her over-powdering her face and neck. It seemed to cover her eyelashes, eyebrows, and the hair on her temples like snow, while her cheeks were plastered with it, and layers of it covered her nostrils, the corners of her eyes, and her chin.

When she got up she exhaled such a strong odor of perfume that it almost made me feel faint.

When we sat down to supper, I found that Paul was in a most execrable temper, and I could get nothing out of him but blame, irritable words, and disagreeable remarks.

Mademoiselle Francesca ate like an ogre, and as soon as she had finished her meal she threw herself upon the sofa in the sitting-room. Sitting down beside her, I said gallantly, kissing her hand:

“Shall I have the bed prepared, or will you sleep on the couch?”

“It is all the same to me. ‘Che mi fa’!”

Her indifference vexed me.

“Should you like to retire at once?”

“Yes; I am very sleepy.”

She got up, yawned, gave her hand to Paul, who took it with a furious look, and I lighted her into the bedroom. A disquieting feeling haunted me. “Here is all you want,” I said again.

The next morning she got up early, like a woman who is accustomed to work. She woke me by doing so, and I watched her through my half-closed eyelids.

She came and went without hurrying herself, as if she were astonished at having nothing to do. At length she went to the dressing-table, and in a moment emptied all my bottles of perfume. She certainly also used some water, but very little.

When she was quite dressed, she sat down on her trunk again, and clasping one knee between her hands, she seemed to be thinking.

At that moment I pretended to first notice her, and said:

“Good-morning, Francesca.”

Without seeming in at all a better temper than the previous night, she murmured, “Good-morning!”

When I asked her whether she had slept well, she nodded her head, and jumping out of bed, I went and kissed her.

She turned her face toward me like a child who is being kissed against its will; but I took her tenderly in my arms, and gently pressed my lips on her eyelids, which she closed with evident distaste under my kisses on her fresh cheek and full lips, which she turned away.

“You don’t seem to like being kissed,” I said to her.

“Mica!” was her only answer.

I sat down on the trunk by her side, and passing my arm through hers, I said: “Mica! mica! mica! in reply to everything. I shall call you Mademoiselle Mica, I think.”

For the first time I fancied that I saw the shadow of a smile on her lips, but it passed by so quickly that I may have been mistaken.

“But if you never say anything but Mica, I shall not know what to do to please you. Let me see; what shall we do to-day?”

She hesitated a moment, as if some fancy had flitted through her head, and then she said carelessly: “It is all the same to me; whatever you like.”

“Very well, Mademoiselle Mica, we will have a carriage and go for a drive.”

“As you please,” she said.

Paul was waiting for us in the dining-room, looking as bored as third parties usually do in love affairs. I assumed a delighted air, and shook hands with him with triumphant energy.

“What are you thinking of doing?” he asked.

“First of all, we will go and see a little of the town, and then we might get a carriage and take a drive in the neighborhood.”

We breakfasted almost in silence, and then set out. I dragged Francesca from palace to palace, and she either looked at nothing or merely glanced carelessly at the various masterpieces. Paul followed us, growling all sorts of disagreeable things. Then we all three took a drive in silence into the country and returned to dinner.

The next day it was the same thing and the next day again; and on the third Paul said to me: “Look here, I am going to leave you; I am not going to stop here for three weeks watching you make love to this creature."

I was perplexed and annoyed, for to my great surprise I had become singularly attached to Francesca. A man is but weak and foolish, carried away by the merest trifle, and a coward every time that his senses are excited or mastered. I clung to this unknown girl, silent and dissatisfied as she always was. I liked her somewhat ill-tempered face, the dissatisfied droop of her mouth, the weariness of her look; I liked her fatigued movements, the contemptuous way in which she let me kiss her, the very indifference of her caresses. A secret bond, that mysterious bond of physical love, which does not satisfy, bound me to her. I told Paul so, quite frankly. He treated me as if I were a fool, and then said:

"Very well, take her with you."

But she obstinately refused to leave Genoa, without giving any reason. I besought, I reasoned, I promised, but all was of no avail, and so I stayed on.

Paul declared that he would go by himself, and went so far as to pack up his portmanteau; but he remained all the same.

Thus a fortnight passed. Francesca was always silent and irritable, lived beside me rather than with me, responded to all my requirements and all my propositions with her perpetual Che mi fa, or with her no less perpetual Mica.

My friend became more and more furious, but my only answer was, "You can go if you are tired of staying. I am not detaining you."

Then he called me names, overwhelmed me with reproaches, and exclaimed: "Where do you think I can go now? We had three weeks at our disposal, and here is a fortnight gone! I cannot continue my journey now; and, in any case, I am not going to Venice, Florence and Rome all by myself. But you will pay for it, and more dearly than you think, most likely. You are not going to bring a man all the way from Paris in order to shut him up at a hotel in Genoa with an Italian adventuress."

When I told him, very calmly, to return to Paris, he exclaimed that he intended to do so the very next day; but the next day he was still there, still in a rage and swearing.

By this time we began to be known in the streets through which we wandered from morning till night. Sometimes French people would turn round astonished at meeting their fellow-countrymen in the company of this girl with her striking costume, who looked singularly out of place, not to say compromising, beside us.

She used to walk along, leaning on my arm, without looking at anything. Why did she remain with me, with us, who seemed to do so little to amuse her? Who was she? Where did she come from? What was she doing? Had she any plan or idea? Where did she live? As an adventuress, or by chance meetings? I tried in vain to find out and to explain it. The better I knew her the more enigmatical she became. She seemed to be a girl of poor family who had been taken away, and then cast aside and lost. What did she think would become of her, or whom was she waiting for? She certainly did not appear to be trying to make a conquest of me, or to make any real profit out of me.

I tried to question her, to speak to her of her childhood and family; but she never gave me an answer. I stayed with her, my heart unfettered and my senses enchained, never wearied of holding her in my arms, that proud and quarrelsome woman, captivated by my senses, or rather carried away, overcome by a youthful, healthy, powerful charm, which emanated from her fragrant person and from the well-molded lines of her body.

Another week passed, and the term of my journey was drawing on, for I had to be back in Paris by the eleventh of July. By this time Paul had come to take his part in the adventure, though still grumbling at me, while I invented pleasures, distractions and excursions to amuse Francesca and my friend; and in order to do this I gave myself a great amount of trouble.

One day I proposed an excursion to Sta Margarita, that charming little town in the midst of gardens, hidden at the foot of a slope which stretches far into the sea up to the village of Portofino. We three walked along the excellent road which goes along the foot of the mountain. Suddenly Francesca said to me: “I shall not be able to go with you to-morrow; I must go and see some of my relatives.”

That was all; I did not ask her any questions, as I was quite sure she would not answer me.

The next morning she got up very early. When she spoke to me it was in a constrained and hesitating voice:

“If I do not come back again, shall you come and fetch me?”

“Most certainly I shall,” was my reply. “Where shall I go to find you?”

Then she explained: “You must go into the Street Victor-Emmanuel, down the Falcone road and the side street San-Rafael and into the furniture shop in the building at the right at the end of a court, and there you must ask for Madame Rondoli. That is the place.”

And so she went away, leaving me rather astonished.

When Paul saw that I was alone, he stammered out: “Where; is Francesca?” And when I told him what had happened, he exclaimed:

“My dear fellow, let us make use of our opportunity, and bolt; as it is, our time is up. Two days, more or less, make no difference. Let us go at once; go and pack up your things. Off we go!”

But I refused. I could not, as I told him, leave the girl in that manner after such companionship for nearly three weeks. At any rate, I ought to say good-by to her, and make her accept a present; I certainly had no intention of behaving badly to her.

But he would not listen; he pressed and worried me, but I would not give way.

I remained indoors for several hours, expecting Francesca’s return, but she did not come, and at last, at dinner, Paul said with a triumphant air:

“She has flown, my dear fellow; it is certainly very strange.”

I must acknowledge that I was surprised and rather vexed. He laughed in my face, and made fun of me.

“It is not exactly a bad way of getting rid of you, though rather primitive. ‘Just wait for me, I shall be back in a moment,’ they often say. How long are you going to wait? I should not wonder if you were foolish enough to go and look for her at the address she gave you. ‘Does Madame Rondoli live here, please?’ ‘No, monsieur.’ I’ll bet that you are longing to go there.”

“Not in the least,” I protested, “and I assure you that if she does not come back to-morrow morning I shall leave by the express at eight o’clock. I shall have waited twenty-four hours, and that is enough; my conscience will be quite clear.”

I spent an uneasy and unpleasant evening, for I really had at heart a very tender feeling for her. I went to bed at twelve o’clock, and hardly slept at all. I got up at six, called Paul, packed up my things, and two hours later we set out for France together.

III

The next year, at just about the same period, I was seized as one is with a periodical fever, with a new desire to go to Italy, and I immediately made up my mind to carry it into effect. There is no doubt that every really well-educated man ought to see Florence, Venice and Rome. This travel has, also, the additional advantage of providing many subjects of conversation in society, and of giving one an opportunity for bringing forward artistic generalities which appear profound.

This time I went alone, and I arrived at Genoa at the same time as the year before, but without any adventure on the road. I went to the same hotel, and actually happened to have the same room.

I was hardly in bed when the recollection of Francesca which, since the evening before, had been floating vaguely through my mind, haunted me with strange persistency. I thought of her nearly the whole night, and by degrees the wish to see her again seized me, a confused desire at first, which gradually grew stronger and more intense. At last I made up my mind to spend the next day in Genoa to try to find her, and if I should not succeed, to take the evening train.

Early in the morning I set out on my search. I remembered the directions she had given me when she left me, perfectly — Victor-Emmanuel Street, house of the furniture-dealer, at the bottom of the yard on the right.

I found it without the least difficulty, and I knocked at the door of a somewhat dilapidated-looking dwelling. It was opened by a stout woman, who must have been very handsome, but who actually was only very dirty. Although she had too much embonpoint, she still bore the lines of majestic beauty; her untidy hair fell over her forehead and shoulders, and one fancied one could see her floating about in an enormous dressing-gown covered with spots of dirt and grease. Round her neck she wore a great gilt necklace, and on her wrists were splendid bracelets of Genoa filigree work.

In rather a hostile manner she asked me what I wanted, and I replied by requesting her to tell me whether Francesca Rondoli lived there.

“What do you want with her?” she asked.

“I had the pleasure of meeting her last year, and I should like to see her again.”

The old woman looked at me suspiciously.

“Where did you meet her?” she asked.

“Why, here in Genoa itself.”

“What is your name?”

I hesitated a moment, and then I told her. I had hardly done so when the Italian put out her arms as if to embrace me. “Oh! you are the Frenchman how glad I am to see you! But what grief you caused the poor child! She waited for you a month; yes, a whole month. At first she thought you would come to fetch her. She wanted to see whether you loved her. If you only knew how she cried when she saw that you were not coming! She cried till she seemed to have no tears left. Then she went to the hotel, but you had gone. She thought that most likely you were travelling in Italy, and that you would return by Genoa to fetch her, as she would not go with you. And she waited more than a month, monsieur; and she was so unhappy; so unhappy. I am her mother."

I really felt a little disconcerted, but I regained my self-possession, and asked:

"Where is she now?"

"She has gone to Paris with a painter, a delightful man, who loves her very much, and who gives her everything that she wants. Just look at what she sent me; they are very pretty, are they not?"

And she showed me, with quite southern animation, her heavy bracelets and necklace. "I have also," she continued, "earrings with stones in them, a silk dress, and some rings; but I only wear them on grand occasions. Oh! she is very happy, monsieur, very happy. She will be so pleased when I tell her you have been here. But pray come in and sit down. You will take something or other, surely?"

But I refused, as I now wished to get away by the first train; but she took me by the arm and pulled me in, saying:

"Please, come in; I must tell her that you have been in here."

I found myself in a small, rather dark room, furnished with only a table and a few chairs.

She continued: "Oh, she is very happy now, very happy. When you met her in the train she was very miserable; she had had an unfortunate love affair in Marseilles, and she was coming home, poor child. But she liked you at once, though she was still rather sad, you understand. Now she has all she wants, and she writes and tells me everything that she does. His name is Bellemin, and they say he is a great painter in your country. He fell in love with her at first sight. But you will take a glass of sirup?-it is very good. Are you quite alone, this year?"

"Yes," I said, "quite alone."

I felt an increasing inclination to laugh, as my first disappointment was dispelled by what Mother Rondoli said. I was obliged; however, to drink a glass of her sirup.

"So you are quite alone?" she continued. "How sorry I am that Francesca is not here now; she would have been company for you all the time you stayed. It is not very amusing to go about all by oneself, and she will be very sorry also."

Then, as I was getting up to go, she exclaimed:

"But would you not like Carlotta to go with you? She knows all the walks very well. She is my second daughter, monsieur."

No doubt she took my look of surprise for consent, for she opened the inner door and called out up the dark stairs which I could not see:

"Carlotta! Carlotta! make haste down, my dear child."

I tried to protest, but she would not listen.

"No; she will be very glad to go with you; she is very nice, and much more cheerful than her sister, and she is a good girl, a very good girl, whom I love very much."

In a few moments a tall, slender, dark girl appeared, her hair hanging down, and her youthful figure showing unmistakably beneath an old dress of her mother's.

The latter at once told her how matters stood.

"This is Francesca's Frenchman, you know, the one whom she knew last year. He is quite alone, and has come to look for her, poor fellow; so I told him that you would go with him to keep him company."

The girl looked at me with her handsome dark eyes, and said, smiling:

"I have no objection, if he wishes it"

I could not possibly refuse, and merely said:

"Of course, I shall be very glad of your company."

Her mother pushed her out. "Go and get dressed directly; put on your blue dress and your hat with the flowers, and make haste."

As soon as she had left the room the old woman explained herself: "I have two others, but they are much younger. It costs a lot of money to bring up four children. Luckily the eldest is off my hands at present."

Then she told all about herself, about her husband, who had been an employee on the railway, but who was dead, and she expatiated on the good qualities of Carlotta, her second girl, who soon returned, dressed, as her sister had been, in a striking, peculiar manner.

Her mother examined her from head to foot, and, after finding everything right, she said:

"Now, my children, you can go." Then turning to the girl, she said: "Be sure you are back by ten o'clock to-night; you know the door is locked then." The answer was:

“All right, mamma; don’t alarm yourself.”

She took my arm and we went wandering about the streets, just as I had wandered the previous year with her sister.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, and then I took my new friend to Santa Margarita, just as I had taken her sister the year previously.

During the whole fortnight which I had at my disposal, I took Carlotta to all the places of interest in and about Genoa. She gave me no cause to regret her sister.

She cried when I left her, and the morning of my departure I gave her four bracelets for her mother, besides a substantial token of my affection for herself.

One of these days I intend to return to Italy, and I cannot help remembering with a certain amount of uneasiness, mingled with hope, that Madame Rondoli has two more daughters.

THE FALSE GEMS

Monsieur Lantin had met the young girl at a reception at the house of the second head of his department, and had fallen head over heels in love with her.

She was the daughter of a provincial tax collector, who had been dead several years. She and her mother came to live in Paris, where the latter, who made the acquaintance of some of the families in her neighborhood, hoped to find a husband for her daughter.

They had very moderate means, and were honorable, gentle, and quiet.

The young girl was a perfect type of the virtuous woman in whose hands every sensible young man dreams of one day intrusting his happiness. Her simple beauty had the charm of angelic modesty, and the imperceptible smile which constantly hovered about the lips seemed to be the reflection of a pure and lovely soul. Her praises resounded on every side. People never tired of repeating: “Happy the man who wins her love! He could not find a better wife.”

Monsieur Lantin, then chief clerk in the Department of the Interior, enjoyed a snug little salary of three thousand five hundred francs, and he proposed to this model young girl, and was accepted.

He was unspeakably happy with her. She governed his household with such clever economy that they seemed to live in luxury. She lavished the most delicate attentions on her husband, coaxed and fondled him; and so great was her charm that six years after their marriage, Monsieur Lantin discovered that he loved his wife even more than during the first days of their honeymoon.

He found fault with only two of her tastes: Her love for the theatre, and her taste for imitation jewelry. Her friends (the wives of some petty officials) frequently procured for her a box at the theatre, often for the first representations of the new plays; and her husband was obliged to accompany her, whether he wished it or not, to these entertainments which bored him excessively after his day's work at the office.

After a time, Monsieur Lantin begged his wife to request some lady of her acquaintance to accompany her, and to bring her home after the theatre. She opposed this arrangement, at first; but, after much persuasion, finally consented, to the infinite delight of her husband.

Now, with her love for the theatre, came also the desire for ornaments. Her costumes remained as before, simple, in good taste, and always modest; but she soon began to adorn her ears with huge rhinestones, which glittered and sparkled like real diamonds. Around her neck she wore strings of false pearls, on her arms bracelets of imitation gold, and combs set with glass jewels.

Her husband frequently remonstrated with her, saying:

"My dear, as you cannot afford to buy real jewelry, you ought to appear adorned with your beauty and modesty alone, which are the rarest ornaments of your sex."

But she would smile sweetly, and say:

"What can I do? I am so fond of jewelry. It is my only weakness. We cannot change our nature."

Then she would wind the pearl necklace round her fingers, make the facets of the crystal gems sparkle, and say:

"Look! are they not lovely? One would swear they were real."

Monsieur Lantin would then answer, smilingly:

"You have bohemian tastes, my dear."

Sometimes, of an evening, when they were enjoying a tete-a-tote by the fireside, she would place on the tea table the morocco leather box containing the "trash," as Monsieur Lantin called it. She would examine the false gems with a passionate attention, as though they imparted some deep and secret joy; and she often persisted in passing a necklace around her husband's neck, and, laughing heartily, would exclaim: "How droll you look!" Then she would throw herself into his arms, and kiss him affectionately.

One evening, in winter, she had been to the opera, and returned home chilled through and through. The next morning she coughed, and eight days later she died of inflammation of the lungs.

Monsieur Lantin's despair was so great that his hair became white in one month. He wept unceasingly; his heart was broken as he remembered her smile, her voice, every charm of his dead wife.

Time did not assuage his grief. Often, during office hours, while his colleagues were discussing the topics of the day, his eyes would suddenly fill with tears, and he would give vent to his grief in heartrending sobs. Everything in his wife's room remained as it was during her lifetime; all her furniture, even her clothing, being left as it was on the day of her death. Here he was wont to seclude himself daily and think of her who had been his treasure-the joy of his existence.

But life soon became a struggle. His income, which, in the hands of his wife, covered all household expenses, was now no longer sufficient for his own immediate wants; and he wondered how she could have managed to buy such excellent wine and the rare delicacies which he could no longer procure with his modest resources.

He incurred some debts, and was soon reduced to absolute poverty. One morning, finding himself without a cent in his pocket, he resolved to sell something, and immediately the thought occurred to him of disposing of his wife's paste jewels, for he cherished in his heart a sort of rancor against these "deceptions," which had always irritated him in the past. The very sight of them spoiled, somewhat, the memory of his lost darling.

To the last days of her life she had continued to make purchases, bringing home new gems almost every evening, and he turned them over some time before finally deciding to sell the heavy necklace, which she seemed to prefer, and which, he thought, ought to be worth about six or seven francs; for it was of very fine workmanship, though only imitation.

He put it in his pocket, and started out in search of what seemed a reliable jeweler's shop. At length he found one, and went in, feeling a little ashamed to expose his misery, and also to offer such a worthless article for sale.

"Sir," said he to the merchant, "I would like to know what this is worth."

The man took the necklace, examined it, called his clerk, and made some remarks in an undertone; he then put the ornament back on the counter, and looked at it from a distance to judge of the effect.

Monsieur Lantin, annoyed at all these ceremonies, was on the point of saying: "Oh! I know well 'enough it is not worth anything," when the jeweler said: "Sir, that necklace is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand francs; but I could not buy it, unless you can tell me exactly where it came from."

The widower opened his eyes wide and remained gaping, not comprehending the merchant’s meaning. Finally he stammered: “You say — are you sure?” The other replied, drily: “You can try elsewhere and see if any one will offer you more. I consider it worth fifteen thousand at the most. Come back; here, if you cannot do better.”

Monsieur Lantin, beside himself with astonishment, took up the necklace and left the store. He wished time for reflection.

Once outside, he felt inclined to laugh, and said to himself: “The fool! Oh, the fool! Had I only taken him at his word! That jeweler cannot distinguish real diamonds from the imitation article.”

A few minutes after, he entered another store, in the Rue de la Paix. As soon as the proprietor glanced at the necklace, he cried out:

“Ah, parbleu! I know it well; it was bought here.”

Monsieur Lantin, greatly disturbed, asked:

“How much is it worth?”

“Well, I sold it for twenty thousand francs. I am willing to take it back for eighteen thousand, when you inform me, according to our legal formality, how it came to be in your possession.”

This time, Monsieur Lantin was dumfounded. He replied:

“But — but — examine it well. Until this moment I was under the impression that it was imitation.”

The jeweler asked:

“What is your name, sir?”

“Lantin — I am in the employ of the Minister of the Interior. I live at number sixteen Rue des Martyrs.”

The merchant looked through his books, found the entry, and said: “That necklace was sent to Madame Lantin’s address, sixteen Rue des Martyrs, July 20, 1876.”

The two men looked into each other’s eyes — the widower speechless with astonishment; the jeweler scenting a thief. The latter broke the silence.

“Will you leave this necklace here for twenty-four hours?” said he; “I will give you a receipt.”

Monsieur Lantin answered hastily: “Yes, certainly.” Then, putting the ticket in his pocket, he left the store.

He wandered aimlessly through the streets, his mind in a state of dreadful confusion. He tried to reason, to understand. His wife could not afford to purchase such a costly ornament. Certainly not.

But, then, it must have been a present! — a present! — a present, from whom? Why was it given her?

He stopped, and remained standing in the middle of the street. A horrible doubt entered his mind — She? Then, all the other jewels must have been presents, too! The earth seemed to tremble beneath him — the tree before him to be falling; he threw up his arms, and fell to the ground, unconscious. He recovered his senses in a pharmacy, into which the passers-by had borne him. He asked to be taken home, and, when he reached the house, he shut himself up in his room, and wept until nightfall. Finally, overcome with fatigue, he went to bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

The sun awoke him next morning, and he began to dress slowly to go to the office. It was hard to work after such shocks. He sent a letter to his employer, requesting to be excused. Then he remembered that he had to return to the jeweler's. He did not like the idea; but he could not leave the necklace with that man. He dressed and went out.

It was a lovely day; a clear, blue sky smiled on the busy city below. Men of leisure were strolling about with their hands in their pockets.

Monsieur Lantin, observing them, said to himself: "The rich, indeed, are happy. With money it is possible to forget even the deepest sorrow. One can go where one pleases, and in travel find that distraction which is the surest cure for grief. Oh if I were only rich!"

He perceived that he was hungry, but his pocket was empty. He again remembered the necklace. Eighteen thousand francs! Eighteen thousand francs! What a sum!

He soon arrived in the Rue de la Paix, opposite the jeweler's. Eighteen thousand francs! Twenty times he resolved to go in, but shame kept him back. He was hungry, however — very hungry — and not a cent in his pocket. He decided quickly, ran across the street, in order not to have time for reflection, and rushed into the store.

The proprietor immediately came forward, and politely offered him a chair; the clerks glanced at him knowingly.

"I have made inquiries, Monsieur Lantin," said the jeweler, "and if you are still resolved to dispose of the gems, I am ready to pay you the price I offered."

"Certainly, sir," stammered Monsieur Lantin.

Whereupon the proprietor took from a drawer eighteen large bills, counted, and handed them to Monsieur Lantin, who signed a receipt; and, with trembling hand, put the money into his pocket.

As he was about to leave the store, he turned toward the merchant, who still wore the same knowing smile, and lowering his eyes, said:

“I have — I have other gems, which came from the same source. Will you buy them, also?”

The merchant bowed: “Certainly, sir.”

Monsieur Lantin said gravely: “I will bring them to you.” An hour later, he returned with the gems.

The large diamond earrings were worth twenty thousand francs; the bracelets, thirty-five thousand; the rings, sixteen thousand; a set of emeralds and sapphires, fourteen thousand; a gold chain with solitaire pendant, forty thousand — making the sum of one hundred and forty-three thousand francs.

The jeweler remarked, jokingly:

“There was a person who invested all her savings in precious stones.”

Monsieur Lantin replied, seriously:

“It is only another way of investing one’s money.”

That day he lunched at Voisin’s, and drank wine worth twenty francs a bottle. Then he hired a carriage and made a tour of the Bois. He gazed at the various turnouts with a kind of disdain, and could hardly refrain from crying out to the occupants:

“I, too, am rich! — I am worth two hundred thousand francs.”

Suddenly he thought of his employer. He drove up to the bureau, and entered gaily, saying:

“Sir, I have come to resign my position. I have just inherited three hundred thousand francs.”

He shook hands with his former colleagues, and confided to them some of his projects for the future; he then went off to dine at the Cafe Anglais.

He seated himself beside a gentleman of aristocratic bearing; and, during the meal, informed the latter confidentially that he had just inherited a fortune of four hundred thousand francs.

For the first time in his life, he was not bored at the theatre, and spent the remainder of the night in a gay frolic.

Six months afterward, he married again. His second wife was a very virtuous woman; but had a violent temper. She caused him much sorrow.

FASCINATION

I can tell you neither the name of the country, nor the name of the man. It was a long, long way from here on a fertile and burning shore. We had been walking since the morning along the coast, with the blue sea bathed in sunlight on one side of us, and the shore covered with crops on the other. Flowers were growing quite close to the waves, those light, gentle, lulling waves. It was very warm, a soft warmth permeated with the odor of the rich, damp, fertile soil. One fancied one was inhaling germs.

I had been told, that evening, that I should meet with hospitality at the house of a Frenchman who lived in an orange grove at the end of a promontory. Who was he? I did not know. He had come there one morning ten years before, and had bought land which he planted with vines and sowed with grain. He had worked, this man, with passionate energy, with fury. Then as he went on from month to month, year to year, enlarging his boundaries, cultivating incessantly the strong virgin soil, he accumulated a fortune by his indefatigable labor.

But he kept on working, they said. Rising at daybreak, he would remain in the fields till evening, superintending everything without ceasing, tormented by one fixed idea, the insatiable desire for money, which nothing can quiet, nothing satisfy. He now appeared to be very rich. The sun was setting as I reached his house. It was situated as described, at the end of a promontory in the midst of a grove of orange trees. It was a large square house, quite plain, and overlooked the sea. As I approached, a man wearing a long beard appeared in the doorway. Having greeted him, I asked if he would give me shelter for the night. He held out his hand and said, smiling:

“Come in, monsieur, consider yourself at home.”

He led me into a room, and put a man servant at my disposal with the perfect ease and familiar graciousness of a man-of-the-world. Then he left me saying:

“We will dine as soon as you are ready to come downstairs.”

We took dinner, sitting opposite each other, on a terrace facing the sea. I began to talk about this rich, distant, unknown land. He smiled, as he replied carelessly:

"Yes, this country is beautiful. But no country satisfies one when they are far from the one they love."

"You regret France?"

"I regret Paris."

"Why do you not go back?"

"Oh, I will return there."

And gradually we began to talk of French society, of the boulevards, and things Parisian. He asked me questions that showed he knew all about these things, mentioned names, all the familiar names in vaudeville known on the sidewalks.

"Whom does one see at Tortoni's now?

"Always the same crowd, except those who died." I looked at him attentively, haunted by a vague recollection. I certainly had seen that head somewhere. But where? And when? He seemed tired, although he was vigorous; and sad, although he was determined. His long, fair beard fell on his chest. He was somewhat bald and had heavy eyebrows and a thick mustache.

The sun was sinking into the sea, turning the vapor from the earth into a fiery mist. The orange blossoms exhaled their powerful, delicious fragrance. He seemed to see nothing besides me, and gazing steadfastly he appeared to discover in the depths of my mind the far-away, beloved and well-known image of the wide, shady pavement leading from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot.

"Do you know Boutrelle?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Has he changed much?"

"Yes, his hair is quite white."

"And La Ridamie?"

"The same as ever."

"And the women? Tell me about the women. Let's see. Do you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes, very much. But that is over."

"Ah! And Sophie Astier?"

"Dead."

“Poor girl. Did you — did you know— “

But he ceased abruptly: And then, in a changed voice, his face suddenly turning pale, he continued:

“No, it is best that I should not speak of that any more, it breaks my heart.”

Then, as if to change the current of his thoughts he rose.

“Would you like to go in?” he said.

“Yes, I think so.”

And he preceded me into the house. The downstairs rooms were enormous, bare and mournful, and had a deserted look. Plates and glasses were scattered on the tables, left there by the dark-skinned servants who wandered incessantly about this spacious dwelling.

Two rifles were banging from two nails, on the wall; and in the corners of the rooms were spades, fishing poles, dried palm leaves, every imaginable thing set down at random when people came home in the evening and ready to hand when they went out at any time, or went to work.

My host smiled as he said:

“This is the dwelling, or rather the kennel, of an exile, but my own room is cleaner. Let us go there.”

As I entered I thought I was in a second-hand store, it was so full of things of all descriptions, strange things of various kinds that one felt must be souvenirs. On the walls were two pretty paintings by well-known artists, draperies, weapons, swords and pistols, and exactly in the middle, on the principal panel, a square of white satin in a gold frame.

Somewhat surprised, I approached to look at it, and perceived a hairpin fastened in the centre of the glossy satin. My host placed his hand on my shoulder.

“That,” said he, “is the only thing that I look at here, and the only thing that I have seen for ten years. M. Prudhomme said: ‘This sword is the most memorable day of my life.’ I can say: ‘This hairpin is all my life.’”

I sought for some commonplace remark, and ended by saying:

“You have suffered on account of some woman?”

He replied abruptly:

“Say, rather, that I am suffering like a wretch.”

“But come out on my balcony. A name rose to my lips just now which I dared not utter; for if you had said ‘Dead’ as you did of Sophie Astier, I should have fired a bullet into my brain, this very day.”

We had gone out on the wide balcony from whence we could see two gulfs, one to the right and the other to the left, enclosed by high gray mountains. It was just twilight and the reflection of the sunset still lingered in the sky.

He continued:

"Is Jeanne de Limours still alive?"

His eyes were fastened on mine and were full of a trembling anxiety. I smiled.

"Parbleu — she is prettier than ever."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated and then said:

"Very well?"

"No."

He took my hand.

"Tell me about her," he said.

"Why, I have nothing to tell. She is one of the most charming women, or, rather, girls, and the most admired in Paris. She leads a delightful existence and lives like a princess, that is all."

"I love her," he murmured in a tone in which he might have said "I am going to die." Then suddenly he continued:

"Ah! For three years we lived in a state of terror and delight. I almost killed her five or six times. She tried to pierce my eyes with that hairpin that you saw just now. Look, do you see that little white spot beneath my left eye? We loved each other. How can I explain that infatuation? You would not understand it."

"There must be a simple form of love, the result of the mutual impulse of two hearts and two souls. But there is also assuredly an atrocious form, that tortures one cruelly, the result of the occult blending of two unlike personalities who detest each other at the same time that they adore one another."

"In three years this woman had ruined me. I had four million francs which she squandered in her calm manner, quietly, eat them up with a gentle smile that seemed to fall from her eyes on to her lips."

"You know her? There is something irresistible about her. What is it? I do not know. Is it those gray eyes whose glance penetrates you like a gimlet and remains there like the point of an arrow? It is more likely the gentle, indifferent and fascinating smile that she wears like a mask. Her slow grace pervades you little by little; exhales from her like a perfume, from her slim figure that scarcely sways as she passes you, for she seems to glide rather than walk; from her pretty voice with its slight drawl that would seem to be the music of her smile; from her gestures, also, which are never exaggerated, but always appropriate, and intoxicate your vision with their harmony. For three years she was the only being that existed for me on the earth! How I suffered; for she deceived me as she deceived everyone! Why? For no reason; just for the pleasure of deceiving. And when I found it out, when I treated her as a common girl and a beggar, she said quietly: ‘Are we married?’

“Since I have been here I have thought so much about her that at last I understand her. She is Manon Lescaut come back to life. It is Manon, who could not love without deceiving; Marion for whom love, amusement, money, are all one.”

He was silent. After a few minutes he resumed:

“When I had spent my last sou on her she said simply:

“‘You understand, my dear boy, that I cannot live on air and weather. I love you very much, better than anyone, but I must live. Poverty and I could not keep house together.”

“And if I should tell you what a horrible life I led with her! When I looked at her I would just as soon have killed her as kissed her. When I looked at her . . . I felt a furious desire to open my arms to embrace and strangle her. She had, back of her eyes, something false and intangible that made me execrate her; and that was, perhaps, the reason I loved her so well. The eternal feminine, the odious and seductive feminine, was stronger in her than in any other woman. She was full of it, overcharged, as with a venomous and intoxicating fluid. She was a woman to a greater extent than any one has ever been.”

“And when I went out with her she would look at all men in such a manner that she seemed to offer herself to each in a single glance. This exasperated me, and still it attached me to her all the more. This creature in just walking along the street belonged to everyone, in spite of me, in spite of herself, by the very fact of her nature, although she had a modest, gentle carriage. Do you understand?

“And what torture! At the theatre, at the restaurant she seemed to belong to others under my very eyes. And as soon as I left her she did belong to others.

“It is now ten years since I saw her and I love her better than ever.”

Night spread over the earth. A strong perfume of orange blossoms pervaded the air. I said:

“Will you see her again?”

“Parbleu! I now have here, in land and money, seven to eight thousand francs. When I reach a million I shall sell out and go away. I shall have enough to live on with her for a year — one whole year. And then, good-bye, my life will be finished.”

“But after that?” I asked.

“After that, I do not know. That will be all, I may possibly ask her to take me as a valet de chambre.”

YVETTE SAMORIS

"The Comtesse Samoris."

"That lady in black over there?"

"The very one. She's wearing mourning for her daughter, whom she killed."

"You don't mean that seriously? How did she die?"

"Oh! it is a very simple story, without any crime in it, any violence."

"Then what really happened?"

"Almost nothing. Many courtesans are born to be virtuous women, they say; and many women called virtuous are born to be courtesans — is that not so? Now, Madame Samoris, who was born a courtesan, had a daughter born a virtuous woman, that's all."

"I don't quite understand you."

"I'll — explain what I mean. The comtesse is nothing but a common, ordinary parvenue originating no one knows where. A Hungarian or Wallachian countess or I know not what. She appeared one winter in apartments she had taken in the Champs Elysees, that quarter for adventurers and adventuresses, and opened her drawing-room to the first comer or to any one that turned up.

"I went there. Why? you will say. I really can't tell you. I went there, as every one goes to such places because the women are facile and the men are dishonest. You know that set composed of filibusters with varied decorations, all noble, all titled, all unknown at the embassies, with the exception of those who are spies. All talk of their honor without the slightest occasion for doing so, boast of their ancestors, tell you about their lives, braggarts, liars, sharpers, as dangerous as the false cards they have up their sleeves, as delusive as their names — in short, the aristocracy of the bagnio.

"I adore these people. They are interesting to study, interesting to know, amusing to understand, often clever, never commonplace like public functionaries. Their wives are always pretty, with a slight flavor of foreign roguery, with the mystery of their existence, half of it perhaps spent in a house of correction. They have, as a rule, magnificent eyes and incredible hair. I adore them also.

"Madame Samoris is the type of these adventuresses, elegant, mature and still beautiful. Charming feline creatures, you feel that they are vicious to the marrow of their bones. You find them very amusing when you visit them; they give card parties; they have dances and suppers; in short, they offer you all the pleasures of social life.

"And she had a daughter — a tall, fine-looking girl, always ready for amusement, always full of laughter and reckless gaiety — a true adventuress' daughter — but, at the same time, an innocent, unsophisticated, artless girl, who saw nothing, knew nothing, understood nothing of all the things that happened in her father's house.

"The girl was simply a puzzle to me. She was a mystery. She lived amid those infamous surroundings with a quiet, tranquil ease that was either terribly criminal or else the result of innocence. She sprang from the filth of that class like a beautiful flower fed on corruption."

"How do you know about them?"

"How do I know? That's the funniest part of the business! One morning there was a ring at my door, and my valet came up to tell me that M. Joseph Bonenthal wanted to speak to me. I said directly:

"'And who is this gentleman?' My valet replied: 'I don't know, monsieur; perhaps 'tis some one that wants employment.' And so it was. The man wanted me to take him as a servant. I asked him where he had been last. He answered: 'With the Comtesse Samoris.' 'Ah!' said I, 'but my house is not a bit like hers.' 'I know that well, monsieur,' he said, 'and that's the very reason I want to take service with monsieur. I've had enough of these people: a man may stay a little while with them, but he won't remain long with them.' I required an additional man servant at the time and so I took him.

"A month later Mademoiselle Yvette Samoris died mysteriously, and here are all the details of her death I could gather from Joseph, who got them from his sweetheart, the comtesse's chambermaid.

"It was a ball night, and two newly arrived guests were chatting behind a door. Mademoiselle Yvette, who had just been dancing, leaned against this door to get a little air.

“They did not see her approaching, but she heard what they were saying. And this was what they said:

“‘But who is the father of the girl?’

“‘A Russian, it appears; Count Rouvaloff. He never comes near the mother now.’

“‘And who is the reigning prince to-day?’

“‘That English prince standing near the window; Madame Samoris adores him. But her adoration of any one never lasts longer than a month or six weeks. Nevertheless, as you see, she has a large circle of admirers. All are called — and nearly all are chosen. That kind of thing costs a good deal, but — hang it, what can you expect?’

“‘And where did she get this name of Samoris?’

“‘From the only man perhaps that she ever loved — a Jewish banker from Berlin who goes by the name of Samuel Morris.’

“‘Good. Thanks. Now that I know what kind of woman she is and have seen her, I’m off!’

“What a shock this was to the mind of a young girl endowed with all the instincts of a virtuous woman! What despair overwhelmed that simple soul! What mental tortures quenched her unbounded gaiety, her delightful laughter, her exultant satisfaction with life! What a conflict took place in that youthful heart up to the moment when the last guest had left! Those were things that Joseph could not tell me. But, the same night, Yvette abruptly entered her mother’s room just as the comtesse was getting into bed, sent out the lady’s maid, who was close to the door, and, standing erect and pale and with great staring eyes, she said:

“‘Mamma, listen to what I heard a little while ago during the ball.’

“And she repeated word for word the conversation just as I told it to you.

“The comtesse was so stunned that she did not know what to say in reply at first. When she recovered her self-possession she denied everything and called God to witness that there was no truth in the story.

“The young girl went away, distracted but not convinced. And she began to watch her mother.

“I remember distinctly the strange alteration that then took place in her. She became grave and melancholy. She would fix on us her great earnest eyes as if she wanted to read what was at the bottom of our hearts. We did not know what to think of her and used to imagine that she was looking out for a husband.

“One evening she overheard her mother talking to her admirer and later saw them together, and her doubts were confirmed. She was heartbroken, and after telling her mother what she had seen, she said coldly, like a man of business laying down the terms of an agreement:

“‘Here is what I have determined to do, mamma: We will both go away to some little town, or rather into the country. We will live there quietly as well as we can. Your jewelry alone may be called a fortune. If you wish to marry some honest man, so much the better; still better will it be if I can find one. If you don’t consent to do this, I will kill myself.’

“This time the comtesse ordered her daughter to go to bed and never to speak again in this manner, so unbecoming in the mouth of a child toward her mother.

“Yvette’s answer to this was: ‘I give you a month to reflect. If, at the end of that month, we have not changed our way of living, I will kill myself, since there is no other honorable issue left to my life.’

“And she left the room.

“At the end of a month the Comtesse Samoris had resumed her usual entertainments, as though nothing had occurred. One day, under the pretext that she had a bad toothache, Yvette purchased a few drops of chloroform from a neighboring chemist. The next day she purchased more, and every time she went out she managed to procure small doses of the narcotic. She filled a bottle with it.

“One morning she was found in bed, lifeless and already quite cold, with a cotton mask soaked in chloroform over her face.

“Her coffin was covered with flowers, the church was hung in white. There was a large crowd at the funeral ceremony.

“Ah! well, if I had known — but you never can know — I would have married that girl, for she was infernally pretty.”

“And what became of the mother?”

“Oh! she shed a lot of tears over it. She has only begun to receive visits again for the past week.”

“And what explanation is given of the girl’s death?”

“Oh! they pretended that it was an accident caused by a new stove, the mechanism of which got out of order. As a good many such accidents have occurred, the thing seemed probable enough.”

A VENDETTA

The widow of Paolo Saverini lived alone with her son in a poor little house on the outskirts of Bonifacio. The town, built on an outjutting part of the mountain, in places even overhanging the sea, looks across the straits, full of sandbanks, towards the southernmost coast of Sardinia. Beneath it, on the other side and almost surrounding it, is a cleft in the cliff like an immense corridor which serves as a harbor, and along it the little Italian and Sardinian fishing boats come by a circuitous route between precipitous cliffs as far as the first houses, and every two weeks the old, wheezy steamer which makes the trip to Ajaccio.

On the white mountain the houses, massed together, makes an even whiter spot. They look like the nests of wild birds, clinging to this peak, overlooking this terrible passage, where vessels rarely venture. The wind, which blows uninterruptedly, has swept bare the forbidding coast; it drives through the narrow straits and lays waste both sides. The pale streaks of foam, clinging to the black rocks, whose countless peaks rise up out of the water, look like bits of rag floating and drifting on the surface of the sea.

The house of widow Saverini, clinging to the very edge of the precipice, looks out, through its three windows, over this wild and desolate picture.

She lived there alone, with her son Antonia and their dog “Semillante,” a big, thin beast, with a long rough coat, of the sheep-dog breed. The young man took her with him when out hunting.

One night, after some kind of a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously stabbed by Nicolas Ravolati, who escaped the same evening to Sardinia.

When the old mother received the body of her child, which the neighbors had brought back to her, she did not cry, but she stayed there for a long time motionless, watching him. Then, stretching her wrinkled hand over the body, she promised him a vendetta. She did not wish anybody near her, and she shut herself up beside the body with the dog, which howled continuously, standing at the foot of the bed, her head stretched towards her master and her tail between her legs. She did not move any more than did the mother, who, now leaning over the body with a blank stare, was weeping silently and watching it.

The young man, lying on his back, dressed in his jacket of coarse cloth, torn at the chest, seemed to be asleep. But he had blood all over him; on his shirt, which had been torn off in order to administer the first aid; on his vest, on his trousers, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had hardened in his beard and in his hair.

His old mother began to talk to him. At the sound of this voice the dog quieted down.

"Never fear, my boy, my little baby, you shall be avenged. Sleep, sleep; you shall be avenged. Do you hear? It's your mother's promise! And she always keeps her word, your mother does, you know she does."

Slowly she leaned over him, pressing her cold lips to his dead ones.

Then Semillante began to howl again with a long, monotonous, penetrating, horrible howl.

The two of them, the woman and the dog, remained there until morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried the next day and soon his name ceased to be mentioned in Bonifacio.

He had neither brothers nor cousins. No man was there to carry on the vendetta. His mother, the old woman, alone pondered over it.

On the other side of the straits she saw, from morning until night, a little white speck on the coast. It was the little Sardinian village Longosardo, where Corsican criminals take refuge when they are too closely pursued. They compose almost the entire population of this hamlet, opposite their native island, awaiting the time to return, to go back to the "maquis." She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had sought refuge in this village.

All alone, all day long, seated at her window, she was looking over there and thinking of revenge. How could she do anything without help — she, an invalid and so near death? But she had promised, she had sworn on the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What could she do? She no longer slept at night; she had neither rest nor peace of mind; she thought persistently. The dog, dozing at her feet, would sometimes lift her head and howl. Since her master's death she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her beast's soul, inconsolable too, had also retained a recollection that nothing could wipe out.

One night, as Semillante began to howl, the mother suddenly got hold of an idea, a savage, vindictive, fierce idea. She thought it over until morning. Then, having arisen at daybreak she went to church. She prayed, prostrate on the floor, begging the Lord to help her, to support her, to give to her poor, broken-down body the strength which she needed in order to avenge her son.

She returned home. In her yard she had an old barrel, which acted as a cistern. She turned it over, emptied it, made it fast to the ground with sticks and stones. Then she chained Semillante to this improvised kennel and went into the house.

She walked ceaselessly now, her eyes always fixed on the distant coast of Sardinia. He was over there, the murderer.

All day and all night the dog howled. In the morning the old woman brought her some water in a bowl, but nothing more; no soup, no bread.

Another day went by. Semillante, exhausted, was sleeping. The following day her eyes were shining, her hair on end and she was pulling wildly at her chain.

All this day the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The beast, furious, was barking hoarsely. Another night went by.

Then, at daybreak, Mother Saverini asked a neighbor for some straw. She took the old rags which had formerly been worn by her husband and stuffed them so as to make them look like a human body.

Having planted a stick in the ground, in front of Semillante's kennel, she tied to it this dummy, which seemed to be standing up. Then she made a head out of some old rags.

The dog, surprised, was watching this straw man, and was quiet, although famished. Then the old woman went to the store and bought a piece of black sausage. When she got home she started a fire in the yard, near the kennel, and cooked the sausage. Semillante, frantic, was jumping about, frothing at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the odor of which went right to her stomach.

Then the mother made of the smoking sausage a necktie for the dummy. She tied it very tight around the neck with string, and when she had finished she untied the dog.

With one leap the beast jumped at the dummy's throat, and with her paws on its shoulders she began to tear at it. She would fall back with a piece of food in her mouth, then would jump again, sinking her fangs into the string, and snatching few pieces of meat she would fall back again and once more spring forward. She was tearing up the face with her teeth and the whole neck was in tatters.

The old woman, motionless and silent, was watching eagerly. Then she chained the beast up again, made her fast for two more days and began this strange performance again.

For three months she accustomed her to this battle, to this meal conquered by a fight. She no longer chained her up, but just pointed to the dummy.

She had taught her to tear him up and to devour him without even leaving any traces in her throat.

Then, as a reward, she would give her a piece of sausage.

As soon as she saw the man, Semillante would begin to tremble. Then she would look up to her mistress, who, lifting her finger, would cry, “Go!” in a shrill tone.

When she thought that the proper time had come, the widow went to confession and, one Sunday morning she partook of communion with an ecstatic fervor. Then, putting on men’s clothes and looking like an old tramp, she struck a bargain with a Sardinian fisherman who carried her and her dog to the other side of the straits.

In a bag she had a large piece of sausage. Semillante had had nothing to eat for two days. The old woman kept letting her smell the food and whetting her appetite.

They got to Longosardo. The Corsican woman walked with a limp. She went to a baker’s shop and asked for Nicolas Ravolati. He had taken up his old trade, that of carpenter. He was working alone at the back of his store.

The old woman opened the door and called:

“Hallo, Nicolas!”

He turned around. Then releasing her dog, she cried:

“Go, go! Eat him up! eat him up!”

The maddened animal sprang for his throat. The man stretched out his arms, clasped the dog and rolled to the ground. For a few seconds he squirmed, beating the ground with his feet. Then he stopped moving, while Semillante dug her fangs into his throat and tore it to ribbons. Two neighbors, seated before their door, remembered perfectly having seen an old beggar come out with a thin, black dog which was eating something that its master was giving him.

At nightfall the old woman was at home again. She slept well that night.

MY TWENTY-FIVE DAYS

I had just taken possession of my room in the hotel, a narrow den between two papered partitions, through which I could hear every sound made by my neighbors; and I was beginning to arrange my clothes and linen in the wardrobe with a long mirror, when I opened the drawer which is in this piece of furniture. I immediately noticed a roll of paper. Having opened it, I spread it out before me, and read this title:

My Twenty-five Days.

It was the diary of a guest at the watering place, of the last occupant of my room, and had been forgotten at the moment of departure.

These notes may be of some interest to sensible and healthy persons who never leave their own homes. It is for their benefit that I transcribe them without altering a letter.

“CHATEL-GUYON, July 15th.

“At the first glance it is not lively, this country. However, I am going to spend twenty-five days here, to have my liver and stomach treated, and to get thin. The twenty-five days of any one taking the baths are very like the twenty-eight days of the reserves; they are all devoted to fatigue duty, severe fatigue duty. To-day I have done nothing as yet; I have been getting settled. I have made the acquaintance of the locality and of the doctor. Chatel-Guyon consists of a stream in which flows yellow water, in the midst of several hillocks on which are a casino, some houses, and some stone crosses. On the bank of the stream, at the end of the valley, may be seen a square building surrounded by a little garden; this is the bathing establishment. Sad people wander around this building — the invalids. A great silence reigns in the walks shaded by trees, for this is not a pleasure resort, but a true health resort; one takes care of one’s health as a business, and one gets well, so it seems.

“Those who know affirm, even, that the mineral springs perform true miracles here. However, no votive offering is hung around the cashier’s office.

"From time to time a gentleman or a lady comes over to a kiosk with a slate roof, which shelters a woman of smiling and gentle aspect, and a spring boiling in a basin of cement: Not a word is exchanged between the invalid and the female custodian of the healing water. She hands the newcomer a little glass in which air bubbles sparkle in the transparent liquid. The guest drinks and goes off with a grave step to resume his interrupted walk beneath the trees.

"No noise in the little park, no breath of air in the leaves; no voice passes through this silence. One ought to write at the entrance to this district: 'No one laughs here; they take care of their health.'

"The people who chat resemble mutes who merely open their mouths to simulate sounds, so afraid are they that their voices might escape.

"In the hotel, the same silence. It is a big hotel, where you dine solemnly with people of good position, who have nothing to say to each other. Their manners bespeak good breeding, and their faces reflect the conviction of a superiority of which it might be difficult for some to give actual proofs.

"At two o'clock I made my way up to the Casino, a little wooden but perched on a hillock, which one reaches by a goat path. But the view from that height is admirable. Chatel-Guyon is situated in a very narrow valley, exactly between the, plain and the mountain. I perceive, at the left, the first great billows of the mountains of Auvergne, covered with woods, and here and there big gray patches, hard masses of lava, for we are at the foot of the extinct volcanoes. At the right, through the narrow cut of the valley, I discover a plain, infinite as the sea, steeped in a bluish fog which lets one only dimly discern the villages, the towns, the yellow fields of ripe grain, and the green squares of meadowland shaded with apple trees. It is the Limagne, an immense level, always enveloped in a light veil of vapor.

"The night has come. And now, after having dined alone, I write these lines beside my open window. I hear, over there, in front of me, the little orchestra of the Casino, which plays airs just as a foolish bird might sing all alone in the desert.

"A dog barks at intervals. This great calm does one good. Goodnight.

"July 16th. — Nothing new. I have taken a bath and then a shower bath. I have swallowed three glasses of water, and I have walked along the paths in the park, a quarter of an hour between each glass, then half an hour after the last. I have begun my twenty-five days.

“July 17th. — Remarked two mysterious, pretty women who are taking their baths and their meals after every one else has finished.

“July 18th. — Nothing new.

“July 19th. — Saw the two pretty women again. They have style and a little indescribable air which I like very much.

“July 20th. — Long walk in a charming wooded valley, as far as the Hermitage of Sans-Souci. This country is delightful, although sad; but so calm; so sweet, so green. One meets along the mountain roads long wagons loaded with hay, drawn by two cows at a slow pace or held back by them in going down the slopes with a great effort of their heads, which are yoked together. A man with a big black hat on his head is driving them with a slender stick, tipping them on the side or on the forehead; and often with a simple gesture, an energetic and serious gesture, he suddenly halts them when the excessive load precipitates their journey down the too rugged descents.

“The air is good to inhale in these valleys. And, if it is very warm, the dust bears with it a light odor of vanilla and of the stable, for so many cows pass over these routes that they leave reminders everywhere. And this odor is a perfume, when it would be a stench if it came from other animals.

“July 21st. — Excursion to the valley of the Enval. It is a narrow gorge inclosed by superb rocks at the very foot of the mountain. A stream flows amid the heaped-up boulders.

“As I reached the bottom of this ravine I heard women’s voices, and I soon perceived the two mysterious ladies of my hotel, who were chatting, seated on a stone.

“The occasion appeared to me a good one, and I introduced myself without hesitation. My overtures were received without embarrassment. We walked back together to the hotel. And we talked about Paris. They knew, it seemed, many people whom I knew, too. Who can they be?

“I shall see them to-morrow. There is nothing more amusing than such meetings as this.

“July 22d. — Day passed almost entirely with the two unknown ladies. They are very pretty, by Jove! — one a brunette and the other a blonde. They say they are widows. H’m?

“I offered to accompany them to Royat tomorrow, and they accepted my offer.

“Chatel-Guyon is less sad than I thought on my arrival.

“July 23d. — Day spent at Royat. Royat is a little patch of hotels at the bottom of a valley, at the gate of Clermont-Ferrand. A great many people there. A large park full of life. Superb view of the Puyde-Dome, seen at the end of a perspective of valleys.

“My fair companions are very popular, which is flattering to me. The man who escorts a pretty woman always believes himself crowned with an aureole; with much more reason, the man who is accompanied by one on each side of him. Nothing is so pleasant as to dine in a fashionable restaurant with a female companion at whom everybody stares, and there is nothing better calculated to exalt a man in the estimation of his neighbors.

“To go to the Bois, in a trap drawn by a sorry nag, or to go out into the boulevard escorted by a plain woman, are the two most humiliating things that could happen to a sensitive heart that values the opinion of others. Of all luxuries, woman is the rarest and the most distinguished; she is the one that costs most and which we desire most; she is, therefore the one that we should seek by preference to exhibit to the jealous eyes of the world.

“To exhibit to the world a pretty woman leaning on your arm is to excite, all at once, every kind of jealousy. It is as much as to say: ‘Look here! I am rich, since I possess this rare and costly object; I have taste, since I have known how to discover this pearl; perhaps, even, I am loved by her, unless I am deceived by her, which would still prove that others also consider her charming.

“But, what a disgrace it is to walk about town with an ugly woman!

“And how many humiliating things this gives people to understand!

“In the first place, they assume she must be your wife, for how could it be supposed that you would have an unattractive sweetheart? A true woman may be ungraceful; but then, her ugliness implies a thousand disagreeable things for you. One supposes you must be a notary or a magistrate, as these two professions have a monopoly of grotesque and well-dowered spouses. Now, is this not distressing to a man? And then, it seems to proclaim to the public that you have the odious courage, and are even under a legal obligation, to caress that ridiculous face and that ill-shaped body, and that you will, without doubt, be shameless enough to make a mother of this by no means desirable being — which is the very height of the ridiculous.

“July 24th. — I never leave the side of the two unknown widows, whom I am beginning to know quite well. This country is delightful and our hotel is excellent. Good season. The treatment is doing me an immense amount of good.

"July 25th. — Drive in a landau to the lake of Tazenat. An exquisite and unexpected jaunt decided on at luncheon. We started immediately on rising from table. After a long journey through the mountains we suddenly perceived an admirable little lake, quite round, very blue, clear as glass, and situated at the bottom of an extinct crater. One side of this immense basin is barren, the other is wooded. In the midst of the trees is a small house where sleeps a good-natured, intellectual man, a sage who passes his days in this Virgilian region. He opens his dwelling for us. An idea comes into my head. I exclaim:

"'Supposing we bathe?'

"'Yes,' they said, 'but costumes.'

"'Bah! we are in the wilderness.'

"And we did bathe!

"If I were a poet, how I would describe this unforgettable vision of those lissome young forms in the transparency of the water! The high, sloping sides shut in the lake, motionless, gleaming and round, as a silver coin; the sun pours into it a flood of warm light; and along the rocks the fair forms move in the almost invisible water in which the swimmers seemed suspended. On the sand at the bottom of the lake one could see their shadows as they moved along.

"July 26th. — Some persons seem to look with shocked and disapproving eyes at my rapid intimacy with the two fair widows. There are some people, then, who imagine that life consists in being bored. Everything that appears to be amusing becomes immediately a breach of good breeding or morality. For them duty has inflexible and mortally tedious rules.

"I would draw their attention, with all respect, to the fact that duty is not the same for Mormons, Arabs Zulus, Turks, Englishmen, and Frenchmen, and that there are very virtuous people among all these nations.

"I will cite a single example. As regards women, duty begins in England at nine years of age; in France at fifteen. As for me, I take a little of each people's notion of duty, and of the whole I make a result comparable to the morality of good King Solomon.

"July 27th. — Good news. I have lost 620 grams in weight. Excellent, this water of Chatel-Guyon! I am taking the widows to dine at Riom. A sad town whose anagram constitutes it an objectionable neighbor to healing springs: Riom, Mori.

"July 28th. — Hello, how's this! My two widows have been visited by two gentlemen who came to look for them. Two widowers, without doubt. They are leaving this evening. They have written to me on fancy notepaper.

"July 29th. — Alone! Long excursion on foot to the extinct crater of Nachere. Splendid view.

"July 30th. — Nothing. I am taking the treatment.

"July 31st. — Ditto. Ditto. This pretty country is full of polluted streams. I am drawing the notice of the municipality to the abominable sewer which poisons the road in front of the hotel. All the kitchen refuse of the establishment is thrown into it. This is a good way to breed cholera.

"August 1st. — Nothing. The treatment.

"August 2d. — Admirable walk to Chateauneuf, a place of sojourn for rheumatic patients, where everybody is lame. Nothing can be queerer than this population of cripples!

"August 3d. — Nothing. The treatment.

"August 4th. — Ditto. Ditto.

"August 5th. — Ditto. Ditto.

"August 6th. — Despair! I have just weighed myself. I have gained 310 grams. But then?

"August 7th. — Drove sixty-six kilometres in a carriage on the mountain. I will not mention the name of the country through respect for its women.

"This excursion had been pointed out to me as a beautiful one, and one that was rarely made. After four hours on the road, I arrived at a rather pretty village on the banks of a river in the midst of an admirable wood of walnut trees. I had not yet seen a forest of walnut trees of such dimensions in Auvergne. It constitutes, moreover, all the wealth of the district, for it is planted on the village common. This common was formerly only a hillside covered with brushwood. The authorities had tried in vain to get it cultivated. There was scarcely enough pasture on it to feed a few sheep.

"To-day it is a superb wood, thanks to the women, and it has a curious name: it is called the Sins of the Cure.

"Now I must say that the women of the mountain districts have the reputation of being light, lighter than in the plain. A bachelor who meets them owes them at least a kiss; and if he does not take more he is only a blockhead. If we consider this fairly, this way of looking at the matter is the only one that is logical and reasonable. As woman, whether she be of the town or the country, has her natural mission to please man, man should always show her that she pleases him. If he abstains from every sort of demonstration, this means that he considers her ugly; it is almost an insult to her. If I were a woman, I would not receive, a second time, a man who failed to show me respect at our first meeting, for I would consider that he had failed in appreciation of my beauty, my charm, and my feminine qualities.

“So the bachelors of the village X often proved to the women of the district that they found them to their taste, and, as the cure was unable to prevent these demonstrations, as gallant as they were natural, he resolved to utilize them for the benefit of the general prosperity. So he imposed as a penance on every woman who had gone wrong that she should plant a walnut tree on the common. And every night lanterns were seen moving about like will-o’-the-wisps on the hillock, for the erring ones scarcely like to perform their penance in broad daylight.

“In two years there was no longer any room on the lands belonging to the village, and to-day they calculate that there are more than three thousand trees around the belfry which rings out the services amid their foliage. These are the Sins of the Cure.

“Since we have been seeking for so many ways of rewooding France, the Administration of Forests might surely enter into some arrangement with the clergy to employ a method so simple as that employed by this humble cure.

“August 7th. — Treatment.

“August 8th. — I am packing up my trunks and saying good-by to the charming little district so calm and silent, to the green mountain, to the quiet valleys, to the deserted Casino, from which you can see, almost veiled by its light, bluish mist, the immense plain of the Limagne.

“I shall leave to-morrow.”

Here the manuscript stopped. I will add nothing to it, my impressions of the country not having been exactly the same as those of my predecessor. For I did not find the two widows!

THE TERROR

You say you cannot possibly understand it, and I believe you. You think I am losing my mind? Perhaps I am, but for other reasons than those you imagine, my dear friend.

Yes, I am going to be married, and will tell you what has led me to take that step.

I may add that I know very little of the girl who is going to become my wife to-morrow; I have only seen her four or five times. I know that there is nothing unpleasing about her, and that is enough for my purpose. She is small, fair, and stout; so, of course, the day after to-morrow I shall ardently wish for a tall, dark, thin woman.

She is not rich, and belongs to the middle classes. She is a girl such as you may find by the gross, well adapted for matrimony, without any apparent faults, and with no particularly striking qualities. People say of her:

"Mlle. Lajolle is a very nice girl," and tomorrow they will say: "What a very nice woman Madame Raymon is." She belongs, in a word, to that immense number of girls whom one is glad to have for one's wife, till the moment comes when one discovers that one happens to prefer all other women to that particular woman whom one has married.

"Well," you will say to me, "what on earth did you get married for?"

I hardly like to tell you the strange and seemingly improbable reason that urged me on to this senseless act; the fact, however, is that I am afraid of being alone.

I don't know how to tell you or to make you understand me, but my state of mind is so wretched that you will pity me and despise me.

I do not want to be alone any longer at night. I want to feel that there is some one close to me, touching me, a being who can speak and say something, no matter what it be.

I wish to be able to awaken somebody by my side, so that I may be able to ask some sudden question, a stupid question even, if I feel inclined, so that I may hear a human voice, and feel that there is some waking soul close to me, some one whose reason is at work; so that when I hastily light the candle I may see some human face by my side — because — because — I am ashamed to confess it — because I am afraid of being alone.

Oh, you don't understand me yet.

I am not afraid of any danger; if a man were to come into the room, I should kill him without trembling. I am not afraid of ghosts, nor do I believe in the supernatural. I am not afraid of dead people, for I believe in the total annihilation of every being that disappears from the face of this earth.

Well — yes, well, it must be told: I am afraid of myself, afraid of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible fear.

You may laugh, if you like. It is terrible, and I cannot get over it. I am afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of the familiar objects; which are animated, as far as I am concerned, by a kind of animal life. Above all, I am afraid of my own dreadful thoughts, of my reason, which seems as if it were about to leave me, driven away by a mysterious and invisible agony.

At first I feel a vague uneasiness in my mind, which causes a cold shiver to run all over me. I look round, and of course nothing is to be seen, and I wish that there were something there, no matter what, as long as it were something tangible. I am frightened merely because I cannot understand my own terror.

If I speak, I am afraid of my own voice. If I walk, I am afraid of I know not what, behind the door, behind the curtains, in the cupboard, or under my bed, and yet all the time I know there is nothing anywhere, and I turn round suddenly because I am afraid of what is behind me, although there is nothing there, and I know it.

I become agitated. I feel that my fear increases, and so I shut myself up in my own room, get into bed, and hide under the clothes; and there, cowering down, rolled into a ball, I close my eyes in despair, and remain thus for an indefinite time, remembering that my candle is alight on the table by my bedside, and that I ought to put it out, and yet — I dare not do it.

It is very terrible, is it not, to be like that?

Formerly I felt nothing of all that. I came home quite calm, and went up and down my apartment without anything disturbing my peace of mind.

Had any one told me that I should be attacked by a malady — for I can call it nothing else — of most improbable fear, such a stupid and terrible malady as it is, I should have laughed outright. I was certainly never afraid of opening the door in the dark. I went to bed slowly, without locking it, and never got up in the middle of the night to make sure that everything was firmly closed.

It began last year in a very strange manner on a damp autumn evening. When my servant had left the room, after I had dined, I asked myself what I was going to do. I walked up and down my room for some time, feeling tired without any reason for it, unable to work, and even without energy to read. A fine rain was falling, and I felt unhappy, a prey to one of those fits of despondency, without any apparent cause, which make us feel inclined to cry, or to talk, no matter to whom, so as to shake off our depressing thoughts.

I felt that I was alone, and my rooms seemed to me to be more empty than they had ever been before. I was in the midst of infinite and overwhelming solitude. What was I to do? I sat down, but a kind of nervous impatience seemed to affect my legs, so I got up and began to walk about again. I was, perhaps, rather feverish, for my hands, which I had clasped behind me, as one often does when walking slowly, almost seemed to burn one another. Then suddenly a cold shiver ran down my back, and I thought the damp air might have penetrated into my rooms, so I lit the fire for the first time that year, and sat down again and looked at the flames. But soon I felt that I could not possibly remain quiet, and so I got up again and determined to go out, to pull myself together, and to find a friend to bear me company.

I could not find anyone, so I walked to the boulevard to try and meet some acquaintance or other there.

It was wretched everywhere, and the wet pavement glistened in the gaslight, while the oppressive warmth of the almost impalpable rain lay heavily over the streets and seemed to obscure the light of the lamps.

I went on slowly, saying to myself: “I shall not find a soul to talk to.”

I glanced into several cafes, from the Madeleine as far as the Faubourg Poissoniere, and saw many unhappy-looking individuals sitting at the tables who did not seem even to have enough energy left to finish the refreshments they had ordered.

For a long time I wandered aimlessly up and down, and about midnight I started for home. I was very calm and very tired. My janitor opened the door at once, which was quite unusual for him, and I thought that another lodger had probably just come in.

When I go out I always double-lock the door of my room, and I found it merely closed, which surprised me; but I supposed that some letters had been brought up for me in the course of the evening.

I went in, and found my fire still burning so that it lighted up the room a little, and, while in the act of taking up a candle, I noticed somebody sitting in my armchair by the fire, warming his feet, with his back toward me.

I was not in the slightest degree frightened. I thought, very naturally, that some friend or other had come to see me. No doubt the porter, to whom I had said I was going out, had lent him his own key. In a moment I remembered all the circumstances of my return, how the street door had been opened immediately, and that my own door was only latched and not locked.

I could see nothing of my friend but his head, and he had evidently gone to sleep while waiting for me, so I went up to him to rouse him. I saw him quite distinctly; his right arm was hanging down and his legs were crossed; the position of his head, which was somewhat inclined to the left of the armchair, seemed to indicate that he was asleep. “Who can it be?” I asked myself. I could not see clearly, as the room was rather dark, so I put out my hand to touch him on the shoulder, and it came in contact with the back of the chair. There was nobody there; the seat was empty.

I fairly jumped with fright. For a moment I drew back as if confronted by some terrible danger; then I turned round again, impelled by an imperious standing upright, panting with fear, so upset that I could not collect my thoughts, and ready to faint.

But I am a cool man, and soon recovered myself. I thought: “It is a mere hallucination, that is all,” and I immediately began to reflect on this phenomenon. Thoughts fly quickly at such moments.

I had been suffering from an hallucination, that was an incontestable fact. My mind had been perfectly lucid and had acted regularly and logically, so there was nothing the matter with the brain. It was only my eyes that had been deceived; they had had a vision, one of those visions which lead simple folk to believe in miracles. It was a nervous seizure of the optical apparatus, nothing more; the eyes were rather congested, perhaps.

I lit my candle, and when I stooped down to the fire in doing so I noticed that I was trembling, and I raised myself up with a jump, as if somebody had touched me from behind.

I was certainly not by any means calm.

I walked up and down a little, and hummed a tune or two. Then I double-locked the door and felt rather reassured; now, at any rate, nobody could come in.

I sat down again and thought over my adventure for a long time; then I went to bed and blew out my light.

For some minutes all went well; I lay quietly on my back, but presently an irresistible desire seized me to look round the room, and I turned over on my side.

My fire was nearly out, and the few glowing embers threw a faint light on the floor by the chair, where I fancied I saw the man sitting again.

I quickly struck a match, but I had been mistaken; there was nothing there. I got up, however, and hid the chair behind my bed, and tried to get to sleep, as the room was now dark; but I had not forgotten myself for more than five minutes, when in my dream I saw all the scene which I had previously witnessed as clearly as if it were reality. I woke up with a start, and having lit the candle, sat up in bed, without venturing even to try to go to sleep again.

Twice, however, sleep overcame me for a few moments in spite of myself, and twice I saw the same thing again, till I fancied I was going mad. When day broke, however, I thought that I was cured, and slept peacefully till noon.

It was all past and over. I had been feverish, had had the nightmare. I know not what. I had been ill, in fact, but yet thought I was a great fool.

I enjoyed myself thoroughly that evening. I dined at a restaurant and afterward went to the theatre, and then started for home. But as I got near the house I was once more seized by a strange feeling of uneasiness. I was afraid of seeing him again. I was not afraid of him, not afraid of his presence, in which I did not believe; but I was afraid of being deceived again. I was afraid of some fresh hallucination, afraid lest fear should take possession of me.

For more than an hour I wandered up and down the pavement; then, feeling that I was really too foolish, I returned home. I breathed so hard that I could hardly get upstairs, and remained standing outside my door for more than ten minutes; then suddenly I had a courageous impulse and my will asserted itself. I inserted my key into the lock, and went into the apartment with a candle in my hand. I kicked open my bedroom door, which was partly open, and cast a frightened glance toward the fireplace. There was nothing there. A-h! What a relief and what a delight! What a deliverance! I walked up and down briskly and boldly, but I was not altogether reassured, and kept turning round with a jump; the very shadows in the corners disquieted me.

I slept badly, and was constantly disturbed by imaginary noises, but did not see him; no, that was all over.

Since that time I have been afraid of being alone at night. I feel that the spectre is there, close to me, around me; but it has not appeared to me again.

And supposing it did, what would it matter, since I do not believe in it, and know that it is nothing?

However, it still worries me, because I am constantly thinking of it. His right arm hanging down and his head inclined to the left like a man who was asleep — I don't want to think about it!

Why, however, am I so persistently possessed with this idea? His feet were close to the fire!

He haunts me; it is very stupid, but who and what is he? I know that he does not exist except in my cowardly imagination, in my fears, and in my agony. There — enough of that!

Yes, it is all very well for me to reason with myself, to stiffen my backbone, so to say; but I cannot remain at home because I know he is there. I know I shall not see him again; he will not show himself again; that is all over. But he is there, all the same, in my thoughts. He remains invisible, but that does not prevent his being there. He is behind the doors, in the closed cupboard, in the wardrobe, under the bed, in every dark corner. If I open the door or the cupboard, if I take the candle to look under the bed and throw a light on the dark places he is there no longer, but I feel that he is behind me. I turn round, certain that I shall not see him, that I shall never see him again; but for all that, he is behind me.

It is very stupid, it is dreadful; but what am I to do? I cannot help it.

But if there were two of us in the place I feel certain that he would not be there any longer, for he is there just because I am alone, simply and solely because I am alone!

LEGEND OF MONT ST. MICHEL

I had first seen it from Cancale, this fairy castle in the sea. I got an indistinct impression of it as of a gray shadow outlined against the misty sky. I saw it again from Avranches at sunset. The immense stretch of sand was red, the horizon was red, the whole boundless bay was red. The rocky castle rising out there in the distance like a weird, seignorial residence, like a dream palace, strange and beautiful-this alone remained black in the crimson light of the dying day.

The following morning at dawn I went toward it across the sands, my eyes fastened on this, gigantic jewel, as big as a mountain, cut like a cameo, and as dainty as lace. The nearer I approached the greater my admiration grew, for nothing in the world could be more wonderful or more perfect.

As surprised as if I had discovered the habitation of a god, I wandered through those halls supported by frail or massive columns, raising my eyes in wonder to those spires which looked like rockets starting for the sky, and to that marvellous assemblage of towers, of gargoyles, of slender and charming ornaments, a regular fireworks of stone, granite lace, a masterpiece of colossal and delicate architecture.

As I was looking up in ecstasy a Lower Normandy peasant came up to me and told me the story of the great quarrel between Saint Michael and the devil.

A sceptical genius has said: “God made man in his image and man has returned the compliment.”

This saying is an eternal truth, and it would be very curious to write the history of the local divinity of every continent as well as the history of the patron saints in each one of our provinces. The negro has his ferocious man-eating idols; the polygamous Mahometan fills his paradise with women; the Greeks, like a practical people, deified all the passions.

Every village in France is under the influence of some protecting saint, modelled according to the characteristics of the inhabitants.

Saint Michael watches over Lower Normandy, Saint Michael, the radiant and victorious angel, the sword-carrier, the hero of Heaven, the victorious, the conqueror of Satan.

But this is how the Lower Normandy peasant, cunning, deceitful and tricky, understands and tells of the struggle between the great saint and the devil.

To escape from the malice of his neighbor, the devil, Saint Michael built himself, in the open ocean, this habitation worthy of an archangel; and only such a saint could build a residence of such magnificence.

But as he still feared the approaches of the wicked one, he surrounded his domains by quicksands, more treacherous even than the sea.

The devil lived in a humble cottage on the hill, but he owned all the salt marshes, the rich lands where grow the finest crops, the wooded valleys and all the fertile hills of the country, while the saint a ruled only over the sands. Therefore Satan was rich, whereas Saint Michael was as poor as a church mouse.

After a few years of fasting the saint grew tired of this state of affairs and began to think of some compromise with the devil, but the matter was by no means easy, as Satan kept a good hold on his crops.

He thought the thing over for about six months; then one morning he walked across to the shore. The demon was eating his soup in front of his door when he saw the saint. He immediately rushed toward him, kissed the hem of his sleeve, invited him in and offered him refreshments.

Saint Michael drank a bowl of milk and then began: “I have come here to propose to you a good bargain.”

The devil, candid and trustful, answered: “That will suit me.”

“Here it is. Give me all your lands.”

Satan, growing alarmed, wished to speak “But— “

She saint continued: “Listen first. Give me all your lands. I will take care of all the work, the ploughing, the sowing, the fertilizing, everything, and we will share the crops equally. How does that suit you?”

The devil, who was naturally lazy, accepted. He only demanded in addition a few of those delicious gray mullet which are caught around the solitary mount. Saint Michael promised the fish.

They grasped hands and spat on the ground to show that it was a bargain, and the saint continued: “See here, so that you will have nothing to complain of, choose that part of the crops which you prefer: the part that grows above ground or the part that stays in the ground." Satan cried out: "I will take all that will be above ground."

"It's a bargain!" said the saint. And he went away.

Six months later, all over the immense domain of the devil, one could see nothing but carrots, turnips, onions, salsify, all the plants whose juicy roots are good and savory and whose useless leaves are good for nothing but for feeding animals.

Satan wished to break the contract, calling Saint Michael a swindler.

But the saint, who had developed quite a taste for agriculture, went back to see the devil and said:

"Really, I hadn't thought of that at all; it was just an accident, no fault of mine. And to make things fair with you, this year I'll let you take everything that is under the ground."

"Very well," answered Satan.

The following spring all the evil spirit's lands were covered with golden wheat, oats as big as beans, flax, magnificent colza, red clover, peas, cabbage, artichokes, everything that develops into grains or fruit in the sunlight.

Once more Satan received nothing, and this time he completely lost his temper. He took back his fields and remained deaf to all the fresh propositions of his neighbor.

A whole year rolled by. From the top of his lonely manor Saint Michael looked at the distant and fertile lands and watched the devil direct the work, take in his crops and thresh the wheat. And he grew angry, exasperated at his powerlessness.

As he was no longer able to deceive Satan, he decided to wreak vengeance on him, and he went out to invite him to dinner for the following Monday.

"You have been very unfortunate in your dealings with me," he said; "I know it, but I don't want any ill feeling between us, and I expect you to dine with me. I'll give you some good things to eat."

Satan, who was as greedy as he was lazy, accepted eagerly. On the day appointed he donned his finest clothes and set out for the castle.

Saint Michael sat him down to a magnificent meal. First there was a 'vol-au-vent', full of cocks' crests and kidneys, with meat-balls, then two big gray mullet with cream sauce, a turkey stuffed with chestnuts soaked in wine, some salt-marsh lamb as tender as cake, vegetables which melted in the mouth and nice hot pancake which was brought on smoking and spreading a delicious odor of butter.

They drank new, sweet, sparkling cider and heady red wine, and after each course they whetted their appetites with some old apple brandy.

The devil drank and ate to his heart's content; in fact he took so much that he was very uncomfortable, and began to retch.

Then Saint Michael arose in anger and cried in a voice like thunder: "What! before me, rascal! You dare — before me— "

Satan, terrified, ran away, and the saint, seizing a stick, pursued him. They ran through the halls, turning round the pillars, running up the staircases, galloping along the cornices, jumping from gargoyle to gargoyle. The poor devil, who was woefully ill, was running about madly and trying hard to escape. At last he found himself at the top of the last terrace, right at the top, from which could be seen the immense bay, with its distant towns, sands and pastures. He could no longer escape, and the saint came up behind him and gave him a furious kick, which shot him through space like a cannonball.

He shot through the air like a javelin and fell heavily before the town of Mortain. His horns and claws stuck deep into the rock, which keeps through eternity the traces of this fall of Satan.

He stood up again, limping, crippled until the end of time, and as he looked at this fatal castle in the distance, standing out against the setting sun, he understood well that he would always be vanquished in this unequal struggle, and he went away limping, heading for distant countries, leaving to his enemy his fields, his hills, his valleys and his marshes.

And this is how Saint Michael, the patron saint of Normandy, vanquished the devil.

Another people would have dreamed of this battle in an entirely different manner.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT

Jacques de Randal, having dined at home alone, told his valet he might go out, and he sat down at his table to write some letters.

He ended every year in this manner, writing and dreaming. He reviewed the events of his life since last New Year's Day, things that were now all over and dead; and, in proportion as the faces of his friends rose up before his eyes, he wrote them a few lines, a cordial New Year's greeting on the first of January.

So he sat down, opened a drawer, took out of it a woman's photograph, gazed at it a few moments, and kissed it. Then, having laid it beside a sheet of notepaper, he began:

> "MY DEAR IRENE: You must by this time have received the little souvenir I sent, you addressed to the maid. I have shut myself up this evening in order to tell you — — "

The pen here ceased to move. Jacques rose up and began walking up and down the room.

For the last ten months he had had a sweetheart, not like the others, a woman with whom one engages in a passing intrigue, of the theatrical world or the demi-monde, but a woman whom he loved and won. He was no longer a young man, although he was still comparatively young for a man, and he looked on life seriously in a positive and practical spirit.

Accordingly, he drew up the balance sheet of his passion, as he drew up every year the balance sheet of friendships that were ended or freshly contracted, of circumstances and persons that had entered into his life.

His first ardor of love having grown calmer, he asked himself with the precision of a merchant making a calculation what was the state of his heart with regard to her, and he tried to form an idea of what it would be in the future.

He found there a great and deep affection; made up of tenderness, gratitude and the thousand subtleties which give birth to long and powerful attachments.

A ring at the bell made him start. He hesitated. Should he open the door? But he said to himself that one must always open the door on New Year's night, to admit the unknown who is passing by and knocks, no matter who it may be.

So he took a wax candle, passed through the antechamber, drew back the bolts, turned the key, pulled the door back, and saw his sweetheart standing pale as a corpse, leaning against the wall.

He stammered:

"What is the matter with you?"

She replied:

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Without servants?"

"Yes."

"You are not going out?"

"No."

She entered with the air of a woman who knew the house. As soon as she was in the drawing-room, she sank down on the sofa, and, covering her face with her hands, began to weep bitterly.

He knelt down at her feet, and tried to remove her hands from her eyes, so that he might look at them, and exclaimed:

"Irene, Irene, what is the matter with you? I implore you to tell me what is the matter with you?"

Then, amid her sobs, she murmured:

"I can no longer live like this."

"Live like this? What do you mean?"

"Yes. I can no longer live like this. I have endured so much. He struck me this afternoon."

"Who? Your husband?"

"Yes, my husband."

"Ah!"

He was astonished, having never suspected that her husband could be brutal. He was a man of the world, of the better class, a clubman, a lover of horses, a theatergoer and an expert swordsman; he was known, talked about, appreciated everywhere, having very courteous manners, a very mediocre intellect, an absence of education and of the real culture needed in order to think like all well-bred people, and finally a respect for conventionalities.

He appeared to devote himself to his wife, as a man ought to do in the case of wealthy and well-bred people. He displayed enough of anxiety about her wishes, her health, her dresses, and, beyond that, left her perfectly free.

Randal, having become Irene's friend, had a right to the affectionate hand-clasp which every husband endowed with good manners owes to his wife's intimate acquaintance. Then, when Jacques, after having been for some time the friend, became the lover, his relations with the husband were more cordial, as is fitting.

Jacques had never dreamed that there were storms in this household, and he was bewildered at this unexpected revelation.

He asked:

"How did it happen? Tell me."

Thereupon she related a long story, the entire history of her life since the day of her marriage, the first disagreement arising out of a mere nothing, then becoming accentuated at every new difference of opinion between two dissimilar dispositions.

Then came quarrels, a complete separation, not apparent, but real; next, her husband showed himself aggressive, suspicious, violent. Now, he was jealous, jealous of Jacques, and that very day, after a scene, he had struck her.

She added with decision: "I will not go back to him. Do with me what you like."

Jacques sat down opposite to her, their knees touching. He took her hands:

"My dear love, you are going to commit a gross, an irreparable folly. If you want to leave your husband, put him in the wrong, so that your position as a woman of the world may be saved."

She asked, as she looked at him uneasily:

"Then, what do you advise me?"

"To go back home and to put up with your life there till the day when you can obtain either a separation or a divorce, with the honors of war."

"Is not this thing which you advise me to do a little cowardly?"

"No; it is wise and sensible. You have a high position, a reputation to protect, friends to preserve and relations to deal with. You must not lose all these through a mere caprice."

She rose up, and said with violence:

"Well, no! I cannot stand it any longer! It is at an end! it is at an end!"

Then, placing her two hands on her lover's shoulders, and looking him straight in the face, she asked:

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes."

"Then take care of me."

He exclaimed:

"Take care of you? In my own house? Here? Why, you are mad. It would mean losing you forever; losing you beyond hope of recall! You are mad!"

She replied, slowly and seriously, like a woman who feels the weight of her words:

"Listen, Jacques. He has forbidden me to see you again, and I will not play this comedy of coming secretly to your house. You must either lose me or take me."

"My dear Irene, in that case, obtain your divorce, and I will marry you."

"Yes, you will marry me in — two years at the soonest. Yours is a patient love."

"Look here! Reflect! If you remain here he'll come to-morrow to take you away, seeing that he is your husband, seeing that he has right and law on his side."

"I did not ask you to keep me in your own house, Jacques, but to take me anywhere you like. I thought you loved me enough to do that. I have made a mistake. Good-by!"

She turned round and went toward the door so quickly that he was only able to catch hold of her when she was outside the room:

"Listen, Irene."

She struggled, and would not listen to him. Her eyes were full of tears, and she stammered:

"Let me alone! let me alone! let me alone!"

He made her sit down by force, and once more falling on his knees at her feet, he now brought forward a number of arguments and counsels to make her understand the folly and terrible risk of her project. He omitted nothing which he deemed necessary to convince her, finding even in his very affection for her incentives to persuasion.

As she remained silent and cold as ice, he begged of her, implored of her to listen to him, to trust him, to follow his advice.

When he had finished speaking, she only replied:

“Are you disposed to let me go away now? Take away your hands, so that I may rise to my feet.”

“Look here, Irene.”

“Will you let me go?”

“Irene — is your resolution irrevocable?”

“Will you let me go.”

“Tell me only whether this resolution, this mad resolution of yours, which you will bitterly regret, is irrevocable?”

“Yes — let me go!”

“Then stay. You know well that you are at home here. We shall go away to-morrow morning.”

She rose to her feet in spite of him, and said in a hard tone:

“No. It is too late. I do not want sacrifice; I do not want devotion.”

“Stay! I have done what I ought to do; I have said what I ought to say. I have no further responsibility on your behalf. My conscience is at peace. Tell me what you want me to do, and I will obey.”’

She resumed her seat, looked at him for a long time, and then asked, in a very calm voice:

“Well, then, explain.”

“Explain what? What do you wish me to explain?”

“Everything — everything that you thought about before changing your mind. Then I will see what I ought to do.”

“But I thought about nothing at all. I had to warn you that you were going to commit an act of folly. You persist; then I ask to share in this act of folly, and I even insist on it.”

“It is not natural to change one’s mind so quickly.”

“Listen, my dear love. It is not a question here of sacrifice or devotion. On the day when I realized that I loved you, I said to myself what every lover ought to say to himself in the same case: ‘The man who loves a woman, who makes an effort to win her, who gets her, and who takes her, enters into a sacred contract with himself and with her. That is, of course, in dealing with a woman like you, not a woman with a fickle heart and easily impressed.'

"Marriage which has a great social value, a great legal value, possesses in my eyes only a very slight moral value, taking into account the conditions under which it generally takes place.

"Therefore, when a woman, united by this lawful bond, but having no attachment to her husband, whom she cannot love, a woman whose heart is free, meets a man whom she cares for, and gives herself to him, when a man who has no other tie, takes a woman in this way, I say that they pledge themselves toward each other by this mutual and free agreement much more than by the 'Yes' uttered in the presence of the mayor.

"I say that, if they are both honorable persons, their union must be more intimate, more real, more wholesome, than if all the sacraments had consecrated it.

"This woman risks everything. And it is exactly because she knows it, because she gives everything, her heart, her body, her soul, her honor, her life, because she has foreseen all miseries, all dangers all catastrophes, because she dares to do a bold act, an intrepid act, because she is prepared, determined to brave everything — her husband, who might kill her, and society, which may cast her out. This is why she is worthy of respect in the midst of her conjugal infidelity; this is why her lover, in taking her, should also foresee everything, and prefer her to every one else whatever may happen. I have nothing more to say. I spoke in the beginning like a sensible man whose duty it was to warn you; and now I am only a man — a man who loves you — Command, and I obey."

Radiant, she closed his mouth with a kiss, and said in a low tone:

"It is not true, darling! There is nothing the matter! My husband does not suspect anything. But I wanted to see, I wanted to know, what you would do I wished for a New Year's gift — the gift of your heart — another gift besides the necklace you sent me. You have given it to me. Thanks! thanks! God be thanked for the happiness you have given me!"

FRIEND PATIENCE

"What became of Leremy?"

"He is captain in the Sixth Dragoons."

"And Pinson?"

"He's a subprefect."

"And Racollet?"

"Dead."

We were searching for other names which would remind us of the youthful faces of our younger days. Once in a while we had met some of these old comrades, bearded, bald, married, fathers of several children, and the realization of these changes had given us an unpleasant shudder, reminding us how short life is, how everything passes away, how everything changes. My friend asked me:

"And Patience, fat Patience?"

I almost, howled:

"Oh! as for him, just listen to this. Four or five years ago I was in Limoges, on a tour of inspection, and I was waiting for dinner time. I was seated before the big cafe in the Place du Theatre, just bored to death. The tradespeople were coming by twos, threes or fours, to take their absinthe or vermouth, talking all the time of their own or other people's business, laughing loudly, or lowering their voices in order to impart some important or delicate piece of news.

"I was saying to myself: 'What shall I do after dinner?' And I thought of the long evening in this provincial town, of the slow, dreary walk through unknown streets, of the impression of deadly gloom which these provincial people produce on the lonely traveller, and of the whole oppressive atmosphere of the place.

"I was thinking of all these things as I watched the little jets of gas flare up, feeling my loneliness increase with the falling shadows.

"A big, fat man sat down at the next table and called in a stentorian voice:

"'Waiter, my bitters!'

"The 'my' came out like the report of a cannon. I immediately understood that everything was his in life, and not another's; that he had his nature, by Jove, his appetite, his trousers, his everything, his, more absolutely and more completely than anyone else's. Then he looked round him with a satisfied air. His bitters were brought, and he ordered:

"'My newspaper!'

"I wondered: 'Which newspaper can his be?' The title would certainly reveal to me his opinions, his theories, his principles, his hobbies, his weaknesses.

"The waiter brought the Temps. I was surprised. Why the Temps, a serious, sombre, doctrinaire, impartial sheet? I thought:

"'He must be a serious man with settled and regular habits; in short, a good bourgeois.'

"He put on his gold-rimmed spectacles, leaned back before beginning to read, and once more glanced about him. He noticed me, and immediately began to stare at me in an annoying manner. I was even going to ask the reason for this attention, when he exclaimed from his seat:

"'Well, by all that's holy, if this isn't Gontran Lardois.'

"I answered:

"'Yes, monsieur, you are not mistaken.'

"Then he quickly rose and came toward me with hands outstretched:

"'Well, old man, how are you?'

"As I did not recognize him at all I was greatly embarrassed. I stammered:

"'Why-very well-and-you?'

"He began to laugh "'I bet you don't recognize me.'

"'No, not exactly. It seems — however— '

"He slapped me on the back:

"'Come on, no joking! I am Patience, Robert Patience, your friend, your chum.'

"I recognized him. Yes, Robert Patience, my old college chum. It was he. I took his outstretched hand:

"'And how are you?'

"'Fine!'

"His smile was like a paean of victory.

"He asked:

"'What are you doing here?'

"I explained that I was government inspector of taxes.

"He continued, pointing to my red ribbon:

"'Then you have-been a success?'

"I answered:

"'Fairly so. And you?'

"'I am doing well!'

"'What are you doing?'

"'I'm in business.'

"'Making money?'

"'Heaps. I'm very rich. But come around to lunch, to-morrow noon, 17 Rue du Coq-qui-Chante; you will see my place.'

"He seemed to hesitate a second, then continued:

"'Are you still the good sport that you used to be?'

"'I — I hope so.'

"'Not married?'

"'No.'

"'Good. And do you still love a good time and potatoes?'

"I was beginning to find him hopelessly vulgar. Nevertheless, I answered "'Yes.'

"'And pretty girls?'

"'Most assuredly.'

"He began to laugh good-humoredly.

"'Good, good! Do you remember our first escapade, in Bordeaux, after that dinner at Routie's? What a spree!'

"I did, indeed, remember that spree; and the recollection of it cheered me up. This called to mind other pranks. He would say:

"'Say, do you remember the time when we locked the proctor up in old man Latoque's cellar?'

"And he laughed and banged the table with his fist, and then he continued:

"'Yes-yes-yes-and do you remember the face of the geography teacher, M. Marin, the day we set off a firecracker in the globe, just as he was haranguing about the principal volcanoes of the earth?'

"Then suddenly I asked him:

"'And you, are you married?'

"He exclaimed:

"'Ten years, my boy, and I have four children, remarkable youngsters; but you'll see them and their mother.'

"We were talking rather loud; the people around us looked at us in surprise.

"Suddenly my friend looked at his watch, a chronometer the size of a pumpkin, and he cried:

"'Thunder! I'm sorry, but I'll have to leave you; I am never free at night.'

"He rose, took both my hands, shook them as though he were trying to wrench my arms from their sockets, and exclaimed:

"'So long, then; till to-morrow noon!'

"'So long!'

"I spent the morning working in the office of the collector-general of the Department. The chief wished me to stay to luncheon, but I told him that I had an engagement with a friend. As he had to go out, he accompanied me.

"I asked him:

"'Can you tell me how I can find the Rue du Coq-qui-Chante?'

"He answered:

"'Yes, it's only five minutes' walk from here. As I have nothing special to do, I will take you there.'

"We started out and soon found ourselves there. It was a wide, fine-looking street, on the outskirts of the town. I looked at the houses and I noticed No. 17. It was a large house with a garden behind it. The facade, decorated with frescoes, in the Italian style, appeared to me as being in bad taste. There were goddesses holding vases, others swathed in clouds. Two stone cupids supported the number of the house.

"I said to the treasurer:

"'Here is where I am going.'

"I held my hand out to him. He made a quick, strange gesture, said nothing and shook my hand.

"I rang. A maid appeared. I asked:

"'Monsieur Patience, if you please?'

"She answered:

"'Right here, sir. Is it to monsieur that you wish to speak?'

"'Yes.'

"The hall was decorated with paintings from the brush of some local artist. Pauls and Virginias were kissing each other under palm trees bathed in a pink light. A hideous Oriental lantern was ranging from the ceiling. Several doors were concealed by bright hangings.

"But what struck me especially was the odor. It was a sickening and perfumed odor, reminding one of rice powder and the mouldy smell of a cellar. An indefinable odor in a heavy atmosphere as oppressive as that of public baths. I followed the maid up a marble stairway, covered with a green, Oriental carpet, and was ushered into a sumptubus parlor.

"Left alone, I looked about me.

"The room was richly furnished, but in the pretentious taste of a parvenu. Rather fine engravings of the last century represented women with powdered hair dressed high surprised by gentlemen in interesting positions. Another lady, lying in a large bed, was teasing with her foot a little dog, lost in the sheets. One drawing showed four feet, bodies concealed behind a curtain. The large room, surrounded by soft couches, was entirely impregnated with that enervating and insipid odor which I had already noticed. There seemed to be something suspicious about the walls, the hangings, the exaggerated luxury, everything.

"I approached the window to look into the garden. It was very big, shady, beautiful. A wide path wound round a grass plot in the midst of which was a fountain, entered a shrubbery and came out farther away. And, suddenly, yonder, in the distance, between two clumps of bushes, three women appeared. They were walking slowly, arm in arm, clad in long, white tea-gowns covered with lace. Two were blondes and the other was dark-haired. Almost immediately they disappeared again behind the trees. I stood there entranced, delighted with this short and charming apparition, which brought to my mind a whole world of poetry. They had scarcely allowed themselves to be seen, in just the proper light, in that frame of foliage, in the midst of that mysterious, delightful park. It seemed to me that I had suddenly seen before me the great ladies of the last century, who were depicted in the engravings on the wall. And I began to think of the happy, joyous, witty and amorous times when manners were so graceful and lips so approachable.

"A deep voice male me jump. Patience had come in, beaming, and held out his hands to me.

"He looked into my eyes with the sly look which one takes when divulging secrets of love, and, with a Napoleonic gesture, he showed me his sumptuous parlor, his park, the three women, who had reappeared in the back of it, then, in a triumphant voice, where the note of pride was prominent, he said:

"'And to think that I began with nothing — my wife and my sister-in-law!'"

ABANDONED

"I really think you must be mad, my dear, to go for a country walk in such weather as this. You have had some very strange notions for the last two months. You drag me to the seaside in spite of myself, when you have never once had such a whim during all the forty-four years that we have been married. You chose Fecamp, which is a very dull town, without consulting me in the matter, and now you are seized with such a rage for walking, you who hardly ever stir out on foot, that you want to take a country walk on the hottest day of the year. Ask d'Apreval to go with you, as he is ready to gratify all your whims. As for me, I am going back to have a nap."

Madame de Cadour turned to her old friend and said:

"Will you come with me, Monsieur d'Apreval?"

He bowed with a smile, and with all the gallantry of former years:

"I will go wherever you go," he replied.

"Very well, then, go and get a sunstroke," Monsieur de Cadour said; and he went back to the Hotel des Bains to lie down for an hour or two.

As soon as they were alone, the old lady and her old companion set off, and she said to him in a low voice, squeezing his hand:

"At last! at last!"

"You are mad," he said in a whisper. "I assure you that you are mad. Think of the risk you are running. If that man— "

She started.

"Oh! Henri, do not say that man, when you are speaking of him."

"Very well," he said abruptly, "if our son guesses anything, if he has any suspicions, he will have you, he will have us both in his power. You have got on without seeing him for the last forty years. What is the matter with you to-day?"

They had been going up the long street that leads from the sea to the town, and now they turned to the right, to go to Etretat. The white road stretched in front of him, then under a blaze of brilliant sunshine, so they went on slowly in the burning heat. She had taken her old friend’s arm, and was looking straight in front of her, with a fixed and haunted gaze, and at last she said:

“And so you have not seen him again, either?”

“No, never.”

“Is it possible?”

“My dear friend, do not let us begin that discussion again. I have a wife and children and you have a husband, so we both of us have much to fear from other people’s opinion.”

She did not reply; she was thinking of her long past youth and of many sad things that had occurred. How well she recalled all the details of their early friendship, his smiles, the way he used to linger, in order to watch her until she was indoors. What happy days they were, the only really delicious days she had ever enjoyed, and how quickly they were over!

And then — her discovery — of the penalty she paid! What anguish!

Of that journey to the South, that long journey, her sufferings, her constant terror, that secluded life in the small, solitary house on the shores of the Mediterranean, at the bottom of a garden, which she did not venture to leave. How well she remembered those long days which she spent lying under an orange tree, looking up at the round, red fruit, amid the green leaves. How she used to long to go out, as far as the sea, whose fresh breezes came to her over the wall, and whose small waves she could hear lapping on the beach. She dreamed of its immense blue expanse sparkling under the sun, with the white sails of the small vessels, and a mountain on the horizon. But she did not dare to go outside the gate. Suppose anybody had recognized her!

And those days of waiting, those last days of misery and expectation! The impending suffering, and then that terrible night! What misery she had endured, and what a night it was! How she had groaned and screamed! She could still see the pale face of her lover, who kissed her hand every moment, and the clean-shaven face of the doctor and the nurse’s white cap.

And what she felt when she heard the child’s feeble cries, that wail, that first effort of a human’s voice!

And the next day! the next day! the only day of her life on which she had seen and kissed her son; for, from that time, she had never even caught a glimpse of him.

And what a long, void existence hers had been since then, with the thought of that child always, always floating before her. She had never seen her son, that little creature that had been part of herself, even once since then; they had taken him from her, carried him away, and had hidden him. All she knew was that he had been brought up by some peasants in Normandy, that he had become a peasant himself, had married well, and that his father, whose name he did not know, had settled a handsome sum of money on him.

How often during the last forty years had she wished to go and see him and to embrace him! She could not imagine to herself that he had grown! She always thought of that small human atom which she had held in her arms and pressed to her bosom for a day.

How often she had said to M. d'Apreval: "I cannot bear it any longer; I must go and see him."

But he had always stopped her and kept her from going. She would be unable to restrain and to master herself; their son would guess it and take advantage of her, blackmail her; she would be lost.

"What is he like?" she said.

"I do not know. I have not seen him again, either."

"Is it possible? To have a son and not to know him; to be afraid of him and to reject him as if he were a disgrace! It is horrible."

They went along the dusty road, overcome by the scorching sun, and continually ascending that interminable hill.

"One might take it for a punishment," she continued; "I have never had another child, and I could no longer resist the longing to see him, which has possessed me for forty years. You men cannot understand that. You must remember that I shall not live much longer, and suppose I should never see him, never have seen him! . . . Is it possible? How could I wait so long? I have thought about him every day since, and what a terrible existence mine has been! I have never awakened, never, do you understand, without my first thoughts being of him, of my child. How is he? Oh, how guilty I feel toward him! Ought one to fear what the world may say in a case like this? I ought to have left everything to go after him, to bring him up and to show my love for him. I should certainly have been much happier, but I did not dare, I was a coward. How I have suffered! Oh, how those poor, abandoned children must hate their mothers!"

She stopped suddenly, for she was choked by her sobs. The whole valley was deserted and silent in the dazzling light and the overwhelming heat, and only the grasshoppers uttered their shrill, continuous chirp among the sparse yellow grass on both sides of the road.

"Sit down a little," he said.

She allowed herself to be led to the side of the ditch and sank down with her face in her hands. Her white hair, which hung in curls on both sides of her face, had become tangled. She wept, overcome by profound grief, while he stood facing her, uneasy and not knowing what to say, and he merely murmured: "Come, take courage."

She got up.

"I will," she said, and wiping her eyes, she began to walk again with the uncertain step of an elderly woman.

A little farther on the road passed beneath a clump of trees, which hid a few houses, and they could distinguish the vibrating and regular blows of a blacksmith's hammer on the anvil; and presently they saw a wagon standing on the right side of the road in front of a low cottage, and two men shoeing a horse under a shed.

Monsieur d'Apreval went up to them.

"Where is Pierre Benedict's farm?" he asked.

"Take the road to the left, close to the inn, and then go straight on; it is the third house past Poret's. There is a small spruce fir close to the gate; you cannot make a mistake."

They turned to the left. She was walking very slowly now, her legs threatened to give way, and her heart was beating so violently that she felt as if she should suffocate, while at every step she murmured, as if in prayer:

"Oh! Heaven! Heaven!"

Monsieur d'Apreval, who was also nervous and rather pale, said to her somewhat gruffly:

"If you cannot manage to control your feelings, you will betray yourself at once. Do try and restrain yourself."

"How can I?" she replied. "My child! When I think that I am going to see my child."

They were going along one of those narrow country lanes between farmyards, that are concealed beneath a double row of beech trees at either side of the ditches, and suddenly they found themselves in front of a gate, beside which there was a young spruce fir.

"This is it," he said.

She stopped suddenly and looked about her. The courtyard, which was planted with apple trees, was large and extended as far as the small thatched dwelling house. On the opposite side were the stable, the barn, the cow house and the poultry house, while the gig, the wagon and the manure cart were under a slated outhouse. Four calves were grazing under the shade of the trees and black hens were wandering all about the enclosure.

All was perfectly still; the house door was open, but nobody was to be seen, and so they went in, when immediately a large black dog came out of a barrel that was standing under a pear tree, and began to bark furiously.

There were four bee-hives on boards against the wall of the house.

Monsieur d'Apreval stood outside and called out:

"Is anybody at home?"

Then a child appeared, a little girl of about ten, dressed in a chemise and a linen, petticoat, with dirty, bare legs and a timid and cunning look. She remained standing in the doorway, as if to prevent any one going in.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Is your father in?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"And your mother?"

"Gone after the cows."

"Will she be back soon?"

"I don't know."

Then suddenly the lady, as if she feared that her companion might force her to return, said quickly:

"I shall not go without having seen him."

"We will wait for him, my dear friend."

As they turned away, they saw a peasant woman coming toward the house, carrying two tin pails, which appeared to be heavy and which glistened brightly in the sunlight.

She limped with her right leg, and in her brown knitted jacket, that was faded by the sun and washed out by the rain, she looked like a poor, wretched, dirty servant.

"Here is mamma," the child said.

When she got close to the house, she looked at the strangers angrily and suspiciously, and then she went in, as if she had not seen them. She looked old and had a hard, yellow, wrinkled face, one of those wooden faces that country people so often have.

Monsieur d'Apreval called her back.

"I beg your pardon, madame, but we came in to know whether you could sell us two glasses of milk."

She was grumbling when she reappeared in the door, after putting down her pails.

"I don't sell milk," she replied.

"We are very thirsty," he said, "and madame is very tired. Can we not get something to drink?"

The peasant woman gave them an uneasy and cunning glance and then she made up her mind.

"As you are here, I will give you some," she said, going into the house, and almost immediately the child came out and brought two chairs, which she placed under an apple tree, and then the mother, in turn, brought out two bowls of foaming milk, which she gave to the visitors. She did not return to the house, however, but remained standing near them, as if to watch them and to find out for what purpose they had come there.

"You have come from Fecamp?" she said.

"Yes," Monsieur d'Apreval replied, "we are staying at Fecamp for the summer."

And then, after a short silence, he continued:

"Have you any fowls you could sell us every week?"

The woman hesitated for a moment and then replied:

"Yes, I think I have. I suppose you want young ones?"

"Yes, of course."

"'What do you pay for them in the market?"

D'Apreval, who had not the least idea, turned to his companion:

"What are you paying for poultry in Fecamp, my dear lady?"

"Four francs and four francs fifty centimes," she said, her eyes full of tears, while the farmer's wife, who was looking at her askance, asked in much surprise:

"Is the lady ill, as she is crying?"

He did not know what to say, and replied with some hesitation:

"No — no — but she lost her watch as we came along, a very handsome watch, and that troubles her. If anybody should find it, please let us know."

Mother Benedict did not reply, as she thought it a very equivocal sort of answer, but suddenly she exclaimed:

"Oh, here is my husband!"

She was the only one who had seen him, as she was facing the gate. D'Apreval started and Madame de Cadour nearly fell as she turned round suddenly on her chair.

A man bent nearly double, and out of breath, stood there, ten-yards from them, dragging a cow at the end of a rope. Without taking any notice of the visitors, he said:

"Confound it! What a brute!"

And he went past them and disappeared in the cow house.

Her tears had dried quickly as she sat there startled, without a word and with the one thought in her mind, that this was her son, and D'Apreval, whom the same thought had struck very unpleasantly, said in an agitated voice:

"Is this Monsieur Benedict?"

"Who told you his name?" the wife asked, still rather suspiciously.

"The blacksmith at the corner of the highroad," he replied, and then they were all silent, with their eyes fixed on the door of the cow house, which formed a sort of black hole in the wall of the building. Nothing could be seen inside, but they heard a vague noise, movements and footsteps and the sound of hoofs, which were deadened by the straw on the floor, and soon the man reappeared in the door, wiping his forehead, and came toward the house with long, slow strides. He passed the strangers without seeming to notice them and said to his wife:

"Go and draw me a jug of cider; I am very thirsty."

Then he went back into the house, while his wife went into the cellar and left the two Parisians alone.

"Let us go, let us go, Henri," Madame de Cadour said, nearly distracted with grief, and so d'Apreval took her by the arm, helped her to rise, and sustaining her with all his strength, for he felt that she was nearly fainting, he led her out, after throwing five francs on one of the chairs.

As soon as they were outside the gate, she began to sob and said, shaking with grief:

"Oh! oh! is that what you have made of him?"

He was very pale and replied coldly:

"I did what I could. His farm is worth eighty thousand francs, and that is more than most of the sons of the middle classes have."

They returned slowly, without speaking a word. She was still crying; the tears ran down her cheeks continually for a time, but by degrees they stopped, and they went back to Fecamp, where they found Monsieur de Cadour waiting dinner for them. As soon as he saw them, he began to laugh and exclaimed:

"So my wife has had a sunstroke, and I am very glad of it. I really think she has lost her head for some time past!"

Neither of them replied, and when the husband asked them, rubbing his hands:

"Well, I hope that, at least, you have had a pleasant walk?"

Monsieur d'Apreval replied:

"A delightful walk, I assure you; perfectly delightful."

DENIS

To Leon Chapron.

Marambot opened the letter which his servant Denis gave him and smiled.

For twenty years Denis has been a servant in this house. He was a short, stout, jovial man, who was known throughout the countryside as a model servant. He asked:

“Is monsieur pleased? Has monsieur received good news?”

M. Marambot was not rich. He was an old village druggist, a bachelor, who lived on an income acquired with difficulty by selling drugs to the farmers. He answered:

“Yes, my boy. Old man Malois is afraid of the law-suit with which I am threatening him. I shall get my money to-morrow. Five thousand francs are not liable to harm the account of an old bachelor.”

M. Marambot rubbed his hands with satisfaction. He was a man of quiet temperament, more sad than gay, incapable of any prolonged effort, careless in business.

He could undoubtedly have amassed a greater income had he taken advantage of the deaths of colleagues established in more important centers, by taking their places and carrying on their business. But the trouble of moving and the thought of all the preparations had always stopped him. After thinking the matter over for a few days, he would be satisfied to say:

“Bah! I’ll wait until the next time. I’ll not lose anything by the delay. I may even find something better.”

Denis, on the contrary, was always urging his master to new enterprises. Of an energetic temperament, he would continually repeat:

“Oh! If I had only had the capital to start out with, I could have made a fortune! One thousand francs would do me.”

M. Marambot would smile without answering and would go out in his little garden, where, his hands behind his back, he would walk about dreaming.

All day long, Denis sang the joyful refrains of the folk-songs of the district. He even showed an unusual activity, for he cleaned all the windows of the house, energetically rubbing the glass, and singing at the top of his voice.

M. Marambot, surprised at his zeal, said to him several times, smiling:

"My boy, if you work like that there will be nothing left for you to do to-morrow."

The following day, at about nine o'clock in the morning, the postman gave Denis four letters for his master, one of them very heavy. M. Marambot immediately shut himself up in his room until late in the afternoon. He then handed his servant four letters for the mail. One of them was addressed to M. Malois; it was undoubtedly a receipt for the money.

Denis asked his master no questions; he appeared to be as sad and gloomy that day as he had seemed joyful the day before.

Night came. M. Marambot went to bed as usual and slept.

He was awakened by a strange noise. He sat up in his bed and listened. Suddenly the door opened, and Denis appeared, holding in one hand a candle and in the other a carving knife, his eyes staring, his face contracted as though moved by some deep emotion; he was as pale as a ghost.

M. Marambot, astonished, thought that he was sleep-walking, and he was going to get out of bed and assist him when the servant blew out the light and rushed for the bed. His master stretched out his hands to receive the shock which knocked him over on his back; he was trying to seize the hands of his servant, whom he now thought to be crazy, in order to avoid the blows which the latter was aiming at him.

He was struck by the knife; once in the shoulder, once in the forehead and the third time in the chest. He fought wildly, waving his arms around in the darkness, kicking and crying:

"Denis! Denis! Are you mad? Listen, Denis!"

But the latter, gasping for breath, kept up his furious attack always striking, always repulsed, sometimes with a kick, sometimes with a punch, and rushing forward again furiously.

M. Marambot was wounded twice more, once in the leg and once in the stomach. But, suddenly, a thought flashed across his mind, and he began to shriek:

"Stop, stop, Denis, I have not yet received my money!"

The man immediately ceased, and his master could hear his labored breathing in the darkness.

M. Marambot then went on:

"I have received nothing. M. Malois takes back what he said, the law-suit will take place; that is why you carried the letters to the mail. Just read those on my desk."

With a final effort, he reached for his matches and lit the candle.

He was covered with blood. His sheets, his curtains, and even the walls, were spattered with red. Denis, standing in the middle of the room, was also bloody from head to foot.

When he saw the blood, M. Marambot thought himself dead, and fell unconscious.

At break of day he revived. It was some time, however, before he regained his senses, and was able to understand or remember. But, suddenly, the memory of the attack and of his wounds returned to him, and he was filled with such terror that he closed his eyes in order not to see anything. After a few minutes he grew calmer and began to think. He had not died' immediately, therefore he might still recover. He felt weak, very weak; but he had no real pain, although he noticed an uncomfortable smarting sensation in several parts of his body. He also felt icy cold, and all wet, and as though wrapped up in bandages. He thought that this dampness came from the blood which he had lost; and he shivered at the dreadful thought of this red liquid which had come from his veins and covered his bed. The idea of seeing this terrible spectacle again so upset him that he kept his eyes closed with all his strength, as though they might open in spite of himself.

What had become of Denis? He had probably escaped.

But what could he, Marambot, do now? Get up? Call for help? But if he should make the slightest motions, his wounds would undoubtedly open up again and he would die from loss of blood.

Suddenly he heard the door of his room open. His heart almost stopped. It was certainly Denis who was coming to finish him up. He held his breath in order to make the murderer think that he had been successful.

He felt his sheet being lifted up, and then someone feeling his stomach. A sharp pain near his hip made him start. He was being very gently washed with cold water. Therefore, someone must have discovered the misdeed and he was being cared for. A wild joy seized him; but prudently, he did not wish to show that he was conscious. He opened one eye, just one, with the greatest precaution.

He recognized Denis standing beside him, Denis himself! Mercy! He hastily closed his eye again.

Denis! What could he be doing? What did he want? What awful scheme could he now be carrying out?

What was he doing? Well, he was washing him in order to hide the traces of his crime! And he would now bury him in the garden, under ten feet of earth, so that no one could discover him! Or perhaps under the wine cellar! And M. Marambot began to tremble like a leaf. He kept saying to himself: "I am lost, lost!" He closed his eyes so as not to see the knife as it descended for the final stroke. It did not come. Denis was now lifting him up and bandaging him. Then he began carefully to dress the wound on his leg, as his master had taught him to do.

There was no longer any doubt. His servant, after wishing to kill him, was trying to save him.

Then M. Marambot, in a dying voice, gave him the practical piece of advice:

"Wash the wounds in a dilute solution of carbolic acid!"

Denis answered:

"This is what I am doing, monsieur."

M. Marambot opened both his eyes. There was no sign of blood either on the bed, on the walls, or on the murderer. The wounded man was stretched out on clean white sheets.

The two men looked at each other.

Finally M. Marambot said calmly:

"You have been guilty of a great crime."

Denis answered:

"I am trying to make up for it, monsieur. If you will not tell on me, I will serve you as faithfully as in the past."

This was no time to anger his servant. M. Marambot murmured as he closed his eyes:

"I swear not to tell on you."

Denis saved his master. He spent days and nights without sleep, never leaving the sick room, preparing drugs, broths, potions, feeling his pulse, anxiously counting the beats, attending him with the skill of a trained nurse and the devotion of a son.

He continually asked:

“Well, monsieur, how do you feel?”

M. Marambot would answer in a weak voice:

“A little better, my boy, thank you.”

And when the sick man would wake up at night, he would often see his servant seated in an armchair, weeping silently.

Never had the old druggist been so cared for, so fondled, so spoiled. At first he had said to himself:

“As soon as I am well I shall get rid of this rascal.”

He was now convalescing, and from day to day he would put off dismissing his murderer. He thought that no one would ever show him such care and attention, for he held this man through fear; and he warned him that he had left a document with a lawyer denouncing him to the law if any new accident should occur.

This precaution seemed to guarantee him against any future attack; and he then asked himself if it would not be wiser to keep this man near him, in order to watch him closely.

Just as formerly, when he would hesitate about taking some larger place of business, he could not make up his mind to any decision.

“There is always time,” he would say to himself.

Denis continued to show himself an admirable servant. M. Marambot was well. He kept him.

One morning, just as he was finishing breakfast, he suddenly heard a great noise in the kitchen. He hastened in there. Denis was struggling with two gendarmes. An officer was taking notes on his pad.

As soon as he saw his master, the servant began to sob, exclaiming:

“You told on me, monsieur, that’s not right, after what you had promised me. You have broken your word of honor, Monsieur Marambot; that is not right, that’s not right!”

M. Marambot, bewildered and distressed at being suspected, lifted his hand:

“I swear to you before the Lord, my boy that I did not tell on you. I haven’t the slightest idea how the police could have found out about your attack on me.”

The officer started:

“You say that he attacked you, M. Marambot?”

The bewildered druggist answered:

“Yes — but I did not tell on him — I haven’t said a word — I swear it — he has served me excellently from that time on— “

The officer pronounced severely:

“I will take down your testimony. The law will take notice of this new action, of which it was ignorant, Monsieur Marambot. I was commissioned to arrest your servant for the theft of two ducks surreptitiously taken by him from M. Duhamel of which act there are witnesses. I shall make a note of your information.”

Then, turning toward his men, he ordered:

“Come on, bring him along!”

The two gendarmes dragged Denis out.

The lawyer used a plea of insanity, contrasting the two misdeeds in order to strengthen his argument. He had clearly proved that the theft of the two ducks came from the same mental condition as the eight knife-wounds in the body of Maramlot. He had cunningly analyzed all the phases of this transitory condition of mental aberration, which could, doubtless, be cured by a few months’ treatment in a reputable sanatorium. He had spoken in enthusiastic terms of the continued devotion of this faithful servant, of the care with which he had surrounded his master, wounded by him in a moment of alienation.

Touched by this memory, M. Marambot felt the tears rising to his eyes.

The lawyer noticed it, opened his arms with a broad gesture, spreading out the long black sleeves of his robe like the wings of a bat, and exclaimed:

“Look, look, gentleman of the jury, look at those tears. What more can I say for my client? What speech, what argument, what reasoning would be worth these tears of his master? They, speak louder than I do, louder than the law; they cry: ‘Mercy, for the poor wandering mind of a while ago! They implore, they pardon, they bless!”

He was silent and sat down.

Then the judge, turning to Marambot, whose testimony had been excellent for his servant, asked him:

“But, monsieur, even admitting that you consider this man insane, that does not explain why you should have kept him. He was none the less dangerous.”

Marambot, wiping his eyes, answered:

“Well, your honor, what can you expect? Nowadays it’s so hard to find good servants — I could never have found a better one.”

Denis was acquitted and put in a sanatorium at his master’s expense.

MY WIFE

It had been a stag dinner. These men still came together once in a while without their wives as they had done when they were bachelors. They would eat for a long time, drink for a long time; they would talk of everything, stir up those old and joyful memories which bring a smile to the lip and a tremor to the heart. One of them was saying: “Georges, do you remember our excursion to Saint-Germain with those two little girls from Montmartre?”

“I should say I do!”

And a little detail here or there would be remembered, and all these things brought joy to the hearts.

The conversation turned on marriage, and each one said with a sincere air: “Oh, if it were to do over again!” Georges Duportin added: “It’s strange how easily one falls into it. You have fully decided never to marry; and then, in the springtime, you go to the country; the weather is warm; the summer is beautiful; the fields are full of flowers; you meet a young girl at some friend’s house — crash! all is over. You return married!”

Pierre Letoile exclaimed: “Correct! that is exactly my case, only there were some peculiar incidents— “

His friend interrupted him: “As for you, you have no cause to complain. You have the most charming wife in the world, pretty, amiable, perfect! You are undoubtedly the happiest one of us all.”

The other one continued: “It’s not my fault.”

“How so?”

“It is true that I have a perfect wife, but I certainly married her much against my will.”

“Nonsense!”

“Yes — this is the adventure. I was thirty-five, and I had no more idea of marrying than I had of hanging myself. Young girls seemed to me to be inane, and I loved pleasure.

“During the month of May I was invited to the wedding of my cousin, Simon d’Erabel, in Normandy. It was a regular Normandy wedding. We sat down at the table at five o’clock in the evening and at eleven o’clock we were still eating. I had been paired off, for the occasion, with a Mademoiselle Dumoulin, daughter of a retired colonel, a young, blond, soldierly person, well formed, frank and talkative. She took complete possession of me for the whole day, dragged me into the park, made me dance willy-nilly, bored me to death. I said to myself: ‘That’s all very well for to-day, but tomorrow I’ll get out. That’s all there is to it!’

“Toward eleven o’clock at night the women retired to their rooms; the men stayed, smoking while they drank or drinking while they smoked, whichever you will.

“Through the open window we could see the country folks dancing. Farmers and peasant girls were jumping about in a circle yelling at the top of their lungs a dance air which was feebly accompanied by two violins and a clarinet. The wild song of the peasants often completely drowned the sound of the instruments, and the weak music, interrupted by the unrestrained voices, seemed to come to us in little fragments of scattered notes. Two enormous casks, surrounded by flaming torches, contained drinks for the crowd. Two men were kept busy rinsing the glasses or bowls in a bucket and immediately holding them under the spigots, from which flowed the red stream of wine or the golden stream of pure cider; and the parched dancers, the old ones quietly, the girls panting, came up, stretched out their arms and grasped some receptacle, threw back their heads and poured down their throats the drink which they preferred. On a table were bread, butter, cheese and sausages. Each one would step up from time to time and swallow a mouthful, and under the starlit sky this healthy and violent exercise was a pleasing sight, and made one also feel like drinking from these enormous casks and eating the crisp bread and butter with a raw onion.

“A mad desire seized me to take part in this merrymaking, and I left my companions. I must admit that I was probably a little tipsy, but I was soon entirely so.

“I grabbed the hand of a big, panting peasant woman and I jumped her about until I was out of breath.

“Then I drank some wine and reached for another girl. In order to refresh myself afterward, I swallowed a bowlful of cider, and I began to bounce around as if possessed.

“I was very light on my feet. The boys, delighted, were watching me and trying to imitate me; the girls all wished to dance with me, and jumped about heavily with the grace of cows.

“After each dance I drank a glass of wine or a glass of cider, and toward two o’clock in the morning I was so drunk that I could hardly stand up.

“I realized my condition and tried to reach my room. Everybody was asleep and the house was silent and dark.

“I had no matches and everybody was in bed. As soon as I reached the vestibule I began to, feel dizzy. I had a lot of trouble to find the banister. At last, by accident, my hand came in contact with it, and I sat down on the first step of the stairs in order to try to gather my scattered wits.

“My room was on the second floor; it was the third door to the left. Fortunately I had not forgotten that. Armed with this knowledge, I arose, not without difficulty, and I began to ascend, step by step. In my hands I firmly gripped the iron railing in order not to fall, and took great pains to make no noise.

“Only three or four times did my foot miss the steps, and I went down on my knees; but thanks to the energy of my arms and the strength of my will, I avoided falling completely.

“At last I reached the second floor and I set out in my journey along the hall, feeling my way by the walls. I felt one door; I counted: ‘One’; but a sudden dizziness made me lose my hold on the wall, make a strange turn and fall up against the other wall. I wished to turn in a straight line: The crossing was long and full of hardships. At last I reached the shore, and, prudently, I began to travel along again until I met another door. In order to be sure to make no mistake, I again counted out loud: ‘Two.’ I started out on my walk again. At last I found the third door. I said: ‘Three, that’s my room,’ and I turned the knob. The door opened. Notwithstanding my befuddled state, I thought: ‘Since the door opens, this must be home.’ After softly closing the door, I stepped out in the darkness. I bumped against something soft: my easy-chair. I immediately stretched myself out on it.

“In my condition it would not have been wise to look for my bureau, my candles, my matches. It would have taken me at least two hours. It would probably have taken me that long also to undress; and even then I might not have succeeded. I gave it up.

"I only took my shoes off; I unbuttoned my waistcoat, which was choking me, I loosened my trousers and went to sleep.

"This undoubtedly lasted for a long time. I was suddenly awakened by a deep voice which was saying: 'What, you lazy girl, still in bed? It's ten o'clock!'

"A woman's voice answered: 'Already! I was so tired yesterday.'

"In bewilderment I wondered what this dialogue meant. Where was I? What had I done? My mind was wandering, still surrounded by a heavy fog. The first voice continued: 'I'm going to raise your curtains.'

"I heard steps approaching me. Completely at a loss what to do, I sat up. Then a hand was placed on my head. I started. The voice asked: 'Who is there?' I took good care not to answer. A furious grasp seized me. I in turn seized him, and a terrific struggle ensued. We were rolling around, knocking over the furniture and crashing against the walls. A woman's voice was shrieking: 'Help! help!'

"Servants, neighbors, frightened women crowded around us. The blinds were open and the shades drawn. I was struggling with Colonel Dumoulin.

"I had slept beside his daughter's bed!

"When we were separated, I escaped to my room, dumbfounded. I locked myself in and sat down with my feet on a chair, for my shoes had been left in the young girl's room.

"I heard a great noise through the whole house, doors being opened and closed, whisperings and rapid steps.

"After half an hour some one knocked on my door. I cried: 'Who is there?' It was my uncle, the bridegroom's father. I opened the door:

"He was pale and furious, and he treated me harshly: 'You have behaved like a scoundrel in my house, do you hear?' Then he added more gently 'But, you young fool, why the devil did you let yourself get caught at ten o'clock in the morning? You go to sleep like a log in that room, instead of leaving immediately — immediately after.'

"I exclaimed: 'But, uncle, I assure you that nothing occurred. I was drunk and got into the wrong room.'

"He shrugged his shoulders! 'Don't talk nonsense.' I raised my hand, exclaiming: 'I swear to you on my honor.' My uncle continued: 'Yes, that's all right. It's your duty to say that.'

"I in turn grew angry and told him the whole unfortunate occurrence. He looked at me with a bewildered expression, not knowing what to believe.

Then he went out to confer with the colonel.

"I heard that a kind of jury of the mothers had been formed, to which were submitted the different phases of the situation.

"He came back an hour later, sat down with the dignity of a judge and began: 'No matter what may be the situation, I can see only one way out of it for you; it is to marry Mademoiselle Dumoulin.'

"I bounded out of the chair, crying: 'Never! never!'

"Gravely he asked: 'Well, what do you expect to do?'

"I answered simply: 'Why — leave as soon as my shoes are returned to me.'

"My uncle continued: 'Please do not jest. The colonel has decided to blow your brains out as soon as he sees you. And you may be sure that he does not threaten idly. I spoke of a duel and he answered: "No, I tell you that I will blow his brains out."'

"'Let us now examine the question from another point of view. Either you have misbehaved yourself — and then so much the worse for you, my boy; one should not go near a young girl — or else, being drunk, as you say, you made a mistake in the room. In this case, it's even worse for you. You shouldn't get yourself into such foolish situations. Whatever you may say, the poor girl's reputation is lost, for a drunkard's excuses are never believed. The only real victim in the matter is the girl. Think it over.'

"He went away, while I cried after him: 'Say what you will, I'll not marry her!'

"I stayed alone for another hour. Then my aunt came. She was crying. She used every argument. No one believed my story. They could not imagine that this young girl could have forgotten to lock her door in a house full of company. The colonel had struck her. She had been crying the whole morning. It was a terrible and unforgettable scandal. And my good aunt added: 'Ask for her hand, anyhow. We may, perhaps, find some way out of it when we are drawing up the papers.'

"This prospect relieved me. And I agreed to write my proposal. An hour later I left for Paris. The following day I was informed that I had been accepted.

"Then, in three weeks, before I had been able to find any excuse, the banns were published, the announcement sent out, the contract signed, and one Monday morning I found myself in a church, beside a weeping young girl, after telling the magistrate that I consented to take her as my companion — for better, for worse.

"I had not seen her since my adventure, and I glanced at her out of the corner of my eye with a certain malevolent surprise. However, she was not ugly — far from it. I said to myself: 'There is some one who won't laugh every day.'

"She did not look at me once until, the evening, and she did not say a single word.

"Toward the middle of the night I entered the bridal chamber with the full intention of letting her know my resolutions, for I was now master. I found her sitting in an armchair, fully dressed, pale and with red eyes. As soon as I entered she rose and came slowly toward me saying: 'Monsieur, I am ready to do whatever you may command. I will kill myself if you so desire'

"The colonel's daughter was as pretty as she could be in this heroic role. I kissed her; it was my privilege.

"I soon saw that I had not got a bad bargain. I have now been married five years. I do not regret it in the least."

Pierre Letoile was silent. His companions were laughing. One of them said: "Marriage is indeed a lottery; you must never choose your numbers. The haphazard ones are the best."

Another added by way of conclusion: "Yes, but do not forget that the god of drunkards chose for Pierre."

THE UNKNOWN

We were speaking of adventures, and each one of us was relating his story of delightful experiences, surprising meetings, on the train, in a hotel, at the seashore. According to Roger des Annettes, the seashore was particularly favorable to the little blind god.

Gontran, who was keeping mum, was asked what he thought of it.

“I guess Paris is about the best place for that,” he said. “Woman is like a precious trinket, we appreciate her all the more when we meet her in the most unexpected places; but the rarest ones are only to be found in Paris.”

He was silent for a moment, and then continued:

“By Jove, it’s great! Walk along the streets on some spring morning. The little women, daintily tripping along, seem to blossom out like flowers. What a delightful, charming sight! The dainty perfume of violet is everywhere. The city is gay, and everybody notices the women. By Jove, how tempting they are in their light, thin dresses, which occasionally give one a glimpse of the delicate pink flesh beneath!

“One saunters along, head up, mind alert, and eyes open. I tell you it’s great! You see her in the distance, while still a block away; you already know that she is going to please you at closer quarters. You can recognize her by the flower on her hat, the toss of her head, or her gait. She approaches, and you say to yourself: ‘Look out, here she is!’ You come closer to her and you devour her with your eyes.

“Is it a young girl running errands for some store, a young woman returning from church, or hastening to see her lover? What do you care? Her well-rounded bosom shows through the thin waist. Oh, if you could only take her in your arms and fondle and kiss her! Her glance may be timid or bold, her hair light or dark. What difference does it make? She brushes against you, and a cold shiver runs down your spine. Ah, how you wish for her all day! How many of these dear creatures have I met this way, and how wildly in love I would have been had I known them more intimately.

"Have you ever noticed that the ones we would love the most distractedly are those whom we never meet to know? Curious, isn't it? From time to time we barely catch a glimpse of some woman, the mere sight of whom thrills our senses. But it goes no further. When I think of all the adorable creatures that I have elbowed in the streets of Paris, I fairly rave. Who are they! Where are they? Where can I find them again? There is a proverb which says that happiness often passes our way; I am sure that I have often passed alongside the one who could have caught me like a linnet in the snare of her fresh beauty."

Roger des Annettes had listened smilingly. He answered: "I know that as well as you do. This is what happened to me: About five years ago, for the first time I met, on the Pont de la Concorde, a young woman who made a wonderful impression on me. She was dark, rather stout, with glossy hair, and eyebrows which nearly met above two dark eyes. On her lip was a scarcely perceptible down, which made one dream-dream as one dreams of beloved woods, on seeing a bunch of wild violets. She had a small waist and a well-developed bust, which seemed to present a challenge, offer a temptation. Her eyes were like two black spots on white enamel. Her glance was strange, vacant, unthinking, and yet wonderfully beautiful.

"I imagined that she might be a Jewess. I followed her, and then turned round to look at her, as did many others. She walked with a swinging gait that was not graceful, but somehow attracted one. At the Place de la Concorde she took a carriage, and I stood there like a fool, moved by the strongest desire that had ever assailed me.

"For about three weeks I thought only of her; and then her memory passed out of my mind.

"Six months later I descried her in the Rue de la Paix again. On seeing her I felt the same shock that one experiences on seeing a once dearly loved woman. I stopped that I might better observe her. When she passed close enough to touch me I felt as though I were standing before a red hot furnace. Then, when she had passed by, I noticed a delicious sensation, as of a cooling breeze blowing over my face. I did not follow her. I was afraid of doing something foolish. I was afraid of myself.

"She haunted all my dreams.

"It was a year before I saw her again. But just as the sun was going down on one beautiful evening in May I recognized her walking along the Avenue des Champs-Elysees. The Arc de Triomphe stood out in bold relief against the fiery glow of the sky. A golden haze filled the air; it was one of those delightful spring evenings which are the glory of Paris.

"I followed her, tormented by a desire to address her, to kneel before her, to pour forth the emotion which was choking me. Twice I passed by her only to fall back, and each time as I passed by I felt this sensation, as of scorching heat, which I had noticed in the Rue de la Paix.

"She glanced at me, and then I saw her enter a house on the Rue de Presbourg. I waited for her two hours and she did not come out. Then I decided to question the janitor. He seemed not to understand me. 'She must be visiting some one,' he said.

"The next time I was eight months without seeing her. But one freezing morning in January, I was walking along the Boulevard Malesherbes at a dog trot, so as to keep warm, when at the corner I bumped into a woman and knocked a small package out of her hand. I tried to apologize. It was she!

"At first I stood stock still from the shock; then having returned to her the package which she had dropped, I said abruptly:

"'I am both grieved and delighted, madame, to have jostled you. For more than two years I have known you, admired you, and had the most ardent wish to be presented to you; nevertheless I have been unable to find out who you are, or where you live. Please excuse these foolish words. Attribute them to a passionate desire to be numbered among your acquaintances. Such sentiments can surely offend you in no way! You do not know me. My name is Baron Roger des Annettes. Make inquiries about me, and you will find that I am a gentleman. Now, if you refuse my request, you will throw me into abject misery. Please be good to me and tell me how I can see you.'

"She looked at me with her strange vacant stare, and answered smilingly:

"'Give me your address. I will come and see you.'

"I was so dumfounded that I must have shown my surprise. But I quickly gathered my wits together and gave her a visiting card, which she slipped into her pocket with a quick, deft movement.

"Becoming bolder, I stammered:

"'When shall I see you again?'

"She hesitated, as though mentally running over her list of engagements, and then murmured:

"'Will Sunday morning suit you?'

"'I should say it would!'

"She went on, after having stared at me, judged, weighed and analyzed me with this heavy and vacant gaze which seemed to leave a quieting and deadening impression on the person towards whom it was directed.

"Until Sunday my mind was occupied day and night trying to guess who she might be and planning my course of conduct towards her. I finally decided to buy her a jewel, a beautiful little jewel, which I placed in its box on the mantelpiece, and left it there awaiting her arrival.

"I spent a restless night waiting for her.

"At ten o'clock she came, calm and quiet, and with her hand outstretched, as though she had known me for years. Drawing up a chair, I took her hat and coat and furs, and laid them aside. And then, timidly, I took her hand in mine; after that all went on without a hitch.

"Ah, my friends! what a bliss it is, to stand at a discreet distance and watch the hidden pink and blue ribbons, partly concealed, to observe the hazy lines of the beloved one's form, as they become visible through the last of the filmy garments! What a delight it is to watch the ostrich-like modesty of those who are in reality none too modest. And what is so pretty as their motions!

"Her back was turned towards me, and suddenly, my eyes were irresistibly drawn to a large black spot right between her shoulders. What could it be? Were my eyes deceiving me? But no, there it was, staring me in the face! Then my mind reverted to the faint down on her lip, the heavy eyebrows almost meeting over her coal-black eyes, her glossy black hair — I should have been prepared for some surprise.

"Nevertheless I was dumfounded, and my mind was haunted by dim visions of strange adventures. I seemed to see before me one of the evil genii of the Thousand and One Nights, one of these dangerous and crafty creatures whose mission it is to drag men down to unknown depths. I thought of Solomon, who made the Queen of Sheba walk on a mirror that he might be sure that her feet were not cloven.

"And when the time came for me to sing of love to her, my voice forsook me. At first she showed surprise, which soon turned to anger; and she said, quickly putting on her wraps:

"'It was hardly worth while for me to go out of my way to come here.'

"I wanted her to accept the ring which I had bought for her, but she replied haughtily: 'For whom do you take me, sir?' I blushed to the roots of my hair. She left without saying another word.

"There is my whole adventure. But the worst part of it is that I am now madly in love with her. I can't see a woman without thinking of her. All the others disgust me, unless they remind me of her. I cannot kiss a woman without seeing her face before me, and without suffering the torture of unsatisfied desire. She is always with me, always there, dressed or nude, my true love. She is there, beside the other one, visible but intangible. I am almost willing to believe that she was bewitched, and carried a talisman between her shoulders.

"Who is she? I don't know yet. I have met her once or twice since. I bowed, but she pretended not to recognize me. Who is she? An Oriental? Yes, doubtless an oriental Jewess! I believe that she must be a Jewess! But why? Why? I don't know!"

THE APPARITION

The subject of sequestration of the person came up in speaking of a recent lawsuit, and each of us had a story to tell — a true story, he said. We had been spending the evening together at an old family mansion in the Rue de Grenelle, just a party of intimate friends. The old Marquis de la Tour-Samuel, who was eighty-two, rose, and, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, said in his somewhat shaky voice:

"I also know of something strange, so strange that it has haunted me all my life. It is now fifty-six years since the incident occurred, and yet not a month passes that I do not see it again in a dream, so great is the impression of fear it has left on my mind. For ten minutes I experienced such horrible fright that ever since then a sort of constant terror has remained with me. Sudden noises startle me violently, and objects imperfectly distinguished at night inspire me with a mad desire to flee from them. In short, I am afraid of the dark!

"But I would not have acknowledged that before I reached my present age. Now I can say anything. I have never receded before real danger, ladies. It is, therefore, permissible, at eighty-two years of age, not to be brave in presence of imaginary danger.

"That affair so completely upset me, caused me such deep and mysterious and terrible distress, that I never spoke of it to any one. I will now tell it to you exactly as it happened, without any attempt at explanation.

"In July, 1827, I was stationed at Rouen. One day as I was walking along the quay I met a man whom I thought I recognized without being able to recall exactly who he was. Instinctively I made a movement to stop. The stranger perceived it and at once extended his hand.

"He was a friend to whom I had been deeply attached as a youth. For five years I had not seen him; he seemed to have aged half a century. His hair was quite white and he walked bent over as though completely exhausted.

He apparently understood my surprise, and he told me of the misfortune which had shattered his life.

"Having fallen madly in love with a young girl, he had married her, but after a year of more than earthly happiness she died suddenly of an affection of the heart. He left his country home on the very day of her burial and came to his town house in Rouen, where he lived, alone and unhappy, so sad and wretched that he thought constantly of suicide.

"'Since I have found you again in this manner,' he said, 'I will ask you to render me an important service. It is to go and get me out of the desk in my bedroom — our bedroom — some papers of which I have urgent need. I cannot send a servant or a business clerk, as discretion and absolute silence are necessary. As for myself, nothing on earth would induce me to reenter that house. I will give you the key of the room, which I myself locked on leaving, and the key of my desk, also a few words for my gardener, telling him to open the chateau for you. But come and breakfast with me tomorrow and we will arrange all that.'

"I promised to do him the slight favor he asked. It was, for that matter, only a ride which I could make in an hour on horseback, his property being but a few miles distant from Rouen.

"At ten o'clock the following day I breakfasted, tete-a-tete, with my friend, but he scarcely spoke.

"He begged me to pardon him; the thought of the visit I was about to make to that room, the scene of his dead happiness, overcame him, he said. He, indeed, seemed singularly agitated and preoccupied, as though undergoing some mysterious mental struggle.

"At length he explained to me exactly what I had to do. It was very simple. I must take two packages of letters and a roll of papers from the first right-hand drawer of the desk, of which I had the key. He added:

"'I need not beg you to refrain from glancing at them.'

"I was wounded at that remark and told him so somewhat sharply. He stammered:

"'Forgive me, I suffer so,' and tears came to his eyes.

"At about one o'clock I took leave of him to accomplish my mission.

"'The weather was glorious, and I trotted across the fields, listening to the song of the larks and the rhythmical clang of my sword against my boot. Then I entered the forest and walked my horse. Branches of trees caressed my face as I passed, and now and then I caught a leaf with my teeth and chewed it, from sheer gladness of heart at being alive and vigorous on such a radiant day.

"As I approached the chateau I took from my pocket the letter I had for the gardener, and was astonished at finding it sealed. I was so irritated that I was about to turn back without having fulfilled my promise, but reflected that I should thereby display undue susceptibility. My friend in his troubled condition might easily have fastened the envelope without noticing that he did so.

"The manor looked as if it had been abandoned for twenty years. The open gate was falling from its hinges, the walks were overgrown with grass and the flower beds were no longer distinguishable.

"The noise I made by kicking at a shutter brought out an old man from a side door. He seemed stunned with astonishment at seeing me. On receiving my letter, he read it, reread it, turned it over and over, looked me up and down, put the paper in his pocket and finally said:

"'Well, what is it you wish?'

"I replied shortly:

"'You ought to know, since you have just read your master's orders. I wish to enter the chateau.'

"He seemed overcome.

"'Then you are going in — into her room?'

"I began to lose patience.

"'Damn it! Are you presuming to question me?'

"He stammered in confusion:

"'No — sir — but — but it has not been opened since — since the-death. If you will be kind enough to wait five minutes I will go and — and see if— '

"I interrupted him angrily:

"'See here, what do you mean by your tricks?

"'You know very well you cannot enter the room, since here is the key!'

"He no longer objected.

"'Then, sir, I will show you the way.'

"'Show me the staircase and leave me. I'll find my way without you.'

"'But — sir — indeed— '

"This time I lost patience, and pushing him aside, went into the house.

"I first went through the kitchen, then two rooms occupied by this man and his wife. I then crossed a large hall, mounted a staircase and recognized the door described by my friend.

"I easily opened it, and entered the apartment. It was so dark that at first I could distinguish nothing. I stopped short, disagreeably affected by that disagreeable, musty odor of closed, unoccupied rooms. As my eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness I saw plainly enough a large and disordered bedroom, the bed without sheets but still retaining its mattresses and pillows, on one of which was a deep impression, as though an elbow or a head had recently rested there.

"The chairs all seemed out of place. I noticed that a door, doubtless that of a closet, had remained half open.

"I first went to the window, which I opened to let in the light, but the fastenings of the shutters had grown so rusty that I could not move them. I even tried to break them with my sword, but without success. As I was growing irritated over my useless efforts and could now see fairly well in the semi-darkness, I gave up the hope of getting more light, and went over to the writing desk.

"I seated myself in an armchair and, letting down the lid of the desk, I opened the drawer designated. It was full to the top. I needed but three packages, which I knew how to recognize, and began searching for them.

"I was straining my eyes in the effort to read the superscriptions when I seemed to hear, or, rather, feel, something rustle back of me. I paid no attention, believing that a draught from the window was moving some drapery. But in a minute or so another movement, almost imperceptible, sent a strangely disagreeable little shiver over my skin. It was so stupid to be affected, even slightly, that self-respect prevented my turning around. I had just found the second package I needed and was about to lay my hand on the third when a long and painful sigh, uttered just at my shoulder, made me bound like a madman from my seat and land several feet off. As I jumped I had turned round my hand on the hilt of my sword, and, truly, if I had not felt it at my side I should have taken to my heels like a coward.

"A tall woman dressed in white, stood gazing at me from the back of the chair where I had been sitting an instant before.

"Such a shudder ran through all my limbs that I nearly fell backward. No one who has not experienced it can understand that frightful, unreasoning terror! The mind becomes vague, the heart ceases to beat, the entire body grows as limp as a sponge.

"I do not believe in ghosts, nevertheless I collapsed from a hideous dread of the dead, and I suffered, oh! I suffered in a few moments more than in all the rest of my life from the irresistible terror of the supernatural. If she had not spoken I should have died perhaps. But she spoke, she spoke in a sweet, sad voice that set my nerves vibrating. I dare not say that I became master of myself and recovered my reason. No! I was terrified and scarcely knew what I was doing. But a certain innate pride, a remnant of soldierly instinct, made me, almost in spite of myself, maintain a bold front. She said:

"'Oh, sir, you can render me a great service.'

"I wanted to reply, but it was impossible for me to pronounce a word. Only a vague sound came from my throat. She continued:

"'Will you? You can save me, cure me. I suffer frightfully. I suffer, oh! how I suffer!' and she slowly seated herself in my armchair, still looking at me.

"'Will you?' she said.

"I nodded in assent, my voice still being paralyzed.

"Then she held out to me a tortoise-shell comb and murmured:

"'Comb my hair, oh! comb my hair; that will cure me; it must be combed. Look at my head — how I suffer; and my hair pulls so!'

"Her hair, unbound, very long and very black, it seemed to me, hung over the back of the armchair and touched the floor.

"Why did I promise? Why did I take that comb with a shudder, and why did I hold in my hands her long black hair that gave my skin a frightful cold sensation, as though I were handling snakes? I cannot tell.

"That sensation has remained in my fingers, and I still tremble in recalling it.

"I combed her hair. I handled, I know not how, those icy locks. I twisted, knotted, and unknotted, and braided them. She sighed, bowed her head, seemed happy. Suddenly she said, 'Thank you!' snatched the comb from my hands and fled by the door that I had noticed ajar.

"Left alone, I experienced for several seconds the horrible agitation of one who awakens from a nightmare. At length I regained my senses. I ran to the window and with a mighty effort burst open the shutters, letting a flood of light into the room. Immediately I sprang to the door by which that being had departed. I found it closed and immovable!

"Then the mad desire to flee overcame me like a panic the panic which soldiers know in battle. I seized the three packets of letters on the open desk, ran from the room, dashed down the stairs four steps at a time, found myself outside, I know not how, and, perceiving my horse a few steps off, leaped into the saddle and galloped away.

"I stopped only when I reached Rouen and alighted at my lodgings. Throwing the reins to my orderly, I fled to my room and shut myself in to reflect. For an hour I anxiously asked myself if I were not the victim of a hallucination. Undoubtedly I had had one of those incomprehensible nervous attacks those exaltations of mind that give rise to visions and are the stronghold of the supernatural. And I was about to believe I had seen a vision, had a hallucination, when, as I approached the window, my eyes fell, by chance, upon my breast. My military cape was covered with long black hairs! One by one, with trembling fingers, I plucked them off and threw them away.

"I then called my orderly. I was too disturbed, too upset to go and see my friend that day, and I also wished to reflect more fully upon what I ought to tell him. I sent him his letters, for which he gave the soldier a receipt. He asked after me most particularly, and, on being told I was ill — had had a sunstroke — appeared exceedingly anxious. Next morning I went to him, determined to tell him the truth. He had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned. I called again during the day; my friend was still absent. After waiting a week longer without news of him, I notified the authorities and a judicial search was instituted. Not the slightest trace of his whereabouts or manner of disappearance was discovered.

"A minute inspection of the abandoned chateau revealed nothing of a suspicious character. There was no indication that a woman had been concealed there.

"After fruitless researches all further efforts were abandoned, and for fifty-six years I have heard nothing; I know no more than before."

CLOCHETTE

How strange those old recollections are which haunt us, without our being able to get rid of them.

This one is so very old that I cannot understand how it has clung so vividly and tenaciously to my memory. Since then I have seen so many sinister things, which were either affecting or terrible, that I am astonished at not being able to pass a single day without the face of Mother Bellflower recurring to my mind's eye, just as I knew her formerly, now so long ago, when I was ten or twelve years old.

She was an old seamstress who came to my parents' house once a week, every Thursday, to mend the linen. My parents lived in one of those country houses called chateaux, which are merely old houses with gable roofs, to which are attached three or four farms lying around them.

The village, a large village, almost a market town, was a few hundred yards away, closely circling the church, a red brick church, black with age.

Well, every Thursday Mother Clochette came between half-past six and seven in the morning, and went immediately into the linen-room and began to work. She was a tall, thin, bearded or rather hairy woman, for she had a beard all over her face, a surprising, an unexpected beard, growing in improbable tufts, in curly bunches which looked as if they had been sown by a madman over that great face of a gendarme in petticoats. She had them on her nose, under her nose, round her nose, on her chin, on her cheeks; and her eyebrows, which were extraordinarily thick and long, and quite gray, bushy and bristling, looked exactly like a pair of mustaches stuck on there by mistake.

She limped, not as lame people generally do, but like a ship at anchor. When she planted her great, bony, swerving body on her sound leg, she seemed to be preparing to mount some enormous wave, and then suddenly she dipped as if to disappear in an abyss, and buried herself in the ground. Her walk reminded one of a storm, as she swayed about, and her head, which was always covered with an enormous white cap, whose ribbons fluttered down her back, seemed to traverse the horizon from north to south and from south to north, at each step.

I adored Mother Clochette. As soon as I was up I went into the linen-room where I found her installed at work, with a foot-warmer under her feet. As soon as I arrived, she made me take the foot-warmer and sit upon it, so that I might not catch cold in that large, chilly room under the roof.

“That draws the blood from your throat,” she said to me.

She told me stories, whilst mending the linen with her long crooked nimble fingers; her eyes behind her magnifying spectacles, for age had impaired her sight, appeared enormous to me, strangely profound, double.

She had, as far as I can remember the things which she told me and by which my childish heart was moved, the large heart of a poor woman. She told me what had happened in the village, how a cow had escaped from the cow-house and had been found the next morning in front of Prosper Malet’s windmill, looking at the sails turning, or about a hen’s egg which had been found in the church belfry without any one being able to understand what creature had been there to lay it, or the story of Jean-Jean Pila’s dog, who had been ten leagues to bring back his master’s breeches which a tramp had stolen whilst they were hanging up to dry out of doors, after he had been in the rain. She told me these simple adventures in such a manner, that in my mind they assumed the proportions of never-to-be -forgotten dramas, of grand and mysterious poems; and the ingenious stories invented by the poets which my mother told me in the evening, had none of the flavor, none of the breadth or vigor of the peasant woman’s narratives.

Well, one Tuesday, when I had spent all the morning in listening to Mother Clochette, I wanted to go upstairs to her again during the day after picking hazelnuts with the manservant in the wood behind the farm. I remember it all as clearly as what happened only yesterday.

On opening the door of the linen-room, I saw the old seamstress lying on the ground by the side of her chair, with her face to the ground and her arms stretched out, but still holding her needle in one hand and one of my shirts in the other. One of her legs in a blue stocking, the longer one, no doubt, was extended under her chair, and her spectacles glistened against the wall, as they had rolled away from her.

I ran away uttering shrill cries. They all came running, and in a few minutes I was told that Mother Clochette was dead.

I cannot describe the profound, poignant, terrible emotion which stirred my childish heart. I went slowly down into the drawing-room and hid myself in a dark corner, in the depths of an immense old armchair, where I knelt down and wept. I remained there a long time, no doubt, for night came on. Suddenly somebody came in with a lamp, without seeing me, however, and I heard my father and mother talking with the medical man, whose voice I recognized.

He had been sent for immediately, and he was explaining the causes of the accident, of which I understood nothing, however. Then he sat down and had a glass of liqueur and a biscuit.

He went on talking, and what he then said will remain engraved on my mind until I die! I think that I can give the exact words which he used.

“Ah!” said he, “the poor woman! She broke her leg the day of my arrival here, and I had not even had time to wash my hands after getting off the diligence before I was sent for in all haste, for it was a bad case, very bad.

“She was seventeen, and a pretty girl, very pretty! Would any one believe it? I have never told her story before, and nobody except myself and one other person who is no longer living in this part of the country ever knew it. Now that she is dead, I may be less discreet.

“Just then a young assistant-teacher came to live in the village; he was a handsome, well-made fellow, and looked like a non-commissioned officer. All the girls ran after him, but he paid no attention to them, partly because he was very much afraid of his superior, the schoolmaster, old Grabu, who occasionally got out of bed the wrong foot first.

“Old Grabu already employed pretty Hortense who has just died here, and who was afterwards nicknamed Clochette. The assistant master singled out the pretty young girl, who was, no doubt, flattered at being chosen by this impregnable conqueror; at any rate, she fell in love with him, and he succeeded in persuading her to give him a first meeting in the hay-loft behind the school, at night, after she had done her day’s sewing.

“She pretended to go home, but instead of going downstairs when she left the Grabus’ she went upstairs and hid among the hay, to wait for her lover. He soon joined her, and was beginning to say pretty things to her, when the door of the hay-loft opened and the schoolmaster appeared, and asked: ‘What are you doing up there, Sigisbert?’ Feeling sure that he would be caught, the young schoolmaster lost his presence of mind and replied stupidly: ‘I came up here to rest a little amongst the bundles of hay, Monsieur Grabu.’

“The loft was very large and absolutely dark, and Sigisbert pushed the frightened girl to the further end and said: ‘Go over there and hide yourself. I shall lose my position, so get away and hide yourself.’

“When the schoolmaster heard the whispering, he continued: ‘Why, you are not by yourself?’ ‘Yes, I am, Monsieur Grabu!’ ‘But you are not, for you are talking.’ ‘I swear I am, Monsieur Grabu.’ ‘I will soon find out,’ the old man replied, and double locking the door, he went down to get a light.

“Then the young man, who was a coward such as one frequently meets, lost his head, and becoming furious all of a sudden, he repeated: ‘Hide yourself, so that he may not find you. You will keep me from making a living for the rest of my life; you will ruin my whole career. Do hide yourself!’ They could hear the key turning in the lock again, and Hortense ran to the window which looked out on the street, opened it quickly, and then said in a low and determined voice: ‘You will come and pick me up when he is gone,’ and she jumped out.

“Old Grabu found nobody, and went down again in great surprise, and a quarter of an hour later, Monsieur Sigisbert came to me and related his adventure. The girl had remained at the foot of the wall unable to get up, as she had fallen from the second story, and I went with him to fetch her. It was raining in torrents, and I brought the unfortunate girl home with me, for the right leg was broken in three places, and the bones had come trough the flesh. She did not complain, and merely said, with admirable resignation: ‘I am punished, well punished!’

“I sent for assistance and for the work-girl’s relatives and told them a, made-up story of a runaway carriage which had knocked her down and lamed her outside my door. They believed me, and the gendarmes for a whole month tried in vain to find the author of this accident.

“That is all! And I say that this woman was a heroine and belonged to the race of those who accomplish the grandest deeds of history.

“That was her only love affair, and she died a virgin. She was a martyr, a noble soul, a sublimely devoted woman! And if I did not absolutely admire her, I should not have told you this story, which I would never tell any one during her life; you understand why.”

The doctor ceased. Mamma cried and papa said some words which I did not catch; then they left the room and I remained on my knees in the armchair and sobbed, whilst I heard a strange noise of heavy footsteps and something knocking against the side of the staircase.

They were carrying away Clochette’s body.

THE KISS

My Little Darling: So you are crying from morning until night and from night until morning, because your husband leaves you; you do not know what to do and so you ask your old aunt for advice; you must consider her quite an expert. I don't know as much as you think I do, and yet I am not entirely ignorant of the art of loving, or, rather, of making one's self loved, in which you are a little lacking. I can admit that at my age.

You say that you are all attention, love, kisses and caresses for him. Perhaps that is the very trouble; I think you kiss him too much.

My dear, we have in our hands the most terrible power in the world: LOVE.

Man is gifted with physical strength, and he exercises force. Woman is gifted with charm, and she rules with caresses. It is our weapon, formidable and invincible, but we should know how to use it.

Know well that we are the mistresses of the world! To tell the history of Love from the beginning of the world would be to tell the history of man himself: Everything springs from it, the arts, great events, customs, wars, the overthrow of empires.

In the Bible you find Delila, Judith; in fables we find Omphale, Helen; in history the Sabines, Cleopatra and many others.

Therefore we reign supreme, all-powerful. But, like kings, we must make use of delicate diplomacy.

Love, my dear, is made up of imperceptible sensations. We know that it is as strong as death, but also as frail as glass. The slightest shock breaks it, and our power crumbles, and we are never able to raise it again.

We have the power of making ourselves adored, but we lack one tiny thing, the understanding of the various kinds of caresses. In embraces we lose the sentiment of delicacy, while the man over whom we rule remains master of himself, capable of judging the foolishness of certain words. Take care, my dear; that is the defect in our armor. It is our Achilles' heel.

Do you know whence comes our real power? From the kiss, the kiss alone! When we know how to hold out and give up our lips we can become queens.

The kiss is only a preface, however, but a charming preface. More charming than the realization itself. A preface which can always be read over again, whereas one cannot always read over the book.

Yes, the meeting of lips is the most perfect, the most divine sensation given to human beings, the supreme limit of happiness: It is in the kiss alone that one sometimes seems to feel this union of souls after which we strive, the intermingling of hearts, as it were.

Do you remember the verses of Sully-Prudhomme:

Caresses are nothing but anxious bliss,
Vain attempts of love to unite souls through a kiss.

One caress alone gives this deep sensation of two beings welded into one — it is the kiss. No violent delirium of complete possession is worth this trembling approach of the lips, this first moist and fresh contact, and then the long, lingering, motionless rapture.

Therefore, my dear, the kiss is our strongest weapon, but we must take care not to dull it. Do not forget that its value is only relative, purely conventional. It continually changes according to circumstances, the state of expectancy and the ecstasy of the mind. I will call attention to one example.

Another poet, Francois Coppee, has written a line which we all remember, a line which we find delightful, which moves our very hearts.

After describing the expectancy of a lover, waiting in a room one winter’s evening, his anxiety, his nervous impatience, the terrible fear of not seeing her, he describes the arrival of the beloved woman, who at last enters hurriedly, out of breath, bringing with her part of the winter breeze, and he exclaims:

Oh! the taste of the kisses first snatched through the veil.

Is that not a line of exquisite sentiment, a delicate and charming observation, a perfect truth? All those who have hastened to a clandestine meeting, whom passion has thrown into the arms of a man, well do they know these first delicious kisses through the veil; and they tremble at the memory of them. And yet their sole charm lies in the circumstances, from being late, from the anxious expectancy, but from the purely — or, rather, impurely, if you prefer — sensual point of view, they are detestable.

Think! Outside it is cold. The young woman has walked quickly; the veil is moist from her cold breath. Little drops of water shine in the lace. The lover seizes her and presses his burning lips to her liquid breath. The moist veil, which discolors and carries the dreadful odor of chemical dye, penetrates into the young man's mouth, moistens his mustache. He does not taste the lips of his beloved, he tastes the dye of this lace moistened with cold breath. And yet, like the poet, we would all exclaim:

Oh! the taste of the kisses first snatched through the veil.

Therefore, the value of this caress being entirely a matter of convention, we must be careful not to abuse it.

Well, my dear, I have several times noticed that you are very clumsy. However, you were not alone in that fault; the majority of women lose their authority by abusing the kiss with untimely kisses. When they feel that their husband or their lover is a little tired, at those times when the heart as well as the body needs rest, instead of understanding what is going on within him, they persist in giving inopportune caresses, tire him by the obstinacy of begging lips and give caresses lavished with neither rhyme nor reason.

Trust in the advice of my experience. First, never kiss your husband in public, in the train, at the restaurant. It is bad taste; do not give in to your desires. He would feel ridiculous and would never forgive you.

Beware of useless kisses lavished in intimacy. I am sure that you abuse them. For instance, I remember one day that you did something quite shocking. Probably you do not remember it.

All three of us were together in the drawing-room, and, as you did not stand on ceremony before me, your husband was holding you on his knees and kissing you at great length on the neck, the lips and throat. Suddenly you exclaimed: "Oh! the fire!" You had been paying no attention to it, and it was almost out. A few lingering embers were glowing on the hearth. Then he rose, ran to the woodbox, from which he dragged two enormous logs with great difficulty, when you came to him with begging lips, murmuring:

"Kiss me!" He turned his head with difficulty and tried to hold up the logs at the same time. Then you gently and slowly placed your mouth on that of the poor fellow, who remained with his neck out of joint, his sides twisted, his arms almost dropping off, trembling with fatigue and tired from his desperate effort. And you kept drawing out this torturing kiss, without seeing or understanding. Then when you freed him, you began to grumble: "How badly you kiss!" No wonder!

Oh, take care of that! We all have this foolish habit, this unconscious need of choosing the most inconvenient moments. When he is carrying a glass of water, when he is putting on his shoes, when he is tying his scarf — in short, when he finds himself in any uncomfortable position — then is the time which we choose for a caress which makes him stop for a whole minute in the middle of a gesture with the sole desire of getting rid of us!

Do not think that this criticism is insignificant. Love, my dear, is a delicate thing. The least little thing offends it; know that everything depends on the tact of our caresses. An ill-placed kiss may do any amount of harm.

Try following my advice.

Your old aunt,
COLLETTE.

This story appeared in the Gaulois in November, 1882, under the pseudonym of “Maufrigneuse.”

THE LEGION OF HONOR

HOW HE GOT THE LEGION OF HONOR

From the time some people begin to talk they seem to have an overmastering desire or vocation.

Ever since he was a child, M. Caillard had only had one idea in his head — to wear the ribbon of an order. When he was still quite a small boy he used to wear a zinc cross of the Legion of Honor pinned on his tunic, just as other children wear a soldier's cap, and he took his mother's hand in the street with a proud air, sticking out his little chest with its red ribbon and metal star so that it might show to advantage.

His studies were not a success, and he failed in his examination for Bachelor of Arts; so, not knowing what to do, he married a pretty girl, as he had plenty of money of his own.

They lived in Paris, as many rich middle-class people do, mixing with their own particular set, and proud of knowing a deputy, who might perhaps be a minister some day, and counting two heads of departments among their friends.

But M. Caillard could not get rid of his one absorbing idea, and he felt constantly unhappy because he had not the right to wear a little bit of colored ribbon in his buttonhole.

When he met any men who were decorated on the boulevards, he looked at them askance, with intense jealousy. Sometimes, when he had nothing to do in the afternoon, he would count them, and say to himself: "Just let me see how many I shall meet between the Madeleine and the Rue Drouot."

Then he would walk slowly, looking at every coat with a practiced eye for the little bit of red ribbon, and when he had got to the end of his walk he always repeated the numbers aloud.

"Eight officers and seventeen knights. As many as that! It is stupid to sow the cross broadcast in that fashion. I wonder how many I shall meet going back?"

And he returned slowly, unhappy when the crowd of passers-by interfered with his vision.

He knew the places where most were to be found. They swarmed in the Palais Royal. Fewer were seen in the Avenue de l’Opera than in the Rue de la Paix, while the right side of the boulevard was more frequented by them than the left.

They also seemed to prefer certain cafes and theatres. Whenever he saw a group of white-haired old gentlemen standing together in the middle of the pavement, interfering with the traffic, he used to say to himself:

“They are officers of the Legion of Honor,” and he felt inclined to take off his hat to them.

He had often remarked that the officers had a different bearing to the mere knights. They carried their head differently, and one felt that they enjoyed a higher official consideration and a more widely extended importance.

Sometimes, however, the worthy man would be seized with a furious hatred for every one who was decorated; he felt like a Socialist toward them.

Then, when he got home, excited at meeting so many crosses — just as a poor, hungry wretch might be on passing some dainty provision shop — he used to ask in a loud voice:

“When shall we get rid of this wretched government?”

And his wife would be surprised, and ask:

“What is the matter with you to-day?”

“I am indignant,” he replied, “at the injustice I see going on around us. Oh, the Communards were certainly right!”

After dinner he would go out again and look at the shops where the decorations were sold, and he examined all the emblems of various shapes and colors. He would have liked to possess them all, and to have walked gravely at the head of a procession, with his crush hat under his arm and his breast covered with decorations, radiant as a star, amid a buzz of admiring whispers and a hum of respect.

But, alas! he had no right to wear any decoration whatever.

He used to say to himself: “It is really too difficult for any man to obtain the Legion of Honor unless he is some public functionary. Suppose I try to be appointed an officer of the Academy!”

But he did not know how to set about it, and spoke on the subject to his wife, who was stupefied.

“Officer of the Academy! What have you done to deserve it?”

He got angry. “I know what I am talking about. I only want to know how to set about it. You are quite stupid at times.”

She smiled. “You are quite right. I don’t understand anything about it.”

An idea struck him: “Suppose you were to speak to M. Rosselin, the deputy; he might be able to advise me. You understand I cannot broach the subject to him directly. It is rather difficult and delicate, but coming from you it might seem quite natural.”

Mme. Caillard did what he asked her, and M. Rosselin promised to speak to the minister about it; and then Caillard began to worry him, till the deputy told him he must make a formal application and put forward his claims.

“What were his charms?” he said. “He was not even a Bachelor of Arts.” However, he set to work and produced a pamphlet, with the title, “The People’s Right to Instruction,” but he could not finish it for want of ideas.

He sought for easier subjects, and began several in succession. The first was, “The Instruction of Children by Means of the Eye.” He wanted gratuitous theatres to be established in every poor quarter of Paris for little children. Their parents were to take them there when they were quite young, and, by means of a magic lantern, all the notions of human knowledge were to be imparted to them. There were to be regular courses. The sight would educate the mind, while the pictures would remain impressed on the brain, and thus science would, so to say, be made visible. What could be more simple than to teach universal history, natural history, geography, botany, zoology, anatomy, etc., etc., in this manner?

He had his ideas printed in pamphlets, and sent a copy to each deputy, ten to each minister, fifty to the President of the Republic, ten to each Parisian, and five to each provincial newspaper.

Then he wrote on “Street Lending-Libraries.” His idea was to have little pushcarts full of books drawn about the streets. Everyone would have a right to ten volumes a month in his home on payment of one sou.

“The people,” M. Caillard said, “will only disturb itself for the sake of its pleasures, and since it will not go to instruction, instruction must come to it,” etc., etc.

His essays attracted no attention, but he sent in his application, and he got the usual formal official reply. He thought himself sure of success, but nothing came of it.

Then he made up his mind to apply personally. He begged for an interview with the Minister of Public Instruction, and he was received by a young subordinate, who was very grave and important, and kept touching the knobs of electric bells to summon ushers, and footmen, and officials inferior to himself. He declared to M. Caillard that his matter was going on quite favorably, and advised him to continue his remarkable labors, and M. Caillard set at it again.

M. Rosselin, the deputy, seemed now to take a great interest in his success, and gave him a lot of excellent, practical advice. He, himself, was decorated, although nobody knew exactly what he had done to deserve such a distinction.

He told Caillard what new studies he ought to undertake; he introduced him to learned societies which took up particularly obscure points of science, in the hope of gaining credit and honors thereby; and he even took him under his wing at the ministry.

One day, when he came to lunch with his friend — for several months past he had constantly taken his meals there — he said to him in a whisper as he shook hands: “I have just obtained a great favor for you. The Committee of Historical Works is going to intrust you with a commission. There are some researches to be made in various libraries in France.”

Caillard was so delighted that he could scarcely eat or drink, and a week later he set out. He went from town to town, studying catalogues, rummaging in lofts full of dusty volumes, and was hated by all the librarians.

One day, happening to be at Rouen, he thought he should like to go and visit his wife, whom he had not seen for more than a week, so he took the nine o’clock train, which would land him at home by twelve at night.

He had his latchkey, so he went in without making any noise, delighted at the idea of the surprise he was going to give her. She had locked herself in. How tiresome! However, he cried out through the door:

“Jeanne, it is I!”

She must have been very frightened, for he heard her jump out of her bed and speak to herself, as if she were in a dream. Then she went to her dressing room, opened and closed the door, and went quickly up and down her room barefoot two or three times, shaking the furniture till the vases and glasses sounded. Then at last she asked:

“Is it you, Alexander?”

“Yes, yes,” he replied; “make haste and open the door.”

As soon as she had done so, she threw herself into his arms, exclaiming:

“Oh, what a fright! What a surprise! What a pleasure!”

He began to undress himself methodically, as he did everything, and took from a chair his overcoat, which he was in the habit of hanging up in the hall. But suddenly he remained motionless, struck dumb with astonishment — there was a red ribbon in the buttonhole:

“Why,” he stammered, “this — this — this overcoat has got the ribbon in it!”

In a second, his wife threw herself on him, and, taking it from his hands, she said:

“No! you have made a mistake — give it to me.”

But he still held it by one of the sleeves, without letting it go, repeating in a half-dazed manner:

“Oh! Why? Just explain — Whose overcoat is it? It is not mine, as it has the Legion of Honor on it.”

She tried to take it from him, terrified and hardly able to say:

“Listen — listen! Give it to me! I must not tell you! It is a secret. Listen to me!”

But he grew angry and turned pale.

“I want to know how this overcoat comes to be here? It does not belong to me.”

Then she almost screamed at him:

“Yes, it does; listen! Swear to me — well — you are decorated!”

She did not intend to joke at his expense.

He was so overcome that he let the overcoat fall and dropped into an armchair.

“I am — you say I am — decorated?”

“Yes, but it is a secret, a great secret.”

She had put the glorious garment into a cupboard, and came to her husband pale and trembling.

“Yes,” she continued, “it is a new overcoat that I have had made for you. But I swore that I would not tell you anything about it, as it will not be officially announced for a month or six weeks, and you were not to have known till your return from your business journey. M. Rosselin managed it for you."

"Rosselin!" he contrived to utter in his joy. "He has obtained the decoration for me? He — Oh!"

And he was obliged to drink a glass of water.

A little piece of white paper fell to the floor out of the pocket of the overcoat. Caillard picked it up; it was a visiting card, and he read out:

"Rosselin-Deputy."

"You see how it is," said his wife.

He almost cried with joy, and, a week later, it was announced in the Journal Officiel that M. Caillard had been awarded the Legion of Honor on account of his exceptional services.

THE TEST

The Bondels were a happy family, and although they frequently quarrelled about trifles, they soon became friends again.

Bondel was a merchant who had retired from active business after saving enough to allow him to live quietly; he had rented a little house at Saint-Germain and lived there with his wife. He was a quiet man with very decided opinions; he had a certain degree of education and read serious newspapers; nevertheless, he appreciated the gaulois wit. Endowed with a logical mind, and that practical common sense which is the master quality of the industrial French bourgeois, he thought little, but clearly, and reached a decision only after careful consideration of the matter in hand. He was of medium size, with a distinguished look, and was beginning to turn gray.

His wife, who was full of serious qualities, had also several faults. She had a quick temper and a frankness that bordered upon violence. She bore a grudge a long time. She had once been pretty, but had now become too stout and too red; but in her neighborhood at Saint-Germain she still passed for a very beautiful woman, who exemplified health and an uncertain temper.

Their dissensions almost always began at breakfast, over some trivial matter, and they often continued all day and even until the following day. Their simple, common, limited life imparted seriousness to the most unimportant matters, and every topic of conversation became a subject of dispute. This had not been so in the days when business occupied their minds, drew their hearts together, and gave them common interests and occupation.

But at Saint-Germain they saw fewer people. It had been necessary to make new acquaintances, to create for themselves a new world among strangers, a new existence devoid of occupations. Then the monotony of loneliness had soured each of them a little; and the quiet happiness which they had hoped and waited for with the coming of riches did not appear.

One June morning, just as they were sitting down to breakfast, Bondel asked:

“Do you know the people who live in the little red cottage at the end of the Rue du Berceau?”

Madame Bondel was out of sorts. She answered:

“Yes and no; I am acquainted with them, but I do not care to know them.”

“Why not? They seem to be very nice.”

“Because— “

“This morning I met the husband on the terrace and we took a little walk together.”

Seeing that there was danger in the air, Bendel added: “It was he who spoke to me first.”

His wife looked at him in a displeased manner. She continued: “You would have done just as well to avoid him.”

“Why?”

“Because there are rumors about them.”

“What kind?”

“Oh! rumors such as one often hears!”

M. Bondel was, unfortunately, a little hasty. He exclaimed:

“My dear, you know that I abhor gossip. As for those people, I find them very pleasant.”

She asked testily: “The wife also?”

“Why, yes; although I have barely seen her.”

The discussion gradually grew more heated, always on the same subject for lack of others. Madame Bondel obstinately refused to say what she had heard about these neighbors, allowing things to be understood without saying exactly what they were. Bendel would shrug his shoulders, grin, and exasperate his wife. She finally cried out: “Well! that gentleman is deceived by his wife, there!”

The husband answered quietly: “I can’t see how that affects the honor of a man.”

She seemed dumfounded: “What! you don’t see? — you don’t see? — well, that’s too much! You don’t see! — why, it’s a public scandal! he is disgraced!”

He answered: “Ah! by no means! Should a man be considered disgraced because he is deceived, because he is betrayed, robbed? No, indeed! I’ll grant you that that may be the case for the wife, but as for him— “

She became furious, exclaiming: “For him as well as for her. They are both in disgrace; it’s a public shame.”

Bondel, very calm, asked: “First of all, is it true? Who can assert such a thing as long as no one has been caught in the act?”

Madame Bondel was growing uneasy; she snapped: “What? Who can assert it? Why, everybody! everybody! it’s as clear as the nose on your face. Everybody knows it and is talking about it. There is not the slightest doubt.”

He was grinning: “For a long time people thought that the sun revolved around the earth. This man loves his wife and speaks of her tenderly and reverently. This whole business is nothing but lies!”

Stamping her foot, she stammered: “Do you think that that fool, that idiot, knows anything about it?”

Bondel did not grow angry; he was reasoning clearly: “Excuse me. This gentleman is no fool. He seemed to me, on the contrary, to be very intelligent and shrewd; and you can’t make me believe that a man with brains doesn’t notice such a thing in his own house, when the neighbors, who are not there, are ignorant of no detail of this liaison — for I’ll warrant that they know everything.”

Madame Bondel had a fit of angry mirth, which irritated her husband’s nerves. She laughed: “Ha! ha! ha! they’re all the same! There’s not a man alive who could discover a thing like that unless his nose was stuck into it!”

The discussion was wandering to other topics now. She was exclaiming over the blindness of deceived husbands, a thing which he doubted and which she affirmed with such airs of personal contempt that he finally grew angry. Then the discussion became an angry quarrel, where she took the side of the women and he defended the men. He had the conceit to declare: “Well, I swear that if I had ever been deceived, I should have noticed it, and immediately, too. And I should have taken away your desire for such things in such a manner that it would have taken more than one doctor to set you on foot again!”

Boiling with anger, she cried out to him: “You! you! why, you’re as big a fool as the others, do you hear!”

He still maintained: “I can swear to you that I am not!”

She laughed so impertinently that he felt his heart beat and a chill run down his back. For the third time he said:

“I should have seen it!”

She rose, still laughing in the same manner. She slammed the door and left the room, saying: “Well! if that isn’t too much!”

Bondel remained alone, ill at ease. That insolent, provoking laugh had touched him to the quick. He went outside, walked, dreamed. The realization of the loneliness of his new life made him sad and morbid. The neighbor, whom he had met that morning, came to him with outstretched hands. They continued their walk together. After touching on various subjects they came to talk of their wives. Both seemed to have something to confide, something inexpressible, vague, about these beings associated with their lives; their wives. The neighbor was saying:

“Really, at times, one might think that they bear some particular ill-will toward their husband, just because he is a husband. I love my wife — I love her very much; I appreciate and respect her; well! there are times when she seems to have more confidence and faith in our friends than in me.”

Bondel immediately thought: “There is no doubt; my wife was right!”

When he left this man he began to think things over again. He felt in his soul a strange confusion of contradictory ideas, a sort of interior burning; that mocking, impertinent laugh kept ringing in his ears and seemed to say: “Why; you are just the same as the others, you fool!” That was indeed bravado, one of those pieces of impudence of which a woman makes use when she dares everything, risks everything, to wound and humiliate the man who has aroused her ire. This poor man must also be one of those deceived husbands, like so many others. He had said sadly: “There are times when she seems to have more confidence and faith in our friends than in me.” That is how a husband formulated his observations on the particular attentions of his wife for another man. That was all. He had seen nothing more. He was like the rest — all the rest!

And how strangely Bondel’s own wife had laughed as she said: “You, too — you, too.” How wild and imprudent these creatures are who can arouse such suspicions in the heart for the sole purpose of revenge!

He ran over their whole life since their marriage, reviewed his mental list of their acquaintances, to see whether she had ever appeared to show more confidence in any one else than in himself. He never had suspected any one, he was so calm, so sure of her, so confident.

But, now he thought of it, she had had a friend, an intimate friend, who for almost a year had dined with them three times a week. Tancret, good old Tancret, whom he, Bendel, loved as a brother and whom he continued to see on the sly, since his wife, he did not know why, had grown angry at the charming fellow.

He stopped to think, looking over the past with anxious eyes. Then he grew angry at himself for harboring this shameful insinuation of the defiant, jealous, bad ego which lives in all of us. He blamed and accused himself when he remembered the visits and the demeanor of this friend whom his wife had dismissed for no apparent reason. But, suddenly, other memories returned to him, similar ruptures due to the vindictive character of Madame Bondel, who never pardoned a slight. Then he laughed frankly at himself for the doubts which he had nursed; and he remembered the angry looks of his wife as he would tell her, when he returned at night: “I saw good old Tancret, and he wished to be remembered to you,” and he reassured himself.

She would invariably answer: “When you see that gentleman you can tell him that I can very well dispense with his remembrances.” With what an irritated, angry look she would say these words! How well one could feel that she did not and would not forgive — and he had suspected her even for a second? Such foolishness!

But why did she grow so angry? She never had given the exact reason for this quarrel. She still bore him that grudge! Was it? — But no — no — and Bondel declared that he was lowering himself by even thinking of such things.

Yes, he was undoubtedly lowering himself, but he could not help thinking of it, and he asked himself with terror if this thought which had entered into his mind had not come to stop, if he did not carry in his heart the seed of fearful torment. He knew himself; he was a man to think over his doubts, as formerly he would ruminate over his commercial operations, for days and nights, endlessly weighing the pros and the cons.

He was already becoming excited; he was walking fast and losing his calmness. A thought cannot be downed. It is intangible, cannot be caught, cannot be killed.

Suddenly a plan occurred to him; it was bold, so bold that at first he doubted whether he would carry it out.

Each time that he met Tancret, his friend would ask for news of Madame Bondel, and Bondel would answer: “She is still a little angry.” Nothing more. Good Lord! What a fool he had been! Perhaps!

Well, he would take the train to Paris, go to Tancret, and bring him back with him that very evening, assuring him that his wife's mysterious anger had disappeared. But how would Madame Bondel act? What a scene there would be! What anger! what scandal! What of it? — that would be revenge! When she should come face to face with him, unexpectedly, he certainly ought to be able to read the truth in their expressions.

He immediately went to the station, bought his ticket, got into the car, and as soon as he felt him self being carried away by the train, he felt a fear, a kind of dizziness, at what he was going to do. In order not to weaken, back down, and return alone, he tried not to think of the matter any longer, to bring his mind to bear on other affairs, to do what he had decided to do with a blind resolution; and he began to hum tunes from operettas and music halls until he reached Paris.

As soon as he found himself walking along the streets that led to Tancret's, he felt like stopping, He paused in front of several shops, noticed the prices of certain objects, was interested in new things, felt like taking a glass of beer, which was not his usual custom; and as he approached his friend's dwelling he ardently hoped not meet him. But Tancret was at home, alone, reading. He jumped up in surprise, crying: "Ah! Bondel! what luck!"

Bondel, embarrassed, answered: "Yes, my dear fellow, I happened to be in Paris, and I thought I'd drop in and shake hands with you."

"That's very nice, very nice! The more so that for some time you have not favored me with your presence very often."

"Well, you see — even against one's will, one is often influenced by surrounding conditions, and as my wife seemed to bear you some ill-will"

"Jove! 'seemed' — she did better than that, since she showed me the door."

"What was the reason? I never heard it."

"Oh! nothing at all — a bit of foolishness — a discussion in which we did not both agree."

"But what was the subject of this discussion?"

"A lady of my acquaintance, whom you may perhaps know by name, Madame Boutin."

"Ah! really. Well, I think that my wife has forgotten her grudge, for this very morning she spoke to me of you in very pleasant terms."

Tancret started and seemed so dumfounded that for a few minutes he could find nothing to say. Then he asked: "She spoke of me — in pleasant terms?”

“Yes.”

“You are sure?”

“Of course I am. I am not dreaming.”

“And then?”

“And then — as I was coming to Paris I thought that I would please you by coming to tell you the good news.”

“Why, yes — why, yes— “

Bondel appeared to hesitate; then, after a short pause, he added: “I even had an idea.”

“What is it?”

“To take you back home with me to dinner.”

Tancret, who was naturally prudent, seemed a little worried by this proposition, and he asked: “Oh! really — is it possible? Are we not exposing ourselves to — to — a scene?”

“No, no, indeed!”

“Because, you know, Madame Bendel bears malice for a long time.”

“Yes, but I can assure you that she no longer bears you any ill — will. I am even convinced that it will be a great pleasure for her to see you thus, unexpectedly.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really!”

“Well, then! let us go along. I am delighted. You see, this misunderstanding was very unpleasant for me.”

They set out together toward the Saint-Lazare station, arm in arm. They made the trip in silence. Both seemed absorbed in deep meditation. Seated in the car, one opposite the other, they looked at each other without speaking, each observing that the other was pale.

Then they left the train and once more linked arms as if to unite against some common danger. After a walk of a few minutes they stopped, a little out of breath, before Bondel’s house. Bondel ushered his friend into the parlor, called the servant, and asked: “Is madame at home?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Please ask her to come down at once.”

They dropped into two armchairs and waited. Both were filled with the same longing to escape before the appearance of the much-feared person.

A well-known, heavy tread could be heard descending the stairs. A hand moved the knob, and both men watched the brass handle turn. Then the door opened wide, and Madame Bondel stopped and looked to see who was there before she entered. She looked, blushed, trembled, retreated a step, then stood motionless, her cheeks aflame and her hands resting against the sides of the door frame.

Tancret, as pale as if about to faint, had arisen, letting fall his hat, which rolled along the floor. He stammered out: “Mon Dieu — madame — it is I — I thought — I ventured — I was so sorry— “

As she did not answer, he continued: “Will you forgive me?”

Then, quickly, carried away by some impulse, she walked toward him with her hands outstretched; and when he had taken, pressed, and held these two hands, she said, in a trembling, weak little voice, which was new to her husband:

“Ah! my dear friend — how happy I am!”

And Bondel, who was watching them, felt an icy chill run over him, as if he had been dipped in a cold bath.

FOUND ON A DROWNED MAN

Madame, you ask me whether I am laughing at you? You cannot believe that a man has never been in love. Well, then, no, no, I have never loved, never!

Why is this? I really cannot tell. I have never experienced that intoxication of the heart which we call love! Never have I lived in that dream, in that exaltation, in that state of madness into which the image of a woman casts us. I have never been pursued, haunted, roused to fever heat, lifted up to Paradise by the thought of meeting, or by the possession of, a being who had suddenly become for me more desirable than any good fortune, more beautiful than any other creature, of more consequence than the whole world! I have never wept, I have never suffered on account of any of you. I have not passed my nights sleepless, while thinking of her. I have no experience of waking thoughts bright with thought and memories of her. I have never known the wild rapture of hope before her arrival, or the divine sadness of regret when she went from me, leaving behind her a delicate odor of violet powder.

I have never been in love.

I have also often asked myself why this is. And truly I can scarcely tell. Nevertheless I have found some reasons for it; but they are of a metaphysical character, and perhaps you will not be able to appreciate them.

I suppose I am too critical of women to submit to their fascination. I ask you to forgive me for this remark. I will explain what I mean. In every creature there is a moral being and a physical being. In order to love, it would be necessary for me to find a harmony between these two beings which I have never found. One always predominates; sometimes the moral, sometimes the physical.

The intellect which we have a right to require in a woman, in order to love her, is not the same as the virile intellect. It is more, and it is less. A woman must be frank, delicate, sensitive, refined, impressionable. She has no need of either power or initiative in thought, but she must have kindness, elegance, tenderness, coquetry and that faculty of assimilation which, in a little while, raises her to an equality with him who shares her life. Her greatest quality must be tact, that subtle sense which is to the mind what touch is to the body. It reveals to her a thousand little things, contours, angles and forms on the plane of the intellectual.

Very frequently pretty women have not intellect to correspond with their personal charms. Now, the slightest lack of harmony strikes me and pains me at the first glance. In friendship this is not of importance. Friendship is a compact in which one fairly shares defects and merits. We may judge of friends, whether man or woman, giving them credit for what is good, and overlooking what is bad in them, appreciating them at their just value, while giving ourselves up to an intimate, intense and charming sympathy.

In order to love, one must be blind, surrender one's self absolutely, see nothing, question nothing, understand nothing. One must adore the weakness as well as the beauty of the beloved object, renounce all judgment, all reflection, all perspicacity.

I am incapable of such blindness and rebel at unreasoning subjugation. This is not all. I have such a high and subtle idea of harmony that nothing can ever fulfill my ideal. But you will call me a madman. Listen to me. A woman, in my opinion, may have an exquisite soul and charming body without that body and that soul being in perfect harmony with one another. I mean that persons who have noses made in a certain shape should not be expected to think in a certain fashion. The fat have no right to make use of the same words and phrases as the thin. You, who have blue eyes, madame, cannot look at life and judge of things and events as if you had black eyes. The shade of your eyes should correspond, by a sort of fatality, with the shade of your thought. In perceiving these things, I have the scent of a bloodhound. Laugh if you like, but it is so.

And yet, once I imagined that I was in love for an hour, for a day. I had foolishly yielded to the influence of surrounding circumstances. I allowed myself to be beguiled by a mirage of Dawn. Would you like me to tell you this short story?

I met, one evening, a pretty, enthusiastic little woman who took a poetic fancy to spend a night with me in a boat on a river. I would have preferred a room and a bed; however, I consented to the river and the boat.

It was in the month of June. My fair companion chose a moonlight night in order the better to stimulate her imagination.

We had dined at a riverside inn and set out in the boat about ten o'clock. I thought it a rather foolish kind of adventure, but as my companion pleased me I did not worry about it. I sat down on the seat facing her; I seized the oars, and off we starred.

I could not deny that the scene was picturesque. We glided past a wooded isle full of nightingales, and the current carried us rapidly over the river covered with silvery ripples. The tree toads uttered their shrill, monotonous cry; the frogs croaked in the grass by the river's bank, and the lapping of the water as it flowed on made around us a kind of confused murmur almost imperceptible, disquieting, and gave us a vague sensation of mysterious fear.

The sweet charm of warm nights and of streams glittering in the moonlight penetrated us. It was delightful to be alive and to float along thus, and to dream and to feel at one's side a sympathetic and beautiful young woman.

I was somewhat affected, somewhat agitated, somewhat intoxicated by the pale brightness of the night and the consciousness of my proximity to a lovely woman.

"Come and sit beside me," she said.

I obeyed.

She went on:

"Recite some poetry for me."

This appeared to be rather too much. I declined; she persisted. She certainly wanted to play the game, to have a whole orchestra of sentiment, from the moon to the rhymes of poets. In the end I had to yield, and, as if in mockery, I repeated to her a charming little poem by Louis Bouilhet, of which the following are the last verses:

"I hate the poet who with tearful eye
Murmurs some name while gazing tow'rds a star,
Who sees no magic in the earth or sky,
Unless Lizette or Ninon be not far.

"The bard who in all Nature nothing sees
Divine, unless a petticoat he ties
Amorously to the branches of the trees

Or nightcap to the grass, is scarcely wise.

“He has not heard the Eternal’s thunder tone,
The voice of Nature in her various moods,
Who cannot tread the dim ravines alone,
And of no woman dream mid whispering woods.”

I expected some reproaches. Nothing of the sort. She murmured:

“How true it is!”

I was astonished. Had she understood?

Our boat had gradually approached the bank and become entangled in the branches of a willow which impeded its progress. I placed my arm round my companion’s waist, and very gently approached my lips towards her neck. But she repulsed me with an abrupt, angry movement.

“Have done, pray! How rude you are!”

I tried to draw her toward me. She resisted, caught hold of the tree, and was near flinging us both into the water. I deemed it prudent to cease my importunities.

She said:

“I would rather capsize you. I feel so happy. I want to dream. This is so delightful.” Then, in a slightly malicious tone, she added:

“Have you already forgotten the verses you repeated to me just now?”

She was right. I became silent.

She went on:

“Come, now!”

And I plied the oars once more.

I began to think the night long and my position ridiculous.

My companion said to me:

“Will you make me a promise?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“To remain quiet, well-behaved and discreet, if I permit you— “

“What? Say what you mean!”

“Here is what I mean: I want to lie down on my back at the bottom of the boat with you by my side. But I forbid you to touch me, to embrace me — in short — to caress me.”

I promised. She said warningly:

“If you move, ‘I’ll capsize the boat.”

And then we lay down side by side, our eyes turned toward the sky, while the boat glided slowly through the water. We were rocked by its gentle motion. The slight sounds of the night came to us more distinctly in the bottom of the boat, sometimes causing us to start. And I felt springing up within me a strange, poignant emotion, an infinite tenderness, something like an irresistible impulse to open my arms in order to embrace, to open my heart in order to love, to give myself, to give my thoughts, my body, my life, my entire being to some one.

My companion murmured, like one in a dream:

“Where are we; Where are we going? It seems to me that I am leaving the earth. How sweet it is! Ah, if you loved me — a little!!!”

My heart began to throb. I had no answer to give. It seemed to me that I loved her. I had no longer any violent desire. I felt happy there by her side, and that was enough for me.

And thus we remained for a long, long time without stirring. We had clasped each other’s hands; some delightful force rendered us motionless, an unknown force stronger than ourselves, an alliance, chaste, intimate, absolute, of our beings lying there side by side, belonging to each other without contact. What was this? How do I know? Love, perhaps?

Little by little the dawn appeared. It was three o’clock in the morning. Slowly a great brightness spread over the sky. The boat knocked up against something. I rose up. We had come close to a tiny islet.

But I remained enchanted, in an ecstasy. Before us stretched the firmament, red, pink, violet, spotted with fiery clouds resembling golden vapor. The river was glowing with purple and three houses on one side of it seemed to be burning.

I bent toward my companion. I was going to say, “Oh! look!” But I held my tongue, quite dazed, and I could no longer see anything except her. She, too, was rosy, with rosy flesh tints with a deeper tinge that was partly a reflection of the hue of the sky. Her tresses were rosy; her eyes were rosy; her teeth were rosy; her dress, her laces, her smile, all were rosy. And in truth I believed, so overpowering was the illusion, that the dawn was there in the flesh before me.

She rose softly to her feet, holding out her lips to me; and I moved toward her, trembling, delirious feeling indeed that I was going to kiss Heaven, to kiss happiness, to kiss a dream that had become a woman, to kiss the ideal which had descended into human flesh.

She said to me: “You have a caterpillar in your hair.” And, suddenly, I felt as sad as if I had lost all hope in life.

That is all, madame. It is puerile, silly, stupid. But I am sure that since that day it would be impossible for me to love. And yet — who can tell?

[The young man upon whom this letter was found was yesterday taken out of the Seine between Bougival and Marly. An obliging bargeman, who had searched the pockets in order to ascertain the name of the deceased, brought this paper to the author.]

THE ORPHAN

Mademoiselle Source had adopted this boy under very sad circumstances. She was at the time thirty-six years old. Being disfigured through having as a child slipped off her nurse's lap into the fireplace and burned her face shockingly, she had determined not to marry, for she did not want any man to marry her for her money.

A neighbor of hers, left a widow just before her child was born, died in giving birth, without leaving a sou. Mademoiselle Source took the new-born child, put him out to nurse, reared him, sent him to a boarding-school, then brought him home in his fourteenth year, in order to have in her empty house somebody who would love her, who would look after her, and make her old age pleasant.

She had a little country place four leagues from Rennes, and she now dispensed with a servant; her expenses having increased to more than double since this orphan's arrival, her income of three thousand francs was no longer sufficient to support three persons.

She attended to the housekeeping and cooking herself, and sent out the boy on errands, letting him also occupy himself in cultivating the garden. He was gentle, timid, silent, and affectionate. And she experienced a deep happiness, a fresh happiness when he kissed her without surprise or horror at her disfigurement. He called her "Aunt," and treated her as a mother.

In the evening they both sat down at the fireside, and she made nice little dainties for him. She heated some wine and toasted a slice of bread, and it made a charming little meal before going to bed. She often took him on her knees and covered him with kisses, murmuring tender words in his ear. She called him: "My little flower, my cherub, my adored angel, my divine jewel." He softly accepted her caresses, hiding his head on the old maid's shoulder. Although he was now nearly fifteen, he had remained small and weak, and had a rather sickly appearance.

Sometimes Mademoiselle Source took him to the city, to see two married female relatives of hers, distant cousins, who were living in the suburbs, and who were the only members of her family in existence. The two women had always found fault with her, for having adopted this boy, on account of the inheritance; but for all that, they gave her a cordial welcome, having still hopes of getting a share for themselves, a third, no doubt, if what she possessed were only equally divided.

She was happy, very happy, always occupied with her adopted child. She bought books for him to improve his mind, and he became passionately fond of reading.

He no longer climbed on her knee to pet her as he had formerly done; but, instead, would go and sit down in his little chair in the chimney-corner and open a volume. The lamp placed at the edge of the Tittle table above his head shone on his curly hair, and on a portion of his forehead; he did not move, he did not raise his eyes or make any gesture. He read on, interested, entirely absorbed in the story he was reading.

Seated opposite to him, she would gaze at him earnestly, astonished at his studiousness, often on the point of bursting into tears.

She said to him occasionally: “You will fatigue yourself, my treasure!” hoping that he would raise his head, and come across to embrace her; but he did not even answer her; he had not heard or understood what she was saying; he paid no attention to anything save what he read in those pages.

For two years he devoured an incalculable number of volumes. His character changed.

After this, he asked Mademoiselle Source several times for money, which she gave him. As he always wanted more, she ended by refusing, for she was both methodical and decided, and knew how to act rationally when it was necessary to do so. By dint of entreaties he obtained a large sum from her one night; but when he begged her for more a few days later, she showed herself inflexible, and did not give way to him further, in fact.

He appeared to be satisfied with her decision.

He again became quiet, as he had formerly been, remaining seated for entire hours, without moving, plunged in deep reverie. He now did not even talk to Madame Source, merely answering her remarks with short, formal words. Nevertheless, he was agreeable and attentive in his manner toward her; but he never embraced her now.

She had by this time grown slightly afraid of him when they sat facing one another at night on opposite sides of the fireplace. She wanted to wake him up, to make him say something, no matter what, that would break this dreadful silence, which was like the darkness of a wood. But he did not appear to listen to her, and she shuddered with the terror of a poor feeble woman when she had spoken to him five or six times successively without being able to get a word out of him.

What was the matter with him? What was going on in that closed-up head? When she had remained thus two or three hours opposite him, she felt as if she were going insane, and longed to rush away and to escape into the open country in order to avoid that mute, eternal companionship and also some vague danger, which she could not define, but of which she had a presentiment.

She frequently wept when she was alone. What was the matter with him? When she expressed a wish, he unmurmuringly carried it into execution. When she wanted anything brought from the city, he immediately went there to procure it. She had no complaint to make of him; no, indeed! And yet —

Another year flitted by, and it seemed to her that a fresh change had taken place in the mind of the young man. She perceived it; she felt it; she divined it. How? No matter! She was sure she was not mistaken; but she could not have explained in what manner the unknown thoughts of this strange youth had changed.

It seemed to her that, until now, he had been like a person in a hesitating frame of mind, who had suddenly arrived at a determination. This idea came to her one evening as she met his glance, a fixed, singular glance which she had not seen in his face before.

Then he commenced to watch her incessantly, and she wished she could hide herself in order to avoid that cold eye riveted on her.

He kept staring at her, evening after evening, for hours together, only averting his eyes when she said, utterly unnerved:

“Do not look at me like that, my child!”

Then he would lower his head.

But the moment her back was turned she once more felt that his eyes were upon her. Wherever she went, he pursued her with his persistent gaze.

Sometimes, when she was walking in her little garden, she suddenly noticed him hidden behind a bush, as if he were lying in wait for her; and, again, when she sat in front of the house mending stockings while he was digging some vegetable bed, he kept continually watching her in a surreptitious manner, as he worked.

It was in vain that she asked him:

"What's the matter with you, my boy? For the last three years, you have become very different. I don't recognize you. Do tell me what ails you, and what you are thinking of."

He invariably replied, in a quiet, weary tone:

"Why, nothing ails me, aunt!"

And when she persisted:

"Ah! my child, answer me, answer me when I speak to you. If you knew what grief you caused me, you would always answer, and you would not look at me that way. Have you any trouble? Tell me! I'll comfort you!"

He went away, with a tired air, murmuring:

"But there is nothing the matter with me, I assure you."

He had not grown much, having always a childish look, although his features were those of a man. They were, however, hard and badly cut. He seemed incomplete, abortive, only half finished, and disquieting as a mystery. He was a self-contained, unapproachable being, in whom there seemed always to be some active, dangerous mental labor going on. Mademoiselle Source was quite conscious of all this, and she could not sleep at night, so great was her anxiety. Frightful terrors, dreadful nightmares assailed her. She shut herself up in her own room, and barricaded the door, tortured by fear.

What was she afraid of? She could not tell.

She feared everything, the night, the walls, the shadows thrown by the moon on the white curtains of the windows, and, above all, she feared him.

Why?

What had she to fear? Did she know what it was?

She could live this way no longer! She felt certain that a misfortune threatened her, a frightful misfortune.

She set forth secretly one morning, and went into the city to see her relatives. She told them about the matter in a gasping voice. The two women thought she was going mad and tried to reassure her.

She said:

"If you knew the way he looks at me from morning till night. He never takes his eyes off me! At times, I feel a longing to cry for help, to call in the neighbors, so much am I afraid. But what could I say to them? He does nothing but look at me."

The two female cousins asked:

"Is he ever brutal to you? Does he give you sharp answers?"

She replied:

"No, never; he does everything I wish; he works hard: he is steady; but I am so frightened that I care nothing for that. He is planning something, I am certain of that — quite certain. I don't care to remain all alone like that with him in the country."

The relatives, astonished at her words, declared that people would be amazed, would not understand; and they advised her to keep silent about her fears and her plans, without, however, dissuading her from coming to reside in the city, hoping in that way that the entire inheritance would eventually fall into their hands.

They even promised to assist her in selling her house, and in finding another, near them.

Mademoiselle Source returned home. But her mind was so much upset that she trembled at the slightest noise, and her hands shook whenever any trifling disturbance agitated her.

Twice she went again to consult her relatives, quite determined now not to remain any longer in this way in her lonely dwelling. At last, she found a little cottage in the suburbs, which suited her, and she privately bought it.

The signature of the contract took place on a Tuesday morning, and Mademoiselle Source devoted the rest of the day to the preparations for her change of residence.

At eight o'clock in the evening she got into the diligence which passed within a few hundred yards of her house, and she told the conductor to put her down in the place where she usually alighted. The man called out to her as he whipped his horses:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Source — good night!"

She replied as she walked on:

"Good evening, Pere Joseph." Next morning, at half-past seven, the postman who conveyed letters to the village noticed at the cross-road, not far from the high road, a large splash of blood not yet dry. He said to himself: "Hallo! some boozer must have had a nose bleed."

But he perceived ten paces farther on a pocket handkerchief also stained with blood. He picked it up. The linen was fine, and the postman, in alarm, made his way over to the ditch, where he fancied he saw a strange object.

Mademoiselle Source was lying at the bottom on the grass, her throat cut with a knife.

An hour later, the gendarmes, the examining magistrate, and other authorities made an inquiry as to the cause of death.

The two female relatives, called as witnesses, told all about the old maid's fears and her last plans.

The orphan was arrested. After the death of the woman who had adopted him, he wept from morning till night, plunged, at least to all appearance, in the most violent grief.

He proved that he had spent the evening up to eleven o'clock in a cafe. Ten persons had seen him, having remained there till his departure.

The driver of the diligence stated that he had set down the murdered woman on the road between half-past nine and ten o'clock.

The accused was acquitted. A will, drawn up a long time before, which had been left in the hands of a notary in Rennes, made him sole heir. So he inherited everything.

For a long time, the people of the country boycotted him, as they still suspected him. His house, that of the dead woman, was looked upon as accursed. People avoided him in the street.

But he showed himself so good-natured, so open, so familiar, that gradually these horrible doubts were forgotten. He was generous, obliging, ready to talk to the humblest about anything, as long as they cared to talk to him.

The notary, Maitre Rameau, was one of the first to take his part, attracted by his smiling loquacity. He said at a dinner, at the tax collector's house:

"A man who speaks with such facility and who is always in good humor could not have such a crime on his conscience."

Touched by his argument, the others who were present reflected, and they recalled to mind the long conversations with this man who would almost compel them to stop at the road corners to listen to his ideas, who insisted on their going into his house when they were passing by his garden, who could crack a joke better than the lieutenant of the gendarmes himself, and who possessed such contagious gaiety that, in spite of the repugnance with which he inspired them, they could not keep from always laughing in his company.

All doors were opened to him after a time.

He is to-day the mayor of his township.

THE BEGGAR

He had seen better days, despite his present misery and infirmities.

At the age of fifteen both his legs had been crushed by a carriage on the Varville highway. From that time forth he begged, dragging himself along the roads and through the farmyards, supported by crutches which forced his shoulders up to his ears. His head looked as if it were squeezed in between two mountains.

A foundling, picked up out of a ditch by the priest of Les Billettes on the eve of All Saints' Day and baptized, for that reason, Nicholas Toussaint, reared by charity, utterly without education, crippled in consequence of having drunk several glasses of brandy given him by the baker (such a funny story!) and a vagabond all his life afterward — the only thing he knew how to do was to hold out his hand for alms.

At one time the Baroness d'Avary allowed him to sleep in a kind of recess spread with straw, close to the poultry yard in the farm adjoining the chateau, and if he was in great need he was sure of getting a glass of cider and a crust of bread in the kitchen. Moreover, the old lady often threw him a few pennies from her window. But she was dead now.

In the villages people gave him scarcely anything — he was too well known. Everybody had grown tired of seeing him, day after day for forty years, dragging his deformed and tattered person from door to door on his wooden crutches. But he could not make up his mind to go elsewhere, because he knew no place on earth but this particular corner of the country, these three or four villages where he had spent the whole of his miserable existence. He had limited his begging operations and would not for worlds have passed his accustomed bounds.

He did not even know whether the world extended for any distance beyond the trees which had always bounded his vision. He did not ask himself the question. And when the peasants, tired of constantly meeting him in their fields or along their lanes, exclaimed: "Why don't you go to other villages instead of always limping about here?" he did not answer, but slunk away, possessed with a vague dread of the unknown — the dread of a poor wretch who fears confusedly a thousand things — new faces, taunts, insults, the suspicious glances of people who do not know him and the policemen walking in couples on the roads. These last he always instinctively avoided, taking refuge in the bushes or behind heaps of stones when he saw them coming.

When he perceived them in the distance, 'With uniforms gleaming in the sun, he was suddenly possessed with unwonted agility — the agility of a wild animal seeking its lair. He threw aside his crutches, fell to the ground like a limp rag, made himself as small as possible and crouched like a bare under cover, his tattered vestments blending in hue with the earth on which he cowered.

He had never had any trouble with the police, but the instinct to avoid them was in his blood. He seemed to have inherited it from the parents he had never known.

He had no refuge, no roof for his head, no shelter of any kind. In summer he slept out of doors and in winter he showed remarkable skill in slipping unperceived into barns and stables. He always decamped before his presence could be discovered. He knew all the holes through which one could creep into farm buildings, and the handling of his crutches having made his arms surprisingly muscular he often hauled himself up through sheer strength of wrist into hay-lofts, where he sometimes remained for four or five days at a time, provided he had collected a sufficient store of food beforehand.

He lived like the beasts of the field. He was in the midst of men, yet knew no one, loved no one, exciting in the breasts of the peasants only a sort of careless contempt and smoldering hostility. They nicknamed him "Bell," because he hung between his two crutches like a church bell between its supports.

For two days he had eaten nothing. No one gave him anything now. Every one's patience was exhausted. Women shouted to him from their doorsteps when they saw him coming:

"Be off with you, you good-for-nothing vagabond! Why, I gave you a piece of bread only three days ago!"

And he turned on his crutches to the next house, where he was received in the same fashion.

The women declared to one another as they stood at their doors:

"We can't feed that lazy brute all the year round!"

And yet the "lazy brute" needed food every day.

He had exhausted Saint-Hilaire, Varville and Les Billettes without getting a single copper or so much as a dry crust. His only hope was in Tournolles, but to reach this place he would have to walk five miles along the highroad, and he felt so weary that he could hardly drag himself another yard. His stomach and his pocket were equally empty, but he started on his way.

It was December and a cold wind blew over the fields and whistled through the bare branches of the trees; the clouds careered madly across the black, threatening sky. The cripple dragged himself slowly along, raising one crutch after the other with a painful effort, propping himself on the one distorted leg which remained to him.

Now and then he sat down beside a ditch for a few moments' rest. Hunger was gnawing his vitals, and in his confused, slow-working mind he had only one idea-to eat-but how this was to be accomplished he did not know. For three hours he continued his painful journey. Then at last the sight of the trees of the village inspired him with new energy.

The first peasant he met, and of whom he asked alms, replied:

"So it's you again, is it, you old scamp? Shall I never be rid of you?"

And "Bell" went on his way. At every door he got nothing but hard words. He made the round of the whole village, but received not a halfpenny for his pains.

Then he visited the neighboring farms, toiling through the muddy land, so exhausted that he could hardly raise his crutches from the ground. He met with the same reception everywhere. It was one of those cold, bleak days, when the heart is frozen and the temper irritable, and hands do not open either to give money or food.

When he had visited all the houses he knew, "Bell" sank down in the corner of a ditch running across Chiquet's farmyard. Letting his crutches slip to the ground, he remained motionless, tortured by hunger, but hardly intelligent enough to realize to the full his unutterable misery.

He awaited he knew not what, possessed with that vague hope which persists in the human heart in spite of everything. He awaited in the corner of the farmyard in the biting December wind, some mysterious aid from Heaven or from men, without the least idea whence it was to arrive. A number of black hens ran hither and thither, seeking their food in the earth which supports all living things. Ever now and then they snapped up in their beaks a grain of corn or a tiny insect; then they continued their slow, sure search for nutriment.

"Bell" watched them at first without thinking of anything. Then a thought occurred rather to his stomach than to his mind — the thought that one of those fowls would be good to eat if it were cooked over a fire of dead wood.

He did not reflect that he was going to commit a theft. He took up a stone which lay within reach, and, being of skillful aim, killed at the first shot the fowl nearest to him. The bird fell on its side, flapping its wings. The others fled wildly hither and thither, and "Bell," picking up his crutches, limped across to where his victim lay.

Just as he reached the little black body with its crimsoned head he received a violent blow in his back which made him let go his hold of his crutches and sent him flying ten paces distant. And Farmer Chiquet, beside himself with rage, cuffed and kicked the marauder with all the fury of a plundered peasant as "Bell" lay defenceless before him.

The farm hands came up also and joined their master in cuffing the lame beggar. Then when they were tired of beating him they carried him off and shut him up in the woodshed, while they went to fetch the police.

"Bell," half dead, bleeding and perishing with hunger, lay on the floor. Evening came — then night — then dawn. And still he had not eaten.

About midday the police arrived. They opened the door of the woodshed with the utmost precaution, fearing resistance on the beggar's part, for Farmer Chiquet asserted that he had been attacked by him and had had great, difficulty in defending himself.

The sergeant cried:

"Come, get up!"

But "Bell" could not move. He did his best to raise himself on his crutches, but without success. The police, thinking his weakness feigned, pulled him up by main force and set him between the crutches.

Fear seized him — his native fear of a uniform, the fear of the game in presence of the sportsman, the fear of a mouse for a cat-and by the exercise of almost superhuman effort he succeeded in remaining upright.

"Forward!" said the sergeant. He walked. All the inmates of the farm watched his departure. The women shook their fists at him the men scoffed at and insulted him. He was taken at last! Good riddance! He went off between his two guards. He mustered sufficient energy — the energy of despair — to drag himself along until the evening, too dazed to know what was happening to him, too frightened to understand.

People whom he met on the road stopped to watch him go by and peasants muttered:

“It’s some thief or other.”

Toward evening he reached the country town. He had never been so far before. He did not realize in the least what he was there for or what was to become of him. All the terrible and unexpected events of the last two days, all these unfamiliar faces and houses struck dismay into his heart.

He said not a word, having nothing to say because he understood nothing. Besides, he had spoken to no one for so many years past that he had almost lost the use of his tongue, and his thoughts were too indeterminate to be put into words.

He was shut up in the town jail. It did not occur to the police that he might need food, and he was left alone until the following day. But when in the early morning they came to examine him he was found dead on the floor. Such an astonishing thing!

THE RABBIT

Old Lecacheur appeared at the door of his house between five and a quarter past five in the morning, his usual hour, to watch his men going to work.

He was only half awake, his face was red, and with his right eye open and the left nearly closed, he was buttoning his braces over his fat stomach with some difficulty, at the same time looking into every corner of the farmyard with a searching glance. The sun darted its oblique rays through the beech trees by the side of the ditch and athwart the apple trees outside, and was making the cocks crow on the dunghill, and the pigeons coo on the roof. The smell of the cow stable came through the open door, and blended in the fresh morning air with the pungent odor of the stable, where the horses were neighing, with their heads turned toward the light.

As soon as his trousers were properly fastened, Lecacheur came out, and went, first of all, toward the hen house to count the morning's eggs, for he had been afraid of thefts for some time; but the servant girl ran up to him with lifted arms and cried:

"Master! master! they have stolen a rabbit during the night."

"A rabbit?"

"Yes, master, the big gray rabbit, from the hutch on the left"; whereupon the farmer completely opened his left eye, and said, simply:

"I must see about that."

And off he went to inspect it. The hutch had been broken open and the rabbit was gone. Then he became thoughtful, closed his right eye again, and scratched his nose, and after a little consideration, he said to the frightened girl, who was standing stupidly before her master:

"Go and fetch the gendarmes; say I expect them as soon as possible."

Lecacheur was mayor of the village, Pavigny-le-Gras, and ruled it like a master, on account of his money and position, and as soon as the servant had disappeared in the direction of the village, which was only about five hundred yards off, he went into the house to have his morning coffee and to discuss the matter with his wife, whom he found on her knees in front of the fire, trying to make it burn quickly, and as soon as he got to the door, he said:

"Somebody has stolen the gray rabbit."

She turned round so suddenly that she found herself sitting on the floor, and looking at her husband with distressed eyes, she said:

"What is it, Cacheux? Somebody has stolen a rabbit?"

"The big gray one."

She sighed.

"What a shame! Who can have done it?"

She was a little, thin, active, neat woman, who knew all about farming. Lecacheur had his own ideas about the matter.

"It must be that fellow, Polyte."

His wife got up suddenly and said in a furious voice:

"He did it! he did it! You need not look for any one else. He did it! You have said it, Cacheux!"

All her peasant's fury, all her avarice, all her rage of a saving woman against the man of whom she had always been suspicious, and against the girl whom she had always suspected, showed themselves in the contraction of her mouth, and the wrinkles in the cheeks and forehead of her thin, exasperated face.

"And what have you done?" she asked.

"I have sent for the gendarmes."

This Polyte was a laborer, who had been employed on the farm for a few days, and who had been dismissed by Lecacheur for an insolent answer. He was an old soldier, and was supposed to have retained his habits of marauding and debauchery front his campaigns in Africa. He did anything for a livelihood, but whether he were a mason, a navvy, a reaper, whether he broke stones or lopped trees, he was always lazy, and so he remained nowhere for long, and had, at times, to change his neighborhood to obtain work.

From the first day that he came to the farm, Lecacheur's wife had detested him, and now she was sure that he had committed the theft.

In about half an hour the two gendarmes arrived. Brigadier Senateur was very tall and thin, and Gendarme Lenient short and fat. Lecacheur made them sit down, and told them the affair, and then they went and saw the scene of the theft, in order to verify the fact that the hutch had been broken open, and to collect all the proofs they could. When they got back to the kitchen, the mistress brought in some wine, filled their glasses, and asked with a distrustful look:

"Shall you catch him?"

The brigadier, who had his sword between his legs, appeared thoughtful. Certainly, he was sure of taking him, if he was pointed out to him, but if not, he could not answer for being able to discover him, himself, and after reflecting for a long time, he put this simple question:

"Do you know the thief?"

And Lecacheur replied, with a look of Normandy slyness in his eyes:

"As for knowing him, I do not, as I did not see him commit the theft. If I had seen him, I should have made him eat it raw, skin and flesh, without a drop of cider to wash it down. But as for saying who it is, I cannot, although I believe it is that good-for-nothing Polyte."

Then he related at length his troubles with Polyte, his leaving his service, his bad reputation, things which had been told him, accumulating insignificant and minute proofs, and then, the brigadier, who had been listening very attentively while he emptied his glass and filled it again with an indifferent air, turned to his gendarme and said:

"We must go and look in the cottage of Severin's wife." At which the gendarme smiled and nodded three times.

Then Madame Lecacheur came to them, and very quietly, with all a peasant's cunning, questioned the brigadier in her turn. That shepherd Severin, a simpleton, a sort of brute who had been brought up and had grown up among his bleating flocks, and who knew scarcely anything besides them in the world, had nevertheless preserved the peasant's instinct for saving, at the bottom of his heart. For years and years he must have hidden in hollow trees and crevices in the rocks all that he earned, either as a shepherd or by curing animals' sprains — for the bonesetter's secret had been handed down to him by the old shepherd whose place he took-by touch or word, and one day he bought a small property, consisting of a cottage and a field, for three thousand francs.

A few months later it became known that he was going to marry a servant, notorious for her bad morals, the innkeeper's servant. The young fellows said that the girl, knowing that he was pretty well off, had been to his cottage every night, and had taken him, captured him, led him on to matrimony, little by little night by night.

And then, having been to the mayor's office and to church, she now lived in the house which her man had bought, while he continued to tend his flocks, day and night, on the plains.

And the brigadier added:

"Polyte has been sleeping there for three weeks, for the thief has no place of his own to go to!"

The gendarme made a little joke:

"He takes the shepherd's blankets."

Madame Lecacheur, who was seized by a fresh access of rage, of rage increased by a married woman's anger against debauchery, exclaimed:

"It is she, I am sure. Go there. Ah, the blackguard thieves!"

But the brigadier was quite unmoved.

"One minute," he said. "Let us wait until twelve o'clock, as he goes and dines there every day. I shall catch them with it under their noses."

The gendarme smiled, pleased at his chief's idea, and Lecacheur also smiled now, for the affair of the shepherd struck him as very funny; deceived husbands are always a joke.

Twelve o'clock had just struck when the brigadier, followed by his man, knocked gently three times at the door of a little lonely house, situated at the corner of a wood, five hundred yards from the village.

They had been standing close against the wall, so as not to be seen from within, and they waited. As nobody answered, the brigadier knocked again in a minute or two. It was so quiet that the house seemed uninhabited; but Lenient, the gendarme, who had very quick ears, said that he heard somebody moving about inside, and then Senateur got angry. He would not allow any one to resist the authority of the law for a moment, and, knocking at the door with the hilt of his sword, he cried out:

"Open the door, in the name of the law."

As this order had no effect, he roared out:

"If you do not obey, I shall smash the lock. I am the brigadier of the gendarmerie, by G — ! Here, Lenient."

He had not finished speaking when the door opened and Senateur saw before him a fat girl, with a very red, blowzy face, with drooping breasts, a big stomach and broad hips, a sort of animal, the wife of the shepherd Severin, and he went into the cottage.

"I have come to pay you a visit, as I want to make a little search," he said, and he looked about him. On the table there was a plate, a jug of cider and a glass half full, which proved that a meal was in progress. Two knives were lying side by side, and the shrewd gendarme winked at his superior officer.

"It smells good," the latter said.

"One might swear that it was stewed rabbit," Lenient added, much amused.

"Will you have a glass of brandy?" the peasant woman asked.

"No, thank you; I only want the skin of the rabbit that you are eating."

She pretended not to understand, but she was trembling.

"What rabbit?"

The brigadier had taken a seat, and was calmly wiping his forehead.

"Come, come, you are not going to try and make us believe that you live on couch grass. What were you eating there all by yourself for your dinner?"

"I? Nothing whatever, I swear to you. A mite of butter on my bread."

"You are a novice, my good woman. A mite of butter on your bread. You are mistaken; you ought to have said: a mite of butter on the rabbit. By G — , your butter smells good! It is special butter, extra good butter, butter fit for a wedding; certainly, not household butter!"

The gendarme was shaking with laughter, and repeated:

"Not household butter certainly."

As Brigadier Senateur was a joker, all the gendarmes had grown facetious, and the officer continued:

"Where is your butter?"

"My butter?"

"Yes, your butter."

"In the jar."

"Then where is the butter jar?"

"Here it is."

She brought out an old cup, at the bottom of which there was a layer of rancid salt butter, and the brigadier smelled of it, and said, with a shake of his head:

"It is not the same. I want the butter that smells of the rabbit. Come, Lenient, open your eyes; look under the sideboard, my good fellow, and I will look under the bed."

Having shut the door, he went up to the bed and tried to move it; but it was fixed to the wall, and had not been moved for more than half a century, apparently. Then the brigadier stooped, and made his uniform crack. A button had flown off.

"Lenient," he said.

"Yes, brigadier?"

"Come here, my lad, and look under the bed; I am too tall. I will look after the sideboard."

He got up and waited while his man executed his orders.

Lenient, who was short and stout, took off his kepi, laid himself on his stomach, and, putting his face on the floor, looked at the black cavity under the bed, and then, suddenly, he exclaimed:

"All right, here we are!"

"What have you got? The rabbit?"

"No, the thief."

"The thief! Pull him out, pull him out!"

The gendarme had put his arms under the bed and laid hold of something, and he was pulling with all his might, and at last a foot, shod in a thick boot, appeared, which he was holding in his right hand. The brigadier took it, crying:

"Pull! Pull!"

And Lenient, who was on his knees by that time, was pulling at the other leg. But it was a hard job, for the prisoner kicked out hard, and arched up his back under the bed.

"Courage! courage! pull! pull!" Senateur cried, and they pulled him with all their strength, so that the wooden slat gave way, and he came out as far as his head; but at last they got that out also, and they saw the terrified and furious face of Polyte, whose arms remained stretched out under the bed.

"Pull away!" the brigadier kept on exclaiming. Then they heard a strange noise, and as the arms followed the shoulders, and the hands the arms, they saw in the hands the handle of a saucepan, and at the end of the handle the saucepan itself, which contained stewed rabbit.

"Good Lord! good Lord!" the brigadier shouted in his delight, while Lenient took charge of the man; the rabbit's skin, an overwhelming proof, was discovered under the mattress, and then the gendarmes returned in triumph to the village with their prisoner and their booty.

A week later, as the affair had made much stir, Lecacheur, on going into the mairie to consult the schoolmaster, was told that the shepherd Severin had been waiting for him for more than an hour, and he found him sitting on a chair in a corner, with his stick between his legs. When he saw the mayor, he got up, took off his cap, and said:

"Good-morning, Maitre Cacheux"; and then he remained standing, timid and embarrassed.

"What do you want?" the former said.

"This is it, monsieur. Is it true that somebody stole one of your rabbits last week?"

"Yes, it is quite true, Severin."

"Who stole the rabbit?"

"Polyte Ancas, the laborer."

"Right! right! And is it also true that it was found under my bed?"

"What do you mean, the rabbit?"

"The rabbit and then Polyte."

"Yes, my poor Severin, quite true, but who told you?"

"Pretty well everybody. I understand! And I suppose you know all about marriages, as you marry people?"

"What about marriage?"

"With regard to one's rights."

"What rights?"

"The husband's rights and then the wife's rights."

"Of course I do."

"Oh! Then just tell me, M'sieu Cacheux, has my wife the right to go to bed with Polyte?"

"What, to go to bed with Polyte?"

"Yes, has she any right before the law, and, seeing that she is my wife, to go to bed with Polyte?"

"Why, of course not, of course not."

"If I catch him there again, shall I have the right to thrash him and her also?"

"Why — why — why, yes."

"Very well, then; I will tell you why I want to know. One night last week, as I had my suspicions, I came in suddenly, and they were not behaving properly. I chucked Polyte out, to go and sleep somewhere else; but that was all, as I did not know what my rights were. This time I did not see them; I only heard of it from others. That is over, and we will not say any more about it; but if I catch them again — by G — , if I catch them again, I will make them lose all taste for such nonsense, Maitre Cacheux, as sure as my name is Severin.”

HIS AVENGER

When M. Antoine Leuillet married the widow, Madame Mathilde Souris, he had already been in love with her for ten years.

M. Souris has been his friend, his old college chum. Leuillet was very much attached to him, but thought he was somewhat of a simpleton. He would often remark: “That poor Souris who will never set the world on fire.”

When Souris married Miss Mathilde Duval, Leuillet was astonished and somewhat annoyed, as he was slightly devoted to her, himself. She was the daughter of a neighbor, a former proprietor of a draper’s establishment who had retired with quite a small fortune. She married Souris for his money.

Then Leuillet thought he would start a flirtation with his friend’s wife. He was a good-looking man, intelligent and also rich. He thought it would be all plain sailing, but he was mistaken. Then he really began to admire her with an admiration that his friendship for the husband obliged him to keep within the bounds of discretion, making him timid and embarrassed. Madame Souris believing that his presumptions had received a wholesome check now treated him as a good friend. This went on for nine years.

One morning a messenger brought Leuillet a distracted note from the poor woman. Souris had just died suddenly from the rupture of an aneurism. He was dreadfully shocked, for they were just the same age. But almost immediately a feeling of profound joy, of intense relief, of emancipation filled his being. Madame Souris was free.

He managed, however, to assume the sad, sympathetic expression that was appropriate, waited the required time, observed all social appearances. At the end of fifteen months he married the widow.

This was considered to be a very natural, and even a generous action. It was the act of a good friend of an upright man.

He was happy at last, perfectly happy.

They lived in the most cordial intimacy, having understood and appreciated each other from the first. They had no secrets from one another and even confided to each other their most secret thoughts. Leuillet loved his wife now with a quiet and trustful affection; he loved her as a tender, devoted companion who is an equal and a confidante. But there lingered in his mind a strange and inexplicable bitterness towards the defunct Souris, who had first been the husband of this woman, who had had the flower of her youth and of her soul, and had even robbed her of some of her poetry. The memory of the dead husband marred the happiness of the living husband, and this posthumous jealousy tormented his heart by day and by night.

The consequence was he talked incessantly of Souris, asked about a thousand personal and secret minutia, wanted to know all about his habits and his person. And he sneered at him even in his grave, recalling with self-satisfaction his whims, ridiculing his absurdities, dwelling on his faults.

He would call to his wife all over the house:

“Hallo, Mathilde!”

“Here I am, dear.”

“Come here a moment.”

She would come, always smiling, knowing well that he would say something about Souris and ready to flatter her new husband’s inoffensive mania.

“Tell me, do you remember one day how Souris insisted on explaining to me that little men always commanded more affection than big men?”

And he made some remarks that were disparaging to the deceased, who was a small man, and decidedly flattering to himself, Leuillet, who was a tall man.

Mme. Leuillet allowed him to think he was right, quite right, and she laughed heartily, gently ridiculing her former husband for the sake of pleasing the present one, who always ended by saying:

“All the same, what a ninny that Souris was!”

They were happy, quite happy, and Leuillet never ceased to show his devotion to his wife.

One night, however, as they lay awake, Leuillet said as he kissed his wife:

“See here, dearie.”

“Well?”

"Was Souris — I don't exactly know how to say it — was Souris very loving?"

She gave him a kiss for reply and murmured "Not as loving as you are, mon chat."

He was flattered in his self-love and continued:

"He must have been — a ninny — was he not?"

She did not reply. She only smiled slyly and hid her face in her husband's neck.

"He must have been a ninny and not — not — not smart?"

She shook her head slightly to imply, "No — not at all smart."

He continued:

"He must have been an awful nuisance, eh?"

This time she was frank and replied:

"Oh yes!"

He kissed her again for this avowal and said:

"What a brute he was! You were not happy with him?"

"No," she replied. "It was not always pleasant."

Leuillet was delighted, forming in his mind a comparison, much in his own favor, between his wife's former and present position. He was silent for a time, and then with a burst of laughter he asked:

"Tell me?"

"What?"

"Will you be frank, very frank with me?"

"Why yes, my dear."

"Well then, tell me truly did you never feel tempted to — to — to deceive that imbecile Souris?"

Mme. Leuillet said: "Oh!" pretending to be shocked and hid her face again on her husband's shoulder. But he saw that she was laughing.

"Come now, own up," he persisted. "He looked like a ninny, that creature! It would be funny, so funny! Good old Souris! Come, come, dearie, you do not mind telling me, me, of all people."

He insisted on the "me" thinking that if she had wished to deceive Souris she would have chosen him, and he was trembling in anticipation of her avowal, sure that if she had not been a virtuous woman she would have encouraged his own attentions.

But she did not answer, laughing still, as at the recollection of something exceedingly comical.

Leuillet, in his turn began to laugh, thinking he might have been the lucky man, and he muttered amid his mirth: “That poor Souris, that poor Souris, oh, yes, he looked like a fool!”

Mme. Leuillet was almost in spasms of laughter.

“Come, confess, be frank. You know I will not mind.”

Then she stammered out, almost choking with laughter: “Yes, yes.”

“Yes, what?” insisted her husband. “Come, tell all.”

She was quieter now and putting her mouth to her husband’s ear, she whispered: “Yes, I did deceive him.”

He felt a chill run down his back and to his very bones, and he stammered out, dumfounded: “You — you — deceived him — criminally?”

She still thought he was amused and replied: “Yes — yes, absolutely.”

He was obliged to sit up to recover his breath, he was so shocked and upset at what he had heard.

She had become serious, understanding too late what she had done.

“With whom?” said Leuillet at length.

She was silent seeking some excuse.

“A young man,” she replied at length.

He turned suddenly toward her and said drily:

“I did not suppose it was the cook. I want to know what young man, do you hear?”

She did not answer.

He snatched the covers from her face, repeating:

“I want to know what young man, do you hear?”

Then she said sorrowfully: “I was only in fun.” But he was trembling with rage. “What? How? You were only in fun? You were making fun of me, then? But I am not satisfied, do you hear? I want the name of the young man!”

She did not reply, but lay there motionless.

He took her by the arm and squeezed it, saying: “Do you understand me, finally? I wish you to reply when I speak to you.”

“I think you are going crazy,” she said nervously, “let me alone!”

He was wild with rage, not knowing what to say, exasperated, and he shook her with all his might, repeating:

“Do you hear me, do you hear me?”

She made an abrupt effort to disengage herself and the tips of her fingers touched her husband’s nose. He was furious, thinking she had tried to hit him, and he sprang upon her holding her down; and boxing her ears with all his might, he cried: “Take that, and that, there, there, wretch!”

When he was out of breath and exhausted, he rose and went toward the dressing table to prepare a glass of eau sucree with orange flower, for he felt as if he should faint.

She was weeping in bed, sobbing bitterly, for she felt as if her happiness was over, through her own fault.

Then, amidst her tears, she stammered out:

“Listen, Antoine, come here, I told you a lie, you will understand, listen.”

And prepared to defend herself now, armed with excuses and artifice, she raised her disheveled head with its nightcap all awry.

Turning toward her, he approached, ashamed of having struck her, but feeling in the bottom of his heart as a husband, a relentless hatred toward this woman who had deceived the former husband, Souris.

MY UNCLE JULES

A white-haired old man begged us for alms. My companion, Joseph Davranche, gave him five francs. Noticing my surprised look, he said:

"That poor unfortunate reminds me of a story which I shall tell you, the memory of which continually pursues me. Here it is:

"My family, which came originally from Havre, was not rich. We just managed to make both ends meet. My father worked hard, came home late from the office, and earned very little. I had two sisters.

"My mother suffered a good deal from our reduced circumstances, and she often had harsh words for her husband, veiled and sly reproaches. The poor man then made a gesture which used to distress me. He would pass his open hand over his forehead, as if to wipe away perspiration which did not exist, and he would answer nothing. I felt his helpless suffering. We economized on everything, and never would accept an invitation to dinner, so as not to have to return the courtesy. All our provisions were bought at bargain sales. My sisters made their own gowns, and long discussions would arise on the price of a piece of braid worth fifteen centimes a yard. Our meals usually consisted of soup and beef, prepared with every kind of sauce.

"They say it is wholesome and nourishing, but I should have preferred a change.

"I used to go through terrible scenes on account of lost buttons and torn trousers.

"Every Sunday, dressed in our best, we would take our walk along the breakwater. My father, in a frock coat, high hat and kid gloves, would offer his arm to my mother, decked out and beribboned like a ship on a holiday. My sisters, who were always ready first, would await the signal for leaving; but at the last minute some one always found a spot on my father's frock coat, and it had to be wiped away quickly with a rag moistened with benzine.

“My father, in his shirt sleeves, his silk hat on his head, would await the completion of the operation, while my mother, putting on her spectacles, and taking off her gloves in order not to spoil them, would make haste.

“Then we set out ceremoniously. My sisters marched on ahead, arm in arm. They were of marriageable age and had to be displayed. I walked on the left of my mother and my father on her right. I remember the pompous air of my poor parents in these Sunday walks, their stern expression, their stiff walk. They moved slowly, with a serious expression, their bodies straight, their legs stiff, as if something of extreme importance depended upon their appearance.

“Every Sunday, when the big steamers were returning from unknown and distant countries, my father would invariably utter the same words:

“‘What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?’

“My Uncle Jules, my father’s brother, was the only hope of the family, after being its only fear. I had heard about him since childhood, and it seemed to me that I should recognize him immediately, knowing as much about him as I did. I knew every detail of his life up to the day of his departure for America, although this period of his life was spoken of only in hushed tones.

“It seems that he had led a bad life, that is to say, he had squandered a little money, which action, in a poor family, is one of the greatest crimes. With rich people a man who amuses himself only sows his wild oats. He is what is generally called a sport. But among needy families a boy who forces his parents to break into the capital becomes a good-for-nothing, a rascal, a scamp. And this distinction is just, although the action be the same, for consequences alone determine the seriousness of the act.

“Well, Uncle Jules had visibly diminished the inheritance on which my father had counted, after he had swallowed his own to the last penny. Then, according to the custom of the times, he had been shipped off to America on a freighter going from Havre to New York.

“Once there, my uncle began to sell something or other, and he soon wrote that he was making a little money and that he soon hoped to be able to indemnify my father for the harm he had done him. This letter caused a profound emotion in the family. Jules, who up to that time had not been worth his salt, suddenly became a good man, a kind-hearted fellow, true and honest like all the Davranches.

“One of the captains told us that he had rented a large shop and was doing an important business.

“Two years later a second letter came, saying: ‘My dear Philippe, I am writing to tell you not to worry about my health, which is excellent. Business is good. I leave to-morrow for a long trip to South America. I may be away for several years without sending you any news. If I shouldn’t write, don’t worry. When my fortune is made I shall return to Havre. I hope that it will not be too long and that we shall all live happily together . . . .’

“This letter became the gospel of the family. It was read on the slightest provocation, and it was shown to everybody.

“For ten years nothing was heard from Uncle Jules; but as time went on my father’s hope grew, and my mother, also, often said:

“‘When that good Jules is here, our position will be different. There is one who knew how to get along!’

“And every Sunday, while watching the big steamers approaching from the horizon, pouring out a stream of smoke, my father would repeat his eternal question:

“‘What a surprise it would be if Jules were on that one! Eh?’

“We almost expected to see him waving his handkerchief and crying:

“‘Hey! Philippe!’

“Thousands of schemes had been planned on the strength of this expected return; we were even to buy a little house with my uncle’s money — a little place in the country near Ingouville. In fact, I wouldn’t swear that my father had not already begun negotiations.

“The elder of my sisters was then twenty-eight, the other twenty-six. They were not yet married, and that was a great grief to every one.

“At last a suitor presented himself for the younger one. He was a clerk, not rich, but honorable. I have always been morally certain that Uncle Jules’ letter, which was shown him one evening, had swept away the young man’s hesitation and definitely decided him.

“He was accepted eagerly, and it was decided that after the wedding the whole family should take a trip to Jersey.

“Jersey is the ideal trip for poor people. It is not far; one crosses a strip of sea in a steamer and lands on foreign soil, as this little island belongs to England. Thus, a Frenchman, with a two hours’ sail, can observe a neighboring people at home and study their customs.

“This trip to Jersey completely absorbed our ideas, was our sole anticipation, the constant thought of our minds.

“At last we left. I see it as plainly as if it had happened yesterday. The boat was getting up steam against the quay at Granville; my father, bewildered, was superintending the loading of our three pieces of baggage; my mother, nervous, had taken the arm of my unmarried sister, who seemed lost since the departure of the other one, like the last chicken of a brood; behind us came the bride and groom, who always stayed behind, a thing that often made me turn round.

“The whistle sounded. We got on board, and the vessel, leaving the breakwater, forged ahead through a sea as flat as a marble table. We watched the coast disappear in the distance, happy and proud, like all who do not travel much.

“My father was swelling out his chest in the breeze, beneath his frock coat, which had that morning been very carefully cleaned; and he spread around him that odor of benzine which always made me recognize Sunday. Suddenly he noticed two elegantly dressed ladies to whom two gentlemen were offering oysters. An old, ragged sailor was opening them with his knife and passing them to the gentlemen, who would then offer them to the ladies. They ate them in a dainty manner, holding the shell on a fine handkerchief and advancing their mouths a little in order not to spot their dresses. Then they would drink the liquid with a rapid little motion and throw the shell overboard.

“My father was probably pleased with this delicate manner of eating oysters on a moving ship. He considered it good form, refined, and, going up to my mother and sisters, he asked:

“‘Would you like me to offer you some oysters?’

“My mother hesitated on account of the expense, but my two sisters immediately accepted. My mother said in a provoked manner:

“‘I am afraid that they will hurt my stomach. Offer the children some, but not too much, it would make them sick.’ Then, turning toward me, she added:

“‘As for Joseph, he doesn’t need any. Boys shouldn’t be spoiled.’

“However, I remained beside my mother, finding this discrimination unjust. I watched my father as he pompously conducted my two sisters and his son-in-law toward the ragged old sailor.

“The two ladies had just left, and my father showed my sisters how to eat them without spilling the liquor. He even tried to give them an example, and seized an oyster. He attempted to imitate the ladies, and immediately spilled all the liquid over his coat. I heard my mother mutter:

“‘He would do far better to keep quiet.’

“But, suddenly, my father appeared to be worried; he retreated a few steps, stared at his family gathered around the old shell opener, and quickly came toward us. He seemed very pale, with a peculiar look. In a low voice he said to my mother:

“‘It’s extraordinary how that man opening the oysters looks like Jules.’

“Astonished, my mother asked:

“‘What Jules?’

“My father continued:

“‘Why, my brother. If I did not know that he was well off in America, I should think it was he.’

“Bewildered, my mother stammered:

“‘You are crazy! As long as you know that it is not he, why do you say such foolish things?’

“But my father insisted:

“‘Go on over and see, Clarisse! I would rather have you see with your own eyes.’

“She arose and walked to her daughters. I, too, was watching the man. He was old, dirty, wrinkled, and did not lift his eyes from his work.

“My mother returned. I noticed that she was trembling. She exclaimed quickly:

“‘I believe that it is he. Why don’t you ask the captain? But be very careful that we don’t have this rogue on our hands again!’

“My father walked away, but I followed him. I felt strangely moved.

“The captain, a tall, thin man, with blond whiskers, was walking along the bridge with an important air as if he were commanding the Indian mail steamer.

“My father addressed him ceremoniously, and questioned him about his profession, adding many compliments:

“‘What might be the importance of Jersey? What did it produce? What was the population? The customs? The nature of the soil?’ etc., etc.

“‘You have there an old shell opener who seems quite interesting. Do you know anything about him?’

“The captain, whom this conversation began to weary, answered dryly:

“‘He is some old French tramp whom I found last year in America, and I brought him back. It seems that he has some relatives in Havre, but that he doesn’t wish to return to them because he owes them money. His name is Jules — Jules Darmanche or Darvanche or something like that. It seems that he was once rich over there, but you can see what’s left of him now.’

“My father turned ashy pale and muttered, his throat contracted, his eyes haggard.

“‘Ah! ah! very well, very well. I’m not in the least surprised. Thank you very much, captain.’

“He went away, and the astonished sailor watched him disappear. He returned to my mother so upset that she said to him:

“‘Sit down; some one will notice that something is the matter.’

“He sank down on a bench and stammered:

“‘It’s he! It’s he!’

“Then he asked:

“‘What are we going to do?’

“She answered quickly:

“‘We must get the children out of the way. Since Joseph knows everything, he can go and get them. We must take good care that our son-in-law doesn’t find out.’

“My father seemed absolutely bewildered. He murmured:

“‘What a catastrophe!’

“Suddenly growing furious, my mother exclaimed:

“‘I always thought that that thief never would do anything, and that he would drop down on us again! As if one could expect anything from a Davranche!’

“My father passed his hand over his forehead, as he always did when his wife reproached him. She added:

“‘Give Joseph some money so that he can pay for the oysters. All that it needed to cap the climax would be to be recognized by that beggar. That would be very pleasant! Let’s get down to the other end of the boat, and take care that that man doesn’t come near us!’

“They gave me five francs and walked away.

“Astonished, my sisters were awaiting their father. I said that mamma had felt a sudden attack of sea-sickness, and I asked the shell opener:

“‘How much do we owe you, monsieur?’

“I felt like laughing: he was my uncle! He answered:

“‘Two francs fifty.’

“I held out my five francs and he returned the change. I looked at his hand; it was a poor, wrinkled, sailor’s hand, and I looked at his face, an unhappy old face. I said to myself:

“‘That is my uncle, the brother of my father, my uncle!’

“I gave him a ten-cent tip. He thanked me:

“‘God bless you, my young sir!’

“He spoke like a poor man receiving alms. I couldn’t help thinking that he must have begged over there! My sisters looked at me, surprised at my generosity. When I returned the two francs to my father, my mother asked me in surprise:

“‘Was there three francs’ worth? That is impossible.’

“I answered in a firm voice

“‘I gave ten cents as a tip.’

“My mother started, and, staring at me, she exclaimed:

“‘You must be crazy! Give ten cents to that man, to that vagabond— ‘

“She stopped at a look from my father, who was pointing at his son-in-law. Then everybody was silent.

“Before us, on the distant horizon, a purple shadow seemed to rise out of the sea. It was Jersey.

“As we approached the breakwater a violent desire seized me once more to see my Uncle Jules, to be near him, to say to him something consoling, something tender. But as no one was eating any more oysters, he had disappeared, having probably gone below to the dirty hold which was the home of the poor wretch.”

THE MODEL

Curving like a crescent moon, the little town of Etretat, with its white cliffs, its white, shingly beach and its blue sea, lay in the sunlight at high noon one July day. At either extremity of this crescent its two “gates,” the smaller to the right, the larger one at the left, stretched forth — one a dwarf and the other a colossal limb — into the water, and the bell tower, almost as tall as the cliff, wide below, narrowing at the top, raised its pointed summit to the sky.

On the sands beside the water a crowd was seated watching the bathers. On the terrace of, the Casino another crowd, seated or walking, displayed beneath the brilliant sky a perfect flower patch of bright costumes, with red and blue parasols embroidered with large flowers in silk.

On the walk at the end of the terrace, other persons, the restful, quiet ones, were walking slowly, far from the dressy throng.

A young man, well known and celebrated as a painter, Jean Sumner, was walking with a dejected air beside a wheeled chair in which sat a young woman, his wife. A manservant was gently pushing the chair, and the crippled woman was gazing sadly at the brightness of the sky, the gladness of the day, and the happiness of others.

They did not speak. They did not look at each other.

“Let us stop a while,” said the young woman.

They stopped, and the painter sat down on a camp stool that the servant handed him.

Those who were passing behind the silent and motionless couple looked at them compassionately. A whole legend of devotion was attached to them. He had married her in spite of her infirmity, touched by her affection for him, it was said.

Not far from there, two young men were chatting, seated on a bench and looking out into the horizon.

“No, it is not true; I tell you that I am well acquainted with Jean Sumner.”

"But then, why did he marry her? For she was a cripple when she married, was she not?"

"Just so. He married her — he married her — just as every one marries, parbleu! because he was an idiot!"

"But why?"

"But why — but why, my friend? There is no why. People do stupid things just because they do stupid things. And, besides, you know very well that painters make a specialty of foolish marriages. They almost always marry models, former sweethearts, in fact, women of doubtful reputation, frequently. Why do they do this? Who can say? One would suppose that constant association with the general run of models would disgust them forever with that class of women. Not at all. After having posed them they marry them. Read that little book, so true, so cruel and so beautiful, by Alphonse Daudet: 'Artists' Wives.'

"In the case of the couple you see over there the accident occurred in a special and terrible manner. The little woman played a frightful comedy, or, rather, tragedy. She risked all to win all. Was she sincere? Did she love Jean? Shall we ever know? Who is able to determine precisely how much is put on and how much is real in the actions of a woman? They are always sincere in an eternal mobility of impressions. They are furious, criminal, devoted, admirable and base in obedience to intangible emotions. They tell lies incessantly without intention, without knowing or understanding why, and in spite of it all are absolutely frank in their feelings and sentiments, which they display by violent, unexpected, incomprehensible, foolish resolutions which overthrow our arguments, our customary poise and all our selfish plans. The unforeseenness and suddenness of their determinations will always render them undecipherable enigmas as far as we are concerned. We continually ask ourselves:

"'Are they sincere? Are they pretending?'

"But, my friend, they are sincere and insincere at one and the same time, because it is their nature to be extremists in both and to be neither one nor the other.

"See the methods that even the best of them employ to get what they desire. They are complex and simple, these methods. So complex that we can never guess at them beforehand, and so simple that after having been victimized we cannot help being astonished and exclaiming: 'What! Did she make a fool of me so easily as that?'

"And they always succeed, old man, especially when it is a question of getting married.

"But this is Sumner's story:

"The little woman was a model, of course. She posed for him. She was pretty, very stylish-looking, and had a divine figure, it seems. He fancied that he loved her with his whole soul. That is another strange thing. As soon as one likes a woman one sincerely believes that they could not get along without her for the rest of their life. One knows that one has felt the same way before and that disgust invariably succeeded gratification; that in order to pass one's existence side by side with another there must be not a brutal, physical passion which soon dies out, but a sympathy of soul, temperament and temper. One should know how to determine in the enchantment to which one is subjected whether it proceeds from the physical, from a certain sensuous intoxication, or from a deep spiritual charm.

"Well, he believed himself in love; he made her no end of promises of fidelity, and was devoted to her.

"She was really attractive, gifted with that fashionable flippancy that little Parisians so readily affect. She chattered, babbled, made foolish remarks that sounded witty from the manner in which they were uttered. She used graceful gesture's which were calculated to attract a painter's eye. When she raised her arms, when she bent over, when she got into a carriage, when she held out her hand to you, her gestures were perfect and appropriate.

"For three months Jean never noticed that, in reality, she was like all other models.

"He rented a little house for her for the summer at Andresy.

"I was there one evening when for the first time doubts came into my friend's mind.

"As it was a beautiful evening we thought we would take a stroll along the bank of the river. The moon poured a flood of light on the trembling water, scattering yellow gleams along its ripples in the currents and all along the course of the wide, slow river.

"We strolled along the bank, a little enthused by that vague exaltation that these dreamy evenings produce in us. We would have liked to undertake some wonderful task, to love some unknown, deliciously poetic being. We felt ourselves vibrating with raptures, longings, strange aspirations. And we were silent, our beings pervaded by the serene and living coolness of the beautiful night, the coolness of the moonlight, which seemed to penetrate one’s body, permeate it, soothe one’s spirit, fill it with fragrance and steep it in happiness.

“Suddenly Josephine (that is her name) uttered an exclamation:

“‘Oh, did you see the big fish that jumped, over there?’

“He replied without looking, without thinking:

“‘Yes, dear.’

“She was angry.

“‘No, you did not see it, for your back was turned.’

“He smiled.

“‘Yes, that’s true. It is so delightful that I am not thinking of anything.’

“She was silent, but at the end of a minute she felt as if she must say something and asked:

“‘Are you going to Paris to-morrow?’

“‘I do not know,’ he replied.

“She was annoyed again.

“‘Do you think it is very amusing to walk along without speaking? People talk when they are not stupid.’

“He did not reply. Then, feeling with her woman’s instinct that she was going to make him angry, she began to sing a popular air that had harassed our ears and our minds for two years:

“‘Je regardais en fair.’

“He murmured:

“‘Please keep quiet.’

“She replied angrily:

“‘Why do you wish me to keep quiet?’

“‘You spoil the landscape for us!’ he said.

“Then followed a scene, a hateful, idiotic scene, with unexpected reproaches, unsuitable recriminations, then tears. Nothing was left unsaid. They went back to the house. He had allowed her to talk without replying, enervated by the beauty of the scene and dumfounded by this storm of abuse.

“Three months later he strove wildly to free himself from those invincible and invisible bonds with which such a friendship chains our lives. She kept him under her influence, tyrannizing over him, making his life a burden to him. They quarreled continually, vituperating and finally fighting each other.

“He wanted to break with her at any cost. He sold all his canvases, borrowed money from his friends, realizing twenty thousand francs (he was not well known then), and left them for her one morning with a note of farewell.

“He came and took refuge with me.

“About three o’clock that afternoon there was a ring at the bell. I went to the door. A woman sprang toward me, pushed me aside, came in and went into my atelier. It was she!

“He had risen when he saw her coming.’

“She threw the envelope containing the banknotes at his feet with a truly noble gesture and said in a quick tone:

“‘There’s your money. I don’t want it!’

“She was very pale, trembling and ready undoubtedly to commit any folly. As for him, I saw him grow pale also, pale with rage and exasperation, ready also perhaps to commit any violence.

“He asked:

“‘What do you want?’

“She replied:

“‘I do not choose to be treated like a common woman. You implored me to accept you. I asked you for nothing. Keep me with you!’

“He stamped his foot.

“‘No, that’s a little too much! If you think you are going— ‘

“I had seized his arm.

“‘Keep still, Jean. . . Let me settle it.’

“I went toward her and quietly, little by little, I began to reason with her, exhausting all the arguments that are used under similar circumstances. She listened to me, motionless, with a fixed gaze, obstinate and silent.

“Finally, not knowing what more to say, and seeing that there would be a scene, I thought of a last resort and said:

“‘He loves you still, my dear, but his family want him to marry some one, and you understand— ‘

“She gave a start and exclaimed:

“‘Ah! Ah! Now I understand:

“And turning toward him, she said:

“‘You are — you are going to get married?’

“He replied decidedly” ‘Yes.’

“She took a step forward.

"'If you marry, I will kill myself! Do you hear?'

"He shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"'Well, then kill yourself!'

"She stammered out, almost choking with her violent emotion:

"'What do you say? What do you say? What do you say? Say it again!'

"He repeated:

"'Well, then kill yourself if you like!'

"With her face almost livid, she replied:

"'Do not dare me! I will throw myself from the window!'

"He began to laugh, walked toward the window, opened it, and bowing with the gesture of one who desires to let some one else precede him, he said:

"'This is the way. After you!'

"She looked at him for a second with terrible, wild, staring eyes. Then, taking a run as if she were going to jump a hedge in the country, she rushed past me and past him, jumped over the sill and disappeared.

"I shall never forget the impression made on me by that open window after I had seen that body pass through it to fall to the ground. It appeared to me in a second to be as large as the heavens and as hollow as space. And I drew back instinctively, not daring to look at it, as though I feared I might fall out myself.

"Jean, dumfounded, stood motionless.

"They brought the poor girl in with both legs broken. She will never walk again.

"Jean, wild with remorse and also possibly touched with gratitude, made up his mind to marry her.

"There you have it, old man."

It was growing dusk. The young woman felt chilly and wanted to go home, and the servant wheeled the invalid chair in the direction of the village. The painter walked beside his wife, neither of them having exchanged a word for an hour.

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A VAGABOND

He was a journeyman carpenter, a good workman and a steady fellow, twenty-seven years old, but, although the eldest son, Jacques Randel had been forced to live on his family for two months, owing to the general lack of work. He had walked about seeking work for over a month and had left his native town, Ville-Avary, in La Manche, because he could find nothing to do and would no longer deprive his family of the bread they needed themselves, when he was the strongest of them all. His two sisters earned but little as charwomen. He went and inquired at the town hall, and the mayor’s secretary told him that he would find work at the Labor Agency, and so he started, well provided with papers and certificates, and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers and a shirt in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

And he had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in sun and rain, without ever reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work as a carpenter, but at every carpenter’s shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and, finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stonecutter; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up fagots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days’ work occasionally by offering himself at a shamefully low price, in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now for a week he had found nothing, and had no money left, and nothing to eat but a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty, and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, as the other pair had already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday, toward the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly through the sky by the gusts of wind which whistled among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that hour on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of wheat straw, like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry, with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides, so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth, he grasped his stick tightly in his hand, with a longing to strike the first passerby who might be going home to supper.

He looked at the sides of the road, imagining he saw potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch and have had a capital supper off the warm, round vegetables with which he would first of all have warmed his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot which he might pick up in a field as he had done the day before.

For the last two days he had talked to himself as he quickened his steps under the influence of his thoughts. He had never thought much hitherto, as he had given all his mind, all his simple faculties to his mechanical work. But now fatigue and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open air lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, and that question which he was continually asked, “Why do you not remain at home?” distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of the relations he had left at home and who also had not a penny, filled him by degrees with rage, which had been accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short, growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which tripped his bare feet, he grumbled: “How wretched! how miserable! A set of hogs — to let a man die of hunger — a carpenter — a set of hogs — not two sous — not two sous — and now it is raining — a set of hogs!”

He was indignant at the injustice of fate, and cast the blame on men, on all men, because nature, that great, blind mother, is unjust, cruel and perfidious, and he repeated through his clenched teeth:

"A set of hogs" as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And, without considering that there is another injustice which is human, and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants and to sit down to table in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have no right to live now, as they are letting me die of hunger, and yet I only ask for work — a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart rose to his head like terrible intoxication, and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe and because the air is the common property of everybody. So nobody has the right to leave me without bread!"

A fine, thick, icy cold rain was coming down, and he stopped and murmured: "Oh, misery! Another month of walking before I get home." He was indeed returning home then, for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town, where he was known — and he did not mind what he did — than on the highroads, where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not prosperous, he would turn day laborer, be a mason's hodman, a ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned a franc a day, that would at any rate buy him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket handkerchief round his neck to prevent the cold rain from running down his back and chest, but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced about him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head, and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow and the cow looked at him and then, suddenly giving her a kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udders bang down. Then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs and drank for a long time, squeezing her warm, swollen teats, which tasted of the cowstall, with both hands, and he drank as long as she gave any milk. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked at a light which was shining among the trees in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong, thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew on the workman's face, and he said: "You are not cold inside there!" He put his hands on her chest and under her stomach to find some warmth there, and then the idea struck him that he might pass the night beside that large, warm animal. So he found a comfortable place and laid his head on her side, and then, as he was worn out with fatigue, fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other against the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and soon went soundly to sleep again. The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining, and the sky was bright. The cow was resting with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide, moist nostrils, and said: "Good-by, my beauty, until next time. You are a nice animal. Good-by." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours walked straight before him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot, some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, driving before him a score of frightened, bleating sheep, with the help of an active dog. Randel got up, and raising his cap, said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other, giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass and looking for a kind, compassionate face before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. “I have been looking for work,” he said, “for the last two months and cannot find any, and I have not a sou in my pocket.” But the would-be gentleman replied: “You should have read the notice which is stuck up at the entrance to the village: ‘Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.’ Let me tell you that I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly I shall have you arrested.”

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: “Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for, at any rate, I should not die of hunger.” And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly side by side, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accoutrements and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers, and to put them to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them, and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking heavily, with military step, and balancing themselves as if they were doing the goose step; and then, suddenly, as they passed him, appearing to have noticed him, they stopped and looked at him angrily and threateningly, and the brigadier came up to him and asked: “What are you doing here?” “I am resting,” the man replied calmly. “Where do you come from?” “If I had to tell you all the places I have been to it would take me more than an hour.” “Where are you going to?” “To Ville-Avary.” “Where is that?” “In La Manche.” “Is that where you belong?” “It is.” “Why did you leave it?” “To look for work.”

The brigadier turned to his gendarme and said in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by an oft-repeated trick: “They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it.” And then he continued: “Have you any papers?” “Yes, I have some.” “Give them to me.”

Randel took his papers out of his pocket, his certificates, those poor, worn-out, dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing, and then, having seen that they were all in order, he gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom some one cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments’ further reflection, he asked him: “Have you any money on you?” “No.” “None whatever?” “None.” “Not even a sou?” “Not even a son!” “How do you live then?” “On what people give me.” “Then you beg?” And Randel answered resolutely: “Yes, when I can.”

Then the gendarme said: “I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me.” The carpenter got up and said: “Wherever you please.” And, placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: “Well, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains.”

And they set off toward the village, the red tiles of which could be seen through the leafless trees, a quarter of a league off. Service was about to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people, who immediately formed two lines to see the criminal pass. He was being followed by a crowd of excited children. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes, with hatred in their eyes and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-’spahi’, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half-franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of Widow Malet, whom the police had been looking for for six months.

In the municipal court, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor again, sitting on the magisterial bench, with the schoolmaster by his side. “Aha! aha!” the magistrate exclaimed, “so here you are again, my fine fellow. I told you I should have you locked up. Well, brigadier, what is he charged with?”

“He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order.”

“Show me his papers,” the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them and then said: “Search him.” So they searched him, but found nothing, and the mayor seemed perplexed, and asked the workman:

“What were you doing on the road this morning?” “I was looking for work.” “Work? On the highroad?” “How do you expect me to find any if I hide in the woods?”

They looked at each other with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different hostile species, and the magistrate continued: “I am going to have you set at liberty, but do not be brought up before me again." To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country." But the magistrate replied severely: "be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate, give me something to eat," the workman said, but the other grew indignant: "Have we nothing to do but to feed you? Ah! ah! ah! that is rather too much!" But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then, so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The mayor had risen and he repeated: "Take him away immediately or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village, the brigadier said: "Now off with you and do not let me catch you about here again, for if I do, you will know it."

Randel went off without replying or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house, where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger, seized him and almost drove him against the walls of the house like a wild beast.

He said aloud in a grumbling voice: "In Heaven's name! they must give me some this time!" And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as no one came he knocked louder and called out: "Hey! hey! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing stirred, he went up to the window and pushed it wider open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat and cabbage, escaped into the cold outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two places were set at the table, and no doubt the proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimney-piece, between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fireplace, and, having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots and onions until his plate was full, and, having put it on the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces, and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat, besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty and took one of the bottles off the mantelpiece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass when he saw it was brandy. So much the better; it was warming and would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He certainly enjoyed it, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful, which he drank at two gulps. And then almost immediately he felt quite merry and light-hearted from the effects of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness filled his heart.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, and dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells began to ring. Mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence, which guides all beings and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket and the brandy bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off walking again, but instead of following the highroad he ran across the fields toward a wood he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, light-hearted, glad of what he had done, and so nimble that he sprang over the enclosure of the fields at a single bound, and as soon as he was under the trees he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked, and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim, and his legs as elastic as springs, and he started singing the old popular song:

“Oh! what joy, what joy it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.”

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss, and that soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels as he used to do when a child, so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up and began over again. And between each time he began to sing again:

“Oh! what joy, what joy it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.”

Suddenly he found himself above a deep road, and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant, who was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down, and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him raised her head and said: “Was that you singing like that?” He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was a fall of at least six feet and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her, she exclaimed: “Oh! dear, how you frightened me!”

But he did not hear her, for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been deprived of everything for two months, and who is drunk; who is young, ardent and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the vigorous flesh of men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half-open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders, and without a word, threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall, and they rolled over noisily, and all the milk was spilt, and then she screamed lustily, but it was of no avail in that lonely spot.

When she got up the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury, and, taking off one of her wooden sabots, she threw it at the man to break his head if he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason of this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered, and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could, while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever been before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused, he lost recollection of everything and could no longer think about anything, and so he sat down at the foot of a tree, and in five minutes was fast asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake, and, on opening his eyes, he saw two cocked hats of shiny leather bending over him, and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now. He had become a jailbird, caught by those hunters of criminals who would not let him go again.

"Now, start!" the brigadier said, and they set off. It was late afternoon, and the autumn twilight was setting in over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women and girls, excited with anger, as if every man had been robbed and every woman attacked, wished to see the wretch brought back, so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the Hotel de Ville, where the mayor was waiting for him to be himself avenged on this vagabond, and as soon as he saw him approaching he cried:

"Ah! my fine fellow! here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was, and continued: "I said so. I said so, the moment I saw him in the road."

And then with increased satisfaction:

"Oh, you blackguard! Oh, you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

THE FISHING HOLE

"Cuts and wounds which caused death." Such was the charge upon which Leopold Renard, upholsterer, was summoned before the Court of Assizes.

Round him were the principal witnesses, Madame Flameche, widow of the victim, and Louis Ladureau, cabinetmaker, and Jean Durdent, plumber.

Near the criminal was his wife, dressed in black, an ugly little woman, who looked like a monkey dressed as a lady.

This is how Renard (Leopold) recounted the drama.

"Good heavens, it is a misfortune of which I was the prime victim all the time, and with which my will has nothing to do. The facts are their own commentary, Monsieur le President. I am an honest man, a hard-working man, an upholsterer, living in the same street for the last sixteen years, known, liked, respected and esteemed by all, as my neighbors can testify, even the porter's wife, who is not amiable every day. I am fond of work, I am fond of saving, I like honest men and respectable amusements. That is what has ruined me, so much the worse for me; but as my will had nothing to do with it, I continue to respect myself.

"Every Sunday for the last five years my wife and I have spent the day at Passy. We get fresh air, and, besides, we are fond of fishing. Oh! we are as fond of it as we are of little onions. Melie inspired me with that enthusiasm, the jade, and she is more enthusiastic than I am, the scold, seeing that all the mischief in this business is her fault, as you will see immediately.

"I am strong and mild tempered, without a pennyworth of malice in me. But she! oh! la! la! she looks like nothing; she is short and thin. Very well, she does more mischief than a weasel. I do not deny that she has some good qualities; she has some, and very important ones for a man in business. But her character! Just ask about it in the neighborhood, and even the porter's wife, who has just sent me about my business — she will tell you something about it.

"Every day she used to find fault with my mild temper: 'I would not put up with this! I would not put up with that.' If I had listened to her, Monsieur le President, I should have had at least three hand-to-hand fights a month . . . ."

Madame Renard interrupted him: "And for good reasons, too; they laugh best who laugh last."

He turned toward her frankly: "Well, I can't blame you, since you were not the cause of it."

Then, facing the President again, he said:

"I will continue. We used to go to Passy every Saturday evening, so as to begin fishing at daybreak the next morning. It is a habit which has become second nature with us, as the saying is. Three years ago this summer I discovered a place, oh! such a spot. Oh, dear, dear! In the shade, eight feet of water at least and perhaps ten, a hole with cavities under the bank, a regular nest for fish and a paradise for the fisherman. I might look upon that fishing hole as my property, Monsieur le President, as I was its Christopher Columbus. Everybody in the neighborhood knew it, without making any opposition. They would say: 'That is Renard's place'; and nobody would have gone there, not even Monsieur Plumeau, who is well known, be it said without any offense, for poaching on other people's preserves.

"Well, I returned to this place of which I felt certain, just as if I had owned it. I had scarcely got there on Saturday, when I got into Delila, with my wife. Delila is my Norwegian boat, which I had built by Fournaire, and which is light and safe. Well, as I said, we got into the boat and we were going to set bait, and for setting bait there is none to be compared with me, and they all know it. You want to know with what I bait? I cannot answer that question; it has nothing to do with the accident. I cannot answer; that is my secret. There are more than three hundred people who have asked me; I have been offered glasses of brandy and liqueur, fried fish, matelotes, to make me tell. But just go and try whether the chub will come. Ah! they have tempted my stomach to get at my secret, my recipe. Only my wife knows, and she will not tell it any more than I will. Is not that so, Melie?"

The president of the court interrupted him.

"Just get to the facts as soon as you can," and the accused continued: "I am getting to them, I am getting to them. Well, on Saturday, July 8, we left by the twenty-five past five train and before dinner we went to set bait as usual. The weather promised to keep fine and I said to Melie: 'All right for tomorrow.’ And she replied: ‘If looks like it,’ We never talk more than that together.

“And then we returned to dinner. I was happy and thirsty, and that was the cause of everything. I said to Melie: ‘Look here, Melie, it is fine weather, suppose I drink a bottle of ‘Casque a meche’.’ That is a weak white wine which we have christened so, because if you drink too much of it it prevents you from sleeping and takes the place of a nightcap. Do you understand me?

“She replied: ‘You can do as you please, but you will be ill again and will not be able to get up tomorrow.’ That was true, sensible and prudent, clear-sighted, I must confess. Nevertheless I could not resist, and I drank my bottle. It all came from that.

“Well, I could not sleep. By Jove! it kept me awake till two o’clock in the morning, and then I went to sleep so soundly that I should not have heard the angel sounding his trump at the last judgment.

“In short, my wife woke me at six o’clock and I jumped out of bed, hastily put on my trousers and jersey, washed my face and jumped on board Delila. But it was too late, for when I arrived at my hole it was already occupied! Such a thing had never happened to me in three years, and it made me feel as if I were being robbed under my own eyes. I said to myself: ‘Confound it all! confound it!’ And then my wife began to nag at me. ‘Eh! what about your ‘Casque a meche’? Get along, you drunkard! Are you satisfied, you great fool?’ I could say nothing, because it was all true, but I landed all the same near the spot and tried to profit by what was left. Perhaps after all the fellow might catch nothing and go away.

“He was a little thin man in white linen coat and waistcoat and a large straw hat, and his wife, a fat woman, doing embroidery, sat behind him.

“When she saw us take up our position close to them she murmured: ‘Are there no other places on the river?’ My wife, who was furious, replied: ‘People who have any manners make inquiries about the habits of the neighborhood before occupying reserved spots.’

“As I did not want a fuss, I said to her: ‘Hold your tongue, Melie. Let them alone, let them alone; we shall see.’

“Well, we fastened Delila under the willows and had landed and were fishing side by side, Melie and I, close to the two others. But here, monsieur, I must enter into details.

“We had only been there about five minutes when our neighbor’s line began to jerk twice, thrice; and then he pulled out a chub as thick as my thigh; rather less, perhaps, but nearly as big! My heart beat, the perspiration stood on my forehead and Melie said to me: ‘Well, you sot, did you see that?’

“Just then Monsieur Bru, the grocer of Poissy, who is fond of gudgeon fishing, passed in a boat and called out to me: ‘So somebody has taken your usual place, Monsieur Renard?’ And I replied: ‘Yes, Monsieur Bru, there are some people in this world who do not know the rules of common politeness.’

“The little man in linen pretended not to hear, nor his fat lump of a wife, either.”

Here the president interrupted him a second time: “Take care, you are insulting the widow, Madame Flameche, who is present.”

Renard made his excuses: “I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon; my anger carried me away. Well, not a quarter of an hour had passed when the little man caught another chub, and another almost immediately, and another five minutes later.

“Tears were in my eyes, and I knew that Madame Renard was boiling with rage, for she kept on nagging at me: ‘Oh, how horrid! Don’t you see that he is robbing you of your fish? Do you think that you will catch anything? Not even a frog, nothing whatever. Why, my hands are tingling, just to think of it.’

“But I said to myself: ‘Let us wait until twelve o’clock. Then this poacher will go to lunch and I shall get my place again. As for me, Monsieur le President, I lunch on that spot every Sunday. We bring our provisions in Delila. But there! At noon the wretch produced a chicken in a newspaper, and while he was eating, he actually caught another chub!

“Melie and I had a morsel also, just a bite, a mere nothing, for our heart was not in it.

“Then I took up my newspaper to aid my digestion. Every Sunday I read the Gil Blas in the shade by the side of the water. It is Columbine’s day, you know; Columbine, who writes the articles in the Gil Blas. I generally put Madame Renard into a rage by pretending to know this Columbine. It is not true, for I do not know her and have never seen her, but that does not matter. She writes very well, and then she says things that are pretty plain for a woman. She suits me and there are not many of her sort.

“Well, I began to tease my wife, but she got angry immediately, and very angry, so I held my tongue. At that moment our two witnesses who are present here, Monsieur Ladureau and Monsieur Durdent, appeared on the other side of the river. We knew each other by sight. The little man began to fish again and he caught so many that I trembled with vexation and his wife said: ‘It is an uncommonly good spot, and we will come here always, Desire.’ As for me, a cold shiver ran down my back, and Madame Renard kept repeating: ‘You are not a man; you have the blood of a chicken in your veins’; and suddenly I said to her: ‘Look here, I would rather go away or I shall be doing something foolish.’

“And she whispered to me, as if she had put a red-hot iron under my nose: ‘You are not a man. Now you are going to run away and surrender your place! Go, then, Bazaine!’

“I felt hurt, but yet I did not move, while the other fellow pulled out a bream: Oh, I never saw such a large one before, never! And then my wife began to talk aloud, as if she were thinking, and you can see her tricks. She said: ‘That is what one might call stolen fish, seeing that we set the bait ourselves. At any rate, they ought to give us back the money we have spent on bait.’

“Then the fat woman in the cotton dress said in her turn: ‘Do you mean to call us thieves, madame?’ Explanations followed and compliments began to fly. Oh, Lord! those creatures know some good ones. They shouted so loud that our two witnesses, who were on the other bank, began to call out by way of a joke: ‘Less noise over there; you will interfere with your husbands’ fishing.’

“The fact is that neither the little man nor I moved any more than if we had been two tree stumps. We remained there, with our eyes fixed on the water, as if we had heard nothing; but, by Jove! we heard all the same. ‘You are a thief! You are nothing better than a tramp! You are a regular jade!’ and so on and so on. A sailor could not have said more.

“Suddenly I heard a noise behind me and turned round. It was the other one, the fat woman, who had attacked my wife with her parasol. Whack, whack! Melie got two of them. But she was furious, and she hits hard when she is in a rage. She caught the fat woman by the hair and then thump! thump! slaps in the face rained down like ripe plums. I should have let them fight it out: women together, men together. It does not do to mix the blows. But the little man in the linen jacket jumped up like a devil and was going to rush at my wife. Ah! no, no, not that, my friend! I caught the gentleman with the end of my fist, and crash! crash! One on the nose, the other in the stomach. He threw up his arms and legs and fell on his back into the river, just into the hole.

"I should have fished him out most certainly, Monsieur le President, if I had had time. But, to make matters worse, the fat woman had the upper hand and was pounding Melie for all she was worth. I know I ought not to have interfered while the man was in the water, but I never thought that he would drown and said to myself: 'Bah, it will cool him.'

"I therefore ran up to the women to separate them and all I received was scratches and bites. Good Lord, what creatures! Well, it took me five minutes, and perhaps ten, to separate those two viragos. When I turned round there was nothing to be seen.

"The water was as smooth as a lake and the others yonder kept shouting: 'Fish him out! fish him out!' It was all very well to say that, but I cannot swim and still less dive.

"At last the man from the dam came and two gentlemen with boathooks, but over a quarter of an hour had passed. He was found at the bottom of the hole, in eight feet of water, as I have said. There he was, the poor little man, in his linen suit! Those are the facts such as I have sworn to. I am innocent, on my honor."

The witnesses having given testimony to the same effect, the accused was acquitted.

THE SPASM

OR

THE MANNERISM

The hotel guests slowly entered the dining-room and took their places. The waiters did not hurry themselves, in order to give the late comers a chance and thus avoid the trouble of bringing in the dishes a second time. The old bathers, the habitues, whose season was almost over, glanced, gazed toward the door whenever it opened, to see what new faces might appear.

This is the principal distraction of watering places. People look forward to the dinner hour in order to inspect each day's new arrivals, to find out who they are, what they do, and what they think. We always have a vague desire to meet pleasant people, to make agreeable acquaintances, perhaps to meet with a love adventure. In this life of elbowings, unknown strangers assume an extreme importance. Curiosity is aroused, sympathy is ready to exhibit itself, and sociability is the order of the day.

We cherish antipathies for a week and friendships for a month; we see people with different eyes, when we view them through the medium of acquaintanceship at watering places. We discover in men suddenly, after an hour's chat, in the evening after dinner, under the trees in the park where the healing spring bubbles up, a high intelligence and astonishing merits, and a month afterward we have completely forgotten these new friends, who were so fascinating when we first met them.

Permanent and serious ties are also formed here sooner than anywhere else. People see each other every day; they become acquainted very quickly, and their affection is tinged with the sweetness and unrestraint of long-standing intimacies. We cherish in after years the dear and tender memories of those first hours of friendship, the memory of those first conversations in which a soul was unveiled, of those first glances which interrogate and respond to questions and secret thoughts which the mouth has not as yet uttered, the memory of that first cordial confidence, the memory of that delightful sensation of opening our hearts to those who seem to open theirs to us in return.

And the melancholy of watering places, the monotony of days that are all alike, proves hourly an incentive to this heart expansion.

Well, this evening, as on every other evening, we awaited the appearance of strange faces.

Only two appeared, but they were very remarkable, a man and a woman — father and daughter. They immediately reminded me of some of Edgar Poe's characters; and yet there was about them a charm, the charm associated with misfortune. I looked upon them as the victims of fate. The man was very tall and thin, rather stooped, with perfectly white hair, too white for his comparatively youthful physiognomy; and there was in his bearing and in his person that austerity peculiar to Protestants. The daughter, who was probably twenty-four or twenty-five, was small in stature, and was also very thin, very pale, and she had the air of one who was worn out with utter lassitude. We meet people like this from time to time, who seem too weak for the tasks and the needs of daily life, too weak to move about, to walk, to do all that we do every day. She was rather pretty; with a transparent, spiritual beauty. And she ate with extreme slowness, as if she were almost incapable of moving her arms.

It must have been she, assuredly, who had come to take the waters.

They sat facing me, on the opposite side of the table; and I at once noticed that the father had a very singular, nervous twitching.

Every time he wanted to reach an object, his hand described a sort of zigzag before it succeeded in reaching what it was in search of, and after a little while this movement annoyed me so that I turned aside my head in order not to see it.

I noticed, too, that the young girl, during meals, wore a glove on her left hand.

After dinner I went for a stroll in the park of the bathing establishment. This led toward the little Auvergnese station of Chatel-Guyon, hidden in a gorge at the foot of the high mountain, from which flowed so many boiling springs, arising from the deep bed of extinct volcanoes. Over yonder, above our heads, the domes of extinct craters lifted their ragged peaks above the rest in the long mountain chain. For Chatel-Guyon is situated at the entrance to the land of mountain domes.

Beyond it stretches out the region of peaks, and, farther on again the region of precipitous summits.

The “Puy de Dome” is the highest of the domes, the Peak of Sancy is the loftiest of the peaks, and Cantal is the most precipitous of these mountain heights.

It was a very warm evening, and I was walking up and down a shady path, listening to the opening, strains of the Casino band, which was playing on an elevation overlooking the park.

And I saw the father and the daughter advancing slowly in my direction. I bowed as one bows to one’s hotel companions at a watering place; and the man, coming to a sudden halt, said to me:

“Could you not, monsieur, tell us of a nice walk to take, short, pretty, and not steep; and pardon my troubling you?”

I offered to show them the way toward the valley through which the little river flowed, a deep valley forming a gorge between two tall, craggy, wooded slopes.

They gladly accepted my offer.

And we talked, naturally, about the virtue of the waters.

“Oh,” he said, “my daughter has a strange malady, the seat of which is unknown. She suffers from incomprehensible nervous attacks. At one time the doctors think she has an attack of heart disease, at another time they imagine it is some affection of the liver, and at another they declare it to be a disease of the spine. To-day this protean malady, that assumes a thousand forms and a thousand modes of attack, is attributed to the stomach, which is the great caldron and regulator of the body. This is why we have come here. For my part, I am rather inclined to think it is the nerves. In any case it is very sad.”

Immediately the remembrance of the violent spasmodic movement of his hand came back to my mind, and I asked him:

“But is this not the result of heredity? Are not your own nerves somewhat affected?”

He replied calmly:

“Mine? Oh, no-my nerves have always been very steady.”

Then, suddenly, after a pause, he went on:

"Ah! You were alluding to the jerking movement of my hand every time I try to reach for anything? This arises from a terrible experience which I had. Just imagine, this daughter of mine was actually buried alive!"

I could only utter, "Ah!" so great were my astonishment and emotion.

He continued:

"Here is the story. It is simple. Juliette had been subject for some time to serious attacks of the heart. We believed that she had disease of that organ, and were prepared for the worst.

"One day she was carried into the house cold, lifeless, dead. She had fallen down unconscious in the garden. The doctor certified that life was extinct. I watched by her side for a day and two nights. I laid her with my own hands in the coffin, which I accompanied to the cemetery, where she was deposited in the family vault. It is situated in the very heart of Lorraine.

"I wished to have her interred with her jewels, bracelets, necklaces, rings, all presents which she had received from me, and wearing her first ball dress.

"You may easily imagine my state of mind when I re-entered our home. She was the only one I had, for my wife had been dead for many years. I found my way to my own apartment in a half-distracted condition, utterly exhausted, and sank into my easy-chair, without the capacity to think or the strength to move. I was nothing better now than a suffering, vibrating machine, a human being who had, as it were, been flayed alive; my soul was like an open wound.

"My old valet, Prosper, who had assisted me in placing Juliette in her coffin, and aided me in preparing her for her last sleep, entered the room noiselessly, and asked:

"'Does monsieur want anything?'

"I merely shook my head in reply.

"'Monsieur is wrong,' he urged. 'He will injure his health. Would monsieur like me to put him to bed?'

"I answered: 'No, let me alone!'

"And he left the room.

"I know not how many hours slipped away. Oh, what a night, what a night! It was cold. My fire had died out in the huge grate; and the wind, the winter wind, an icy wind, a winter hurricane, blew with a regular, sinister noise against the windows.

"How many hours slipped away? There I was without sleeping, powerless, crushed, my eyes wide open, my legs stretched out, my body limp, inanimate, and my mind torpid with despair. Suddenly the great doorbell, the great bell of the vestibule, rang out.

"I started so that my chair cracked under me. The solemn, ponderous sound vibrated through the empty country house as through a vault. I turned round to see what the hour was by the clock. It was just two in the morning. Who could be coming at such an hour?

"And, abruptly, the bell again rang twice. The servants, without doubt, were afraid to get up. I took a wax candle and descended the stairs. I was on the point of asking: 'Who is there?'

"Then I felt ashamed of my weakness, and I slowly drew back the heavy bolts. My heart was throbbing wildly. I was frightened. I opened the door brusquely, and in the darkness I distinguished a white figure, standing erect, something that resembled an apparition.

"I recoiled petrified with horror, faltering:

"'Who-who-who are you?'

"A voice replied:

"'It is I, father.'

"It was my daughter.

"I really thought I must be mad, and I retreated backward before this advancing spectre. I kept moving away, making a sign with my hand,' as if to drive the phantom away, that gesture which you have noticed — that gesture which has remained with me ever since.

"'Do not be afraid, papa,' said the apparition. 'I was not dead. Somebody tried to steal my rings and cut one of my fingers; the blood began to flow, and that restored me to life.'

"And, in fact, I could see that her hand was covered with blood.

"I fell on my knees, choking with sobs and with a rattling in my throat.

"Then, when I had somewhat collected my thoughts, though I was still so bewildered that I scarcely realized the awesome happiness that had befallen me, I made her go up to my room and sit dawn in my easy-chair; then I rang excitedly for Prosper to get him to rekindle the fire and to bring some wine, and to summon assistance.

"The man entered, stared at my daughter, opened his mouth with a gasp of alarm and stupefaction, and then fell back dead.

"It was he who had opened the vault, who had mutilated and then abandoned my daughter; for he could not efface the traces of the theft. He had not even taken the trouble to put back the coffin into its place, feeling sure, besides, that he would not be suspected by me, as I trusted him absolutely.

"You see, monsieur, that we are very unfortunate people."

He was silent.

The night had fallen, casting its shadows over the desolate, mournful vale, and a sort of mysterious fear possessed me at finding myself by the side of those strange beings, of this young girl who had come back from the tomb, and this father with his uncanny spasm.

I found it impossible to make any comment on this dreadful story. I only murmured:

"What a horrible thing!"

Then, after a minute's silence, I added:

"Let us go indoors. I think it is growing cool."

And we made our way back to the hotel.

IN THE WOOD

As the mayor was about to sit down to breakfast, word was brought to him that the rural policeman, with two prisoners, was awaiting him at the Hotel de Ville. He went there at once and found old Hochedur standing guard before a middle-class couple whom he was regarding with a severe expression on his face.

The man, a fat old fellow with a red nose and white hair, seemed utterly dejected; while the woman, a little roundabout individual with shining cheeks, looked at the official who had arrested them, with defiant eyes.

“What is it? What is it, Hochedur?”

The rural policeman made his deposition: He had gone out that morning at his usual time, in order to patrol his beat from the forest of Champioux as far as the boundaries of Argenteuil. He had not noticed anything unusual in the country except that it was a fine day, and that the wheat was doing well, when the son of old Bredel, who was going over his vines, called out to him: “Here, Daddy Hochedur, go and have a look at the outskirts of the wood. In the first thicket you will find a pair of pigeons who must be a hundred and thirty years old between them!”

He went in the direction indicated, entered the thicket, and there he heard words which made him suspect a flagrant breach of morality. Advancing, therefore, on his hands and knees as if to surprise a poacher, he had arrested the couple whom he found there.

The mayor looked at the culprits in astonishment, for the man was certainly sixty, and the woman fifty-five at least, and he began to question them, beginning with the man, who replied in such a weak voice that he could scarcely be heard.

“What is your name?”

“Nicholas Beaurain.”

“Your occupation?”

“Haberdasher, in the Rue des Martyrs, in Paris.”

"What were you doing in the wood?"

The haberdasher remained silent, with his eyes on his fat paunch, and his hands hanging at his sides, and the mayor continued:

"Do you deny what the officer of the municipal authorities states?"

"No, monsieur."

"So you confess it?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"What have you to say in your defence?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

"Where did you meet the partner in your misdemeanor?"

"She is my wife, monsieur."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then — then — you do not live together-in Paris?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but we are living together!"

"But in that case — you must be mad, altogether mad, my dear sir, to get caught playing lovers in the country at ten o'clock in the morning."

The haberdasher seemed ready to cry with shame, and he muttered: "It was she who enticed me! I told her it was very stupid, but when a woman once gets a thing into her head — you know — you cannot get it out."

The mayor, who liked a joke, smiled and replied: "In your case, the contrary ought to have happened. You would not be here, if she had had the idea only in her head."

Then Monsieur Beauain was seized with rage and turning to his wife, he said: "Do you see to what you have brought us with your poetry? And now we shall have to go before the courts at our age, for a breach of morals! And we shall have to shut up the shop, sell our good will, and go to some other neighborhood! That's what it has come to."

Madame Beaurain got up, and without looking at her husband, she explained herself without embarrassment, without useless modesty, and almost without hesitation.

"Of course, monsieur, I know that we have made ourselves ridiculous. Will you allow me to plead my cause like an advocate, or rather like a poor woman? And I hope that you will be kind enough to send us home, and to spare us the disgrace of a prosecution.

"Years ago, when I was young, I made Monsieur Beaurain's acquaintance one Sunday in this neighborhood. He was employed in a draper's shop, and

I was a saleswoman in a ready-made clothing establishment. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I used to come and spend Sundays here occasionally with a friend of mine, Rose Leveque, with whom I lived in the Rue Pigalle, and Rose had a sweetheart, while I had none. He used to bring us here, and one Saturday he told me laughing that he should bring a friend with him the next day. I quite understood what he meant, but I replied that it would be no good; for I was virtuous, monsieur.

"The next day we met Monsieur Beaurain at the railway station, and in those days he was good-looking, but I had made up my mind not to encourage him, and I did not. Well, we arrived at Bezons. It was a lovely day, the sort of day that touches your heart. When it is fine even now, just as it used to be formerly, I grow quite foolish, and when I am in the country I utterly lose my head. The green grass, the swallows flying so swiftly, the smell of the grass, the scarlet poppies, the daisies, all that makes me crazy. It is like champagne when one is not accustomed to it!

"Well, it was lovely weather, warm and bright, and it seemed to penetrate your body through your eyes when you looked and through your mouth when you breathed. Rose and Simon hugged and kissed each other every minute, and that gave me a queer feeling! Monsieur Beaurain and I walked behind them, without speaking much, for when people do not know each other, they do not find anything to talk about. He looked timid, and I liked to see his embarrassment. At last we got to the little wood; it was as cool as in a bath there, and we four sat down. Rose and her lover teased me because I looked rather stern, but you will understand that I could not be otherwise. And then they began to kiss and hug again, without putting any more restraint upon themselves than if we had not been there; and then they whispered together, and got up and went off among the trees, without saying a word. You may fancy what I looked like, alone with this young fellow whom I saw for the first time. I felt so confused at seeing them go that it gave me courage, and I began to talk. I asked him what his business was, and he said he was a linen draper's assistant, as I told you just now. We talked for a few minutes, and that made him bold, and he wanted to take liberties with me, but I told him sharply to keep his place. Is not that true, Monsieur Beaurain?"

Monsieur Beaurain, who was looking at his feet in confusion, did not reply, and she continued: "Then he saw that I was virtuous, and he began to make love to me nicely, like an honorable man, and from that time he came every Sunday, for he was very much in love with me. I was very fond of him also, very fond of him! He was a good-looking fellow, formerly, and in short he married me the next September, and we started in business in the Rue des Martyrs.

"It was a hard struggle for some years, monsieur. Business did not prosper, and we could not afford many country excursions, and, besides, we had got out of the way of them. One has other things in one's head, and thinks more of the cash box than of pretty speeches, when one is in business. We were growing old by degrees without perceiving it, like quiet people who do not think much about love. One does not regret anything as long as one does not notice what one has lost.

"And then, monsieur, business became better, and we were tranquil as to the future! Then, you see, I do not exactly know what went on in my mind, no, I really do not know, but I began to dream like a little boarding-school girl. The sight of the little carts full of flowers which are drawn about the streets made me cry; the smell of violets sought me out in my easy-chair, behind my cash box, and made my heart beat! Then I would get up and go out on the doorstep to look at the blue sky between the roofs. When one looks up at the sky from the street, it looks like a river which is descending on Paris, winding as it flows, and the swallows pass to and fro in it like fish. These ideas are very stupid at my age! But how can one help it, monsieur, when one has worked all one's life? A moment comes in which one perceives that one could have done something else, and that one regrets, oh! yes, one feels intense regret! Just think, for twenty years I might have gone and had kisses in the woods, like other women. I used to think how delightful it would be to lie under the trees and be in love with some one! And I thought of it every day and every night! I dreamed of the moonlight on the water, until I felt inclined to drown myself.

"I did not venture to speak to Monsieur Beaurain about this at first. I knew that he would make fun of me, and send me back to sell my needles and cotton! And then, to speak the truth, Monsieur Beaurain never said much to me, but when I looked in the glass, I also understood quite well that I no longer appealed to any one!

"Well, I made up my mind, and I proposed to him an excursion into the country, to the place where we had first become acquainted. He agreed without mistrusting anything, and we arrived here this morning, about nine o'clock.

“I felt quite young again when I got among the wheat, for a woman’s heart never grows old! And really, I no longer saw my husband as he is at present, but just as he was formerly! That I will swear to you, monsieur. As true as I am standing here I was crazy. I began to kiss him, and he was more surprised than if I had tried to murder him. He kept saying to me: ‘Why, you must be mad! You are mad this morning! What is the matter with you?’ I did not listen to him, I only listened to my own heart, and I made him come into the wood with me. That is all. I have spoken the truth, Monsieur le Maire, the whole truth.”

The mayor was a sensible man. He rose from his chair, smiled, and said: “Go in peace, madame, and when you again visit our forests, be more discreet.”

MARTINE

It came to him one Sunday after mass. He was walking home from church along the by-road that led to his house when he saw ahead of him Martine, who was also going home.

Her father walked beside his daughter with the important gait of a rich farmer. Discarding the smock, he wore a short coat of gray cloth and on his head a round-topped hat with wide brim.

She, laced up in a corset which she wore only once a week, walked along erect, with her squeezed-in waist, her broad shoulders and prominent hips, swinging herself a little. She wore a hat trimmed with flowers, made by a milliner at Yvetot, and displayed the back of her full, round, supple neck, reddened by the sun and air, on which fluttered little stray locks of hair.

Benoist saw only her back; but he knew well the face he loved, without, however, having ever noticed it more closely than he did now.

Suddenly he said: “Nom d’un nom, she is a fine girl, all the same, that Martine.” He watched her as she walked, admiring her hastily, feeling a desire taking possession of him. He did not long to see her face again, no. He kept gazing at her figure, repeating to himself: “Nom d’un nom, she is a fine girl.”

Martine turned to the right to enter “La Martiniere,” the farm of her father, Jean Martin, and she cast a glance behind her as she turned round. She saw Benoist, who looked to her very comical. She called out: “Good-morning, Benoist.” He replied: “Good-morning, Martine; good-morning, mait Martin,” and went on his way.

When he reached home the soup was on the table. He sat down opposite his mother beside the farm hand and the hired man, while the maid servant went to draw some cider.

He ate a few spoonfuls, then pushed away his plate. His mother said:

“Don’t you feel well?”

"No. I feel as if I had some pap in my stomach and that takes away my appetite."

He watched the others eating, as he cut himself a piece of bread from time to time and carried it lazily to his mouth, masticating it slowly. He thought of Martine. "She is a fine girl, all the same." And to think that he had not noticed it before, and that it came to him, just like that, all at once, and with such force that he could not eat.

He did not touch the stew. His mother said:

"Come, Benoist, try and eat a little; it is loin of mutton, it will do you good. When one has no appetite, they should force themselves to eat."

He swallowed a few morsels, then, pushing away his plate, said:

"No. I can't go that, positively."

When they rose from table he walked round the farm, telling the farm hand he might go home and that he would drive up the animals as he passed by them.

The country was deserted, as it was the day of rest. Here and there in a field of clover cows were moving along heavily, with full bellies, chewing their cud under a blazing sun. Unharnessed plows were standing at the end of a furrow; and the upturned earth ready for the seed showed broad brown patches of stubble of wheat and oats that had lately been harvested.

A rather dry autumn wind blew across the plain, promising a cool evening after the sun had set. Benoist sat down on a ditch, placed his hat on his knees as if he needed to cool off his head, and said aloud in the stillness of the country: "If you want a fine girl, she is a fine girl."

He thought of it again at night, in his bed, and in the morning when he awoke.

He was not sad, he was not discontented, he could not have told what ailed him. It was something that had hold of him, something fastened in his mind, an idea that would not leave him and that produced a sort of tickling sensation in his heart.

Sometimes a big fly is shut up in a room. You hear it flying about, buzzing, and the noise haunts you, irritates you. Suddenly it stops; you forget it; but all at once it begins again, obliging you to look up. You cannot catch it, nor drive it away, nor kill it, nor make it keep still. As soon as it settles for a second, it starts off buzzing again.

The recollection of Martine disturbed Benoist's mind like an imprisoned fly.

Then he longed to see her again and walked past the Martiniere several times. He saw her, at last, hanging out some clothes on a line stretched between two apple trees.

It was a warm day. She had on only a short skirt and her chemise, showing the curves of her figure as she hung up the towels. He remained there, concealed by the hedge, for more than an hour, even after she had left. He returned home more obsessed with her image than ever.

For a month his mind was full of her, he trembled when her name was mentioned in his presence. He could not eat, he had night sweats that kept him from sleeping.

On Sunday, at mass, he never took his eyes off her. She noticed it and smiled at him, flattered at his appreciation.

One evening, he suddenly met her in the road. She stopped short when she saw him coming. Then he walked right up to her, choking with fear and emotion, but determined to speak to her. He began falteringly:

“See here, Martine, this cannot go on like this any longer.”

She replied as if she wanted to tease him:

“What cannot go on any longer, Benoist?”

“My thinking of you as many hours as there are in the day,” he answered.

She put her hands on her hips.

“I do not oblige you to do so.”

“Yes, it is you,” he stammered; “I cannot sleep, nor rest, nor eat, nor anything.”

“What do you need to cure you of all that?” she asked.

He stood there in dismay, his arms swinging, his eyes staring, his mouth agape.

She hit him a punch in the stomach and ran off.

From that day they met each other along the roadside, in by-roads or else at twilight on the edge of a field, when he was going home with his horses and she was driving her cows home to the stable.

He felt himself carried, cast toward her by a strong impulse of his heart and body. He would have liked to squeeze her, strangle her, eat her, make her part of himself. And he trembled with impotence, impatience, rage, to think she did not belong to him entirely, as if they were one being.

People gossiped about it in the countryside. They said they were engaged. He had, besides, asked her if she would be his wife, and she had answered “Yes.”

They, were waiting for an opportunity to talk to their parents about it.

But, all at once, she stopped coming to meet him at the usual hour. He did not even see her as he wandered round the farm. He could only catch a glimpse of her at mass on Sunday. And one Sunday, after the sermon, the priest actually published the banns of marriage between Victoire-Adelaide Martin and Josephin-Isidore Vallin.

Benoist felt a sensation in his hands as if the blood had been drained off. He had a buzzing in the ears; and could hear nothing; and presently he perceived that his tears were falling on his prayer book.

For a month he stayed in his room. Then he went back to his work.

But he was not cured, and it was always in his mind. He avoided the roads that led past her home, so that he might not even see the trees in the yard, and this obliged him to make a great circuit morning and evening.

She was now married to Vallin, the richest farmer in the district. Benoist and he did not speak now, though they had been comrades from childhood.

One evening, as Benoist was passing the town hall, he heard that she was enceinte. Instead of experiencing a feeling of sorrow, he experienced, on the contrary, a feeling of relief. It was over, now, all over. They were more separated by that than by her marriage. He really preferred that it should be so.

Months passed, and more months. He caught sight of her, occasionally, going to the village with a heavier step than usual. She blushed as she saw him, lowered her head and quickened her pace. And he turned out of his way so as not to pass her and meet her glance.

He dreaded the thought that he might one morning meet her face to face, and be obliged to speak to her. What could he say to her now, after all he had said formerly, when he held her hands as he kissed her hair beside her cheeks? He often thought of those meetings along the roadside. She had acted horridly after all her promises.

By degrees his grief diminished, leaving only sadness behind. And one day he took the old road that led past the farm where she now lived. He looked at the roof from a distance. It was there, in there, that she lived with another! The apple trees were in bloom, the cocks crowed on the dung hill. The whole dwelling seemed empty, the farm hands had gone to the fields to their spring toil. He stopped near the gate and looked into the yard. The dog was asleep outside his kennel, three calves were walking slowly, one behind the other, towards the pond. A big turkey was strutting before the door, parading before the turkey hens like a singer at the opera.

Benoist leaned against the gate post and was suddenly seized with a desire to weep. But suddenly, he heard a cry, a loud cry for help coming from the house. He was struck with dismay, his hands grasping the wooden bars of the gate, and listened attentively. Another cry, a prolonged, heartrending cry, reached his ears, his soul, his flesh. It was she who was crying like that! He darted inside, crossed the grass patch, pushed open the door, and saw her lying on the floor, her body drawn up, her face livid, her eyes haggard, in the throes of childbirth.

He stood there, trembling and paler than she was, and stammered:

"Here I am, here I am, Martine!"

She replied in gasps:

"Oh, do not leave me, do not leave me, Benoist!"

He looked at her, not knowing what to say, what to do. She began to cry out again:

"Oh, oh, it is killing me. Oh, Benoist!"

She writhed frightfully.

Benoist was suddenly seized with a frantic longing to help her, to quiet her, to remove her pain. He leaned over, lifted her up and laid her on her bed; and while she kept on moaning he began to take off her clothes, her jacket, her skirt and her petticoat. She bit her fists to keep from crying out. Then he did as he was accustomed to doing for cows, ewes, and mares: he assisted in delivering her and found in his hands a large infant who was moaning.

He wiped it off and wrapped it up in a towel that was drying in front of the fire, and laid it on a bundle of clothes ready for ironing that was on the table. Then he went back to the mother.

He took her up and placed her on the floor again, then he changed the bedclothes and put her back into bed. She faltered:

"Thank you, Benoist, you have a noble heart." And then she wept a little as if she felt regretful.

He did not love her any longer, not the least bit. It was all over. Why? How? He could not have said. What had happened had cured him better than ten years of absence.

She asked, exhausted and trembling:

"What is it?"

He replied calmly:

“It is a very fine girl.”

Then they were silent again. At the end of a few moments, the mother, in a weak voice, said:

“Show her to me, Benoist.”

He took up the little one and was showing it to her as if he were holding the consecrated wafer, when the door opened, and Isidore Vallin appeared.

He did not understand at first, then all at once he guessed.

Benoist, in consternation, stammered out:

“I was passing, I was just passing by when f heard her crying out, and I came — there is your child, Vallin!”

Then the husband, his eyes full of tears, stepped forward, took the little mite of humanity that he held out to him, kissed it, unable to speak from emotion for a few seconds; then placing the child on the bed, he held out both hands to Benoist, saying:

“Your hand upon it, Benoist. From now on we understand each other. If you are willing, we will be a pair of friends, a pair of friends!” And Benoist replied: “Indeed I will, certainly, indeed I will.”

ALL OVER

Compte de Lormerin had just finished dressing. He cast a parting glance at the large mirror which occupied an entire panel in his dressing-room and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, although quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no sign of a paunch, with a small mustache of doubtful shade, which might be called fair, he had a walk, a nobility, a "chic," in short, that indescribable something which establishes a greater difference between two men than would millions of money. He murmured:

"Lormerin is still alive!"

And he went into the drawing-room where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work table of the gentleman who never works, there were a dozen letters lying beside three newspapers of different opinions. With a single touch he spread out all these letters, like a gambler giving the choice of a card; and he scanned the handwriting, a thing he did each morning before opening the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry and vague anxiety. What did these sealed mysterious letters bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing the writing, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always gave him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple, nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he looked at it uneasily, with a sort of chill at his heart. He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, and yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope, without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying glass which he used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. “Whom is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have often read its tracings, yes, very often. But this must have been a long, long time ago. Whom the deuce can it be from? Pooh! it’s only somebody asking for money.”

And he tore open the letter. Then he read:

> MY DEAR FRIEND: You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I left Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call “my hospital.” Do you remember him? He died five years ago, and now I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married, for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you have never seen. I informed you of her birth, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.
>
> You are still the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well, if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call Lison, come and dine with her this evening, with the elderly Baronne de Vance your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, although happy, reaches out to you a devoted hand, which you must clasp, but no longer kiss, my poor Jaquelet.
>
> LISE DE VANCE.

Lormerin’s heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by a poignant emotion that made the tears mount up to his eyes!

If he had ever loved a woman in his life it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called “Ashflower,” on account of the strange color of her hair and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a dainty, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail baronne, the wife of that gouty, pimply baron, who had abruptly carried her off to the provinces, shut her up, kept her in seclusion through jealousy, jealousy of the handsome Lormerin.

Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he too, had been truly loved. She familiarly gave him, the name of Jaquelet, and would pronounce that word in a delicious fashion.

A thousand forgotten memories came back to him, far, off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening she had called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The fragrance from her bodice embalmed the warm air-the odor of her bodice, and perhaps, too, the fragrance of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

"I don't know. The moon and the water have affected me. Every time I see poetic things I have a tightening at the heart, and I have to cry."

He smiled, affected himself, considering her feminine emotion charming — the unaffected emotion of a poor little woman, whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering:

"My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love affair, short-lived and dainty, it had been and over all too quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by this old brute of a baron, who had carried off his wife, and never let any one see her afterward.

Lormerin had forgotten, in fact, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out another so quickly in Paris, when one is a bachelor! No matter; he had kept a little altar for her in his heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose, and said aloud: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

And instinctively he turned toward the mirror to inspect himself from head to foot. He reflected: "She must look very old, older than I look." And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those bygone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were of no importance.

The whole day he kept thinking of this ghost of other days. What was she like now? How strange it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! But would he recognize her?

He made his toilet with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better with the coat than a black one, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch With the curling iron, for he had preserved his hair, and started very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he saw on entering a pretty drawing-room newly furnished was his own portrait, an old faded photograph, dating from the days when he was a beau, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose up abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an old woman with white hair who extended both hands toward him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other several times; then, lifting up his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep.

He could not abstain from murmuring:

"Is it you, Lise?"

She replied:

"Yes, it is I; it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, would you? I have had so much sorrow — so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now — or, rather, don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept — and young! If I had by chance met you in the street I would have exclaimed: 'Jaquelet!'. Now, sit down and let us, first of all, have a chat. And then I will call my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You'll see how she resembles me — or, rather, how I resembled her — no, it is not quite that; she is just like the 'me' of former days — you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared that there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over; it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman — it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. Why had he come to this house? What could he talk about? Of the long ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything in presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer recall all the nice, tender things, so sweet, so bitter, that had come to his mind that morning when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Ashflower. What, then, had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved? That woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young girl who used to call him "Jaquelet" so prettily?

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they talked only commonplaces, awkwardly and spasmodically and slowly, she rose and pressed the button of the bell.

"I am going to call Renee," she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a dress; then a young voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, mamma!"

Lormerin remained bewildered as at the sight of an apparition.

He stammered:

"Good-day, mademoiselle"

Then, turning toward the mother:

"Oh! it is you!"

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and come back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even younger, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

"Good-morning, Lison!"

A man-servant announced:

"Dinner is ready, madame."

And they proceeded toward the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea:

"Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled again repeating over and over:

"Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eyes of the young girl that he found again his memories of the past. Twenty times he opened his mouth to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison?" forgetting this white-haired lady who was looking at him tenderly.

And yet, there were moments when, he no longer felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glances, in her entire being, something which he did not find again. And he made prodigious efforts of mind to recall his lady love, to seize again what had escaped from her, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

The baronne said:

“You have lost your old vivacity, my poor friend.”

He murmured:

“There are many other things that I have lost!”

But in his heart, touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more, like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar intonation, some expression of her mother’s, a certain style of speaking and thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He got away early, and took a turn along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Apart from the two women, he now saw only one, a young one, the old one come back out of the past, and he loved her as he had loved her in bygone years. He loved her with greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think what he should do.

But, as he was passing, with a wax candle in his hand, before the glass, the large glass in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightful ravages, which he had not perceived till now.

And he sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring:

“All over, Lormerin!”

THE PARROT

OR

THE DROWNED MAN

I

Everybody in Fecamp knew Mother Patin's story. She had certainly been unfortunate with her husband, for in his lifetime he used to beat her, just as wheat is threshed in the barn.

He was master of a fishing bark and had married her, formerly, because she was pretty, although poor.

Patin was a good sailor, but brutal. He used to frequent Father Auban's inn, where he would usually drink four or five glasses of brandy, on lucky days eight or ten glasses and even more, according to his mood. The brandy was served to the customers by Father Auban's daughter, a pleasing brunette, who attracted people to the house only by her pretty face, for nothing had ever been gossiped about her.

Patin, when he entered the inn, would be satisfied to look at her and to compliment her politely and respectfully. After he had had his first glass of brandy he would already find her much nicer; at the second he would wink; at the third he would say. "If you were only willing, Mam'zelle Desiree — — " without ever finishing his sentence; at the fourth he would try to hold her back by her skirt in order to kiss her; and when he went as high as ten it was Father Auban who brought him the remaining drinks.

The old innkeeper, who knew all the tricks of the trade, made Desiree walk about between the tables in order to increase the consumption of drinks; and Desiree, who was a worthy daughter of Father Auban, flitted around among the benches and joked with them, her lips smiling and her eyes sparkling.

Patin got so well accustomed to Desiree's face that he thought of it even while at sea, when throwing out his nets, in storms or in calms, on moonlit or dark evenings. He thought of her while holding the tiller in the stern of his boat, while his four companions were slumbering with their heads on their arms. He always saw her, smiling, pouring out the yellow brandy with a peculiar shoulder movement and then exclaiming as she turned away: "There, now; are you satisfied?"

He saw her so much in his mind's eye that he was overcome by an irresistible desire to marry her, and, not being able to hold out any longer, he asked for her hand.

He was rich, owned his own vessel, his nets and a little house at the foot of the hill on the Retenue, whereas Father Auban had nothing. The marriage was therefore eagerly agreed upon and the wedding took place as soon as possible, as both parties were desirous for the affair to be concluded as early as convenient.

Three days after the wedding Patin could no longer understand how he had ever imagined Desiree to be different from other women. What a fool he had been to encumber himself with a penniless creature, who had undoubtedly inveigled him with some drug which she had put in his brandy!

He would curse all day lung, break his pipe with his teeth and maul his crew. After he had sworn by every known term at everything that came his way he would rid himself of his remaining anger on the fish and lobsters, which he pulled from the nets and threw into the baskets amid oaths and foul language. When he returned home he would find his wife, Father Auban's daughter, within reach of his mouth and hand, and it was not long before he treated her like the lowest creature in the world. As she listened calmly, accustomed to paternal violence, he grew exasperated at her quiet, and one evening he beat her. Then life at his home became unbearable.

For ten years the principal topic of conversation on the Retenue was about the beatings that Patin gave his wife and his manner of cursing at her for the least thing. He could, indeed, curse with a richness of vocabulary in a roundness of tone unequalled by any other man in Fecamp. As soon as his ship was sighted at the entrance of the harbor, returning from the fishing expedition, every one awaited the first volley he would hurl from the bridge as soon as he perceived his wife's white cap.

Standing at the stern he would steer, his eye fixed on the bows and on the sail, and, notwithstanding the difficulty of the narrow passage and the height of the turbulent waves, he would search among the watching women and try to recognize his wife, Father Auban's daughter, the wretch!

Then, as soon as he saw her, notwithstanding the noise of the wind and waves, he would let loose upon her with such power and volubility that every one would laugh, although they pitied her greatly. When he arrived at the dock he would relieve his mind, while unloading the fish, in such an expressive manner that he attracted around him all the loafers of the neighborhood. The words left his mouth sometimes like shots from a cannon, short and terrible, sometimes like peals of thunder, which roll and rumble for five minutes, such a hurricane of oaths that he seemed to have in his lungs one of the storms of the Eternal Father.

When he left his ship and found himself face to face with her, surrounded by all the gossips of the neighborhood, he would bring up a new cargo of insults and bring her back to their dwelling, she in front, he behind, she weeping, he yelling at her.

At last, when alone with her behind closed doors, he would thrash her on the slightest pretext. The least thing was sufficient to make him raise his hand, and when he had once begun he did not stop, but he would throw into her face the true motive for his anger. At each blow he would roar: "There, you beggar! There, you wretch! There, you pauper! What a bright thing I did when I rinsed my mouth with your rascal of a father's apology for brandy."

The poor woman lived in continual fear, in a ceaseless trembling of body and soul, in everlasting expectation of outrageous thrashings.

This lasted ten years. She was so timorous that she would grow pale whenever she spoke to any one, and she thought of nothing but the blows with which she was threatened; and she became thinner, more yellow and drier than a smoked fish.

II

One night, when her husband was at sea, she was suddenly awakened by the wild roaring of the wind!

She sat up in her bed, trembling, but, as she hear nothing more, she lay down again; almost immediately there was a roar in the chimney which shook the entire house; it seemed to cross the heavens like a pack of furious animals snorting and roaring.

Then she arose and rushed to the harbor. Other women were arriving from all sides, carrying lanterns. The men also were gathering, and all were watching the foaming crests of the breaking wave.

The storm lasted fifteen hours. Eleven sailors never returned; Patin was among them.

In the neighborhood of Dieppe the wreck of his bark, the Jeune-Amelie, was found. The bodies of his sailors were found near Saint-Valery, but his body was never recovered. As his vessel seemed to have been cut in two, his wife expected and feared his return for a long time, for if there had been a collision he alone might have been picked up and carried afar off.

Little by little she grew accustomed to the thought that she was rid of him, although she would start every time that a neighbor, a beggar or a peddler would enter suddenly.

One afternoon, about four years after the disappearance of her husband, while she was walking along the Rue aux Juifs, she stopped before the house of an old sea captain who had recently died and whose furniture was for sale. Just at that moment a parrot was at auction. He had green feathers and a blue head and was watching everybody with a displeased look. “Three francs!” cried the auctioneer. “A bird that can talk like a lawyer, three francs!”

A friend of the Patin woman nudged her and said:

“You ought to buy that, you who are rich. It would be good company for you. That bird is worth more than thirty francs. Anyhow, you can always sell it for twenty or twenty-five!”

Patin’s widow added fifty centimes, and the bird was given her in a little cage, which she carried away. She took it home, and, as she was opening the wire door in order to give it something to drink, he bit her finger and drew blood.

“Oh, how naughty he is!” she said.

Nevertheless she gave it some hemp-seed and corn and watched it pruning its feathers as it glanced warily at its new home and its new mistress. On the following morning, just as day was breaking, the Patin woman distinctly heard a loud, deep, roaring voice calling: “Are you going to get up, carrion?”

Her fear was so great that she hid her head under the sheets, for when Patin was with her as soon as he would open his eyes he would shout those well-known words into her ears.

Trembling, rolled into a ball, her back prepared for the thrashing which she already expected, her face buried in the pillows, she murmured: “Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he has come back!”

Minutes passed; no noise disturbed the quiet room. Then, trembling, she stuck her head out of the bed, sure that he was there, watching, ready to beat her. Except for a ray of sun shining through the window, she saw nothing, and she said to her self: “He must be hidden.”

She waited a long time and then, gaining courage, she said to herself: “I must have dreamed it, seeing there is nobody here.”

A little reassured, she closed her eyes, when from quite near a furious voice, the thunderous voice of the drowned man, could be heard crying: “Say! when in the name of all that’s holy are you going to get up, you b —— ?”

She jumped out of bed, moved by obedience, by the passive obedience of a woman accustomed to blows and who still remembers and always will remember that voice! She said: “Here I am, Patin; what do you want?”

Put Patin did not answer. Then, at a complete loss, she looked around her, then in the chimney and under the bed and finally sank into a chair, wild with anxiety, convinced that Patin’s soul alone was there, near her, and that he had returned in order to torture her.

Suddenly she remembered the loft, in order to reach which one had to take a ladder. Surely he must have hidden there in order to surprise her. He must have been held by savages on some distant shore, unable to escape until now, and he had returned, worse that ever. There was no doubting the quality of that voice. She raised her head and asked: “Are you up there, Patin?”

Patin did not answer. Then, with a terrible fear which made her heart tremble, she climbed the ladder, opened the skylight, looked, saw nothing, entered, looked about and found nothing. Sitting on some straw, she began to cry, but while she was weeping, overcome by a poignant and supernatural terror, she heard Patin talking in the room below.

He seemed less angry and he was saying: “Nasty weather! Fierce wind! Nasty weather! I haven’t eaten, damn it!”

She cried through the ceiling: “Here I am, Patin; I am getting your meal ready. Don’t get angry.”

She ran down again. There was no one in the room. She felt herself growing weak, as if death were touching her, and she tried to run and get help from the neighbors, when a voice near her cried out: “I haven’t had my breakfast, by G — !”

And the parrot in his cage watched her with his round, knowing, wicked eye. She, too, looked at him wildly, murmuring: “Ah! so it’s you!”

He shook his head and continued: “Just you wait! I’ll teach you how to loaf.”

What happened within her? She felt, she understood that it was he, the dead man, who had come back, who had disguised himself in the feathers of this bird in order to continue to torment her; that he would curse, as formerly, all day long, and bite her, and swear at her, in order to attract the neighbors and make them laugh. Then she rushed for the cage and seized the bird, which scratched and tore her flesh with its claws and beak. But she held it with all her strength between her hands. She threw it on the ground and rolled over it with the frenzy of one possessed. She crushed it and finally made of it nothing but a little green, flabby lump which no longer moved or spoke. Then she wrapped it in a cloth, as in a shroud, and she went out in her nightgown, barefoot; she crossed the dock, against which the choppy waves of the sea were beating, and she shook the cloth and let drop this little, dead thing, which looked like so much grass. Then she returned, threw herself on her knees before the empty cage, and, overcome by what she had done, kneeled and prayed for forgiveness, as if she had committed some heinous crime.

THE PIECE OF STRING

It was market-day, and from all the country round Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the town. The men walked slowly, throwing the whole body forward at every step of their long, crooked legs. They were deformed from pushing the plough which makes the left-shoulder higher, and bends their figures side-ways; from reaping the grain, when they have to spread their legs so as to keep on their feet. Their starched blue blouses, glossy as though varnished, ornamented at collar and cuffs with a little embroidered design and blown out around their bony bodies, looked very much like balloons about to soar, whence issued two arms and two feet.

Some of these fellows dragged a cow or a calf at the end of a rope. And just behind the animal followed their wives beating it over the back with a leaf-covered branch to hasten its pace, and carrying large baskets out of which protruded the heads of chickens or ducks. These women walked more quickly and energetically than the men, with their erect, dried-up figures, adorned with scanty little shawls pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads wrapped round with a white cloth, enclosing the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Now a char-a-banc passed by, jogging along behind a nag and shaking up strangely the two men on the seat, and the woman at the bottom of the cart who held fast to its sides to lessen the hard jolting.

In the market-place at Goderville was a great crowd, a mingled multitude of men and beasts. The horns of cattle, the high, long-napped hats of wealthy peasants, the head-dresses of the women came to the surface of that sea. And the sharp, shrill, barking voices made a continuous, wild din, while above it occasionally rose a huge burst of laughter from the sturdy lungs of a merry peasant or a prolonged bellow from a cow tied fast to the wall of a house.

It all smelled of the stable, of milk, of hay and of perspiration, giving off that half-human, half-animal odor which is peculiar to country folks.

Maitre Hauchecorne, of Breaute, had just arrived at Goderville and was making his way toward the square when he perceived on the ground a little piece of string. Maitre Hauchecorne, economical as are all true Normans, reflected that everything was worth picking up which could be of any use, and he stooped down, but painfully, because he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin string from the ground and was carefully preparing to roll it up when he saw Maitre Malandain, the harness maker, on his doorstep staring at him. They had once had a quarrel about a halter, and they had borne each other malice ever since. Maitre Hauchecorne was overcome with a sort of shame at being seen by his enemy picking up a bit of string in the road. He quickly hid it beneath his blouse and then slipped it into his breeches, pocket, then pretended to be still looking for something on the ground which he did not discover and finally went off toward the market-place, his head bent forward and his body almost doubled in two by rheumatic pains.

He was at once lost in the crowd, which kept moving about slowly and noisily as it chaffered and bargained. The peasants examined the cows, went off, came back, always in doubt for fear of being cheated, never quite daring to decide, looking the seller square in the eye in the effort to discover the tricks of the man and the defect in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, their legs tied together, with terrified eyes and scarlet combs.

They listened to propositions, maintaining their prices in a decided manner with an impassive face or perhaps deciding to accept the smaller price offered, suddenly calling out to the customer who was starting to go away:

“All right, I’ll let you have them, Mait’ Anthime.”

Then, little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived at a distance poured into the inns.

At Jourdain’s the great room was filled with eaters, just as the vast court was filled with vehicles of every sort — wagons, gigs, chars-a-bancs, tilburies, innumerable vehicles which have no name, yellow with mud, misshapen, pieced together, raising their shafts to heaven like two arms, or it may be with their nose on the ground and their rear in the air.

Just opposite to where the diners were at table the huge fireplace, with its bright flame, gave out a burning heat on the backs of those who sat at the right. Three spits were turning, loaded with chickens, with pigeons and with joints of mutton, and a delectable odor of roast meat and of gravy flowing over crisp brown skin arose from the hearth, kindled merriment, caused mouths to water.

All the aristocracy of the plough were eating there at Mait' Jourdain's, the innkeeper's, a dealer in horses also and a sharp fellow who had made a great deal of money in his day.

The dishes were passed round, were emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Every one told of his affairs, of his purchases and his sales. They exchanged news about the crops. The weather was good for greens, but too wet for grain.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the courtyard before the house. Every one, except some of the most indifferent, was on their feet at once and ran to the door, to the windows, their mouths full and napkins in their hand.

When the public crier had finished his tattoo he called forth in a jerky voice, pausing in the wrong places:

"Be it known to the inhabitants of Goderville and in general to all persons present at the market that there has been lost this morning on the Beuzeville road, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and business papers. You are requested to return it to the mayor's office at once or to Maitre Fortune Houlbreque, of Manneville. There will be twenty francs reward."

Then the man went away. They heard once more at a distance the dull beating of the drum and the faint voice of the crier. Then they all began to talk of this incident, reckoning up the chances which Maitre Houlbreque had of finding or of not finding his pocketbook again.

The meal went on. They were finishing their coffee when the corporal of gendarmes appeared on the threshold.

He asked:

"Is Maitre Hauchecorne, of Breaute, here?"

Maitre Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table answered:

"Here I am, here I am."

And he followed the corporal.

The mayor was waiting for him, seated in an armchair. He was the notary of the place, a tall, grave man of pompous speech.

“Maitre Hauchecorne,” said he, “this morning on the Beuzeville road, you were seen to pick up the pocketbook lost by Maitre Houlbreque, of Manneville.”

The countryman looked at the mayor in amazement frightened already at this suspicion which rested on him, he knew not why.

“I — I picked up that pocketbook?”

“Yes, YOU.”

“I swear I don’t even know anything about it.”

“You were seen.”

“I was seen — I? Who saw me?”

“M. Malandain, the harness-maker.”

Then the old man remembered, understood, and, reddening with anger, said:

“Ah! he saw me, did he, the rascal? He saw me picking up this string here, M’sieu le Maire.”

And fumbling at the bottom of his pocket, he pulled out of it the little end of string.

But the mayor incredulously shook his head:

“You will not make me believe, Maitre Hauchecorne, that M. Malandain, who is a man whose word can be relied on, has mistaken this string for a pocketbook.”

The peasant, furious, raised his hand and spat on the ground beside him as if to attest his good faith, repeating:

“For all that, it is God’s truth, M’sieu le Maire. There! On my soul’s salvation, I repeat it.”

The mayor continued:

“After you picked up the object in question, you even looked about for some time in the mud to see if a piece of money had not dropped out of it.”

The good man was choking with indignation and fear.

“How can they tell — how can they tell such lies as that to slander an honest man! How can they?”

His protestations were in vain; he was not believed.

He was confronted with M. Malandain, who repeated and sustained his testimony. They railed at one another for an hour. At his own request Maitre Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

At last the mayor, much perplexed, sent him away, warning him that he would inform the public prosecutor and ask for orders.

The news had spread. When he left the mayor's office the old man was surrounded, interrogated with a curiosity which was serious or mocking, as the case might be, but into which no indignation entered. And he began to tell the story of the string. They did not believe him. They laughed.

He passed on, buttonholed by every one, himself buttonholing his acquaintances, beginning over and over again his tale and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out to prove that he had nothing in them.

They said to him:

"You old rogue!"

He grew more and more angry, feverish, in despair at not being believed, and kept on telling his story.

The night came. It was time to go home. He left with three of his neighbors, to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the string, and all the way he talked of his adventure.

That evening he made the round of the village of Breaute for the purpose of telling every one. He met only unbelievers.

He brooded over it all night long.

The next day, about one in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a farm hand of Maitre Breton, the market gardener at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maitre Holbreque, of Manneville.

This man said, indeed, that he had found it on the road, but not knowing how to read, he had carried it home and given it to his master.

The news spread to the environs. Maitre Hauchecorne was informed. He started off at once and began to relate his story with the denoument. He was triumphant.

"What grieved me," said he, "was not the thing itself, do you understand, but it was being accused of lying. Nothing does you so much harm as being in disgrace for lying."

All day he talked of his adventure. He told it on the roads to the people who passed, at the cabaret to the people who drank and next Sunday when they came out of church. He even stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was easy now, and yet something worried him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had a joking manner while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel their remarks behind his back.

On Tuesday of the following week he went to market at Goderville, prompted solely by the need of telling his story.

Malandain, standing on his doorstep, began to laugh as he saw him pass. Why?

He accosted a farmer of Criquetot, who did not let hire finish, and giving him a punch in the pit of the stomach cried in his face: “Oh, you great rogue!” Then he turned his heel upon him.

Maitre Hauchecorne remained speechless and grew more and more uneasy. Why had they called him “great rogue”?

When seated at table in Jourdain’s tavern he began again to explain the whole affair.

A horse dealer of Montivilliers shouted at him:

“Get out, get out, you old scamp! I know all about your old string.”

Hauchecorne stammered:

“But since they found it again, the pocketbook!”

But the other continued:

“Hold your tongue, daddy; there’s one who finds it and there’s another who returns it. And no one the wiser.”

The farmer was speechless. He understood at last. They accused him of having had the pocketbook brought back by an accomplice, by a confederate.

He tried to protest. The whole table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner, and went away amid a chorus of jeers.

He went home indignant, choking with rage, with confusion, the more cast down since with his Norman craftiness he was, perhaps, capable of having done what they accused him of and even of boasting of it as a good trick. He was dimly conscious that it was impossible to prove his innocence, his craftiness being so well known. He felt himself struck to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

He began anew to tell his tale, lengthening his recital every day, each day adding new proofs, more energetic declarations and more sacred oaths, which he thought of, which he prepared in his hours of solitude, for his mind was entirely occupied with the story of the string. The more he denied it, the more artful his arguments, the less he was believed.

“Those are liars proofs,” they said behind his back.

He felt this. It preyed upon him and he exhausted himself in useless efforts.

He was visibly wasting away.

Jokers would make him tell the story of “the piece of string” to amuse them, just as you make a soldier who has been on a campaign tell his story of the battle. His mind kept growing weaker and about the end of December he took to his bed.

He passed away early in January, and, in the ravings of death agony, he protested his innocence, repeating:

“A little bit of string — a little bit of string. See, here it is, M’sieu le Maire.”

TOINE

He was known for thirty miles round was father Toine — fat Toine, Toine-my-extra, Antoine Macheble, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy — the innkeeper of Tournevent.

It was he who had made famous this hamlet buried in a niche in the valley that led down to the sea, a poor little peasants' hamlet consisting of ten Norman cottages surrounded by ditches and trees.

The houses were hidden behind a curve which had given the place the name of Tournevent. It seemed to have sought shelter in this ravine overgrown with grass and rushes, from the keen, salt sea wind — the ocean wind that devours and burns like fire, that drys up and withers like the sharpest frost of winter, just as birds seek shelter in the furrows of the fields in time of storm.

But the whole hamlet seemed to be the property of Antoine Macheble, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy, who was called also Toine, or Toine-My-Extra-Special, the latter in consequence of a phrase current in his mouth:

"My Extra-Special is the best in France:"

His "Extra-Special" was, of course, his cognac.

For the last twenty years he had served the whole countryside with his Extra-Special and his "Burnt-Brandy," for whenever he was asked: "What shall I drink, Toine?" he invariably answered: "A burnt-brandy, my son-in-law; that warms the inside and clears the head — there's nothing better for your body."

He called everyone his son-in-law, though he had no daughter, either married or to be married.

Well known indeed was Toine Burnt-Brandy, the stoutest man in all Normandy. His little house seemed ridiculously small, far too small and too low to hold him; and when people saw him standing at his door, as he did all day long, they asked one another how he could possibly get through the door. But he went in whenever a customer appeared, for it was only right that Toine should be invited to take his thimbleful of whatever was drunk in his wine shop.

His inn bore the sign: “The Friends’ Meeting-Place” — and old Toine was, indeed, the friend of all. His customers came from Fecamp and Montvilliers, just for the fun of seeing him and hearing him talk; for fat Toine would have made a tombstone laugh. He had a way of chaffing people without offending them, or of winking to express what he didn’t say, of slapping his thighs when he was merry in such a way as to make you hold your sides, laughing. And then, merely to see him drink was a curiosity. He drank everything that was offered him, his roguish eyes twinkling, both with the enjoyment of drinking and at the thought of the money he was taking in. His was a double pleasure: first, that of drinking; and second, that of piling up the cash.

You should have heard him quarrelling with his wife! It was worth paying for to see them together. They had wrangled all the thirty years they had been married; but Toine was good-humored, while his better-half grew angry. She was a tall peasant woman, who walked with long steps like a stork, and had a head resembling that of an angry screech-owl. She spent her time rearing chickens in a little poultry-yard behind the inn, and she was noted for her success in fattening them for the table.

Whenever the gentry of Fecamp gave a dinner they always had at least one of Madame Toine’s chickens to be in the fashion.

But she was born ill-tempered, and she went through life in a mood of perpetual discontent. Annoyed at everyone, she seemed to be particularly annoyed at her husband. She disliked his gaiety, his reputation, his rude health, his embonpoint. She treated him as a good-for-nothing creature because he earned his money without working, and as a glutton because he ate and drank as much as ten ordinary men; and not a day went by without her declaring spitefully:

“You’d be better in the stye along with the pigs! You’re so fat it makes me sick to look at you!”

And she would shout in his face:

“Wait! Wait a bit! We’ll see! You’ll burst one of these fine days like a sack of corn-you old bloat, you!”

Toine would laugh heartily, patting his corpulent person, and replying:

“Well, well, old hen, why don’t you fatten up your chickens like that? just try!”

And, rolling his sleeves back from his enormous arm, he said:

“That would make a fine wing now, wouldn’t it?”

And the customers, doubled up with laughter, would thump the table with their fists and stamp their feet on the floor.

The old woman, mad with rage, would repeat:

“Wait a bit! Wait a bit! You’ll see what’ll happen. He’ll burst like a sack of grain!”

And off she would go, amid the jeers and laughter of the drinkers.

Toine was, in fact, an astonishing sight, he was so fat, so heavy, so red. He was one of those enormous beings with whom Death seems to be amusing himself — playing perfidious tricks and pranks, investing with an irresistibly comic air his slow work of destruction. Instead of manifesting his approach, as with others, in white hairs, in emaciation, in wrinkles, in the gradual collapse which makes the onlookers say: “Gad! how he has changed!” he took a malicious pleasure in fattening Toine, in making him monstrous and absurd, in tingeing his face with a deep crimson, in giving him the appearance of superhuman health, and the changes he inflicts on all were in the case of Toine laughable, comic, amusing, instead of being painful and distressing to witness.

“Wait a bit! Wait a bit!” said his wife. “You’ll see.”

At last Toine had an apoplectic fit, and was paralyzed in consequence. The giant was put to bed in the little room behind the partition of the drinking-room that he might hear what was said and talk to his friends, for his head was quite clear although his enormous body was helplessly inert. It was hoped at first that his immense legs would regain some degree of power; but this hope soon disappeared, and Toine spent his days and nights in the bed, which was only made up once a week, with the help of four neighbors who lifted the innkeeper, each holding a limb, while his mattress was turned.

He kept his spirits, nevertheless; but his gaiety was of a different kind — more timid, more humble; and he lived in a constant, childlike fear of his wife, who grumbled from morning till night:

“Look at him there — the great glutton! the good-for-nothing creature, the old boozer! Serve him right, serve him right!”

He no longer answered her. He contented himself with winking behind the old woman’s back, and turning over on his other side — the only movement of which he was now capable. He called this exercise a "tack to the north" or a "tack to the south."

His great distraction nowadays was to listen to the conversations in the bar, and to shout through the wall when he recognized a friend's voice:

"Hallo, my son-in-law! Is that you, Celestin?"

And Celestin Maloisel answered:

"Yes, it's me, Toine. Are you getting about again yet, old fellow?"

"Not exactly getting about," answered Toine. "But I haven't grown thin; my carcass is still good."

Soon he got into the way of asking his intimates into his room to keep him company, although it grieved him to see that they had to drink without him. It pained him to the quick that his customers should be drinking without him.

"That's what hurts worst of all," he would say: "that I cannot drink my Extra-Special any more. I can put up with everything else, but going without drink is the very deuce."

Then his wife's screech-owl face would appear at the window, and she would break in with the words:

"Look at him! Look at him now, the good-for-nothing wretch! I've got to feed him and wash him just as if he were a pig!"

And when the old woman had gone, a cock with red feathers would sometimes fly up to the window sill and looking into the room with his round inquisitive eye, would begin to crow loudly. Occasionally, too, a few hens would flutter as far as the foot of the bed, seeking crumbs on the floor. Toine's friends soon deserted the drinking room to come and chat every afternoon beside the invalid's bed. Helpless though he was, the jovial Toine still provided them with amusement. He would have made the devil himself laugh. Three men were regular in their attendance at the bedside: Celestin Maloisel, a tall, thin fellow, somewhat gnarled, like the trunk of an apple-tree; Prosper Horslaville, a withered little man with a ferret nose, cunning as a fox; and Cesaire Paumelle, who never spoke, but who enjoyed Toine's society all the same.

They brought a plank from the yard, propped it upon the edge of the bed, and played dominoes from two till six.

But Toine's wife soon became insufferable. She could not endure that her fat, lazy husband should amuse himself at games while lying in his bed; and whenever she caught him beginning a game she pounced furiously on the dominoes, overturned the plank, and carried all away into the bar, declaring that it was quite enough to have to feed that fat, lazy pig without seeing him amusing himself, as if to annoy poor people who had to work hard all day long.

Celestin Maloisel and Cesaire Paumelle bent their heads to the storm, but Prosper Horslaville egged on the old woman, and was only amused at her wrath.

One day, when she was more angry than usual, he said:

“Do you know what I’d do if I were you?”

She fixed her owl’s eyes on him, and waited for his next words.

Prosper went on:

“Your man is as hot as an oven, and he never leaves his bed — well, I’d make him hatch some eggs.”

She was struck dumb at the suggestion, thinking that Prosper could not possibly be in earnest. But he continued:

“I’d put five under one arm, and five under the other, the same day that I set a hen. They’d all come out at the same time; then I’d take your husband’s chickens to the hen to bring up with her own. You’d rear a fine lot that way.”

“Could it be done?” asked the astonished old woman.

“Could it be done?” echoed the man. “Why not? Since eggs can be hatched in a warm box why shouldn’t they be hatched in a warm bed?”

She was struck by this reasoning, and went away soothed and reflective.

A week later she entered Toine’s room with her apron full of eggs, and said:

“I’ve just put the yellow hen on ten eggs. Here are ten for you; try not to break them.”

“What do you want?” asked the amazed Toine.

“I want you to hatch them, you lazy creature!” she answered.

He laughed at first; then, finding she was serious, he got angry, and refused absolutely to have the eggs put under his great arms, that the warmth of his body might hatch them.

But the old woman declared wrathfully:

“You’ll get no dinner as long as you won’t have them. You’ll see what’ll happen.”

Tome was uneasy, but answered nothing.

When twelve o’clock struck, he called out:

“Hullo, mother, is the soup ready?”

“There’s no soup for you, lazy-bones,” cried the old woman from her kitchen.

He thought she must be joking, and waited a while. Then he begged, implored, swore, “tacked to the north” and “tacked to the south,” and beat on the wall with his fists, but had to consent at last to five eggs being placed against his left side; after which he had his soup.

When his friends arrived that afternoon they thought he must be ill, he seemed so constrained and queer.

They started the daily game of dominoes. But Tome appeared to take no pleasure in it, and reached forth his hand very slowly, and with great precaution.

“What’s wrong with your arm?” asked Horslaville.

“I have a sort of stiffness in the shoulder,” answered Toine.

Suddenly they heard people come into the inn. The players were silent.

It was the mayor with the deputy. They ordered two glasses of Extra-Special, and began to discuss local affairs. As they were talking in somewhat low tones Toine wanted to put his ear to the wall, and, forgetting all about his eggs, he made a sudden “tack to the north,” which had the effect of plunging him into the midst of an omelette.

At the loud oath he swore his wife came hurrying into the room, and, guessing what had happened, stripped the bedclothes from him with lightning rapidity. She stood at first without moving or uttering a syllable, speechless with indignation at sight of the yellow poultice sticking to her husband’s side.

Then, trembling with fury, she threw herself on the paralytic, showering on him blows such as those with which she cleaned her linen on the seashore. Tome’s three friends were choking with laughter, coughing, spluttering and shouting, and the fat innkeeper himself warded his wife’s attacks with all the prudence of which he was capable, that he might not also break the five eggs at his other side.

Tome was conquered. He had to hatch eggs, he had to give up his games of dominoes and renounce movement of any sort, for the old woman angrily deprived him of food whenever he broke an egg.

He lay on his back, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, motionless, his arms raised like wings, warming against his body the rudimentary chickens enclosed in their white shells.

He spoke now only in hushed tones; as if he feared a noise as much as motion, and he took a feverish interest in the yellow hen who was accomplishing in the poultry-yard the same task as he.

“Has the yellow hen eaten her food all right?” he would ask his wife.

And the old woman went from her fowls to her husband and from her husband to her fowls, devoured by anxiety as to the welfare of the little chickens who were maturing in the bed and in the nest.

The country people who knew the story came, agog with curiosity, to ask news of Toine. They entered his room on tiptoe, as one enters a sick-chamber, and asked:

“Well! how goes it?”

“All right,” said Toine; “only it keeps me fearfully hot.”

One morning his wife entered in a state of great excitement, and declared:

“The yellow hen has seven chickens! Three of the eggs were addled.”

Toine’s heart beat painfully. How many would he have?

“Will it soon be over?” he asked, with the anguish of a woman who is about to become a mother.

“It’s to be hoped so!” answered the old woman crossly, haunted by fear of failure.

They waited. Friends of Toine who had got wind that his time was drawing near arrived, and filled the little room.

Nothing else was talked about in the neighboring cottages. Inquirers asked one another for news as they stood at their doors.

About three o’clock Toine fell asleep. He slumbered half his time nowadays. He was suddenly awakened by an unaccustomed tickling under his right arm. He put his left hand on the spot, and seized a little creature covered with yellow down, which fluttered in his hand.

His emotion was so great that he cried out, and let go his hold of the chicken, which ran over his chest. The bar was full of people at the time. The customers rushed to Toine’s room, and made a circle round him as they would round a travelling showman; while Madame Toine picked up the chicken, which had taken refuge under her husband’s beard.

No one spoke, so great was the tension. It was a warm April day. Outside the window the yellow hen could be heard calling to her newly-fledged brood.

Toine, who was perspiring with emotion and anxiety, murmured:

“I have another now — under the left arm.”

His’ wife plunged her great bony hand into the bed, and pulled out a second chicken with all the care of a midwife.

The neighbors wanted to see it. It was passed from one to another, and examined as if it were a phenomenon.

For twenty minutes no more hatched out, then four emerged at the same moment from their shells.

There was a great commotion among the lookers-on. And Toine smiled with satisfaction, beginning to take pride in this unusual sort of paternity. There were not many like him! Truly, he was a remarkable specimen of humanity!

“That makes six!” he declared. “Great heavens, what a christening we’ll have!”

And a loud laugh rose from all present. Newcomers filled the bar. They asked one another:

“How many are there?”

“Six.”

Toine’s wife took this new family to the hen, who clucked loudly, bristled her feathers, and spread her wings wide to shelter her growing brood of little ones.

“There’s one more!” cried Toine.

He was mistaken. There were three! It was an unalloyed triumph! The last chicken broke through its shell at seven o’clock in the evening. All the eggs were good! And Toine, beside himself with joy, his brood hatched out, exultant, kissed the tiny creature on the back, almost suffocating it. He wanted to keep it in his bed until morning, moved by a mother’s tenderness toward the tiny being which he had brought to life, but the old woman carried it away like the others, turning a deaf ear to her husband’s entreaties.

The delighted spectators went off to spread the news of the event, and Horslaville, who was the last to go, asked:

“You’ll invite me when the first is cooked, won’t you, Toine?”

At this idea a smile overspread the fat man’s face, and he answered:

“Certainly I’ll invite you, my son-in-law.”

MADAME HUSSON’S “ROSIER”

We had just left Gisors, where I was awakened to hearing the name of the town called out by the guards, and I was dozing off again when a terrific shock threw me forward on top of a large lady who sat opposite me.

One of the wheels of the engine had broken, and the engine itself lay across the track. The tender and the baggage car were also derailed, and lay beside this mutilated engine, which rattled, groaned, hissed, puffed, sputtered, and resembled those horses that fall in the street with their flanks heaving, their breast palpitating, their nostrils steaming and their whole body trembling, but incapable of the slightest effort to rise and start off again.

There were no dead or wounded; only a few with bruises, for the train was not going at full speed. And we looked with sorrow at the great crippled iron creature that could not draw us along any more, and that blocked the track, perhaps for some time, for no doubt they would have to send to Paris for a special train to come to our aid.

It was then ten o’clock in the morning, and I at once decided to go back to Gisors for breakfast.

As I was walking along I said to myself:

“Gisors, Gisors — why, I know someone there!

“Who is it? Gisors? Let me see, I have a friend in this town.” A name suddenly came to my mind, “Albert Marambot.” He was an old school friend whom I had not seen for at least twelve years, and who was practicing medicine in Gisors. He had often written, inviting me to come and see him, and I had always promised to do so, without keeping my word. But at last I would take advantage of this opportunity.

I asked the first passer-by:

“Do you know where Dr. Marambot lives?”

He replied, without hesitation, and with the drawling accent of the Normans:

“Rue Dauphine.”

I presently saw, on the door of the house he pointed out, a large brass plate on which was engraved the name of my old chum. I rang the bell, but the servant, a yellow-haired girl who moved slowly, said with a Stupid air:

"He isn't here, he isn't here."

I heard a sound of forks and of glasses and I cried:

"Hallo, Marambot!"

A door opened and a large man, with whiskers and a cross look on his face, appeared, carrying a dinner napkin in his hand.

I certainly should not have recognized him. One would have said he was forty-five at least, and, in a second, all the provincial life which makes one grow heavy, dull and old came before me. In a single flash of thought, quicker than the act of extending my hand to him, I could see his life, his manner of existence, his line of thought and his theories of things in general. I guessed at the prolonged meals that had rounded out his stomach, his after-dinner naps from the torpor of a slow indigestion aided by cognac, and his vague glances cast on the patient while he thought of the chicken that was roasting before the fire. His conversations about cooking, about cider, brandy and wine, the way of preparing certain dishes and of blending certain sauces were revealed to me at sight of his puffy red cheeks, his heavy lips and his lustreless eyes.

"You do not recognize me. I am Raoul Aubertin," I said.

He opened his arms and gave me such a hug that I thought he would choke me.

"You have not breakfasted, have you?"

"No."

"How fortunate! I was just sitting down to table and I have an excellent trout."

Five minutes later I was sitting opposite him at breakfast. I said:

"Are you a bachelor?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And do you like it here?"

"Time does not hang heavy; I am busy. I have patients and friends. I eat well, have good health, enjoy laughing and shooting. I get along."

"Is not life very monotonous in this little town?"

"No, my dear boy, not when one knows how to fill in the time. A little town, in fact, is like a large one. The incidents and amusements are less varied, but one makes more of them; one has fewer acquaintances, but one meets them more frequently. When you know all the windows in a street, each one of them interests you and puzzles you more than a whole street in Paris.

"A little town is very amusing, you know, very amusing, very amusing. Why, take Gisors. I know it at the tips of my fingers, from its beginning up to the present time. You have no idea what queer history it has."

"Do you belong to Gisors?"

"I? No. I come from Gournay, its neighbor and rival. Gournay is to Gisors what Lucullus was to Cicero. Here, everything is for glory; they say 'the proud people of Gisors.' At Gournay, everything is for the stomach; they say 'the chewers of Gournay.' Gisors despises Gournay, but Gournay laughs at Gisors. It is a very comical country, this."

I perceived that I was eating something very delicious, hard-boiled eggs wrapped in a covering of meat jelly flavored with herbs and put on ice for a few moments. I said as I smacked my lips to compliment Marambot:

"That is good."

He smiled.

"Two things are necessary, good jelly, which is hard to get, and good eggs. Oh, how rare good eggs are, with the yolks slightly reddish, and with a good flavor! I have two poultry yards, one for eggs and the other for chickens. I feed my laying hens in a special manner. I have my own ideas on the subject. In an egg, as in the meat of a chicken, in beef, or in mutton, in milk, in everything, one perceives, and ought to taste, the juice, the quintessence of all the food on which the animal has fed. How much better food we could have if more attention were paid to this!"

I laughed as I said:

"You are a gourmand?"

"Parbleu. It is only imbeciles who are not. One is a gourmand as one is an artist, as one is learned, as one is a poet. The sense of taste, my friend, is very delicate, capable of perfection, and quite as worthy of respect as the eye and the ear. A person who lacks this sense is deprived of an exquisite faculty, the faculty of discerning the quality of food, just as one may lack the faculty of discerning the beauties of a book or of a work of art; it means to be deprived of an essential organ, of something that belongs to higher humanity; it means to belong to one of those innumerable classes of the infirm, the unfortunate, and the fools of which our race is composed; it means to have the mouth of an animal, in a word, just like the mind of an animal. A man who cannot distinguish one kind of lobster from another; a herring — that admirable fish that has all the flavors, all the odors of the sea — from a mackerel or a whiting; and a Cresane from a Duchess pear, may be compared to a man who should mistake Balzac for Eugene Sue; a symphony of Beethoven for a military march composed by the bandmaster of a regiment; and the Apollo Belvidere for the statue of General de Blaumont.

“Who is General de Blaumont?”

“Oh, that’s true, you do not know. It is easy to tell that you do not belong to Gisors. I told you just now, my dear boy, that they called the inhabitants of this town ‘the proud people of Gisors,’ and never was an epithet better deserved. But let us finish breakfast first, and then I will tell you about our town and take you to see it.”

He stopped talking every now and then while he slowly drank a glass of wine which he gazed at affectionately as he replaced the glass on the table.

It was amusing to see him, with a napkin tied around his neck, his cheeks flushed, his eyes eager, and his whiskers spreading round his mouth as it kept working.

He made me eat until I was almost choking. Then, as I was about to return to the railway station, he seized me by the arm and took me through the streets. The town, of a pretty, provincial type, commanded by its citadel, the most curious monument of military architecture of the seventh century to be found in France, overlooks, in its turn, a long, green valley, where the large Norman cows graze and ruminate in the pastures.

The doctor quoted:

“‘Gisors, a town of 4,000 inhabitants in the department of Eure, mentioned in Caesar’s Commentaries: Caesaris ostium, then Caesartium, Caesortium, Gisortium, Gisors.’ I shall not take you to visit the old Roman encampment, the remains of which are still in existence.”

I laughed and replied:

“My dear friend, it seems to me that you are affected with a special malady that, as a doctor, you ought to study; it is called the spirit of provincialism.”

He stopped abruptly.

“The spirit of provincialism, my friend, is nothing but natural patriotism,” he said. “I love my house, my town and my province because I discover in them the customs of my own village; but if I love my country, if I become angry when a neighbor sets foot in it, it is because I feel that my home is in danger, because the frontier that I do not know is the high road to my province. For instance, I am a Norman, a true Norman; well, in spite of my hatred of the German and my desire for revenge, I do not detest them, I do not hate them by instinct as I hate the English, the real, hereditary natural enemy of the Normans; for the English traversed this soil inhabited by my ancestors, plundered and ravaged it twenty times, and my aversion to this perfidious people was transmitted to me at birth by my father. See, here is the statue of the general."

"What general?"

"General Blaumont! We had to have a statue. We are not 'the proud people of Gisors' for nothing! So we discovered General de Blaumont. Look in this bookseller's window."

He drew me towards the bookstore, where about fifteen red, yellow and blue volumes attracted the eye. As I read the titles, I began to laugh idiotically. They read:

Gisors, its origin, its future, by M. X. . . ., member of several learned societies; History of Gisors, by the Abbe A . . .; Gasors from the time of Caesar to the present day, by M. B. . . ., Landowner; Gisors and its environs, by Doctor C. D. . . .; The Glories of Gisors, by a Discoverer.

"My friend," resumed Marambot, "not a year, not a single year, you understand, passes without a fresh history of Gisors being published here; we now have twenty-three."

"And the glories of Gisors?" I asked.

"Oh, I will not mention them all, only the principal ones. We had first General de Blaumont, then Baron Davillier, the celebrated ceramist who explored Spain and the Balearic Isles, and brought to the notice of collectors the wonderful Hispano-Arabic china. In literature we have a very clever journalist, now dead, Charles Brainne, and among those who are living, the very eminent editor of the Nouvelliste de Rouen, Charles Lapierre . . . and many others, many others."

We were traversing along street with a gentle incline, with a June sun beating down on it and driving the residents into their houses.

Suddenly there appeared at the farther end of the street a drunken man who was staggering along, with his head forward his arms and legs limp. He would walk forward rapidly three, six, or ten steps and then stop. When these energetic movements landed him in the middle of the road he stopped short and swayed on his feet, hesitating between falling and a fresh start. Then he would dart off in any direction, sometimes falling against the wall of a house, against which he seemed to be fastened, as though he were trying to get in through the wall. Then he would suddenly turn round and look ahead of him, his mouth open and his eyes blinking in the sunlight, and getting away from the wall by a movement of the hips, he started off once more.

A little yellow dog, a half-starved cur, followed him, barking; stopping when he stopped, and starting off when he started.

“Hallo,” said Marambot, “there is Madame Husson’s ‘Rosier’.

“Madame Husson’s ‘Rosier’,” I exclaimed in astonishment. “What do you mean?”

The doctor began to laugh.

“Oh, that is what we call drunkards round here. The name comes from an old story which has now become a legend, although it is true in all respects.”

“Is it an amusing story?”

“Very amusing.”

“Well, then, tell it to me.”

“I will.”

There lived formerly in this town a very upright old lady who was a great guardian of morals and was called Mme. Husson. You know, I am telling you the real names and not imaginary ones. Mme. Husson took a special interest in good works, in helping the poor and encouraging the deserving. She was a little woman with a quick walk and wore a black wig. She was ceremonious, polite, on very good terms with the Almighty in the person of Abby Malon, and had a profound horror, an inborn horror of vice, and, in particular, of the vice the Church calls lasciviousness. Any irregularity before marriage made her furious, exasperated her till she was beside herself.

Now, this was the period when they presented a prize as a reward of virtue to any girl in the environs of Paris who was found to be chaste. She was called a Rosiere, and Mme. Husson got the idea that she would institute a similar ceremony at Gisors. She spoke about it to Abbe Malon, who at once made out a list of candidates.

However, Mme. Husson had a servant, an old woman called Francoise, as upright as her mistress. As soon as the priest had left, madame called the servant and said:

“Here, Francoise, here are the girls whose names M. le cure has submitted to me for the prize of virtue; try and find out what reputation they bear in the district."

And Francoise set out. She collected all the scandal, all the stories, all the tattle, all the suspicions. That she might omit nothing, she wrote it all down together with her memoranda in her housekeeping book, and handed it each morning to Mme. Husson, who, after adjusting her spectacles on her thin nose, read as follows:

Bread...........................four sous
Milk............................two sous
Butter ....eight sous

Malvina Levesque got into trouble last year with Mathurin Poilu.

Leg of mutton...................twenty-five sous
Salt............................one sou

Rosalie Vatinel was seen in the Riboudet woods with Cesaire Pienoir, by Mme. Onesime, the ironer, on July the 20th about dusk.

Radishes........................one sou
Vinegar.........................two sous
Oxalic acid.....................two sous

Josephine Durdent, who is not believed to have committed a fault, although she corresponds with young Oportun, who is in service in Rouen, and who sent her a present of a cap by diligence.

Not one came out unscathed in this rigorous inquisition. Francoise inquired of everyone, neighbors, drapers, the principal, the teaching sisters at school, and gathered the slightest details.

As there is not a girl in the world about whom gossips have not found something to say, there was not found in all the countryside one young girl whose name was free from some scandal.

But Mme. Husson desired that the "Rosiere" of Gisors, like Caesar's wife, should be above suspicion, and she was horrified, saddened and in despair at the record in her servant's housekeeping account-book.

They then extended their circle of inquiries to the neighboring villages; but with no satisfaction.

They consulted the mayor. His candidates failed. Those of Dr. Barbesol were equally unlucky, in spite of the exactness of his scientific vouchers.

But one morning Francoise, on returning from one of her expeditions, said to her mistress:

"You see, madame, that if you wish to give a prize to anyone, there is only Isidore in all the country round."

Mme. Husson remained thoughtful. She knew him well, this Isidore, the son of Virginie the greengrocer. His proverbial virtue had been the delight of Gisors for several years, and served as an entertaining theme of conversation in the town, and of amusement to the young girls who loved to tease him. He was past twenty-one, was tall, awkward, slow and timid; helped his mother in the business, and spent his days picking over fruit and vegetables, seated on a chair outside the door.

He had an abnormal dread of a petticoat and cast down his eyes whenever a female customer looked at him smilingly, and this well-known timidity made him the butt of all the wags in the country.

Bold words, coarse expressions, indecent allusions, brought the color to his cheeks so quickly that Dr. Barbesol had nicknamed him “the thermometer of modesty.” Was he as innocent as he looked? ill-natured people asked themselves. Was it the mere presentiment of unknown and shameful mysteries or else indignation at the relations ordained as the concomitant of love that so strongly affected the son of Virginie the greengrocer? The urchins of the neighborhood as they ran past the shop would fling disgusting remarks at him just to see him cast down his eyes. The girls amused themselves by walking up and down before him, cracking jokes that made him go into the store. The boldest among them teased him to his face just to have a laugh, to amuse themselves, made appointments with him and proposed all sorts of things.

So Madame Husson had become thoughtful.

Certainly, Isidore was an exceptional case of notorious, unassailable virtue. No one, among the most sceptical, most incredulous, would have been able, would have dared, to suspect Isidore of the slightest infraction of any law of morality. He had never been seen in a cafe, never been seen at night on the street. He went to bed at eight o’clock and rose at four. He was a perfection, a pearl.

But Mme. Husson still hesitated. The idea of substituting a boy for a girl, a “rosier” for a “rosiere,” troubled her, worried her a little, and she resolved to consult Abbe Malon.

The abbe responded:

“What do you desire to reward, madame? It is virtue, is it not, and nothing but virtue? What does it matter to you, therefore, if it is masculine or feminine? Virtue is eternal; it has neither sex nor country; it is ‘Virtue.’”

Thus encouraged, Mme. Husson went to see the mayor.

He approved heartily.

"We will have a fine ceremony," he said. "And another year if we can find a girl as worthy as Isidore we will give the reward to her. It will even be a good example that we shall set to Nanterre. Let us not be exclusive; let us welcome all merit."

Isidore, who had been told about this, blushed deeply and seemed happy.

The ceremony was fixed for the 15th of August, the festival of the Virgin Mary and of the Emperor Napoleon. The municipality had decided to make an imposing ceremony and had built the platform on the couronneaux, a delightful extension of the ramparts of the old citadel where I will take you presently.

With the natural revulsion of public feeling, the virtue of Isidore, ridiculed hitherto, had suddenly become respected and envied, as it would bring him in five hundred francs besides a savings bank book, a mountain of consideration, and glory enough and to spare. The girls now regretted their frivolity, their ridicule, their bold manners; and Isidore, although still modest and timid, had now a little contented air that bespoke his internal satisfaction.

The evening before the 15th of August the entire Rue Dauphine was decorated with flags. Oh, I forgot to tell you why this street had been called Rue Dauphine.

It seems that the wife or mother of the dauphin, I do not remember which one, while visiting Gisors had been feted so much by the authorities that during a triumphal procession through the town she stopped before one of the houses in this street, halting the procession, and exclaimed:

"Oh, the pretty house! How I should like to go through it! To whom does it belong?"

They told her the name of the owner, who was sent for and brought, proud and embarrassed, before the princess. She alighted from her carriage, went into the house, wishing to go over it from top to bottom, and even shut herself in one of the rooms alone for a few seconds.

When she came out, the people, flattered at this honor paid to a citizen of Gisors, shouted "Long live the dauphine!" But a rhymester wrote some words to a refrain, and the street retained the title of her royal highness, for

"The princess, in a hurry,
Without bell, priest, or beadle,
But with some water only,

Had baptized it."

But to come back to Isidore.

They had scattered flowers all along the road as they do for processions at the Fete-Dieu, and the National Guard was present, acting on the orders of their chief, Commandant Desbarres, an old soldier of the Grand Army, who pointed with pride to the beard of a Cossack cut with a single sword stroke from the chin of its owner by the commandant during the retreat in Russia, and which hung beside the frame containing the cross of the Legion of Honor presented to him by the emperor himself.

The regiment that he commanded was, besides, a picked regiment celebrated all through the province, and the company of grenadiers of Gisors was called on to attend all important ceremonies for a distance of fifteen to twenty leagues. The story goes that Louis Philippe, while reviewing the militia of Eure, stopped in astonishment before the company from Gisors, exclaiming:

"Oh, who are those splendid grenadiers?"

"The grenadiers of Gisors," replied the general.

"I might have known it," murmured the king.

So Commandant Desbarres came at the head of his men, preceded by the band, to get Isidore in his mother's store.

After a little air had been played by the band beneath the windows, the "Rosier" himself appeared — on the threshold. He was dressed in white duck from head to foot and wore a straw hat with a little bunch of orange blossoms as a cockade.

The question of his clothes had bothered Mme. Husson a good deal, and she hesitated some time between the black coat of those who make their first communion and an entire white suit. But Francoise, her counsellor, induced her to decide on the white suit, pointing out that the Rosier would look like a swan.

Behind him came his guardian, his godmother, Mme. Husson, in triumph. She took his arm to go out of the store, and the mayor placed himself on the other side of the Rosier. The drums beat. Commandant Desbarres gave the order "Present arms!" The procession resumed its march towards the church amid an immense crowd of people who has gathered from the neighboring districts.

After a short mass and an affecting discourse by Abbe Malon, they continued on their way to the couronneaux, where the banquet was served in a tent.

Before taking their seats at table, the mayor gave an address. This is it, word for word. I learned it by heart:

"Young man, a woman of means, beloved by the poor and respected by the rich, Mme. Husson, whom the whole country is thanking here, through me, had the idea, the happy and benevolent idea, of founding in this town a prize for, virtue, which should serve as a valuable encouragement to the inhabitants of this beautiful country.

"You, young man, are the first to be rewarded in this dynasty of goodness and chastity. Your name will remain at the head of this list of the most deserving, and your life, understand me, your whole life, must correspond to this happy commencement. To-day, in presence of this noble woman, of these soldier-citizens who have taken up their arms in your honor, in presence of this populace, affected, assembled to applaud you, or, rather, to applaud virtue, in your person, you make a solemn contract with the town, with all of us, to continue until your death the excellent example of your youth.

"Do not forget, young man, that you are the first seed cast into this field of hope; give us the fruits that we expect of you."

The mayor advanced three steps, opened his arms and pressed Isidore to his heart.

The "Rosier" was sobbing without knowing why, from a confused emotion, from pride and a vague and happy feeling of tenderness.

Then the mayor placed in one hand a silk purse in which gold tingled — five hundred francs in gold! — and in his other hand a savings bank book. And he said in a solemn tone:

"Homage, glory and riches to virtue."

Commandant Desbarres shouted "Bravo!" the grenadiers vociferated, and the crowd applauded.

Mme. Husson wiped her eyes, in her turn. Then they all sat down at the table where the banquet was served.

The repast was magnificent and seemed interminable. One course followed another; yellow cider and red wine in fraternal contact blended in the stomach of the guests. The rattle of plates, the sound of voices, and of music softly played, made an incessant deep hum, and was dispersed abroad in the clear sky where the swallows were flying. Mme. Husson occasionally readjusted her black wig, which would slip over on one side, and chatted with Abbe Malon. The mayor, who was excited, talked politics with Commandant Desbarres, and Isidore ate, drank, as if he had never eaten or drunk before. He helped himself repeatedly to all the dishes, becoming aware for the first time of the pleasure of having one's belly full of good things which tickle the palate in the first place. He had let out a reef in his belt and, without speaking, and although he was a little uneasy at a wine stain on his white waistcoat, he ceased eating in order to take up his glass and hold it to his mouth as long as possible, to enjoy the taste slowly.

It was time for the toasts. They were many and loudly applauded. Evening was approaching and they had been at the table since noon. Fine, milky vapors were already floating in the air in the valley, the light night-robe of streams and meadows; the sun neared the horizon; the cows were lowing in the distance amid the mists of the pasture. The feast was over. They returned to Gisors. The procession, now disbanded, walked in detachments. Mme. Husson had taken Isidore's arm and was giving him a quantity of urgent, excellent advice.

They stopped at the door of the fruit store, and the "Rosier" was left at his mother's house. She had not come home yet. Having been invited by her family to celebrate her son's triumph, she had taken luncheon with her sister after having followed the procession as far as the banqueting tent.

So Isidore remained alone in the store, which was growing dark. He sat down on a chair, excited by the wine and by pride, and looked about him. Carrots, cabbages, and onions gave out their strong odor of vegetables in the closed room, that coarse smell of the garden blended with the sweet, penetrating odor of strawberries and the delicate, slight, evanescent fragrance of a basket of peaches.

The "Rosier" took one of these and ate it, although he was as full as an egg. Then, all at once, wild with joy, he began to dance about the store, and something rattled in his waistcoat.

He was surprised, and put his hand in his pocket and brought out the purse containing the five hundred francs, which he had forgotten in his agitation. Five hundred francs! What a fortune! He poured the gold pieces out on the counter and spread them out with his big hand with a slow, caressing touch so as to see them all at the same time. There were twenty-five, twenty-five round gold pieces, all gold! They glistened on the wood in the dim light and he counted them over and over, one by one. Then he put them back in the purse, which he replaced in his pocket.

Who will ever know or who can tell what a terrible conflict took place in the soul of the "Rosier" between good and evil, the tumultuous attack of Satan, his artifices, the temptations which he offered to this timid virgin heart? What suggestions, what imaginations, what desires were not invented by the evil one to excite and destroy this chosen one? He seized his hat, Mme. Husson's saint, his hat, which still bore the little bunch of orange blossoms, and going out through the alley at the back of the house, he disappeared in the darkness.

Virginie, the fruiterer, on learning that her son had returned, went home at once, and found the house empty. She waited, without thinking anything about it at first; but at the end of a quarter of an hour she made inquiries. The neighbors had seen Isidore come home and had not seen him go out again. They began to look for him, but could not find him. His mother, in alarm, went to the mayor. The mayor knew nothing, except that he had left him at the door of his home. Mme. Husson had just retired when they informed her that her protege had disappeared. She immediately put on her wig, dressed herself and went to Virginie's house. Virginie, whose plebeian soul was readily moved, was weeping copiously amid her cabbages, carrots and onions.

They feared some accident had befallen him. What could it be? Commandant Desbarres notified the police, who made a circuit of the town, and on the high road to Pontoise they found the little bunch of orange blossoms. It was placed on a table around which the authorities were deliberating. The "Rosier" must have been the victim of some stratagem, some trick, some jealousy; but in what way? What means had been employed to kidnap this innocent creature, and with what object?

Weary of looking for him without any result, Virginie, alone, remained watching and weeping.

The following evening, when the coach passed by on its return from Paris, Gisors learned with astonishment that its "Rosier" had stopped the vehicle at a distance of about two hundred metres from the town, had climbed up on it and paid his fare, handing over a gold piece and receiving the change, and that he had quietly alighted in the centre of the great city.

There was great excitement all through the countryside. Letters passed between the mayor and the chief of police in Paris, but brought no result.

The days followed one another, a week passed.

Now, one morning, Dr. Barbesol, who had gone out early, perceived, sitting on a doorstep, a man dressed in a grimy linen suit, who was sleeping with his head leaning against the wall. He approached him and recognized Isidore. He tried to rouse him, but did not succeed in doing so. The ex-”Rosier” was in that profound, invincible sleep that is alarming, and the doctor, in surprise, went to seek assistance to help him in carrying the young man to Boncheval’s drugstore. When they lifted him up they found an empty bottle under him, and when the doctor sniffed at it, he declared that it had contained brandy. That gave a suggestion as to what treatment he would require. They succeeded in rousing him.

Isidore was drunk, drunk and degraded by a week of guzzling, drunk and so disgusting that a ragman would not have touched him. His beautiful white duck suit was a gray rag, greasy, muddy, torn, and destroyed, and he smelt of the gutter and of vice.

He was washed, sermonized, shut up, and did not leave the house for four days. He seemed ashamed and repentant. They could not find on him either his purse, containing the five hundred francs, or the bankbook, or even his silver watch, a sacred heirloom left by his father, the fruiterer.

On the fifth day he ventured into the Rue Dauphine, Curious glances followed him and he walked along with a furtive expression in his eyes and his head bent down. As he got outside the town towards the valley they lost sight of him; but two hours later he returned laughing and rolling against the walls. He was drunk, absolutely drunk.

Nothing could cure him.

Driven from home by his mother, he became a wagon driver, and drove the charcoal wagons for the Pougrisel firm, which is still in existence.

His reputation as a drunkard became so well known and spread so far that even at Evreux they talked of Mme. Husson’s “Rosier,” and the sots of the countryside have been given that nickname.

A good deed is never lost.

Dr. Marambot rubbed his hands as he finished his story. I asked:

“Did you know the ‘Rosier’?”

“Yes. I had the honor of closing his eyes.”

“What did he die of?”

“An attack of delirium tremens, of course.”

We had arrived at the old citadel, a pile of ruined walls dominated by the enormous tower of St. Thomas of Canterbury and the one called the

Prisoner’s Tower.

Marambot told me the story of this prisoner, who, with the aid of a nail, covered the walls of his dungeon with sculptures, tracing the reflections of the sun as it glanced through the narrow slit of a loophole.

I also learned that Clothaire II had given the patrimony of Gisors to his cousin, Saint Romain, bishop of Rouen; that Gisors ceased to be the capital of the whole of Vexin after the treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte; that the town is the chief strategic centre of all that portion of France, and that in consequence of this advantage she was taken and retaken over and over again. At the command of William the Red, the eminent engineer, Robert de Bellesme, constructed there a powerful fortress that was attacked later by Louis le Gros, then by the Norman barons, was defended by Robert de Candos, was finally ceded to Louis le Gros by Geoffry Plantagenet, was retaken by the English in consequence of the treachery of the Knights-Templars, was contested by Philippe-Augustus and Richard the Lionhearted, was set on fire by Edward III of England, who could not take the castle, was again taken by the English in 1419, restored later to Charles VIII by Richard de Marbury, was taken by the Duke of Calabria occupied by the League, inhabited by Henry IV, etc., etc.

And Marambot, eager and almost eloquent, continued:

“What beggars, those English! And what sots, my boy; they are all ‘Rosiers,’ those hypocrites!”

Then, after a silence, stretching out his arm towards the tiny river that glistened in the meadows, he said:

“Did you know that Henry Monnier was one of the most untiring fishermen on the banks of the Epte?”

“No, I did not know it.”

“And Bouffe, my boy, Bouffe was a painter on glass.”

“You are joking!”

“No, indeed. How is it you do not know these things?”

THE ADOPTED SON

The two cottages stood beside each other at the foot of a hill near a little seashore resort. The two peasants labored hard on the unproductive soil to rear their little ones, and each family had four.

Before the adjoining doors a whole troop of urchins played and tumbled about from morning till night. The two eldest were six years old, and the youngest were about fifteen months; the marriages, and afterward the births, having taken place nearly simultaneously in both families.

The two mothers could hardly distinguish their own offspring among the lot, and as for the fathers, they were altogether at sea. The eight names danced in their heads; they were always getting them mixed up; and when they wished to call one child, the men often called three names before getting the right one.

The first of the two cottages, as you came up from the bathing beach, Rolleport, was occupied by the Tuvaches, who had three girls and one boy; the other house sheltered the Vallins, who had one girl and three boys.

They all subsisted frugally on soup, potatoes and fresh air. At seven o’clock in the morning, then at noon, then at six o’clock in the evening, the housewives got their broods together to give them their food, as the gooseherds collect their charges. The children were seated, according to age, before the wooden table, varnished by fifty years of use; the mouths of the youngest hardly reaching the level of the table. Before them was placed a bowl filled with bread, soaked in the water in which the potatoes had been boiled, half a cabbage and three onions; and the whole line ate until their hunger was appeased. The mother herself fed the smallest.

A small pot roast on Sunday was a feast for all; and the father on this day sat longer over the meal, repeating: “I wish we could have this every day.”

One afternoon, in the month of August, a phaeton stopped suddenly in front of the cottages, and a young woman, who was driving the horses, said to the gentleman sitting at her side:

“Oh, look at all those children, Henri! How pretty they are, tumbling about in the dust, like that!”

The man did not answer, accustomed to these outbursts of admiration, which were a pain and almost a reproach to him. The young woman continued:

“I must hug them! Oh, how I should like to have one of them — that one there — the little tiny one!”

Springing down from the carriage, she ran toward the children, took one of the two youngest — a Tuvache child — and lifting it up in her arms, she kissed him passionately on his dirty cheeks, on his tousled hair daubed with earth, and on his little hands, with which he fought vigorously, to get away from the caresses which displeased him.

Then she got into the carriage again, and drove off at a lively trot. But she returned the following week, and seating herself on the ground, took the youngster in her arms, stuffed him with cakes; gave candies to all the others, and played with them like a young girl, while the husband waited patiently in the carriage.

She returned again; made the acquaintance of the parents, and reappeared every day with her pockets full of dainties and pennies.

Her name was Madame Henri d’Hubieres.

One morning, on arriving, her husband alighted with her, and without stopping to talk to the children, who now knew her well, she entered the farmer’s cottage.

They were busy chopping wood for the fire. They rose to their feet in surprise, brought forward chairs, and waited expectantly.

Then the woman, in a broken, trembling voice, began:

“My good people, I have come to see you, because I should like — I should like to take — your little boy with me— “

The country people, too bewildered to think, did not answer.

She recovered her breath, and continued: “We are alone, my husband and I. We would keep it. Are you willing?”

The peasant woman began to understand. She asked:

“You want to take Charlot from us? Oh, no, indeed!”

Then M. d’Hubieres intervened:

“My wife has not made her meaning clear. We wish to adopt him, but he will come back to see you. If he turns out well, as there is every reason to expect, he will be our heir. If we, perchance, should have children, he will share equally with them; but if he should not reward our care, we should give him, when he comes of age, a sum of twenty thousand francs, which shall be deposited immediately in his name, with a lawyer. As we have thought also of you, we should pay you, until your death, a pension of one hundred francs a month. Do you understand me?”

The woman had arisen, furious.

“You want me to sell you Charlot? Oh, no, that’s not the sort of thing to ask of a mother! Oh, no! That would be an abomination!”

The man, grave and deliberate, said nothing; but approved of what his wife said by a continued nodding of his head.

Madame d’Hubieres, in dismay, began to weep; turning to her husband, with a voice full of tears, the voice of a child used to having all its wishes gratified, she stammered:

“They will not do it, Henri, they will not do it.”

Then he made a last attempt: “But, my friends, think of the child’s future, of his happiness, of— “

The peasant woman, however, exasperated, cut him short:

“It’s all considered! It’s all understood! Get out of here, and don’t let me see you again — the idea of wanting to take away a child like that!”

Madame d’Hubieres remembered that there were two children, quite little, and she asked, through her tears, with the tenacity of a wilful and spoiled woman:

“But is the other little one not yours?”

Father Tuvache answered: “No, it is our neighbors’. You can go to them if you wish.” And he went back into his house, whence resounded the indignant voice of his wife.

The Vallins were at table, slowly eating slices of bread which they parsimoniously spread with a little rancid butter on a plate between the two.

M. d’Hubieres recommenced his proposals, but with more insinuations, more oratorical precautions, more shrewdness.

The two country people shook their heads, in sign of refusal, but when they learned that they were to have a hundred francs a month, they considered the matter, consulting one another by glances, much disturbed. They kept silent for a long time, tortured, hesitating. At last the woman asked: “What do you say to it, man?” In a weighty tone he said: “I say that it’s not to be despised.”

Madame d’Hubieres, trembling with anguish, spoke of the future of their child, of his happiness, and of the money which he could give them later.

The peasant asked: “This pension of twelve hundred francs, will it be promised before a lawyer?”

M. d’Hubieres responded: “Why, certainly, beginning with to-morrow.”

The woman, who was thinking it over, continued:

“A hundred francs a month is not enough to pay for depriving us of the child. That child would be working in a few years; we must have a hundred and twenty francs.”

Tapping her foot with impatience, Madame d’Hubieres granted it at once, and, as she wished to carry off the child with her, she gave a hundred francs extra, as a present, while her husband drew up a paper. And the young woman, radiant, carried off the howling brat, as one carries away a wished-for knick-knack from a shop.

The Tuvaches, from their door, watched her departure, silent, serious, perhaps regretting their refusal.

Nothing more was heard of little Jean Vallin. The parents went to the lawyer every month to collect their hundred and twenty francs. They had quarrelled with their neighbors, because Mother Tuvache grossly insulted them, continually, repeating from door to door that one must be unnatural to sell one’s child; that it was horrible, disgusting, bribery. Sometimes she would take her Charlot in her arms, ostentatiously exclaiming, as if he understood:

“I didn’t sell you, I didn’t! I didn’t sell you, my little one! I’m not rich, but I don’t sell my children!”

The Vallins lived comfortably, thanks to the pension. That was the cause of the unappeasable fury of the Tuvaches, who had remained miserably poor. Their eldest went away to serve his time in the army; Charlot alone remained to labor with his old father, to support the mother and two younger sisters.

He had reached twenty-one years when, one morning, a brilliant carriage stopped before the two cottages. A young gentleman, with a gold watch-chain, got out, giving his hand to an aged, white-haired lady. The old lady said to him: “It is there, my child, at the second house.” And he entered the house of the Vallins as though at home.

The old mother was washing her aprons; the infirm father slumbered at the chimney-corner. Both raised their heads, and the young man said:

"Good-morning, papa; good-morning, mamma!"

They both stood up, frightened! In a flutter, the peasant woman dropped her soap into the water, and stammered:

"Is it you, my child? Is it you, my child?"

He took her in his arms and hugged her, repeating: "Good-morning, mamma," while the old man, all a-tremble, said, in his calm tone which he never lost: "Here you are, back again, Jean," as if he had just seen him a month ago.

When they had got to know one another again, the parents wished to take their boy out in the neighborhood, and show him. They took him to the mayor, to the deputy, to the cure, and to the schoolmaster.

Charlot, standing on the threshold of his cottage, watched him pass. In the evening, at supper, he said to the old people: "You must have been stupid to let the Vallins' boy be taken."

The mother answered, obstinately: "I wouldn't sell my child."

The father remained silent. The son continued:

"It is unfortunate to be sacrificed like that."

Then Father Tuvache, in an angry tone, said:

"Are you going to reproach us for having kept you?" And the young man said, brutally:

"Yes, I reproach you for having been such fools. Parents like you make the misfortune of their children. You deserve that I should leave you." The old woman wept over her plate. She moaned, as she swallowed the spoonfuls of soup, half of which she spilled: "One may kill one's self to bring up children!"

Then the boy said, roughly: "I'd rather not have been born than be what I am. When I saw the other, my heart stood still. I said to myself: 'See what I should have been now!'" He got up: "See here, I feel that I would do better not to stay here, because I would throw it up to you from morning till night, and I would make your life miserable. I'll never forgive you for that!"

The two old people were silent, downcast, in tears.

He continued: "No, the thought of that would be too much. I'd rather look for a living somewhere else."

He opened the door. A sound of voices came in at the door. The Vallins were celebrating the return of their child.

COWARD

In society he was called “Handsome Signoles.” His name was Vicomte Gontran-Joseph de Signoles.

An orphan, and possessed of an ample fortune, he cut quite a dash, as it is called. He had an attractive appearance and manner, could talk well, had a certain inborn elegance, an air of pride and nobility, a good mustache, and a tender eye, that always finds favor with women.

He was in great request at receptions, waltzed to perfection, and was regarded by his own sex with that smiling hostility accorded to the popular society man. He had been suspected of more than one love affair, calculated to enhance the reputation of a bachelor. He lived a happy, peaceful life — a life of physical and mental well-being. He had won considerable fame as a swordsman, and still more as a marksman.

“When the time comes for me to fight a duel,” he said, “I shall choose pistols. With such a weapon I am sure to kill my man.”

One evening, having accompanied two women friends of his with their husbands to the theatre, he invited them to take some ice cream at Tortoni’s after the performance. They had been seated a few minutes in the restaurant when Signoles noticed that a man was staring persistently at one of the ladies. She seemed annoyed, and lowered her eyes. At last she said to her husband:

“There’s a man over there looking at me. I don’t know him; do you?”

The husband, who had noticed nothing, glanced across at the offender, and said:

“No; not in the least.”

His wife continued, half smiling, half angry:

“It’s very tiresome! He quite spoils my ice cream.”

The husband shrugged his shoulders.

“Nonsense! Don’t take any notice of him. If we were to bother our heads about all the ill-mannered people we should have no time for anything else."

But the vicomte abruptly left his seat. He could not allow this insolent fellow to spoil an ice for a guest of his. It was for him to take cognizance of the offence, since it was through him that his friends had come to the restaurant. He went across to the man and said:

"Sir, you are staring at those ladies in a manner I cannot permit. I must ask you to desist from your rudeness."

The other replied:

"Let me alone, will you!"

"Take care, sir," said the vicomte between his teeth, "or you will force me to extreme measures."

The man replied with a single word — a foul word, which could be heard from one end of the restaurant to the other, and which startled every one there. All those whose backs were toward the two disputants turned round; all the others raised their heads; three waiters spun round on their heels like tops; the two lady cashiers jumped, as if shot, then turned their bodies simultaneously, like two automata worked by the same spring.

There was dead silence. Then suddenly a sharp, crisp sound. The vicomte had slapped his adversary's face. Every one rose to interfere. Cards were exchanged.

When the vicomte reached home he walked rapidly up and down his room for some minutes. He was in a state of too great agitation to think connectedly. One idea alone possessed him: a duel. But this idea aroused in him as yet no emotion of any kind. He had done what he was bound to do; he had proved himself to be what he ought to be. He would be talked about, approved, congratulated. He repeated aloud, speaking as one does when under the stress of great mental disturbance:

"What a brute of a man!" Then he sat down, and began to reflect. He would have to find seconds as soon as morning came. Whom should he choose? He bethought himself of the most influential and best-known men of his acquaintance. His choice fell at last on the Marquis de la Tour-Noire and Colonel Bourdin-a nobleman and a soldier. That would be just the thing. Their names would carry weight in the newspapers. He was thirsty, and drank three glasses of water, one after another; then he walked up and down again. If he showed himself brave, determined, prepared to face a duel in deadly earnest, his adversary would probably draw back and proffer excuses. He picked up the card he had taken from his pocket and thrown on a table. He read it again, as he had already read it, first at a glance in the restaurant, and afterward on the way home in the light of each gas lamp: "Georges Lamil, 51 Rue Moncey." That was all.

He examined closely this collection of letters, which seemed to him mysterious, fraught with many meanings. Georges Lamil! Who was the man? What was his profession? Why had he stared so at the woman? Was it not monstrous that a stranger, an unknown, should thus all at once upset one's whole life, simply because it had pleased him to stare rudely at a woman? And the vicomte once more repeated aloud:

"What a brute!"

Then he stood motionless, thinking, his eyes still fixed on the card. Anger rose in his heart against this scrap of paper — a resentful anger, mingled with a strange sense of uneasiness. It was a stupid business altogether! He took up a penknife which lay open within reach, and deliberately stuck it into the middle of the printed name, as if he were stabbing some one.

So he would have to fight! Should he choose swords or pistols? — for he considered himself as the insulted party. With the sword he would risk less, but with the pistol there was some chance of his adversary backing out. A duel with swords is rarely fatal, since mutual prudence prevents the combatants from fighting close enough to each other for a point to enter very deep. With pistols he would seriously risk his life; but, on the other hand, he might come out of the affair with flying colors, and without a duel, after all.

"I must be firm," he said. "The fellow will be afraid."

The sound of his own voice startled him, and he looked nervously round the room. He felt unstrung. He drank another glass of water, and then began undressing, preparatory to going to bed.

As soon as he was in bed he blew out the light and shut his eyes.

"I have all day to-morrow," he reflected, "for setting my affairs in order. I must sleep now, in order to be calm when the time comes."

He was very warm in bed, but he could not succeed in losing consciousness. He tossed and turned, remained for five minutes lying on his back, then changed to his left side, then rolled over to his right. He was thirsty again, and rose to drink. Then a qualm seized him:

"Can it be possible that I am afraid?"

Why did his heart beat so uncontrollably at every well-known sound in his room? When the clock was about to strike, the prefatory grating of its spring made him start, and for several seconds he panted for breath, so unnerved was he.

He began to reason with himself on the possibility of such a thing: “Could I by any chance be afraid?”

No, indeed; he could not be afraid, since he was resolved to proceed to the last extremity, since he was irrevocably determined to fight without flinching. And yet he was so perturbed in mind and body that he asked himself:

“Is it possible to be afraid in spite of one’s self?”

And this doubt, this fearful question, took possession of him. If an irresistible power, stronger than his own will, were to quell his courage, what would happen? He would certainly go to the place appointed; his will would force him that far. But supposing, when there, he were to tremble or faint? And he thought of his social standing, his reputation, his name.

And he suddenly determined to get up and look at himself in the glass. He lighted his candle. When he saw his face reflected in the mirror he scarcely recognized it. He seemed to see before him a man whom he did not know. His eyes looked disproportionately large, and he was very pale.

He remained standing before the mirror. He put out his tongue, as if to examine the state of his health, and all at once the thought flashed into his mind:

“At this time the day after to-morrow I may be dead.”

And his heart throbbed painfully.

“At this time the day after to-morrow I may be dead. This person in front of me, this ‘I’ whom I see in the glass, will perhaps be no more. What! Here I am, I look at myself, I feel myself to be alive — and yet in twenty-four hours I may be lying on that bed, with closed eyes, dead, cold, inanimate.”

He turned round, and could see himself distinctly lying on his back on the couch he had just quitted. He had the hollow face and the limp hands of death.

Then he became afraid of his bed, and to avoid seeing it went to his smoking-room. He mechanically took a cigar, lighted it, and began walking back and forth. He was cold; he took a step toward the bell, to wake his valet, but stopped with hand raised toward the bell rope.

“He would see that I am afraid!”

And, instead of ringing, he made a fire himself. His hands quivered nervously as they touched various objects. His head grew dizzy, his thoughts confused, disjointed, painful; a numbness seized his spirit, as if he had been drinking.

And all the time he kept on saying:

"What shall I do? What will become of me?"

His whole body trembled spasmodically; he rose, and, going to the window, drew back the curtains.

The day — a summer day-was breaking. The pink sky cast a glow on the city, its roofs, and its walls. A flush of light enveloped the awakened world, like a caress from the rising sun, and the glimmer of dawn kindled new hope in the breast of the vicomte. What a fool he was to let himself succumb to fear before anything was decided — before his seconds had interviewed those of Georges Lamil, before he even knew whether he would have to fight or not!

He bathed, dressed, and left the house with a firm step.

He repeated as he went:

"I must be firm — very firm. I must show that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the marquis and the colonel, placed themselves at his disposal, and, having shaken him warmly by the hand, began to discuss details.

"You want a serious duel?" asked the colonel.

"Yes — quite serious," replied the vicomte.

"You insist on pistols?" put in the marquis.

"Yes."

"Do you leave all the other arrangements in our hands?"

With a dry, jerky voice the vicomte answered:

"Twenty paces — at a given signal — the arm to be raised, not lowered — shots to be exchanged until one or other is seriously wounded."

"Excellent conditions," declared the colonel in a satisfied tone. "You are a good shot; all the chances are in your favor."

And they parted. The vicomte returned home to, wait for them. His agitation, only temporarily allayed, now increased momentarily. He felt, in arms, legs and chest, a sort of trembling — a continuous vibration; he could not stay still, either sitting or standing. His mouth was parched, and he made every now and then a clicking movement of the tongue, as if to detach it from his palate.

He attempted, to take luncheon, but could not eat. Then it occurred to him to seek courage in drink, and he sent for a decanter of rum, of which he swallowed, one after another, six small glasses.

A burning warmth, followed by a deadening of the mental faculties, ensued. He said to himself:

“I know how to manage. Now it will be all right!”

But at the end of an hour he had emptied the decanter, and his agitation was worse than ever. A mad longing possessed him to throw himself on the ground, to bite, to scream. Night fell.

A ring at the bell so unnerved him that he had not the strength to rise to receive his seconds.

He dared not even to speak to them, wish them good-day, utter a single word, lest his changed voice should betray him.

“All is arranged as you wished,” said the colonel. “Your adversary claimed at first the privilege of the offended part; but he yielded almost at once, and accepted your conditions. His seconds are two military men.”

“Thank you,” said the vicomte.

The marquis added:

“Please excuse us if we do not stay now, for we have a good deal to see to yet. We shall want a reliable doctor, since the duel is not to end until a serious wound has been inflicted; and you know that bullets are not to be trifled with. We must select a spot near some house to which the wounded party can be carried if necessary. In fact, the arrangements will take us another two or three hours at least.”

The vicomte articulated for the second time:

“Thank you.”

“You’re all right?” asked the colonel. “Quite calm?”

“Perfectly calm, thank you.”

The two men withdrew.

When he was once more alone he felt as though he should go mad. His servant having lighted the lamps, he sat down at his table to write some letters. When he had traced at the top of a sheet of paper the words: “This is my last will and testament,” he started from his seat, feeling himself incapable of connected thought, of decision in regard to anything.

So he was going to fight! He could no longer avoid it. What, then, possessed him? He wished to fight, he was fully determined to fight, and yet, in spite of all his mental effort, in spite of the exertion of all his will power, he felt that he could not even preserve the strength necessary to carry him through the ordeal. He tried to conjure up a picture of the duel, his own attitude, and that of his enemy.

Every now and then his teeth chattered audibly. He thought he would read, and took down Chateauvillard's Rules of Dueling. Then he said:

"Is the other man practiced in the use of the pistol? Is he well known? How can I find out?"

He remembered Baron de Vaux's book on marksmen, and searched it from end to end. Georges Lamil was not mentioned. And yet, if he were not an adept, would he have accepted without demur such a dangerous weapon and such deadly conditions?

He opened a case of Gastinne Renettes which stood on a small table, and took from it a pistol. Next he stood in the correct attitude for firing, and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot, and the weapon shook in his grasp.

Then he said to himself:

"It is impossible. I cannot fight like this."

He looked at the little black, death-spitting hole at the end of the pistol; he thought of dishonor, of the whispers at the clubs, the smiles in his friends' drawing-rooms, the contempt of women, the veiled sneers of the newspapers, the insults that would be hurled at him by cowards.

He still looked at the weapon, and raising the hammer, saw the glitter of the priming below it. The pistol had been left loaded by some chance, some oversight. And the discovery rejoiced him, he knew not why.

If he did not maintain, in presence of his opponent, the steadfast bearing which was so necessary to his honor, he would be ruined forever. He would be branded, stigmatized as a coward, hounded out of society! And he felt, he knew, that he could not maintain that calm, unmoved demeanor. And yet he was brave, since the thought that followed was not even rounded to a finish in his mind; but, opening his mouth wide, he suddenly plunged the barrel of the pistol as far back as his throat, and pressed the trigger.

When the valet, alarmed at the report, rushed into the room he found his master lying dead upon his back. A spurt of blood had splashed the white paper on the table, and had made a great crimson stain beneath the words:

"This is my last will and testament."

OLD MONGILET

In the office old Mongilet was considered a type. He was a good old employee, who had never been outside Paris but once in his life.

It was the end of July, and each of us, every Sunday, went to roll in the grass, or soak in the water in the country near by. Asnieres, Argenteuil, Chatou, Borgival, Maisons, Poissy, had their habitues and their ardent admirers. We argued about the merits and advantages of all these places, celebrated and delightful to all Parsian employees.

Daddy Mongilet declared:

"You are like a lot of sheep! It must be pretty, this country you talk of!"

"Well, how about you, Mongilet? Don't you ever go on an excursion?"

"Yes, indeed. I go in an omnibus. When I have had a good luncheon, without any hurry, at the wine shop down there, I look up my route with a plan of Paris, and the time table of the lines and connections. And then I climb up on the box, open my umbrella and off we go. Oh, I see lots of things, more than you, I bet! I change my surroundings. It is as though I were taking a journey across the world, the people are so different in one street and another. I know my Paris better than anyone. And then, there is nothing more amusing than the entresols. You would not believe what one sees in there at a glance. One guesses at domestic scenes simply at sight of the face of a man who is roaring; one is amused on passing by a barber's shop, to see the barber leave his customer whose face is covered with lather to look out in the street. One exchanges heartfelt glances with the milliners just for fun, as one has no time to alight. Ah, how many things one sees!

"It is the drama, the real, the true, the drama of nature, seen as the horses trot by. Heavens! I would not give my excursions in the omnibus for all your stupid excursions in the woods."

"Come and try it, Mongilet, come to the country once just to see."

"I was there once," he replied, "twenty years ago, and you will never catch me there again."

“Tell us about it, Mongilet.”

“If you wish to hear it. This is how it was:

“You knew Boivin, the old editorial clerk, whom we called Boileau?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“He was my office chum. The rascal had a house at Colombes and always invited me to spend Sunday with him. He would say:

“‘Come along, Maculotte [he called me Maculotte for fun]. You will see what a nice excursion we will take.’

“I let myself be entrapped like an animal, and set out, one morning by the 8 o’clock train. I arrived at a kind of town, a country town where there is nothing to see, and I at length found my way to an old wooden door with an iron bell, at the end of an alley between two walls.

“I rang, and waited a long time, and at last the door was opened. What was it that opened it? I could not tell at the first glance. A woman or an ape? The creature was old, ugly, covered with old clothes that looked dirty and wicked. It had chicken’s feathers in its hair and looked as though it would devour me.

“‘What do you want?’ she said.

“‘Mr. Boivin.’

“‘What do you want of him, of Mr. Boivin?’

“I felt ill at ease on being questioned by this fury. I stammered: ‘Why-he expects me.’

“‘Ah, it is you who have come to luncheon?’

“‘Yes,’ I stammered, trembling.

“Then, turning toward the house, she cried in an angry tone:

“‘Boivin, here is your man!’

“It was my friend’s wife. Little Boivin appeared immediately on the threshold of a sort of barrack of plaster covered with zinc, that looked like a foot stove. He wore white duck trousers covered with stains and a dirty Panama hat.

“After shaking my hands warmly, he took me into what he called his garden. It was at the end of another alleyway enclosed by high walls and was a little square the size of a pocket handkerchief, surrounded by houses that were so high that the sun, could reach it only two or three hours in the day. Pansies, pinks, wallflowers and a few rose bushes were languishing in this well without air, and hot as an oven from the refraction of heat from the roofs.

"'I have no trees,' said Boivin, 'but the neighbors' walls take their place. I have as much shade as in a wood.'

"Then he took hold of a button of my coat and said in a low tone:

"'You can do me a service. You saw the wife. She is not agreeable, eh? To-day, as I had invited you, she gave me clean clothes; but if I spot them all is lost. I counted on you to water my plants.'

"I agreed. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeves, and began to work the handle of a kind of pump that wheezed, puffed and rattled like a consumptive as it emitted a thread of water like a Wallace drinking fountain. It took me ten minutes to water it and I was in a bath of perspiration. Boivin directed me:

"'Here — this plant — a little more; enough — now this one.'

"The watering pot leaked and my feet got more water than the flowers. The bottoms of my trousers were soaking and covered with mud. And twenty times running I kept it up, soaking my feet afresh each time, and perspiring anew as I worked the handle of the pump. And when I was tired out and wanted to stop, Boivin, in a tone of entreaty, said as he put his hand on my arm:

"Just one more watering pot full — just one, and that will be all.'

"To thank me he gave me a rose, a big rose, but hardly had it touched my button-hole than it fell to pieces, leaving only a hard little green knot as a decoration. I was surprised, but said nothing.

"Mme. Boivin's voice was heard in the distance:

"'Are you ever coming? When you know that luncheon is ready!'

"We went toward the foot stove. If the garden was in the shade, the house, on the other hand, was in the blazing sun, and the sweating room in the Turkish bath is not as hot as was my friend's dining room.

"Three plates at the side of which were some half-washed forks, were placed on a table of yellow wood in the middle of which stood an earthenware dish containing boiled beef and potatoes. We began to eat.

"A large water bottle full of water lightly colored with wine attracted my attention. Boivin, embarrassed, said to his wife:

"'See here, my dear, just on a special occasion, are you not going to give us some plain wine?'

"She looked at him furiously.

"'So that you may both get tipsy, is that it, and stay here gabbing all day? A fig for your special occasion!'

"He said no more. After the stew she brought in another dish of potatoes cooked with bacon. When this dish was finished, still in silence, she announced:

"'That is all! Now get out!'

"Boivin looked at her in astonishment.

"'But the pigeon — the pigeon you plucked this morning?'

"She put her hands on her hips:

"'Perhaps you have not had enough? Because you bring people here is no reason why we should devour all that there is in the house. What is there for me to eat this evening?'

"We rose. Solvin whispered

"'Wait for me a second, and we will skip.'

"He went into the kitchen where his wife had gone, and I overheard him say:

"'Give me twenty sous, my dear.'

"'What do you want with twenty sons?'

"'Why, one does not know what may happen. It is always better to have some money.'

"She yelled so that I should hear:

"'No, I will not give it to you! As the man has had luncheon here, the least he can do is to pay your expenses for the day.'

"Boivin came back to fetch me. As I wished to be polite I bowed to the mistress of the house, stammering:

"'Madame — many thanks — kind welcome.'

"'That's all right,' she replied. 'But do not bring him back drunk, for you will have to answer to me, you know!'

"We set out. We had to cross a perfectly bare plain under the burning sun. I attempted to gather a flower along the road and gave a cry of pain. It had hurt my hand frightfully. They call these plants nettles. And, everywhere, there was a smell of manure, enough to turn your stomach.

"Boivin said, 'Have a little patience and we will reach the river bank.'

"We reached the river. Here there was an odor of mud and dirty water, and the sun blazed down on the water so that it burned my eyes. I begged Boivin to go under cover somewhere. He took me into a kind of shanty filled with men, a river boatmen's tavern.

"He said:

"'This does not look very grand, but it is very comfortable.'

“I was hungry. I ordered an omelet. But to and behold, at the second glass of wine, that beggar, Boivin, lost his head, and I understand why his wife gave him water diluted.

“He got up, declaimed, wanted to show his strength, interfered in a quarrel between two drunken men who were fighting, and, but for the landlord, who came to the rescue, we should both have been killed.

“I dragged him away, holding him up until we reached the first bush where I deposited him. I lay down beside him and, it seems, I fell asleep. We must certainly have slept a long time, for it was dark when I awoke. Boivin was snoring at my side. I shook him; he rose but he was still drunk, though a little less so.

“We set out through the darkness across the plain. Boivin said he knew the way. He made me turn to the left, then to the right, then to the left. We could see neither sky nor earth, and found ourselves lost in the midst of a kind of forest of wooden stakes, that came as high as our noses. It was a vineyard and these were the supports. There was not a single light on the horizon. We wandered about in this vineyard for about an hour or two, hesitating, reaching out our arms without finding any limit, for we kept retracing our steps.

“At length Boivin fell against a stake that tore his cheek and he remained in a sitting posture on the ground, uttering with all his might long and resounding hallos, while I screamed ‘Help! Help!’ as loud as I could, lighting candle-matches to show the way to our rescuers, and also to keep up my courage.

“At last a belated peasant heard us and put us on our right road. I took Boivin to his home, but as I was leaving him on the threshold of his garden, the door opened suddenly and his wife appeared, a candle in her hand. She frightened me horribly.

“As soon as she saw her husband, whom she must have been waiting for since dark, she screamed, as she darted toward me:

“‘Ah, scoundrel, I knew you would bring him back drunk!’

“My, how I made my escape, running all the way to the station, and as I thought the fury was pursuing me I shut myself in an inner room as the train was not due for half an hour.

“That is why I never married, and why I never go out of Paris.”

MOONLIGHT

Madame Julie Roubere was expecting her elder sister, Madame Henriette Letore, who had just returned from a trip to Switzerland.

The Letore household had left nearly five weeks before. Madame Henriette had allowed her husband to return alone to their estate in Calvados, where some business required his attention, and had come to spend a few days in Paris with her sister. Night came on. In the quiet parlor Madame Roubere was reading in the twilight in an absent-minded way, raising her, eyes whenever she heard a sound.

At last, she heard a ring at the door, and her sister appeared, wrapped in a travelling cloak. And without any formal greeting, they clasped each other in an affectionate embrace, only desisting for a moment to give each other another hug. Then they talked about their health, about their respective families, and a thousand other things, gossiping, jerking out hurried, broken sentences as they followed each other about, while Madame Henriette was removing her hat and veil.

It was now quite dark. Madame Roubere rang for a lamp, and as soon as it was brought in, she scanned her sister's face, and was on the point of embracing her once more. But she held back, scared and astonished at the other's appearance.

On her temples Madame Letore had two large locks of white hair. All the rest of her hair was of a glossy, raven-black hue; but there alone, at each side of her head, ran, as it were, two silvery streams which were immediately lost in the black mass surrounding them. She was, nevertheless, only twenty-four years old, and this change had come on suddenly since her departure for Switzerland.

Without moving, Madame Roubere gazed at her in amazement, tears rising to her eyes, as she thought that some mysterious and terrible calamity must have befallen her sister. She asked:

"What is the matter with you, Henriette?"

Smiling with a sad face, the smile of one who is heartsick, the other replied:

"Why, nothing, I assure you. Were you noticing my white hair?"

But Madame Roubere impetuously seized her by the shoulders, and with a searching glance at her, repeated:

"What is the matter with you? Tell me what is the matter with you. And if you tell me a falsehood, I'll soon find it out."

They remained face to face, and Madame Henriette, who looked as if she were about to faint, had two pearly tears in the corners of her drooping eyes.

Her sister continued:

"What has happened to you? What is the matter with you? Answer me!"

Then, in a subdued voice, the other murmured:

"I have — I have a lover."

And, hiding her forehead on the shoulder of her younger sister, she sobbed.

Then, when she had grown a little calmer, when the heaving of her breast had subsided, she commenced to unbosom herself, as if to cast forth this secret from herself, to empty this sorrow of hers into a sympathetic heart.

Thereupon, holding each other's hands tightly clasped, the two women went over to a sofa in a dark corner of the room, into which they sank, and the younger sister, passing her arm over the elder one's neck, and drawing her close to her heart, listened.

"Oh! I know that there was no excuse for me; I do not understand myself, and since that day I feel as if I were mad. Be careful, my child, about yourself — be careful! If you only knew how weak we are, how quickly we yield, and fall. It takes so little, so little, so little, a moment of tenderness, one of those sudden fits of melancholy which come over you, one of those longings to open, your arms, to love, to cherish something, which we all have at certain moments.

"You know my husband, and you know how fond I am of him; but he is mature and sensible, and cannot even comprehend the tender vibrations of a woman's heart. He is always the same, always good, always smiling, always kind, always perfect. Oh! how I sometimes have wished that he would clasp me roughly in his arms, that he would embrace me with those slow, sweet kisses which make two beings intermingle, which are like mute confidences! How I have wished that he were foolish, even weak, so that he should have need of me, of my caresses, of my tears!

“This all seems very silly; but we women are made like that. How can we help it?

“And yet the thought of deceiving him never entered my mind. Now it has happened, without love, without reason, without anything, simply because the moon shone one night on the Lake of Lucerne.

“During the month when we were travelling together, my husband, with his calm indifference, paralyzed my enthusiasm, extinguished my poetic ardor. When we were descending the mountain paths at sunrise, when as the four horses galloped along with the diligence, we saw, in the transparent morning haze, valleys, woods, streams, and villages, I clasped my hands with delight, and said to him: ‘How beautiful it is, dear! Give me a kiss! Kiss me now!’ He only answered, with a smile of chilling kindliness: ‘There is no reason why we should kiss each other because you like the landscape.’

“And his words froze me to the heart. It seems to me that when people love each other, they ought to feel more moved by love than ever, in the presence of beautiful scenes.

“In fact, I was brimming over with poetry which he kept me from expressing. I was almost like a boiler filled with steam and hermetically sealed.

“One evening (we had for four days been staying in a hotel at Fluelen) Robert, having one of his sick headaches, went to bed immediately after dinner, and I went to take a walk all alone along the edge of the lake.

“It was a night such as one reads of in fairy tales. The full moon showed itself in the middle of the sky; the tall mountains, with their snowy crests, seemed to wear silver crowns; the waters of the lake glittered with tiny shining ripples. The air was mild, with that kind of penetrating warmth which enervates us till we are ready to faint, to be deeply affected without any apparent cause. But how sensitive, how vibrating the heart is at such moments! how quickly it beats, and how intense is its emotion!

“I sat down on the grass, and gazed at that vast, melancholy, and fascinating lake, and a strange feeling arose in me; I was seized with an insatiable need of love, a revolt against the gloomy dullness of my life. What! would it never be my fate to wander, arm in arm, with a man I loved, along a moon-kissed bank like this? Was I never to feel on my lips those kisses so deep, delicious, and intoxicating which lovers exchange on nights that seem to have been made by God for tenderness? Was I never to know ardent, feverish love in the moonlit shadows of a summer's night?

"And I burst out weeping like a crazy woman. I heard something stirring behind me. A man stood there, gazing at me. When I turned my head round, he recognized me, and, advancing, said:

"'You are weeping, madame?'

"It was a young barrister who was travelling with his mother, and whom we had often met. His eyes had frequently followed me.

"I was so confused that I did not know what answer to give or what to think of the situation. I told him I felt ill.

"He walked on by my side in a natural and respectful manner, and began talking to me about what we had seen during our trip. All that I had felt he translated into words; everything that made me thrill he understood perfectly, better than I did myself. And all of a sudden he repeated some verses of Alfred de Musset. I felt myself choking, seized with indescribable emotion. It seemed to me that the mountains themselves, the lake, the moonlight, were singing to me about things ineffably sweet.

"And it happened, I don't know how, I don't know why, in a sort of hallucination.

"As for him, I did not see him again till the morning of his departure.

"He gave me his card!"

And, sinking into her sister's arms, Madame Letore broke into groans — almost into shrieks.

Then, Madame Roubere, with a self-contained and serious air, said very gently:

"You see, sister, very often it is not a man that we love, but love itself. And your real lover that night was the moonlight."

THE FIRST SNOWFALL

The long promenade of La Croisette winds in a curve along the edge of the blue water. Yonder, to the right, Esterel juts out into the sea in the distance, obstructing the view and shutting out the horizon with its pretty southern outline of pointed summits, numerous and fantastic.

To the left, the isles of Sainte Marguerite and Saint Honorat, almost level with the water, display their surface, covered with pine trees.

And all along the great gulf, all along the tall mountains that encircle Cannes, the white villa residences seem to be sleeping in the sunlight. You can see them from a distance, the white houses, scattered from the top to the bottom of the mountains, dotting the dark greenery with specks like snow.

Those near the water have gates opening on the wide promenade which is washed by the quiet waves. The air is soft and balmy. It is one of those warm winter days when there is scarcely a breath of cool air. Above the walls of the gardens may be seen orange trees and lemon trees full of golden fruit. Ladies are walking slowly across the sand of the avenue, followed by children rolling hoops, or chatting with gentlemen.

A young woman has just passed out through the door of her coquettish little house facing La Croisette. She stops for a moment to gaze at the promenaders, smiles, and with an exhausted air makes her way toward an empty bench facing the sea. Fatigued after having gone twenty paces, she sits down out of breath. Her pale face seems that of a dead woman. She coughs, and raises to her lips her transparent fingers as if to stop those paroxysms that exhaust her.

She gazes at the sky full of sunshine and swallows, at the zigzag summits of the Esterel over yonder, and at the sea, the blue, calm, beautiful sea, close beside her.

She smiles again, and murmurs:

“Oh! how happy I am!”

She knows, however, that she is going to die, that she will never see the springtime, that in a year, along the same promenade, these same people who pass before her now will come again to breathe the warm air of this charming spot, with their children a little bigger, with their hearts all filled with hopes, with tenderness, with happiness, while at the bottom of an oak coffin, the poor flesh which is still left to her to-day will have decomposed, leaving only her bones lying in the silk robe which she has selected for a shroud.

She will be no more. Everything in life will go on as before for others. For her, life will be over, over forever. She will be no more. She smiles, and inhales as well as she can, with her diseased lungs, the perfumed air of the gardens.

And she sinks into a reverie.

She recalls the past. She had been married, four years ago, to a Norman gentleman. He was a strong young man, bearded, healthy-looking, with wide shoulders, narrow mind, and joyous disposition.

They had been united through financial motives which she knew nothing about. She would willingly have said No. She said Yes, with a movement of the head, in order not to thwart her father and mother. She was a Parisian, gay, and full of the joy of living.

Her husband brought her home to his Norman chateau. It was a huge stone building surrounded by tall trees of great age. A high clump of pine trees shut out the view in front. On the right, an opening in the trees presented a view of the plain, which stretched out in an unbroken level as far as the distant, farmsteads. A cross-road passed before the gate and led to the high road three kilometres away.

Oh! she recalls everything, her arrival, her first day in her new abode, and her isolated life afterward.

When she stepped out of the carriage, she glanced at the old building, and laughingly exclaimed:

“It does not look cheerful!”

Her husband began to laugh in his turn, and replied:

“Pooh! we get used to it! You’ll see. I never feel bored in it, for my part.”

That day they passed their time in embracing each other, and she did not find it too long. This lasted fully a month. The days passed one after the other in insignificant yet absorbing occupations. She learned the value and the importance of the little things of life. She knew that people can interest themselves in the price of eggs, which cost a few centimes more or less according to the seasons.

It was summer. She went to the fields to see the men harvesting. The brightness of the sunshine found an echo in her heart.

The autumn came. Her husband went out shooting. He started in the morning with his two dogs Medor and Mirza. She remained alone, without grieving, moreover, at Henry's absence. She was very fond of him, but she did not miss him. When he returned home, her affection was especially bestowed on the dogs. She took care of them every evening with a mother's tenderness, caressed them incessantly, gave them a thousand charming little names which she had no idea of applying to her husband.

He invariably told her all about his sport. He described the places where he found partridges, expressed his astonishment at not having caught any hares in Joseph Ledentu's clever, or else appeared indignant at the conduct of M. Lechapelier, of Havre, who always went along the edge of his property to shoot the game that he, Henry de Parville, had started.

She replied: "Yes, indeed! it is not right," thinking of something else all the while.

The winter came, the Norman winter, cold and rainy. The endless floods of rain came down tin the slates of the great gabled roof, rising like a knife blade toward the sky. The roads seemed like rivers of mud, the country a plain of mud, and no sound could be heard save that of water falling; no movement could be seen save the whirling flight of crows that settled down like a cloud on a field and then hurried off again.

About four o'clock, the army of dark, flying creatures came and perched in the tall beeches at the left of the chateau, emitting deafening cries. During nearly an hour, they flew from tree top to tree top, seemed to be fighting, croaked, and made a black disturbance in the gray branches. She gazed at them each evening with a weight at her heart, so deeply was she impressed by the lugubrious melancholy of the darkness falling on the deserted country.

Then she rang for the lamp, and drew near the fire. She burned heaps of wood without succeeding in warming the spacious apartments reeking with humidity. She was cold all day long, everywhere, in the drawing-room, at meals, in her own apartment. It seemed to her she was cold to the marrow of her bones. Her husband only came in to dinner; he was always out shooting, or else he was superintending sowing the seed, tilling the soil, and all the work of the country.

He would come back jovial, and covered with mud, rubbing his hands as he exclaimed:

"What wretched weather!"

Or else:

"A fire looks comfortable!"

Or sometimes:

"Well, how are you to-day? Are you in good spirits?"

He was happy, in good health, without desires, thinking of nothing save this simple, healthy, and quiet life.

About December, when the snow had come, she suffered so much from the icy-cold air of the chateau which seemed to have become chilled in passing through the centuries just as human beings become chilled with years, that she asked her husband one evening:

"Look here, Henry! You ought to have a furnace put into the house; it would dry the walls. I assure you that I cannot keep warm from morning till night."

At first he was stunned at this extravagant idea of introducing a furnace into his manor-house. It would have seemed more natural to him to have his dogs fed out of silver dishes. He gave a tremendous laugh from the bottom of his chest as he exclaimed:

"A furnace here! A furnace here! Ha! ha! ha! what a good joke!"

She persisted:

"I assure you, dear, I feel frozen; you don't feel it because you are always moving about; but all the same, I feel frozen."

He replied, still laughing:

"Pooh! you'll get used to it, and besides it is excellent for the health. You will only be all the better for it. We are not Parisians, damn it! to live in hot-houses. And, besides, the spring is quite near."

About the beginning of January, a great misfortune befell her. Her father and mother died in a carriage accident. She came to Paris for the funeral. And her sorrow took entire possession of her mind for about six months.

The mildness of the beautiful summer days finally roused her, and she lived along in a state of sad languor until autumn.

When the cold weather returned, she was brought face to face, for the first time, with the gloomy future. What was she to do? Nothing. What was going to happen to her henceforth? Nothing. What expectation, what hope, could revive her heart? None. A doctor who was consulted declared that she would never have children.

Sharper, more penetrating still than the year before, the cold made her suffer continually.

She stretched out her shivering hands to the big flames. The glaring fire burned her face; but icy whiffs seemed to glide down her back and to penetrate between her skin and her underclothing. And she shivered from head to foot. Innumerable draughts of air appeared to have taken up their abode in the apartment, living, crafty currents of air as cruel as enemies. She encountered them at every moment; they blew on her incessantly their perfidious and frozen hatred, now on her face, now on her hands, and now on her back.

Once more she spoke of a furnace; but her husband listened to her request as if she were asking for the moon. The introduction of such an apparatus at Parville appeared to him as impossible as the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone.

Having been at Rouen on business one day, he brought back to his wife a dainty foot warmer made of copper, which he laughingly called a "portable furnace"; and he considered that this would prevent her henceforth from ever being cold.

Toward the end of December she understood that she could not always live like this, and she said timidly one evening at dinner:

"Listen, dear! Are we, not going to spend a week or two in Paris before spring:"

He was stupefied.

"In Paris? In Paris? But what are we to do there? Ah! no by Jove! We are better off here. What odd ideas come into your head sometimes."

She faltered:

"It might distract us a little."

He did not understand.

"What is it you want to distract you? Theatres, evening parties, dinners in town? You knew, however, when you came here, that you ought not to expect any distractions of this kind!"

She saw a reproach in these words, and in the tone in which they were uttered. She relapsed into silence. She was timid and gentle, without resisting power and without strength of will.

In January the cold weather returned with violence. Then the snow covered the earth.

One evening, as she watched the great black cloud of crows dispersing among the trees, she began to weep, in spite of herself.

Her husband came in. He asked in great surprise:

“What is the matter with you?”

He was happy, quite happy, never having dreamed of another life or other pleasures. He had been born and had grown up in this melancholy district. He felt contented in his own house, at ease in body and mind.

He did not understand that one might desire incidents, have a longing for changing pleasures; he did not understand that it does not seem natural to certain beings to remain in the same place during the four seasons; he seemed not to know that spring, summer, autumn, and winter have, for multitudes of persons, fresh amusements in new places.

She could say nothing in reply, and she quickly dried her eyes. At last she murmured in a despairing tone:

“I am — I — I am a little sad — I am a little bored.”

But she was terrified at having even said so much, and added very quickly:

“And, besides — I am — I am a little cold.”

This last plea made him angry.

“Ah! yes, still your idea of the furnace. But look here, deuce take it! you have not had one cold since you came here.”

Night came on. She went up to her room, for she had insisted on having a separate apartment. She went to bed. Even in bed she felt cold. She thought:

“It will be always like this, always, until I die.”

And she thought of her husband. How could he have said:

“You — have not had one cold since you came here”?

She would have to be ill, to cough before he could understand what she suffered!

And she was filled with indignation, the angry indignation of a weak, timid being.

She must cough. Then, perhaps, he would take pity on her. Well, she would cough; he should hear her coughing; the doctor should be called in; he should see, her husband, he should see.

She got out of bed, her legs and her feet bare, and a childish idea made her smile:

"I want a furnace, and I must have it. I shall cough so much that he'll have to put one in the house."

And she sat down in a chair in her nightdress. She waited an hour, two hours. She shivered, but she did not catch cold. Then she resolved on a bold expedient.

She noiselessly left her room, descended the stairs, and opened the gate into the garden.

The earth, covered with snows seemed dead. She abruptly thrust forward her bare foot, and plunged it into the icy, fleecy snow. A sensation of cold, painful as a wound, mounted to her heart. However, she stretched out the other leg, and began to descend the steps slowly.

Then she advanced through the grass saying to herself:

"I'll go as far as the pine trees."

She walked with quick steps, out of breath, gasping every time she plunged her foot into the snow.

She touched the first pine tree with her hand, as if to assure herself that she had carried out her plan to the end; then she went back into the house. She thought two or three times that she was going to fall, so numbed and weak did she feel. Before going in, however, she sat down in that icy fleece, and even took up several handfuls to rub on her chest.

Then she went in and got into bed. It seemed to her at the end of an hour that she had a swarm of ants in her throat, and that other ants were running all over her limbs. She slept, however.

Next day she was coughing and could not get up.

She had inflammation of the lungs. She became delirious, and in her delirium she asked for a furnace. The doctor insisted on having one put in. Henry yielded, but with visible annoyance.

She was incurable. Her lungs were seriously affected, and those about her feared for her life.

"If she remains here, she will not last until the winter," said the doctor.

She was sent south. She came to Cannes, made the acquaintance of the sun, loved the sea, and breathed the perfume of orange blossoms.

Then, in the spring, she returned north.

But she now lived with the fear of being cured, with the fear of the long winters of Normandy; and as soon as she was better she opened her window by night and recalled the sweet shores of the Mediterranean.

And now she is going to die. She knows it and she is happy.

She unfolds a newspaper which she has not already opened, and reads this heading:

“The first snow in Paris.”

She shivers and then smiles. She looks across at the Esterel, which is becoming rosy in the rays of the setting sun. She looks at the vast blue sky, so blue, so very blue, and the vast blue sea, so very blue also, and she rises from her seat.

And then she returned to the house with slow steps, only stopping to cough, for she had remained out too long and she was cold, a little cold.

She finds a letter from her husband. She opens it, still smiling, and she reads:

> “MY DEAR LOVE: I hope you are well, and that you do not regret too much our beautiful country. For some days last we have had a good frost, which presages snow. For my part, I adore this weather, and you my believe that I do not light your damned furnace.”

She ceases reading, quite happy at the thought that she had her furnace put in. Her right hand, which holds the letter, falls slowly on her lap, while she raises her left hand to her mouth, as if to calm the obstinate cough which is racking her chest.

A RECOLLECTION

How many recollections of youth come to me in the soft sunlight of early spring! It was an age when all was pleasant, cheerful, charming, intoxicating. How exquisite are the remembrances of those old springtimes!

Do you recall, old friends and brothers, those happy years when life was nothing but a triumph and an occasion for mirth? Do you recall the days of wanderings around Paris, our jolly poverty, our walks in the fresh, green woods, our drinks in the wine-shops on the banks of the Seine and our commonplace and delightful little flirtations?

I will tell you about one of these. It was twelve years ago and already appears to me so old, so old that it seems now as if it belonged to the other end of life, before middle age, this dreadful middle age from which I suddenly perceived the end of the journey.

I was then twenty-five. I had just come to Paris. I was in a government office, and Sundays were to me like unusual festivals, full of exuberant happiness, although nothing remarkable occurred.

Now it is Sunday every day, but I regret the time when I had only one Sunday in the week. How enjoyable it was! I had six francs to spend!

On this particular morning I awoke with that sense of freedom that all clerks know so well — the sense of emancipation, of rest, of quiet and of independence.

I opened my window. The weather was charming. A blue sky full of sunlight and swallows spread above the town.

I dressed quickly and set out, intending to spend the day in the woods breathing the air of the green trees, for I am originally a rustic, having been brought up amid the grass and the trees.

Paris was astir and happy in the warmth and the light. The front of the houses was bathed in sunlight, the janitress' canaries were singing in their cages and there was an air of gaiety in the streets, in the faces of the inhabitants, lighting them up with a smile as if all beings and all things experienced a secret satisfaction at the rising of the brilliant sun.

I walked towards the Seine to take the Swallow, which would land me at Saint-Cloud.

How I loved waiting for the boat on the wharf:

It seemed to me that I was about to set out for the ends of the world, for new and wonderful lands. I saw the boat approaching yonder, yonder under the second bridge, looking quite small with its plume of smoke, then growing larger and ever larger, as it drew near, until it looked to me like a mail steamer.

It came up to the wharf and I went on board. People were there already in their Sunday clothes, startling toilettes, gaudy ribbons and bright scarlet designs. I took up a position in the bows, standing up and looking at the quays, the trees, the houses and the bridges disappearing behind us. And suddenly I perceived the great viaduct of Point du Jour which blocked the river. It was the end of Paris, the beginning of the country, and behind the double row of arches the Seine, suddenly spreading out as though it had regained space and liberty, became all at once the peaceful river which flows through the plains, alongside the wooded hills, amid the meadows, along the edge of the forests.

After passing between two islands the Swallow went round a curved verdant slope dotted with white houses. A voice called out: “Bas Meudon” and a little further on, “Sevres,” and still further, “Saint-Cloud.”

I went on shore and walked hurriedly through the little town to the road leading to the wood.

I had brought with me a map of the environs of Paris, so that I might not lose my way amid the paths which cross in every direction these little forests where Parisians take their outings.

As soon as I was unperceived I began to study my guide, which seemed to be perfectly clear. I was to turn to the right, then to the left, then again to the left and I should reach Versailles by evening in time for dinner.

I walked slowly beneath the young leaves, drinking in the air, fragrant with the odor of young buds and sap. I sauntered along, forgetful of musty papers, of the offices, of my chief, my colleagues, my documents, and thinking of the good things that were sure to come to me, of all the veiled unknown contained in the future. A thousand recollections of childhood came over me, awakened by these country odors, and I walked along, permeated with the fragrant, living enchantment, the emotional enchantment of the woods warmed by the sun of June.

At times I sat down to look at all sorts of little flowers growing on a bank, with the names of which I was familiar. I recognized them all just as if they were the ones I had seen long ago in the country. They were yellow, red, violet, delicate, dainty, perched on long stems or close to the ground. Insects of all colors and shapes, short, long, of peculiar form, frightful, and microscopic monsters, climbed quietly up the stalks of grass which bent beneath their weight.

Then I went to sleep for some hours in a hollow and started off again, refreshed by my doze.

In front of me lay an enchanting pathway and through its somewhat scanty foliage the sun poured down drops of light on the marguerites which grew there. It stretched out interminably, quiet and deserted, save for an occasional big wasp, who would stop buzzing now and then to sip from a flower, and then continue his way.

All at once I perceived at the end of the path two persons, a man and a woman, coming towards me. Annoyed at being disturbed in my quiet walk, I was about to dive into the thicket, when I thought I heard someone calling me. The woman was, in fact, shaking her parasol, and the man, in his shirt sleeves, his coat over one arm, was waving the other as a signal of distress.

I went towards them. They were walking hurriedly, their faces very red, she with short, quick steps and he with long strides. They both looked annoyed and fatigued.

The woman asked:

“Can you tell me, monsieur, where we are? My fool of a husband made us lose our way, although he pretended he knew the country perfectly.”

I replied confidently:

“Madame, you are going towards Saint-Cloud and turning your back on Versailles.”

With a look of annoyed pity for her husband, she exclaimed:

“What, we are turning our back on Versailles? Why, that is just where we want to dine!”

“I am going there also, madame.”

“Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!” she repeated, shrugging her shoulders, and in that tone of sovereign contempt assumed by women to express their exasperation.

She was quite young, pretty, a brunette with a slight shadow on her upper lip.

As for him, he was perspiring and wiping his forehead. It was assuredly a little Parisian bourgeois couple. The man seemed cast down, exhausted and distressed.

"But, my dear friend, it was you— " he murmured.

She did not allow him to finish his sentence.

"It was I! Ah, it is my fault now! Was it I who wanted to go out without getting any information, pretending that I knew how to find my way? Was it I who wanted to take the road to the right on top of the hill, insisting that I recognized the road? Was it I who undertook to take charge of Cachou— "

She had not finished speaking when her husband, as if he had suddenly gone crazy, gave a piercing scream, a long, wild cry that could not be described in any language, but which sounded like 'tuituit'.

The young woman did not appear to be surprised or moved and resumed:

"No, really, some people are so stupid and they pretend they know everything. Was it I who took the train to Dieppe last year instead of the train to Havre — tell me, was it I? Was it I who bet that M. Letourneur lived in Rue des Martyres? Was it I who would not believe that Celeste was a thief?"

She went on, furious, with a surprising flow of language, accumulating the most varied, the most unexpected and the most overwhelming accusations drawn from the intimate relations of their daily life, reproaching her husband for all his actions, all his ideas, all his habits, all his enterprises, all his efforts, for his life from the time of their marriage up to the present time.

He strove to check her, to calm her and stammered:

"But, my dear, it is useless — before monsieur. We are making ourselves ridiculous. This does not interest monsieur."

And he cast mournful glances into the thicket as though he sought to sound its peaceful and mysterious depths, in order to flee thither, to escape and hide from all eyes, and from time to time he uttered a fresh scream, a prolonged and shrill "tuituit." I took this to be a nervous affection.

The young woman, suddenly turning towards me: and changing her tone with singular rapidity, said:

"If monsieur will kindly allow us, we will accompany him on the road, so as not to lose our way again, and be obliged, possibly, to sleep in the wood."

I bowed. She took my arm and began to talk about a thousand things — about herself, her life, her family, her business. They were glovers in the Rue, Saint-Lazare.

Her husband walked beside her, casting wild glances into the thick wood and screaming "tuituit" every few moments.

At last I inquired:

"Why do you scream like that?"

"I have lost my poor dog," he replied in a tone of discouragement and despair.

"How is that — you have lost your dog?"

"Yes. He was just a year old. He had never been outside the shop. I wanted to take him to have a run in the woods. He had never seen the grass nor the leaves and he was almost wild. He began to run about and bark and he disappeared in the wood. I must also add that he was greatly afraid of the train. That may have driven him mad. I kept on calling him, but he has not come back. He will die of hunger in there."

Without turning towards her husband, the young woman said:

"If you had left his chain on, it would not have happened. When people are as stupid as you are they do not keep a dog."

"But, my dear, it was you— " he murmured timidly.

She stopped short, and looking into his eyes as if she were going to tear them out, she began again to cast in his face innumerable reproaches.

It was growing dark. The cloud of vapor that covers the country at dusk was slowly rising and there was a poetry in the air, induced by the peculiar and enchanting freshness of the atmosphere that one feels in the woods at nightfall.

Suddenly the young man stopped, and feeling his body feverishly, exclaimed:

"Oh, I think that I— "

She looked at him.

"Well, what?"

"I did not notice that I had my coat on my arm."

"Well — ?"

"I have lost my pocketbook — my money was in it."

She shook with anger and choked with indignation.

"That was all that was lacking. How stupid you are! how stupid you are! Is it possible that I could have married such an idiot! Well, go and look for it, and see that you find it. I am going on to Versailles with monsieur. I do not want to sleep in the wood."

"Yes, my dear," he replied gently. "Where shall I find you?"

A restaurant had been recommended to me. I gave him the address.

He turned back and, stooping down as he searched the ground with anxious eyes, he moved away, screaming "tuituit" every few moments.

We could see him for some time until the growing darkness concealed all but his outline, but we heard his mournful "tuituit," shriller and shriller as the night grew darker.

As for me, I stepped along quickly and happily in the soft twilight, with this little unknown woman leaning on my arm. I tried to say pretty things to her, but could think of nothing. I remained silent, disturbed, enchanted.

Our path was suddenly crossed by a high road. To the right I perceived a town lying in a valley.

What was this place? A man was passing. I asked him. He replied:

"Bougival."

I was dumfounded.

"What, Bougival? Are you sure?"

"Parbleu, I belong there!"

The little woman burst into an idiotic laugh.

I proposed that we should take a carriage and drive to Versailles. She replied:

"No, indeed. This is very funny and I am very hungry. I am really quite calm. My husband will find his way all right. It is a treat to me to be rid of him for a few hours."

We went into a restaurant beside the water and I ventured to ask for a private compartment. We had some supper. She sang, drank champagne, committed all sorts of follies.

That was my first serious flirtation.

OUR LETTERS

Eight hours of railway travel induce sleep for some persons and insomnia for others with me, any journey prevents my sleeping on the following night.

At about five o’clock I arrived at the estate of Abelle, which belongs to my friends, the Murets d’Artus, to spend three weeks there. It is a pretty house, built by one of their grandfathers in the style of the latter half of the last century. Therefore it has that intimate character of dwellings that have always been inhabited, furnished and enlivened by the same people. Nothing changes; nothing alters the soul of the dwelling, from which the furniture has never been taken out, the tapestries never unnailed, thus becoming worn out, faded, discolored, on the same walls. None of the old furniture leaves the place; only from time to time it is moved a little to make room for a new piece, which enters there like a new-born infant in the midst of brothers and sisters.

The house is on a hill in the center of a park which slopes down to the river, where there is a little stone bridge. Beyond the water the fields stretch out in the distance, and here one can see the cows wandering around, pasturing on the moist grass; their eyes seem full of the dew, mist and freshness of the pasture. I love this dwelling, just as one loves a thing which one ardently desires to possess. I return here every autumn with infinite delight; I leave with regret.

After I had dined with this friendly family, by whom I was received like a relative, I asked my friend, Paul Muret: “Which room did you give me this year?”

“Aunt Rose’s room.”

An hour later, followed by her three children, two little girls and a boy, Madame Muret d’Artus installed me in Aunt Rose’s room, where I had not yet slept.

When I was alone I examined the walls, the furniture, the general aspect of the room, in order to attune my mind to it. I knew it but little, as I had entered it only once or twice, and I looked indifferently at a pastel portrait of Aunt Rose, who gave her name to the room.

This old Aunt Rose, with her curls, looking at me from behind the glass, made very little impression on my mind. She looked to me like a woman of former days, with principles and precepts as strong on the maxims of morality as on cooking recipes, one of these old aunts who are the bugbear of gaiety and the stern and wrinkled angel of provincial families.

I never had heard her spoken of; I knew nothing of her life or of her death. Did she belong to this century or to the preceding one? Had she left this earth after a calm or a stormy existence? Had she given up to heaven the pure soul of an old maid, the calm soul of a spouse, the tender one of a mother, or one moved by love? What difference did it make? The name alone, "Aunt Rose," seemed ridiculous, common, ugly.

I picked up a candle and looked at her severe face, hanging far up in an old gilt frame. Then, as I found it insignificant, disagreeable, even unsympathetic, I began to examine the furniture. It dated from the period of Louis XVI, the Revolution and the Directorate. Not a chair, not a curtain had entered this room since then, and it gave out the subtle odor of memories, which is the combined odor of wood, cloth, chairs, hangings, peculiar to places wherein have lived hearts that have loved and suffered.

I retired but did not sleep. After I had tossed about for an hour or two, I decided to get up and write some letters.

I opened a little mahogany desk with brass trimmings, which was placed between the two windows, in hope of finding some ink and paper; but all I found was a quill-pen, very much worn, and chewed at the end. I was about to close this piece of furniture, when a shining spot attracted my attention it looked like the yellow head of a nail. I scratched it with my finger, and it seemed to move. I seized it between two finger-nails, and pulled as hard as I could. It came toward me gently. It was a long gold pin which had been slipped into a hole in the wood and remained hidden there.

Why? I immediately thought that it must have served to work some spring which hid a secret, and I looked. It took a long time. After about two hours of investigation, I discovered another hole opposite the first one, but at the bottom of a groove. Into this I stuck my pin: a little shelf sprang toward my face, and I saw two packages of yellow letters, tied with a blue ribbon.

I read them. Here are two of them:

> So you wish me to return to you your letters, my dearest friend. Here they are, but it pains me to obey. Of what are you afraid? That I might lose them? But they are under lock and key. Do you fear that they might be stolen? I guard against that, for they are my dearest treasure.
>
> Yes, it pains me deeply. I wondered whether, perhaps you might not be feeling some regret! Not regret at having loved me, for I know that you still do, but the regret of having expressed on white paper this living love in hours when your heart did not confide in me, but in the pen that you held in your hand. When we love, we have need of confession, need of talking or writing, and we either talk or write. Words fly away, those sweet words made of music, air and tenderness, warm and light, which escape as soon as they are uttered, which remain in the memory alone, but which one can neither see, touch nor kiss, as one can with the words written by your hand.
>
> Your letters? Yes, I am returning them to you! But with what sorrow!
>
> Undoubtedly, you must have had an after thought of delicate shame at expressions that are ineffaceable. In your sensitive and timid soul you must have regretted having written to a man that you loved him. You remembered sentences that called up recollections, and you said to yourself: “I will make ashes of those words.”
>
> Be satisfied, be calm. Here are your letters. I love you.

> MY FRIEND:
>
> No, you have not understood me, you have not guessed. I do not regret, and I never shall, that I told you of my affection.
>
> I will always write to you, but you must return my letters to me as soon as you have read them.

I shall shock you, my friend, when I tell you the reason for this demand. It is not poetic, as you imagined, but practical. I am afraid, not of you, but of some mischance. I am guilty. I do not wish my fault to affect others than myself.

Understand me well. You and I may both die. You might fall off your horse, since you ride every day; you might die from a sudden attack, from a duel, from heart disease, from a carriage accident, in a thousand ways. For, if there is only one death, there are more ways of its reaching us than there are days or us to live.

Then your sisters, your brother, or your sister-in-law might find my letters! Do you think that they love me? I doubt it. And then, even if they adored me, is it possible for two women and one man to know a secret — such a secret! — and not to tell of it?

I seem to be saying very disagreeable things, speaking first of your death, and then suspecting the discreetness of your relatives.

But don't all of us die sooner or later? And it is almost certain that one of us will precede the other under the ground. We must therefore foresee all dangers, even that one.

As for me, I will keep your letters beside mine, in the secret of my little desk. I will show them to you there, sleeping side by side in their silken hiding place, full of our love, like lovers in a tomb.

You will say to me: "But if you should die first, my dear, your husband will find these letters."

Oh! I fear nothing. First of all, he does not know the secret of my desk, and then he will not look for it. And even if he finds it after my death, I fear nothing.

Did you ever stop to think of all the love letters that have been found after death? I have been thinking of this for a long time, and that is the reason I decided to ask you for my letters.

Think that never, do you understand, never, does a woman burn, tear or destroy the letters in which it is told her that she is loved. That is our whole life, our whole hope, expectation and dream. These little papers which bear our name in caressing terms are relics which we adore; they are chapels in which we are the saints. Our love letters are our titles to beauty, grace, seduction, the intimate vanity of our womanhood; they are the treasures of our heart. No, a woman does not destroy these secret and delicious archives of her life.

But, like everybody else, we die, and then — then these letters are found! Who finds them? The husband. Then what does he do? Nothing. He burns them.

Oh, I have thought a great deal about that! Just think that every day women are dying who have been loved; every day the traces and proofs of their fault fall into the hands of their husbands, and that there is never a scandal, never a duel.

Think, my dear, of what a man's heart is. He avenges himself on a living woman; he fights with the man who has dishonored her, kills him while she lives, because, well, why? I do not know exactly why. But, if, after her death, he finds similar proofs, he burns them and no one is the wiser, and he continues to shake hands with the friend of the dead woman, and feels quite at ease that these letters should not have fallen into strange hands, and that they are destroyed.

Oh, how many men I know among my friends who must have burned such proofs, and who pretend to know nothing, and yet who would have fought madly had they found them when she was still alive! But she is dead. Honor has changed. The tomb is the boundary of conjugal sinning.

> Therefore, I can safely keep our letters, which, in your hands, would be a menace to both of us. Do you dare to say that I am not right?
>
> I love you and kiss you.

I raised my eyes to the portrait of Aunt Rose, and as I looked at her severe, wrinkled face, I thought of all those women's souls which we do not know, and which we suppose to be so different from what they really are, whose inborn and ingenuous craftiness we never can penetrate, their quiet duplicity; and a verse of De Vigny returned to my memory:

"Always this comrade whose heart is uncertain."

FRIEND JOSEPH

They had been great friends all winter in Paris. As is always the case, they had lost sight of each other after leaving school, and had met again when they were old and gray-haired. One of them had married, but the other had remained in single blessedness.

M. de Meroul lived for six months in Paris and for six months in his little chateau at Tourbeville. Having married the daughter of a neighboring, squire, he had lived a good and peaceful life in the indolence of a man who has nothing to do. Of a calm and quiet disposition, and not over-intelligent he used to spend his time quietly regretting the past, grieving over the customs and institutions of the day and continually repeating to his wife, who would lift her eyes, and sometimes her hands, to heaven, as a sign of energetic assent: “Good gracious! What a government!”

Madame de Meroul resembled her husband intellectually as though she had been his sister. She knew, by tradition, that one should above all respect the Pope and the King!

And she loved and respected them from the bottom of her heart, without knowing them, with a poetic fervor, with an hereditary devotion, with the tenderness of a wellborn woman. She was good to, the marrow of her bones. She had had no children, and never ceased mourning the fact.

On meeting his old friend, Joseph Mouradour, at a ball, M. de Meroul was filled with a deep and simple joy, for in their youth they had been intimate friends.

After the first exclamations of surprise at the changes which time had wrought in their bodies and countenances, they told each other about their lives since they had last met.

Joseph Mouradour, who was from the south of France, had become a government official. His manner was frank; he spoke rapidly and without restraint, giving his opinions without any tact. He was a Republican, one of those good fellows who do not believe in standing on ceremony, and who exercise an almost brutal freedom of speech.

He came to his friend's house and was immediately liked for his easy cordiality, in spite of his radical ideas. Madame de Meroul would exclaim:

"What a shame! Such a charming man!"

Monsieur de Meroul would say to his friend in a serious and confidential tone of voice; "You have no idea the harm that you are doing your country." He loved him all the same, for nothing is stronger than the ties of childhood taken up again at a riper age. Joseph Mouradour bantered the wife and the husband, calling them "my amiable snails," and sometimes he would solemnly declaim against people who were behind the times, against old prejudices and traditions.

When he was once started on his democratic eloquence, the couple, somewhat ill at ease, would keep silent from politeness and good-breeding; then the husband would try to turn the conversation into some other channel in order to avoid a clash. Joseph Mouradour was only seen in the intimacy of the family.

Summer came. The Merouls had no greater pleasure than to receive their friends at their country home at Tourbeville. It was a good, healthy pleasure, the enjoyments of good people and of country proprietors. They would meet their friends at the neighboring railroad station and would bring them back in their carriage, always on the lookout for compliments on the country, on its natural features, on the condition of the roads, on the cleanliness of the farm-houses, on the size of the cattle grazing in the fields, on everything within sight.

They would call attention to the remarkable speed with which their horse trotted, surprising for an animal that did heavy work part of the year behind a plow; and they would anxiously await the opinion of the newcomer on their family domain, sensitive to the least word, and thankful for the slightest good intention.

Joseph Mouradour was invited, and he accepted the invitation.

Husband and wife had come to the train, delighted to welcome him to their home. As soon as he saw them, Joseph Mouradour jumped from the train with a briskness which increased their satisfaction. He shook their hands, congratulated them, overwhelmed them with compliments.

All the way home he was charming, remarking on the height of the trees, the goodness of the crops and the speed of the horse.

When he stepped on the porch of the house, Monsieur de Meroul said, with a certain friendly solemnity:

“Consider yourself at home now.”

Joseph Mouradour answered:

“Thanks, my friend; I expected as much. Anyhow, I never stand on ceremony with my friends. That’s how I understand hospitality.”

Then he went upstairs to dress as a farmer, he said, and he came back all togged out in blue linen, with a little straw hat and yellow shoes, a regular Parisian dressed for an outing. He also seemed to become more vulgar, more jovial, more familiar; having put on with his country clothes a free and easy manner which he judged suitable to the surroundings. His new manners shocked Monsieur and Madame de Meroul a little, for they always remained serious and dignified, even in the country, as though compelled by the two letters preceding their name to keep up a certain formality even in the closest intimacy.

After lunch they all went out to visit the farms, and the Parisian astounded the respectful peasants by his tone of comradeship.

In the evening the priest came to dinner, an old, fat priest, accustomed to dining there on Sundays, but who had been especially invited this day in honor of the new guest.

Joseph, on seeing him, made a wry face. Then he observed him with surprise, as though he were a creature of some peculiar race, which he had never been able to observe at close quarters. During the meal he told some rather free stories, allowable in the intimacy of the family, but which seemed to the Merouls a little out of place in the presence of a minister of the Church. He did not say, “Monsieur l’abbe,” but simply, “Monsieur.” He embarrassed the priest greatly by philosophical discussions about diverse superstitions current all over the world. He said: “Your God, monsieur, is of those who should be respected, but also one of those who should be discussed. Mine is called Reason; he has always been the enemy of yours.”

The Merouls, distressed, tried to turn the trend of the conversation. The priest left very early.

Then the husband said, very quietly:

“Perhaps you went a little bit too far with the priest.”

But Joseph immediately exclaimed:

“Well, that’s pretty good! As if I would be on my guard with a shaveling! And say, do me the pleasure of not imposing him on me any more at meals.

You can both make use of him as much as you wish, but don’t serve him up to your friends, hang it!”

“But, my friends, think of his holy— “

Joseph Mouradour interrupted him:

“Yes, I know; they have to be treated like ‘rosieres.’ But let them respect my convictions, and I will respect theirs!”

That was all for that day.

As soon as Madame de Meroul entered the parlor, the next morning, she noticed in the middle of the table three newspapers which made her start the Voltaire, the Republique-Francaise and the Justice. Immediately Joseph Mouradour, still in blue, appeared on the threshold, attentively reading the Intransigeant. He cried:

“There’s a great article in this by Rochefort. That fellow is a wonder!”

He read it aloud, emphasizing the parts which especially pleased him, so carried away by enthusiasm that he did not notice his friend’s entrance. Monsieur de Meroul was holding in his hand the Gaulois for himself, the Clarion for his wife.

The fiery prose of the master writer who overthrew the empire, spouted with violence, sung in the southern accent, rang throughout the peaceful parsons seemed to spatter the walls and century-old furniture with a hail of bold, ironical and destructive words.

The man and the woman, one standing, the other sitting, were listening with astonishment, so shocked that they could not move.

In a burst of eloquence Mouradour finished the last paragraph, then exclaimed triumphantly:

“Well! that’s pretty strong!”

Then, suddenly, he noticed the two sheets which his friend was carrying, and he, in turn, stood speechless from surprise. Quickly walking toward him he demanded angrily:

“What are you doing with those papers?”

Monsieur de Meroul answered hesitatingly:

“Why — those — those are my papers!”

“Your papers! What are you doing — making fun of me? You will do me the pleasure of reading mine; they will limber up your ideas, and as for yours — there! that’s what I do with them.”

And before his astonished host could stop him, he had seized the two newspapers and thrown them out of the window. Then he solemnly handed the Justice to Madame de Meroul, the Voltaire to her husband, while he sank down into an arm-chair to finish reading the Intransigeant.

The couple, through delicacy, made a pretense of reading a little, they then handed him back the Republican sheets, which they handled gingerly, as though they might be poisoned.

He laughed and declared:

“One week of this regime and I will have you converted to my ideas.”

In truth, at the end of a week he ruled the house. He had closed the door against the priest, whom Madame de Meroul had to visit secretly; he had forbidden the Gaulois and the Clarion to be brought into the house, so that a servant had to go mysteriously to the post-office to get them, and as soon as he entered they would be hidden under sofa cushions; he arranged everything to suit himself — always charming, always good-natured, a jovial and all-powerful tyrant.

Other friends were expected, pious and conservative friends. The unhappy couple saw the impossibility of having them there then, and, not knowing what to do, one evening they announced to Joseph Mouradour that they would be obliged to absent themselves for a few days, on business, and they begged him to stay on alone. He did not appear disturbed, and answered:

“Very well, I don’t mind! I will wait here as long as you wish. I have already said that there should be no formality between friends. You are perfectly right-go ahead and attend to your business. It will not offend me in the least; quite the contrary, it will make me feel much more completely one of the family. Go ahead, my friends, I will wait for you!”

Monsieur and Madame de Meroul left the following day.

He is still waiting for them.

THE EFFEMINATES

How often we hear people say, “He is charming, that man, but he is a girl, a regular girl.” They are alluding to the effeminates, the bane of our land.

For we are all girl-like men in France — that is, fickle, fanciful, innocently treacherous, without consistency in our convictions or our will, violent and weak as women are.

But the most irritating of girl — men is assuredly the Parisian and the boulevardier, in whom the appearance of intelligence is more marked and who combines in himself all the attractions and all the faults of those charming creatures in an exaggerated degree in virtue of his masculine temperament.

Our Chamber of Deputies is full of girl-men. They form the greater number of the amiable opportunists whom one might call “The Charmers.” These are they who control by soft words and deceitful promises, who know how to shake hands in such a manner as to win hearts, how to say “My dear friend” in a certain tactful way to people he knows the least, to change his mind without suspecting it, to be carried away by each new idea, to be sincere in their weathercock convictions, to let themselves be deceived as they deceive others, to forget the next morning what he affirmed the day before.

The newspapers are full of these effeminate men. That is probably where one finds the most, but it is also where they are most needed. The Journal des Debats and the Gazette de France are exceptions.

Assuredly, every good journalist must be somewhat effeminate — that is, at the command of the public, supple in following unconsciously the shades of public opinion, wavering and varying, sceptical and credulous, wicked and devout, a braggart and a true man, enthusiastic and ironical, and always convinced while believing in nothing.

Foreigners, our anti-types, as Mme. Abel called them, the stubborn English and the heavy Germans, regard us with a certain amazement mingled with contempt, and will continue to so regard us till the end of time. They consider us frivolous. It is not that, it is that we are girls. And that is why people love us in spite of our faults, why they come back to us despite the evil spoken of us; these are lovers' quarrels! The effeminate man, as one meets him in this world, is so charming that he captivates you after five minutes' chat. His smile seems made for you; one cannot believe that his voice does not assume specially tender intonations on their account. When he leaves you it seems as if one had known him for twenty years. One is quite ready to lend him money if he asks for it. He has enchanted you, like a woman.

If he commits any breach of manners towards you, you cannot bear any malice, he is so pleasant when you next meet him. If he asks your pardon you long to ask pardon of him. Does he tell lies? You cannot believe it. Does he put you off indefinitely with promises that he does not keep? One lays as much store by his promises as though he had moved heaven and earth to render them a service.

When he admires anything he goes into such raptures that he convinces you. He once adored Victor Hugo, whom he now treats as a back number. He would have fought for Zola, whom he has abandoned for Barbey and d'Aurevilly. And when he admires, he permits no limitation, he would slap your face for a word. But when he becomes scornful, his contempt is unbounded and allows of no protest.

In fact, he understands nothing.

Listen to two girls talking.

“Then you are angry with Julia?” “I slapped her face.” “What had she done?” “She told Pauline that I had no money thirteen months out of twelve, and Pauline told Gontran — you understand.” “You were living together in the Rue Clanzel?” “We lived together four years in the Rue Breda; we quarrelled about a pair of stockings that she said I had worn — it wasn't true — silk stockings that she had bought at Mother Martin's. Then I gave her a pounding and she left me at once. I met her six months ago and she asked me to come and live with her, as she has rented a flat that is twice too large.”

One goes on one's way and hears no more. But on the following Sunday as one is on the way to Saint Germain two young women get into the same railway carriage. One recognizes one of them at once; it is Julia's enemy. The other is Julia!

And there are endearments, caresses, plans. “Say, Julia — listen, Julia,” etc.

The girl-man has his friendships of this kind. For three months he cannot bear to leave his old Jack, his dear Jack. There is no one but Jack in the world. He is the only one who has any intelligence, any sense, any talent. He alone amounts to anything in Paris. One meets them everywhere together, they dine together, walk about in company, and every evening walk home with each other back and forth without being able to part with one another.

Three months later, if Jack is mentioned:

“There is a drinker, a sorry fellow, a scoundrel for you. I know him well, you may be sure. And he is not even honest, and ill-bred,” etc., etc.

Three months later, and they are living together.

But one morning one hears that they have fought a duel, then embraced each other, amid tears, on the duelling ground.

Just now they are the dearest friends in the world, furious with each other half the year, abusing and loving each other by turns, squeezing each other’s hands till they almost crush the bones, and ready to run each other through the body for a misunderstanding.

For the relations of these effeminate men are uncertain. Their temper is by fits and starts, their delight unexpected, their affection turn-about-face, their enthusiasm subject to eclipse. One day they love you, the next day they will hardly look at you, for they have in fact a girl’s nature, a girl’s charm, a girl’s temperament, and all their sentiments are like the affections of girls.

They treat their friends as women treat their pet dogs.

It is the dear little Toutou whom they hug, feed with sugar, allow to sleep on the pillow, but whom they would be just as likely to throw out of a window in a moment of impatience, whom they turn round like a sling, holding it by the tail, squeeze in their arms till they almost strangle it, and plunge, without any reason, in a pail of cold water.

Then, what a strange thing it is when one of these beings falls in love with a real girl! He beats her, she scratches him, they execrate each other, cannot bear the sight of each other and yet cannot part, linked together by no one knows what mysterious psychic bonds. She deceives him, he knows it, sobs and forgives her. He despises and adores her without seeing that she would be justified in despising him. They are both atrociously unhappy and yet cannot separate. They cast invectives, reproaches and abominable accusations at each other from morning till night, and when they have reached the climax and are vibrating with rage and hatred, they fall into each other's arms and kiss each other ardently.

The girl-man is brave and a coward at the same time. He has, more than another, the exalted sentiment of honor, but is lacking in the sense of simple honesty, and, circumstances favoring him, would defalcate and commit infamies which do not trouble his conscience, for he obeys without questioning the oscillations of his ideas, which are always impulsive.

To him it seems permissible and almost right to cheat a haberdasher. He considers it honorable not to pay his debts, unless they are gambling debts — that is, somewhat shady. He dupes people whenever the laws of society admit of his doing so. When he is short of money he borrows in all ways, not always being scrupulous as to tricking the lenders, but he would, with sincere indignation, run his sword through anyone who should suspect him of only lacking in politeness.

YVETTE

CHAPTER I.

The Initiation of Saval

As they were leaving the Cafe Riche, Jean de Servigny said to Leon Saval: “If you don’t object, let us walk. The weather is too fine to take a cab.”

His friend answered: “I would like nothing better.”

Jean replied: “It is hardly eleven o’clock. We shall arrive much before midnight, so let us go slowly.”

A restless crowd was moving along the boulevard, that throng peculiar to summer nights, drinking, chatting, and flowing like a river, filled with a sense of comfort and joy. Here and there a cafe threw a flood of light upon a knot of patrons drinking at little tables on the sidewalk, which were covered with bottles and glasses, hindering the passing of the hurrying multitude. On the pavement the cabs with their red, blue, or green lights dashed by, showing for a second, in the glimmer, the thin shadow of the horse, the raised profile of the coachman, and the dark box of the carriage. The cabs of the Urbaine Company made clear and rapid spots when their yellow panels were struck by the light.

The two friends walked with slow steps, cigars in their mouths, in evening dress and overcoats on their arms, with a flower in their buttonholes, and their hats a trifle on one side, as men will carelessly wear them sometimes, after they have dined well and the air is mild.

They had been linked together since their college days by a close, devoted, and firm affection. Jean de Servigny, small, slender, a trifle bald, rather frail, with elegance of mien, curled mustache, bright eyes, and fine lips, was a man who seemed born and bred upon the boulevard. He was tireless in spite of his languid air, strong in spite of his pallor, one of those slight Parisians to whom gymnastic exercise, fencing, cold shower and hot baths give a nervous, artificial strength. He was known by his marriage as well as by his wit, his fortune, his connections, and by that sociability, amiability, and fashionable gallantry peculiar to certain men.

A true Parisian, furthermore, light, sceptical, changeable, captivating, energetic, and irresolute, capable of everything and of nothing; selfish by principle and generous on occasion, he lived moderately upon his income, and amused himself with hygiene. Indifferent and passionate, he gave himself rein and drew back constantly, impelled by conflicting instincts, yielding to all, and then obeying, in the end, his own shrewd man-about-town judgment, whose weather-vane logic consisted in following the wind and drawing profit from circumstances without taking the trouble to originate them.

His companion, Leon Saval, rich also, was one of those superb and colossal figures who make women turn around in the streets to look at them. He gave the idea of a statue turned into a man, a type of a race, like those sculptured forms which are sent to the Salons. Too handsome, too tall, too big, too strong, he sinned a little from the excess of everything, the excess of his qualities. He had on hand countless affairs of passion.

As they reached the Vaudeville theater, he asked: “Have you warned that lady that you are going to take me to her house to see her?”

Servigny began to laugh: “Forewarn the Marquise Obardi! Do you warn an omnibus driver that you shall enter his stage at the corner of the boulevard?”

Saval, a little perplexed, inquired: “What sort of person is this lady?”

His friend replied: “An upstart, a charming hussy, who came from no one knows where, who made her appearance one day, nobody knows how, among the adventuresses of Paris, knowing perfectly well how to take care of herself. Besides, what difference does it make to us? They say that her real name, her maiden name — for she still has every claim to the title of maiden except that of innocence — is Octavia Bardin, from which she constructs the name Obardi by prefixing the first letter of her first name and dropping the last letter of the last name.”

“Moreover, she is a lovable woman, and you, from your physique, are inevitably bound to become her lover. Hercules is not introduced into Messalina’s home without making some disturbance. Nevertheless I make bold to add that if there is free entrance to this house, just as there is in bazaars, you are not exactly compelled to buy what is for sale. Love and cards are on the programme, but nobody compels you to take up with either. And the exit is as free as the entrance."

"She settled down in the Etoile district, a suspicious neighborhood, three years ago, and opened her drawing-room to that froth of the continents which comes to Paris to practice its various formidable and criminal talents."

"I don't remember just how I went to her house. I went as we all go, because there is card playing, because the women are compliant, and the men dishonest. I love that social mob of buccaneers with decorations of all sorts of orders, all titled, and all entirely unknown at their embassies, except to the spies. They are always dragging in the subject of honor, quoting the list of their ancestors on the slightest provocation, and telling the story of their life at every opportunity, braggarts, liars, sharpers, dangerous as their cards, false as their names, brave because they have to be, like the assassins who can not pluck their victims except by exposing their own lives. In a word, it is the aristocracy of the bagnio."

"I like them. They are interesting to fathom and to know, amusing to listen to, often witty, never commonplace as the ordinary French guests. Their women are always pretty, with a little flavor of foreign knavery, with the mystery of their past existence, half of which, perhaps, spent in a House of Correction. They generally have fine eyes and glorious hair, the true physique of the profession, an intoxicating grace, a seductiveness which drives men to folly, an unwholesome, irresistible charm! They conquer like the highwaymen of old. They are rapacious creatures; true birds of prey. I like them, too."

"The Marquise Obardi is one of the type of these elegant good-for-nothings. Ripe and pretty, with a feline charm, you can see that she is vicious to the marrow. Everybody has a good time at her house, with cards, dancing, and suppers; in fact there is everything which goes to make up the pleasures of fashionable society life."

"Have you ever been or are you now her lover?" Leon Saval asked.

"I have not been her lover, I am not now, and I never shall be. I only go to the house to see her daughter."

"Ah! She has a daughter, then?"

"A daughter! A marvel, my dear man. She is the principal attraction of the den to-day. Tall, magnificent, just ripe, eighteen years old, as fair as her mother is dark, always merry, always ready for an entertainment, always laughing, and ready to dance like mad. Who will be the lucky man, to capture her, or who has already done so? Nobody can tell that. She has ten of us in her train, all hoping."

"Such a daughter in the hands of a woman like the Marquise is a fortune. And they play the game together, the two charmers. No one knows just what they are planning. Perhaps they are waiting for a better bargain than I should prove. But I tell you that I shall close the bargain if I ever get a chance."

"That girl Yvette absolutely baffles me, moreover. She is a mystery. If she is not the most complete monster of astuteness and perversity that I have ever seen, she certainly is the most marvelous phenomenon of innocence that can be imagined. She lives in that atmosphere of infamy with a calm and triumphing ease which is either wonderfully profligate or entirely artless. Strange scion of an adventuress, cast upon the muck-heap of that set, like a magnificent plant nurtured upon corruption, or rather like the daughter of some noble race, of some great artist, or of some grand lord, of some prince or dethroned king, tossed some evening into her mother's arms, nobody can make out what she is nor what she thinks. But you are going to see her."

Saval began to laugh and said: "You are in love with her."

"No. I am on the list, which is not precisely the same thing. I will introduce you to my most serious rivals. But the chances are in my favor. I am in the lead, and some little distinction is shown to me."

"You are in love," Saval repeated.

"No. She disquiets me, seduces and disturbs me, attracts and frightens me away. I mistrust her as I would a trap, and I long for her as I long for a sherbet when I am thirsty. I yield to her charm, and I only approach her with the apprehension that I would feel concerning a man who was known to be a skillful thief. To her presence I have an irrational impulse toward belief in her possible purity and a very reasonable mistrust of her not less probable trickery. I feel myself in contact with an abnormal being, beyond the pale of natural laws, an exquisite or detestable creature — I don't know which."

For the third time Saval said: "I tell you that you are in love. You speak of her with the magniloquence of a poet and the feeling of a troubadour. Come, search your heart, and confess."

Servigny walked a few steps without answering. Then he replied:

"That is possible, after all. In any case, she fills my mind almost continually. Yes, perhaps I am in love. I dream about her too much. I think of her when I am asleep and when I awake — that is surely a grave indication. Her face follows me, accompanies me ceaselessly, ever before me, around me, with me. Is this love, this physical infatuation? Her features are so stamped upon my vision that I see her the moment I shut my eyes. My heart beats quickly every time I look at her, I don't deny it."

"So I am in love with her, but in a queer fashion. I have the strongest desire for her, and yet the idea of making her my wife would seem to me a folly, a piece of stupidity, a monstrous thing: And I have a little fear of her, as well, the fear which a bird feels over which a hawk is hovering."

"And again I am jealous of her, jealous of all of which I am ignorant in her incomprehensible heart. I am always wondering: 'Is she a charming youngster or a wretched jade?' She says things that would make an army shudder; but so does a parrot. She is at times so indiscreet and yet modest that I am forced to believe in her spotless purity, and again so incredibly artless that I must suspect that she has never been chaste. She allures me, excites me, like a woman of a certain category, and at the same time acts like an impeccable virgin. She seems to love me and yet makes fun of me; she deports herself in public as if she were my mistress and treats me in private as if I were her brother or footman."

"There are times when I fancy that she has as many lovers as her mother. And at other times I imagine that she suspects absolutely nothing of that sort of life, you understand. Furthermore, she is a great novel reader. I am at present, while awaiting something better, her book purveyor. She calls me her 'librarian.' Every week the New Book Store sends her, on my orders, everything new that has appeared, and I believe that she reads everything at random. It must make a strange sort of mixture in her head."

"That kind of literary hasty-pudding accounts perhaps for some of the girl's peculiar ways. When a young woman looks at existence through the medium of fifteen thousand novels, she must see it in a strange light, and construct queer ideas about matters and things in general. As for me, I am waiting. It is certain at any rate that I never have had for any other woman the devotion which I have had for her. And still it is quite certain that I shall never marry her. So if she has had numbers, I shall swell the number. And if she has not, I shall take the first ticket, just as I would do for a street car."

"The case is very simple. Of course, she will never marry. Who in the world would marry the Marquise Obardi's daughter, the child of Octavia Bardin? Nobody, for a thousand reasons. Where would they ever find a husband for her? In society? Never. The mother's house is a sort of liberty-hall whose patronage is attracted by the daughter. Girls don't get married under those conditions."

"Would she find a husband among the trades-people? Still less would that be possible. And besides the Marquise is not the woman to make a bad bargain; she will give Yvette only to a man of high position, and that man she will never discover."

"Then perhaps she will look among the common people. Still less likely. There is no solution of the problem, then. This young lady belongs neither to society, nor to the tradesmen's class, nor to the common people, and she can never enter any of these ranks by marriage."

"She belongs through her mother, her birth, her education, her inheritance, her manners, and her customs, to the vortex of the most rapid life of Paris. She can never escape it, save by becoming a nun, which is not at all probable with her manners and tastes. She has only one possible career, a life of pleasure. She will come to it sooner or later, if indeed she has not already begun to tread its primrose path. She cannot escape her fate. From being a young girl she will take the inevitable step, quite simply. And I would like to be the pivot of this transformation."

"I am waiting. There are many lovers. You will see among them a Frenchman, Monsieur de Belvigne; a Russian, called Prince Kravalow, and an Italian, Chevalier Valreali, who have all announced their candidacies and who are consequently maneuvering to the best of their ability. In addition to these there are several freebooters of less importance. The Marquise waits and watches. But I think that she has views about me. She knows that I am very rich, and she makes less of the others."

"Her drawing-room is, moreover, the most astounding that I know of, in such, exhibitions. You even meet very decent men there, like ourselves. As for the women, she has culled the best there is from the basket of pickpockets. Nobody knows where she found them. It is a set apart from Bohemia, apart from everything. She has had one inspiration showing genius, and that is the knack of selecting especially those adventuresses who have children, generally girls. So that a fool might believe that in her house he was among respectable women!" They had reached the avenue of the Champs-Elysees. A gentle breeze softly stirred the leaves and touched the faces of passers-by, like the breaths of a giant fan, waving somewhere in the sky. Silent shadows wandered beneath the trees; others, on benches, made a dark spot. And these shadows spoke very low, as if they were telling each other important or shameful secrets.

"You can't imagine what a collection of fictitious titles are met in this lair," said Servigny, "By the way, I shall present you by the name of Count Saval; plain Saval would not do at all."

"Oh, no, indeed!" cried his friend; "I would not have anyone think me capable of borrowing a title, even for an evening, even among those people. Ah, no!"

Servigny began to laugh.

"How stupid you are! Why, in that set they call me the Duke de Servigny. I don't know how nor why. But at any rate the Duke de Servigny I am and shall remain, without complaining or protesting. It does not worry me. I should have no footing there whatever without a title."

But Saval would not be convinced.

"Well, you are of rank, and so you may remain. But, as for me, no. I shall be the only common person in the drawing-room. So much the worse, or, so much the better. It will be my mark of distinction and superiority."

Servigny was obstinate.

"I tell you that it is not possible. Why, it would almost seem monstrous. You would have the effect of a ragman at a meeting of emperors. Let me do as I like. I shall introduce you as the Vice-Roi du 'Haut-Mississippi,' and no one will be at all astonished. When a man takes on greatness, he can't take too much."

"Once more, no, I do not wish it."

"Very well, have your way. But, in fact, I am very foolish to try to convince you. I defy you to get in without some one giving you a title, just as they give a bunch of violets to the ladies at the entrance to certain stores."

They turned to the right in the Rue de Barrie, mounted one flight of stairs in a fine modern house, and gave their overcoats and canes into the hands of four servants in knee-breeches. A warm odor, as of a festival assembly, filled the air, an odor of flowers, perfumes, and women; and a composed and continuous murmur came from the adjoining rooms, which were filled with people.

A kind of master of ceremonies, tall, erect, wide of girth, serious, his face framed in white whiskers, approached the newcomers, asking with a short and haughty bow: “Whom shall I announce?”

“Monsieur Saval,” Servigny replied.

Then with a loud voice, the man opening the door cried out to the crowd of guests:

“Monsieur the Duke de Servigny.”

“Monsieur the Baron Saval.”

The first drawing-room was filled with women. The first thing which attracted attention was the display of bare shoulders, above a flood of brilliant gowns.

The mistress of the house who stood talking with three friends, turned and came forward with a majestic step, with grace in her mien and a smile on her lips. Her forehead was narrow and very low, and was covered with a mass of glossy black hair, encroaching a little upon the temples.

She was tall, a trifle too large, a little too stout, over ripe, but very pretty, with a heavy, warm, potent beauty. Beneath that mass of hair, full of dreams and smiles, rendering her mysteriously captivating, were enormous black eyes. Her nose was a little narrow, her mouth large and infinitely seductive, made to speak and to conquer.

Her greatest charm was in her voice. It came from that mouth as water from a spring, so natural, so light, so well modulated, so clear, that there was a physical pleasure in listening to it. It was a joy for the ear to hear the flexible words flow with the grace of a babbling brook, and it was a joy for the eyes to see those pretty lips, a trifle too red, open as the words rippled forth.

She gave one hand to Servigny, who kissed it, and dropping her fan on its little gold chain, she gave the other to Saval, saying to him: “You are welcome, Baron, all the Duke’s friends are at home here.”

Then she fixed her brilliant eyes upon the Colossus who had just been introduced to her. She had just the slightest down on her upper lip, a suspicion of a mustache, which seemed darker when she spoke. There was a pleasant odor about her, pervading, intoxicating, some perfume of America or of the Indies. Other people came in, marquesses, counts or princes. She said to Servigny, with the graciousness of a mother: “You will find my daughter in the other parlor. Have a good time, gentlemen, the house is yours.”

And she left them to go to those who had come later, throwing at Saval that smiling and fleeting glance which women use to show that they are pleased. Servigny grasped his friend's arm.

"I will pilot you," said he. "In this parlor where we now are, women, the temples of the fleshly, fresh or otherwise. Bargains as good as new, even better, for sale or on lease. At the right, gaming, the temple of money. You understand all about that. At the lower end, dancing, the temple of innocence, the sanctuary, the market for young girls. They are shown off there in every light. Even legitimate marriages are tolerated. It is the future, the hope, of our evenings. And the most curious part of this museum of moral diseases are these young girls whose souls are out of joint, just like the limbs of the little clowns born of mountebanks. Come and look at them."

He bowed, right and left, courteously, a compliment on his lips, sweeping each low-gowned woman whom he knew with the look of an expert.

The musicians, at the end of the second parlor, were playing a waltz; and the two friends stopped at the door to look at them. A score of couples were whirling-the men with a serious expression, and the women with a fixed smile on their lips. They displayed a good deal of shoulder, like their mothers; and the bodices of some were only held in place by a slender ribbon, disclosing at times more than is generally shown.

Suddenly from the end of the room a tall girl darted forward, gliding through the crowd, brushing against the dancers, and holding her long train in her left hand. She ran with quick little steps as women do in crowds, and called out: "Ah! How is Muscade? How do you do, Muscade?"

Her features wore an expression of the bloom of life, the illumination of happiness. Her white flesh seemed to shine, the golden-white flesh which goes with red hair. The mass of her tresses, twisted on her head, fiery, flaming locks, nestled against her supple neck, which was still a little thin.

She seemed to move just as her mother was made to speak, so natural, noble, and simple were her gestures. A person felt a moral joy and physical pleasure in seeing her walk, stir about, bend her head, or lift her arm. "Ah! Muscade, how do you do, Muscade?" she repeated.

Servigny shook her hand violently, as he would a man's, and said: "Mademoiselle Yvette, my friend, Baron Saval."

"Good evening, Monsieur. Are you always as tall as that?"

Servigny replied in that bantering tone which he always used with her, in order to conceal his mistrust and his uncertainty:

“No, Mam’zelle. He has put on his greatest dimensions to please your mother, who loves a colossus.”

And the young girl remarked with a comic seriousness: “Very well But when you come to see me you must diminish a little if you please. I prefer the medium height. Now Muscade has just the proportions which I like.”

And she gave her hand to the newcomer. Then she asked: “Do you dance, Muscade? Come, let us waltz.” Without replying, with a quick movement, passionately, Servigny clasped her waist and they disappeared with the fury of a whirlwind.

They danced more rapidly than any of the others, whirled and whirled, and turned madly, so close together that they seemed but one, and with the form erect, the legs almost motionless, as if some invisible mechanism, concealed beneath their feet, caused them to twirl. They appeared tireless. The other dancers stopped from time to time. They still danced on, alone. They seemed not to know where they were nor what they were doing, as if, they had gone far away from the ball, in an ecstasy. The musicians continued to play, with their looks fixed upon this mad couple; all the guests gazed at them, and when finally they did stop dancing, everyone applauded them.

She was a little flushed, with strange eyes, ardent and timid, less daring than a moment before, troubled eyes, blue, yet with a pupil so black that they seemed hardly natural. Servigny appeared giddy. He leaned against a door to regain his composure.

“You have no head, my poor Muscade, I am steadier than you,” said Yvette to Servigny. He smiled nervously, and devoured her with a look. His animal feelings revealed themselves in his eyes and in the curl of his lips. She stood beside him looking down, and her bosom rose and fell in short gasps as he looked at her.

Then she said softly: “Really, there are times when you are like a tiger about to spring upon his prey. Come, give me your arm, and let us find your friend.”

Silently he offered her his arm and they went down the long drawing-room together.

Saval was not alone, for the Marquise Obardi had rejoined him. She conversed with him on ordinary and fashionable subjects with a seductiveness in her tones which intoxicated him. And, looking at her with his mental eye, it seemed to him that her lips, uttered words far different from those which they formed. When she saw Servigny her face immediately lighted up, and turning toward him she said:

“You know, my dear Duke, that I have just leased a villa at Bougival for two months, and I count upon your coming to see me there, and upon your friend also. Listen. We take possession next Monday, and shall expect both of you to dinner the following Saturday. We shall keep you over Sunday.”

Perfectly serene and tranquil Yvette smiled, saying with a decision which swept away hesitation on his part:

“Of course Muscade will come to dinner on Saturday. We have only to ask him, for he and I intend to commit a lot of follies in the country.”

He thought he divined the birth of a promise in her smile, and in her voice he heard what he thought was invitation.

Then the Marquise turned her big, black eyes upon Saval: “And you will, of course, come, Baron?”

With a smile that forbade doubt, he bent toward her, saying, “I shall be only too charmed, Madame.”

Then Yvette murmured with malice that was either naive or traitorous: “We will set all the world by the ears down there, won’t we, Muscade, and make my regiment of admirers fairly mad.” And with a look, she pointed out a group of men who were looking at them from a little distance.

Said Servigny to her: “As many follies as YOU may please, Mam’zelle.”

In speaking to Yvette, Servigny never used the word “Mademoiselle,” by reason of his close and long intimacy with her.

Then Saval asked: “Why does Mademoiselle always call my friend Servigny ‘Muscade’?”

Yvette assumed a very frank air and said:

“I will tell you: It is because he always slips through my hands. Now I think I have him, and then I find I have not.”

The Marquise, with her eyes upon Saval, arid evidently preoccupied, said in a careless tone: “You children are very funny.”

But Yvette bridled up: “I do not intend to be funny; I am simply frank. Muscade pleases me, and is always deserting me, and that is what annoys me.”

Servigny bowed profoundly, saying: “I will never leave you any more, Mam’zelle, neither day nor night.” She made a gesture of horror:

"My goodness! no — what do you mean? You are all right during the day, but at night you might embarrass me."

With an air of impertinence he asked: "And why?"

Yvette responded calmly and audaciously, "Because you would not look well en deshabille."

The Marquise, without appearing at all disturbed, said: "What extraordinary subjects for conversation. One would think that you were not at all ignorant of such things."

And Servigny jokingly added: "That is also my opinion, Marquise."

Yvette turned her eyes upon him, and in a haughty, yet wounded, tone said: "You are becoming very vulgar — just as you have been several times lately." And turning quickly she appealed to an individual standing by:

"Chevalier, come and defend me from insult."

A thin, brown man, with an easy carriage, came forward.

"Who is the culprit?" said he, with a constrained smile.

Yvette pointed out Servigny with a nod of her head:

"There he is, but I like him better than I do you, because he is less of a bore."

The Chevalier Valreali bowed:

"I do what I can, Mademoiselle. I may have less ability, but not less devotion."

A gentleman came forward, tall and stout, with gray whiskers, saying in loud tones: "Mademoiselle Yvette, I am your most devoted slave."

Yvette cried: "Ah, Monsieur de Belvigne." Then turning toward Saval, she introduced him.

"My last adorer — big, fat, rich, and stupid. Those are the kind I like. A veritable drum-major — but of the table d'hote. But see, you are still bigger than he. How shall I nickname you? Good! I have it. I shall call you 'M. Colossus of Rhodes, Junior,' from the Colossus who certainly was your father. But you two ought to have very interesting things to say to each other up there, above the heads of us all — so, by-bye."

And she left them quickly, going to the orchestra to make the musicians strike up a quadrille.

Madame Obardi seemed preoccupied. In a soft voice she said to Servigny:

"You are always teasing her. You will warp her character and bring out many bad traits."

Servigny replies: “Why, haven’t you finished her education?”

She appeared not to understand, and continued talking in a friendly way. But she noticed a solemn looking man, wearing a perfect constellation of crosses and orders, standing near her, and she ran to him:

“Ah Prince, Prince, what good fortune!”

Servigny took Saval’s arm and drew him away:

“That is the latest serious suitor, Prince Kravalow. Isn’t she superb?”

“To my mind they are both superb. The mother would suffice for me perfectly,” answered Saval.

Servigny nodded and said: “At your disposal, my dear boy.”

The dancers elbowed them aside, as they were forming for a quadrille.

“Now let us go and see the sharpers,” said Servigny. And they entered the gambling-room.

Around each table stood a group of men, looking on. There was very little conversation. At times the clink of gold coins, tossed upon the green cloth or hastily seized, added its sound to the murmur of the players, just as if the money was putting in its word among the human voices.

All the men were decorated with various orders, and odd ribbons, and they all wore the same severe expression, with different countenances. The especially distinguishing feature was the beard.

The stiff American with his horseshoe, the haughty Englishman with his fan-beard open on his breast, the Spaniard with his black fleece reaching to the eyes, the Roman with that huge mustache which Italy copied from Victor Emmanuel, the Austrian with his whiskers and shaved chin, a Russian general whose lip seemed armed with two twisted lances, and a Frenchman with a dainty mustache, displayed the fancies of all the barbers in the world.

“You won’t join the game?” asked Servigny.

“No, shall you?”

“Not now. If you are ready to go, we will come back some quieter day. There are too many people here to-day, and we can’t do anything.”

“Well, let us go.”

And they disappeared behind a door-curtain into the hall. As soon as they were in the street Servigny asked: “Well, what do you think of it?”

“It certainly is interesting, but I fancy the women’s side of it more than the men’s.”

“Indeed! Those women are the best of the tribe for us. Don’t you find that you breathe the odor of love among them, just as you scent the perfumes at a hairdresser’s?”

“Really such houses are the place for one to go. And what experts, my dear fellow! What artists! Have you ever eaten bakers’ cakes? They look well, but they amount to nothing. The man who bakes them only knows how to make bread. Well! the love of a woman in ordinary society always reminds me of these bake-shop trifles, while the love you find at houses like the Marquise Obardi’s, don’t you see, is the real sweetmeat. Oh! they know how to make cakes, these charming pastry-cooks. Only you pay five sous, at their shops, for what costs two sous elsewhere.”

“Who is the master of the house just now?” asked Saval.

Servigny shrugged his shoulders, signifying his ignorance.

“I don’t know, the latest one known was an English peer, but he left three months ago. At present she must live off the common herd, or the gambling, perhaps, and on the gamblers, for she has her caprices. But tell me, it is understood that we dine with her on Saturday at Bougival, is it not? People are more free in the country, and I shall succeed in finding out what ideas Yvette has in her head!”

“I should like nothing better,” replied Saval. “I have nothing to do that day.”

Passing down through the Champs-Elysees, under the steps they disturbed a couple making love on one of the benches, and Servigny muttered: “What foolishness and what a serious matter at the same time! How commonplace and amusing love is, always the same and always different! And the beggar who gives his sweetheart twenty sous gets as much return as I would for ten thousand francs from some Obardi, no younger and no less stupid perhaps than this nondescript. What nonsense!”

He said nothing for a few minutes; then he began again: “All the same, it would be good to become Yvette’s first lover. Oh! for that I would give— “

He did not add what he would give, and Saval said good night to him as they reached the corner of the Rue Royale.

CHAPTER II.

Bougival and Love

They had set the table on the veranda which overlooked the river. The Printemps villa, leased by the Marquise Obardi, was halfway up this hill, just at the corner of the Seine, which turned before the garden wall, flowing toward Marly.

Opposite the residence, the island of Croissy formed a horizon of tall trees, a mass of verdure, and they could see a long stretch of the big river as far as the floating cafe of La Grenouillere hidden beneath the foliage.

The evening fell, one of those calm evenings at the waterside, full of color yet soft, one of those peaceful evenings which produces a sensation of pleasure. No breath of air stirred the branches, no shiver of wind ruffled the smooth clear surface of the Seine. It was not too warm, it was mild — good weather to live in. The grateful coolness of the banks of the Seine rose toward a serene sky.

The sun disappeared behind the trees to shine on other lands, and one seemed to absorb the serenity of the already sleeping earth, to inhale, in the peace of space, the life of the infinite.

As they left the drawing-room to seat themselves at the table everyone was joyous. A softened gaiety filled their hearts, they felt that it would be so delightful to dine there in the country, with that great river and that twilight for a setting, breathing that pure and fragrant air.

The Marquise had taken Saval’s arm, and Yvette, Servigny’s. The four were alone by themselves. The two women seemed entirely different persons from what they were at Paris, especially Yvette. She talked but little, and seemed languid and grave.

Saval, hardly recognizing her in this frame of mind, asked her: “What is the matter, Mademoiselle? I find you changed since last week. You have become quite a serious person.”

“It is the country that does that for me,” she replied. “I am not the same, I feel queer; besides I am never two days alike. To-day I have the air of a mad woman, and to-morrow shall be as grave as an elegy. I change with the weather, I don’t know why. You see, I am capable of anything, according to the moment. There are days when I would like to kill people, — not animals, I would never kill animals, — but people, yes, and other days when I weep at a mere thing. A lot of different ideas pass through my head. It depends, too, a good deal on how I get up. Every morning, on waking, I can tell just what I shall be in the evening. Perhaps it is our dreams that settle it for us, and it depends on the book I have just read."

She was clad in a white flannel suit which delicately enveloped her in the floating softness of the material. Her bodice, with full folds, suggested, without displaying and without restraining, her free chest, which was firm and already ripe. And her superb neck emerged from a froth of soft lace, bending with gentle movements, fairer than her gown, a pilaster of flesh, bearing the heavy mass of her golden hair.

Servigny looked at her for a long time: "You are adorable this evening, Mam'zelle," said he, "I wish I could always see you like this."

"Don't make a declaration, Muscade. I should take it seriously, and that might cost you dear."

The Marquise seemed happy, very happy. All in black, richly dressed in a plain gown which showed her strong, full lines, a bit of red at the bodice, a cincture of red carnations falling from her waist like a chain, and fastened at the hips, and a red rose in her dark hair, she carried in all her person something fervid, — in that simple costume, in those flowers which seemed to bleed, in her look, in her slow speech, in her peculiar gestures.

Saval, too, appeared serious and absorbed. From time to time he stroked his pointed beard, trimmed in the fashion of Henri III., and seemed to be meditating on the most profound subjects.

Nobody spoke for several minutes. Then as they were serving the trout, Servigny remarked:

"Silence is a good thing, at times. People are often nearer to each other when they are keeping still than when they are talking. Isn't that so, Marquise?"

She turned a little toward him and answered:

"It is quite true. It is so sweet to think together about agreeable things."

She raised her warm glance toward Saval, and they continued for some seconds looking into each other's eyes. A slight, almost inaudible movement took place beneath the table.

Servigny resumed: "Mam'zelle Yvette, you will make me believe that you are in love if you keep on being as good as that. Now, with whom could you be in love? Let us think together, if you will; I put aside the army of vulgar sighers. I'll only take the principal ones. Is it Prince Kravalow?"

At this name Yvette awoke: "My poor Muscade, can you think of such a thing? Why, the Prince has the air of a Russian in a wax-figure museum, who has won medals in a hairdressing competition."

"Good! We'll drop the Prince. But you have noticed the Viscount Pierre de Belvigne?"

This time she began to laugh, and asked: "Can you imagine me hanging to the neck of 'Raisine'?" She nicknamed him according to the day, Raisine, Malvoisie, [Footnote: Preserved grapes and pears, malmsey, — a poor wine.] Argenteuil, for she gave everybody nicknames. And she would murmur to his face: "My dear little Pierre," or "My divine Pedro, darling Pierrot, give your bow-wow's head to your dear little girl, who wants to kiss it."

"Scratch out number two. There still remains the Chevalier Valreali whom the Marquise seems to favor," continued Servigny.

Yvette regained all her gaiety: "'Teardrop'? Why he weeps like a Magdalene. He goes to all the first-class funerals. I imagine myself dead every time he looks at me."

"That settles the third. So the lightning will strike Baron Saval, here."

"Monsieur the Colossus of Rhodes, Junior? No. He is too strong. It would seem to me as if I were in love with the triumphal arch of L'Etoile."

"Then Mam'zelle, it is beyond doubt that you are in love with me, for I am the only one of your adorers of whom we have not yet spoken. I left myself for the last through modesty and through discretion. It remains for me to thank you."

She replied with happy grace: "In love with you, Muscade? Ah! no. I like you, but I don't love you. Wait — I — I don't want to discourage you. I don't love you — yet. You have a chance — perhaps. Persevere, Muscade, be devoted, ardent, submissive, full of little attentions and considerations, docile to my slightest caprices, ready for anything to please me, and we shall see — later."

"But, Mam'zelle, I would rather furnish all you demand afterward than beforehand, if it be the same to you."

She asked with an artless air: "After what, Muscade?"

"After you have shown me that you love me, by Jove!"

"Well, act as if I loved you, and believe it, if you wish."

"But you— "

"Be quiet, Muscade; enough on the subject."

The sun had sunk behind the island, but the whole sky still flamed like a fire, and the peaceful water of the river seemed changed to blood. The reflections from the horizon reddened houses, objects, and persons. The scarlet rose in the Marquise's hair had the appearance of a splash of purple fallen from the clouds upon her head.

As Yvette looked on from her end, the Marquise rested, as if by carelessness, her bare hand upon Saval's hand; but the young girl made a motion and the Marquise withdrew her hand with a quick gesture, pretending to readjust something in the folds of her corsage.

Servigny, who was looking at them, said:

"If you like, Mam'zelle, we will take a walk on the island after dinner."

"Oh, yes! That will be delightful. We will go all alone, won't we, Muscade?"

"Yes, all alone, Mam'zelle!"

The vast silence of the horizon, the sleepy tranquillity of the evening captured heart, body, and voice. There are peaceful, chosen hours when it becomes almost impossible to talk.

The servants waited on them noiselessly. The firmamental conflagration faded away, and the soft night spread its shadows over the earth.

"Are you going to stay long in this place?" asked Saval.

And the Marquise answered, dwelling on each word: "Yes, as long as I am happy."

As it was too dark to see, lamps were brought. They cast upon the table a strange, pale gleam beneath the great obscurity of space; and very soon a shower of gnats fell upon the tablecloth — the tiny gnats which immolate themselves by passing over the glass chimneys, and, with wings and legs scorched, powder the table linen, dishes, and cups with a kind of gray and hopping dust.

They swallowed them in the wine, they ate them in the sauces, they saw them moving on the bread, and had their faces and hands tickled by the countless swarm of these tiny insects. They were continually compelled to throw away the beverages, to cover the plates, and while eating to shield the food with infinite precautions.

It amused Yvette. Servigny took care to shelter what she bore to her mouth, to guard her glass, to hold his handkerchief stretched out over her head like a roof. But the Marquise, disgusted, became nervous, and the end of the dinner came quickly. Yvette, who had not forgotten Servigny's proposition, said to him:

"Now we'll go to the island."

Her mother cautioned her in a languid tone: “Don’t be late, above all things. We will escort you to the ferry.”

And they started in couples, the young girl and her admirer walking in front, on the road to the shore. They heard, behind them, the Marquise and Saval speaking very rapidly in low tones. All was dark, with a thick, inky darkness. But the sky swarmed with grains of fire, and seemed to sow them in the river, for the black water was flecked with stars.

The frogs were croaking monotonously upon the bank, and numerous nightingales were uttering their low, sweet song in the calm and peaceful air.

Yvette suddenly said: “Gracious! They are not walking behind us any more, where are they?” And she called out: “Mamma!” No voice replied. The young girl resumed: “At any rate, they can’t be far away, for I heard them just now.”

Servigny murmured: “They must have gone back. Your mother was cold, perhaps.” And he drew her along.

Before them a light gleamed. It was the tavern of Martinet, restaurant-keeper and fisherman. At their call a man came out of the house, and they got into a large boat which was moored among the weeds of the shore.

The ferryman took his oars, and the unwieldy barge, as it advanced, disturbed the sleeping stars upon the water and set them into a mad dance, which gradually calmed down after they had passed. They touched the other shore and disembarked beneath the great trees. A cool freshness of damp earth permeated the air under the lofty and clustered branches, where there seemed to be as many nightingales as there were leaves. A distant piano began to play a popular waltz.

Servigny took Yvette’s arm and very gently slipped his hand around her waist and gave her a slight hug.

“What are you thinking about?” he said.

“I? About nothing at all. I am very happy!”

“Then you don’t love me?”

“Oh, yes, Muscade, I love you, I love you a great deal; only leave me alone. It is too beautiful here to listen to your nonsense.”

He drew her toward him, although she tried, by little pushes, to extricate herself, and through her soft flannel gown he felt the warmth of her flesh. He stammered:

“Yvette!”

“Well, what?”

“I do love you!”

“But you are not in earnest, Muscade.”

“Oh, yes I am. I have loved you for a long time.”

She continually kept trying to separate herself from him, trying to release the arm crushed between their bodies. They walked with difficulty, trammeled by this bond and by these movements, and went zigzagging along like drunken folk.

He knew not what to say to her, feeling that he could not talk to a young girl as he would to a woman. He was perplexed, thinking what he ought to do, wondering if she consented or did not understand, and curbing his spirit to find just the right, tender, and decisive words. He kept saying every second:

“Yvette! Speak! Yvette!”

Then, suddenly, risking all, he kissed her on the cheek. She gave a little start aside, and said with a vexed air:

“Oh! you are absurd. Are you going to let me alone?”

The tone of her voice did not at all reveal her thoughts nor her wishes; and, not seeing her too angry, he applied his lips to the beginning of her neck, just beneath the golden hair, that charming spot which he had so often coveted.

Then she made great efforts to free herself. But he held her strongly, and placing his other hand on her shoulder, he compelled her to turn her head toward him and gave her a fond, passionate kiss, squarely on the mouth.

She slipped from his arms by a quick undulation of the body, and, free from his grasp, she disappeared into the darkness with a great swishing of skirts, like the whir of a bird as it flies away.

He stood motionless a moment, surprised by her suppleness and her disappearance, then hearing nothing, he called gently: “Yvette!”

She did not reply. He began to walk forward, peering through the shadows, looking in the underbrush for the white spot her dress should make. All was dark. He cried out more loudly:

“Mam’zelle Yvette! Mam’zelle Yvette!”

Nothing stirred. He stopped and listened. The whole island was still; there was scarcely a rustle of leaves over his head. The frogs alone continued their deep croakings on the shores. Then he wandered from thicket to thicket, going where the banks were steep and bushy and returning to places where they were flat and bare as a dead man’s arm. He proceeded until he was opposite Bougival and reached the establishment of La Grenouillere, groping the clumps of trees, calling out continually:

“Mam’zelle Yvette, where are you? Answer. It is ridiculous! Come, answer! Don’t keep me hunting like this.”

A distant clock began to strike. He counted the hours: twelve. He had been searching through the island for two hours. Then he thought that perhaps she had gone home; and he went back very anxiously, this time by way of the bridge. A servant dozing on a chair was waiting in the hall.

Servigny awakened him and asked: “Is it long since Mademoiselle Yvette came home? I left her at the foot of the place because I had a call to make.”

And the valet replied: “Oh! yes, Monsieur, Mademoiselle came in before ten o’clock.”

He proceeded to his room and went to bed. But he could not close his eyes. That stolen kiss had stirred him to the soul. He kept wondering what she thought and what she knew. How pretty and attractive she was!

His desires, somewhat wearied by the life he led, by all his procession of sweethearts, by all his explorations in the kingdom of love, awoke before this singular child, so fresh, irritating, and inexplicable. He heard one o’clock strike, then two. He could not sleep at all. He was warm, he felt his heart beat and his temples throb, and he rose to open the window. A breath of fresh air came in, which he inhaled deeply. The thick darkness was silent, black, motionless. But suddenly he perceived before him, in the shadows of the garden, a shining point; it seemed a little red coal.

“Well, a cigar!” he said to himself. “It must be Saval,” and he called softly: “Leon!”

“Is it you, Jean?”

“Yes. Wait. I’ll come down.” He dressed, went out, and rejoining his friend who was smoking astride an iron chair, inquired: “What are you doing here at this hour?”

“I am resting,” Saval replied. And he began to laugh. Servigny pressed his hand: “My compliments, my dear fellow. And as for me, I — am making a fool of myself.”

“You mean— “

“I mean that — Yvette and her mother do not resemble each other.”

“What has happened? Tell me.”

Servigny recounted his attempts and their failure. Then he resumed:

"Decidedly, that little girl worries me. Fancy my not being able to sleep! What a queer thing a girl is! She appears to be as simple as anything, and yet you know nothing about her. A woman who has lived and loved, who knows life, can be quickly understood. But when it comes to a young virgin, on the contrary, no one can guess anything about her. At heart I begin to think that she is making sport of me."

Saval tilted his chair. He said, very slowly: "Take care, my dear fellow, she will lead you to marriage. Remember those other illustrious examples. It was just by this same process that Mademoiselle de Montijo, who was at least of good family, became empress. Don't play Napoleon."

Servigny murmured: "As for that, fear nothing. I am neither a simpleton nor an emperor. A man must be either one or the other to make such a move as that. But tell me, are you sleepy?"

"Not a bit."

"Will you take a walk along the river?"

"Gladly."

They opened the iron gate and began to walk along the river bank toward Marly. It was the quiet hour which precedes dawn, the hour of deep sleep, of complete rest, of profound peacefulness. Even the gentle sounds of the night were hushed. The nightingales sang no longer; the frogs had finished their hubbub; some kind of an animal only, probably a bird, was making somewhere a kind of sawing sound, feeble, monotonous, and regular as a machine. Servigny, who had moments of poetry, and of philosophy too, suddenly remarked: "Now this girl completely puzzles me. In arithmetic, one and one make two. In love one and one ought to make one but they make two just the same. Have you ever felt that? That need of absorbing a woman in yourself or disappearing in her? I am not speaking of the animal embrace, but of that moral and mental eagerness to be but one with a being, to open to her all one's heart and soul, and to fathom her thoughts to the depths."

"And yet you can never lay bare all the fluctuations of her wishes, desires, and opinions. You can never guess, even slightly, all the unknown currents, all the mystery of a soul that seems so near, a soul hidden behind two eyes that look at you, clear as water, transparent as if there were nothing beneath a soul which talks to you by a beloved mouth, which seems your very own, so greatly do you desire it; a soul which throws you by words its thoughts, one by one, and which, nevertheless, remains further away from you than those stars are from each other, and more impenetrable. Isn’t it queer, all that?”

“I don’t, ask so much,” Saval rejoined. “I don’t look behind the eyes. I care little for the contents, but much for the vessel.” And Servigny replied: “What a singular person Yvette is! How will she receive me this morning?”

As they reached the works at Marly they perceived that the sky was brightening. The cocks began to crow in the poultry-yards. A bird twittered in a park at the left, ceaselessly reiterating a tender little theme.

“It is time to go back,” said Saval.

They returned, and as Servigny entered his room, he saw the horizon all pink through his open windows.

Then he shut the blinds, drew the thick, heavy curtains, went back to bed and fell asleep. He dreamed of Yvette all through his slumber. An odd noise awoke him. He sat on the side of the bed and listened, but heard nothing further. Then suddenly there was a crackling against the blinds, like falling hail. He jumped from the bed, ran to the window, opened it, and saw Yvette standing in the path and throwing handfuls of gravel at his face. She was clad in pink, with a wide-brimmed straw hat ornamented with a mousquetaire plume, and was laughing mischievously.

“Well! Muscade, are you asleep? What could you have been doing all night to make you wake so late? Have you been seeking adventures, my poor Muscade?”

He was dazzled by the bright daylight striking him full in the eyes, still overwhelmed with fatigue, and surprised at the jesting tranquillity of the young girl.

“I’ll be down in a second, Mam’zelle,” he answered. “Just time to splash my face with water, and I will join you.”

“Hurry,” she cried, “it is ten o’clock, and besides I have a great plan to unfold to you, a plot we are going to concoct. You know that we breakfast at eleven.”

He found her seated on a bench, with a book in her lap, some novel or other. She took his arm in a familiar and friendly way, with a frank and gay manner, as if nothing had happened the night before, and drew him toward the end of the garden.

“This is my plan,” she said. “We will disobey mamma, and you shall take me presently to La Grenouillere restaurant. I want to see it. Mamma says that decent women cannot go to the place. Now it is all the same to me whether persons can go there or cannot. You’ll take me, won’t you, Muscade? And we will have a great time — with the boatmen.”

She exhaled a delicious fragrance, although he could not exactly define just what light and vague odor enveloped her. It was not one of those heavy perfumes of her mother, but a discreet breath in which he fancied he could detect a suspicion of iris powder, and perhaps a suggestion of vervain.

Whence emanated that indiscernible perfume? From her dress, her hair, or her skin? He puzzled over this, and as he was speaking very close to her, he received full in the face her fresh breath, which seemed to him just as delicious to inhale.

Then he thought that this evasive perfume which he was trying to recognize was perhaps only evoked by her charming eyes, and was merely a sort of deceptive emanation of her young and alluring grace.

“That is agreed, isn’t it, Muscade? As it will be very warm after breakfast, mamma will not go out. She always feels the heat very much. We will leave her with your friend, and you shall take me. They will think that we have gone into the forest. If you knew how much it will amuse me to see La Grenouillere!”

They reached the iron gate opposite the Seine. A flood of sunshine fell upon the slumberous, shining river. A slight heat-mist rose from it, a sort of haze of evaporated water, which spread over the surface of the stream a faint gleaming vapor.

From time to time, boats passed by, a quick yawl or a heavy passage boat, and short or long whistles could be heard, those of the trains which every Sunday poured the citizens of Paris into the suburbs, and those of the steamboats signaling their approach to pass the locks at Marly.

But a tiny bell sounded. Breakfast was announced, and they went back into the house. The repast was a silent one. A heavy July noon overwhelmed the earth, and oppressed humanity. The heat seemed thick, and paralyzed both mind and body. The sluggish words would not leave the lips, and all motion seemed laborious, as if the air had become a resisting medium, difficult to traverse. Only Yvette, although silent, seemed animated and nervous with impatience. As soon as they had finished the last course she said:

“If we were to go for a walk in the forest, it would be deliciously cool under the trees.”

The Marquise murmured with a listless air: “Are you mad? Does anyone go out in such weather?”

And the young girl, delighted, rejoined: “Oh, well! We will leave the Baron to keep you company. Muscade and I will climb the hill and sit on the grass and read.”

And turning toward Servigny she asked: “That is understood?”

“At your service, Mam’zelle,” he replied.

Yvette ran to get her hat. The Marquise shrugged her shoulders with a sigh. “She certainly is mad.” she said.

Then with an indolence in her amorous and lazy gestures, she gave her pretty white hand to the Baron, who kissed it softly. Yvette and Servigny started. They went along the river, crossed the bridge and went on to the island, and then seated themselves on the bank, beneath the willows, for it was too soon to go to La Grenouillere.

The young girl at once drew a book from her pocket and smilingly said: “Muscade, you are going to read to me.” And she handed him the volume.

He made a motion as if of fright. “I, Mam’zelle? I don’t know how to read!”

She replied with gravity: “Come, no excuses, no objections; you are a fine suitor, you! All for nothing, is that it? Is that your motto?”

He took the book, opened it, and was astonished. It was a treatise on entomology. A history of ants by an English author. And as he remained inert, believing that he was making sport of her, she said with impatience: “Well, read!”

“Is it a wager, or just a simple fad?” he asked.

“No, my dear. I saw that book in a shop. They told me that it was the best authority on ants and I thought that it would be interesting to learn about the life of these little insects while you see them running over the grass; so read, if you please.”

She stretched herself flat upon the grass, her elbows resting upon the ground, her head between her hands, her eyes fixed upon the ground. He began to read as follows:

“The anthropoid apes are undoubtedly the animals which approach nearest to man by their anatomical structure, but if we consider the habits of the ants, their organization into societies, their vast communities, the houses and roads that they construct, their custom of domesticating animals, and sometimes even of making slaves of them, we are compelled to admit that they have the right to claim a place near to man in the scale of intelligence.”

He continued in a monotonous voice, stopping from time to time to ask: “Isn’t that enough?”

She shook her head, and having caught an ant on the end of a severed blade of grass, she amused herself by making it go from one end to the other of the sprig, which she tipped up whenever the insect reached one of the ends. She listened with mute and contented attention to all the wonderful details of the life of these frail creatures: their subterranean homes; the manner in which they seize, shut up, and feed plant-lice to drink the sweet milk which they secrete, as we keep cows in our barns; their custom of domesticating little blind insects which clean the anthills, and of going to war to capture slaves who will take care of their victors with such tender solicitude that the latter even lose the habit of feeding themselves.

And little by little, as if a maternal tenderness had sprung up in her heart for the poor insect which was so tiny and so intelligent, Yvette made it climb on her finger, looking at it with a moved expression, almost wanting to embrace it.

And as Servigny read of the way in which they live in communities, and play games of strength and skill among themselves, the young girl grew enthusiastic and sought to kiss the insect which escaped her and began to crawl over her face. Then she uttered a piercing cry, as if she had been threatened by a terrible danger, and with frantic gestures tried to brush it off her face. With a loud laugh Servigny caught it near her tresses and imprinted on the spot where he had seized it a long kiss without Yvette withdrawing her forehead.

Then she exclaimed as she rose: “That is better than a novel. Now let us go to La Grenouillere.”

They reached that part of the island which is set out as a park and shaded with great trees. Couples were strolling beneath the lofty foliage along the Seine, where the boats were gliding by.

The boats were filled with young people, working-girls and their sweethearts, the latter in their shirt-sleeves, with coats on their arms, tall hats tipped back, and a jaded look. There were tradesmen with their families, the women dressed in their best and the children flocking like little chicks about their parents. A distant, continuous sound of voices, a heavy, scolding clamor announced the proximity of the establishment so dear to the boatmen.

Suddenly they saw it. It was a huge boat, roofed over, moored to the bank. On board were many men and women drinking at tables, or else standing up, shouting, singing, bandying words, dancing, capering, to the sound of a piano which was groaning — out of tune and rattling as an old kettle.

Two tall, russet-haired, half-tipsy girls, with red lips, were talking coarsely. Others were dancing madly with young fellows half clad, dressed like jockeys, in linen trousers and colored caps. The odors of a crowd and of rice-powder were noticeable.

The drinkers around the tables were swallowing white, red, yellow, and green liquids, and vociferating at the top of their lungs, feeling as it were, the necessity of making a noise, a brutal need of having their ears and brains filled with uproar. Now and then a swimmer, standing on the roof, dived into the water, splashing the nearest guests, who yelled like savages.

On the stream passed the flotillas of light craft, long, slender wherries, swiftly rowed by bare-armed oarsmen, whose muscles played beneath their bronzed skin. The women in the boats, in blue or red flannel skirts, with umbrellas, red or blue, opened over their heads and gleaming under the burning sun, leaned back in their chairs at the stern of the boats, and seemed almost to float upon the water, in motionless and slumberous pose.

The heavier boats proceeded slowly, crowded with people. A collegian, wanting to show off, rowed like a windmill against all the other boats, bringing the curses of their oarsmen down upon his head, and disappearing in dismay after almost drowning two swimmers, followed by the shouts of the crowd thronging in the great floating cafe.

Yvette, radiantly happy, taking Servigny’s arm, went into the midst of this noisy mob. She seemed to enjoy the crowding, and stared at the girls with a calm and gracious glance.

“Look at that one, Muscade,” she said. “What pretty hair she has! They seem to be having such fun!”

As the pianist, a boatman dressed in red with a huge straw hat, began a waltz, Yvette grasped her companion and they danced so long and madly that everybody looked at them. The guests, standing on the tables, kept time with their feet; others threw glasses, and the musician, seeming to go mad, struck the ivory keys with great bangs; swaying his whole body and swinging his head covered with that immense hat. Suddenly he stopped and, slipping to the deck, lay flat, beneath his head-gear, as if dead with fatigue. A loud laugh arose and everybody applauded.

Four friends rushed forward, as they do in cases of accident, and lifting up their comrade, they carried him by his four limbs, after carefully placing his great hat on his stomach. A joker following them intoned the “De Profundis,” and a procession formed and threaded the paths of the island, guests and strollers and everyone they met falling into line.

Yvette darted forward, delighted, laughing with her whole heart, chatting with everybody, stirred by the movement and the noise. The young men gazed at her, crowded against her, seeming to devour her with their glances; and Servigny began to fear lest the adventure should terminate badly.

The procession still kept on its way; hastening its step; for the four bearers had taken a quick pace, followed by the yelling crowd. But suddenly, they turned toward the shore, stopped short as they reached the bank, swung their comrade for a moment, and then, all four acting together, flung him into the river.

A great shout of joy rang out from all mouths, while the poor pianist, bewildered, paddled, swore, coughed, and spluttered, and though sticking in the mud managed to get to the shore. His hat which floated down the stream was picked up by a boat. Yvette danced with joy, clapping and repeating: “Oh! Muscade, what fun! what fun!”

Servigny looked on, having become serious, a little disturbed, a little chilled to see her so much at her ease in this common place. A sort of instinct revolted in him, that instinct of the proper, which a well-born man always preserves even when he casts himself loose, that instinct which avoids too common familiarities and too degrading contacts. Astonished, he muttered to himself:

“Egad! Then YOU are at home here, are you?” And he wanted to speak familiarly to her, as a man does to certain women the first time he meets them. He no longer distinguished her from the russet-haired, hoarse-voiced creatures who brushed against them. The language of the crowd was not at all choice, but nobody seemed shocked or surprised. Yvette did not even appear to notice it.

“Muscade, I want to go in bathing,” she said. “We’ll go into the river together.”

“At your service,” said he.

They went to the bath-office to get bathing-suits. She was ready the first, and stood on the bank waiting for him, smiling on everyone who looked at her. Then side by side they went into the luke-warm water.

She swam with pleasure, with intoxication, caressed by the wave, throbbing with a sensual delight, raising herself at each stroke as if she were going to spring from the water. He followed her with difficulty, breathless, and vexed to feel himself mediocre at the sport.

But she slackened her pace, and then, turning over suddenly, she floated, with her arms folded and her eyes wide open to the blue sky. He observed, thus stretched out on the surface of the river, the undulating lines of her form, her firm neck and shoulders, her slightly submerged hips, and bare ankles, gleaming in the water, and the tiny foot that emerged.

He saw her thus exhibiting herself, as if she were doing it on purpose, to lure him on, or again to make sport of him. And he began to long for her with a passionate ardor and an exasperating impatience. Suddenly she turned, looked at him, and burst into laughter.

"You have a fine head," she said.

He was annoyed at this bantering, possessed with the anger of a baffled lover. Then yielding brusquely to a half felt desire for retaliation, a desire to avenge himself, to wound her, he said:

"Well, does this sort of life suit you?"

She asked with an artless air: "What do you mean?"

"Oh, come, don't make game of me. You know well enough what I mean!"

"No, I don't, on my word of honor."

"Oh, let us stop this comedy! Will you or will you not?"

"I do not understand you."

"You are not as stupid as all that; besides I told you last night."

"Told me what? I have forgotten!"

"That I love you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"What nonsense!"

"I swear it."

"Then prove it."

"That is all I ask."

"What is?"

“To prove it.”

“Well, do so.”

“But you did not say so last night.”

“You did not ask anything.”

“What absurdity!”

“And besides it is not to me to whom you should make your proposition.”

“To whom, then?”

“Why, to mamma, of course.”

He burst into laughter. “To your mother. No, that is too much!”

She had suddenly become very grave, and looking him straight in the eyes, said:

“Listen, Muscade, if you really love me enough to marry me, speak to mamma first, and I will answer you afterward.”

He thought she was still making sport of him, and angrily replied: “Mam’zelle, you must be taking me for somebody else.”

She kept looking at him with her soft, clear eyes. She hesitated and then said:

“I don’t understand you at all.”

Then he answered quickly with somewhat of ill nature in his voice:

“Come now, Yvette, let us cease this absurd comedy, which has already lasted too long. You are playing the part of a simple little girl, and the role does not fit you at all, believe me. You know perfectly well that there can be no question of marriage between us, but merely of love. I have told you that I love you. It is the truth. I repeat, I love you. Don’t pretend any longer not to understand me, and don’t treat me as if I were a fool.”

They were face to face, treading water, merely moving their hands a little, to steady themselves. She was still for a moment, as if she could not make out the meaning of his words, then she suddenly blushed up to the roots of her hair. Her whole face grew purple from her neck to her ears, which became almost violet, and without answering a word she fled toward the shore, swimming with all her strength with hasty strokes. He could not keep up with her and panted with fatigue as he followed. He saw her leave the water, pick up her cloak, and go to her dressing-room without looking back.

It took him a long time to dress, very much perplexed as to what he ought to do, puzzled over what he should say to her, and wondering whether he ought to excuse himself or persevere. When he was ready, she had gone away all alone. He went back slowly, anxious and disturbed.

The Marquise was strolling, on Saval's arm, in the circular path around the lawn. As she observed Servigny, she said, with that careless air which she had maintained since the night before.

"I told you not to go out in such hot weather. And now Yvette has come back almost with a sun stroke. She has gone to lie down. She was as red as a poppy, the poor child, and she has a frightful headache. You must have been walking in the full sunlight, or you must have done something foolish. You are as unreasonable as she."

The young girl did not come down to dinner. When they wanted to send her up something to eat she called through the door that she was not hungry, for she had shut herself in, and she begged that they would leave her undisturbed. The two young men left by the ten o'clock train, promising to return the following Thursday, and the Marquise seated herself at the open window to dream, hearing in the distance the orchestra of the boatmen's ball, with its sprightly music, in the deep and solemn silence of the night.

Swayed by love as a person is moved by a fondness for horses or boating, she was subject to sudden tendernesses which crept over her like a disease. These passions took possession of her suddenly, penetrated her entire being, maddened her, enervated or overwhelmed her, in measure as they were of an exalted, violent, dramatic, or sentimental character.

She was one of those women who are created to love and to be loved. Starting from a very low station in life, she had risen in her adventurous career, acting instinctively, with inborn cleverness, accepting money and kisses, naturally, without distinguishing between them, employing her extraordinary ability in an unthinking and simple fashion. From all her experiences she had never known either a genuine tenderness or a great repulsion.

She had had various friends, for she had to live, as in traveling a person eats at many tables. But occasionally her heart took fire, and she really fell in love, which state lasted for some weeks or months, according to conditions. These were the delicious moments of her life, for she loved with all her soul. She cast herself upon love as a person throws himself into the river to drown himself, and let herself be carried away, ready to die, if need be, intoxicated, maddened, infinitely happy. She imagined each time that she never had experienced anything like such an attachment, and she would have been greatly astonished if some one had told her of how many men she had dreamed whole nights through, looking at the stars.

Saval had captivated her, body and soul. She dreamed of him, lulled by his face and his memory, in the calm exaltation of consummated love, of present and certain happiness.

A sound behind her made her turn around. Yvette had just entered, still in her daytime dress, but pale, with eyes glittering, as sometimes is the case after some great fatigue. She leaned on the sill of the open window, facing her mother.

"I want to speak to you," she said.

The Marquise looked at her in astonishment. She loved her like an egotistical mother, proud of her beauty, as a person is proud of a fortune, too pretty still herself to become jealous, too indifferent to plan the schemes with which they charged her, too clever, nevertheless, not to have full consciousness of her daughter's value.

"I am listening, my child," she said; "what is it?"

Yvette gave her a piercing look, as if to read the depths of her soul and to seize all the sensations which her words might awake.

"It is this. Something strange has just happened."

"What can it be?"

"Monsieur de Servigny has told me that he loves me."

The Marquise, disturbed, waited a moment, and, as Yvette said nothing more, she asked:

"How did he tell you that? Explain yourself!"

Then the young girl, sitting at her mother's feet, in a coaxing attitude common with her, and clasping her hands, added:

"He asked me to marry him."

Madame Obardi made a sudden gesture of stupefaction and cried:

"Servigny! Why! you are crazy!"

Yvette had not taken her eyes off her mother's face, watching her thoughts and her surprise. She asked with a serious voice:

"Why am I crazy? Why should not Monsieur de Servigny marry me?"

The Marquise, embarrassed, stammered:

"You are mistaken, it is not possible. You either did not hear or did not understand. Monsieur de Servigny is too rich for you, and too much of a Parisian to marry." Yvette rose softly. She added: "But if he loves me as he says he does, mamma?"

Her mother replied, with some impatience: “I thought you big enough and wise enough not to have such ideas. Servigny is a man-about-town and an egotist. He will never marry anyone but a woman of his set and his fortune. If he asked you in marriage, it is only that he wants— “

The Marquise, incapable of expressing her meaning, was silent for a moment, then continued: “Come now, leave me alone and go to bed.”

And the young girl, as if she had learned what she sought to find out, answered in a docile voice: “Yes, mamma!”

She kissed her mother on the forehead and withdrew with a calm step. As she reached the door, the Marquise called out: “And your sunstroke?” she said.

“I did not have one at all. It was that which caused everything.”

The Marquise added: “We will not speak of it again. Only don’t stay alone with him for some time from now, and be very sure that he will never marry you, do you understand, and that he merely means to — compromise you.”

She could not find better words to express her thought. Yvette went to her room. Madame Obardi began to dream. Living for years in an opulent and loving repose, she had carefully put aside all reflections which might annoy or sadden her. Never had she been willing to ask herself the question. — What would become of Yvette? It would be soon enough to think about the difficulties when they arrived. She well knew, from her experience, that her daughter could not marry a man who was rich and of good society, excepting by a totally improbable chance, by one of those surprises of love which place adventuresses on thrones.

She had not considered it, furthermore, being too much occupied with herself to make any plans which did not directly concern herself.

Yvette would do as her mother, undoubtedly. She would lead a gay life. Why not? But the Marquise had never dared ask when, or how. That would all come about in time.

And now her daughter, all of a sudden, without warning, had asked one of those questions which could not be answered, forcing her to take an attitude in an affair, so delicate, so dangerous in every respect, and so disturbing to the conscience which a woman is expected to show in matters concerning her daughter.

Sometimes nodding but never asleep, she had too much natural astuteness to be deceived a minute about Servigny’s intentions, for she knew men by experience, and especially men of that set. So at the first words uttered by Yvette, she had cried almost in spite of herself: “Servigny, marry you? You are crazy!”

How had he come to employ that old method, he, that sharp man of the world? What would he do now? And she, the young girl, how should she warn her more clearly and even forbid her, for she might make great mistakes. Would anyone have believed that this big girl had remained so artless, so ill informed, so guileless? And the Marquise, greatly perplexed and already wearied with her reflections, endeavored to make up her mind what to do without finding a solution of the problem, for the situation seemed to her very embarrassing. Worn out with this worry, she thought:

“I will watch them more clearly, I will act according to circumstances. If necessary, I will speak to Servigny, who is sharp and will take a hint.”

She did not think out what she should say to him, nor what he would answer, nor what sort of an understanding could be established between them, but happy at being relieved of this care without having had to make a decision, she resumed her dreams of the handsome Saval, and turning toward that misty light which hovers over Paris, she threw kisses with both hands toward the great city, rapid kisses which she tossed into the darkness, one after the other, without counting; and, very low, as if she were talking to Saval still, she murmured:

“I love you, I love you!”

CHAPTER III.

ENLIGHTENMENT

Yvette, also, could not sleep. Like her mother, she leaned upon the sill of the open window, and tears, her first bitter tears, filled her eyes. Up to this time she had lived, had grown up, in the heedless and serene confidence of happy youth. Why should she have dreamed, reflected, puzzled? Why should she not have been a young girl, like all other young girls? Why should a doubt, a fear, or painful suspicion have come to her?

She seemed posted on all topics because she had a way of talking on all subjects, because she had taken the tone, demeanor, and words of the people who lived around her. But she really knew no more than a little girl raised in a convent; her audacities of speech came from her memory, from that unconscious faculty of imitation and assimilation which women possess, and not from a mind instructed and emboldened.

She spoke of love as the son of a painter or a musician would, at the age of ten or twelve years, speak of painting or music. She knew or rather suspected very well what sort of mystery this word concealed; — too many jokes had been whispered before her, for her innocence not to be a trifle enlightened, — but how could she have drawn the conclusion from all this, that all families did not resemble hers?

They kissed her mother’s hand with the semblance of respect; all their friends had titles; they all were rich or seemed to be so; they all spoke familiarly of the princes of the royal line. Two sons of kings had even come often, in the evening, to the Marquise’s house. How should she have known?

And, then, she was naturally artless. She did not estimate or sum up people as her mother, did. She lived tranquilly, too joyous in her life to worry herself about what might appear suspicious to creatures more calm, thoughtful, reserved, less cordial, and sunny.

But now, all at once, Servigny, by a few words, the brutality of which she felt without understanding them, awakened in her a sudden disquietude, unreasoning at first, but which grew into a tormenting apprehension. She had fled home, had escaped like a wounded animal, wounded in fact most deeply by those words which she ceaselessly repeated to get all their sense and bearing: “You know very well that there can be no question of marriage between us — but only of love.”

What did he mean? And why this insult? Was she then in ignorance of something, some secret, some shame? She was the only one ignorant of it, no doubt. But what could she do? She was frightened, startled, as a person is when he discovers some hidden infamy, some treason of a beloved friend, one of those heart-disasters which crush.

She dreamed, reflected, puzzled, wept, consumed by fears and suspicions. Then her joyous young soul reassuring itself, she began to plan an adventure, to imagine an abnormal and dramatic situation, founded on the recollections of all the poetical romances she had read. She recalled all the moving catastrophes, or sad and touching stories; she jumbled them together, and concocted a story of her own with which she interpreted the half-understood mystery which enveloped her life.

She was no longer cast down. She dreamed, she lifted veils, she imagined unlikely complications, a thousand singular, terrible things, seductive, nevertheless, by their very strangeness. Could she be, by chance, the natural daughter of a prince? Had her poor mother, betrayed and deserted, made Marquise by some king, perhaps King Victor Emmanuel, been obliged to take flight before the anger of the family? Was she not rather a child abandoned by its relations, who were noble and illustrious, the fruit of a clandestine love, taken in by the Marquise, who had adopted and brought her up?

Still other suppositions passed through her mind. She accepted or rejected them according to the dictates of her fancy. She was moved to pity over her own case, happy at the bottom of her heart, and sad also, taking a sort of satisfaction in becoming a sort of a heroine of a book who must: assume a noble attitude, worthy of herself.

She laid out the part she must play, according to events at which she guessed. She vaguely outlined this role, like one of Scribe's or of George Sand's. It should be endued with devotion, self-abnegation, greatness of soul, tenderness; and fine words. Her pliant nature almost rejoiced in this new attitude. She pondered almost till evening what she should do, wondering how she should manage to wrest the truth from the Marquise.

And when night came, favorable to tragic situations, she had thought out a simple and subtile trick to obtain what she wanted: it was, brusquely, to say that Servigny had asked for her hand in marriage.

At this news, Madame Obardi, taken by surprise, would certainly let a word escape her lips, a cry which would throw light into the mind of her daughter. And Yvette had accomplished her plan.

She expected an explosion of astonishment, an expansion of love, a confidence full of gestures and tears. But, instead of this, her mother, without appearing stupefied or grieved, had only seemed bored; and from the constrained, discontented, and worried tone in which she had replied, the young girl, in whom there suddenly awaked all the astuteness, keenness, and sharpness of a woman, understanding that she must not insist, that the mystery was of another nature, that it would be painful to her to learn it, and that she must puzzle it out all alone, had gone back to her room, her heart oppressed, her soul in distress, possessed now with the apprehensions of a real misfortune, without knowing exactly either whence or why this emotion came to her. So she wept, leaning at the window.

She wept long, not dreaming of anything now, not seeking to discover anything more, and little by little, weariness overcoming her, she closed her eyes. She dozed for a few minutes, with that deep sleep of people who are tired out and have not the energy to undress and go to bed, that heavy sleep, broken by dreams, when the head nods upon the breast.

She did not go to bed until the first break of day, when the cold of the morning, chilling her, compelled her to leave the window.

The next day and the day after, she maintained a reserved and melancholy attitude. Her thoughts were busy; she was learning to spy out, to guess at conclusions, to reason. A light, still vague, seemed to illumine men and things around her in a new manner; she began to entertain suspicions against all, against everything that she had believed, against her mother. She imagined all sorts of things during these two days. She considered all the possibilities, taking the most extreme resolutions with the suddenness of her changeable and unrestrained nature. Wednesday she hit upon a plan, an entire schedule of conduct and a system of spying. She rose Thursday morning with the resolve to be very sharp and armed against everybody.

She determined even to take for her motto these two words: “Myself alone,” and she pondered for more than an hour how she should arrange them to produce a good effect engraved about her crest, on her writing paper.

Saval and Servigny arrived at ten o’clock. The young girl gave her hand with reserve, without embarrassment, and in a tone, familiar though grave, she said:

“Good morning, Muscade, are you well?” “Good morning, Mam’zelle, fairly, thanks, and you?” He was watching her. “What comedy will she play me,” he said to himself.

The Marquise having taken Saval’s arm, he took Yvette’s, and they began to stroll about the lawn, appearing and disappearing every minute, behind the clumps of trees.

Yvette walked with a thoughtful air, looking at the gravel of the pathway, appearing hardly to hear what her companion said and scarcely answering him.

Suddenly she asked: “Are you truly my friend, Muscade?”

“Why, of course, Mam’zelle.”

“But truly, truly, now?”

“Absolutely your friend, Mam’zelle, body and soul.”

“Even enough of a friend not to lie to me once, just once?”

“Even twice, if necessary.”

“Even enough to tell me the absolute, exact truth?”

“Yes, Mam’zelle.”

“Well, what do you think, way down in your heart, of the Prince of Kravalow?”

“Ah, the devil!”

“You see that you are already preparing to lie.”

“Not at all, but I am seeking the words, the proper words. Great Heavens, Prince Kravalow is a Russian, who speaks Russian, who was born in Russia, who has perhaps had a passport to come to France, and about whom there is nothing false but his name and title.”

She looked him in the eyes: “You mean that he is — ?”

“An adventurer, Mam’zelle.”

“Thank you, and Chevalier Valreali is no better?” “You have hit it.”

“And Monsieur de Belvigne?”

“With him it is a different thing. He is of provincial society, honorable up to a certain point, but only a little scorched from having lived too rapidly.”

“And you?”

“I am what they call a butterfly, a man of good family, who had intelligence and who has squandered it in making phrases, who had good health and who has injured it by dissipation, who had some worth perhaps and who has scattered it by doing nothing. There is left to me a certain knowledge of life, a complete absence of prejudice, a large contempt for mankind, including women, a very deep sentiment of the uselessness of my acts and a vast tolerance for the mob.”

“Nevertheless, at times, I can be frank, and I am even capable of affection, as you could see, if you would. With these defects and qualities I place myself at your orders, Mam’zelle, morally and physically, to do what you please with me.”

She did not laugh; she listened, weighing his words and his intentions; then she resumed:

“What do you think of the Countess de Lammy?”

He replied, vivaciously: "You will permit me not to give my opinion about the women."

"About none of them?"

"About none of them." "Then you must have a bad opinion of them all. Come, think; won't you make a single exception?"

He sneered with that insolent air which he generally wore; and with that brutal audacity which he used as a weapon, he said: "Present company is always excepted."

She blushed a little, but calmly asked: "Well, what do you think of me?"

"You want me to tell. Well, so be it. I think you are a young person of good sense, and practicalness, or if you prefer, of good practical sense, who knows very well how to arrange her pastime, to amuse people, to hide her views, to lay her snares, and who, without hurrying, awaits events."

"Is that all?" she asked.

"That's all."

Then she said with a serious earnestness: "I shall make you change that opinion, Muscade."

Then she joined her mother, who was proceeding with short steps, her head down, with that manner assumed in talking very low, while walking, of very intimate and very sweet things. As she advanced she drew shapes in the sand, letters perhaps, with the point of her sunshade, and she spoke, without looking at Saval, long, softly, leaning on his arm, pressed against him.

Yvette suddenly fixed her eyes upon her, and a suspicion, rather a feeling than a doubt, passed through her mind as a shadow of a cloud driven by the wind passes over the ground.

The bell rang for breakfast. It was silent and almost gloomy. There was a storm in the air. Great solid clouds rested upon the horizon, mute and heavy, but charged with a tempest. As soon as they had taken their coffee on the terrace, the Marquise asked:

"Well, darling, are you going to take a walk today with your friend Servigny? It is a good time to enjoy the coolness under the trees."

Yvette gave her a quick glance.

"No, mamma, I am not going out to-day."

The Marquise appeared annoyed, and insisted. "Oh, go and take a stroll, my child, it is excellent for you."

Then Yvette distinctly said: “No, mamma, I shall stay in the house to-day, and you know very well why, because I told you the other evening.”

Madame Obardi gave it no further thought, preoccupied with the thought of remaining alone with Saval. She blushed and was annoyed, disturbed on her own account, not knowing how she could find a free hour or two. She stammered:

“It is true. I was not thinking of it. I don’t know where my head is.”

And Yvette taking up some embroidery, which she called “the public safety,” and at which she worked five or six times a year, on dull days, seated herself on a low chair near her mother, while the two young men, astride folding-chairs, smoked their cigars.

The hours passed in a languid conversation. The Marquise fidgety, cast longing glances at Saval, seeking some pretext, some means, of getting rid of her daughter. She finally realized that she would not succeed, and not knowing what ruse to employ, she said to Servigny: “You know, my dear Duke, that I am going to keep you both this evening. To-morrow we shall breakfast at the Fournaise restaurant, at Chaton.”

He understood, smiled, and bowed: “I am at your orders, Marquise.”

The day wore on slowly and painfully under the threatenings of the storm. The hour for dinner gradually approached. The heavy sky was filled with slow and heavy clouds. There was not a breath of air stirring. The evening meal was silent, too. An oppression, an embarrassment, a sort of vague fear, seemed to make the two men and the two women mute.

When the covers were removed, they sat long upon the terrace; only speaking at long intervals. Night fell, a sultry night. Suddenly the horizon was torn by an immense flash of lightning, which illumined with a dazzling and wan light the four faces shrouded in darkness. Then a far-off sound, heavy and feeble, like the rumbling of a carriage upon a bridge, passed over the earth; and it seemed that the heat of the atmosphere increased, that the air suddenly became more oppressive, and the silence of the evening deeper.

Yvette rose. “I am going to bed,” she said, “the storm makes me ill.”

And she offered her brow to the Marquise, gave her hand to the two young men, and withdrew.

As her room was just above the terrace, the leaves of a great chestnut-tree growing before the door soon gleamed with a green hue, and Servigny kept his eyes fixed on this pale light in the foliage, in which at times he thought he saw a shadow pass. But suddenly the light went out. Madame Obardi gave a great sigh.

"My daughter has gone to bed," she said.

Servigny rose, saying: "I am going to do as much, Marquise, if you will permit me." He kissed the hand she held out to him and disappeared in turn.

She was left alone with Saval, in the night. In a moment she was clasped in his arms. Then, although he tried to prevent her, she kneeled before him murmuring: "I want to see you by the lightning flashes."

But Yvette, her candle snuffed out, had returned to her balcony, barefoot, gliding like a shadow, and she listened, consumed by an unhappy and confused suspicion. She could not see, as she was above them, on the roof of the terrace.

She heard nothing but a murmur of voices, and her heart beat so fast that she could actually hear its throbbing. A window closed on the floor above her. Servigny, then, must have just gone up to his room. Her mother was alone with the other man.

A second flash of lightning, clearing the sky; lighted up for a second all the landscape she knew so well, with a startling and sinister gleam, and she saw the great river, with the color of melted lead, as a river appears in dreams in fantastic scenes.

Just then a voice below her uttered the words: "I love you!" And she heard nothing more. A strange shudder passed over her body, and her soul shivered in frightful distress. A heavy, infinite silence, which seemed eternal, hung over the world. She could no longer breathe, her breast oppressed by something unknown and horrible. Another flash of lightning illumined space, lighting up the horizon for an instant, then another almost immediately came, followed by still others. And the voice, which she had already heard, repeated more loudly: "Oh! how I love you! how I love you!" And Yvette recognized the voice; it was her mother's.

A large drop of warm rain fell upon her brow, and a slight and almost imperceptible motion ran through the leaves, the quivering of the rain which was now beginning. Then a noise came from afar, a confused sound, like that of the wind in the branches: it was the deluge descending in sheets on earth and river and trees. In a few minutes the water poured about her, covering her, drenching her like a shower-bath. She did not move, thinking only of what was happening on the terrace.

She heard them get up and go to their rooms. Doors were closed within the house; and the young girl, yielding to an irresistible desire to learn what was going on, a desire which maddened and tortured her, glided downstairs, softly opened the outer door, and, crossing the lawn under the furious downpour, ran and hid in a clump of trees, to look at the windows.

Only one window was lighted, her mother's. And suddenly two shadows appeared in the luminous square, two shadows, side by side. Then distracted, without reflection, without knowing what she was doing, she screamed with all her might, in a shrill voice: "Mamma!" as a person would cry out to warn people in danger of death.

Her desperate cry was lost in the noise of the rain, but the couple separated, disturbed. And one of the shadows disappeared, while the other tried to discover something, peering through the darkness of the garden.

Fearing to be surprised, or to meet her mother at that moment, Yvette rushed back to the house, ran upstairs, dripping wet, and shut herself in her room, resolved to open her door to no one.

Without taking, off her streaming dress, which clung to her form, she fell on her knees, with clasped hands, in her distress imploring some superhuman protection, the mysterious aid of Heaven, the unknown support which a person seeks in hours of tears and despair.

The great lightning flashes threw for an instant their livid reflections into her room, and she saw herself in the mirror of her wardrobe, with her wet and disheveled hair, looking so strange that she did not recognize herself. She remained there so long that the storm abated without her perceiving it. The rain ceased, a light filled the sky, still obscured with clouds, and a mild, balmy, delicious freshness, a freshness of grass and wet leaves, came in through the open window.

Yvette rose, took off her wet, cold garments, without thinking what she was doing, and went to bed. She stared with fixed eyes at the dawning day. Then she wept again, and then she began to think.

Her mother! A lover! What a shame! She had read so many books in which women, even mothers, had overstepped the bounds of propriety, to regain their honor at the pages of the climax, that she was not astonished beyond measure at finding herself enveloped in a drama similar to all those of her reading. The violence of her first grief, the cruel shock of surprise, had already worn off a little, in the confused remembrance of analogous situations. Her mind had rambled among such tragic adventures, painted by the novel-writers, that the horrible discovery seemed, little by little, like the natural continuation of some serial story, begun the evening before.

She said to herself: “I will save my mother.” And almost reassured by this heroic resolution, she felt herself strengthened, ready at once for the devotion and the struggle. She reflected on the means which must be employed. A single one seemed good, which was quite in keeping with her romantic nature. And she rehearsed the interview which she should have with the Marquise, as an actor rehearses the scene which he is going to play.

The sun had risen. The servants were stirring about the house. The chambermaid came with the chocolate. Yvette put the tray on the table and said:

“You will say to my mother that I am not well, that I am going to stay in bed until those gentlemen leave, that I could not sleep last night, and that I do not want to be disturbed because I am going to try to rest.”

The servant, surprised, looked at the wet dress, which had fallen like a rag on the carpet.

“So Mademoiselle has been out?” she said.

“Yes, I went out for a walk in the rain to refresh myself.”

The maid picked up the skirts, stockings, and wet shoes; then she went away carrying on her arm, with fastidious precautions, these garments, soaked as the clothes of a drowned person. And Yvette waited, well knowing that her mother would come to her.

The Marquise entered, having jumped from her bed at the first words of the chambermaid, for a suspicion had possessed her, heart since that cry: “Mamma!” heard in the dark.

“What is the matter?” she said.

Yvette looked at her and stammered: “I — I— “ Then overpowered by a sudden and terrible emotion, she began to choke.

The Marquise, astonished, again asked: “What in the world is the matter with you?”

Then, forgetting all her plans and prepared phrases, the young girl hid her face in both hands and stammered:

“Oh! mamma! Oh! mamma!”

Madame Obardi stood by the bed, too much affected thoroughly to understand, but guessing almost everything, with that subtile instinct whence she derived her strength. As Yvette could not speak, choked with tears, her mother, worn out finally and feeling some fearful explanation coming, brusquely asked:

“Come, will you tell me what the matter is?”

Yvette could hardly utter the words: “Oh! last night — I saw — your window.”

The Marquise, very pale; said: “Well? what of it?”

Her daughter repeated, still sobbing: “Oh! mamma! Oh! mamma!”

Madame Obardi, whose fear and embarrassment turned to anger, shrugged her shoulders and turned to go. “I really believe that you are crazy. When this ends, you will let me know.”

But the young girl, suddenly took her hands from her face, which was streaming with tears.

“No, listen, I must speak to you, listen. You must promise me — we must both go, away, very far off, into the country, and we must live like the country people; and no one must know what has become of us. Say you will, mamma; I beg you, I implore you; will you?”

The Marquise, confused, stood in the middle of the room. She had in her veins the irascible blood of the common people. Then a sense of shame, a mother’s modesty, mingled with a vague sentiment of fear and the exasperation of a passionate woman whose love is threatened, and she shuddered, ready to ask for pardon, or to yield to some violence.

“I don’t understand you,” she said.

Yvette replied:

“I saw you, mamma, last night. You cannot — if you knew — we will both go away. I will love you so much that you will forget— “

Madame Obardi said in a trembling voice: “Listen, my daughter, there are some things which you do not yet understand. Well, don’t forget — don’t forget-that I forbid you ever to speak to me about those things.”

But the young girl, brusquely taking the role of savior which she had imposed upon herself, rejoined:

“No, mamma, I am no longer a child, and I have the right to know. I know that we receive persons of bad repute, adventurers, and I know that, on that account, people do not respect us. I know more. Well, it must not be, any longer, do you hear? I do not wish it. We will go away: you will sell your jewels; we will work, if need be, and we will live as honest women, somewhere very far away. And if I can marry, so much the better.”

She answered: “You are crazy. You will do me the favor to rise and come down to breakfast with all the rest.”

“No, mamma. There is some one whom I shall never see again, you understand me. I want him to leave, or I shall leave. You shall choose between him and me.”

She was sitting up in bed, and she raised her voice, speaking as they do on the stage, playing, finally, the drama which she had dreamed, almost forgetting her grief in the effort to fulfill her mission.

The Marquise, stupefied, again repeated: “You are crazy— “ not finding anything else to say.

Yvette replied with a theatrical energy: “No, mamma, that man shall leave the house, or I shall go myself, for I will not weaken.”

“And where will you go? What will you do?”

“I do not know, it matters little — I want you to be an honest woman.”

These words which recurred, aroused in the Marquise a perfect fury, and she cried:

“Be silent. I do not permit you to talk to me like that. I am as good as anybody else, do you understand? I lead a certain sort of life, it is true, and I am proud of it; the ‘honest women’ are not as good as I am.”

Yvette, astonished, looked at her, and stammered: “Oh! mamma!”

But the Marquise, carried away with excitement, continued:

“Yes, I lead a certain life — what of it? Otherwise you would be a cook, as I was once, and earn thirty sous a day. You would be washing dishes, and your mistress would send you to market — do you understand — and she would turn you out if you loitered, just as you loiter, now because I am — because I lead this life. Listen. When a person is only a nursemaid, a poor girl, with fifty francs saved up, she must know how to manage, if she does not want to starve to death; and there are not two ways for us, there are not two ways, do you understand, when we are servants. We cannot make our fortune with official positions, nor with stockjobbing tricks. We have only one way — only one way.”

She struck her breast as a penitent at the confessional, and flushed and excited, coming toward the bed, she continued: “So much the worse. A pretty girl must live or suffer — she has no choice!” Then returning to her former idea: “Much they deny themselves, your ‘honest women.’ They are worse, because nothing compels them. They have money to live on and amuse themselves, and they choose vicious lives of their own accord. They are the bad ones in reality.”

She was standing near the bed of the distracted Yvette, who wanted to cry out “Help,” to escape. Yvette wept aloud, like children who are whipped. The Marquise was silent and looked at her daughter, and, seeing her overwhelmed with despair, felt, herself, the pangs of grief, remorse, tenderness, and pity, and throwing herself upon the bed with open arms, she also began to sob and stammered:

“My poor little girl, my poor little girl, if you knew, how you were hurting me.” And they wept together, a long while.

Then the Marquise, in whom grief could not long endure, softly rose, and gently said:

“Come, darling, it is unavoidable; what would you have? Nothing can be changed now. We must take life as it comes to us.”

Yvette continued to weep. The blow had been too harsh and too unexpected to permit her to reflect and to recover at once.

Her mother resumed: “Now, get up and come down to breakfast, so that no one will notice anything.”

The young girl shook her head as if to say, “No,” without being able to speak. Then she said, with a slow voice full of sobs:

“No, mamma, you know what I said, I won’t alter my determination. I shall not leave my room till they have gone. I never want to see one of those people again, never, never. If they come back, you will see no more of me.”

The Marquise had dried her eyes, and wearied with emotion, she murmured:

“Come, reflect, be reasonable.”

Then, after a moment’s silence:

“Yes, you had better rest this morning. I will come up to see you this afternoon.” And having kissed her daughter on the forehead, she went to dress herself, already calmed.

Yvette, as soon as her mother had disappeared, rose, and ran to bolt the door, to be alone, all alone; then she began to think. The chambermaid knocked about eleven o’clock, and asked through the door: “Madame the Marquise wants to know if Mademoiselle wishes anything, and what she will take for her breakfast.”

Yvette answered: “I am not hungry, I only ask not to be disturbed.”

And she remained in bed, just as if she had been ill. Toward three o'clock, some one knocked again. She asked:

"Who is there?"

It was her mother's voice which replied: "It is I, darling, I have come to see how you are."

She hesitated what she should do. She opened the door, and then went back to bed. The Marquise approached, and, speaking in low tones, as people do to a convalescent, said:

"Well, are you better? Won't you eat an egg?"

"No, thanks, nothing at all."

Madame Obardi sat down near the bed. They remained without saying anything, then, finally, as her daughter stayed quiet, with her hands inert upon the bedclothes, she asked:

"Don't you intend to get up?"

Yvette answered: "Yes, pretty soon."

Then in a grave and slow tone she said: "I have thought a great deal, mamma, and this — this is my resolution. The past is the past, let us speak no more of it. But the future shall be different or I know what is left for me to do. Now, let us say no more about it."

The Marquise, who thought the explanation finished, felt her impatience gaining a little. It was too much. This big goose of a girl ought to have known about things long ago. But she did not say anything in reply, only repeating:

"You are going to get up?"

"Yes, I am ready."

Then her mother became maid for her, bringing her stockings, her corset, and her skirts. Then she kissed her.

"Will you take a walk before dinner?"

"Yes, mamma."

And they took a stroll along the water, speaking only of commonplace things.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM EMOTION TO PHILOSOPHY

The following day, early in the morning, Yvette went out alone to the place where Servigny had read her the history of the ants. She said to herself:

"I am not going away from this spot without having formed a resolution."

Before her, at her feet, the water flowed rapidly, filled with large bubbles which passed in silent flight with deep whirlings. She already had summed up the points of the situation and the means of extricating herself from it. What should she do if her mother would not accept the conditions which she had imposed, would not renounce her present way of living, her set of visitors — everything and go and hide with her in a distant land?

She might go alone, take flight, but where, and how? What would she live on? By working? At what? To whom should she apply to find work? And, then, the dull and humble life of working-women, daughters of the people, seemed a little disgraceful, unworthy of her. She thought of becoming a governess, like young girls in novels, and of becoming loved by the son of the house, and then marrying him. But to accomplish that she must have been of good birth, so that, when the exasperated father should approach her with having stolen his son's love, she might say in a proud voice:

"My name is Yvette Obardi."

She could not do this. And then, even that would have been a trite and threadbare method.

The convent was not worth much more. Besides, she felt no vocation for a religious life, having only an intermittent and fleeting piety. No one would save her by marrying her, being what she was! No aid was acceptable from a man, no possible issue, no definite resource.

And then she wished to do something energetic and really great and strong, which should serve as an example: so she resolved upon death.

She decided upon this step suddenly, but tranquilly, as if it were a journey, without reflecting, without looking at death, without understanding that it is the end without recommencement, the departure without return, the eternal farewell to earth and to this life.

She immediately settled on this extreme measure, with the lightness of young and excited souls, and she thought of the means which she would employ. But they all seemed to her painful and hazardous, and, furthermore, required a violence of action which repelled her.

She quickly abandoned the poniard and revolver, which might wound only, blind her or disfigure her, and which demanded a practiced and steady hand. She decided against the rope; it was so common, the poor man's way of suicide, ridiculous and ugly; and against water because she knew how to swim So poison remained — but which kind? Almost all of them cause suffering and incite vomitings. She did not want either of these things.

Then she thought of chloroform, having read in a newspaper how a young woman had managed to asphyxiate herself by this process. And she felt at once a sort of joy in her resolution, an inner pride, a sensation of bravery. People should see what she was, and what she was worth.

She returned to Bougival and went to a druggist, from whom she asked a little chloroform for a tooth which was aching. The man, who knew her, gave her a tiny bottle of the narcotic.

Then she set out on foot for Croissy, where she procured a second phial of poison. She obtained a third at Chaton, a fourth at Ruril, and got home late for breakfast.

As she was very hungry after this long walk, she ate heartily with the pleasurable appetite of people who have taken exercise.

Her mother, happy to see her so hungry, and now feeling tranquil herself, said to her as they left the table:

"All our friends are coming to spend Sunday with us. I have invited the Prince, the Chevalier, and Monsieur de Belvigne."

Yvette turned a little pale, but did not reply. She went out almost immediately, reached the railway station, and took a ticket for Paris. And during all the afternoon, she went from druggist to druggist, buying from each one a few drops of chloroform. She came back in the evening with her pockets full of little bottles.

She began the same system on the following day, and by chance found a chemist who gave her, at one stroke, a quarter of a liter. She did not go out on Saturday; it was a lowering and sultry day; she passed it entirely on the terrace, stretched on a long wicker-chair.

She thought of almost nothing, very resolute and very calm. She put on the next morning, a blue costume which was very becoming to her, wishing to look well. Then looking at herself in the glass, she suddenly said:

"To-morrow, I shall be dead." And a peculiar shudder passed over her body. "Dead! I shall speak no more, think no more, no one will see me more, and I shall never see anything again."

And she gazed attentively at her countenance, as if she had never observed it, examining especially her eyes, discovering a thousand things in herself, a secret character in her physiognomy which she had not known before, astonished to see herself, as if she had opposite her a strange person, a new friend.

She said to herself: “It is I, in the mirror, there. How queer it is to look at oneself. But without the mirror we would never know ourselves. Everybody else would know how we look, and we ourselves would know nothing.”

She placed the heavy braids of her thick hair over her breast, following with her glance all her gestures, all her poses, and all her movements. “How pretty I am!” she thought. “Tomorrow I shall be dead, there, upon my bed.” She looked at her bed, and seemed to see herself stretched out, white as the sheets.

Dead! In a week she would be nothing but dust, to dust returned! A horrible anguish oppressed her heart. The bright sunlight fell in floods upon the fields, and the soft morning air came in at the window.

She sat down thinking of it. Death! It was as if the world was going to disappear from her; but no, since nothing would be changed in the world, not even her bedroom. Yes, her room would remain just the same, with the same bed, the same chairs, the same toilette articles, but she would be forever gone, and no one would be sorry, except her mother, perhaps.

People would say: “How pretty she was! that little Yvette,” and nothing more. And as she looked at her arm leaning on the arm of her chair, she thought again, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And again a great shudder of horror ran over her whole body, and she did not know how she could disappear without the whole earth being blotted out, so much it seemed to her that she was a part of everything, of the fields, of the air, of the sunshine, of life itself.

There were bursts of laughter in the garden, a great noise of voices and of calls, the bustling gaiety of country house parties, and she recognized the sonorous tones of M. de Belvigne, singing:

“I am underneath thy window, Oh, deign to show thy face.” She rose, without reflecting, and looked out. They all applauded. They were all five there, with two gentlemen whom she did not know.

She brusquely withdrew, annoyed by the thought that these men had come to amuse themselves at her mother’s house, as at a public place.

The bell sounded for breakfast. “I will show them how to die,” she said.

She went downstairs with a firm step, with something of the resolution of the Christian martyrs going into the circus, where the lions awaited them.

She pressed their hands, smiling in an affable but rather haughty manner. Servigny asked her:

“Are you less cross to-day, Mam’zelle?”

She answered in a severe and peculiar tone: “Today, I am going to commit follies. I am in my Paris mood, look out!”

Then turning toward Monsieur de Belvigne, she said:

“You shall be my escort, my little Malmsey. I will take you all after breakfast to the fete at Marly.”

There was, in fact, a fete at Marly. They introduced the two newcomers to her, the Comte de Tamine and the Marquis de Briquetot.

During the meal, she said nothing further, strengthening herself to be gay in the afternoon, so that no one should guess anything, — so that they should be all the more astonished, and should say: “Who would have thought it? She seemed so happy, so contented! What does take place in those heads?”

She forced herself not to think of the evening, the chosen hour, when they should all be upon the terrace. She drank as much wine as she could stand, to nerve herself, and two little glasses of brandy, and she was flushed as she left the table, a little bewildered, heated in body and mind. It seemed to her that she was strengthened now, and resolved for everything.

“Let us start!” she cried. She took Monsieur de Belvigne’s arm and set the pace for the others. “Come, you shall form my battalion, Servigny. I choose you as sergeant; you will keep outside the ranks, on the right. You will make the foreign guard march in front — the two exotics, the Prince, and the Chevalier — and in the rear the two recruits who have enlisted to-day. Come!”

They started. And Servigny began to imitate the trumpet, while the two newcomers made believe to beat the drum. Monsieur de Belvigne, a little confused, said in a low tone:

“Mademoiselle Yvette, be reasonable, you will compromise yourself.”

She answered: “It is you whom I am compromising, Raisine. As for me, I don’t care much about it. To-morrow it will not occur. So much the worse for you: you ought not to go out with girls like me.”

They went through Bougival to the amazement of the passers-by. All turned to look at them; the citizens came to their doors; the travelers on the little railway which runs from Ruril to Marly jeered at them. The men on the platforms cried:

“To the water with them!”

Yvette marched with a military step, holding Belvigne by the arm, as a prisoner is led. She did not laugh; upon her features sat a pale seriousness, a sort of sinister calm. Servigny interrupted his trumpet blasts only to shout orders. The Prince and the Chevalier were greatly amused, finding all this very funny and in good taste. The two recruits drummed away continually.

When they arrived at the fete, they made a sensation. Girls applauded; young men jeered, and a stout gentleman with his wife on his arm said enviously: “There are some people who are full of fun.”

Yvette saw the wooden horses and compelled Belvigne to mount at her right, while her squad scrambled upon the whirling beasts behind. When the time was up she refused to dismount, constraining her escort to take several more rides on the back of these children’s animals, to the great delight of the public, who shouted jokes at them. Monsieur de Belvigne was livid and dizzy when he got off.

Then she began to wander among the booths. She forced all her men to get weighed among a crowd of spectators. She made them buy ridiculous toys which they had to carry in their hands. The Prince and the Chevalier began to think the joke was being carried too far. Servigny and the drummers, alone, did not seem to be discouraged.

They finally came to the end of the place. Then she gazed at her followers in a peculiar manner, with a shy and mischievous glance, and a strange fancy came to her mind. She drew them up on the bank of the river.

“Let the one who loves me the most jump into the water,” she said.

Nobody leaped. A mob gathered behind them. Women in white aprons looked on in stupor. Two troopers, in red breeches, laughed loudly.

She repeated: “Then there is not one of you capable of jumping into the water at my desire?”

Servigny murmured: “Oh, yes, there is,” and leaped feet foremost into the river. His plunge cast a splash over as far as Yvette’s feet. A murmur of astonishment and gaiety arose in the crowd.

Then the young girl picked up from the ground a little piece of wood, and throwing it into the stream: “Fetch it,” she cried.

The young man began to swim, and seizing the floating stick in his mouth, like a dog, he brought it ashore, and then climbing the bank he kneeled on one knee to present it.

Yvette took it. “You are handsome,” said she, and with a friendly stroke, she caressed his hair.

A stout woman indignantly exclaimed: “Are such things possible!”

Another woman said: “Can people amuse themselves like that!”

A man remarked: “I would not take a plunge for that sort of a girl.”

She again took Belvigne’s arm, exclaiming in his face: “You are a goose, my friend; you don’t know what you missed.”

They now returned. She cast vexed looks on the passers-by. “How stupid all these people seem,” she said. Then raising her eyes to the countenance of her companion, she added: “You, too, like all the rest.”

M. de Belvigne bowed. Turning around she saw that the Prince and the Chevalier had disappeared. Servigny, dejected and dripping, ceased playing on the trumpet, and walked with a gloomy air at the side of the two wearied young men, who also had stopped the drum playing. She began to laugh dryly, saying:

“You seem to have had enough; nevertheless, that is what you call having a good time, isn’t it? You came for that; I have given you your money’s worth.”

Then she walked on, saying nothing further; and suddenly Belvigne perceived that she was weeping. Astounded, he inquired:

“What is the matter?”

She murmured: “Let me alone, it does not concern you.”

But he insisted, like a fool: “Oh, Mademoiselle, come, what is the matter, has anyone annoyed you?”

She repeated impatiently: “Will you keep still?”

Then suddenly, no longer able to resist the despairing sorrow which drowned her heart, she began to sob so violently, that she could no longer walk. She covered her face with her hands, panting for breath, choked by the violence of her despair.

Belvigne stood still at her side, quite bewildered, repeating: “I don’t understand this at all.”

But Servigny brusquely came forward: “Let us go home, Mam’zelle, so that people may not see you weeping in the street. Why do you perpetrate follies like that when they only make you sad?”

And taking her arm he drew her forward. But as soon as they reached the iron gate of the villa she began to run, crossed the garden, and went upstairs, and shut herself in her room. She did not appear again until the dinner hour, very pale and serious. Servigny had bought from a country storekeeper a workingman's costume, with velvet pantaloons, a flowered waistcoat and a blouse, and he adopted the local dialect. Yvette was in a hurry for them to finish, feeling her courage ebbing. As soon as the coffee was served she went to her room again.

She heard the merry voices beneath her window. The Chevalier was making equivocal jokes, foreign witticisms, vulgar and clumsy. She listened, in despair. Servigny, just a bit tipsy, was imitating the common workingman, calling the Marquise "the Missus." And all of a sudden he said to Saval: "Well, Boss?" That caused a general laugh.

Then Yvette decided. She first took a sheet of paper and wrote:

"Bougival, Sunday, nine o'clock in the evening.
"I die so that I may not become a kept woman.

"YVETTE."

Then in a postscript:

"Adieu, my dear mother, pardon."

She sealed the envelope, and addressed it to the Marquise Obardi.

Then she rolled her long chair near the window, drew a little table within reach of her hand, and placed upon it the big bottle of chloroform beside a handful of wadding.

A great rose-tree covered with flowers, climbing as high as her window, exhaled in the night a soft and gentle perfume, in light breaths; and she stood for a moment enjoying it. The moon, in its first quarter, was floating in the dark sky, a little ragged at the left, and veiled at times by slight mists.

Yvette thought: "I am going to die!" And her heart, swollen with sobs, nearly bursting, almost suffocated her. She felt in her a need of asking mercy from some one, of being saved, of being loved.

The voice of Servigny aroused her. He was telling an improper story, which was constantly interrupted by bursts of laughter. The Marquise herself laughed louder than the others.

"There is nobody like him for telling that sort of thing," she said, laughing.

Yvette took the bottle, uncorked it, and poured a little of the liquid on the cotton. A strong, sweet, strange odor arose; and as she brought the piece of cotton to her lips, the fumes entered her throat and made her cough.

Then shutting her mouth, she began to inhale it. She took in long breaths of this deadly vapor, closing her eyes, and forcing herself to stifle in her mind all thoughts, so that she might not reflect, that she might know nothing more.

It seemed to her at first that her chest was growing larger, was expanding, and that her soul, recently heavy and burdened with grief, was becoming light, light, as if the weight which overwhelmed her was lifted, wafted away. Something lively and agreeable penetrated even to the extremities of her limbs, even to the tips of her toes and fingers and entered her flesh, a sort of dreamy intoxication, of soft fever. She saw that the cotton was dry, and she was astonished that she was not already dead. Her senses seemed more acute, more subtle, more alert. She heard the lowest whisper on the terrace. Prince Kravalow was telling how he had killed an Austrian general in a duel.

Then, further off, in the fields, she heard the noise of the night, the occasional barkings of a dog, the short cry of the frogs, the almost imperceptible rustling of the leaves.

She took the bottle again, and saturated once more the little piece of wadding; then she began to breathe in the fumes again. For a few moments she felt nothing; then that soft and soothing feeling of comfort which she had experienced before enveloped her.

Twice she poured more chloroform upon the cotton, eager now for that physical and mental sensation, that dreamy torpor, which bewildered her soul.

It seemed to her that she had no more bones, flesh, legs, or arms. The drug had gently taken all these away from her, without her perceiving it. The chloroform had drawn away her body, leaving her only her mind, more awakened, more active, larger, and more free than she had ever felt it.

She recalled a thousand forgotten things, little details of her childhood, trifles which had given her pleasure. Endowed suddenly with an awakened agility, her mind leaped to the most diverse ideas, ran through a thousand adventures, wandered in the past, and lost itself in the hoped-for events of the future. And her lively and careless thoughts had a sensuous charm: she experienced a divine pleasure in dreaming thus.

She still heard the voices, but she could no longer distinguish the words, which to her seemed to have a different meaning. She was in a kind of strange and changing fairyland.

She was on a great boat which floated through a beautiful country, all covered with flowers. She saw people on the shore, and these people spoke very loudly; then she was again on land, without asking how, and Servigny, clad as a prince, came to seek her, to take her to a bull-fight.

The streets were filled with passers-by, who were talking, and she heard conversations which did not astonish her, as if she had known the people, for through her dreamy intoxication, she still heard her mother's friends laughing and talking on the terrace.

Then everything became vague. Then she awakened, deliciously benumbed, and she could hardly remember what had happened.

So, she was not yet dead. But she felt so calm, in such a state of physical comfort, that she was not in haste to finish with it — she wanted to make this exquisite drowsiness last forever.

She breathed slowly and looked at the moon, opposite her, above the trees. Something had changed in her spirit. She no longer thought as she had done just now. The chloroform quieting her body and her soul had calmed her grief and lulled her desire to die.

Why should she not live? Why should she not be loved? Why should she not lead a happy life? Everything appeared possible to her now, and easy and certain. Everything in life was sweet, everything was charming. But as she wished to dream on still, she poured more of the dream-water on the cotton and began to breathe it in again, stopping at times, so as not to absorb too much of it and die.

She looked at the moon and saw in it a face, a woman's face. She began to scorn the country in the fanciful intoxication of the drug. That face swung in the sky; then it sang, it sang with a well-known voice the alleluia of love.

It was the Marquise, who had come in and seated herself at the piano.

Yvette had wings now. She was flying through a clear night, above the wood and streams. She was flying with delight, opening and closing her wings, borne by the wind as by a caress. She moved in the air, which kissed her skin, and she went so fast, so fast, that she had no time to see anything beneath her, and she found herself seated on the bank of a pond with a line in her hand; she was fishing.

Something pulled on the cord, and when she drew it out of the water, it bore a magnificent pearl necklace, which she had longed for some time ago. She was not at all astonished at this deed, and she looked at Servigny, who had come to her side — she knew not how. He was fishing also, and drew out of the river a wooden horse.

Then she had anew the feeling of awaking, and she heard some one calling down stairs. Her mother had said:

“Put out the candle.” Then Servigny’s voice rose, clear and jesting:

“Put out your candle, Mam’zelle Yvette.”

And all took up the chorus: “Mam’zelle Yvette, put out your candle.”

She again poured chloroform on the cotton, but, as she did not want to die, she placed it far enough from her face to breathe the fresh air, while nevertheless her room was filled with the asphyxiating odor of the narcotic, for she knew that some one was coming, and taking a suitable posture, a pose of the dead, she waited.

The Marquise said: “I am a little uneasy! That foolish child has gone to sleep leaving the light on her table. I will send Clemence to put it out, and to shut the balcony window, which is wide open.”

And soon the maid rapped on the door calling: “Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!” After a moment’s silence, she repeated: “Mademoiselle, Madame the Marquise begs you to put out your candle and shut the window.”

Clemence waited a little, then knocked louder, and cried:

“Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!”

As Yvette did not reply, the servant went away and reported to the Marquise:

“Mademoiselle must have gone to sleep, her door is bolted, and I could not awaken her.”

Madame Obardi murmured:

“But she must not stay like that,”

Then, at the suggestion of Servigny, they all gathered under the window, shouting in chorus:

“Hip! hip! hurrah! Mam’zelle Yvette.”

Their clamor rose in the calm night, through the transparent air beneath the moon, over the sleeping country; and they heard it die away in the distance like the sound of a disappearing train.

As Yvette did not answer the Marquise said: “I only hope that nothing has happened. I am beginning to be afraid.”

Then Servigny, plucking red roses from a big rosebush trained along the wall and buds not yet opened, began to throw them into the room through the window.

At the first rose that fell at her side, Yvette started and almost cried out. Others fell upon her dress, others upon her hair, while others going over her head fell upon the bed, covering it with a rain of flowers.

The Marquise, in a choking voice, cried: “Come, Yvette, answer.”

Then Servigny declared: “Truly this is not natural; I am going to climb up by the balcony.”

But the Chevalier grew indignant.

“Now, let me do it,” he said. “It is a great favor I ask; it is too good a means, and too good a time to obtain a rendezvous.”

All the rest, who thought the young girl was joking, cried: “We protest! He shall not climb up.”

But the Marquise, disturbed, repeated: “And yet some one must go and see.”

The Prince exclaimed with a dramatic gesture:

“She favors the Duke, we are betrayed.”

“Let us toss a coin to see who shall go up,” said the Chevalier. He took a five-franc piece from his pocket, and began with the Prince.

“Tail,” said he. It was head.

The Prince tossed the coin in his turn saying to Saval: “Call, Monsieur.”

Saval called “Head.” It was tail.

The Prince then gave all the others a chance, and they all lost.

Servigny, who was standing opposite him, exclaimed in his insolent way: “PARBLEU! he is cheating!”

The Russian put his hand on his heart and held out the gold piece to his rival, saying: “Toss it yourself, my dear Duke.”

Servigny took it and spinning it up, said: “Head.” It was tail.

He bowed and pointing to the pillar of the balcony said: “Climb up, Prince.” But the Prince looked about him with a disturbed air.

“What are you looking for?” asked the Chevalier.

“Well, — I — would — like — a ladder.” A general laugh followed.

Saval, advancing, said: “We will help you.”

He lifted him in his arms, as strong as those of Hercules, telling him:

“Now climb to that balcony.”

The Prince immediately clung to it, and, Saval letting him go, he swung there, suspended in the air, moving his legs in empty space.

Then Servigny, seeing his struggling legs which sought a resting place, pulled them downward with all his strength; the hands lost their grip and the Prince fell in a heap on Monsieur de Belvigne, who was coming to aid him. “Whose turn next?” asked Servigny. No one claimed the privilege.

“Come, Belvigne, courage!”

“Thank you, my dear boy, I am thinking of my bones.”

“Come, Chevalier, you must be used to scaling walls.”

“I give my place to you, my dear Duke.”

“Ha, ha, that is just what I expected.”

Servigny, with a keen eye, turned to the pillar. Then with a leap, clinging to the balcony, he drew himself up like a gymnast and climbed over the balustrade.

All the spectators, gazing at him, applauded. But he immediately reappeared, calling:

“Come, quick! Come, quick! Yvette is unconscious.” The Marquise uttered a loud cry, and rushed for the stairs.

The young girl, her eyes closed, pretended to be dead. Her mother entered distracted, and threw her self upon her.

“Tell me what is the matter with her, what is the matter with her?”

Servigny picked up the bottle of chloroform which had fallen upon the floor.

“She has drugged herself,” said he.

He placed his ear to her heart; then he added:

“But she is not dead; we can resuscitate her. Have you any ammonia?”

The maid, bewildered, repeated: “Any what, Monsieur?”

“Any smelling-salts.”

“Yes, Monsieur.” “Bring them at once, and leave the door open to make a draft of air.”

The Marquise, on her knees, was sobbing: “Yvette! Yvette, my daughter, my daughter, listen, answer me, Yvette, my child. Oh, my God! my God! what has she done?”

The men, frightened, moved about without speaking, bringing water, towels, glasses, and vinegar. Some one said: “She ought to be undressed.” And the Marquise, who had lost her head, tried to undress her daughter; but did not know what she was doing. Her hands trembled and faltered, and she groaned:

"I cannot, — I cannot— "

The maid had come back bringing a druggist's bottle which Servigny opened and from which he poured out half upon a handkerchief. Then he applied it to Yvette's nose, causing her to choke.

"Good, she breathes," said he. "It will be nothing."

And he bathed her temples, cheeks, and neck with the pungent liquid.

Then he made a sign to the maid to unlace the girl, and when she had nothing more on than a skirt over her chemise, he raised her in his arms and carried her to the bed, quivering, moved by the odor and contact of her flesh. Then she was placed in bed. He arose very pale.

"She will come to herself," he said, "it is nothing." For he had heard her breathe in a continuous and regular way. But seeing all the men with their eyes fixed on Yvette in bed, he was seized with a jealous irritation, and advanced toward them. "Gentlemen," he said, "there are too many of us in this room; be kind enough to leave us alone, — Monsieur Saval and me — with the Marquise."

He spoke in a tone which was dry and full of authority.

Madame Obardi had grasped her lover, and with her head uplifted toward him she cried to him:

"Save her, oh, save her!"

But Servigny turning around saw a letter on the table. He seized it with a rapid movement, and read the address. He understood and thought: "Perhaps it would be better if the Marquise should not know of this," and tearing open the envelope, he devoured at a glance the two lines it contained:

"I die so that I may not become a kept woman."
"Yvette."

"Adieu, my dear mother, pardon."

"The devil!" he thought, "this calls for reflection." And he hid the letter in his pocket.

Then he approached the bed, and immediately the thought came to him that the young girl had regained consciousness but that she dared not show it, from shame, from humiliation, and from fear of questioning. The

Marquise had fallen on her knees now, and was weeping, her head on the foot of the bed. Suddenly she exclaimed:

“A doctor, we must have a doctor!”

But Servigny, who had just said something in a low tone to Saval, replied to her: “No, it is all over. Come, go out a minute, just a minute, and I promise you that she will kiss you when you come back.” And the Baron, taking Madame Obardi by the arm, led her from the room.

Then Servigny, sitting-by the bed, took Yvette’s hand and said: “Mam’zelle, listen to me.”

She did not answer. She felt so well, so soft and warm in bed, that she would have liked never to move, never to speak, and to live like that forever. An infinite comfort had encompassed her, a comfort the like of which she had never experienced.

The mild night air coming in by velvety breaths touched her temples in an exquisite almost imperceptible way. It was a caress like a kiss of the wind, like the soft and refreshing breath of a fan made of all the leaves of the trees and of all the shadows of the night, of the mist of rivers, and of all the flowers too, for the roses tossed up from below into her room and upon her bed, and the roses climbing at her balcony, mingled their heavy perfume with the healthful savor of the evening breeze.

She drank in this air which was so good, her eyes closed, her heart reposing in the yet pervading intoxication of the drug, and she had no longer at all the desire to die, but a strong, imperious wish to live, to be happy — no matter how — to be loved, yes, to be loved.

Servigny repeated: “Mam’zelle Yvette, listen to me.”

And she decided to open her eyes.

He continued, as he saw her reviving: “Come! Come! what does this nonsense mean?”

She murmured: “My poor Muscade, I was so unhappy.”

He squeezed her hand: “And that led you into a pretty scrape! Come, you must promise me not to try it again.”

She did not reply, but nodded her head slightly with an almost imperceptible smile. He drew from his pocket the letter which he had found on the table:

“Had I better show this to your mother?”

She shook her head, no. He knew not what more to say for the situation seemed to him without an outlet. So he murmured:

"My dear child, everyone has hard things to bear. I understand your sorrow and I promise you— "

She stammered: "You are good."

They were silent. He looked at her. She had in her glance something of tenderness, of weakness; and suddenly she raised both her arms, as if she would draw him to her; he bent over her, feeling that she called him, and their lips met.

For a long time they remained thus, their eyes closed.

But, knowing that he would lose his head, he drew away. She smiled at him now, most tenderly; and, with both her hands clinging to his shoulders, she held him.

"I am going to call your mother," he said.

She murmured: "Just a second more. I am so happy."

Then after a silence, she said in a tone so low that it could scarcely be heard: "Will you love me very much? Tell me!"

He kneeled beside her bed, and kissing the hand she had given him, said: "I adore you." But some one was walking near the door. He arose with a bound, and called in his ordinary voice, which seemed nevertheless a little ironical: "You may come in. It is all right now."

The Marquise threw herself on her daughter, with both arms open, and clasped her frantically, covering her countenance with tears, while Servigny with radiant soul and quivering body went out upon the balcony to breathe the fresh air of the night, humming to himself the old couplet:

"A woman changeth oft her mind:
Yet fools still trust in womankind."

NIGHT. A NIGHTMARE

OR

A NIGHT IN PARIS (A NIGHTMARE)

I love the night with passion. I love it the way you love your country, or your mistress, with an instinctive love, a deep love, an invincible love. I love it with all my senses, with my eyes that see it, with my nostrils that breathe it, with my ears that hear the silence of it, with my whole flesh, caressed by its shadows. Larks sing in the sun, in the blue air, the warm air, the light air of clear mornings. But the owl takes refuge in the night, a black blotch that crosses the black space, and, with joy, intoxicated with the vast blackness, he lets out his cry, vibrant and sinister.

The day tires me out and bores me. It is brutal and noisy. I get up with difficulty, I get dressed with weariness, I go out with regret, and each step, each movement, each gesture, each word, each thought exhausts me as though I were lifting a crushing burden.

But when the sun goes down, a joy swirls about me, a joy overruns my entire body. I wake up, I come to life. With each moment that darkness advances, I feel completely different, younger, stronger, more alert, happier. I watch it get thicker, the vast, gentle darkness that falls from the sky. It engulfs the city like an unstoppable, impenetrable flood, it covers up, wears away and destroys colors, shapes, and enfolds the homes, monuments and living things with its imperceptible touch.

At that point, I have the urge to shout for joy like a screech owl, to run across the rooftops like a cat. And an impetuous, invincible desire to love lights up inside my veins.

I go, I walk, now in the darkened suburbs, now in the woods near Paris, where I hear my brothers and sisters, the beasts and their predators, lurking about.

Anything you love too violently always ends up killing you. But how can I explain what happened to me? How can I even make you understand what I might tell you? I do not know, I do not know anymore. I only know what it is. Here goes:

Yesterday, then - was it yesterday? - yes, without a doubt, at least it wasn't any earlier, another day, another month, another year, - I do not know. But it must be yesterday, since another day did not break, since the sun did not reappear. But since what time has this night continued? Since what time? ... Who will tell me? Who can know it, ever?

And so, yesterday, I went out as I do every evening, after my dinner. It was very beautiful outside, very gentle, very warm. Making my way down toward the boulevards, above my head I watched that black river, loaded with stars, cut into pieces in the sky by the rooftops along the street which twisted this stream of heavenly lights and made it ebb and flow like a genuine river.

Everything was distinct in the buoyant air, from the planets down to the gaslights. So great was the fiery brilliance up above and in the town that the shadows themselves took on a glow. Gleaming nights are more joyous than long, sunny days.

On the boulevard the cafés were flickering. People laughed, passed by, ordered drinks. I went inside the theater for a few moments. Which theater? I do not know anymore. The light was so bright inside, it made me unhappy, and I went back out with my spirits depressed by that shock of brutal lighting bouncing off the gilt edges of the balcony, by the artificial glitter of the enormous luster of crystal, by the wall of lights along the ramp, by the gloom of this false, garish clarity. I made it to the Champs-Elysées, where the music cafés seemed like roaring fireplaces amid the foliage. The chestnut trees looked painted, smeared with yellow light, like phosphorescent trees. And just like pale, shining moons, like lunar eggs fallen from the sky, like vibrant, monster pearls with their sea-shell clarity, mysterious and regal, the electric glass fixtures made the gas lines pale by comparison, the conduits of dirty gas as well as the garlands of colored glass. I stopped under the Arch of Triumph to look at the avenue, the long, admirable, starry avenue, going to the heart of Paris between two lines of flame, and the stars! The stars up there, the unknown stars, scattered only by chance around the deep void, where they take on peculiar shapes, which fill us with so much reverie, which provoke us to dream.

I entered the Bois de Boulogne and stayed there a long while, very long. Then I was seized by a singular chill, an unforeseen and powerful emotion, an epiphany of thoughts which bordered on madness.

I walked around a long time, a very long time. Then I came back.

What time was it when I passed back under the Arch of Triumph? I do not know. The city had fallen asleep, and clouds, large, black clouds slowly spread out over the sky.

For the first time I felt that something weird was going to happen, something new. The weather seemed to be turning cold, the air to be thickening; it seemed that the night, my well-beloved night, was starting to weigh upon my heart. The avenue was deserted now. All alone, two patrolmen were walking near the taxi station, and on the pavement barely illuminated by the gas valves which seemed to be dying, a line of vegetable trucks was headed for Halles. They went slowly, loaded with carrots, turnips and cabbage. Their drivers were sleeping, unseen, and the horses all walked at the same pace, following the vehicle ahead of them, noiseless, upon the wooden pavement. Before each light along the sidewalk, the carrots flashed in their redness, the turnips flashed in their whiteness, and the cabbages flashed in their greenness. And they passed by, one after the other, those vehicles, red with the red of fire, white with the white of silver and green with the green of emeralds. I followed them, then I turned onto Royale Street and came back to the boulevards. Nobody else, no more lighted cafés, only a few stragglers in a hurry. I had never before seen Paris so dead, so deserted. I pulled out my watch. It was two o'clock.

Some force was driving me, a need to walk. So I went up to the Bastille. Up there I realized that I had never seen a night so dark, since I could not even make out the Column of July, whose wizardry wrought in gold was lost in the impenetrable darkness. A vault of cloud, as thick as the universe, had drowned the stars, and appeared to be sinking to earth to demolish it.

I came back. There was not a soul around me. On the Plaza du Château-d'eau, however, a drunk nearly ran into me, then he vanished. For a while I heard his uneven and reverberating steps. I walked. At the heights of Montmartre a carriage passed by, descending towards the Seine. I called out to it. The coachman did not answer. A woman was begging near Drouot Street: "Mister, please listen..." I quickened my pace to avoid her outstretched hand. Then, nothing else. In front of the Vaudeville, a rag man was rummaging around the gutter. His little lantern floated on ground level. I asked him, “What time is it, my good man?”

He growled, “How should I know? I have no watch.”

Then all of a sudden I noticed that the gaslights were out. I know that they get turned off very early, before daybreak at this time of year, as an economic measure, but the day was still far off, so far from appearing!

“Let’s go, to Halles,” I thought to myself, “there at least I will find some sign of life.”

I started my trek, but I wasn’t even able to see which way I should turn. I advanced slowly, as if in the woods, recognizing the streets by counting them.

In front of the Crédit Lyonnais, a dog growled. I turned onto Grammont Street and I got lost. I wandered a bit, then I recognized the Stock Exchange by the iron grills which surround it. All of Paris was asleep, in a deep, frightening sleep. In the distance, however, a carriage rolled along, a lone carriage, perhaps the very one which had passed in front of me just before. I sought to join up with it, walking towards the noise of its wheels, across the solitary streets, the black streets, black, black like death.

I got lost again. Where was I? How stupid to extinguish the gas this early! Not one passerby, not one straggler, not one beggar, no caterwauling of cats on the make. Nothing.

So where were the street patrols? I said to myself, “I am going to yell, then they will come.” I yelled. No one responded. I called out more loudly. My voice fled away, without an echo, weak, muted, crushed by the night, by this impenetrable night.

I shouted, “Help! Help! Help!”

To my desperate call there was still no answer. What time was it now? I pulled out my watch, but I didn’t have any matches. I heard the light tick-tock of the little mechanism with an uncanny, bizarre joy. It seemed to be alive. I was less alone. What a mystery! I set to walking again, like a blind man, and, feeling the walls with my walking stick, I continually kept my eyes trained on the sky, hoping that day would come at last. But the space above was black, completely black, more deeply black than the city.

What time could it be now? I was walking, it seemed, since forever, because my legs were buckling under me, my lungs were gasping, and I was suffering horribly from hunger.

I decided to ring at the first garage door I came to. I pulled on the copper ringer, and the bell rang inside the sonorous house; it rang strangely, as if its lively noise were the only living thing in this house.

I waited, nobody answered. Nobody opened the door. I started to ring again, I kept waiting, - nothing!

I was scared! I ran to the next residence, and twenty times in a row I made the bell ring inside the dark hallway where the concierge must have been sleeping. But he did not wake up, - and I walked on further, pulling or pressing with all my strength the rings or buttons, striking with my feet, my stick and my hands the doors which were stubbornly closed to me.

And all of a sudden, I realized that I was arriving in Halles. Halles was deserted, without a sound, without a movement, without a car, without a man, without a bundle of vegetables or flowers. - It was empty, motionless, abandoned, dead!

I was overcome by fear, - horrible. What was happening? Oh, my God! What was happening?

I left. But the time? The time? Who will tell me the time? There was no clock chiming in the bell towers or monuments. I thought, “I am going to open up the glass on my watch and touch the needle with my fingers.” I pulled out my watch... it was not ticking anymore, it had stopped. Nothing more, nothing more, nothing more astir in the city, not a glimmer, not a rustle of sound in the air. Nothing! Nothing more! Not even the distant roll of the carriage, - nothing more!

I was at the docks, and a glacial chill rose from the river. Was the Seine still flowing?

I wanted to know. I found the steps and I walked down... I did not hear the current bubble beneath the arches of the bridge... More walking... then some sand... some silt... then the water... I wet my arms... the water ran... it ran... cold... cold... cold... nearly frozen... nearly solid... nearly dead.

And I was quite aware that I would never have the strength to get back out... that I was going to die there... me also, from hunger - from exhaustion - and from cold.

THE HORLA

May 8. What a lovely day! I have spent all the morning lying on the grass in front of my house, under the enormous plantain tree which covers and shades and shelters the whole of it. I like this part of the country; I am fond of living here because I am attached to it by deep roots, the profound and delicate roots which attach a man to the soil on which his ancestors were born and died, to their traditions, their usages, their food, the local expressions, the peculiar language of the peasants, the smell of the soil, the hamlets, and to the atmosphere itself. I love the house in which I grew up. From my windows I can see the Seine, which flows by the side of my garden, on the other side of the road, almost through my grounds, the great and wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and which is covered with boats passing to and fro.

On the left, down yonder, lies Rouen, populous Rouen with its blue roofs massing under pointed, Gothic towers. Innumerable are they, delicate or broad, dominated by the spire of the cathedral, full of bells which sound through the blue air on fine mornings, sending their sweet and distant Iron clang to me, their metallic sounds, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is strong or light.

What a delicious morning it was! About eleven o’clock, a long line of boats drawn by a steam-tug, as big a fly, and which scarcely puffed while emitting its thick smoke, passed my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flags fluttered toward the sky, there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master; it was perfectly white and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly know why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

May 12. I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence? One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Forces, whose mysterious presence we have to endure. I wake up in the best of spirits, with an inclination to sing in my heart. Why? I go down by the side of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as If some misfortune were awaiting me there. Why? Is it a cold shiver which, passing over my skin, has upset my nerves and given me a fit of low spirits? Is it the form of the clouds, or the tints of the sky, or the colors of the surrounding objects which are so changeable, which have troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes? Who can tell? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see without looking at it, everything that we touch without knowing it, everything that we handle without feeling it, everything that we meet without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprising, and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our organs, and through them on our ideas and on our being itself.

How profound that mystery of the Invisible is! We cannot fathom it with our miserable senses: our eyes are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to or too far from us; we can see neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water; our ears deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes. Our senses are fairies who work the miracle of changing that movement into noise, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the mute agitation of nature a harmony. So with our sense of smell, which is weaker than that of a dog, and so with our sense of taste, which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which could work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

May 16. I am ill, decidedly! I was so well last month! I am feverish, horribly feverish, or rather I am in a state of feverish enervation, which makes my mind suffer as much as my body. I have without ceasing the horrible sensation of some danger threatening me, the apprehension of some coming misfortune or of approaching death, a presentiment which is no doubt, an attack of some illness still unnamed, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

May 18. I have just come from consulting my medical man, for I can no longer get any sleep. He found that my pulse was high, my eyes dilated, my nerves highly strung, but no alarming symptoms. I must have a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

May 25. No change! My state is really very peculiar. As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some terrible menace toward me. I dine quickly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters. Then I walk up and down my drawing-room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear, a fear of sleep and a fear of my bed.

About ten o'clock I go up to my room. As soon as I have entered I lock and bolt the door. I am frightened — of what? Up till the present time I have been frightened of nothing. I open my cupboards, and look under my bed; I listen — I listen — to what? How strange it is that a simple feeling of discomfort, of impeded or heightened circulation, perhaps the irritation of a nervous center, a slight congestion, a small disturbance in the imperfect and delicate functions of our living machinery, can turn the most light-hearted of men into a melancholy one, and make a coward of the bravest? Then, I go to bed, and I wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until the moment when I suddenly fall asleep, as a man throws himself into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown. I do not feel this perfidious sleep coming over me as I used to, but a sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to close my eyes and annihilate me.

I sleep — a long time — two or three hours perhaps — then a dream — no — a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep — I feel it and I know it — and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his hands and squeezing it — squeezing it with all his might in order to strangle me.

I struggle, bound by that terrible powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out — but I cannot; I want to move — I cannot; I try, with the most violent efforts and out of breath, to turn over and throw off this being which is crushing and suffocating me — I cannot!

And then suddenly I wake up, shaken and bathed in perspiration; I light a candle and find that I am alone, and after that crisis, which occurs every night, I at length fall asleep and slumber tranquilly till morning.

June 2. My state has grown worse. What is the matter with me? The bromide does me no good, and the shower-baths have no effect whatever.

Sometimes, in order to tire myself out, though I am fatigued enough already, I go for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I used to think at first that the fresh light and soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, would instill new life into my veins and impart fresh energy to my heart. One day I turned into a broad ride in the wood, and then I diverged toward La Bouille, through a narrow path, between two rows of exceedingly tall trees, which placed a thick, green, almost black roof between the sky and me.

A sudden shiver ran through me, not a cold shiver, but a shiver of agony, and so I hastened my steps, uneasy at being alone in the wood, frightened stupidly and without reason, at the profound solitude. Suddenly it seemed as if I were being followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, close, quite close to me, near enough to touch me.

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad ride, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; on the other side also it extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same — terrible.

I closed my eyes. Why? And then I began to turn round on one heel very quickly, just like a top. I nearly fell down, and opened my eyes; the trees were dancing round me and the earth heaved; I was obliged to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer remembered how I had come! What a strange idea! What a strange, strange idea! I did not the least know. I started off to the right, and got back into the avenue which had led me into the middle of the forest.

June 3. I have had a terrible night. I shall go away for a few weeks, for no doubt a journey will set me up again.

July 2. I have come back, quite cured, and have had a most delightful trip into the bargain. I have been to Mont Saint-Michel, which I had not seen before.

What a sight, when one arrives as I did, at Avranches toward the end of the day! The town stands on a hill, and I was taken into the public garden at the extremity of the town. I uttered a cry of astonishment. An extraordinarily large bay lay extended before me, as far as my eyes could reach, between two hills which were lost to sight in the mist; and in the middle of this immense yellow bay, under a clear, golden sky, a peculiar hill rose up, somber and pointed in the midst of the sand. The sun had just disappeared, and under the still flaming sky stood out the outline of that fantastic rock which bears on its summit a picturesque monument.

At daybreak I went to it. The tide was low, as it had been the night before, and I saw that wonderful abbey rise up before me as I approached it. After several hours' walking, I reached the enormous mass of rock which supports the little town, dominated by the great church. Having climbed the steep and narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic building that has ever been erected to God on earth, large as a town, and full of low rooms which seem buried beneath vaulted roofs, and of lofty galleries supported by delicate columns.

I entered this gigantic granite jewel, which is as light in its effect as a bit of lace and is covered with towers, with slender belfries to which spiral staircases ascend. The flying buttresses raise strange heads that bristle with chimeras. with devils, with fantastic animals, with monstrous flowers, are joined together by finely carved arches, to the blue sky by day, and to the black sky by night.

When I had reached the summit. I said to the monk who accompanied me: "Father, how happy you must be here!" And he replied: "It is very windy, Monsieur"; and so we began to talk while watching the rising tide, which ran over the sand and covered it with a steel cuirass.

And then the monk told me stories, all the old stories belonging to the place — legends, nothing but legends.

One of them struck me forcibly. The country people, those belonging to the Mornet, declare that at night one can hear talking going on in the sand, and also that two goats bleat, one with a strong, the other with a weak voice. Incredulous people declare that it is nothing but the screaming of the sea birds, which occasionally resembles bleatings, and occasionally human lamentations; but belated fishermen swear that they have met an old shepherd, whose cloak covered head they can never see, wandering on the sand, between two tides, round the little town placed so far out of the world. They declare he is guiding and walking before a he-goat with a man's face and a she-goat with a woman's face, both with white hair, who talk incessantly, quarreling in a strange language, and then suddenly cease talking in order to bleat with all their might.

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk. "I scarcely know," he replied; and I continued: "If there are other beings besides ourselves on this earth, how comes it that we have not known it for so long a time, or why have you not seen them? How is it that I have not seen them?”

He replied: “Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Look here; there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature. It knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on to the breakers; it kills, it whistles, it sighs, it roars. But have you ever seen it, and can you see it? Yet it exists for all that.”

I was silent before this simple reasoning. That man was a philosopher, or perhaps a fool; I could not say which exactly, so I held my tongue. What he had said had often been in my own thoughts.

July 3. I have slept badly; certainly there is some feverish influence here, for my coachman is suffering in the same way as I am. When I went back home yesterday, I noticed his singular paleness, and I asked him: “What is the matter with you, Jean?”

“The matter is that I never get any rest, and my nights devour my days. Since your departure, Monsieur, there has been a spell over me.”

However, the other servants are all well, but I am very frightened of having another attack, myself.

July 4. I am decidedly taken again; for my old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt somebody leaning on me who was sucking my life from between my lips with his mouth. Yes, he was sucking it out of my neck like a leech would have done. Then he got up, satiated, and I woke up, so beaten, crushed, and annihilated that I could not move. If this continues for a few days, I shall certainly go away again.

July 5. Have I lost my reason? What has happened? What I saw last night is so strange that my head wanders when I think of it!

As I do now every evening, I had locked my door; then, being thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and I accidentally noticed that the water-bottle was full up to the cut-glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my terrible sleeps, from which I was aroused in about two hours by a still more terrible shock.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered, who wakes up with a knife in his chest, a gurgling in his throat, is covered with blood, can no longer breathe, is going to die and does not understand anything at all about it — there you have it.

Having recovered my senses, I was thirsty again, so I lighted a candle and went to the table on which my water-bottle was. I lifted it up and tilted it over my glass, but nothing came out. It was empty! It was completely empty! At first I could not understand it at all; then suddenly I was seized by such a terrible feeling that I had to sit down, or rather fall into a chair! Then I sprang up with a bound to look about me; then I sat down again, overcome by astonishment and fear, in front of the transparent crystal bottle! I looked at it with fixed eyes, trying to solve the puzzle, and my hands trembled! Some body had drunk the water, but who? I? I without any doubt. It could surely only be I? In that case I was a somnambulist — was living, without knowing it, that double, mysterious life which makes us doubt whether there are not two beings in us — whether a strange, unknowable, and invisible being does not, during our moments of mental and physical torpor, animate the inert body, forcing it to a more willing obedience than it yields to ourselves.

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man sound in mind, wide-awake, full of sense, who looks in horror at the disappearance of a little water while he was asleep, through the glass of a water-bottle! And I remained sitting until it was daylight, without venturing to go to bed again.

July 6. I am going mad. Again all the contents of my water-bottle have been drunk during the night; or rather I have drunk it!

But is it I? Is it I? Who could it be? Who? Oh! God! Am I going mad? Who will save me?

July 10. I have just been through some surprising ordeals. Undoubtedly I must be mad! And yet!

On July 6, before going to bed, I put some wine, milk, water, bread, and strawberries on my table. Somebody drank — I drank — all the water and a little of the milk, but neither the wine, nor the bread, nor the strawberries were touched.

On the seventh of July I renewed the same experiment, with the same results, and on July 8 I left out the water and the milk and nothing was touched.

Lastly, on July 9 I put only water and milk on my table, taking care to wrap up the bottles in white muslin and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, my beard, and my hands with pencil lead, and went to bed.

Deep slumber seized me, soon followed by a terrible awakening. I had not moved, and my sheets were not marked. I rushed to the table. The muslin round the bottles remained intact; I undid the string, trembling with fear. All the water had been drunk, and so had the milk! Ah! Great God! I must start for Paris immediately.

July 12. Paris. I must have lost my head during the last few days! I must be the plaything of my enervated imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist, or I have been brought under the power of one of those influences — hypnotic suggestion, for example — which are known to exist, but have hitherto been inexplicable. In any case, my mental state bordered on madness, and twenty-four hours of Paris sufficed to restore me to my equilibrium.

Yesterday after doing some business and paying some visits, which instilled fresh and invigorating mental air into me, I wound up my evening at the Théâtre Français. A drama by Alexander Dumas the Younger was being acted, and his brilliant and powerful play completed my cure. Certainly solitude is dangerous for active minds. We need men who can think and can talk, around us. When we are alone for a long time, we people space with phantoms.

I returned along the boulevards to my hotel in excellent spirits. Amid the jostling of the crowd I thought, not without irony, of my terrors and surmises of the previous week, because I believed, yes, I believed, that an invisible being lived beneath my roof. How weak our mind is; how quickly it is terrified and unbalanced as soon as we are confronted with a small, incomprehensible fact. Instead of dismissing the problem with: “We do not understand because we cannot find the cause,” we immediately imagine terrible mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 14. Fête of the Republic. I walked through the streets, and the crackers and flags amused me like a child. Still, it is very foolish to make merry on a set date, by Government decree. People are like a flock of sheep, now steadily patient, now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: “Amuse yourself,” and it amuses itself. Say to it: “Go and fight with your neighbor,” and it goes and fights. Say to it: “Vote for the Emperor,” and it votes for the Emperor; then say to it: “Vote for the Republic,” and it votes for the Republic.

Those who direct it are stupid, too; but instead of obeying men they obey principles, a course which can only be foolish, ineffective, and false, for the very reason that principles are ideas which are considered as certain and unchangeable, whereas in this world one is certain of nothing, since light is an illusion and noise is deception.

July 16. I saw some things yesterday that troubled me very much.

I was dining at my cousin's, Madame Sablé, whose husband is colonel of the Seventy-sixth Chasseurs at Limoges. There were two young women there, one of whom had married a medical man, Dr. Parent, who devotes himself a great deal to nervous diseases and to the extraordinary manifestations which just now experiments in hypnotism and suggestion are producing.

He related to us at some length the enormous results obtained by English scientists and the doctors of the medical school at Nancy, and the facts which he adduced appeared to me so strange, that I declared that I was altogether incredulous.

"We are," he declared, "on the point of discovering one of the most important secrets of nature, I mean to say, one of its most important secrets on this earth, for assuredly there are some up in the stars, yonder, of a different kind of importance. Ever since man has thought, since he has been able to express and write down his thoughts, he has felt himself close to a mystery which is impenetrable to his coarse and imperfect senses, and he endeavors to supplement the feeble penetration of his organs by the efforts of his intellect. As long as that intellect remained in its elementary stage, this intercourse with invisible spirits assumed forms which were commonplace though terrifying. Thence sprang the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of wandering spirits, of fairies, of gnomes, of ghosts, I might even say the conception of God, for our ideas of the Workman-Creator, from whatever religion they may have come down to us, are certainly the most mediocre, the stupidest, and the most unacceptable inventions that ever sprang from the frightened brain of any human creature. Nothing is truer than what Voltaire says: `If God made man in His own image, man has certainly paid Him back again.'

"But for rather more than a century, men seem to have had a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others have put us on an unexpected track, and within the last two or three years especially, we have arrived at results really surprising."

My cousin, who is also very incredulous, smiled, and Dr. Parent said to her: "Would you like me to try and send you to sleep, Madame?"

"Yes, certainly."

She sat down in an easy-chair, and he began to look at her fixedly, as if to fascinate her. I suddenly felt myself somewhat discomposed; my heart beat rapidly and I had a choking feeling in my throat. I saw that Madame Sablé's eyes were growing heavy, her mouth twitched, and her bosom heaved, and at the end of ten minutes she was asleep.

"Go behind her," the doctor said to me; so I took a seat behind her. He put a visiting-card into her hands, and said to her: "This is a looking-glass; what do you see in it?"

She replied: "I see my cousin."

"What is he doing?"

"He is twisting his mustache."

"And now?"

"He is taking a photograph out of his pocket."

"Whose photograph is it?"

"His own."

That was true, for the photograph had been given me that same evening at the hotel.

"What is his attitude in this portrait?"

"He is standing up with his hat in his hand."

She saw these things in that card, in that piece of white pasteboard, as if she had seen them in a looking-glass.

The young women were frightened, and exclaimed: "That is quite enough! Quite, quite enough!"

But the doctor said to her authoritatively: "You will get up at eight o'clock to-morrow morning; then you will go and call on your cousin at his hotel and ask him to lend you the five thousand francs which your husband asks of you, and which he will ask for when he sets out on his coming journey."

Then he woke her up.

On returning to my hotel, I thought over this curious séance and I was assailed by doubts, not as to my cousin's absolute and undoubted good faith, for I had known her as well as if she had been my own sister ever since she was a child, but as to a possible trick on the doctor's part. Had not he, perhaps, kept a glass hidden in his hand, which he showed to the young woman in her sleep at the same time as he did the card? Professional conjurers do things which are just as singular.

However, I went to bed, and this morning, at about half past eight, I was awakened by my footman, who said to me: “Madame Sablé has asked to see you immediately, Monsieur.” I dressed hastily and went to her.

She sat down in some agitation, with her eyes on the floor, and without raising her veil said to me: “My dear cousin, I am going to ask a great favor of you.”

“What is it, cousin?”

“I do not like to tell you, and yet I must. I am in absolute want of five thousand francs.”

“What, you?”

“Yes, I, or rather my husband, who has asked me to procure them for him.”

I was so stupefied that I hesitated to answer. I asked myself whether she had not really been making fun of me with Dr. Parent, if it were not merely a very well-acted farce which had been got up beforehand. On looking at her attentively, however, my doubts disappeared. She was trembling with grief, so painful was this step to her, and I was sure that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich and so I continued: “What! Has not your husband five thousand francs at his disposal? Come, think. Are you sure that he commissioned you to ask me for them?”

She hesitated for a few seconds, as if she were making a great effort to search her memory, and then she replied: “Yes — yes, I am quite sure of it.”

“He has written to you?”

She hesitated again and reflected, and I guessed the torture of her thoughts. She did not know. She only knew that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she told a lie.

“Yes, he has written to me.”

“When, pray? You did not mention it to me yesterday.”

“I received his letter this morning.”

“Can you show it to me?”

“No; no — no — it contained private matters, things too personal to ourselves. I burned it.”

“So your husband runs into debt?”

She hesitated again, and then murmured: “I do not know.”

Thereupon I said bluntly: “I have not five thousand francs at my disposal at this moment, my dear cousin.”

She uttered a cry, as if she were in pair; and said: “Oh! oh! I beseech you, I beseech you to get them for me.”

She got excited and clasped her hands as if she were praying to me! I heard her voice change its tone; she wept and sobbed, harassed and dominated by the irresistible order that she had received.

“Oh! oh! I beg you to — if you knew what I am suffering — I want them to-day.”

I had pity on her: “You shall have them by and by, I swear to you.”

“Oh! thank you! thank you! How kind you are.”

I continued: “Do you remember what took place at your house last night?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember that Dr. Parent sent you to sleep?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! Very well then; he ordered you to come to me this morning to borrow five thousand francs, and at this moment you are obeying that suggestion.”

She considered for a few moments, and then replied: “But as it is my husband who wants them— “

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but could not succeed, and when she had gone I went to the doctor. He was just going out, and he listened to me with a smile, and said: “Do you believe now?”

“Yes, I cannot help it.”

“Let us go to your cousin’s.”

She was already resting on a couch, overcome with fatigue. The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her for some time with one hand raised toward her eyes, which she closed by degrees under the irresistible power of this magnetic influence. When she was asleep, he said:

“Your husband does not require the five thousand francs any longer! You must, therefore, forget that you asked your cousin to lend them to you, and, if he speaks to you about it, you will not understand him.”

Then he woke her up, and I took out a pocket-book and said: “Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin.” But she was so surprised, that I did not venture to persist; nevertheless, I tried to recall the circumstance to her, but she denied it vigorously, thought that I was making fun of her, and in the end, very nearly lost her temper.

There! I have just come back, and I have not been able to eat any lunch, for this experiment has altogether upset me.

July 19. Many people to whom I have told the adventure have laughed at me. I no longer know what to think. The wise man says: Perhaps?

July 21. I dined at Bougival, and then I spent the evening at a boatmen's ball. Decidedly everything depends on place and surroundings. It would be the height of folly to believe in the supernatural on the Ile de la Grenouillière. But on the top of Mont Saint-Michel or in India, we are terribly under the influence of our surroundings. I shall return home next week.

July 30. I came back to my own house yesterday. Everything is going on well.

August 2. Nothing fresh; it is splendid weather, and I spend my days in watching the Seine flow past.

August 4. Quarrels among my servants. They declare that the glasses are broken in the cupboards at night. The footman accuses the cook, she accuses the needlewoman, and the latter accuses the other two. Who is the culprit? It would take a clever person to tell.

August 6. This time, I am not mad. I have seen — I have seen — I have seen! — I can doubt no longer — I have seen it!

I was walking at two o'clock among my rose-trees, in the full sunlight — in the walk bordered by autumn roses which are beginning to fall. As I stopped to look at a Géant de Bataille, which had three splendid blooms, I distinctly saw the stalk of one of the roses bend close to me, as if an invisible hand had bent it, and then break, as if that hand had picked it! Then the flower raised itself, following the curve which a hand would have described in carrying it toward a mouth, and remained suspended in the transparent air, alone and motionless, a terrible red spot, three yards from my eyes. In desperation I rushed at it to take it! I found nothing; it had disappeared. Then I was seized with furious rage against myself, for it is not wholesome for a reasonable and serious man to have such hallucinations.

But was it a hallucination? I turned to look for the stalk, and I found it immediately under the bush, freshly broken, between the two other roses which remained on the branch. I returned home, then, with a much disturbed mind; for I am certain now, certain as I am of the alternation of day and night, that there exists close to me an invisible being who lives on milk and on water, who can touch objects, take them and change their places; who is, consequently, endowed with a material nature, although imperceptible to sense, and who lives as I do, under my roof —

August 7. I slept tranquilly. He drank the water out of my decanter, but did not disturb my sleep.

I ask myself whether I am mad. As I was walking just now in the sun by the riverside, doubts as to my own sanity arose in me; not vague doubts such as I have had hitherto, but precise and absolute doubts. I have seen mad people, and I have known some who were quite intelligent, lucid, even clear-sighted in every concern of life, except on one point. They could speak clearly, readily, profoundly on everything; till their thoughts were caught in the breakers of their delusions and went to pieces there, were dispersed and swamped in that furious and terrible sea of fogs and squalls which is called madness.

I certainly should think that I was mad, absolutely mad, if I were not conscious that I knew my state, if I could not fathom it and analyze it with the most complete lucidity. I should, in fact, be a reasonable man laboring under a hallucination. Some unknown disturbance must have been excited in my brain, one of those disturbances which physiologists of the present day try to note and to fix precisely, and that disturbance must have caused a profound gulf in my mind and in the order and logic of my ideas. Similar phenomena occur in dreams, and lead us through the most unlikely phantasmagoria, without causing us any surprise, because our verifying apparatus and our sense of control have gone to sleep, while our imaginative faculty wakes and works. Was it not possible that one of the imperceptible keys of the cerebral finger-board had been paralyzed in me? Some men lose the recollection of proper names, or of verbs, or of numbers, or merely of dates, in consequence of an accident. The localization of all the avenues of thought has been accomplished nowadays; what, then, would there be surprising in the fact that my faculty of controlling the unreality of certain hallucinations should be destroyed for the time being?

I thought of all this as I walked by the side of the water. The sun was shining brightly on the river and made earth delightful, while it filled me with love for life, for the swallows, whose swift agility is always delightful in my eyes, for the plants by the riverside, whose rustling is a pleasure to my ears.

By degrees, however, an inexplicable feeling of discomfort seized me. It seemed to me as if some unknown force were numbing and stopping me, were preventing me from going further and were calling me back. I felt that painful wish to return which comes on you when you have left a beloved invalid at home, and are seized by a presentiment that he is worse.

I, therefore, returned despite of myself, feeling certain that I should find some bad news awaiting me, a letter or a telegram. There was nothing, however, and I was surprised and uneasy, more so than if I had had another fantastic vision.

August 8. I spent a terrible evening, yesterday. He does not show himself any more, but I feel that He is near me, watching me, looking at me, penetrating me, dominating me, and more terrible to me when He hides himself thus than if He were to manifest his constant and invisible presence by supernatural phenomena. However, I slept.

August 9. Nothing, but I am afraid.

August 10. Nothing; but what will happen to-morrow?

August 11. Still nothing. I cannot stop at home with this fear hanging over me and these thoughts in my mind; I shall go away.

August 12. Ten o’clock at night. All day long I have been trying to get away, and have not been able. I contemplated a simple and easy act of liberty, a carriage ride to Rouen — and I have not been able to do it. What is the reason?

August 13. When one is attacked by certain maladies, the springs of our physical being seem broken, our energies destroyed, our muscles relaxed, our bones to be as soft as our flesh, and our blood as liquid as water. I am experiencing the same in my moral being, in a strange and distressing manner. I have no longer any strength, any courage, any self-control, nor even any power to set my own will in motion. I have no power left to will anything, but some one does it for me and I obey.

August 14. I am lost! Somebody possesses my soul and governs it! Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my thoughts. I am no longer master of myself, nothing except an enslaved and terrified spectator of the things which I do. I wish to go out; I cannot. He does not wish to; and so I remain, trembling and distracted in the armchair in which he keeps me sitting. I merely wish to get up and to rouse myself, so as to think that I am still master of myself: I cannot! I am riveted to my chair, and my chair adheres to the floor in such a manner that no force of mine can move us.

Then suddenly, I must, I must go to the foot of my garden to pick some strawberries and eat them — and I go there. I pick the strawberries and I eat them! Oh! my God! my God! Is there a God? If there be one, deliver me! save me! succor me! Pardon! Pity! Mercy! Save me! Oh! what sufferings! what torture! what horror!

August 15. Certainly this is the way in which my poor cousin was possessed and swayed, when she came to borrow five thousand francs of me. She was under the power of a strange will which had entered into her, like another soul, a parasitic and ruling soul. Is the world coming to an end?

But who is he, this invisible being that rules me, this unknowable being, this rover of a supernatural race?

Invisible beings exist, then! how is it, then, that since the beginning of the world they have never manifested themselves in such a manner as they do to me? I have never read anything that resembles what goes on in my house. Oh! If I could only leave it, if I could only go away and flee, and never return, I should be saved; but I cannot.

August 16. I managed to escape to-day for two hours, like a prisoner who finds the door of his dungeon accidentally open. I suddenly felt that I was free and that He was far away, and so I gave orders to put the horses in as quickly as possible, and I drove to Rouen. Oh! how delightful to be able to say to my coachman: “Go to Rouen!”

I made him pull up before the library, and I begged them to lend me Dr. Herrmann Herestauss’s treatise on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and modern world.

Then, as I was getting into my carriage, I intended to say: “To the railway station!” but instead of this I shouted — I did not speak; but I shouted — in such a loud voice that all the passers-by turned round: “Home!” and I fell back on to the cushion of my carriage, overcome by mental agony. He had found me out and regained possession of me.

August 17. Oh! What a night! what a night! And yet it seems to me that I ought to rejoice. I read until one o’clock in the morning! Herestauss, Doctor of Philosophy and Theogony, wrote the history and the manifestation of all those invisible beings which hover around man, or of whom he dreams. He describes their origin, their domains, their power; but none of them resembles the one which haunts me. One might say that man, ever since he has thought, has had a foreboding and a fear of a new being, stronger than himself, his successor in this world, and that, feeling him near, and not being able to foretell the nature of the unseen one, he has, in his terror, created the whole race of hidden beings, vague phantoms born of fear.

Having, therefore, read until one o'clock in the morning, I went and sat down at the open window, in order to cool my forehead and my thoughts in the calm night air. It was very pleasant and warm! How I should have enjoyed such a night formerly!

There was no moon, but the stars darted out their rays in the dark heavens. Who inhabits those worlds? What forms, what living beings, what animals are there yonder? Do those who are thinkers in those distant worlds know more than we do? What can they do more than we? What do they see which we do not? Will not one of them, some day or other, traversing space, appear on our earth to conquer it, just as formerly the Norsemen crossed the sea in order to subjugate nations feebler than themselves?

We are so weak, so powerless, so ignorant, so small — we who live on this particle of mud which revolves in liquid air.

I fell asleep, dreaming thus in the cool night air, and then, having slept for about three quarters of an hour, I opened my eyes without moving, awakened by an indescribably confused and strange sensation. At first I saw nothing, and then suddenly it appeared to me as if a page of the book, which had remained open on my table, turned over of its own accord. Not a breath of air had come in at my window, and I was surprised and waited. In about four minutes, I saw, I saw — yes I saw with my own eyes — another page lift itself up and fall down on the others, as if a finger had turned it over. My armchair was empty, appeared empty, but I knew that He was there, He, and sitting in my place, and that He was reading. With a furious bound, the bound of an enraged wild beast that wishes to disembowel its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him! But before I could reach it, my chair fell over as if somebody had run away from me. My table rocked, my lamp fell and went out, and my window closed as if some thief had been surprised and had fled out into the night, shutting it behind him.

So He had run away; He had been afraid; He, afraid of me!

So to-morrow, or later — some day or other, I should be able to hold him in my clutches and crush him against the ground! Do not dogs occasionally bite and strangle their masters?

August 18. I have been thinking the whole day long. Oh! yes, I will obey Him, follow His impulses, fulfill all His wishes, show myself humble, submissive, a coward. He is the stronger; but an hour will come.

August 19. I know, I know, I know all! I have just read the following in the Revue du Monde Scientifique: “A curious piece of news comes to us from Rio de Janeiro. Madness, an epidemic of madness, which may be compared to that contagious madness which attacked the people of Europe in the Middle Ages, is at this moment raging in the Province of San-Paulo. The frightened inhabitants are leaving their houses, deserting their villages, abandoning their land, saying that they are pursued, possessed, governed like human cattle by invisible, though tangible beings, by a species of vampire, which feeds on their life while they are asleep, and which, besides, drinks water and milk without appearing to touch any other nourishment.

“Professor Don Pedro Henriques, accompanied by several medical savants, has gone to the Province of San-Paulo, in order to study the origin and the manifestations of this surprising madness on the spot, and to propose such measures to the Emperor as may appear to him to be most fitted to restore the mad population to reason.”

Ah! Ah! I remember now that fine Brazilian three-master which passed in front of my windows as it was going up the Seine, on the eighth of last May! I thought it looked so pretty, so white and bright! That Being was on board of her, coming from there, where its race sprang from. And it saw me! It saw my house, which was also white, and He sprang from the ship on to the land. Oh! Good heavens!

Now I know, I can divine. The reign of man is over, and he has come. He whom disquieted priests exorcised, whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights, without seeing him appear, He to whom the imaginations of the transient masters of the world lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, genii, fairies, and familiar spirits. After the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, men more enlightened gave him a truer form. Mesmer divined him, and ten years ago physicians accurately discovered the nature of his power, even before He exercised it himself. They played with that weapon of their new Lord, the sway of a mysterious will over the human soul, which had become enslaved. They called it mesmerism, hypnotism, suggestion, I know not what? I have seen them diverting themselves like rash children with this horrible power! Woe to us! Woe to man! He has come, the — the — what does He call himself — the — I fancy that he is shouting out his name to me and I do not hear him — the — yes — He is shouting it out — I am listening — I cannot — repeat — it — Horla — I have heard — the Horla — it is He — the Horla — He has come! —

Ah I the vulture has eaten the pigeon, the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo; man has killed the lion with an arrow, with a spear, with gunpowder; but the Horla will make of man what man has made of the horse and of the ox: his chattel, his slave, and his food, by the mere power of his will. Woe to us!

But, nevertheless, sometimes the animal rebels and kills the man who has subjugated it. I should also like — I shall be able to — but I must know Him, touch Him, see Him! Learned men say that eyes of animals, as they differ from ours, do not distinguish as ours do. And my eye cannot distinguish this newcomer who is oppressing me.

Why? Oh! Now I remember the words of the monk at Mont Saint-Michel: “Can we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Listen; there is the wind which is the strongest force in nature; it knocks men down, blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs, and casts great ships on to the breakers; it kills, it whistles, it sighs, it roars, — have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however!”

And I went on thinking: my eyes are so weak, so imperfect, that they do not even distinguish hard bodies, if they are as transparent as glass! If a glass without quicksilver behind it were to bar my way, I should run into it, just like a bird which has flown into a room breaks its head against the windowpanes. A thousand things, moreover, deceive a man and lead him astray. How then is it surprising that he cannot perceive a new body which is penetrated and pervaded by the light?

A new being! Why not? It was assuredly bound to come! Why should we be the last? We do not distinguish it, like all the others created before us? The reason is, that its nature is more delicate, its body finer and more finished than ours. Our makeup is so weak, so awkwardly conceived; our body is encumbered with organs that are always tired, always being strained like locks that are too complicated; it lives like a plant and like an animal nourishing itself with difficulty on air, herbs, and flesh; it is a brute machine which is a prey to maladies, to malformations, to decay; it is broken-winded, badly regulated, simple and eccentric, ingeniously yet badly made, a coarse and yet a delicate mechanism, in brief, the outline of a being which might become intelligent and great.

There are only a few — so few — stages of development in this world, from the oyster up to man. Why should there not be one more, when once that period is accomplished which separates the successive products one from the other?

Why not one more? Why not, also, other trees with immense, splendid flowers, perfuming whole regions? Why not other elements beside fire, air, earth, and water? There are four, only four, nursing fathers of various beings! What a pity! Why should not there be forty, four hundred, four thousand! How poor everything is, how mean and wretched — grudgingly given, poorly invented, clumsily made! Ah! the elephant and the hippopotamus, what power! And the camel, what suppleness!

But the butterfly, you will say, a flying flower! I dream of one that should be as large as a hundred worlds, with wings whose shape, beauty, colors, and motion I cannot even express. But I see it — it flutters from star to star, refreshing them and perfuming them with the light and harmonious breath of its flight! And the people up there gaze at it as it passes in an ecstasy of delight!

What is the matter with me? It is He, the Horla who haunts me, and who makes me think of these foolish things! He is within me, He is becoming my soul; I shall kill him!

August 20. I shall kill Him. I have seen Him! Yesterday I sat down at my table and pretended to write very assiduously. I knew quite well that He would come prowling round me, quite close to me, so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him, to seize him. And then — then I should have the strength of desperation; I should have my hands, my knees, my chest, my forehead, my teeth to strangle him, to crush him, to bite him, to tear him to pieces. And I watched for him with all my overexcited nerves.

I had lighted my two lamps and the eight wax candles on my mantelpiece, as if, by this light I should discover Him.

My bed, my old oak bed with its columns, was opposite to me; on my right was the fireplace; on my left the door, which was carefully closed, after I had left it open for some time, in order to attract Him; behind me was a very high wardrobe with a looking-glass in it, which served me to dress by every day, and in which I was in the habit of inspecting myself from head to foot every time I passed it.

So I pretended to be writing in order to deceive Him, for He also was watching me, and suddenly I felt, I was certain, that He was reading over my shoulder, that He was there, almost touching my ear.

I got up so quickly, with my hands extended, that I almost fell. Horror! It was as bright as at midday, but I did not see myself in the glass! It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! But my figure was not reflected in it — and I, I was opposite to it! I saw the large, clear glass from top to bottom, and I looked at it with unsteady eyes. I did not dare advance; I did not venture to make a movement; feeling certain, nevertheless, that He was there, but that He would escape me again, He whose imperceptible body had absorbed my reflection.

How frightened I was! And then suddenly I began to see myself through a mist in the depths of the looking-glass, in a mist as it were, or through a veil of water; and it seemed to me as if this water were flowing slowly from left to right, and making my figure clearer every moment. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever hid me did not appear to possess any clearly defined outlines, but was a sort of opaque transparency, which gradually grew clearer.

At last I was able to distinguish myself completely, as I do every day when I look at myself.

I had seen Him! And the horror of it remained with me, and makes me shudder even now.

August 21. How could I kill Him, since I could not get hold of Him? Poison? But He would see me mix it with the water; and then, would our poisons have any effect on His impalpable body? No — no — no doubt about the matter. Then? — then?

August 22. I sent for a blacksmith from Rouen and ordered iron shutters of him for my room, such as some private hotels in Paris have on the ground floor, for fear of thieves, and he is going to make me a similar door as well. I have made myself out a coward, but I do not care about that!

September 10. Rouen, Hôtel Continental. It is done; it is done — but is He dead? My mind is thoroughly upset by what I have seen.

Well then, yesterday, the locksmith having put on the iron shutters and door, I left everything open until midnight, although it was getting cold.

Suddenly I felt that He was there, and joy, mad joy took possession of me. I got up softly, and I walked to the right and left for some time, so that He might not guess anything; then I took off my boots and put on my slippers carelessly; then I fastened the iron shutters and going back to the door quickly I double-locked it with a padlock, putting the key into my pocket.

Suddenly I noticed that He was moving restlessly round me, that in his turn He was frightened and was ordering me to let Him out. I nearly yielded, though I did not quite, but putting my back to the door, I half opened it, just enough to allow me to go out backward, and as I am very tall, my head touched the lintel. I was sure that He had not been able to escape, and I shut Him up quite alone, quite alone. What happiness! I had Him fast. Then I ran downstairs into the drawing-room which was under my bedroom. I took the two lamps and poured all the oil on to the carpet, the furniture, everywhere; then I set fire to it and made my escape, after having carefully double locked the door.

I went and hid myself at the bottom of the garden, in a clump of laurel bushes. How long it was! how long it was! Everything was dark, silent, motionless, not a breath of air and not a star, but heavy banks of clouds which one could not see, but which weighed, oh! so heavily on my soul.

I looked at my house and waited. How long it was! I already began to think that the fire had gone out of its own accord, or that He had extinguished it, when one of the lower windows gave way under the violence of the flames, and a long, soft, caressing sheet of red flame mounted up the white wall, and kissed it as high as the roof. The light fell on to the trees, the branches, and the leaves, and a shiver of fear pervaded them also! The birds awoke; a dog began to howl, and it seemed to me as if the day were breaking! Almost immediately two other windows flew into fragments, and I saw that the whole of the lower part of my house was nothing but a terrible furnace. But a cry, a horrible, shrill, heart-rending cry, a woman’s cry, sounded through the night, and two garret windows were opened! I had forgotten the servants! I saw the terror-struck faces, and the frantic waving of their arms!

Then, overwhelmed with horror, I ran off to the village, shouting: “Help! help! fire! fire!” Meeting some people who were already coming on to the scene, I went back with them to see!

By this time the house was nothing but a horrible and magnificent funeral pile, a monstrous pyre which lit up the whole country, a pyre where men were burning, and where He was burning also, He, He, my prisoner, that new Being, the new Master, the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls, and a volcano of flames darted up to the sky. Through all the windows which opened on to that furnace, I saw the flames darting, and I reflected that He was there, in that kiln, dead.

Dead? Perhaps? His body? Was not his body, which was transparent, indestructible by such means as would kill ours?

If He were not dead? Perhaps time alone has power over that Invisible and Redoubtable Being. Why this transparent, unrecognizable body, this body belonging to a spirit, if it also had to fear ills, infirmities, and premature destruction?

Premature destruction? All human terror springs from that! After man the Horla. After him who can die every day, at any hour, at any moment, by any accident, He came, He who was only to die at his own proper hour and minute, because He had touched the limits of his existence!

No — no — there is no doubt about it — He is not dead. Then — then — I suppose I must kill myself!

OLD AMABLE

PART I

The humid gray sky seemed to weigh down on the vast brown plain. The odor of autumn, the sad odor of bare, moist lands, of fallen leaves, of dead grass made the stagnant evening air more thick and heavy. The peasants were still at work, scattered through the fields, waiting for the stroke of the Angelus to call them back to the farmhouses, whose thatched roofs were visible here and there through the branches of the leafless trees which protected the apple-gardens against the wind.

At the side of the road, on a heap of clothes, a very small boy seated with his legs apart was playing with a potato, which he now and then let fall on his dress, whilst five women were bending down planting slips of colza in the adjoining plain. With a slow, continuous movement, all along the mounds of earth which the plough had just turned up, they drove in sharp wooden stakes and in the hole thus formed placed the plant, already a little withered, which sank on one side; then they patted down the earth and went on with their work.

A man who was passing, with a whip in his hand, and wearing wooden shoes, stopped near the child, took it up and kissed it. Then one of the women rose up and came across to him. She was a big, red haired girl, with large hips, waist and shoulders, a tall Norman woman, with yellow hair in which there was a blood-red tint.

She said in a resolute voice:

“Why, here you are, Cesaire — well?”

The man, a thin young fellow with a melancholy air, murmured:

“Well, nothing at all — always the same thing.”

“He won’t have it?”

“He won’t have it.”

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you say I ought to do?"

"Go see the cure."

"I will."

"Go at once!"

"I will."

And they stared at each other. He held the child in his arms all the time. He kissed it once more and then put it down again on the woman's clothes.

In the distance, between two farm-houses, could be seen a plough drawn by a horse and driven by a man. They moved on very gently, the horse, the plough and the laborer, in the dim evening twilight.

The woman went on:

"What did your father say?"

"He said he would not have it."

"Why wouldn't he have it?"

The young man pointed toward the child whom he had just put back on the ground, then with a glance he drew her attention to the man drawing the plough yonder there.

And he said emphatically:

"Because 'tis his — this child of yours."

The girl shrugged her shoulders and in an angry tone said:

"Faith, every one knows it well — that it is Victor's. And what about it after all? I made a slip. Am I the only woman that did? My mother also made a slip before me, and then yours did the same before she married your dad! Who is it that hasn't made a slip in the country? I made a slip with Victor because he took advantage of me while I was asleep in the barn, it's true, and afterward it happened between us when I wasn't asleep. I certainly would have married him if he weren't a servant man. Am I a worse woman for that?"

The man said simply:

"As for me, I like you just as you are, with or without the child. It's only my father that opposes me. All the same, I'll see about settling the business."

She answered:

"Go to the cure at once."

"I'm going to him."

And he set forth with his heavy peasant's tread, while the girl, with her hands on her hips, turned round to plant her colza.

In fact, the man who thus went off, Cesaire Houlbreque, the son of deaf old Amable Houlbreque, wanted to marry, in spite of his father, Celeste Levesque, who had a child by Victor Lecoq, a mere laborer on her parents' farm, who had been turned out of doors for this act.

The hierarchy of caste, however, does not exist in the country, and if the laborer is thrifty, he becomes, by taking a farm in his turn, the equal of his former master.

So Cesaire Houlbieque went off, his whip under his arm, brooding over his own thoughts and lifting up one after the other his heavy wooden shoes daubed with clay. Certainly he desired to marry Celeste Levesque. He wanted her with her child because she was the wife he wanted. He could not say why, but he knew it, he was sure of it. He had only to look at her to be convinced of it, to feel quite queer, quite stirred up, simply stupid with happiness. He even found a pleasure in kissing the little boy, Victor's little boy, because he belonged to her.

And he gazed, without hate, at the distant outline of the man who was driving his plough along the horizon.

But old Amable did not want this marriage. He opposed it with the obstinacy of a deaf man, with a violent obstinacy.

Cesaire in vain shouted in his ear, in that ear which still heard a few sounds:

"I'll take good care of you, daddy. I tell you she's a good girl and strong, too, and also thrifty."

The old man repeated:

"As long as I live I won't see her your wife."

And nothing could get the better of him, nothing could make him waver. One hope only was left to Cesaire. Old Amable was afraid of the cure through the apprehension of death which he felt drawing nigh; he had not much fear of God, nor of the Devil, nor of Hell, nor of Purgatory, of which he had no conception, but he dreaded the priest, who represented to him burial, as one might fear the doctors through horror of diseases. For the last tight days Celeste, who knew this weakness of the old man, had been urging Cesaire to go and find the cure, but Cesaire always hesitated, because he had not much liking for the black robe, which represented to him hands always stretched out for collections or for blessed bread.

However, he had made up his mind, and he proceeded toward the presbytery, thinking in what manner he would speak about his case.

The Abbe Raffin, a lively little priest, thin and never shaved, was awaiting his dinner-hour while warming his feet at his kitchen fire.

As soon as he saw the peasant entering he asked, merely turning his head:

“Well, Cesaire, what do you want?”

“I’d like to have a talk with you, M. le Cure.”

The man remained standing, intimidated, holding his cap in one hand and his whip in the other.

“Well, talk.”

Cesaire looked at the housekeeper, an old woman who dragged her feet while putting on the cover for her master’s dinner at the corner of the table in front of the window.

He stammered:

“’Tis— ’tis a sort of confession.”

Thereupon the Abbe Raffin carefully surveyed his peasant. He saw his confused countenance, his air of constraint, his wandering eyes, and he gave orders to the housekeeper in these words:

“Marie, go away for five minutes to your room, while I talk to Cesaire.”

The servant cast on the man an angry glance and went away grumbling.

The clergyman went on:

“Come, now, tell your story.”

The young fellow still hesitated, looked down at his wooden shoes, moved about his cap, then, all of a sudden, he made up his mind:

“Here it is: I want to marry Celeste Levesque.”

“Well, my boy, what’s there to prevent you?”

“The father won’t have it.”

“Your father?”

“Yes, my father.”

“What does your father say?”

“He says she has a child.”

“She’s not the first to whom that happened, since our Mother Eve.”

“A child by Victor Lecoq, Anthime Loisel’s servant man.”

“Ha! ha! So he won’t have it?”

“He won’t have it.”

“What! not at all?”

“No, no more than an ass that won’t budge an inch, saving your presence.”

“What do you say to him yourself in order to make him decide?”

“I say to him that she’s a good girl, and strong, too, and thrifty also.”

“And this does not make him agree to it. So you want me to speak to him?”

“Exactly. You speak to him.”

“And what am I to tell your father?”

“Why, what you tell people in your sermons to make them give you sous.”

In the peasant’s mind every effort of religion consisted in loosening the purse strings, in emptying the pockets of men in order to fill the heavenly coffer. It was a kind of huge commercial establishment, of which the cures were the clerks; sly, crafty clerks, sharp as any one must be who does business for the good God at the expense of the country people.

He knew full well that the priests rendered services, great services to the poorest, to the sick and dying, that they assisted, consoled, counselled, sustained, but all this by means of money, in exchange for white pieces, for beautiful glittering coins, with which they paid for sacraments and masses, advice and protection, pardon of sins and indulgences, purgatory and paradise according to the yearly income and the generosity of the sinner.

The Abbe Raffin, who knew his man and who never lost his temper, burst out laughing.

“Well, yes, I’ll tell your father my little story; but you, my lad, you’ll come to church.”

Houlbreque extended his hand in order to give a solemn assurance:

“On the word of a poor man, if you do this for me, I promise that I will.”

“Come, that’s all right. When do you wish me to go and find your father?”

“Why, the sooner the better-to-night, if you can.”

“In half an hour, then, after supper.”

“In half an hour.”

“That’s understood. So long, my lad.”

“Good-by till we meet again, Monsieur le Cure; many thanks.”

“Not at all, my lad.”

And Cesaire Houlbreque returned home, his heart relieved of a great weight.

He held on lease a little farm, quite small, for they were not rich, his father and he. Alone with a female servant, a little girl of fifteen, who made the soup, looked after the fowls, milked the cows and churned the butter, they lived frugally, though Cesaire was a good cultivator. But they did not possess either sufficient lands or sufficient cattle to earn more than the indispensable.

The old man no longer worked. Sad, like all deaf people, crippled with pains, bent double, twisted, he went through the fields leaning on his stick, watching the animals and the men with a hard, distrustful eye. Sometimes he sat down on the side of the road and remained there without moving for hours, vaguely pondering over the things that had engrossed his whole life, the price of eggs, and corn, the sun and the rain which spoil the crops or make them grow. And, worn out with rheumatism, his old limbs still drank in the humidity of the soul, as they had drunk in for the past sixty years, the moisture of the walls of his low house thatched with damp straw.

He came back at the close of the day, took his place at the end of the table in the kitchen and when the earthen bowl containing the soup had been placed before him he placed round it his crooked fingers, which seemed to have kept the round form of the bowl and, winter and summer, he warmed his hands, before commencing to eat, so as to lose nothing, not even a particle of the heat that came from the fire, which costs a great deal, neither one drop of soup into which fat and salt have to be put, nor one morsel of bread, which comes from the wheat.

Then he climbed up a ladder into a loft, where he had his straw-bed, while his son slept below stairs at the end of a kind of niche near the chimneypiece and the servant shut herself up in a kind of cellar, a black hole which was formerly used to store the potatoes.

Cesaire and his father scarcely ever talked to each other. From time to time only, when there was a question of selling a crop or buying a calf, the young man would ask his father’s advice, and, making a speaking-trumpet of his two hands, he would bawl out his views into his ear, and old Amable either approved of them or opposed them in a slow, hollow voice that came from the depths of his stomach.

So one evening Cesaire, approaching him as if about to discuss the purchase of a horse or a heifer, communicated to him at the top of his voice his intention to marry Celeste Levesque.

Then the father got angry. Why? On the score of morality? No, certainly. The virtue of a girl is of slight importance in the country. But his avarice, his deep, fierce instinct for saving, revolted at the idea that his son should bring up a child which he had not begotten himself. He had thought suddenly, in one second, of the soup the little fellow would swallow before becoming useful on the farm. He had calculated all the pounds of bread, all the pints of cider that this brat would consume up to his fourteenth year, and a mad anger broke loose from him against Cesaire, who had not bestowed a thought on all this.

He replied in an unusually strong voice:

"Have you lost your senses?"

Thereupon Cesaire began to enumerate his reasons, to speak about Celeste's good qualities, to prove that she would be worth a thousand times what the child would cost. But the old man doubted these advantages, while he could have no doubts as to the child's existence; and he replied with emphatic repetition, without giving any further explanation:

"I will not have it! I will not have it! As long as I live, this won't be done!" And at this point they had remained for the last three months without one or the other giving in, resuming at least once a week the same discussion, with the same arguments, the same words, the same gestures and the same fruitlessness.

It was then that Celeste had advised Cesaire to go and ask for the cure's assistance.

On arriving home the peasant found his father already seated at table, for he came late through his visit to the presbytery.

They dined in silence, face to face, ate a little bread and butter after the soup and drank a glass of cider. Then they remained motionless in their chairs, with scarcely a glimmer of light, the little servant girl having carried off the candle in order to wash the spoons, wipe the glasses and cut the crusts of bread to be ready for next morning's breakfast.

There was a knock, at the door, which was immediately opened, and the priest appeared. The old man raised toward him an anxious eye full of suspicion, and, foreseeing danger, he was getting ready to climb up his ladder when the Abbe Raffin laid his hand on his shoulder and shouted close to his temple:

"I want to have a talk with you, Father Amable."

Cesaire had disappeared, taking advantage of the door being open. He did not want to listen, for he was afraid and did not want his hopes to crumble slowly with each obstinate refusal of his father. He preferred to learn the truth at once, good or bad, later on; and he went out into the night. It was a moonless, starless night, one of those misty nights when the air seems thick with humidity. A vague odor of apples floated through the farmyard, for it was the season when the earliest applies were gathered, the "early ripe," as they are called in the cider country. As Cesaire passed along by the cattlesheds the warm smell of living beasts asleep on manure was exhaled through the narrow windows, and he heard the stamping of the horses, who were standing at the end of the stable, and the sound of their jaws tearing and munching the hay on the racks.

He went straight ahead, thinking about Celeste. In this simple nature, whose ideas were scarcely more than images generated directly by objects, thoughts of love only formulated themselves by calling up before the mind the picture of a big red-haired girl standing in a hollow road and laughing, with her hands on her hips.

It was thus he saw her on the day when he first took a fancy for her. He had, however, known her from infancy, but never had he been so struck by her as on that morning. They had stopped to talk for a few minutes and then he went away, and as he walked along he kept repeating:

"Faith, she's a fine girl, all the same. 'Tis a pity she made a slip with Victor."

Till evening he kept thinking of her and also on the following morning.

When he saw her again he felt something tickling the end of his throat, as if a cock's feather had been driven through his mouth into his chest, and since then, every time he found himself near her, he was astonished at this nervous tickling which always commenced again.

In three months he made up his mind to marry her, so much did she please him. He could not have said whence came this power over him, but he explained it in these words:

"I am possessed by her," as if the desire for this girl within him were as dominating as one of the powers of hell. He scarcely bothered himself about her transgression. It was a pity, but, after all, it did her no harm, and he bore no grudge against Victor Lecoq.

But if the cure should not succeed, what was he to do? He did not dare to think of it, the anxiety was such a torture to him.

He reached the presbytery and seated himself near the little gateway to wait for the priest's return.

He was there perhaps half an hour when he heard steps on the road, and although the night was very dark, he presently distinguished the still darker shadow of the cassock.

He rose up, his legs giving way under him, not even venturing to speak, not daring to ask a question.

The clergyman perceived him and said gaily:

"Well, my lad, it's all right."

Cesaire stammered:

"All right, 'tisn't possible."

"Yes, my lad, but not without trouble. What an old ass your father is!"

The peasant repeated:

"'Tisn't possible!"

"Why, yes. Come and look me up to-morrow at midday in order to settle about the publication of the banns."

The young man seized the cure's hand. He pressed it, shook it, bruised it as he stammered:

"True-true-true, Monsieur le Cure, on the word of an honest man, you'll see me to-morrow-at your sermon."

PART II

The wedding took place in the middle of December. It was simple, the bridal pair not being rich. Cesaire, attired in new clothes, was ready since eight o'clock in the morning to go and fetch his betrothed and bring her to the mayor's office, but it was too early. He seated himself before the kitchen table and waited for the members of the family and the friends who were to accompany him.

For the last eight days it had been snowing, and the brown earth, the earth already fertilized by the autumn sowing, had become a dead white, sleeping under a great sheet of ice.

It was cold in the thatched houses adorned with white caps, and the round apples in the trees of the enclosures seemed to be flowering, covered with white as they had been in the pleasant month of their blossoming.

This day the big clouds to the north, the big great snow clouds, had disappeared and the blue sky showed itself above the white earth on which the rising sun cast silvery reflections.

Cesaire looked straight before him through the window, thinking of nothing, quite happy.

The door opened, two women entered, peasant women in their Sunday clothes, the aunt and the cousin of the bridegroom; then three men, his cousins; then a woman who was a neighbor. They sat down on chairs and remained, motionless and silent, the women on one side of the kitchen, the men on the other, suddenly seized with timidity, with that embarrassed sadness which takes possession of people assembled for a ceremony. One of the cousins soon asked:

“Is it not the hour?”

Cesaire replied:

“I am much afraid it is.”

“Come on! Let us start,” said another.

Those rose up. Then Cesaire, whom a feeling of uneasiness had taken possession of, climbed up the ladder of the loft to see whether his father was ready. The old man, always as a rule an early riser, had not yet made his appearance. His son found him on his bed of straw, wrapped up in his blanket, with his eyes open and a malicious gleam in them.

He bawled into his ear: “Come, daddy, get up. It’s time for the wedding.”

The deaf man murmured-in a doleful tone:

“I can’t get up. I have a sort of chill over me that freezes my back. I can’t stir.”

The young man, dumbfounded, stared at him, guessing that this was a dodge.

“Come, daddy; you must make an effort.”

“I can’t do it.”

“Look here! I’ll help you.”

And he stooped toward the old man, pulled off his blanket, caught him by the arm and lifted him up. But old Amable began to whine, “Ooh! ooh! ooh! What suffering! Ooh! I can’t. My back is stiffened up. The cold wind must have rushed in through this cursed roof.”

“Well, you’ll get no dinner, as I’m having a spread at Polyte’s inn. This will teach you what comes of acting mulishly.”

And he hurried down the ladder and started out, accompanied by his relatives and guests.

The men had turned up the bottoms of their trousers so as not to get them wet in the snow. The women held up their petticoats and showed their lean ankles with gray woollen stockings and their bony shanks resembling broomsticks. And they all moved forward with a swinging gait, one behind the other, without uttering a word, moving cautiously, for fear of losing the road which was-hidden beneath the flat, uniform, uninterrupted stretch of snow.

As they approached the farmhouses they saw one or two persons waiting to join them, and the procession went on without stopping and wound its way forward, following the invisible outlines of the road, so that it resembled a living chaplet of black beads undulating through the white countryside.

In front of the bride's door a large group was stamping up and down the open space awaiting the bridegroom. When he appeared they gave him a loud greeting, and presently Celeste came forth from her room, clad in a blue dress, her shoulders covered with a small red shawl and her head adorned with orange flowers.

But every one asked Cesaire:

"Where's your father?"

He replied with embarrassment:

"He couldn't move on account of the pains."

And the farmers tossed their heads with a sly, incredulous air.

They directed their steps toward the mayor's office. Behind the pair about to be wedded a peasant woman carried Victor's child, as if it were going to be baptized; and the risen, in pairs now, with arms linked, walked through the snow with the movements of a sloop at sea.

After having been united by the mayor in the little municipal house the pair were made one by the cure, in his turn, in the modest house of God. He blessed their union by promising them fruitfulness, then he preached to them on the matrimonial virtues, the simple and healthful virtues of the country, work, concord and fidelity, while the child, who was cold, began to fret behind the bride.

As soon as the couple reappeared on the threshold of the church shots were discharged from the ditch of the cemetery. Only the barrels of the guns could be seen whence came forth rapid jets of smoke; then a head could be seen gazing at the procession. It was Victor Lecoq celebrating the marriage of his old sweetheart, wishing her happiness and sending her his good wishes with explosions of powder. He had employed some friends of his, five or six laboring men, for these salvos of musketry. It was considered a nice attention.

The repast was given in Polyte Cacheprune's inn. Twenty covers were laid in the great hall where people dined on market days, and the big leg of mutton turning before the spit, the fowls browned under their own gravy, the chitterlings sputtering over the bright, clear fire filled the house with a thick odor of live coal sprinkled with fat — the powerful, heavy odor of rustic fare.

They sat down to table at midday and the soup was poured at once into the plates. All faces had already brightened up; mouths opened to utter loud jokes and eyes were laughing with knowing winks. They were going to amuse themselves and no mistake.

The door opened, and old Amable appeared. He seemed in a bad humor and his face wore a scowl as he dragged himself forward on his sticks, whining at every step to indicate his suffering. As soon as they saw him they stopped talking, but suddenly his neighbor, Daddy Malivoire, a big joker, who knew all the little tricks and ways of people, began to yell, just as Cesaire used to do, by making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

"Hallo, my cute old boy, you have a good nose on you to be able to smell Polyte's cookery from your own house!"

A roar of laughter burst forth from the throats of those present. Malivoire, excited by his success, went on:

"There's nothing for the rheumatics like a chitterling poultice! It keeps your belly warm, along with a glass of three-six!"

The men uttered shouts, banged the table with their fists, laughed, bending on one side and raising up their bodies again as if they were working a pump. The women clucked like hens, while the servants wriggled, standing against the walls. Old Amable was the only one that did not laugh, and, without making any reply, waited till they made room for him.

They found a place for him in the middle of the table, facing his daughter-in-law, and, as soon as he was seated, he began to eat. It was his son who was paying, after all; it was right he should take his share. With each ladleful of soup that went into his stomach, with each mouthful of bread or meat crushed between his gums, with each glass of cider or wine that flowed through his gullet he thought he was regaining something of his own property, getting back a little of his money which all those gluttons were devouring, saving in fact a portion of his own means. And he ate in silence with the obstinacy of a miser who hides his coppers, with the same gloomy persistence with which he formerly performed his daily labors.

But all of a sudden he noticed at the end of the table Celeste's child on a woman's lap, and his eye remained fixed on the little boy. He went on eating, with his glance riveted on the youngster, into whose mouth the woman who minded him every now and then put a little morsel which he nibbled at. And the old man suffered more from the few mouthfuls sucked by this little chap than from all that the others swallowed.

The meal lasted till evening. Then every one went back home.

Cesaire raised up old Amable.

"Come, daddy, we must go home," said he.

And he put the old man's two sticks in his hands.

Celeste took her child in her arms, and they went on slowly through the pale night whitened by the snow. The deaf old man, three-fourths tipsy, and even more malicious under the influence of drink, refused to go forward. Several times he even sat down with the object of making his daughter-in-law catch cold, and he kept whining, without uttering a word, giving vent to a sort of continuous groaning as if he were in pain.

When they reached home he at once climbed up to his loft, while Cesaire made a bed for the child near the deep niche where he was going to lie down with his wife. But as the newly wedded pair could not sleep immediately, they heard the old man for a long time moving about on his bed of straw, and he even talked aloud several times, whether it was that he was dreaming or that he let his thoughts escape through his mouth, in spite of himself, not being able to keep them back, under the obsession of a fixed idea.

When he came down his ladder next morning he saw his daughter-in-law looking after the housekeeping.

She cried out to him:

"Come, daddy, hurry on! Here's some good soup."

And she placed at the end of the table the round black earthen bowl filled with steaming liquid. He sat down without giving any answer, seized the hot bowl, warmed his hands with it in his customary fashion, and, as it was very cold, even pressed it against his breast to try to make a little of the living heat of the boiling liquid enter into him, into his old body stiffened by so many winters.

Then he took his sticks and went out into the fields, covered with ice, till it was time for dinner, for he had seen Celeste's youngster still asleep in a big soap-box.

He did not take his place in the household. He lived in the thatched house, as in bygone days, but he seemed not to belong to it any longer, to be no longer interested in anything, to look upon those people, his son, the wife and the child as strangers whom he did not know, to whom he never spoke.

The winter glided by. It was long and severe.

Then the early spring made the seeds sprout forth again, and the peasants once more, like laborious ants, passed their days in the fields, toiling from morning till night, under the wind and under the rain, along the furrows of brown earth which brought forth the bread of men.

The year promised well for the newly married pair. The crops grew thick and strong. There were no late frosts, and the apples bursting into bloom scattered on the grass their rosy white snow which promised a hail of fruit for the autumn.

Cesaire toiled hard, rose early and left off work late, in order to save the expense of a hired man.

His wife said to him sometimes:

"You'll make yourself ill in the long run."

He replied:

"Certainly not. I'm a good judge."

Nevertheless one evening he came home so fatigued that he had to get to bed without supper. He rose up next morning at the usual hour, but he could not eat, in spite of his fast on the previous night, and he had to come back to the house in the middle of the afternoon in order to go to bed again. In the course of the night he began to cough; he turned round on his straw couch, feverish, with his forehead burning, his tongue dry and his throat parched by a burning thirst.

However, at daybreak he went toward his grounds, but next morning the doctor had to be sent for and pronounced him very ill with inflammation of the lungs.

And he no longer left the dark recess in which he slept. He could be heard coughing, gasping and tossing about in this hole. In order to see him, to give his medicine and to apply cupping-glasses they had to-bring a candle to the entrance. Then one could see his narrow head with his long matted beard underneath a thick lacework of spiders' webs, which hung and floated when stirred by the air. And the hands of the sick man seemed dead under the dingy sheets.

Celeste watched him with restless activity, made him take physic, applied blisters to him, went back and forth in the house, while old Amable remained at the edge of his loft, watching at a distance the gloomy cavern where his son lay dying. He did not come near him, through hatred of the wife, sulking like an ill-tempered dog.

Six more days passed, then one morning, as Celeste, who now slept on the ground on two loose bundles of straw, was going to see whether her man was better, she no longer heard his rapid breathing from the interior of his recess. Terror stricken, she asked:

"Well Cesaire, what sort of a night had you?"

He did not answer. She put out her hand to touch him, and the flesh on his face felt cold as ice. She uttered a great cry, the long cry of a woman overpowered with fright. He was dead.

At this cry the deaf old man appeared at the top of his ladder, and when he saw Celeste rushing to call for help, he quickly descended, placed his hand on his son's face, and suddenly realizing what had happened, went to shut the door from the inside, to prevent the wife from re-entering and resuming possession of the dwelling, since his son was no longer living.

Then he sat down on a chair by the dead man's side.

Some of the neighbors arrived, called out and knocked. He did not hear them. One of them broke the glass of the window and jumped into the room. Others followed. The door was opened again and Celeste reappeared, all in tears, with swollen face and bloodshot eyes. Then old Amable, vanquished, without uttering a word, climbed back to his loft.

The funeral took place next morning. Then, after the ceremony, the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law found themselves alone in the farmhouse with the child.

It was the usual dinner hour. She lighted the fire, made some soup and placed the plates on the table, while the old man sat on the chair waiting without appearing to look at her. When the meal was ready she bawled in his ear —

"Come, daddy, you must eat." He rose up, took his seat at the end of the table, emptied his soup bowl, masticated his bread and butter, drank his two glasses of cider and then took himself off.

It was one of those warm days, one of those enjoyable days when life ferments, pulsates, blooms all over the surface of the soil.

Old Amable pursued a little path across the fields. He looked at the young wheat and the young oats, thinking that his son was now under the earth, his poor boy! He walked along wearily, dragging his legs after him in a limping fashion. And, as he was all alone in the plain, all alone under the blue sky, in the midst of the growing crops, all alone with the larks which he saw hovering above his head, without hearing their light song, he began to weep as he proceeded on his way.

Then he sat down beside a pond and remained there till evening, gazing at the little birds that came there to drink. Then, as the night was falling, he returned to the house, supped without saying a word and climbed up to his loft. And his life went on as in the past. Nothing was changed, except that his son Cesaire slept in the cemetery.

What could he, an old man, do? He could work no longer; he was now good for nothing except to swallow the soup prepared by his daughter-in-law. And he ate it in silence, morning and evening, watching with an eye of rage the little boy also taking soup, right opposite him, at the other side of the table. Then he would go out, prowl about the fields after the fashion of a vagabond, hiding behind the barns where he would sleep for an hour or two as if he were afraid of being seen and then come back at the approach of night.

But Celeste's mind began to be occupied by graver anxieties. The farm needed a man to look after it and cultivate it. Somebody should be there always to go through the fields, not a mere hired laborer, but a regular farmer, a master who understood the business and would take an interest in the farm. A lone woman could not manage the farming, watch the price of corn and direct the sale and purchase of cattle. Then ideas came into her head, simple practical ideas, which she had turned over in her head at night. She could not marry again before the end of the year, and it was necessary at once to take care of pressing interests, immediate interests.

Only one man could help her out of her difficulties, Victor Lecoq, the father of her child. He was strong and understood farming; with a little money in his pocket he would make an excellent cultivator. She was aware of his skill, having known him while he was working on her parents' farm.

So one morning, seeing him passing along the road with a cart of manure, she went out to meet him. When he perceived her, he drew up his horses and she said to him as if she had met him the night before:

"Good-morrow, Victor — are you quite well, the same as ever?"

He replied:

"I'm quite well, the same as ever — and how are you?"

"Oh, I'd be all right, only that I'm alone in the house, which bothers me on account of the farm."

Then they remained chatting for a long time, leaning against the wheel of the heavy cart. The man every now and then lifted up his cap to scratch his forehead and began thinking, while she, with flushed cheeks, went on talking warmly, told him about her views, her plans; her projects for the future. At last he said in a low tone:

"Yes, it can be done."

She opened her hand like a countryman clinching a bargain and asked:

"Is it agreed?"

He pressed her outstretched hand.

"'Tis agreed."

"It's settled, then, for next Sunday?"

"It's settled for next Sunday"

"Well, good-morning, Victor."

"Good-morning, Madame Houlbreque."

PART III

This particular Sunday was the day of the village festival, the annual festival in honor of the patron saint, which in Normandy is called the assembly.

For the last eight days quaint-looking vehicles in which live the families of strolling fair exhibitors, lottery managers, keepers of shooting galleries and other forms of amusement or exhibitors of curiosities whom the peasants call "wonder-makers" could be seen coming along the roads drawn slowly by gray or sorrel horses.

The dirty wagons with their floating curtains, accompanied by a melancholy-looking dog, who trotted, with his head down, between the wheels, drew up one after the other on the green in front of the town hall. Then a tent was erected in front of each ambulant abode, and inside this tent could be seen, through the holes in the canvas, glittering things which excited the envy or the curiosity of the village youngsters.

As soon as the morning of the fete arrived all the booths were opened, displaying their splendors of glass or porcelain, and the peasants on their way to mass looked with genuine satisfaction at these modest shops which they saw again, nevertheless, each succeeding year.

Early in the afternoon there was a crowd on the green. From every neighboring village the farmers arrived, shaken along with their wives and children in the two-wheeled open chars-a-bancs, which rattled along, swaying like cradles. They unharnessed at their friends' houses and the farmyards were filled with strange-looking traps, gray, high, lean, crooked, like long-clawed creatures from the depths of the sea. And each family, with the youngsters in front and the grown-up ones behind, came to the assembly with tranquil steps, smiling countenances and open hands, big hands, red and bony, accustomed to work and apparently tired of their temporary rest.

A clown was blowing a trumpet. The barrel-organ accompanying the carrousel sent through the air its shrill jerky notes. The lottery-wheel made a whirring sound like that of cloth tearing, and every moment the crack of the rifle could be heard. And the slow-moving throng passed on quietly in front of the booths resembling paste in a fluid condition, with the motions of a flock of sheep and the awkwardness of heavy animals who had escaped by chance.

The girls, holding one another's arms in groups of six or eight, were singing; the youths followed them, making jokes, with their caps over their ears and their blouses stiffened with starch, swollen out like blue balloons.

The whole countryside was there — masters, laboring men and women servants.

Old Amable himself, wearing his old-fashioned green frock coat, had wished to see the assembly, for he never failed to attend on such an occasion.

He looked at the lotteries, stopped in front of the shooting galleries to criticize the shots and interested himself specially in a very simple game which consisted in throwing a big wooden ball into the open mouth of a mannikin carved and painted on a board.

Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Daddy Malivoire, who exclaimed:

"Ha, daddy! Come and have a glass of brandy."

And they sat down at the table of an open-air restaurant.

They drank one glass of brandy, then two, then three, and old Amable once more began wandering through the assembly. His thoughts became slightly confused, he smiled without knowing why, he smiled in front of the lotteries, in front of the wooden horses and especially in front of the killing game. He remained there a long time, filled with delight, when he saw a holiday-maker knocking down the gendarme or the cure, two authorities whom he instinctively distrusted. Then he went back to the inn and drank a glass of cider to cool himself. It was late, night came on. A neighbor came to warn him:

"You'll get back home late for the stew, daddy."

Then he set out on his way to the farmhouse. A soft shadow, the warm shadow of a spring night, was slowly descending on the earth.

When he reached the front door he thought he saw through the window which was lighted up two persons in the house. He stopped, much surprised, then he went in, and he saw Victor Lecoq seated at the table, with a plate filled with potatoes before him, taking his supper in the very same place where his son had sat.

And he turned round suddenly as if he wanted to go away. The night was very dark now. Celeste started up and shouted at him:

"Come quick, daddy! Here's some good stew to finish off the assembly with."

He complied through inertia and sat down, watching in turn the man, the woman and the child. Then he began to eat quietly as on ordinary days.

Victor Lecoq seemed quite at home, talked from time to time to Celeste, took up the child in his lap and kissed him. And Celeste again served him with food, poured out drink for him and appeared happy while speaking to him. Old Amable's eyes followed them attentively, though he could not hear what they were saying.

When he had finished supper (and he had scarcely eaten anything, there was such a weight at his heart) he rose up, and instead of ascending to his loft as he did every night he opened the gate of the yard and went out into the open air.

When he had gone, Celeste, a little uneasy, asked:

"What is he going to do?"

Victor replied in an indifferent tone:

"Don't bother yourself. He'll come back when he's tired."

Then she saw after the house, washed the plates and wiped the table, while the man quietly took off his clothes. Then he slipped into the dark and hollow bed in which she had slept with Cesaire.

The yard gate opened and old Amable again appeared. As soon as he entered the house he looked round on every side with the air of an old dog on the scent. He was in search of Victor Lecoq. As he did not see him, he took the candle off the table and approached the dark niche in which his son had died. In the interior of it he perceived the man lying under the bed clothes and already asleep. Then the deaf man noiselessly turned round, put back the candle and went out into the yard.

Celeste had finished her work. She put her son into his bed, arranged everything and waited for her father-in-law's return before lying down herself.

She remained sitting on a chair, without moving her hands and with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

As he did not come back, she murmured in a tone of impatience and annoyance:

"This good-for-nothing old man will make us burn four sous' worth of candles."

Victor answered from under the bed clothes:

"It's over an hour since he went out. We ought to see whether he fell asleep on the bench outside the door."

"I'll go and see," she said.

She rose up, took the light and went out, shading the light with her hand in order to see through the darkness.

She saw nothing in front of the door, nothing on the bench, nothing on the dung heap, where the old man used sometimes to sit in hot weather.

But, just as she was on the point of going in again, she chanced to raise her eyes toward the big apple tree, which sheltered the entrance to the farmyard, and suddenly she saw two feet — two feet at the height of her face belonging to a man who was hanging.

She uttered terrible cries:

"Victor! Victor! Victor!"

He ran out in his shirt. She could not utter another word, and turning aside her head so as not to see, she pointed toward the tree with her outstretched arm.

Not understanding what she meant, he took the candle in order to find out, and in the midst of the foliage lit up from below he saw old Amable hanging high up with a stable-halter round his neck.

A ladder was leaning against the trunk of the apple tree.

Victor ran to fetch a bill-hook, climbed up the tree and cut the halter. But the old man was already cold and his tongue protruded horribly with a frightful grimace.

THE CHRISTENING

"Well doctor, a little brandy?"

"With pleasure."

The old ship's surgeon, holding out his glass, watched it as it slowly filled with the golden liquid. Then, holding it in front of his eyes, he let the light from the lamp stream through it, smelled it, tasted a few drops and smacked his lips with relish. Then he said:

"Ah! the charming poison! Or rather the seductive murderer, the delightful destroyer of peoples!

"You people do not know it the way I do. You may have read that admirable book entitled L'Assommoir, but you have not, as I have, seen alcohol exterminate a whole tribe of savages, a little kingdom of negroes — alcohol calmly unloaded by the barrel by red-bearded English seamen.

"Right near here, in a little village in Brittany near Pont-l'Abbe, I once witnessed a strange and terrible tragedy caused by alcohol. I was spending my vacation in a little country house left me by my father. You know this flat coast where the wind whistles day and night, where one sees, standing or prone, these giant rocks which in the olden times were regarded as guardians, and which still retain something majestic and imposing about them. I always expect to see them come to life and start to walk across the country with the slow and ponderous tread of giants, or to unfold enormous granite wings and fly toward the paradise of the Druids.

"Everywhere is the sea, always ready on the slightest provocation to rise in its anger and shake its foamy mane at those bold enough to brave its wrath.

"And the men who travel on this terrible sea, which, with one motion of its green back, can overturn and swallow up their frail barks — they go out in the little boats, day and night, hardy, weary and drunk. They are often drunk. They have a saying which says: ‘When the bottle is full you see the reef, but when it is empty you see it no more.’

“Go into one of their huts; you will never find the father there. If you ask the woman what has become of her husband, she will stretch her arms out over the dark ocean which rumbles and roars along the coast. He remained, there one night, when he had had too much to drink; so did her oldest son. She has four more big, strong, fair-haired boys. Soon it will be their time.

“As I said, I was living in a little house near Pont-l’Abbe. I was there alone with my servant, an old sailor, and with a native family which took care of the grounds in my absence. It consisted of three persons, two sisters and a man, who had married one of them, and who attended to the garden.

“A short time before Christmas my gardener’s wife presented him with a boy. The husband asked me to stand as god-father. I could hardly deny the request, and so he borrowed ten francs from me for the cost of the christening, as he said.

“The second day of January was chosen as the date of the ceremony. For a week the earth had been covered by an enormous white carpet of snow, which made this flat, low country seem vast and limitless. The ocean appeared to be black in contrast with this white plain; one could see it rolling, raging and tossing its waves as though wishing to annihilate its pale neighbor, which appeared to be dead, it was so calm, quiet and cold.

“At nine o’clock the father, Kerandec, came to my door with his sister-in-law, the big Kermagan, and the nurse, who carried the infant wrapped up in a blanket. We started for the church. The weather was so cold that it seemed to dry up the skin and crack it open. I was thinking of the poor little creature who was being carried on ahead of us, and I said to myself that this Breton race must surely be of iron, if their children were able, as soon as they were born, to stand such an outing.

“We came to the church, but the door was closed; the priest was late.

“Then the nurse sat down on one of the steps and began to undress the child. At first I thought there must have been some slight accident, but I saw that they were leaving the poor little fellow naked completely naked, in the icy air. Furious at such imprudence, I protested:

“‘Why, you are crazy! You will kill the child!’

“The woman answered quietly: ‘Oh, no, sir; he must wait naked before the Lord.’

“The father and the aunt looked on undisturbed. It was the custom. If it were not adhered to misfortune was sure to attend the little one.

“I scolded, threatened and pleaded. I used force to try to cover the frail creature. All was in vain. The nurse ran away from me through the snow, and the body of the little one turned purple. I was about to leave these brutes when I saw the priest coming across the country, followed. by the sexton and a young boy. I ran towards him and gave vent to my indignation. He showed no surprise nor did he quicken his pace in the least. He answered:

“‘What can you expect, sir? It’s the custom. They all do it, and it’s of no use trying to stop them.’

“‘But at least hurry up!’ I cried.

“He answered: ‘But I can’t go any faster.’

“He entered the vestry, while we remained outside on the church steps. I was suffering. But what about the poor little creature who was howling from the effects of the biting cold.

“At last the door opened. He went into the church. But the poor child had to remain naked throughout the ceremony. It was interminable. The priest stammered over the Latin words and mispronounced them horribly. He walked slowly and with a ponderous tread. His white surplice chilled my heart. It seemed as though, in the name of a pitiless and barbarous god, he had wrapped himself in another kind of snow in order to torture this little piece of humanity that suffered so from the cold.

“Finally the christening was finished according to the rites and I saw the nurse once more take the frozen, moaning child and wrap it up in the blanket.

“The priest said to me: ‘Do you wish to sign the register?’

“Turning to my gardener, I said: ‘Hurry up and get home quickly so that you can warm that child.’ I gave him some advice so as to ward off, if not too late, a bad attack of pneumonia. He promised to follow my instructions and left with his sister-in-law and the nurse. I followed the priest into the vestry, and when I had signed he demanded five francs for expenses.

“As I had already given the father ten francs, I refused to pay twice. The priest threatened to destroy the paper and to annul the ceremony. I, in turn, threatened him with the district attorney. The dispute was long, and I finally paid five francs.

“As soon as I reached home I went down to Kerandec’s to find out whether everything was all right. Neither father, nor sister-in-law, nor nurse had yet returned. The mother, who had remained alone, was in bed, shivering with cold and starving, for she had had nothing to eat since the day before.

“‘Where the deuce can they have gone?’ I asked. She answered without surprise or anger, ‘They’re going to drink something to celebrate: It was the custom. Then I thought, of my ten francs which were to pay the church and would doubtless pay for the alcohol.

“I sent some broth to the mother and ordered a good fire to be built in the room. I was uneasy and furious and promised myself to drive out these brutes, wondering with terror what was going to happen to the poor infant.

“It was already six, and they had not yet returned. I told my servant to wait for them and I went to bed. I soon fell asleep and slept like a top. At daybreak I was awakened by my servant, who was bringing me my hot water.

“As soon as my eyes were open I asked: ‘How about Kerandec?’

“The man hesitated and then stammered: ‘Oh! he came back, all right, after midnight, and so drunk that he couldn’t walk, and so were Kermagan and the nurse. I guess they must have slept in a ditch, for the little one died and they never even noticed it.’

“I jumped up out of bed, crying:

“‘What! The child is dead?’

“‘Yes, sir. They brought it back to Mother Kerandec. When she saw it she began to cry, and now they are making her drink to console her.’

“‘What’s that? They are making her drink!’

“‘Yes, sir. I only found it out this morning. As Kerandec had no more brandy or money, he took some wood alcohol, which monsieur gave him for the lamp, and all four of them are now drinking that. The mother is feeling pretty sick now.’

“I had hastily put on some clothes, and seizing a stick, with the intention of applying it to the backs of these human beasts, I hastened towards the gardener’s house.

“The mother was raving drunk beside the blue body of her dead baby. Kerandec, the nurse, and the Kermagan woman were snoring on the floor. I had to take care of the mother, who died towards noon.”

The old doctor was silent. He took up the brandy-bottle and poured out another glass. He held it up to the lamp, and the light streaming through it imparted to the liquid the amber color of molten topaz. With one gulp he swallowed the treacherous drink.

THE FARMER’S WIFE

Said the Baron Rene du Treilles to me:

“Will you come and open the hunting season with me at my farm at Marinville? I shall be delighted if you will, my dear boy. In the first place, I am all alone. It is rather a difficult ground to get at, and the place I live in is so primitive that I can invite only my most intimate friends.”

I accepted his invitation, and on Saturday we set off on the train going to Normandy. We alighted at a station called Almivare, and Baron Rene, pointing to a carryall drawn by a timid horse and driven by a big countryman with white hair, said:

“Here is our equipage, my dear boy.”

The driver extended his hand to his landlord, and the baron pressed it warmly, asking:

“Well, Maitre Lebrument, how are you?”

“Always the same, M’sieu le Baron.”

We jumped into this swinging hencoop perched on two enormous wheels, and the young horse, after a violent swerve, started into a gallop, pitching us into the air like balls. Every fall backward on the wooden bench gave me the most dreadful pain.

The peasant kept repeating in his calm, monotonous voice:

“There, there! All right all right, Moutard, all right!”

But Moutard scarcely heard, and kept capering along like a goat.

Our two dogs behind us, in the empty part of the hencoop, were standing up and sniffing the air of the plains, where they scented game.

The baron gazed with a sad eye into the distance at the vast Norman landscape, undulating and melancholy, like an immense English park, where the farmyards, surrounded by two or four rows of trees and full of dwarfed apple trees which hid the houses, gave a vista as far as the eye could see of forest trees, copses and shrubbery such as landscape gardeners look for in laying out the boundaries of princely estates.

And Rene du Treilles suddenly exclaimed:

"I love this soil; I have my very roots in it."

He was a pure Norman, tall and strong, with a slight paunch, and of the old race of adventurers who went to found kingdoms on the shores of every ocean. He was about fifty years of age, ten years less perhaps than the farmer who was driving us.

The latter was a lean peasant, all skin and bone, one of those men who live a hundred years.

After two hours' travelling over stony roads, across that green and monotonous plain, the vehicle entered one of those orchard farmyards and drew up before in old structure falling into decay, where an old maid-servant stood waiting beside a young fellow, who took charge of the horse.

We entered the farmhouse. The smoky kitchen was high and spacious. The copper utensils and the crockery shone in the reflection of the hearth. A cat lay asleep on a chair, a dog under the table. One perceived an odor of milk, apples, smoke, that indescribable smell peculiar to old farmhouses; the odor of the earth, of the walls, of furniture, the odor of spilled stale soup, of former wash-days and of former inhabitants, the smell of animals and of human beings combined, of things and of persons, the odor of time, and of things that have passed away.

I went out to have a look at the farmyard. It was very large, full of apple trees, dwarfed and crooked, and laden with fruit which fell on the grass around them. In this farmyard the Norman smell of apples was as strong as that of the bloom of orange trees on the shores of the south of France.

Four rows of beeches surrounded this inclosure. They were so tall that they seemed to touch the clouds at this hour of nightfall, and their summits, through which the night winds passed, swayed and sang a mournful, interminable song.

I reentered the house.

The baron was warming his feet at the fire, and was listening to the farmer's talk about country matters. He talked about marriages, births and deaths, then about the fall in the price of grain and the latest news about cattle. The "Veularde" (as he called a cow that had been bought at the fair of Veules) had calved in the middle of June. The cider had not been first-class last year. Apricots were almost disappearing from the country.

Then we had dinner. It was a good rustic meal, simple and abundant, long and tranquil. And while we were dining I noticed the special kind of friendly familiarity which had struck me from the start between the baron and the peasant.

Outside, the beeches continued sighing in the night wind, and our two dogs, shut up in a shed, were whining and howling in an uncanny fashion. The fire was dying out in the big fireplace. The maid-servant had gone to bed. Maitre Lebrument said in his turn:

"If you don't mind, M'sieu le Baron, I'm going to bed. I am not used to staying up late."

The baron extended his hand toward him and said: "Go, my friend," in so cordial a tone that I said, as soon as the man had disappeared:

"He is devoted to you, this farmer?"

"Better than that, my dear fellow! It is a drama, an old drama, simple and very sad, that attaches him to me. Here is the story:

"You know that my father was colonel in a cavalry regiment. His orderly was this young fellow, now an old man, the son of a farmer. When my father retired from the army he took this former soldier, then about forty; as his servant. I was at that time about thirty. We were living in our old chateau of Valrenne, near Caudebec-en-Caux.

"At this period my mother's chambermaid was one of the prettiest girls you could see, fair-haired, slender and sprightly in manner, a genuine soubrette of the old type that no longer exists. To-day these creatures spring up into hussies before their time. Paris, with the aid of the railways, attracts them, calls them, takes hold of them, as soon as they are budding into womanhood, these little sluts who in old times remained simple maid-servants. Every man passing by, as recruiting sergeants did formerly, looking for recruits, with conscripts, entices and ruins them — these foolish lassies — and we have now only the scum of the female sex for servant maids, all that is dull, nasty, common and ill-formed, too ugly, even for gallantry.

"Well, this girl was charming, and I often gave her a kiss in dark corners; nothing more, I swear to you! She was virtuous, besides; and I had some respect for my mother's house, which is more than can be said of the blackguards of the present day.

"Now, it happened that my man-servant, the ex-soldier, the old farmer you have just seen, fell madly in love with this girl, perfectly daft. The first thing we noticed was that he forgot everything, he paid no attention to anything.

“My father said incessantly:

“‘See here, Jean, what’s the matter with you? Are you ill?’

“He replied:

“‘No, no, M’sieu le Baron. There’s nothing the matter with me.’

“He grew thin; he broke glasses and let plates fall when waiting on the table. We thought he must have been attacked by some nervous affection, and sent for the doctor, who thought he could detect symptoms of spinal disease. Then my father, full of anxiety about his faithful man-servant, decided to place him in a private hospital. When the poor fellow heard of my father’s intentions he made a clean breast of it.

“‘M’sieu le Baron’

“‘Well, my boy?’

“‘You see, the thing I want is not physic.’

“‘Ha! what is it, then?’

“‘It’s marriage!’

“My father turned round and stared at him in astonishment.

“‘What’s that you say, eh?’

“‘It’s marriage.”

“‘Marriage! So, then, you jackass, you’re to love.’

“‘That’s how it is, M’sieu le Baron.’

“And my father began to laugh so immoderately that my mother called out through the wall of the next room:

“‘What in the world is the matter with you, Gontran?’

“He replied:

“‘Come here, Catherine.’

“And when she came in he told her, with tears in his eyes from sheer laughter, that his idiot of a servant-man was lovesick.

“But my mother, instead of laughing, was deeply affected.

“‘Who is it that you have fallen in love with, my poor fellow?’ she asked.

“He answered without hesitation:

“‘With Louise, Madame le Baronne.’

“My mother said with the utmost gravity: ‘We must try to arrange this matter the best way we can.’

“So Louise was sent for and questioned by my mother; and she said in reply that she knew all about Jean’s liking for her, that in fact Jean had spoken to her about it several times, but that she did not want him. She refused to say why.

"And two months elapsed during which my father and mother never ceased to urge this girl to marry Jean. As she declared she was not in love with any other man, she could not give any serious reason for her refusal. My father at last overcame her resistance by means of a big present of money, and started the pair of them on a farm — this very farm. I did not see them for three years, and then I learned that Louise had died of consumption. But my father and mother died, too, in their turn, and it was two years more before I found myself face to face with Jean.

"At last one autumn day about the end of October the idea came into my head to go hunting on this part of my estate, which my father had told me was full of game.

"So one evening, one wet evening, I arrived at this house. I was shocked to find my father's old servant with perfectly white hair, though he was not more than forty-five or forty-six years of age. I made him dine with me, at the very table where we are now sitting. It was raining hard. We could hear the rain battering at the roof, the walls, and the windows, flowing in a perfect deluge into the farmyard; and my dog was howling in the shed where the other dogs are howling to-night.

"All of a sudden, when the servant-maid had gone to bed, the man said in a timid voice:

"'M'sieu le Baron.'

"'What is it, my dear Jean?'

"'I have something to tell you.'

"'Tell it, my dear Jean.'

"'You remember Louise, my wife.'

"'Certainly, I remember her.'

"'Well, she left me a message for you.'

"'What was it?'

"'A — a — well, it was what you might call a confession.'

"'Ha — and what was it about?'

"'It was — it was — I'd rather, all the same, tell you nothing about it — but I must — I must. Well, it's this — it wasn't consumption she died of at all. It was grief — well, that's the long and short of it. As soon as she came to live here after we were married, she grew thin; she changed so that you wouldn't know her, M'sieu le Baron. She was just as I was before I married her, but it was just the opposite, just the opposite.

"'I sent for the doctor. He said it was her liver that was affected — he said it was what he called a "hepatic" complaint — I don't know these big words, M'sieu le Baron. Then I bought medicine for her, heaps on heaps of bottles that cost about three hundred francs. But she'd take none of them; she wouldn't have them; she said: "It's no use, my poor Jean; it wouldn't do me any good." I saw well that she had some hidden trouble; and then I found her one time crying, and I didn't know what to do, no, I didn't know what to do. I bought her caps, and dresses, and hair oil, and earrings. Nothing did her any good. And I saw that she was going to die. And so one night at the end of November, one snowy night, after she had been in bed the whole day, she told me to send for the cure. So I went for him. As soon as he came— '

"'Jean,' she said, 'I am going to make a confession to you. I owe it to you, Jean. I have never been false to you, never! never, before or after you married me. M'sieu le Cure is there, and can tell you so; he knows my soul. Well, listen, Jean. If I am dying, it is because I was not able to console myself for leaving the chateau, because I was too fond of the young Baron Monsieur Rene, too fond of him, mind you, Jean, there was no harm in it! This is the thing that's killing me. When I could see him no more I felt that I should die. If I could only have seen him, I might have lived, only seen him, nothing more. I wish you'd tell him some day, by and by, when I am no longer here. You will tell him, swear you, will, Jean — swear it — in the presence of M'sieu le Cure! It will console me to know that he will know it one day, that this was the cause of my death! Swear it!'

"'Well, I gave her my promise, M'sieu It Baron, and on the faith of an honest man I have kept my word.'

"And then he ceased speaking, his eyes filling with tears.

"Good God! my dear boy, you can't form any idea of the emotion that filled me when I heard this poor devil, whose wife I had killed without suspecting it, telling me this story on that wet night in this very kitchen.

"I exclaimed: 'Ah! my poor Jean! my poor Jean!'

"He murmured: 'Well, that's all, M'sieu le Baron. I could not help it, one way or the other — and now it's all over!'

"I caught his hand across the table, and I began to weep.

"He asked, 'Will you come and see her grave?' I nodded assent, for I couldn't speak. He rose, lighted a lantern, and we walked through the blinding rain by the light of the lantern.

“He opened a gate, and I saw some crosses of black wood.

“Suddenly he stopped before a marble slab and said: ‘There it is,’ and he flashed the lantern close to it so that I could read the inscription:

“‘TO LOUISE HORTENSE MARINET,
“‘Wife of Jean-Francois Lebrument, Farmer,
“‘SHE WAS A FAITHFUL WIFE. GOD REST HER SOUL.’

“We fell on our knees in the damp grass, he and I, with the lantern between us, and I saw the rain beating on the white marble slab. And I thought of the heart of her sleeping there in her grave. Ah! poor heart! poor heart! Since then I come here every year. And I don’t know why, but I feel as if I were guilty of some crime in the presence of this man who always looks as if he forgave me.”

THE DEVIL

The peasant and the doctor stood on opposite sides of the bed, beside the old, dying woman. She was calm and resigned and her mind quite clear as she looked at them and listened to their conversation. She was going to die, and she did not rebel at it, for her time was come, as she was ninety-two.

The July sun streamed in at the window and the open door and cast its hot flames on the uneven brown clay floor, which had been stamped down by four generations of clodhoppers. The smell of the fields came in also, driven by the sharp wind and parched by the noontide heat. The grass-hoppers chirped themselves hoarse, and filled the country with their shrill noise, which was like that of the wooden toys which are sold to children at fair time.

The doctor raised his voice and said: “Honore, you cannot leave your mother in this state; she may die at any moment.” And the peasant, in great distress, replied: “But I must get in my wheat, for it has been lying on the ground a long time, and the weather is just right for it; what do you say about it, mother?” And the dying old woman, still tormented by her Norman avariciousness, replied yes with her eyes and her forehead, and thus urged her son to get in his wheat, and to leave her to die alone.

But the doctor got angry, and, stamping his foot, he said: “You are no better than a brute, do you hear, and I will not allow you to do it, do you understand? And if you must get in your wheat today, go and fetch Rapet’s wife and make her look after your mother; I will have it, do you understand me? And if you do not obey me, I will let you die like a dog, when you are ill in your turn; do you hear?”

The peasant, a tall, thin fellow with slow movements, who was tormented by indecision, by his fear of the doctor and his fierce love of saving, hesitated, calculated, and stammered out: “How much does La Rapet charge for attending sick people?” “How should I know?” the doctor cried. “That depends upon how long she is needed. Settle it with her, by Heaven! But I want her to be here within an hour, do you hear?"

So the man decided. "I will go for her," he replied; "don't get angry, doctor." And the latter left, calling out as he went: "Be careful, be very careful, you know, for I do not joke when I am angry!" As soon as they were alone the peasant turned to his mother and said in a resigned voice: "I will go and fetch La Rapet, as the man will have it. Don't worry till I get back."

And he went out in his turn.

La Rapet, old was an old washerwoman, watched the dead and the dying of the neighborhood, and then, as soon as she had sewn her customers into that linen cloth from which they would emerge no more, she went and took up her iron to smooth out the linen of the living. Wrinkled like a last year's apple, spiteful, envious, avaricious with a phenomenal avarice, bent double, as if she had been broken in half across the loins by the constant motion of passing the iron over the linen, one might have said that she had a kind of abnormal and cynical love of a death struggle. She never spoke of anything but of the people she had seen die, of the various kinds of deaths at which she had been present, and she related with the greatest minuteness details which were always similar, just as a sportsman recounts his luck.

When Honore Bontemps entered her cottage, he found her preparing the starch for the collars of the women villagers, and he said: "Good-evening; I hope you are pretty well, Mother Rapet?"

She turned her head round to look at him, and said: "As usual, as usual, and you?" "Oh! as for me, I am as well as I could wish, but my mother is not well." "Your mother?" "Yes, my mother!" "What is the matter with her?" "She is going to turn up her toes, that's what's the matter with her!"

The old woman took her hands out of the water and asked with sudden sympathy: "Is she as bad as all that?" "The doctor says she will not last till morning." "Then she certainly is very bad!" Honore hesitated, for he wanted to make a few preparatory remarks before coming to his proposition; but as he could hit upon nothing, he made up his mind suddenly.

"How much will you ask to stay with her till the end? You know that I am not rich, and I can not even afford to keep a servant girl. It is just that which has brought my poor mother to this state — too much worry and fatigue!

She did the work of ten, in spite of her ninety-two years. You don't find any made of that stuff nowadays!"

La Rapet answered gravely: "There are two prices: Forty sous by day and three francs by night for the rich, and twenty sous by day and forty by night for the others. You shall pay me the twenty and forty." But the, peasant reflected, for he knew his mother well. He knew how tenacious of life, how vigorous and unyielding she was, and she might last another week, in spite of the doctor's opinion; and so he said resolutely: "No, I would rather you would fix a price for the whole time until the end. I will take my chance, one way or the other. The doctor says she will die very soon. If that happens, so much the better for you, and so much the worse for her, but if she holds out till to-morrow or longer, so much the better for her and so much the worse for you!"

The nurse looked at the man in astonishment, for she had never treated a death as a speculation, and she hesitated, tempted by the idea of the possible gain, but she suspected that he wanted to play her a trick. "I can say nothing until I have seen your mother," she replied.

"Then come with me and see her."

She washed her hands, and went with him immediately.

They did not speak on the road; she walked with short, hasty steps, while he strode on with his long legs, as if he were crossing a brook at every step.

The cows lying down in the fields, overcome by the heat, raised their heads heavily and lowed feebly at the two passers-by, as if to ask them for some green grass.

When they got near the house, Honore Bontemps murmured: "Suppose it is all over?" And his unconscious wish that it might be so showed itself in the sound of his voice.

But the old woman was not dead. She was lying on her back, on her wretched bed, her hands covered with a purple cotton counterpane, horribly thin, knotty hands, like the claws of strange animals, like crabs, half closed by rheumatism, fatigue and the work of nearly a century which she had accomplished.

La Rapet went up to the bed and looked at the dying woman, felt her pulse, tapped her on the chest, listened to her breathing, and asked her questions, so as to hear her speak; and then, having looked at her for some time, she went out of the room, followed by Honore. Her decided opinion was that the old woman would not last till night. He asked: "Well?" And the sick-nurse replied: “Well, she may last two days, perhaps three. You will have to give me six francs, everything included.”

“Six francs! six francs!” he shouted. “Are you out of your mind? I tell you she cannot last more than five or six hours!” And they disputed angrily for some time, but as the nurse said she must go home, as the time was going by, and as his wheat would not come to the farmyard of its own accord, he finally agreed to her terms.

“Very well, then, that is settled; six francs, including everything, until the corpse is taken out.”

And he went away, with long strides, to his wheat which was lying on the ground under the hot sun which ripens the grain, while the sick-nurse went in again to the house.

She had brought some work with her, for she worked without ceasing by the side of the dead and dying, sometimes for herself, sometimes for the family which employed her as seamstress and paid her rather more in that capacity. Suddenly, she asked: “Have you received the last sacraments, Mother Bontemps?”

The old peasant woman shook her head, and La Rapet, who was very devout, got up quickly:

“Good heavens, is it possible? I will go and fetch the cure”; and she rushed off to the parsonage so quickly that the urchins in the street thought some accident had happened, when they saw her running.

The priest came immediately in his surplice, preceded by a choir boy who rang a bell to announce the passage of the Host through the parched and quiet country. Some men who were working at a distance took off their large hats and remained motionless until the white vestment had disappeared behind some farm buildings; the women who were making up the sheaves stood up to make the sign of the cross; the frightened black hens ran away along the ditch until they reached a well-known hole, through which they suddenly disappeared, while a foal which was tied in a meadow took fright at the sight of the surplice and began to gallop round and round, kicking cut every now and then. The acolyte, in his red cassock, walked quickly, and the priest, with his head inclined toward one shoulder and his square biretta on his head, followed him, muttering some prayers; while last of all came La Rapet, bent almost double as if she wished to prostrate herself, as she walked with folded hands as they do in church.

Honore saw them pass in the distance, and he asked: “Where is our priest going?” His man, who was more intelligent, replied: “He is taking the sacrament to your mother, of course!”

The peasant was not surprised, and said: “That may be,” and went on with his work.

Mother Bontemps confessed, received absolution and communion, and the priest took his departure, leaving the two women alone in the suffocating room, while La Rapet began to look at the dying woman, and to ask herself whether it could last much longer.

The day was on the wane, and gusts of cooler air began to blow, causing a view of Epinal, which was fastened to the wall by two pins, to flap up and down; the scanty window curtains, which had formerly been white, but were now yellow and covered with fly-specks, looked as if they were going to fly off, as if they were struggling to get away, like the old woman’s soul.

Lying motionless, with her eyes open, she seemed to await with indifference that death which was so near and which yet delayed its coming. Her short breathing whistled in her constricted throat. It would stop altogether soon, and there would be one woman less in the world; no one would regret her.

At nightfall Honore returned, and when he went up to the bed and saw that his mother was still alive, he asked: “How is she?” just as he had done formerly when she had been ailing, and then he sent La Rapet away, saying to her: “To-morrow morning at five o’clock, without fail.” And she replied: “To-morrow, at five o’clock.”

She came at daybreak, and found Honore eating his soup, which he had made himself before going to work, and the sick-nurse asked him: “Well, is your mother dead?” “She is rather better, on the contrary,” he replied, with a sly look out of the corner of his eyes. And he went out.

La Rapet, seized with anxiety, went up to the dying woman, who remained in the same state, lethargic and impassive, with her eyes open and her hands clutching the counterpane. The nurse perceived that this might go on thus for two days, four days, eight days, and her avaricious mind was seized with fear, while she was furious at the sly fellow who had tricked her, and at the woman who would not die.

Nevertheless, she began to work, and waited, looking intently at the wrinkled face of Mother Bontemps. When Honore returned to breakfast he seemed quite satisfied and even in a bantering humor. He was decidedly getting in his wheat under very favorable circumstances.

La Rapet was becoming exasperated; every minute now seemed to her so much time and money stolen from her. She felt a mad inclination to take this old woman, this, headstrong old fool, this obstinate old wretch, and to stop that short, rapid breath, which was robbing her of her time and money, by squeezing her throat a little. But then she reflected on the danger of doing so, and other thoughts came into her head; so she went up to the bed and said: "Have you ever seen the Devil?" Mother Bontemps murmured: "No."

Then the sick-nurse began to talk and to tell her tales which were likely to terrify the weak mind of the dying woman. Some minutes before one dies the Devil appears, she said, to all who are in the death throes. He has a broom in his hand, a saucepan on his head, and he utters loud cries. When anybody sees him, all is over, and that person has only a few moments longer to live. She then enumerated all those to whom the Devil had appeared that year: Josephine Loisel, Eulalie Ratier, Sophie Padaknau, Seraphine Grospied.

Mother Bontemps, who had at last become disturbed in mind, moved about, wrung her hands, and tried to turn her head to look toward the end of the room. Suddenly La Rapet disappeared at the foot of the bed. She took a sheet out of the cupboard and wrapped herself up in it; she put the iron saucepan on her head, so that its three short bent feet rose up like horns, and she took a broom in her right hand and a tin pail in her left, which she threw up suddenly, so that it might fall to the ground noisily.

When it came down, it certainly made a terrible noise. Then, climbing upon a chair, the nurse lifted up the curtain which hung at the bottom of the bed, and showed herself, gesticulating and uttering shrill cries into the iron saucepan which covered her face, while she menaced the old peasant woman, who was nearly dead, with her broom.

Terrified, with an insane expression on her face, the dying woman made a superhuman effort to get up and escape; she even got her shoulders and chest out of bed; then she fell back with a deep sigh. All was over, and La Rapet calmly put everything back into its place; the broom into the corner by the cupboard the sheet inside it, the saucepan on the hearth, the pail on the floor, and the chair against the wall. Then, with professional movements, she closed the dead woman's large eyes, put a plate on the bed and poured some holy water into it, placing in it the twig of boxwood that had been nailed to the chest of drawers, and kneeling down, she fervently repeated the prayers for the dead, which she knew by heart, as a matter of business.

And when Honore returned in the evening he found her praying, and he calculated immediately that she had made twenty sows out of him, for she had only spent three days and one night there, which made five francs altogether, instead of the six which he owed her.

THE SNIPE

Old Baron des Ravots had for forty years been the champion sportsman of his province. But a stroke of paralysis had kept him in his chair for the last five or six years. He could now only shoot pigeons from the window of his drawing-room or from the top of his high doorsteps.

He spent his time in reading.

He was a good-natured business man, who had much of the literary spirit of a former century. He worshipped anecdotes, those little risque anecdotes, and also true stories of events that happened in his neighborhood. As soon as a friend came to see him he asked:

“Well, anything new?”

And he knew how to worm out information like an examining lawyer.

On sunny days he had his large reclining chair, similar to a bed, wheeled to the hall door. A man servant behind him held his guns, loaded them and handed them to his master. Another valet, hidden in the bushes, let fly a pigeon from time to time at irregular intervals, so that the baron should be unprepared and be always on the watch.

And from morning till night he fired at the birds, much annoyed if he were taken by surprise and laughing till he cried when the animal fell straight to the earth or, turned over in some comical and unexpected manner. He would turn to the man who was loading the gun and say, almost choking with laughter:

“Did that get him, Joseph? Did you see how he fell?” Joseph invariably replied:

“Oh, monsieur le baron never misses them.”

In autumn, when the shooting season opened, he invited his friends as he had done formerly, and loved to hear them firing in the distance. He counted the shots and was pleased when they followed each other rapidly. And in the evening he made each guest give a faithful account of his day. They remained three hours at table telling about their sport.

They were strange and improbable adventures in which the romancing spirit of the sportsmen delighted. Some of them were memorable stories and were repeated regularly. The story of a rabbit that little Vicomte de Bourril had missed in his vestibule convulsed them with laughter each year anew. Every five minutes a fresh speaker would say:

“I heard ‘birr! birr!’ and a magnificent covey rose at ten paces from me. I aimed. Pif! paf! and I saw a shower, a veritable shower of birds. There were seven of them!”

And they all went into raptures, amazed, but reciprocally credulous.

But there was an old custom in the house called “The Story of the Snipe.”

Whenever this queen of birds was in season the same ceremony took place at each dinner. As they worshipped this incomparable bird, each guest ate one every evening, but the heads were all left in the dish.

Then the baron, acting the part of a bishop, had a plate brought to him containing a little fat, and he carefully anointed the precious heads, holding them by the tip of their slender, needle-like beak. A lighted candle was placed beside him and everyone was silent in an anxiety of expectation.

Then he took one of the heads thus prepared, stuck a pin through it and stuck the pin on a cork, keeping the whole contrivance steady by means of little crossed sticks, and carefully placed this object on the neck of a bottle in the manner of a tourniquet.

All the guests counted simultaneously in a loud tone —

“One-two-three.”

And the baron with a fillip of the finger made this toy whirl round.

The guest to whom the long beak pointed when the head stopped became the possessor of all the heads, a feast fit for a king, which made his neighbors look askance.

He took them one by one and toasted them over the candle. The grease sputtered, the roasting flesh smoked and the lucky winner ate the head, holding it by the beak and uttering exclamations of enjoyment.

And at each head the diners, raising their glasses, drank to his health.

When he had finished the last head he was obliged, at the baron’s orders, to tell an anecdote to compensate the disappointed ones.

Here are some of the stories.

THE WILL

I knew that tall young fellow, Rene de Bourneval. He was an agreeable man, though rather melancholy and seemed prejudiced against everything, was very skeptical, and he could with a word tear down social hypocrisy. He would often say:

"There are no honorable men, or, at least, they are only relatively so when compared with those lower than themselves."

He had two brothers, whom he never saw, the Messieurs de Courcils. I always supposed they were by another father, on account of the difference in the name. I had frequently heard that the family had a strange history, but did not know the details. As I took a great liking to Rene we soon became intimate friends, and one evening, when I had been dining with him alone, I asked him, by chance: "Are you a son of the first or second marriage?" He grew rather pale, and then flushed, and did not speak for a few moments; he was visibly embarrassed. Then he smiled in the melancholy, gentle manner, which was peculiar to him, and said:

"My dear friend, if it will not weary you, I can give you some very strange particulars about my life. I know that you are a sensible man, so I do not fear that our friendship will suffer by my I revelations; and should it suffer, I should not care about having you for my friend any longer.

"My mother, Madame de Courcils, was a poor little, timid woman, whom her husband had married for the sake of her fortune, and her whole life was one of martyrdom. Of a loving, timid, sensitive disposition, she was constantly being ill-treated by the man who ought to have been my father, one of those boors called country gentlemen. A month after their marriage he was living a licentious life and carrying on liaisons with the wives and daughters of his tenants. This did not prevent him from having three children by his wife, that is, if you count me in. My mother said nothing, and lived in that noisy house like a little mouse. Set aside, unnoticed, nervous, she looked at people with her bright, uneasy, restless eyes, the eyes of some terrified creature which can never shake off its fear. And yet she was pretty, very pretty and fair, a pale blonde, as if her hair had lost its color through her constant fear.

"Among the friends of Monsieur de Courcils who constantly came to her chateau, there was an ex-cavalry officer, a widower, a man who was feared, who was at the same time tender and violent, capable of the most determined resolves, Monsieur de Bourneval, whose name I bear. He was a tall, thin man, with a heavy black mustache. I am very like him. He was a man who had read a great deal, and his ideas were not like those of most of his class. His great-grandmother had been a friend of J. J. Rousseau's, and one might have said that he had inherited something of this ancestral connection. He knew the Contrat Social, and the Nouvelle Heloise by heart, and all those philosophical books which prepared in advance the overthrow of our old usages, prejudices, superannuated laws and imbecile morality.

"It seems that he loved my mother, and she loved him, but their liaison was carried on so secretly that no one guessed at its existence. The poor, neglected, unhappy woman must have clung to him in despair, and in her intimacy with him must have imbibed all his ways of thinking, theories of free thought, audacious ideas of independent love; but being so timid she never ventured to speak out, and it was all driven back, condensed, shut up in her heart.

"My two brothers were very hard towards her, like their father, and never gave her a caress, and, accustomed to seeing her count for nothing in the house, they treated her rather like a servant. I was the only one of her sons who really loved her and whom she loved.

"When she died I was seventeen, and I must add, in order that you may understand what follows, that a lawsuit between my father and mother had been decided in my mother's favor, giving her the bulk of the property, and, thanks to the tricks of the law, and the intelligent devotion of a lawyer to her interests, the right to make her will in favor of whom she pleased.

"We were told that there was a will at the lawyer's office and were invited to be present at the reading of it. I can remember it, as if it were yesterday. It was an imposing scene, dramatic, burlesque and surprising, occasioned by the posthumous revolt of that dead woman, by the cry for liberty, by the demands of that martyred one who had been crushed by our oppression during her lifetime and who, from her closed tomb, uttered a despairing appeal for independence.

"The man who believed he was my father, a stout, ruddy-faced man, who looked like a butcher, and my brothers, two great fellows of twenty and twenty-two, were waiting quietly in their chairs. Monsieur de Bourneval, who had been invited to be present, came in and stood behind me. He was very pale and bit his mustache, which was turning gray. No doubt he was prepared for what was going to happen. The lawyer double-locked the door and began to read the will, after having opened, in our presence, the envelope, sealed with red wax, of the contents of which he was ignorant."

My friend stopped talking abruptly, and rising, took from his writing-table an old paper, unfolded it, kissed it and then continued: "This is the will of my beloved mother:

> "'I, the undersigned, Anne Catherine-Genevieve-Mathilde de Croixluce, the legitimate wife of Leopold-Joseph Gontran de Councils sound in body and mind, here express my last wishes.
>
> "I first of all ask God, and then my dear son Rene to pardon me for the act I am about to commit. I believe that my child's heart is great enough to understand me, and to forgive me. I have suffered my whole life long. I was married out of calculation, then despised, misunderstood, oppressed and constantly deceived by my husband.
>
> "'I forgive him, but I owe him nothing.
>
> "'My elder sons never loved me, never petted me, scarcely treated me as a mother, but during my whole life I did my duty towards them, and I owe them nothing more after my death. The ties of blood cannot exist without daily and constant affection. An ungrateful son is less than, a stranger; he is a culprit, for he has no right to be indifferent towards his mother.
>
> "'I have always trembled before men, before their unjust laws, their inhuman customs, their shameful prejudices. Before God, I have no longer any fear. Dead, I fling aside disgraceful hypocrisy; I dare to speak my thoughts, and to avow and to sign the secret of my heart.

"'I therefore leave that part of my fortune of which the law allows me to dispose, in trust to my dear lover, Pierre-Germer-Simon de Bourneval, to revert afterwards to our dear son Rene.

"'(This bequest is specified more precisely in a deed drawn up by a notary.)

"'And I declare before the Supreme Judge who hears me, that I should have cursed heaven and my own existence, if I had not found the deep, devoted, tender, unshaken affection of my lover; if I had not felt in his arms that the Creator made His creatures to love, sustain and console each other, and to weep together in the hours of sadness.

"'Monsieur de Courcils is the father of my two eldest sons; Rene, alone, owes his life to Monsieur de Bourneval. I pray the Master of men and of their destinies, to place father and son above social prejudices, to make them love each other until they die, and to love me also in my coffin.

"'These are my last thoughts, and my last wish.

"'MATHILDE DE CROIXLUCE.'"

"Monsieur de Courcils had risen and he cried:

"'It is the will of a madwoman.'

"Then Monsieur de Bourneval stepped forward and said in a loud, penetrating voice: 'I, Simon de Bourneval, solemnly declare that this writing contains nothing but the strict truth, and I am ready to prove it by letters which I possess.'

"On hearing that, Monsieur de Courcils went up to him, and I 'thought that they were going to attack each other. There they stood, both of them tall, one stout and the other thin, both trembling. My mother's husband stammered out: 'You are a worthless wretch!' And the other replied in a loud, dry voice: 'We will meet elsewhere, monsieur. I should have already slapped your ugly face and challenged you long since if I had not, before everything else, thought of the peace of mind during her lifetime of that poor woman whom you caused to suffer so greatly.'

“Then, turning to me, he said: ‘You are my son; will you come with me? I have no right to take you away, but I shall assume it, if you are willing to come with me: I shook his hand without replying, and we went out together. I was certainly three parts mad.

“Two days later Monsieur de Bourneval killed Monsieur de Courcils in a duel. My brothers, to avoid a terrible scandal, held their tongues. I offered them and they accepted half the fortune which my mother had left me. I took my real father’s name, renouncing that which the law gave me, but which was not really mine. Monsieur de Bourneval died three years later and I am still inconsolable.”

He rose from his chair, walked up and down the room, and, standing in front of me, said:

“Well, I say that my mother’s will was one of the most beautiful, the most loyal, as well as one of the grandest acts that a woman could perform. Do you not think so?”

I held out both hands to him, saying:

“I most certainly do, my friend.”

WALTER SCHNAFFS’ ADVENTURE

Ever since he entered France with the invading army Walter Schnaffs had considered himself the most unfortunate of men. He was large, had difficulty in walking, was short of breath and suffered frightfully with his feet, which were very flat and very fat. But he was a peaceful, benevolent man, not warlike or sanguinary, the father of four children whom he adored, and married to a little blonde whose little tendernesses, attentions and kisses he recalled with despair every evening. He liked to rise late and retire early, to eat good things in a leisurely manner and to drink beer in the saloon. He reflected, besides, that all that is sweet in existence vanishes with life, and he maintained in his heart a fearful hatred, instinctive as well as logical, for cannon, rifles, revolvers and swords, but especially for bayonets, feeling that he was unable to dodge this dangerous weapon rapidly enough to protect his big paunch.

And when night fell and he lay on the ground, wrapped in his cape beside his comrades who were snoring, he thought long and deeply about those he had left behind and of the dangers in his path. “If he were killed what would become of the little ones? Who would provide for them and bring them up?” Just at present they were not rich, although he had borrowed when he left so as to leave them some money. And Walter Schnaffs wept when he thought of all this.

At the beginning of a battle his legs became so weak that he would have fallen if he had not reflected that the entire army would pass over his body. The whistling of the bullets gave him gooseflesh.

For months he had lived thus in terror and anguish.

His company was marching on Normandy, and one day he was sent to reconnoitre with a small detachment, simply to explore a portion of the territory and to return at once. All seemed quiet in the country; nothing indicated an armed resistance.

But as the Prussians were quietly descending into a little valley traversed by deep ravines a sharp fusillade made them halt suddenly, killing twenty of their men, and a company of sharpshooters, suddenly emerging from a little wood as large as your hand, darted forward with bayonets at the end of their rifles.

Walter Schnaffs remained motionless at first, so surprised and bewildered that he did not even think of making his escape. Then he was seized with a wild desire to run away, but he remembered at once that he ran like a tortoise compared with those thin Frenchmen, who came bounding along like a lot of goats. Perceiving a large ditch full of brushwood covered with dead leaves about six paces in front of him, he sprang into it with both feet together, without stopping to think of its depth, just as one jumps from a bridge into the river.

He fell like an arrow through a thick layer of vines and thorny brambles that tore his face and hands and landed heavily in a sitting posture on a bed of stones. Raising his eyes, he saw the sky through the hole he had made in falling through. This aperture might betray him, and he crawled along carefully on hands and knees at the bottom of this ditch beneath the covering of interlacing branches, going as fast as he could and getting away from the scene of the skirmish. Presently he stopped and sat down, crouched like a hare amid the tall dry grass.

He heard firing and cries and groans going on for some time. Then the noise of fighting grew fainter and ceased. All was quiet and silent.

Suddenly something stirred, beside him. He was frightfully startled. It was a little bird which had perched on a branch and was moving the dead leaves. For almost an hour Walter Schnaffs' heart beat loud and rapidly.

Night fell, filling the ravine with its shadows. The soldier began to think. What was he to do? What was to become of him? Should he rejoin the army? But how? By what road? And he began over again the horrible life of anguish, of terror, of fatigue and suffering that he had led since the commencement of the war. No! He no longer had the courage! He would not have the energy necessary to endure long marches and to face the dangers to which one was exposed at every moment.

But what should he do? He could not stay in this ravine in concealment until the end of hostilities. No, indeed! If it were not for having to eat, this prospect would not have daunted him greatly. But he had to eat, to eat every day.

And here he was, alone, armed and in uniform, on the enemy's territory, far from those who would protect him. A shiver ran over him.

All at once he thought: "If I were only a prisoner!" And his heart quivered with a longing, an intense desire to be taken prisoner by the French. A prisoner, he would be saved, fed, housed, sheltered from bullets and swords, without any apprehension whatever, in a good, well-kept prison. A prisoner! What a dream:

His resolution was formed at once.

"I will constitute myself a prisoner."

He rose, determined to put this plan into execution without a moment's delay. But he stood motionless, suddenly a prey to disturbing reflections and fresh terrors.

Where would he make himself a prisoner and how? In What direction? And frightful pictures, pictures of death came into his mind.

He would run terrible danger in venturing alone through the country with his pointed helmet.

Supposing he should meet some peasants. These peasants seeing a Prussian who had lost his way, an unprotected Prussian, would kill him as if he were a stray dog! They would murder him with their forks, their picks, their scythes and their shovels. They would make a stew of him, a pie, with the frenzy of exasperated, conquered enemies.

If he should meet the sharpshooters! These sharpshooters, madmen without law or discipline, would shoot him just for amusement to pass an hour; it would make them laugh to see his head. And he fancied he was already leaning against a wall in-front of four rifles whose little black apertures seemed to be gazing at him.

Supposing he should meet the French army itself. The vanguard would take him for a scout, for some bold and sly trooper who had set off alone to reconnoitre, and they would fire at him. And he could already hear, in imagination, the irregular shots of soldiers lying in the brush, while he himself, standing in the middle of the field, was sinking to the earth, riddled like a sieve with bullets which he felt piercing his flesh.

He sat down again in despair. His situation seemed hopeless.

It was quite a dark, black and silent night. He no longer budged, trembling at all the slight and unfamiliar sounds that occur at night. The sound of a rabbit crouching at the edge of his burrow almost made him run. The cry of an owl caused him positive anguish, giving him a nervous shock that pained like a wound. He opened his big eyes as wide as possible to try and see through the darkness, and he imagined every moment that he heard someone walking close beside him.

After interminable hours in which he suffered the tortures of the damned, he noticed through his leafy cover that the sky was becoming bright. He at once felt an intense relief. His limbs stretched out, suddenly relaxed, his heart quieted down, his eyes closed; he fell asleep.

When he awoke the sun appeared to be almost at the meridian. It must be noon. No sound disturbed the gloomy silence. Walter Schnaffs noticed that he was exceedingly hungry.

He yawned, his mouth watering at the thought of sausage, the good sausage the soldiers have, and he felt a gnawing at his stomach.

He rose from the ground, walked a few steps, found that his legs were weak and sat down to reflect. For two or three hours he again considered the pros and cons, changing his mind every moment, baffled, unhappy, torn by the most conflicting motives.

Finally he had an idea that seemed logical and practical. It was to watch for a villager passing by alone, unarmed and with no dangerous tools of his trade, and to run to him and give himself up, making him understand that he was surrendering.

He took off his helmet, the point of which might betray him, and put his head out of his hiding place with the utmost caution.

No solitary pedestrian could be perceived on the horizon. Yonder, to the right, smoke rose from the chimney of a little village, smoke from kitchen fires! And yonder, to the left, he saw at the end of an avenue of trees a large turreted chateau. He waited till evening, suffering frightfully from hunger, seeing nothing but flights of crows, hearing nothing but the silent expostulation of his empty stomach.

And darkness once more fell on him.

He stretched himself out in his retreat and slept a feverish sleep, haunted by nightmares, the sleep of a starving man.

Dawn again broke above his head and he began to make his observations. But the landscape was deserted as on the previous day, and a new fear came into Walter Schnaffs' mind — the fear of death by hunger! He pictured himself lying at full length on his back at the bottom of his hiding place, with his two eyes closed, and animals, little creatures of all kinds, approached and began to feed on his dead body, attacking it all over at once, gliding beneath his clothing to bite his cold flesh, and a big crow pecked out his eyes with its sharp beak.

He almost became crazy, thinking he was going to faint and would not be able to walk. And he was just preparing to rush off to the village, determined to dare anything, to brave everything, when he perceived three peasants walking to the fields with their forks across their shoulders, and he dived back into his hiding place.

But as soon as it grew dark he slowly emerged from the ditch and started off, stooping and fearful, with beating heart, towards the distant chateau, preferring to go there rather than to the village, which seemed to him as formidable as a den of tigers.

The lower windows were brilliantly lighted. One of them was open and from it escaped a strong odor of roast meat, an odor which suddenly penetrated to the olfactories and to the stomach of Walter Schnaffs, tickling his nerves, making him breathe quickly, attracting him irresistibly and inspiring his heart with the boldness of desperation.

And abruptly, without reflection, he placed himself, helmet on head, in front of the window.

Eight servants were at dinner around a large table. But suddenly one of the maids sat there, her mouth agape, her eyes fixed and letting fall her glass. They all followed the direction of her gaze.

They saw the enemy!

Good God! The Prussians were attacking the chateau!

There was a shriek, only one shriek made up of eight shrieks uttered in eight different keys, a terrific screaming of terror, then a tumultuous rising from their seats, a jostling, a scrimmage and a wild rush to the door at the farther end. Chairs fell over, the men knocked the women down and walked over them. In two seconds the room was empty, deserted, and the table, covered with eatables, stood in front of Walter Schnaffs, lost in amazement and still standing at the window.

After some moments of hesitation he climbed in at the window and approached the table. His fierce hunger caused him to tremble as if he were in a fever, but fear still held him back, numbed him. He listened. The entire house seemed to shudder. Doors closed, quick steps ran along the floor above. The uneasy Prussian listened eagerly to these confused sounds. Then he heard dull sounds, as though bodies were falling to the ground at the foot of the walls, human beings jumping from the first floor.

Then all motion, all disturbance ceased, and the great chateau became as silent as the grave.

Walter Schnaffs sat down before a clean plate and began to eat. He took great mouthfuls, as if he feared he might be interrupted before he had swallowed enough. He shovelled the food into his mouth, open like a trap, with both hands, and chunks of food went into his stomach, swelling out his throat as it passed down. Now and then he stopped, almost ready to burst like a stopped-up pipe. Then he would take the cider jug and wash down his esophagus as one washes out a clogged rain pipe.

He emptied all the plates, all the dishes and all the bottles. Then, intoxicated with drink and food, besotted, red in the face, shaken by hiccoughs, his mind clouded and his speech thick, he unbuttoned his uniform in order to breathe or he could not have taken a step. His eyes closed, his mind became torpid; he leaned his heavy forehead on his folded arms on the table and gradually lost all consciousness of things and events.

The last quarter of the moon above the trees in the park shed a faint light on the landscape. It was the chill hour that precedes the dawn.

Numerous silent shadows glided among the trees and occasionally a blade of steel gleamed in the shadow as a ray of moonlight struck it.

The quiet chateau stood there in dark outline. Only two windows were still lighted up on the ground floor.

Suddenly a voice thundered:

“Forward! nom d’un nom! To the breach, my lads!”

And in an instant the doors, shutters and window panes fell in beneath a wave of men who rushed in, breaking, destroying everything, and took the house by storm. In a moment fifty soldiers, armed to the teeth, bounded into the kitchen, where Walter Schnaffs was peacefully sleeping, and placing to his breast fifty loaded rifles, they overturned him, rolled him on the floor, seized him and tied his head and feet together.

He gasped in amazement, too besotted to understand, perplexed, bruised and wild with fear.

Suddenly a big soldier, covered with gold lace, put his foot on his stomach, shouting:

“You are my prisoner. Surrender!”

The Prussian heard only the one word “prisoner” and he sighed, “Ya, ya, ya.”

He was raised from the floor, tied in a chair and examined with lively curiosity by his victors, who were blowing like whales. Several of them sat down, done up with excitement and fatigue.

He smiled, actually smiled, secure now that he was at last a prisoner.

Another officer came into the room and said:

"Colonel, the enemy has escaped; several seem to have been wounded. We are in possession."

The big officer, who was wiping his forehead, exclaimed: "Victory!"

And he wrote in a little business memorandum book which he took from his pocket:

"After a desperate encounter the Prussians were obliged to beat a retreat, carrying with them their dead and wounded, the number of whom is estimated at fifty men. Several were taken prisoners."

The young officer inquired:

"What steps shall I take, colonel?"

"We will retire in good order," replied the colonel, "to avoid having to return and make another attack with artillery and a larger force of men."

And he gave the command to set out.

The column drew up in line in the darkness beneath the walls of the chateau and filed out, a guard of six soldiers with revolvers in their hands surrounding Walter Schnaffs, who was firmly bound.

Scouts were sent ahead to reconnoitre. They advanced cautiously, halting from time to time.

At daybreak they arrived at the district of La Roche-Oysel, whose national guard had accomplished this feat of arms.

The uneasy and excited inhabitants were expecting them. When they saw the prisoner's helmet tremendous shouts arose. The women raised their 10 arms in wonder, the old people wept. An old grandfather threw his crutch at the Prussian and struck the nose of one of their own defenders.

The colonel roared:

"See that the prisoner is secure!"

At length they reached the town hall. The prison was opened and Walter Schnaffs, freed from his bonds, cast into it. Two hundred armed men mounted guard outside the building.

Then, in spite of the indigestion that had been troubling him for some time, the Prussian, wild with joy, began to dance about, to dance frantically, throwing out his arms and legs and uttering wild shouts until he fell down exhausted beside the wall.

He was a prisoner-saved!

That was how the Chateau de Charnpignet was taken from the enemy after only six hours of occupation.

Colonel Ratier, a cloth merchant, who had led the assault at the head of a body of the national guard of La Roche-Oysel, was decorated with an order.

AT SEA

The following paragraphs recently appeared in the papers:

"Boulogne-Sur-Mer, January 22. — Our correspondent writes:

"A fearful accident has thrown our sea-faring population, which has suffered so much in the last two years, into the greatest consternation. The fishing smack commanded by Captain Javel, on entering the harbor was wrecked on the rocks of the harbor breakwater.

"In spite of the efforts of the life boat and the shooting of life lines from the shore four sailors and the cabin boy were lost.

"The rough weather continues. Fresh disasters are anticipated."

Who is this Captain Javel? Is he the brother of the one-armed man?

If the poor man tossed about in the waves and dead, perhaps, beneath his wrecked boat, is the one I am thinking of, he took part, just eighteen years ago, in another tragedy, terrible and simple as are all these fearful tragedies of the sea.

Javel, senior, was then master of a trawling smack.

The trawling smack is the ideal fishing boat. So solidly built that it fears no weather, with a round bottom, tossed about unceasingly on the waves like a cork, always on top, always thrashed by the harsh salt winds of the English Channel, it ploughs the sea unweariedly with bellying sail, dragging along at its side a huge trawling net, which scours the depths of the ocean, and detaches and gathers in all the animals asleep in the rocks, the flat fish glued to the sand, the heavy crabs with their curved claws, and the lobsters with their pointed mustaches.

When the breeze is fresh and the sea choppy, the boat starts in to trawl. The net is fastened all along a big log of wood clamped with iron and is let down by two ropes on pulleys at either end of the boat. And the boat, driven by the wind and the tide, draws along this apparatus which ransacks and plunders the depths of the sea.

Javel had on board his younger brother, four sailors and a cabin boy. He had set sail from Boulogne on a beautiful day to go trawling.

But presently a wind sprang up, and a hurricane obliged the smack to run to shore. She gained the English coast, but the high sea broke against the rocks and dashed on the beach, making it impossible to go into port, filling all the harbor entrances with foam and noise and danger.

The smack started off again, riding on the waves, tossed, shaken, dripping, buffeted by masses of water, but game in spite of everything; accustomed to this boisterous weather, which sometimes kept it roving between the two neighboring countries without its being able to make port in either.

At length the hurricane calmed down just as they were in the open, and although the sea was still high the captain gave orders to cast the net.

So it was lifted overboard, and two men in the bows and two in the stern began to unwind the ropes that held it. It suddenly touched bottom, but a big wave made the boat heel, and Javel, junior, who was in the bows directing the lowering of the net, staggered, and his arm was caught in the rope which the shock had slipped from the pulley for an instant. He made a desperate effort to raise the rope with the other hand, but the net was down and the taut rope did not give.

The man cried out in agony. They all ran to his aid. His brother left the rudder. They all seized the rope, trying to free the arm it was bruising. But in vain. “We must cut it,” said a sailor, and he took from his pocket a big knife, which, with two strokes, could save young Javel’s arm.

But if the rope were cut the trawling net would be lost, and this net was worth money, a great deal of money, fifteen hundred francs. And it belonged to Javel, senior, who was tenacious of his property.

“No, do not cut, wait, I will luff,” he cried, in great distress. And he ran to the helm and turned the rudder. But the boat scarcely obeyed it, being impeded by the net which kept it from going forward, and prevented also by the force of the tide and the wind.

Javel, junior, had sunk on his knees, his teeth clenched, his eyes haggard. He did not utter a word. His brother came back to him, in dread of the sailor’s knife.

“Wait, wait,” he said. “We will let down the anchor.”

They cast anchor, and then began to turn the capstan to loosen the moorings of the net. They loosened them at length and disengaged the imprisoned arm, in its bloody woolen sleeve.

Young Javel seemed like an idiot. They took off his jersey and saw a horrible sight, a mass of flesh from which the blood spurted as if from a pump. Then the young man looked at his arm and murmured: “Foutu” (done for).

Then, as the blood was making a pool on the deck of the boat, one of the sailors cried: “He will bleed to death, we must bind the vein.”

So they took a cord, a thick, brown, tarry cord, and twisting it around the arm above the wound, tightened it with all their might. The blood ceased to spurt by slow degrees, and, presently, stopped altogether.

Young Javel rose, his arm hanging at his side. He took hold of it with the other hand, raised it, turned it over, shook it. It was all mashed, the bones broken, the muscles alone holding it together. He looked at it sadly, reflectively. Then he sat down on a folded sail and his comrades advised him to keep wetting the arm constantly to prevent it from mortifying.

They placed a pail of water beside him, and every few minutes he dipped a glass into it and bathed the frightful wound, letting the clear water trickle on to it.

“You would be better in the cabin,” said his brother. He went down, but came up again in an hour, not caring to be alone. And, besides, he preferred the fresh air. He sat down again on his sail and began to bathe his arm.

They made a good haul. The broad fish with their white bellies lay beside him, quivering in the throes of death; he looked at them as he continued to bathe his crushed flesh.

As they were about to return to Boulogne the wind sprang up anew, and the little boat resumed its mad course, bounding and tumbling about, shaking up the poor wounded man.

Night came on. The sea ran high until dawn. As the sun rose the English coast was again visible, but, as the weather had abated a little, they turned back towards the French coast, tacking as they went.

Towards evening Javel, junior, called his comrades and showed them some black spots, all the horrible tokens of mortification in the portion of the arm below the broken bones.

The sailors examined it, giving their opinion.

“That might be the ‘Black,’” thought one.

“He should put salt water on it,” said another.

They brought some salt water and poured it on the wound. The injured man became livid, ground his teeth and writhed a little, but did not exclaim.

Then, as soon as the smarting had abated, he said to his brother:

“Give me your knife.”

The brother handed it to him.

“Hold my arm up, quite straight, and pull it.”

They did as he asked them.

Then he began to cut off his arm. He cut gently, carefully, severing al the tendons with this blade that was sharp as a razor. And, presently, there was only a stump left. He gave a deep sigh and said:

“It had to be done. It was done for.”

He seemed relieved and breathed loud. He then began again to pour water on the stump of arm that remained.

The sea was still rough and they could not make the shore.

When the day broke, Javel, junior, took the severed portion of his arm and examined it for a long time. Gangrene had set in. His comrades also examined it and handed it from one to the other, feeling it, turning it over, and sniffing at it.

“You must throw that into the sea at once,” said his brother.

But Javel, junior, got angry.

“Oh, no! Oh, no! I don’t want to. It belongs to me, does it not, as it is my arm?”

And he took and placed it between his feet.

“It will putrefy, just the same,” said the older brother. Then an idea came to the injured man. In order to preserve the fish when the boat was long at sea, they packed it in salt, in barrels. He asked:

“Why can I not put it in pickle?”

“Why, that’s a fact,” exclaimed the others.

Then they emptied one of the barrels, which was full from the haul of the last few days; and right at the bottom of the barrel they laid the detached arm. They covered it with salt, and then put back the fish one by one.

One of the sailors said by way of joke:

“I hope we do not sell it at auction.”

And everyone laughed, except the two Javels.

The wind was still boisterous. They tacked within sight of Boulogne until the following morning at ten o’clock. Young Javel continued to bathe his wound. From time to time he rose and walked from one end to the other of the boat.

His brother, who was at the tiller, followed him with glances, and shook his head.

At last they ran into harbor.

The doctor examined the wound and pronounced it to be in good condition. He dressed it properly and ordered the patient to rest. But Javel would not go to bed until he got back his severed arm, and he returned at once to the dock to look for the barrel which he had marked with a cross.

It was emptied before him and he seized the arm, which was well preserved in the pickle, had shrunk and was freshened. He wrapped it up in a towel he had brought for the purpose and took it home.

His wife and children looked for a long time at this fragment of their father, feeling the fingers, and removing the grains of salt that were under the nails. Then they sent for a carpenter to make a little coffin.

The next day the entire crew of the trawling smack followed the funeral of the detached arm. The two brothers, side by side, led the procession; the parish beadle carried the corpse under his arm.

Javel, junior, gave up the sea. He obtained a small position on the dock, and when he subsequently talked about his accident, he would say confidentially to his auditors:

“If my brother had been willing to cut away the net, I should still have my arm, that is sure. But he was thinking only of his property.”

MINUET

Great misfortunes do not affect me very much, said John Bridelle, an old bachelor who passed for a sceptic. I have seen war at quite close quarters; I walked across corpses without any feeling of pity. The great brutal facts of nature, or of humanity, may call forth cries of horror or indignation, but do not cause us that tightening of the heart, that shudder that goes down your spine at sight of certain little heartrending episodes.

The greatest sorrow that anyone can experience is certainly the loss of a child, to a mother; and the loss of his mother, to a man. It is intense, terrible, it rends your heart and upsets your mind; but one is healed of these shocks, just as large bleeding wounds become healed. Certain meetings, certain things half perceived, or surmised, certain secret sorrows, certain tricks of fate which awake in us a whole world of painful thoughts, which suddenly unclose to us the mysterious door of moral suffering, complicated, incurable; all the deeper because they appear benign, all the more bitter because they are intangible, all the more tenacious because they appear almost factitious, leave in our souls a sort of trail of sadness, a taste of bitterness, a feeling of disenchantment, from which it takes a long time to free ourselves.

I have always present to my mind two or three things that others would surely not have noticed, but which penetrated my being like fine, sharp incurable stings.

You might not perhaps understand the emotion that I retained from these hasty impressions. I will tell you one of them. She was very old, but as lively as a young girl. It may be that my imagination alone is responsible for my emotion.

I am fifty. I was young then and studying law. I was rather sad, somewhat of a dreamer, full of a pessimistic philosophy and did not care much for noisy cafes, boisterous companions, or stupid girls. I rose early and one of my chief enjoyments was to walk alone about eight o’clock in the morning in the nursery garden of the Luxembourg.

You people never knew that nursery garden. It was like a forgotten garden of the last century, as pretty as the gentle smile of an old lady. Thick hedges divided the narrow regular paths, — peaceful paths between two walls of carefully trimmed foliage. The gardener’s great shears were pruning unceasingly these leafy partitions, and here and there one came across beds of flowers, lines of little trees looking like schoolboys out for a walk, companies of magnificent rose bushes, or regiments of fruit trees.

An entire corner of this charming spot was in habited by bees. Their straw hives skillfully arranged at distances on boards had their entrances — as large as the opening of a thimble — turned towards the sun, and all along the paths one encountered these humming and gilded flies, the true masters of this peaceful spot, the real promenaders of these quiet paths.

I came there almost every morning. I sat down on a bench and read. Sometimes I let my book fall on my knees, to dream, to listen to the life of Paris around me, and to enjoy the infinite repose of these old-fashioned hedges.

But I soon perceived that I was not the only one to frequent this spot as soon as the gates were opened, and I occasionally met face to face, at a turn in the path, a strange little old man.

He wore shoes with silver buckles, knee-breeches, a snuff-colored frock coat, a lace jabot, and an outlandish gray hat with wide brim and long-haired surface that might have come out of the ark.

He was thin, very thin, angular, grimacing and smiling. His bright eyes were restless beneath his eyelids which blinked continuously. He always carried in his hand a superb cane with a gold knob, which must have been for him some glorious souvenir.

This good man astonished me at first, then caused me the intensest interest. I watched him through the leafy walls, I followed him at a distance, stopping at a turn in the hedge so as not to be seen.

And one morning when he thought he was quite alone, he began to make the most remarkable motions. First he would give some little springs, then make a bow; then, with his slim legs, he would give a lively spring in the air, clapping his feet as he did so, and then turn round cleverly, skipping and frisking about in a comical manner, smiling as if he had an audience, twisting his poor little puppet-like body, bowing pathetic and ridiculous little greetings into the empty air. He was dancing.

I stood petrified with amazement, asking myself which of us was crazy, he or I.

He stopped suddenly, advanced as actors do on the stage, then bowed and retreated with gracious smiles, and kissing his hand as actors do, his trembling hand, to the two rows of trimmed bushes.

Then he continued his walk with a solemn demeanor.

After that I never lost sight of him, and each morning he began anew his outlandish exercises.

I was wildly anxious to speak to him. I decided to risk it, and one day, after greeting him, I said:

"It is a beautiful day, monsieur."

He bowed.

"Yes, sir, the weather is just as it used to be."

A week later we were friends and I knew his history. He had been a dancing master at the opera, in the time of Louis XV. His beautiful cane was a present from the Comte de Clermont. And when we spoke about dancing he never stopping talking.

One day he said to me:

"I married La Castris, monsieur. I will introduce you to her if you wish it, but she does not get here till later. This garden, you see, is our delight and our life. It is all that remains of former days. It seems as though we could not exist if we did not have it. It is old and distingue, is it not? I seem to breathe an air here that has not changed since I was young. My wife and I pass all our afternoons here, but I come in the morning because I get up early."

As soon as I had finished luncheon I returned to the Luxembourg, and presently perceived my friend offering his arm ceremoniously to a very old little lady dressed in black, to whom he introduced me. It was La Castris, the great dancer, beloved by princes, beloved by the king, beloved by all that century of gallantry that seems to have left behind it in the world an atmosphere of love.

We sat down on a bench. It was the month of May. An odor of flowers floated in the neat paths; a hot sun glided its rays between the branches and covered us with patches of light. The black dress of La Castris seemed to be saturated with sunlight.

The garden was empty. We heard the rattling of vehicles in the distance.

“Tell me,” I said to the old dancer, “what was the minuet?”

He gave a start.

“The minuet, monsieur, is the queen of dances, and the dance of queens, do you understand? Since there is no longer any royalty, there is no longer any minuet.”

And he began in a pompous manner a long dithyrambic eulogy which I could not understand. I wanted to have the steps, the movements, the positions, explained to me. He became confused, was amazed at his inability to make me understand, became nervous and worried.

Then suddenly, turning to his old companion who had remained silent and serious, he said:

“Elise, would you like — say — would you like, it would be very nice of you, would you like to show this gentleman what it was?”

She turned eyes uneasily in all directions, then rose without saying a word and took her position opposite him.

Then I witnessed an unheard-of thing.

They advanced and retreated with childlike grimaces, smiling, swinging each other, bowing, skipping about like two automaton dolls moved by some old mechanical contrivance, somewhat damaged, but made by a clever workman according to the fashion of his time.

And I looked at them, my heart filled with extraordinary emotions, my soul touched with an indescribable melancholy. I seemed to see before me a pathetic and comical apparition, the out-of-date ghost of a former century.

They suddenly stopped. They had finished all the figures of the dance. For some seconds they stood opposite each other, smiling in an astonishing manner. Then they fell on each other’s necks sobbing.

I left for the provinces three days later. I never saw them again. When I returned to Paris, two years later, the nursery had been destroyed. What became of them, deprived of the dear garden of former days, with its mazes, its odor of the past, and the graceful windings of its hedges?

Are they dead? Are they wandering among modern streets like hopeless exiles? Are they dancing — grotesque spectres — a fantastic minuet in the moonlight, amid the cypresses of a cemetery, along the pathways bordered by graves?

Their memory haunts me, obsesses me, torments me, remains with me like a wound. Why? I do not know.

No doubt you think that very absurd?

THE SON

The two old friends were walking in the garden in bloom, where spring was bringing everything to life.

One was a senator, the other a member of the French Academy, both serious men, full of very logical but solemn arguments, men of note and reputation.

They talked first of politics, exchanging opinions; not on ideas, but on men, personalities in this regard taking the predominance over ability. Then they recalled some memories. Then they walked along in silence, enervated by the warmth of the air.

A large bed of wallflowers breathed out a delicate sweetness. A mass of flowers of all species and color flung their fragrance to the breeze, while a cytisus covered with yellow clusters scattered its fine pollen abroad, a golden cloud, with an odor of honey that bore its balmy seed across space, similar to the sachet-powders of perfumers.

The senator stopped, breathed in the cloud of floating pollen, looked at the fertile shrub, yellow as the sun, whose seed was floating in the air, and said:

"When one considers that these imperceptible fragrant atoms will create existences at a hundred leagues from here, will send a thrill through the fibres and sap of female trees and produce beings with roots, growing from a germ, just as we do, mortal like ourselves, and who will be replaced by other beings of the same order, like ourselves again!"

And, standing in front of the brilliant cytisus, whose live pollen was shaken off by each breath of air, the senator added:

"Ah, old fellow, if you had to keep count of all your children you would be mightily embarrassed. Here is one who generates freely, and then lets them go without a pang and troubles himself no more about them."

"We do the same, my friend," said the academician.

"Yes, I do not deny it; we let them go sometimes," resumed the senator, "but we are aware that we do, and that constitutes our superiority."

"No, that is not what I mean," said the other, shaking his head. "You see, my friend, that there is scarcely a man who has not some children that he does not know, children— 'father unknown' — whom he has generated almost unconsciously, just as this tree reproduces.

"If we had to keep account of our amours, we should be just as embarrassed as this cytisus which you apostrophized would be in counting up his descendants, should we not?

"From eighteen to forty years, in fact, counting in every chance cursory acquaintanceship, we may well say that we have been intimate with two or three hundred women.

"Well, then, my friend, among this number can you be sure that you have not had children by at least one of them, and that you have not in the streets, or in the bagnio, some blackguard of a son who steals from and murders decent people, i.e., ourselves; or else a daughter in some disreputable place, or, if she has the good fortune to be deserted by her mother, as cook in some family?

"Consider, also, that almost all those whom we call 'prostitutes' have one or two children of whose paternal parentage they are ignorant, generated by chance at the price of ten or twenty francs. In every business there is profit and loss. These wildings constitute the 'loss' in their profession. Who generated them? You — I — we all did, the men called 'gentlemen'! They are the consequences of our jovial little dinners, of our gay evenings, of those hours when our comfortable physical being impels us to chance liaisons.

"Thieves, marauders, all these wretches, in fact, are our children. And that is better for us than if we were their children, for those scoundrels generate also!

"I have in my mind a very horrible story that I will relate to you. It has caused me incessant remorse, and, further than that, a continual doubt, a disquieting uncertainty, that, at times, torments me frightfully.

"When I was twenty-five I undertook a walking tour through Brittany with one of my friends, now a member of the cabinet.

"After walking steadily for fifteen or twenty days and visiting the Cotes-du-Nord and part of Finistere we reached Douarnenez. From there we went without halting to the wild promontory of Raz by the bay of Les Trepaases, and passed the night in a village whose name ends in ‘of.’ The next morning a strange lassitude kept my friend in bed; I say bed from habit, for our couch consisted simply of two bundles of straw.

“It would never do to be ill in this place. So I made him get up, and we reached Andierne about four or five o’clock in the evening.

“The following day he felt a little better, and we set out again. But on the road he was seized with intolerable pain, and we could scarcely get as far as Pont Labbe.

“Here, at least, there was an inn. My friend went to bed, and the doctor, who had been sent for from Quimper, announced that he had a high fever, without being able to determine its nature.

“Do you know Pont Labbe? No? Well, then, it is the most Breton of all this Breton Brittany, which extends from the promontory of Raz to the Morbihan, of this land which contains the essence of the Breton manners, legends and customs. Even to-day this corner of the country has scarcely changed. I say ‘even to-day,’ for I now go there every year, alas!

“An old chateau laves the walls of its towers in a great melancholy pond, melancholy and frequented by flights of wild birds. It has an outlet in a river on which boats can navigate as far as the town. In the narrow streets with their old-time houses the men wear big hats, embroidered waistcoats and four coats, one on top of the other; the inside one, as large as your hand, barely covering the shoulder-blades, and the outside one coming to just above the seat of the trousers.

“The girls, tall, handsome and fresh have their bosoms crushed in a cloth bodice which makes an armor, compresses them, not allowing one even to guess at their robust and tortured neck. They also wear a strange headdress. On their temples two bands embroidered in colors frame their face, inclosing the hair, which falls in a shower at the back of their heads, and is then turned up and gathered on top of the head under a singular cap, often woven with gold or silver thread.

“The servant at our inn was eighteen at most, with very blue eyes, a pale blue with two tiny black pupils, short teeth close together, which she showed continually when she laughed, and which seemed strong enough to grind granite.

“She did not know a word of French, speaking only Breton, as did most of her companions.

“As my friend did not improve much, and although he had no definite malady, the doctor forbade him to continue his journey yet, ordering complete rest. I spent my days with him, and the little maid would come in incessantly, bringing either my dinner or some herb tea.

“I teased her a little, which seemed to amuse her, but we did not chat, of course, as we could not understand each other.

“But one night, after I had stayed quite late with my friend and was going back to my room, I passed the girl, who was going to her room. It was just opposite my open door, and, without reflection, and more for fun than anything else, I abruptly seized her round the waist, and before she recovered from her astonishment I had thrown her down and locked her in my room. She looked at me, amazed, excited, terrified, not daring to cry out for fear of a scandal and of being probably driven out, first by her employers and then, perhaps, by her father.

“I did it as a joke at first. She defended herself bravely, and at the first chance she ran to the door, drew back the bolt and fled.

“I scarcely saw her for several days. She would not let me come near her. But when my friend was cured and we were to get out on our travels again I saw her coming into my room about midnight the night before our departure, just after I had retired.

“She threw herself into my arms and embraced me passionately, giving me all the assurances of tenderness and despair that a woman can give when she does not know a word of our language.

“A week later I had forgotten this adventure, so common and frequent when one is travelling, the inn servants being generally destined to amuse travellers in this way.

“I was thirty before I thought of it again, or returned to Pont Labbe.

“But in 1876 I revisited it by chance during a trip into Brittany, which I made in order to look up some data for a book and to become permeated with the atmosphere of the different places.

“Nothing seemed changed. The chateau still laved its gray wall in the pond outside the little town; the inn was the same, though it had been repaired, renovated and looked more modern. As I entered it I was received by two young Breton girls of eighteen, fresh and pretty, bound up in their tight cloth bodices, with their silver caps and wide embroidered bands on their ears.

"It was about six o'clock in the evening. I sat down to dinner, and as the host was assiduous in waiting on me himself, fate, no doubt, impelled me to say:

"'Did you know the former proprietors of this house? I spent about ten days here thirty years ago. I am talking old times.'

"'Those were my parents, monsieur,' he replied.

"Then I told him why we had stayed over at that time, how my comrade had been delayed by illness. He did not let me finish.

"'Oh, I recollect perfectly. I was about fifteen or sixteen. You slept in the room at the end and your friend in the one I have taken for myself, overlooking the street.'

"It was only then that the recollection of the little maid came vividly to my mind. I asked: 'Do you remember a pretty little servant who was then in your father's employ, and who had, if my memory does not deceive me, pretty eyes and fresh-looking teeth?'

"'Yes, monsieur; she died in childbirth some time after.'

"And, pointing to the courtyard where a thin, lame man was stirring up the manure, he added:

"'That is her son.'

"I began to laugh:

"'He is not handsome and does not look much like his mother. No doubt he looks like his father.'

"'That is very possible,' replied the innkeeper; 'but we never knew whose child it was. She died without telling any one, and no one here knew of her having a beau. Every one was hugely astonished when they heard she was enceinte, and no one would believe it.'

"A sort of unpleasant chill came over me, one of those painful surface wounds that affect us like the shadow of an impending sorrow. And I looked at the man in the yard. He had just drawn water for the horses and was carrying two buckets, limping as he walked, with a painful effort of his shorter leg. His clothes were ragged, he was hideously dirty, with long yellow hair, so tangled that it looked like strands of rope falling down at either side of his face.

"'He is not worth much,' continued the innkeeper; 'we have kept him for charity's sake. Perhaps he would have turned out better if he had been brought up like other folks. But what could one do, monsieur? No father, no mother, no money! My parents took pity on him, but he was not their child, you understand.'

"I said nothing.

"I slept in my old room, and all night long I thought of this frightful stableman, saying to myself: 'Supposing it is my own son? Could I have caused that girl's death and procreated this being? It was quite possible!'

"I resolved to speak to this man and to find out the exact date of his birth. A variation of two months would set my doubts at rest.

"I sent for him the next day. But he could not speak French. He looked as if he could not understand anything, being absolutely ignorant of his age, which I had inquired of him through one of the maids. He stood before me like an idiot, twirling his hat in 'his knotted, disgusting hands, laughing stupidly, with something of his mother's laugh in the corners of his mouth and of his eyes.

"The landlord, appearing on the scene, went to look for the birth certificate of this wretched being. He was born eight months and twenty-six days after my stay at Pont Labbe, for I recollect perfectly that we reached Lorient on the fifteenth of August. The certificate contained this description: 'Father unknown.' The mother called herself Jeanne Kerradec.

"Then my heart began to beat rapidly. I could not utter a word, for I felt as if I were choking. I looked at this animal whose long yellow hair reminded me of a straw heap, and the beggar, embarrassed by my gaze, stopped laughing, turned his head aside, and wanted to get away.

"All day long I wandered beside the little river, giving way to painful reflections. But what was the use of reflection? I could be sure of nothing. For hours and hours I weighed all the pros and cons in favor of or against the probability of my being the father, growing nervous over inexplicable suppositions, only to return incessantly to the same horrible uncertainty, then to the still more atrocious conviction that this man was my son.

"I could eat no dinner, and went to my room.

"I lay awake for a long time, and when I finally fell asleep I was haunted by horrible visions. I saw this laborer laughing in my face and calling me 'papa.' Then he changed into a dog and bit the calves of my legs, and no matter how fast I ran he still followed me, and instead of barking, talked and reviled me. Then he appeared before my colleagues at the Academy, who had assembled to decide whether I was really his father; and one of them cried out: 'There can be no doubt about it! See how he resembles him.’ And, indeed, I could see that this monster looked like me. And I awoke with this idea fixed in my mind and with an insane desire to see the man again and assure myself whether or not we had similar features.

“I joined him as he was going to mass (it was Sunday) and I gave him five francs as I gazed at him anxiously. He began to laugh in an idiotic manner, took the money, and then, embarrassed afresh at my gaze, he ran off, after stammering an almost inarticulate word that, no doubt, meant ‘thank you.’

“My day passed in the same distress of mind as on the previous night. I sent for the landlord, and, with the greatest caution, skill and tact, I told him that I was interested in this poor creature, so abandoned by every one and deprived of everything, and I wished to do something for him.

“But the man replied: ‘Oh, do not think of it, monsieur; he is of no account; you will only cause yourself annoyance. I employ him to clean out the stable, and that is all he can do. I give him his board and let him sleep with the horses. He needs nothing more. If you have an old pair of trousers, you might give them to him, but they will be in rags in a week.’

“I did not insist, intending to think it over.

“The poor wretch came home that evening frightfully drunk, came near setting fire to the house, killed a horse by hitting it with a pickaxe, and ended up by lying down to sleep in the mud in the midst of the pouring rain, thanks to my donation.

“They begged me next day not to give him any more money. Brandy drove him crazy, and as soon as he had two sous in his pocket he would spend it in drink. The landlord added: ‘Giving him money is like trying to kill him.’ The man had never, never in his life had more than a few centimes, thrown to him by travellers, and he knew of no destination for this metal but the wine shop.

“I spent several hours in my room with an open book before me which I pretended to read, but in reality looking at this animal, my son! my son! trying to discover if he looked anything like me. After careful scrutiny I seemed to recognize a similarity in the lines of the forehead and the root of the nose, and I was soon convinced that there was a resemblance, concealed by the difference in garb and the man’s hideous head of hair.

“I could not stay here any longer without arousing suspicion, and I went away, my heart crushed, leaving with the innkeeper some money to soften the existence of his servant.

“For six years now I have lived with this idea in my mind, this horrible uncertainty, this abominable suspicion. And each year an irresistible force takes me back to Pont Labbe. Every year I condemn myself to the torture of seeing this animal raking the manure, imagining that he resembles me, and endeavoring, always vainly, to render him some assistance. And each year I return more uncertain, more tormented, more worried.

“I tried to have him taught, but he is a hopeless idiot. I tried to make his life less hard. He is an irreclaimable drunkard, and spends in drink all the money one gives him, and knows enough to sell his new clothes in order to get brandy.

“I tried to awaken his master’s sympathy, so that he should look after him, offering to pay him for doing so. The innkeeper, finally surprised, said, very wisely: ‘All that you do for him, monsieur, will only help to destroy him. He must be kept like a prisoner. As soon as he has any spare time, or any comfort, he becomes wicked. If you wish to do good, there is no lack of abandoned children, but select one who will appreciate your attention.’

“What could I say?

“If I allowed the slightest suspicion of the doubts that tortured me to escape, this idiot would assuredly become cunning, in order to blackmail me, to compromise me and ruin me. He would call out ‘papa,’ as in my dream.

“And I said to myself that I had killed the mother and lost this atrophied creature, this larva of the stable, born and raised amid the manure, this man who, if brought up like others, would have been like others.

“And you cannot imagine what a strange, embarrassed and intolerable feeling comes over me when he stands before me and I reflect that he came from myself, that he belongs to me through the intimate bond that links father and son, that, thanks to the terrible law of heredity, he is my own self in a thousand ways, in his blood and his flesh, and that he has even the same germs of disease, the same leaven of emotions.

“I have an incessant restless, distressing longing to see him, and the sight of him causes me intense suffering, as I look down from my window and watch him for hours removing and carting the horse manure, saying to myself: ‘That is my son.’

“And I sometimes feel an irresistible longing to embrace him. I have never even touched his dirty hand.”

The academician was silent. His companion, a tactful man, murmured: “Yes, indeed, we ought to take a closer interest in children who have no father.”

A gust of wind passing through the tree shook its yellow clusters, enveloping in a fragrant and delicate mist the two old men, who inhaled in the fragrance with deep breaths.

The senator added: “It is good to be twenty-five and even to have children like that.”

THAT PIG OF A MORIN

"Here, my friend," I said to Labarbe, "you have just repeated those five words, that pig of a Morin. Why on earth do I never hear Morin's name mentioned without his being called a pig?"

Labarbe, who is a deputy, looked at me with his owl-like eyes and said: "Do you mean to say that you do not know Morin's story and you come from La Rochelle?" I was obliged to declare that I did not know Morin's story, so Labarbe rubbed his hands and began his recital.

"You knew Morin, did you not, and you remember his large linen-draper's shop on the Quai de la Rochelle?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, then. You must know that in 1862 or '63 Morin went to spend a fortnight in Paris for pleasure; or for his pleasures, but under the pretext of renewing his stock, and you also know what a fortnight in Paris means to a country shopkeeper; it fires his blood. The theatre every evening, women's dresses rustling up against you and continual excitement; one goes almost mad with it. One sees nothing but dancers in tights, actresses in very low dresses, round legs, fat shoulders, all nearly within reach of one's hands, without daring, or being able, to touch them, and one scarcely tastes food. When one leaves the city one's heart is still all in a flutter and one's mind still exhilarated by a sort of longing for kisses which tickles one's lips.

"Morin was in that condition when he took his ticket for La Rochelle by the eight-forty night express. As he was walking up and down the waiting-room at the station he stopped suddenly in front of a young lady who was kissing an old one. She had her veil up, and Morin murmured with delight: 'By Jove what a pretty woman!'

"When she had said 'good-by' to the old lady she went into the waiting-room, and Morin followed her; then she went on the platform and Morin still followed her; then she got into an empty carriage, and he again followed her. There were very few travellers on the express. The engine whistled and the train started. They were alone. Morin devoured her with his eyes. She appeared to be about nineteen or twenty and was fair, tall, with a bold look. She wrapped a railway rug round her and stretched herself on the seat to sleep.

"Morin asked himself: 'I wonder who she is?' And a thousand conjectures, a thousand projects went through his head. He said to himself: 'So many adventures are told as happening on railway journeys that this may be one that is going to present itself to me. Who knows? A piece of good luck like that happens very suddenly, and perhaps I need only be a little venturesome. Was it not Danton who said: "Audacity, more audacity and always audacity"? If it was not Danton it was Mirabeau, but that does not matter. But then I have no audacity, and that is the difficulty. Oh! If one only knew, if one could only read people's minds! I will bet that every day one passes by magnificent opportunities without knowing it, though a gesture would be enough to let me know her mind.'

"Then he imagined to himself combinations which conducted him to triumph. He pictured some chivalrous deed or merely some slight service which he rendered her, a lively, gallant conversation which ended in a declaration.

"But he could find no opening, had no pretext, and he waited for some fortunate circumstance, with his heart beating and his mind topsy-turvy. The night passed and the pretty girl still slept, while Morin was meditating his own fall. The day broke and soon the first ray of sunlight appeared in the sky, a long, clear ray which shone on the face of the sleeping girl and woke her. She sat up, looked at the country, then at Morin and smiled. She smiled like a happy woman, with an engaging and bright look, and Morin trembled. Certainly that smile was intended for him; it was discreet invitation, the signal which he was waiting for. That smile meant to say: 'How stupid, what a ninny, what a dolt, what a donkey you are, to have sat there on your seat like a post all night!

"'Just look at me, am I not charming? And you have sat like that for the whole night, when you have been alone with a pretty woman, you great simpleton!'

"She was still smiling as she looked at him; she even began to laugh; and he lost his head trying to find something suitable to say, no matter what. But he could think of nothing, nothing, and then, seized with a coward's courage, he said to himself:

"'So much the worse, I will risk everything,' and suddenly, without the slightest warning, he went toward her, his arms extended, his lips protruding, and, seizing her in his arms, he kissed her.

"She sprang up immediately with a bound, crying out: 'Help! help!' and screaming with terror; and then she opened the carriage door and waved her arm out, mad with terror and trying to jump out, while Morin, who was almost distracted and feeling sure that she would throw herself out, held her by the skirt and stammered: 'Oh, madame! oh, madame!'

"The train slackened speed and then stopped. Two guards rushed up at the young woman's frantic signals. She threw herself into their arms, stammering: 'That man wanted — wanted — to — to— ' And then she fainted.

"They were at Mauze station, and the gendarme on duty arrested Morin. When the victim of his indiscreet admiration had regained her consciousness, she made her charge against him, and the police drew it up. The poor linen draper did not reach home till night, with a prosecution hanging over him for an outrage to morals in a public place." II

"At that time I was editor of the Fanal des Charentes, and I used to meet Morin every day at the Cafe du Commerce, and the day after his adventure. he came to see me, as he did not know what to do. I did not hide my opinion from him, but said to him: 'You are no better than a pig. No decent man behaves like that.'

"He cried. His wife had given him a beating, and he foresaw his trade ruined, his name dragged through the mire and dishonored, his friends scandalized and taking no notice of him. In the end he excited my pity, and I sent for my colleague, Rivet, a jocular but very sensible little man, to give us his advice.

"He advised me to see the public prosecutor, who was a friend of mine, and so I sent Morin home and went to call on the magistrate. He told me that the woman who had been insulted was a young lady, Mademoiselle Henriette Bonnel, who had just received her certificate as governess in Paris and spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt, who were very respectable tradespeople in Mauze. What made Morin's case all the more serious was that the uncle had lodged a complaint, but the public official had consented to let the matter drop if this complaint were withdrawn, so we must try and get him to do this.

"I went back to Morin's and found him in bed, ill with excitement and distress. His wife, a tall raw-boned woman with a beard, was abusing him continually, and she showed me into the room, shouting at me: 'So you have come to see that pig of a Morin. Well, there he is, the darling!' And she planted herself in front of the bed, with her hands on her hips. I told him how matters stood, and he begged me to go and see the girl's uncle and aunt. It was a delicate mission, but I undertook it, and the poor devil never ceased repeating: 'I assure you I did not even kiss her; no, not even that. I will take my oath to it!'

"I replied: 'It is all the same; you are nothing but a pig.' And I took a thousand francs which he gave me to employ as I thought best, but as I did not care to venture to her uncle's house alone, I begged Rivet to go with me, which he agreed to do on condition that we went immediately, for he had some urgent business at La Rochelle that afternoon. So two hours later we rang at the door of a pretty country house. An attractive girl came and opened the door to us assuredly the young lady in question, and I said to Rivet in a low voice: 'Confound it! I begin to understand Morin!'

"The uncle, Monsieur Tonnelet, subscribed to the Fanal, and was a fervent political coreligionist of ours. He received us with open arms and congratulated us and wished us joy; he was delighted at having the two editors in his house, and Rivet whispered to me: 'I think we shall be able to arrange the matter of that pig of a Morin for him.'

"The niece had left the room and I introduced the delicate subject. I waved the spectre of scandal before his eyes; I accentuated the inevitable depreciation which the young lady would suffer if such an affair became known, for nobody would believe in a simple kiss, and the good man seemed undecided, but he could not make up his mind about anything without his wife, who would not be in until late that evening. But suddenly he uttered an exclamation of triumph: 'Look here, I have an excellent idea; I will keep you here to dine and sleep, and when my wife comes home I hope we shall be able to arrange matters:

"Rivet resisted at first, but the wish to extricate that pig of a Morin decided him, and we accepted the invitation, and the uncle got up radiant, called his niece and proposed that we should take a stroll in his grounds, saying: 'We will leave serious matters until the morning.' Rivet and he began to talk politics, while I soon found myself lagging a little behind with 'the girl who was really charming — charming — and with the greatest precaution I began to speak to her about her adventure and try to make her my ally. She did not, however, appear the least confused, and listened to me like a person who was enjoying the whole thing very much.

"I said to her: 'Just think, mademoiselle, how unpleasant it will be for you. You will have to appear in court, to encounter malicious looks, to speak before everybody and to recount that unfortunate occurrence in the railway carriage in public. Do you not think, between ourselves, that it would have been much better for you to have put that dirty scoundrel back in his place without calling for assistance, and merely to change your carriage?' She began to laugh and replied: 'What you say is quite true, but what could I do? I was frightened, and when one is frightened one does not stop to reason with one's self. As soon as I realized the situation I was very sorry, that I had called out, but then it was too late. You must also remember that the idiot threw himself upon me like a madman, without saying a word and looking like a lunatic. I did not even know what he wanted of me.'

"She looked me full in the face without being nervous or intimidated and I said to myself: 'She is a queer sort of girl, that: I can quite see how that pig Morin came to make a mistake,' and I went on jokingly: 'Come, mademoiselle, confess that he was excusable, for, after all, a man cannot find himself opposite such a pretty girl as you are without feeling a natural desire to kiss her.'

"She laughed more than ever and showed her teeth and said: 'Between the desire and the act, monsieur, there is room for respect.' It was an odd expression to use, although it was not very clear, and I asked abruptly: 'Well, now, suppose I were to kiss you, what would you do?' She stopped to look at me from head to foot and then said calmly: 'Oh, you? That is quite another matter.'

"I knew perfectly well, by Jove, that it was not the same thing at all, as everybody in the neighborhood called me 'Handsome Labarbe' — I was thirty years old in those days — but I asked her: 'And why, pray?' She shrugged her shoulders and replied: 'Well! because you are not so stupid as he is.' And then she added, looking at me slyly: 'Nor so ugly, either: And before she could make a movement to avoid me I had implanted a hearty kiss on her cheek. She sprang aside, but it was too late, and then she said: 'Well, you are not very bashful, either! But don't do that sort of thing again.'

“I put on a humble look and said in a low voice: ‘Oh, mademoiselle! as for me, if I long for one thing more than another it is to be summoned before a magistrate for the same reason as Morin.’

“‘Why?’ she asked. And, looking steadily at her, I replied: ‘Because you are one of the most beautiful creatures living; because it would be an honor and a glory for me to have wished to offer you violence, and because people would have said, after seeing you: “Well, Labarbe has richly deserved what he has got, but he is a lucky fellow, all the same.”’

“She began to laugh heartily again and said: ‘How funny you are!’ And she had not finished the word ‘funny’ before I had her in my arms and was kissing her ardently wherever I could find a place, on her forehead, on her eyes, on her lips occasionally, on her cheeks, all over her head, some part of which she was obliged to leave exposed, in spite of herself, to defend the others; but at last she managed to release herself, blushing and angry. ‘You are very unmannerly, monsieur,’ she said, ‘and I am sorry I listened to you.’

“I took her hand in some confusion and stammered out: ‘I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, mademoiselle. I have offended you; I have acted like a brute! Do not be angry with me for what I have done. If you knew— ‘ I vainly sought for some excuse, and in a few moments she said: ‘There is nothing for me to know, monsieur.’ But I had found something to say, and I cried: ‘Mademoiselle, I love you!’

“She was really surprised and raised her eyes to look at me, and I went on: ‘Yes, mademoiselle, and pray listen to me. I do not know Morin, and I do not care anything about him. It does not matter to me the least if he is committed for trial and locked up meanwhile. I saw you here last year, and I was so taken with you that the thought of you has never left me since, and it does not matter to me whether you believe me or not. I thought you adorable, and the remembrance of you took such a hold on me that I longed to see you again, and so I made use of that fool Morin as a pretext, and here I am. Circumstances have made me exceed the due limits of respect, and I can only beg you to pardon me.’

“She looked at me to see if I was in earnest and was ready to smile again. Then she murmured: ‘You humbug!’ But I raised my hand and said in a sincere voice (and I really believe that I was sincere): ‘I swear to you that I am speaking the truth,’ and she replied quite simply: ‘Don’t talk nonsense!’

“We were alone, quite alone, as Rivet and her uncle had disappeared down a sidewalk, and I made her a real declaration of love, while I squeezed and kissed her hands, and she listened to it as to something new and agreeable, without exactly knowing how much of it she was to believe, while in the end I felt agitated, and at last really myself believed what I said. I was pale, anxious and trembling, and I gently put my arm round her waist and spoke to her softly, whispering into the little curls over her ears. She seemed in a trance, so absorbed in thought was she.

"Then her hand touched mine, and she pressed it, and I gently squeezed her waist with a trembling, and gradually firmer, grasp. She did not move now, and I touched her cheek with my lips, and suddenly without seeking them my lips met hers. It was a long, long kiss, and it would have lasted longer still if I had not heard a hm! hm! just behind me, at which she made her escape through the bushes, and turning round I saw Rivet coming toward me, and, standing in the middle of the path, he said without even smiling: 'So that is the way you settle the affair of that pig of a Morin.' And I replied conceitedly: 'One does what one can, my dear fellow. But what about the uncle? How have you got on with him? I will answer for the niece.' 'I have not been so fortunate with him,' he replied.

"Whereupon I took his arm and we went indoors." III

"Dinner made me lose my head altogether. I sat beside her, and my hand continually met hers under the tablecloth, my foot touched hers and our glances met.

"After dinner we took a walk by moonlight, and I whispered all the tender things I could think of to her. I held her close to me, kissed her every moment, while her uncle and Rivet were arguing as they walked in front of us. They went in, and soon a messenger brought a telegram from her aunt, saying that she would not return until the next morning at seven o'clock by the first train.

"'Very well, Henriette,' her uncle said, 'go and show the gentlemen their rooms.' She showed Rivet his first, and he whispered to me: 'There was no danger of her taking us into yours first.' Then she took me to my room, and as soon as she was alone with me I took her in my arms again and tried to arouse her emotion, but when she saw the danger she escaped out of the room, and I retired very much put out and excited and feeling rather foolish, for I knew that I should not sleep much, and I was wondering how I could have committed such a mistake, when there was a gentle knock at my door, and on my asking who was there a low voice replied: 'I'

“I dressed myself quickly and opened the door, and she came in. ‘I forgot to ask you what you take in the morning,’ she said; ‘chocolate, tea or coffee?’ I put my arms round her impetuously and said, devouring her with kisses: ‘I will take — I will take— ‘

“But she freed herself from my arms, blew out my candle and disappeared and left me alone in the dark, furious, trying to find some matches, and not able to do so. At last I got some and I went into the passage, feeling half mad, with my candlestick in my hand.

“What was I about to do? I did not stop to reason, I only wanted to find her, and I would. I went a few steps without reflecting, but then I suddenly thought: ‘Suppose I should walk into the uncle’s room what should I say?’ And I stood still, with my head a void and my heart beating. But in a few moments I thought of an answer: ‘Of course, I shall say that I was looking for Rivet’s room to speak to him about an important matter,’ and I began to inspect all the doors, trying to find hers, and at last I took hold of a handle at a venture, turned it and went in. There was Henriette, sitting on her bed and looking at me in tears. So I gently turned the key, and going up to her on tiptoe I said: ‘I forgot to ask you for something to read, mademoiselle.’

“I was stealthily returning to my room when a rough hand seized me and a voice — it was Rivet’s — whispered in my ear: ‘So you have not yet quite settled that affair of Morin’s?’

“At seven o’clock the next morning Henriette herself brought me a cup of chocolate. I never have drunk anything like it, soft, velvety, perfumed, delicious. I could hardly take away my lips from the cup, and she had hardly left the room when Rivet came in. He seemed nervous and irritable, like a man who had not slept, and he said to me crossly:

“‘If you go on like this you will end by spoiling the affair of that pig of a Morin!’

“At eight o’clock the aunt arrived. Our discussion was very short, for they withdrew their complaint, and I left five hundred francs for the poor of the town. They wanted to keep us for the day, and they arranged an excursion to go and see some ruins. Henriette made signs to me to stay, behind her parents’ back, and I accepted, but Rivet was determined to go, and though I took him aside and begged and prayed him to do this for me, he appeared quite exasperated and kept saying to me: ‘I have had enough of that pig of a Morin’s affair, do you hear?’

“Of course I was obliged to leave also, and it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I could have gone on arranging that business as long as I lived, and when we were in the railway carriage, after shaking hands with her in silence, I said to Rivet: ‘You are a mere brute!’ And he replied: ‘My dear fellow, you were beginning to annoy me confoundedly.’

“On getting to the Fanal office, I saw a crowd waiting for us, and as soon as they saw us they all exclaimed: ‘Well, have you settled the affair of that pig of a Morin?’ All La Rochelle was excited about it, and Rivet, who had got over his ill-humor on the journey, had great difficulty in keeping himself from laughing as he said: ‘Yes, we have managed it, thanks to Labarbe: And we went to Morin’s.

“He was sitting in an easy-chair with mustard plasters on his legs and cold bandages on his head, nearly dead with misery. He was coughing with the short cough of a dying man, without any one knowing how he had caught it, and his wife looked at him like a tigress ready to eat him, and as soon as he saw us he trembled so violently as to make his hands and knees shake, so I said to him immediately: ‘It is all settled, you dirty scamp, but don’t do such a thing again.’

“He got up, choking, took my hands and kissed them as if they had belonged to a prince, cried, nearly fainted, embraced Rivet and even kissed Madame Morin, who gave him such a push as to send him staggering back into his chair; but he never got over the blow; his mind had been too much upset. In all the country round, moreover, he was called nothing but ‘that pig of a Morin,’ and that epithet went through him like a sword-thrust every time he heard it. When a street boy called after him ‘Pig!’ he turned his head instinctively. His friends also overwhelmed him with horrible jokes and used to ask him, whenever they were eating ham, ‘Is it a bit of yourself?’ He died two years later.

“As for myself, when I was a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 1875, I called on the new notary at Fousserre, Monsieur Belloncle, to solicit his vote, and a tall, handsome and evidently wealthy lady received me. ‘You do not know me again?’ she said. And I stammered out: ‘Why — no — madame.’ ‘Henriette Bonnel.’ ‘Ah!’ And I felt myself turning pale, while she seemed perfectly at her ease and looked at me with a smile.

“As soon as she had left me alone with her husband he took both my hands, and, squeezing them as if he meant to crush them, he said: ‘I have been intending to go and see you for a long time, my dear sir, for my wife has very often talked to me about you. I know — yes, I know under what painful circumstances you made her acquaintance, and I know also how perfectly you behaved, how full of delicacy, tact and devotion you showed yourself in the affair— ‘ He hesitated and then said in a lower tone, as if he had been saying something low and coarse, ‘in the affair of that pig of a Morin.’”

SAINT ANTHONY

OR

SAINT-ANTOINE

They called him Saint Anthony, because his name was Anthony, and also, perhaps, because he was a good fellow, jovial, a lover of practical jokes, a tremendous eater and a heavy drinker and a gay fellow, although he was sixty years old.

He was a big peasant of the district of Caux, with a red face, large chest and stomach, and perched on two legs that seemed too slight for the bulk of his body.

He was a widower and lived alone with his two men servants and a maid on his farm, which he conducted with shrewd economy. He was careful of his own interests, understood business and the raising of cattle, and farming. His two sons and his three daughters, who had married well, were living in the neighborhood and came to dine with their father once a month. His vigor of body was famous in all the countryside. “He is as strong as Saint Anthony,” had become a kind of proverb.

At the time of the Prussian invasion Saint Anthony, at the wine shop, promised to eat an army, for he was a braggart, like a true Norman, a bit of a, coward and a blusterer. He banged his fist on the wooden table, making the cups and the brandy glasses dance, and cried with the assumed wrath of a good fellow, with a flushed face and a sly look in his eye: “I shall have to eat some of them, nom de Dieu!” He reckoned that the Prussians would not come as far as Tanneville, but when he heard they were at Rautot he never went out of the house, and constantly watched the road from the little window of his kitchen, expecting at any moment to see the bayonets go by.

One morning as he was eating his luncheon with the servants the door opened and the mayor of the commune, Maitre Chicot, appeared, followed by a soldier wearing a black copper-pointed helmet. Saint Anthony bounded to his feet and his servants all looked at him, expecting to see him slash the Prussian. But he merely shook hands with the mayor, who said:

"Here is one for you, Saint Anthony. They came last night. Don't do anything foolish, above all things, for they talked of shooting and burning everything if there is the slightest unpleasantness, I have given you warning. Give him something to eat; he looks like a good fellow. Good-day. I am going to call on the rest. There are enough for all." And he went out.

Father Anthony, who had turned pale, looked at the Prussian. He was a big, young fellow with plump, white skin, blue eyes, fair hair, unshaven to his cheek bones, who looked stupid, timid and good. The shrewd Norman read him at once, and, reassured, he made him a sign to sit down. Then he said: "Will you take some soup?"

The stranger did not understand. Anthony then became bolder, and pushing a plateful of soup right under his nose, he said: "Here, swallow that, big pig!"

The soldier answered "Ya," and began to eat greedily, while the farmer, triumphant, feeling he had regained his reputation, winked his eye at the servants, who were making strange grimaces, what with their terror and their desire to laugh.

When the Prussian had devoured his soup, Saint Anthony gave him another plateful, which disappeared in like manner; but he flinched at the third which the farmer tried to insist on his eating, saying: "Come, put that into your stomach; 'twill fatten you or it is your own fault, eh, pig!"

The soldier, understanding only that they wanted to make him eat all his soup, laughed in a contented manner, making a sign to show that he could not hold any more.

Then Saint Anthony, become quite familiar, tapped him on the stomach, saying: "My, there is plenty in my pig's belly!" But suddenly he began to writhe with laughter, unable to speak. An idea had struck him which made him choke with mirth. "That's it, that's it, Saint Anthony and his pig. There's my pig!" And the three servants burst out laughing in their turn.

The old fellow was so pleased that he had the brandy brought in, good stuff, 'fil en dix', and treated every one. They clinked glasses with the Prussian, who clacked his tongue by way of flattery to show that he enjoyed it. And Saint Anthony exclaimed in his face: “Eh, is not that superfine? You don’t get anything like that in your home, pig!”

From that time Father Anthony never went out without his Prussian. He had got what he wanted. This was his vengeance, the vengeance of an old rogue. And the whole countryside, which was in terror, laughed to split its sides at Saint Anthony’s joke. Truly, there was no one like him when it came to humor. No one but he would have thought of a thing like that. He was a born joker!

He went to see his neighbors every day, arm in arm with his German, whom he introduced in a jovial manner, tapping him on the shoulder: “See, here is my pig; look and see if he is not growing fat, the animal!”

And the peasants would beam with smiles. “He is so comical, that reckless fellow, Antoine!”

“I will sell him to you, Cesaire, for three pistoles” (thirty francs).

“I will take him, Antoine, and I invite you to eat some black pudding.”

“What I want is his feet.”

“Feel his belly; you will see that it is all fat.”

And they all winked at each other, but dared not laugh too loud, for fear the Prussian might finally suspect they were laughing at him. Anthony, alone growing bolder every day, pinched his thighs, exclaiming, “Nothing but fat”; tapped him on the back, shouting, “That is all bacon”; lifted him up in his arms as an old Colossus that could have lifted an anvil, declaring, “He weighs six hundred and no waste.”

He had got into the habit of making people offer his “pig” something to eat wherever they went together. This was the chief pleasure, the great diversion every day. “Give him whatever you please, he will swallow everything.” And they offered the man bread and butter, potatoes, cold meat, chitterlings, which caused the remark, “Some of your own, and choice ones.”

The soldier, stupid and gentle, ate from politeness, charmed at these attentions, making himself ill rather than refuse, and he was actually growing fat and his uniform becoming tight for him. This delighted Saint Anthony, who said: “You know, my pig, that we shall have to have another cage made for you.”

They had, however, become the best friends in the world, and when the old fellow went to attend to his business in the neighborhood the Prussian accompanied him for the simple pleasure of being with him.

The weather was severe; it was freezing hard. The terrible winter of 1870 seemed to bring all the scourges on France at one time.

Father Antoine, who made provision beforehand, and took advantage of every opportunity, foreseeing that manure would be scarce for the spring farming, bought from a neighbor who happened to be in need of money all that he had, and it was agreed that he should go every evening with his cart to get a load.

So every day at twilight he set out for the farm of Haules, half a league distant, always accompanied by his “pig.” And each time it was a festival, feeding the animal. All the neighbors ran over there as they would go to high mass on Sunday.

But the soldier began to suspect something, be mistrustful, and when they laughed too loud he would roll his eyes uneasily, and sometimes they lighted up with anger.

One evening when he had eaten his fill he refused to swallow another morsel, and attempted to rise to leave the table. But Saint Anthony stopped him by a turn of the wrist and, placing his two powerful hands on his shoulders, he sat him down again so roughly that the chair smashed under him.

A wild burst of laughter broke forth, and Anthony, beaming, picked up his pig, acted as though he were dressing his wounds, and exclaimed: “Since you will not eat, you shall drink, nom de Dieu!” And they went to the wine shop to get some brandy.

The soldier rolled his eyes, which had a wicked expression, but he drank, nevertheless; he drank as long as they wanted him, and Saint Anthony held his head to the great delight of his companions.

The Norman, red as a tomato, his eyes ablaze, filled up the glasses and clinked, saying: “Here’s to you!”. And the Prussian, without speaking a word, poured down one after another glassfuls of cognac.

It was a contest, a battle, a revenge! Who would drink the most, nom d’un nom! They could neither of them stand any more when the liter was emptied. But neither was conquered. They were tied, that was all. They would have to begin again the next day.

They went out staggering and started for home, walking beside the dung cart which was drawn along slowly by two horses.

Snow began to fall and the moonless night was sadly lighted by this dead whiteness on the plain. The men began to feel the cold, and this aggravated their intoxication. Saint Anthony, annoyed at not being the victor, amused himself by shoving his companion so as to make him fall over into the ditch. The other would dodge backwards, and each time he did he uttered some German expression in an angry tone, which made the peasant roar with laughter. Finally the Prussian lost his temper, and just as Anthony was rolling towards him he responded with such a terrific blow with his fist that the Colossus staggered.

Then, excited by the brandy, the old man seized the pugilist round the waist, shook him for a few moments as he would have done with a little child, and pitched him at random to the other side of the road. Then, satisfied with this piece of work, he crossed his arms and began to laugh afresh.

But the soldier picked himself up in a hurry, his head bare, his helmet having rolled off, and drawing his sword he rushed over to Father Anthony.

When he saw him coming the peasant seized his whip by the top of the handle, his big holly wood whip, straight, strong and supple as the sinew of an ox.

The Prussian approached, his head down, making a lunge with his sword, sure of killing his adversary. But the old fellow, squarely hitting the blade, the point of which would have pierced his stomach, turned it aside, and with the butt end of the whip struck the soldier a sharp blow on the temple and he fell to the ground.

Then he, gazed aghast, stupefied with amazement, at the body, twitching convulsively at first and then lying prone and motionless. He bent over it, turned it on its back, and gazed at it for some time. The man's eyes were closed, and blood trickled from a wound at the side of his forehead. Although it was dark, Father Anthony could distinguish the bloodstain on the white snow.

He remained there, at his wit's end, while his cart continued slowly on its way.

What was he to do? He would be shot! They would burn his farm, ruin his district! What should he do? What should he do? How could he hide the body, conceal the fact of his death, deceive the Prussians? He heard voices in the distance, amid the utter stillness of the snow. All at once he roused himself, and picking up the helmet he placed it on his victim's head. Then, seizing him round the body, he lifted him up in his arms, and thus running with him, he overtook his team, and threw the body on top of the manure. Once in his own house he would think up some plan.

He walked slowly, racking his brain, but without result. He saw, he felt, that he was lost. He entered his courtyard. A light was shining in one of the attic windows; his maid was not asleep. He hastily backed his wagon to the edge of the manure hollow. He thought that by overturning the manure the body lying on top of it would fall into the ditch and be buried beneath it, and he dumped the cart.

As he had foreseen, the man was buried beneath the manure. Anthony evened it down with his fork, which he stuck in the ground beside it. He called his stableman, told him to put up the horses, and went to his room.

He went to bed, still thinking of what he had best do, but no ideas came to him. His apprehension increased in the quiet of his room. They would shoot him! He was bathed in perspiration from fear, his teeth chattered, he rose shivering, not being able to stay in bed.

He went downstairs to the kitchen, took the bottle of brandy from the sideboard and carried it upstairs. He drank two large glasses, one after another, adding a fresh intoxication to the late one, without quieting his mental anguish. He had done a pretty stroke of work, nom de Dieu, idiot!

He paced up and down, trying to think of some stratagem, some explanations, some cunning trick, and from time to time he rinsed his mouth with a swallow of “fil en dix” to give him courage.

But no ideas came to him, not one.

Towards midnight his watch dog, a kind of cross wolf called “Devorant,” began to howl frantically. Father Anthony shuddered to the marrow of his bones, and each time the beast began his long and lugubrious wail the old man’s skin turned to goose flesh.

He had sunk into a chair, his legs weak, stupefied, done up, waiting anxiously for “Devorant” to set up another howl, and starting convulsively from nervousness caused by terror.

The clock downstairs struck five. The dog was still howling. The peasant was almost insane. He rose to go and let the dog loose, so that he should not hear him. He went downstairs, opened the hall door, and stepped out into the darkness. The snow was still falling. The earth was all white, the farm buildings standing out like black patches. He approached the kennel. The dog was dragging at his chain. He unfastened it. “Devorant” gave a bound, then stopped short, his hair bristling, his legs rigid, his muzzle in the air, his nose pointed towards the manure heap.

Saint Anthony, trembling from head to foot, faltered:

"What's the matter with you, you dirty hound?" and he walked a few steps forward, gazing at the indistinct outlines, the sombre shadow of the courtyard.

Then he saw a form, the form of a man sitting on the manure heap!

He gazed at it, paralyzed by fear, and breathing hard. But all at once he saw, close by, the handle of the manure fork which was sticking in the ground. He snatched it up and in one of those transports of fear that will make the greatest coward brave he rushed forward to see what it was.

It was he, his Prussian, come to life, covered with filth from his bed of manure which had kept him warm. He had sat down mechanically, and remained there in the snow which sprinkled down, all covered with dirt and blood as he was, and still stupid from drinking, dazed by the blow and exhausted from his wound.

He perceived Anthony, and too sodden to understand anything, he made an attempt to rise. But the moment the old man recognized him, he foamed with rage like a wild animal.

"Ah, pig! pig!" he sputtered. "You are not dead! You are going to denounce me now — wait — wait!"

And rushing on the German with all the strength of leis arms he flung the raised fork like a lance and buried the four prongs full length in his breast.

The soldier fell over on his back, uttering a long death moan, while the old peasant, drawing the fork out of his breast, plunged it over and over again into his abdomen, his stomach, his throat, like a madman, piercing the body from head to foot, as it still quivered, and the blood gushed out in streams.

Finally he stopped, exhausted by his arduous work, swallowing great mouthfuls of air, calmed down at the completion of the murder.

As the cocks were beginning to crow in the poultry yard and it was near daybreak, he set to work to bury the man.

He dug a hole in the manure till he reached the earth, dug down further, working wildly, in a frenzy of strength with frantic motions of his arms and body.

When the pit was deep enough he rolled the corpse into it with the fork, covered it with earth, which he stamped down for some time, and then put back the manure, and he smiled as he saw the thick snow finishing his work and covering up its traces with a white sheet.

He then stuck the fork in the manure and went into the house. His bottle, still half full of brandy stood on the table. He emptied it at a draught, threw himself on his bed and slept heavily.

He woke up sober, his mind calm and clear, capable of judgment and thought.

At the end of an hour he was going about the country making inquiries everywhere for his soldier. He went to see the Prussian officer to find out why they had taken away his man.

As everyone knew what good friends they were, no one suspected him. He even directed the research, declaring that the Prussian went to see the girls every evening.

An old retired gendarme who had an inn in the next village, and a pretty daughter, was arrested and shot.

LASTING LOVE

It was the end of the dinner that opened the shooting season. The Marquis de Bertrans with his guests sat around a brightly lighted table, covered with fruit and flowers. The conversation drifted to love. Immediately there arose an animated discussion, the same eternal discussion as to whether it were possible to love more than once. Examples were given of persons who had loved once; these were offset by those who had loved violently many times. The men agreed that passion, like sickness, may attack the same person several times, unless it strikes to kill. This conclusion seemed quite incontestable. The women, however, who based their opinion on poetry rather than on practical observation, maintained that love, the great passion, may come only once to mortals. It resembles lightning, they said, this love. A heart once touched by it becomes forever such a waste, so ruined, so consumed, that no other strong sentiment can take root there, not even a dream. The marquis, who had indulged in many love affairs, disputed this belief.

"I tell you it is possible to love several times with all one's heart and soul. You quote examples of persons who have killed themselves for love, to prove the impossibility of a second passion. I wager that if they had not foolishly committed suicide, and so destroyed the possibility of a second experience, they would have found a new love, and still another, and so on till death. It is with love as with drink. He who has once indulged is forever a slave. It is a thing of temperament."

They chose the old doctor as umpire. He thought it was as the marquis had said, a thing of temperament.

"As for me," he said, "I once knew of a love which lasted fifty-five years without one day's respite, and which ended only with death." The wife of the marquis clasped her hands.

"That is beautiful! Ah, what a dream to be loved in such a way! What bliss to live for fifty-five years enveloped in an intense, unwavering affection! How this happy being must have blessed his life to be so adored!”

The doctor smiled.

“You are not mistaken, madame, on this point the loved one was a man. You even know him; it is Monsieur Chouquet, the chemist. As to the woman, you also know her, the old chair-mender, who came every year to the chateau.” The enthusiasm of the women fell. Some expressed their contempt with “Pouah!” for the loves of common people did not interest them. The doctor continued: “Three months ago I was called to the deathbed of the old chair-mender. The priest had preceded me. She wished to make us the executors of her will. In order that we might understand her conduct, she told us the story of her life. It is most singular and touching: Her father and mother were both chair-menders. She had never lived in a house. As a little child she wandered about with them, dirty, unkempt, hungry. They visited many towns, leaving their horse, wagon and dog just outside the limits, where the child played in the grass alone until her parents had repaired all the broken chairs in the place. They seldom spoke, except to cry, ‘Chairs! Chairs! Chair-mender!’

“When the little one strayed too far away, she would be called back by the harsh, angry voice of her father. She never heard a word of affection. When she grew older, she fetched and carried the broken chairs. Then it was she made friends with the children in the street, but their parents always called them away and scolded them for speaking to the barefooted child. Often the boys threw stones at her. Once a kind woman gave her a few pennies. She saved them most carefully.

“One day — she was then eleven years old — as she was walking through a country town she met, behind the cemetery, little Chouquet, weeping bitterly, because one of his playmates had stolen two precious liards (mills). The tears of the small bourgeois, one of those much-envied mortals, who, she imagined, never knew trouble, completely upset her. She approached him and, as soon as she learned the cause of his grief, she put into his hands all her savings. He took them without hesitation and dried his eyes. Wild with joy, she kissed him. He was busy counting his money, and did not object. Seeing that she was not repulsed, she threw her arms round him and gave him a hug — then she ran away.

“What was going on in her poor little head? Was it because she had sacrificed all her fortune that she became madly fond of this youngster, or was it because she had given him the first tender kiss? The mystery is alike for children and for those of riper years. For months she dreamed of that corner near the cemetery and of the little chap. She stole a sou here and, there from her parents on the chair money or groceries she was sent to buy. When she returned to the spot near the cemetery she had two francs in her pocket, but he was not there. Passing his father's drug store, she caught sight of him behind the counter. He was sitting between a large red globe and a blue one. She only loved him the more, quite carried away at the sight of the brilliant-colored globes. She cherished the recollection of it forever in her heart. The following year she met him near the school playing marbles. She rushed up to him, threw her arms round him, and kissed him so passionately that he screamed, in fear. To quiet him, she gave him all her money. Three francs and twenty centimes! A real gold mine, at which he gazed with staring eyes.

"After this he allowed her to kiss him as much as she wished. During the next four years she put into his hands all her savings, which he pocketed conscientiously in exchange for kisses. At one time it was thirty sons, at another two francs. Again, she only had twelve sous. She wept with grief and shame, explaining brokenly that it had been a poor year. The next time she brought five francs, in one whole piece, which made her laugh with joy. She no longer thought of any one but the boy, and he watched for her with impatience; sometimes he would run to meet her. This made her heart thump with joy. Suddenly he disappeared. He had gone to boarding school. She found this out by careful investigation. Then she used great diplomacy to persuade her parents to change their route and pass by this way again during vacation. After a year of scheming she succeeded. She had not seen him for two years, and scarcely recognized him, he was so changed, had grown taller, better looking and was imposing in his uniform, with its brass buttons. He pretended not to see her, and passed by without a glance. She wept for two days and from that time loved and suffered unceasingly.

"Every year he came home and she passed him, not daring to lift her eyes. He never condescended to turn his head toward her. She loved him madly, hopelessly. She said to me:

"'He is the only man whom I have ever seen. I don't even know if another exists.' Her parents died. She continued their work.

"One day, on entering the village, where her heart always remained, she saw Chouquet coming out of his pharmacy with a young lady leaning on his arm. She was his wife. That night the chair-mender threw herself into the river. A drunkard passing the spot pulled her out and took her to the drug store. Young Chouquet came down in his dressing gown to revive her. Without seeming to know who she was he undressed her and rubbed her; then he said to her, in a harsh voice:

"'You are mad! People must not do stupid things like that.' His voice brought her to life again. He had spoken to her! She was happy for a long time. He refused remuneration for his trouble, although she insisted.

"All her life passed in this way. She worked, thinking always of him. She began to buy medicines at his pharmacy; this gave her a chance to talk to him and to see him closely. In this way, she was still able to give him money.

"As I said before, she died this spring. When she had closed her pathetic story she entreated me to take her earnings to the man she loved. She had worked only that she might leave him something to remind him of her after her death. I gave the priest fifty francs for her funeral expenses. The next morning I went to see the Chouquets. They were finishing breakfast, sitting opposite each other, fat and red, important and self-satisfied. They welcomed me and offered me some coffee, which I accepted. Then I began my story in a trembling voice, sure that they would be softened, even to tears. As soon as Chouquet understood that he had been loved by 'that vagabond! that chair-mender! that wanderer!' he swore with indignation as though his reputation had been sullied, the respect of decent people lost, his personal honor, something precious and dearer to him than life, gone. His exasperated wife kept repeating: 'That beggar! That beggar!'

"Seeming unable to find words suitable to the enormity, he stood up and began striding about. He muttered: 'Can you understand anything so horrible, doctor? Oh, if I had only known it while she was alive, I should have had her thrown into prison. I promise you she would not have escaped.'

"I was dumfounded; I hardly knew what to think or say, but I had to finish my mission. 'She commissioned me,' I said, 'to give you her savings, which amount to three thousand five hundred francs. As what I have just told you seems to be very disagreeable, perhaps you would prefer to give this money to the poor.'

"They looked at me, that man and woman,' speechless with amazement. I took the few thousand francs from out of my pocket. Wretched-looking money from every country. Pennies and gold pieces all mixed together. Then I asked:

"'What is your decision?'

"Madame Chouquet spoke first. 'Well, since it is the dying woman's wish, it seems to me impossible to refuse it.'

"Her husband said, in a shamefaced manner: 'We could buy something for our children with it.'

"I answered dryly: 'As you wish.'

"He replied: 'Well, give it to us anyhow, since she commissioned you to do so; we will find a way to put it to some good purpose.'

"I gave them the money, bowed and left.

"The next day Chouquet came to me and said brusquely:

"'That woman left her wagon here — what have you done with it?'

"'Nothing; take it if you wish.'

"'It's just what I wanted,' he added, and walked off. I called him back and said:

"'She also left her old horse and two dogs. Don't you need them?'

"He stared at me surprised: 'Well, no! Really, what would I do with them?'

"'Dispose of them as you like.'

"He laughed and held out his hand to me. I shook it. What could I do? The doctor and the druggist in a country village must not be at enmity. I have kept the dogs. The priest took the old horse. The wagon is useful to Chouquet, and with the money he has bought railroad stock. That is the only deep, sincere love that I have ever known in all my life."

The doctor looked up. The marquise, whose eyes were full of tears, sighed and said:

"There is no denying the fact, only women know how to love."

PIERROT

Mme. Lefevre was a country dame, a widow, one of these half peasants, with ribbons and bonnets with trimming on them, one of those persons who clipped her words and put on great airs in public, concealing the soul of a pretentious animal beneath a comical and bedizened exterior, just as the country-folks hide their coarse red hands in ecru silk gloves.

She had a servant, a good simple peasant, called Rose.

The two women lived in a little house with green shutters by the side of the high road in Normandy, in the centre of the country of Caux. As they had a narrow strip of garden in front of the house, they grew some vegetables.

One night someone stole twelve onions. As soon as Rose became aware of the theft, she ran to tell madame, who came downstairs in her woolen petticoat. It was a shame and a disgrace! They had robbed her, Mme. Lefevre! As there were thieves in the country, they might come back.

And the two frightened women examined the foot tracks, talking, and supposing all sorts of things.

“See, they went that way! They stepped on the wall, they jumped into the garden!”

And they became apprehensive for the future. How could they sleep in peace now!

The news of the theft spread. The neighbor came, making examinations and discussing the matter in their turn, while the two women explained to each newcomer what they had observed and their opinion.

A farmer who lived near said to them:

“You ought to have a dog.”

That is true, they ought to have a dog, if it were only to give the alarm. Not a big dog. Heavens! what would they do with a big dog? He would eat their heads off. But a little dog (in Normandy they say “quin”), a little puppy who would bark.

As soon as everyone had left, Mme. Lefevre discussed this idea of a dog for some time. On reflection she made a thousand objections, terrified at the idea of a bowl full of soup, for she belonged to that race of parsimonious country women who always carry centimes in their pocket to give alms in public to beggars on the road and to put in the Sunday collection plate.

Rose, who loved animals, gave her opinion and defended it shrewdly. So it was decided that they should have a dog, a very small dog.

They began to look for one, but could find nothing but big dogs, who would devour enough soup to make one shudder. The grocer of Rolleville had one, a tiny one, but he demanded two francs to cover the cost of sending it. Mme. Lefevre declared that she would feed a “quin,” but would not buy one.

The baker, who knew all that occurred, brought in his wagon one morning a strange little yellow animal, almost without paws, with the body of a crocodile, the head of a fox, and a curly tail — a true cockade, as big as all the rest of him. Mme. Lefevre thought this common cur that cost nothing was very handsome. Rose hugged it and asked what its name was.

“Pierrot,” replied the baker.

The dog was installed in an old soap box and they gave it some water which it drank. They then offered it a piece of bread. He ate it. Mme. Lefevre, uneasy, had an idea.

“When he is thoroughly accustomed to the house we can let him run. He can find something to eat, roaming about the country.”

They let him run, in fact, which did not prevent him from being famished. Also he never barked except to beg for food, and then he barked furiously.

Anyone might come into the garden, and Pierrot would run up and fawn on each one in turn and not utter a bark.

Mme. Lefevre, however, had become accustomed to the animal. She even went so far as to like it and to give it from time to time pieces of bread soaked in the gravy on her plate.

But she had not once thought of the dog tax, and when they came to collect eight francs — eight francs, madame — for this puppy who never even barked, she almost fainted from the shock.

It was immediately decided that they must get rid of Pierrot. No one wanted him. Every one declined to take him for ten leagues around. Then they resolved, not knowing what else to do, to make him “piquer du mas.”

"Piquer du mas" means to eat chalk. When one wants to get rid of a dog they make him "Piquer du mas."

In the midst of an immense plain one sees a kind of hut, or rather a very small roof standing above the ground. This is the entrance to the clay pit. A big perpendicular hole is sunk for twenty metres underground and ends in a series of long subterranean tunnels.

Once a year they go down into the quarry at the time they fertilize the ground. The rest of the year it serves as a cemetery for condemned dogs, and as one passed by this hole plaintive howls, furious or despairing barks and lamentable appeals reach one's ear.

Sportsmen's dogs and sheep dogs flee in terror from this mournful place, and when one leans over it one perceives a disgusting odor of putrefaction.

Frightful dramas are enacted in the darkness.

When an animal has suffered down there for ten or twelve days, nourished on the foul remains of his predecessors, another animal, larger and more vigorous, is thrown into the hole. There they are, alone, starving, with glittering eyes. They watch each other, follow each other, hesitate in doubt. But hunger impels them; they attack each other, fight desperately for some time, and the stronger eats the weaker, devours him alive.

When it was decided to make Pierrot "piquer du mas" they looked round for an executioner. The laborer who mended the road demanded six sous to take the dog there. That seemed wildly exorbitant to Mme. Lefevre. The neighbor's hired boy wanted five sous; that was still too much. So Rose having observed that they had better carry it there themselves, as in that way it would not be brutally treated on the way and made to suspect its fate, they resolved to go together at twilight.

They offered the dog that evening a good dish of soup with a piece of butter in it. He swallowed every morsel of it, and as he wagged his tail with delight Rose put him in her apron.

They walked quickly, like thieves, across the plain. They soon perceived the chalk pit and walked up to it. Mme. Lefevre leaned over to hear if any animal was moaning. No, there were none there; Pierrot would be alone. Then Rose, who was crying, kissed the dog and threw him into the chalk pit, and they both leaned over, listening.

First they heard a dull sound, then the sharp, bitter, distracting cry of an animal in pain, then a succession of little mournful cries, then despairing appeals, the cries of a dog who is entreating, his head raised toward the opening of the pit.

He yelped, oh, how he yelped!

They were filled with remorse, with terror, with a wild inexplicable fear, and ran away from the spot. As Rose went faster Mme. Lefevre cried: “Wait for me, Rose, wait for me!”

At night they were haunted by frightful nightmares.

Mme. Lefevre dreamed she was sitting down at table to eat her soup, but when she uncovered the tureen Pierrot was in it. He jumped out and bit her nose.

She awoke and thought she heard him yelping still. She listened, but she was mistaken.

She fell asleep again and found herself on a high road, an endless road, which she followed. Suddenly in the middle of the road she perceived a basket, a large farmer’s basket, lying there, and this basket frightened her.

She ended by opening it, and Pierrot, concealed in it, seized her hand and would not let go. She ran away in terror with the dog hanging to the end of her arm, which he held between his teeth.

At daybreak she arose, almost beside herself, and ran to the chalk pit.

He was yelping, yelping still; he had yelped all night. She began to sob and called him by all sorts of endearing names. He answered her with all the tender inflections of his dog’s voice.

Then she wanted to see him again, promising herself that she would give him a good home till he died.

She ran to the chalk digger, whose business it was to excavate for chalk, and told him the situation. The man listened, but said nothing. When she had finished he said:

“You want your dog? That will cost four francs.” She gave a jump. All her grief was at an end at once.

“Four francs!” she said. “You would die of it! Four francs!”

“Do you suppose I am going to bring my ropes, my windlass, and set it up, and go down there with my boy and let myself be bitten, perhaps, by your cursed dog for the pleasure of giving it back to you? You should not have thrown it down there.”

She walked away, indignant. Four francs!

As soon as she entered the house she called Rose and told her of the quarryman’s charges. Rose, always resigned, repeated:

“Four francs! That is a good deal of money, madame.” Then she added: “If we could throw him something to eat, the poor dog, so he will not die of hunger.”

Mme. Lefevre approved of this and was quite delighted. So they set out again with a big piece of bread and butter.

They cut it in mouthfuls, which they threw down one after the other, speaking by turns to Pierrot. As soon as the dog finished one piece he yelped for the next.

They returned that evening and the next day and every day. But they made only one trip.

One morning as they were just letting fall the first mouthful they suddenly heard a tremendous barking in the pit. There were two dogs there. Another had been thrown in, a large dog.

“Pierrot!” cried Rose. And Pierrot yelped and yelped. Then they began to throw down some food. But each time they noticed distinctly a terrible struggle going on, then plaintive cries from Pierrot, who had been bitten by his companion, who ate up everything as he was the stronger.

It was in vain that they specified, saying:

“That is for you, Pierrot.” Pierrot evidently got nothing.

The two women, dumfounded, looked at each other and Mme. Lefevre said in a sour tone:

“I could not feed all the dogs they throw in there! We must give it up.”

And, suffocating at the thought of all the dogs living at her expense, she went away, even carrying back what remained of the bread, which she ate as she walked along.

Rose followed her, wiping her eyes on the corner of her blue apron.

A NORMANDY JOKE

It was a wedding procession that was coming along the road between the tall trees that bounded the farms and cast their shadow on the road. At the head were the bride and groom, then the family, then the invited guests, and last of all the poor of the neighborhood. The village urchins who hovered about the narrow road like flies ran in and out of the ranks or climbed up the trees to see it better.

The bridegroom was a good-looking young fellow, Jean Patu, the richest farmer in the neighborhood, but he was above all things, an ardent sportsman who seemed to take leave of his senses in order to satisfy that passion, and who spent large sums on his dogs, his keepers, his ferrets and his guns. The bride, Rosalie Roussel, had been courted by all the likely young fellows in the district, for they all thought her handsome and they knew that she would have a good dowry. But she had chosen Patu; partly, perhaps, because she liked him better than she did the others, but still more, like a careful Normandy girl, because he had more crown pieces.

As they entered the white gateway of the husband’s farm, forty shots resounded without their seeing those who fired, as they were hidden in the ditches. The noise seemed to please the men, who were slouching along heavily in their best clothes, and Patu left his wife, and running up to a farm servant whom he perceived behind a tree, took his gun and fired a shot himself, as frisky as a young colt. Then they went on, beneath the apple trees which were heavy with fruit, through the high grass and through the midst of the calves, who looked at them with their great eyes, got up slowly and remained standing, with their muzzles turned toward the wedding party.

The men became serious when they came within measurable distance of the wedding dinner. Some of them, the rich ones, had on tall, shining silk hats, which seemed altogether out of place there; others had old head-coverings with a long nap, which might have been taken for moleskin, while the humblest among them wore caps. All the women had on shawls, which they wore loosely on their back, holding the tips ceremoniously under their arms. They were red, parti-colored, flaming shawls, and their brightness seemed to astonish the black fowls on the dung-heap, the ducks on the side of the pond and the pigeons on the thatched roofs.

The extensive farm buildings seemed to be waiting there at the end of that archway of apple trees, and a sort of vapor came out of open door and windows and an almost overpowering odor of eatables was exhaled from the vast building, from all its openings and from its very walls. The string of guests extended through the yard; but when the foremost of them reached the house, they broke the chain and dispersed, while those behind were still coming in at the open gate. The ditches were now lined with urchins and curious poor people, and the firing did not cease, but came from every side at once, and a cloud of smoke, and that odor which has the same intoxicating effect as absinthe, blended with the atmosphere. The women were shaking their dresses outside the door, to get rid of the dust, were undoing their cap-strings and pulling their shawls over their arms, and then they went into the house to lay them aside altogether for the time. The table was laid in the great kitchen that would hold a hundred persons; they sat down to dinner at two o'clock; and at eight o'clock they were still eating, and the men, in their shirt-sleeves, with their waistcoats unbuttoned and with red faces, were swallowing down the food and drink as if they had been whirlpools. The cider sparkled merrily, clear and golden in the large glasses, by the side of the dark, blood-colored wine, and between every dish they made a "hole," the Normandy hole, with a glass of brandy which inflamed the body and put foolish notions into the head. Low jokes were exchanged across the table until the whole arsenal of peasant wit was exhausted. For the last hundred years the same broad stories had served for similar occasions, and, although every one knew them, they still hit the mark and made both rows of guests roar with laughter.

At one end of the table four young fellows, who were neighbors, were preparing some practical jokes for the newly married couple, and they seemed to have got hold of a good one by the way they whispered and laughed, and suddenly one of them, profiting by a moment of silence, exclaimed: "The poachers will have a good time to-night, with this moon! I say, Jean, you will not be looking at the moon, will you?" The bridegroom turned to him quickly and replied: "Only let them come, that's all!" But the other young fellow began to laugh, and said: “I do not think you will pay much attention to them!”

The whole table was convulsed with laughter, so that the glasses shook, but the bridegroom became furious at the thought that anybody would profit by his wedding to come and poach on his land, and repeated: “I only say-just let them come!”

Then there was a flood of talk with a double meaning which made the bride blush somewhat, although she was trembling with expectation; and when they had emptied the kegs of brandy they all went to bed. The young couple went into their own room, which was on the ground floor, as most rooms in farmhouses are. As it was very warm, they opened the window and closed the shutters. A small lamp in bad taste, a present from the bride’s father, was burning on the chest of drawers, and the bed stood ready to receive the young people.

The young woman had already taken off her wreath and her dress, and she was in her petticoat, unlacing her boots, while Jean was finishing his cigar and looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. Suddenly, with a brusque movement, like a man who is about to set to work, he took off his coat. She had already taken off her boots, and was now pulling off her stockings, and then she said to him: “Go and hide yourself behind the curtains while I get into bed.”

He seemed as if he were about to refuse; but at last he did as she asked him, and in a moment she unfastened her petticoat, which slipped down, fell at her feet and lay on the ground. She left it there, stepped over it in her loose chemise and slipped into the bed, whose springs creaked beneath her weight. He immediately went up to the bed, and, stooping over his wife, he sought her lips, which she hid beneath the pillow, when a shot was heard in the distance, in the direction of the forest of Rapees, as he thought.

He raised himself anxiously, with his heart beating, and running to the window, he opened the shutters. The full moon flooded the yard with yellow light, and the reflection of the apple trees made black shadows at their feet, while in the distance the fields gleamed, covered with the ripe corn. But as he was leaning out, listening to every sound in the still night, two bare arms were put round his neck, and his wife whispered, trying to pull him back: “Do leave them alone; it has nothing to do with you. Come to bed.”

He turned round, put his arms round her, and drew her toward him, but just as he was laying her on the ‘bed, which yielded beneath her weight, they heard another report, considerably nearer this time, and Jean, giving way to his tumultuous rage, swore aloud: “Damn it! They will think I do not go out and see what it is because of you! Wait, wait a few minutes!” He put on his shoes again, took down his gun, which was always hanging within reach against the wall, and, as his wife threw herself on her knees in her terror, imploring him not to go, he hastily freed himself, ran to the window and jumped into the yard.

She waited one hour, two hours, until daybreak, but her husband did not return. Then she lost her head, aroused the house, related how angry Jean was, and said that he had gone after the poachers, and immediately all the male farm-servants, even the boys, went in search of their master. They found him two leagues from the farm, tied hand and foot, half dead with rage, his gun broken, his trousers turned inside out, and with three dead hares hanging round his neck, and a placard on his chest with these words: “Who goes on the chase loses his place.”

In later years, when he used to tell this story of his wedding night, he usually added: “Ah! as far as a joke went it was a good joke. They caught me in a snare, as if I had been a rabbit, the dirty brutes, and they shoved my head into a bag. But if I can only catch them some day they had better look out for themselves!”

That is how they amuse themselves in Normandy on a wedding day.

AM I INSANE?

OR

IS HE MAD?

"AM I insane or jealous? I know not which, but I suffer horribly. I committed a crime it is true, but is not insane jealousy, betrayed love, and the terrible pain I endure, enough to make anyone commit a crime, without actually being a criminal?

I have loved this woman to madness — and yet, is it true? Did I love her? No, no! She owned me body and soul, I was her plaything, she ruled me by her smile, her look, the divine form of her body. It was all those things that I loved, but the woman contained in that body, I despise her; hate her. I always have hated her, for she is but an impure, perfidious creature, in whom there was no soul; even less than that, she is but a mass of soft flesh in which dwells infamy!

The first few months of our union were deliciously strange. Her eyes were three different colors. No, I am not insane, I swear they were. They were gray at noon, shaded green at twilight, and blue at sun rise. In moments of love they were blue; the pupils dilated and nervous. Her lips trembled and often the tip of her pink tongue could be seen, as that of a reptile ready to hiss. When she raised her heavy lids and I saw that ardent look, I shuddered, not only for the unceasing desire to possess her, but for the desire to kill this beast.

When she walked across the room each step resounded in my heart. When she disrobed and emerged infamous but radiant from the white mass of linen and lace, a sudden weakness seized me, my limbs gave way beneath me, and my chest heaved; I was faint, coward that I was!

Each morning when she awakened I waited for that first look, my heart filled with rage, hatred, and disdain for this beast whose slave I was; but when she fixed those limpid blue eyes on me, that languishing look showing traces of lassitude, it was like a burning, unquenchable fire within me, inciting me to passion.

When she opened her eyes that day I saw a dull, indifferent look; a look devoid of desire, and I knew then she was tired of me. I saw it, knew it, felt right away that it was all over, and each hour and minute proved to me that I was right. When I beckoned her with my arms and lips she shrank from me.

“Leave me alone,” she said. “You are horrid!”

Then I became suspicious, insanely jealous; but I am not insane, no indeed! I watched her slyly; not that she had betrayed me, but she was so cold that I knew another would soon take my place.

At times she would say:

“Men disgust me!” Alas! it was too true.

Then I became jealous of her indifference, of her thoughts, which I knew to be impure, and when she awakened sometimes with that same look of lassitude I suffocated with anger, and an irresistible desire to choke her and make her confess the shameful secrets of her heart took hold of me.

Am I insane? No.

One night I saw that she was happy. I felt, in fact I was convinced, that a new passion ruled her. As of old, her eyes shone, she was feverish and her whole self fluttered with love.

I feigned ignorance, but I watched her closely. I discovered nothing however. I waited a week, a month, almost a year. She was radiantly, ideally happy; as if soothed by some ephemeral caress.

At last I guessed. No, I am not insane, I swear I am not. How can I explain this inconceivable, horrible thing? How can I make myself understood? This is how I guessed.

She came in one night from a long ride on horseback and sank exhausted in a seat facing me. An unnatural flush tinted her cheeks and her eyes, — those eyes that I knew so well, — had such a look in them. I was not mistaken, I had seen her look like that; she loved! But whom? What? I almost lost my head, and so as not to look at her I turned to the window. A valet was leading her horse to the stable and she stood and watched him disappear; then she fell asleep almost immediately. I thought and thought all night. My mind wandered through mysteries too deep to conceive. Who can fathom the perversity and strange caprices of a sensual woman?

Every morning she rode madly through hills and dales and each time she came back languid; exhausted. At last I understood. It was of the horse I was jealous — of the wind which caressed her face, of the drooping leaves and of the dewdrops, of the saddle which carried her! It was all those things which made her so happy and brought her back to me satiated; exhausted! I resolved to be revenged. I became very attentive. Every time she came back from her ride I helped her down and the horse made a vicious rush at me. She would pat him on the neck, kiss his quivering nostrils, without even wiping her lips. I watched my chance.

One morning I got up before dawn and went to the path in the woods she loved so well. I carried a rope with me, and my pistols were hidden in my breast as if I were going to fight a duel. I drew the rope across the path, tying it to a tree on each side, and hid myself in the grass. Presently I heard her horse's hoofs, then I saw her coming at a furious pace; her cheeks flushed, an insane look in her eyes. She seemed enraptured; transported into another sphere.

As the animal approached the rope he struck it with his fore feet and fell. Before she had struck the ground I caught her in my arms and helped her to her feet. I then approached the horse, put my pistol close to his ear, and shot him — as I would a man.

She turned on me and dealt me two terrific blows across the face with her riding-whip which felled me, and as she rushed at me again, I shot her!

Tell me, Am I insane?

FATHER MATTHEW

We had just left Rouen and were galloping along the road to Jumieges. The light carriage flew along across the level country. Presently the horse slackened his pace to walk up the hill of Cantelen.

One sees there one of the most magnificent views in the world. Behind us lay Rouen, the city of churches, with its Gothic belfries, sculptured like ivory trinkets; before us Saint Sever, the manufacturing suburb, whose thousands of smoking chimneys rise amid the expanse of sky, opposite the thousand sacred steeples of the old city.

On the one hand the spire of the cathedral, the highest of human monuments, on the other the engine of the power-house, its rival, and almost as high, and a metre higher than the tallest pyramid in Egypt.

Before us wound the Seine, with its scattered islands and bordered by white banks, covered with a forest on the right and on the left immense meadows, bounded by another forest yonder in the distance.

Here and there large ships lay at anchor along the banks of the wide river. Three enormous steam boats were starting out, one behind the other, for Havre, and a chain of boats, a bark, two schooners and a brig, were going upstream to Rouen, drawn by a little tug that emitted a cloud of black smoke.

My companion, a native of the country, did not glance at this wonderful landscape, but he smiled continually; he seemed to be amused at his thoughts. Suddenly he cried:

“Ah, you will soon see something comical — Father Matthew’s chapel. That is a sweet morsel, my boy.”

I looked at him in surprise. He continued:

“I will give you a whiff of Normandy that will stay by you. Father Matthew is the handsomest Norman in the province and his chapel is one of the wonders of the world, nothing more nor less. But I will first give you a few words of explanation.

“Father Matthew, who is also called Father ‘La Boisson,’ is an old sergeant-major who has come back to his native land. He combines in admirable proportions, making a perfect whole, the humbug of the old soldier and the sly roguery of the Norman. On his return to Normandy, thanks to influence and incredible cleverness, he was made doorkeeper of a votive chapel, a chapel dedicated to the Virgin and frequented chiefly by young women who have gone astray . . . . He composed and had painted a special prayer to his ‘Good Virgin.’ This prayer is a masterpiece of unintentional irony, of Norman wit, in which jest is blended with fear of the saint and with the superstitious fear of the secret influence of something. He has not much faith in his protectress, but he believes in her a little through prudence, and he is considerate of her through policy.

“This is how this wonderful prayer begins:

“‘Our good Madame Virgin Mary, natural protectress of girl mothers in this land and all over the world, protect your servant who erred in a moment of forgetfulness . . .’

“It ends thus:

“‘Do not forget me, especially when you are with your holy spouse, and intercede with God the Father that he may grant me a good husband, like your own.’

“This prayer, which was suppressed by the clergy of the district, is sold by him privately, and is said to be very efficacious for those who recite it with unction.

“In fact he talks of the good Virgin as the valet de chambre of a redoubted prince might talk of his master who confided in him all his little private secrets. He knows a number of amusing anecdotes at his expense which he tells confidentially among friends as they sit over their glasses.

“But you will see for yourself.

“As the fees coming from the Virgin did not appear sufficient to him, he added to the main figure a little business in saints. He has them all, or nearly all. There was not room enough in the chapel, so he stored them in the wood-shed and brings them forth as soon as the faithful ask for them. He carved these little wooden statues himself — they are comical in the extreme — and painted them all bright green one year when they were painting his house. You know that saints cure diseases, but each saint has his specialty, and you must not confound them or make any blunders. They are as jealous of each other as mountebanks.

"In order that they may make no mistake, the old women come and consult Matthew.

"'For diseases of the ear which saint is the best?'

"'Why, Saint Osyme is good and Saint Pamphilius is not bad.' But that is not all.

"As Matthew has some time to spare, he drinks; but he drinks like a professional, with conviction, so much so that he is intoxicated regularly every evening. He is drunk, but he is aware of it. He is so well aware of it that he notices each day his exact degree of intoxication. That is his chief occupation; the chapel is a secondary matter.

"And he has invented — listen and catch on — he has invented the 'Saoulometre.'

"There is no such instrument, but Matthew's observations are as precise as those of a mathematician. You may hear him repeating incessantly: 'Since Monday I have had more than forty-five,' or else 'I was between fifty-two and fifty-eight,' or else 'I had at least sixty-six to seventy,' or 'Hullo, cheat, I thought I was in the fifties and here I find I had had seventy-five!'

"He never makes a mistake.

"He declares that he never reached his limit, but as he acknowledges that his observations cease to be exact when he has passed ninety, one cannot depend absolutely on the truth of that statement.

"When Matthew acknowledges that he has passed ninety, you may rest assured that he is blind drunk.

"On these occasions his wife, Melie, another marvel, flies into a fury. She waits for him at the door of the house, and as he enters she roars at him:

"'So there you are, slut, hog, giggling sot!'

"Then Matthew, who is not laughing any longer, plants himself opposite her and says in a severe tone:

"'Be still, Melie; this is no time to talk; wait till to-morrow.'

"If she keeps on shouting at him, he goes up to her and says in a shaky voice:

"'Don't bawl any more. I have had about ninety; I am not counting any more. Look out, I am going to hit you!'

"Then Melie beats a retreat.

"If, on the following day, she reverts to the subject, he laughs in her face and says:

"'Come, come! We have said enough. It is past. As long as I have not reached my limit there is no harm done. But if I go, past that I will allow you to correct me, my word on it!'"

We had reached the top of the hill. The road entered the delightful forest of Roumare.

Autumn, marvellous autumn, blended its gold and purple with the remaining traces of verdure. We passed through Duclair. Then, instead of going on to Jumieges, my friend turned to the left and, taking a crosscut, drove in among the trees.

And presently from the top of a high hill we saw again the magnificent valley of the Seine and the winding river beneath us.

At our right a very small slate-covered building, with a bell tower as large as a sunshade, adjoined a pretty house with green Venetian blinds, and all covered with honeysuckle and roses.

"Here are some friends!" cried a big voice, and Matthew appeared on the threshold. He was a man about sixty, thin and with a goatee and long, white mustache.

My friend shook him by the hand and introduced me, and Matthew took us into a clean kitchen, which served also as a dining-room. He said:

"I have no elegant apartment, monsieur. I do not like to get too far away from the food. The saucepans, you see, keep me company." Then, turning to my friend:

"Why did you come on Thursday? You know quite well that this is the day I consult my Guardian Saint. I cannot go out this afternoon."

And running to the door, he uttered a terrific roar: "Melie!" which must have startled the sailors in the ships along the stream in the valley below.

Melie did not reply.

Then Matthew winked his eye knowingly.

"She is not pleased with me, you see, because yesterday I was in the nineties."

My friend began to laugh. "In the nineties, Matthew! How did you manage it?"

"I will tell you," said Matthew. "Last year I found only twenty rasieres (an old dry measure) of apricots. There are no more, but those are the only things to make cider of. So I made some, and yesterday I tapped the barrel. Talk of nectar! That was nectar. You shall tell me what you think of it. Polyte was here, and we sat down and drank a glass and another without being satisfied (one could go on drinking it until to-morrow), and at last, with glass after glass, I felt a chill at my stomach. I said to Polyte: ‘Supposing we drink a glass of cognac to warm ourselves?’ He agreed. But this cognac, it sets you on fire, so that we had to go back to the cider. But by going from chills to heat and heat to chills, I saw that I was in the nineties. Polyte was not far from his limit.”

The door opened and Melie appeared. At once, before bidding us good-day, she cried:

“Great hog, you have both of you reached your limit!”

“Don’t say that, Melie; don’t say that,” said Matthew, getting angry. “I have never reached my limit.”

They gave us a delicious luncheon outside beneath two lime trees, beside the little chapel and overlooking the vast landscape. And Matthew told us, with a mixture of humor and unexpected credulity, incredible stories of miracles.

We had drunk a good deal of delicious cider, sparkling and sweet, fresh and intoxicating, which he preferred to all other drinks, and were smoking our pipes astride our chairs when two women appeared.

They were old, dried up and bent. After greeting us they asked for Saint Blanc. Matthew winked at us as he replied:

“I will get him for you.” And he disappeared in his wood shed. He remained there fully five minutes. Then he came back with an expression of consternation. He raised his hands.

“I don’t know where he is. I cannot find him. I am quite sure that I had him.” Then making a speaking trumpet of his hands, he roared once more:

“Meli-e-a!”

“What’s the matter?” replied his wife from the end of the garden.

“Where’s Saint Blanc? I cannot find him in the wood shed.”

Then Melie explained it this way:

“Was not that the one you took last week to stop up a hole in the rabbit hutch?”

Matthew gave a start.

“By thunder, that may be!” Then turning to the women, he said:

“Follow me.”

They followed him. We did the same, almost choking with suppressed laughter.

Saint Blanc was indeed stuck into the earth like an ordinary stake, covered with mud and dirt, and forming a corner for the rabbit hutch.

As soon as they perceived him, the two women fell on their knees, crossed themselves and began to murmur an “Oremus.” But Matthew darted toward them.

“Wait,” he said, “you are in the mud; I will get you a bundle of straw.”

He went to fetch the straw and made them a priedieu. Then, looking at his muddy saint and doubtless afraid of bringing discredit on his business, he added:

“I will clean him off a little for you.”

He took a pail of water and a brush and began to scrub the wooden image vigorously, while the two old women kept on praying.

When he had finished he said:

“Now he is all right.” And he took us back to the house to drink another glass.

As he was carrying the glass to his lips he stopped and said in a rather confused manner:

“All the same, when I put Saint Blanc out with the rabbits I thought he would not make any more money. For two years no one had asked for him. But the saints, you see, they are never out of date.”

THE UMBRELLA

Mme. Oreille was a very economical woman; she knew the value of a centime, and possessed a whole storehouse of strict principles with regard to the multiplication of money, so that her cook found the greatest difficulty in making what the servants call their market-penny, and her husband was hardly allowed any pocket money at all. They were, however, very comfortably off, and had no children; but it really pained Mme. Oreille to see any money spent; it was like tearing at her heartstrings when she had to take any of those nice crown-pieces out of her pocket; and whenever she had to spend anything, no matter how necessary it might be, she slept badly the next night.

Oreille was continually saying to his wife:

"You really might be more liberal, as we have no children, and never spend our income."

"You don't know what may happen," she used to reply. "It is better to have too much than too little."

She was a little woman of about forty, very active, rather hasty, wrinkled, very neat and tidy, and with a very short temper.

Her husband frequently complained of all the privations she made him endure; some of them were particularly painful to him, as they touched his vanity.

He was one of the head clerks in the War Office, and only stayed on there in obedience to his wife's wish, to increase their income which they did not nearly spend.

For two years he had always come to the office with the same old patched umbrella, to the great amusement of his fellow clerks. At last he got tired of their jokes, and insisted upon his wife buying him a new one. She bought one for eight francs and a half, one of those cheap articles which large houses sell as an advertisement. When the men in the office saw the article, which was being sold in Paris by the thousand, they began their jokes again, and Oreille had a dreadful time of it. They even made a song about it, which he heard from morning till night all over the immense building.

Oreille was very angry, and peremptorily told his wife to get him a new one, a good silk one, for twenty francs, and to bring him the bill, so that he might see that it was all right.

She bought him one for eighteen francs, and said, getting red with anger as she gave it to her husband:

“This will last you for five years at least.”

Oreille felt quite triumphant, and received a small ovation at the office with his new acquisition.

When he went home in the evening his wife said to him, looking at the umbrella uneasily:

“You should not leave it fastened up with the elastic; it will very likely cut the silk. You must take care of it, for I shall not buy you a new one in a hurry.”

She took it, unfastened it, and remained dumfounded with astonishment and rage; in the middle of the silk there was a hole as big as a six-penny-piece; it had been made with the end of a cigar.

“What is that?” she screamed.

Her husband replied quietly, without looking at it:

“What is it? What do you mean?”

She was choking with rage, and could hardly get out a word.

“You — you — have — burned — your umbrella! Why — you must be — mad! Do you wish to ruin us outright?”

He turned round, and felt that he was growing pale.

“What are you talking about?”

“I say that you have burned your umbrella. Just look here.”

And rushing at him, as if she were going to beat him, she violently thrust the little circular burned hole under his nose.

He was so utterly struck dumb at the sight of it that he could only stammer out:

“What-what is it? How should I know? I have done nothing, I will swear. I don’t know what is the matter with the umbrella.”

“You have been playing tricks with it at the office; you have been playing the fool and opening it, to show it off!” she screamed.

“I only opened it once, to let them see what a nice one it was, that is all, I swear.”

But she shook with rage, and got up one of those conjugal scenes which make a peaceable man dread the domestic hearth more than a battlefield where bullets are raining.

She mended it with a piece of silk cut out of the old umbrella, which was of a different color, and the next day Oreille went off very humbly with the mended article in his hand. He put it into a cupboard, and thought no more of it than of some unpleasant recollection.

But he had scarcely got home that evening when his wife took the umbrella from him, opened it, and nearly had a fit when she saw what had befallen it, for the disaster was irreparable. It was covered with small holes, which evidently proceeded from burns, just as if some one had emptied the ashes from a lighted pipe on to it. It was done for utterly, irreparably.

She looked at it without a word, in too great a passion to be able to say anything. He, also, when he saw the damage, remained almost dumfounded, in a state of frightened consternation.

They looked at each other, then he looked at the floor; and the next moment she threw the useless article at his head, screaming out in a transport of the most violent rage, for she had recovered her voice by that time:

"Oh! you brute! you brute! You did it on purpose, but I will pay you out for it. You shall not have another."

And then the scene began again, and after the storm had raged for an hour, he at last was able to explain himself. He declared that he could not understand it at all, and that it could only proceed from malice or from vengeance.

A ring at the bell saved him; it was a friend whom they were expecting to dinner.

Mme. Oreille submitted the case to him. As for buying a new umbrella, that was out of the question; her husband should not have another. The friend very sensibly said that in that case his clothes would be spoiled, and they were certainly worth more than the umbrella. But the little woman, who was still in a rage, replied:

"Very well, then, when it rains he may have the kitchen umbrella, for I will not give him a new silk one."

Oreille utterly rebelled at such an idea.

"All right," he said; "then I shall resign my post. I am not going to the office with the kitchen umbrella."

The friend interposed.

“Have this one re-covered; it will not cost much.”

But Mme. Oreille, being in the temper that she was, said:

“It will cost at least eight francs to re-cover it. Eight and eighteen are twenty-six. Just fancy, twenty-six francs for an umbrella! It is utter madness!”

The friend, who was only a poor man of the middle classes, had an inspiration:

“Make your fire assurance pay for it. The companies pay for all articles that are burned, as long as the damage has been done in your own house.”

On hearing this advice the little woman calmed down immediately, and then, after a moment’s reflection, she said to her husband:

“To-morrow, before going to your office, you will go to the Maternelle Assurance Company, show them the state your umbrella is in, and make them pay for the damage.”

M. Oreille fairly jumped, he was so startled at the proposal.

“I would not do it for my life! It is eighteen francs lost, that is all. It will not ruin us.”

The next morning he took a walking-stick when he went out, and, luckily, it was a fine day.

Left at home alone, Mme. Oreille could not get over the loss of her eighteen francs by any means. She had put the umbrella on the dining-room table, and she looked at it without being able to come to any determination.

Every moment she thought of the assurance company, but she did not dare to encounter the quizzical looks of the gentlemen who might receive her, for she was very timid before people, and blushed at a mere nothing, and was embarrassed when she had to speak to strangers.

But the regret at the loss of the eighteen francs pained her as if she had been wounded. She tried not to think of it any more, and yet every moment the recollection of the loss struck her painfully. What was she to do, however? Time went on, and she could not decide; but suddenly, like all cowards, on making a resolve, she became determined.

“I will go, and we will see what will happen.”

But first of all she was obliged to prepare the umbrella so that the disaster might be complete, and the reason of it quite evident. She took a match from the mantelpiece, and between the ribs she burned a hole as big as the palm of her hand; then she delicately rolled it up, fastened it with the elastic band, put on her bonnet and shawl, and went quickly toward the Rue de Rivoli, where the assurance office was.

But the nearer she got, the slower she walked. What was she going to say, and what reply would she get?

She looked at the numbers of the houses; there were still twenty-eight. That was all right, so she had time to consider, and she walked slower and slower. Suddenly she saw a door on which was a large brass plate with "La Maternelle Fire Assurance Office" engraved on it. Already! She waited a moment, for she felt nervous and almost ashamed; then she walked past, came back, walked past again, and came back again.

At last she said to herself:

"I must go in, however, so I may as well do it sooner as later."

She could not help noticing, however, how her heart beat as she entered. She went into an enormous room with grated doors all round it, and above them little openings at which a man's head appeared, and as a gentleman carrying a number of papers passed her, she stopped him and said timidly: "I beg your pardon, monsieur, but can you tell me where I must apply for payment for anything that has been accidentally burned?"

He replied in a sonorous voice:

"The first door on the left; that is the department you want."

This frightened her still more, and she felt inclined to run away, to put in no claim, to sacrifice her eighteen francs. But the idea of that sum revived her courage, and she went upstairs, out of breath, stopping at almost every other step.

She knocked at a door which she saw on the first landing, and a clear voice said, in answer:

"Come in!"

She obeyed mechanically, and found herself in a large room where three solemn gentlemen, all with a decoration in their buttonholes, were standing talking.

One of them asked her: "What do you want, madame?"

She could hardly get out her words, but stammered: "I have come — I have come on account of an accident, something— ".

He very politely pointed out a seat to her,

"If you will kindly sit down I will attend to you in a moment."

And, returning to the other two, he went on with the conversation.

"The company, gentlemen, does not consider that it is under any obligation to you for more than four hundred thousand francs, and we can pay no attention to your claim to the further sum of a hundred thousand, which you wish to make us pay. Besides that, the surveyor's valuation— "

One of the others interrupted him:

"That is quite enough, monsieur; the law courts will decide between us, and we have nothing further to do than to take our leave." And they went out after mutual ceremonious bows.

Oh! if she could only have gone away with them, how gladly she would have done it; she would have run away and given up everything. But it was too late, for the gentleman came back, and said, bowing:

"What can I do for you, madame?"

She could scarcely speak, but at last she managed to say:

"I have come-for this."

The manager looked at the object which she held out to him in mute astonishment.

With trembling fingers she tried to undo the elastic, and succeeding, after several attempts, she hastily opened the damaged remains of the umbrella.

"It looks to me to be in a very bad state of health," he said compassionately.

"It cost me twenty francs," she said, with some hesitation.

He seemed astonished. "Really! As much as that?"

"Yes, it was a capital article, and I wanted you to see the condition it is in."

"Yes, yes, I see; very well. But I really do not understand what it can have to do with me."

She began to feel uncomfortable; perhaps this company did not pay for such small articles, and she said:

"But — it is burned."

He could not deny it.

"I see that very well," he replied.

She remained open-mouthed, not knowing what to say next; then, suddenly recollecting that she had left out the main thing, she said hastily:

"I am Mme. Oreille; we are assured in La Maternelle, and I have come to claim the value of this damage."

"I only want you to have it re-covered," she added quickly, fearing a positive refusal.

The manager was rather embarrassed, and said: “But, really, madame, we do not sell umbrellas; we cannot undertake such kinds of repairs.”

The little woman felt her courage reviving; she was not going to give up without a struggle; she was not even afraid any more, and said:

“I only want you to pay me the cost of repairing it; I can quite well get it done myself.”

The gentleman seemed rather confused.

“Really, madame, it is such a very small matter! We are never asked to give compensation for such trivial losses. You must allow that we cannot make good pocket-handkerchiefs, gloves, brooms, slippers, all the small articles which are every day exposed to the chances of being burned.”

She got red in the face, and felt inclined to fly into a rage.

“But, monsieur, last December one of our chimneys caught fire, and caused at least five hundred francs’ damage; M. Oreille made no claim on the company, and so it is only just that it should pay for my umbrella now.”

The manager, guessing that she was telling a lie, said, with a smile:

“You must acknowledge, madame, that it is very surprising that M. Oreille should have asked no compensation for damages amounting to five hundred francs, and should now claim five or six francs for mending an umbrella.”

She was not the least put out, and replied:

“I beg your pardon, monsieur, the five hundred francs affected M. Oreille’s pocket, whereas this damage, amounting to eighteen francs, concerns Mme. Oreille’s pocket only, which is a totally different matter.”

As he saw that he had no chance of getting rid of her, and that he would only be wasting his time, he said resignedly:

“Will you kindly tell me how the damage was done?”

She felt that she had won the victory, and said:

“This is how it happened, monsieur: In our hall there is a bronze stick and umbrella stand, and the other day, when I came in, I put my umbrella into it. I must tell you that just above there is a shelf for the candlesticks and matches. I put out my hand, took three or four matches, and struck one, but it missed fire, so I struck another, which ignited, but went out immediately, and a third did the same.”

The manager interrupted her to make a joke.

“I suppose they were government matches, then?”

She did not understand him, and went on:

"Very likely. At any rate, the fourth caught fire, and I lit my candle, and went into my room to go to bed; but in a quarter of an hour I fancied that I smelt something burning, and I have always been terribly afraid of fire. If ever we have an accident it will not be my fault, I assure you. I am terribly nervous since our chimney was on fire, as I told you; so I got up, and hunted about everywhere, sniffing like a dog after game, and at last I noticed that my umbrella was burning. Most likely a match had fallen between the folds and burned it. You can see how it has damaged it."

The manager had taken his cue, and asked her: "What do you estimate the damage at?"

She did not know what to say, as she was not certain what value to put on it, but at last she replied:

"Perhaps you had better get it done yourself. I will leave it to you."

He, however, naturally refused.

"No, madame, I cannot do that. Tell me the amount of your claim, that is all I want to know."

"Well, I think that — Look here, monsieur, I do not want to make any money out of you, so I will tell you what we will do. I will take my umbrella to the maker, who will re-cover it in good, durable silk, and I will bring the bill to you. Will that suit you, monsieur?"

"Perfectly, madame; we will settle it so. Here is a note for the cashier, who will repay you whatever it costs you."

He gave Mme. Oreille a slip of paper, who took it, got up and went out, thanking him, for she was in a hurry to escape lest he should change his mind.

She went briskly through the streets, looking out for a really good umbrella maker, and when she found a shop which appeared to be a first-class one, she went in, and said, confidently:

"I want this umbrella re-covered in silk, good silk. Use the very best and strongest you have; I don't mind what it costs."

BELHOMME’S BEAST

The coach for Havre was ready to leave Criquetot, and all the passengers were waiting for their names to be called out, in the courtyard of the Commercial Hotel kept by Monsieur Malandain, Jr.

It was a yellow wagon, mounted on wheels which had once been yellow, but were now almost gray through the accumulation of mud. The front wheels were very small, the back ones, high and fragile, carried the large body of the vehicle, which was swollen like the belly of an animal. Three white horses, with enormous heads and great round knees, were the first things one noticed. They were harnessed ready to draw this coach, which had something of the appearance of a monster in its massive structure. The horses seemed already asleep in front of the strange vehicle.

The driver, Cesaire Horlaville, a little man with a big paunch, supple nevertheless, through his constant habit of climbing over the wheels to the top of the wagon, his face all aglow from exposure to the brisk air of the plains, to rain and storms, and also from the use of brandy, his eyes twitching from the effect of constant contact with wind and hail, appeared in the doorway of the hotel, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. Large round baskets, full of frightened poultry, were standing in front of the peasant women. Cesaire Horlaville took them one after the other and packed them on the top of his coach; then more gently, he loaded on those containing eggs; finally he tossed up from below several little bags of grain, small packages wrapped in handkerchiefs, pieces of cloth, or paper. Then he opened the back door, and drawing a list from his pocket he called:

“Monsieur le cure de Gorgeville.”

The priest advanced. He was a large, powerful, robust man with a red face and a genial expression. He hitched up his cassock to lift his foot, just as the women hold up their skirts, and climbed into the coach.

“The schoolmaster of Rollebose-les-Grinets.”

The man hastened forward, tall, timid, wearing a long frock coat which fell to his knees, and he in turn disappeared through the open door.

“Maitre Poiret, two seats.”

Poiret approached, a tall, round-shouldered man, bent by the plow, emaciated through abstinence, bony, with a skin dried by a sparing use of water. His wife followed him, small and thin, like a tired animal, carrying a large green umbrella in her hands.

“Maitre Rabot, two seats.”

Rabot hesitated, being of an undecided nature. He asked:

“You mean me?”

The driver was going to answer with a jest, when Rabot dived head first towards the door, pushed forward by a vigorous shove from his wife, a tall, square woman with a large, round stomach like a barrel, and hands as large as hams.

Rabot slipped into the wagon like a rat entering a hole.

“Maitre Caniveau.”

A large peasant, heavier than an ox, made the springs bend, and was in turn engulfed in the interior of the yellow chest.

“Maitre Belhomme.”

Belhomme, tall and thin, came forward, his neck bent, his head hanging, a handkerchief held to his ear as if he were suffering from a terrible toothache.

All these people wore the blue blouse over quaint and antique coats of a black or greenish cloth, Sunday clothes which they would only uncover in the streets of Havre. Their heads were covered by silk caps at high as towers, the emblem of supreme elegance in the small villages of Normandy.

Cesaire Horlaville closed the door, climbed up on his box and snapped his whip.

The three horses awoke and, tossing their heads, shook their bells.

The driver then yelling “Get up!” as loud as he could, whipped up his horses. They shook themselves, and, with an effort, started off at a slow, halting gait. And behind them came the coach, rattling its shaky windows and iron springs, making a terrible clatter of hardware and glass, while the passengers were tossed hither and thither like so many rubber balls.

At first all kept silent out of respect for the priest, that they might not shock him. Being of a loquacious and genial disposition, he started the conversation.

"Well, Maitre Caniveau," said he, "how are you getting along?"

The enormous farmer who, on account of his size, girth and stomach, felt a bond of sympathy for the representative of the Church, answered with a smile:

"Pretty well, Monsieur le cure, pretty well. And how are you?"

"Oh! I'm always well and healthy."

"And you, Maitre Poiret?" asked the abbe.

"Oh! I'd be all right only the colzas ain't a-goin' to give much this year, and times are so hard that they are the only things worth while raisin'."

"Well, what can you expect? Times are hard."

"Hub! I should say they were hard," sounded the rather virile voice of Rabot's big consort.

As she was from a neighboring village, the priest only knew her by name.

"Is that you, Blondel?" he said.

"Yes, I'm the one that married Rabot."

Rabot, slender, timid, and self-satisfied, bowed smilingly, bending his head forward as though to say: "Yes, I'm the Rabot whom Blondel married."

Suddenly Maitre Belhomme, still holding his handkerchief to his ear, began groaning in a pitiful fashion. He was going "Oh-oh-oh!" and stamping his foot in order to show his terrible suffering.

"You must have an awful toothache," said the priest.

The peasant stopped moaning for a minute and answered:

"No, Monsieur le cure, it is not the teeth. It's my ear-away down at the bottom of my ear."

"Well, what have you got in your ear? A lump of wax?"

"I don't know whether it's wax; but I know that it is a bug, a big bug, that crawled in while I was asleep in the haystack."

"A bug! Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? As sure as I am of heaven, Monsieur le cure! I can feel it gnawing at the bottom of my ear! It's eating my head for sure! It's eating my head! Oh-oh-oh!" And he began to stamp his foot again.

Great interest had been aroused among the spectators. Each one gave his bit of advice. Poiret claimed that it was a spider, the teacher, thought it might be a caterpillar. He had already seen such a thing once, at Campemuret, in Orne, where he had been for six years. In this case the caterpillar had gone through the head and out at the nose. But the man remained deaf in that ear ever after, the drum having been pierced.

"It's more likely to be a worm," said the priest.

Maitre Belhomme, his head resting against the door, for he had been the last one to enter, was still moaning.

"Oh — oh — oh! I think it must be an ant, a big ant — there it is biting again. Oh, Monsieur le cure, how it hurts! how it hurts!"

"Have you seen the doctor?" asked Caniveau.

"I should say not!"

"Why?"

The fear of the doctor seemed to cure Belhomme. He straightened up without, however, dropping his handkerchief.

"What! You have money for them, for those loafers? He would have come once, twice, three times, four times, five times! That means two five-franc pieces, two five-franc pieces, for sure. And what would he have done, the loafer, tell me, what would he have done? Can you tell me?"

Caniveau was laughing.

"No, I don't know. Where are you going?"

"I am going to Havre, to see Chambrelan."

"Who is Chambrelan?"

"The healer, of course."

"What healer?"

"The healer who cured my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes, the healer who cured my father years ago."

"What was the matter with your father?"

"A draught caught him in the back, so that he couldn't move hand or foot."

"Well, what did your friend Chambrelan do to him?"

"He kneaded his back with both hands as though he were making bread! And he was all right in a couple of hours!"

Belhomme thought that Chambrelan must also have used some charm, but he did not dare say so before the priest. Caniveau replied, laughing:

"Are you sure it isn't a rabbit that you have in your ear? He might have taken that hole for his home. Wait, I'll make him run away."

Whereupon Caniveau, making a megaphone of his hands, began to mimic the barking of hounds. He snapped, howled, growled, barked. And everybody in the carriage began to roar, even the schoolmaster, who, as a rule, never ever smiled.

However, as Belhomme seemed angry at their making fun of him, the priest changed the conversation and turning to Rabot's big wife, said:

"You have a large family, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le cure — and it's a pretty hard matter to bring them up!"

Rabot agreed, nodding his head as though to say: "Oh, yes, it's a hard thing to bring up!"

"How many children?"

She replied authoritatively in a strong, clear voice:

"Sixteen children, Monsieur le cure, fifteen of them by my husband!"

And Rabot smiled broadly, nodding his head. He was responsible for fifteen, he alone, Rabot! His wife said so! Therefore there could be no doubt about it. And he was proud!

And whose was the sixteenth? She didn't tell. It was doubtless the first. Perhaps everybody knew, for no one was surprised. Even Caniveau kept mum.

But Belhomme began to moan again:

"Oh-oh-oh! It's scratching about in the bottom of my ear! Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

The coach just then stopped at the Cafe Polyto. The priest said:

"If someone were to pour a little water into your ear, it might perhaps drive it out. Do you want to try?"

"Sure! I am willing."

And everybody got out in order to witness the operation. The priest asked for a bowl, a napkin and a glass of water, then he told the teacher to hold the patient's head over on one side, and, as soon as the liquid should have entered the ear, to turn his head over suddenly on the other side.

But Caniveau, who was already peering into Belhomme's ear to see if he couldn't discover the beast, shouted:

"Gosh! What a mess! You'll have to clear that out, old man. Your rabbit could never get through that; his feet would stick."

The priest in turn examined the passage and saw that it was too narrow and too congested for him to attempt to expel the animal. It was the teacher who cleared out this passage by means of a match and a bit of cloth. Then, in the midst of the general excitement, the priest poured into the passage half a glass of water, which trickled over the face through the hair and down the neck of the patient. Then the schoolmaster quickly twisted the head round over the bowl, as though he were trying to unscrew it. A couple of drops dripped into the white bowl. All the passengers rushed forward. No insect had come out.

However, Belhomme exclaimed: “I don’t feel anything any more.” The priest triumphantly exclaimed: “Certainly it has been drowned.” Everybody was happy and got back into the coach.

But hardly had they started when Belhomme began to cry out again. The bug had aroused itself and had become furious. He even declared that it had now entered his head and was eating his brain. He was howling with such contortions that Poirat’s wife, thinking him possessed by the devil, began to cry and to cross herself. Then, the pain abating a little, the sick man began to tell how it was running round in his ear. With his finger he imitated the movements of the body, seeming to see it, to follow it with his eyes: “There is goes up again! Oh — oh — oh — what torture!”

Caniveau was getting impatient. “It’s the water that is making the bug angry. It is probably more accustomed to wine.”

Everybody laughed, and he continued: “When we get to the Cafe Bourbeux, give it some brandy, and it won’t bother you any more, I wager.”

But Belhomme could contain himself no longer; he began howling as though his soul were being torn from his body. The priest was obliged to hold his head for him. They asked Cesaire Horlaville to stop at the nearest house. It was a farmhouse at the side of the road. Belhomme was carried into it and laid on the kitchen table in order to repeat the operation. Caniveau advised mixing brandy and water in order to benumb and perhaps kill the insect. But the priest preferred vinegar.

They poured the liquid in drop by drop this time, that it might penetrate down to the bottom, and they left it several minutes in the organ that the beast had chosen for its home.

A bowl had once more been brought; Belhomme was turned over bodily by the priest and Caniveau, while the schoolmaster was tapping on the healthy ear in order to empty the other.

Cesaire Horlaville himself, whip in hand, had come in to observe the proceedings.

Suddenly, at the bottom of the bowl appeared a little brown spot, no bigger than a tiny seed. However, it was moving. It was a flea! First there were cries of astonishment and then shouts of laughter. A flea! Well, that was a good joke, a mighty good one! Caniveau was slapping his thigh, Cesaire Horlaville snapped his whip, the priest laughed like a braying donkey, the teacher cackled as though he were sneezing, and the two women were giving little screams of joy, like the clucking of hens.

Belhomme had seated himself on the table and had taken the bowl between his knees; he was observing, with serious attention and a vengeful anger in his eye, the conquered insect which was twisting round in the water. He grunted, “You rotten little beast!” and he spat on it.

The driver, wild with joy, kept repeating: “A flea, a flea, ah! there you are, damned little flea, damned little flea, damned little flea!” Then having calmed down a little, he cried: “Well, back to the coach! We’ve lost enough time.”

DISCOVERY

The steamer was crowded with people and the crossing promised to be good. I was going from Havre to Trouville.

The ropes were thrown off, the whistle blew for the last time, the whole boat started to tremble, and the great wheels began to revolve, slowly at first, and then with ever-increasing rapidity.

We were gliding along the pier, black with people. Those on board were waving their handkerchiefs, as though they were leaving for America, and their friends on shore were answering in the same manner.

The big July sun was shining down on the red parasols, the light dresses, the joyous faces and on the ocean, barely stirred by a ripple. When we were out of the harbor, the little vessel swung round the big curve and pointed her nose toward the distant shore which was barely visible through the early morning mist. On our left was the broad estuary of the Seine, her muddy water, which never mingles with that of the ocean, making large yellow streaks clearly outlined against the immense sheet of the pure green sea.

As soon as I am on a boat I feel the need of walking to and fro, like a sailor on watch. Why? I do not know. Therefore I began to thread my way along the deck through the crowd of travellers. Suddenly I heard my name called. I turned around. I beheld one of my old friends, Henri Sidoine, whom I had not seen for ten years.

We shook hands and continued our walk together, talking of one thing or another. Suddenly Sidoine, who had been observing the crowd of passengers, cried out angrily:

“It’s disgusting, the boat is full of English people!”

It was indeed full of them. The men were standing about, looking over the ocean with an all-important air, as though to say: “We are the English, the lords of the sea! Here we are!”

The young girls, formless, with shoes which reminded one of the naval constructions of their fatherland, wrapped in multi-colored shawls, were smiling vacantly at the magnificent scenery. Their small heads, planted at the top of their long bodies, wore English hats of the strangest build.

And the old maids, thinner yet, opening their characteristic jaws to the wind, seemed to threaten one with their long, yellow teeth. On passing them, one could notice the smell of rubber and of tooth wash.

Sidoine repeated, with growing anger:

“Disgusting! Can we never stop their coming to France?”

I asked, smiling:

“What have you got against them? As far as I am concerned, they don’t worry me.”

He snapped out:

“Of course they don’t worry you! But I married one of them.”

I stopped and laughed at him.

“Go ahead and tell me about it. Does she make you very unhappy?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“No, not exactly.”

“Then she — is not true to you?”

“Unfortunately, she is. That would be cause for a divorce, and I could get rid of her.”

“Then I’m afraid I don’t understand!”

“You don’t understand? I’m not surprised. Well, she simply learned how to speak French — that’s all! Listen.

“I didn’t have the least desire of getting married when I went to spend the summer at Etretat two years ago. There is nothing more dangerous than watering-places. You have no idea how it suits young girls. Paris is the place for women and the country for young girls.

“Donkey rides, surf-bathing, breakfast on the grass, all these things are traps set for the marriageable man. And, really, there is nothing prettier than a child about eighteen, running through a field or picking flowers along the road.

“I made the acquaintance of an English family who were stopping at the same hotel where I was. The father looked like those men you see over there, and the mother was like all other Englishwomen.

“They had two sons, the kind of boys who play rough games with balls, bats or rackets from morning till night; then came two daughters, the elder a dry, shrivelled-up Englishwoman, the younger a dream of beauty, a heavenly blonde. When those chits make up their minds to be pretty, they are divine. This one had blue eyes, the kind of blue which seems to contain all the poetry, all the dreams, all the hopes and happiness of the world!

"What an infinity of dreams is caused by two such eyes! How well they answer the dim, eternal question of our heart!

"It must not be forgotten either that we Frenchmen adore foreign women. As soon as we meet a Russian, an Italian, a Swede, a Spaniard, or an Englishwoman with a pretty face, we immediately fall in love with her. We enthuse over everything which comes from outside — clothes, hats, gloves, guns and — women. But what a blunder!

"I believe that that which pleases us in foreign women is their accent. As soon as a woman speaks our language badly we think she is charming, if she uses the wrong word she is exquisite and if she jabbers in an entirely unintelligible jargon, she becomes irresistible.

"My little English girl, Kate, spoke a language to be marvelled at. At the beginning I could understand nothing, she invented so many new words; then I fell absolutely in love with this queer, amusing dialect. All maimed, strange, ridiculous terms became delightful in her mouth. Every evening, on the terrace of the Casino, we had long conversations which resembled spoken enigmas.

"I married her! I loved her wildly, as one can only love in a dream. For true lovers only love a dream which has taken the form of a woman.

"Well, my dear fellow, the most foolish thing I ever did was to give my wife a French teacher. As long as she slaughtered the dictionary and tortured the grammar I adored her. Our conversations were simple. They revealed to me her surprising gracefulness and matchless elegance; they showed her to me as a wonderful speaking jewel, a living doll made to be kissed, knowing, after a fashion, how to express what she loved. She reminded me of the pretty little toys which say 'papa' and 'mamma' when you pull a string.

"Now she talks — badly — very badly. She makes as many mistakes as ever — but I can understand her.

"I have opened my doll to look inside — and I have seen. And now I have to talk to her!

"Ah! you don't know, as I do, the opinions, the ideas, the theories of a well-educated young English girl, whom I can blame in nothing, and who repeats to me from morning till night sentences from a French reader prepared in England for the use of young ladies' schools.

“You have seen those cotillon favors, those pretty gilt papers, which enclose candies with an abominable taste. I have one of them. I tore it open. I wished to eat what was inside and it disgusted me so that I feel nauseated at seeing her compatriots.

“I have married a parrot to whom some old English governess might have taught French. Do you understand?”

The harbor of Trouville was now showing its wooden piers covered with people.

I said:

“Where is your wife?”

He answered:

“I took her back to Etretat.”

“And you, where are you going?”

“I? Oh, I am going to rest up here at Trouville.”

Then, after a pause, he added:

“You have no idea what a fool a woman can be at times!”

THE ACCURSED BREAD

Daddy Taille had three daughters: Anna, the eldest, who was scarcely ever mentioned in the family; Rose, the second girl, who was eighteen, and Clara, the youngest, who was a girl of fifteen.

Old Taille was a widower and a foreman in M. Lebrument's button manufactory. He was a very upright man, very well thought of, abstemious; in fact, a sort of model workman. He lived at Havre, in the Rue d'Angouleme.

When Anna ran away from home the old man flew into a fearful rage. He threatened to kill the head clerk in a large draper's establishment in that town, whom he suspected. After a time, when he was told by various people that she was very steady and investing money in government securities, that she was no gadabout, but was a great friend of Monsieur Dubois, who was a judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, the father was appeased.

He even showed some anxiety as to how she was getting on, and asked some of her old friends who had been to see her, and when told that she had her own furniture, and that her mantelpiece was covered with vases and the walls with pictures, that there were clocks and carpets everywhere, he gave a broad contented smile. He had been working for thirty years to get together a wretched five or six thousand francs. This girl was evidently no fool.

One fine morning the son of Touchard, the cooper, at the other end of the street, came and asked him for the hand of Rose, the second girl. The old man's heart began to beat, for the Touchards were rich and in a good position. He was decidedly lucky with his girls.

The marriage was agreed upon, and it was settled that it should be a grand affair, and the wedding dinner was to be held at Sainte-Adresse, at Mother Jusa's restaurant. It would cost a lot certainly, but never mind, it did not matter just for once in a way.

But one morning, just as the old man was going home to luncheon with his two daughters, the door opened suddenly, and Anna appeared. She was well dressed and looked undeniably pretty and nice. She threw her arms round her father's neck before he could say a word, then fell into her sisters' arms with many tears and then asked for a plate, so that she might share the family soup. Taille was moved to tears in his turn and said several times:

"That is right, dear, that is right."

Then she told them about herself. She did not wish Rose's wedding to take place at Sainte-Adresse — certainly not. It should take place at her house and would cost her father nothing. She had settled everything and arranged everything, so it was "no good to say any more about it — there!"

"Very well, my dear! very well!" the old man said; "we will leave it so." But then he felt some doubt. Would the Touchards consent? But Rose, the bride-elect, was surprised and asked: "Why should they object, I should like to know? Just leave that to me; I will talk to Philip about it."

She mentioned it to her lover the very same day, and he declared it would suit him exactly. Father and Mother Touchard were naturally delighted at the idea of a good dinner which would cost them nothing and said:

"You may be quite sure that everything will be in first-rate style."

They asked to be allowed to bring a friend, Madame Florence, the cook on the first floor, and Anna agreed to everything.

The wedding was fixed for the last Tuesday of the month.

After the civil formalities and the religious ceremony the wedding party went to Anna's house. Among those whom the Tailles had brought was a cousin of a certain age, a Monsieur Sauvetanin, a man given to philosophical reflections, serious, and always very self-possessed, and Madame Lamondois, an old aunt.

Monsieur Sautevanin had been told off to give Anna his arm, as they were looked upon as the two most important persons in the company.

As soon as they had arrived at the door of Anna's house she let go her companion's arm, and ran on ahead, saying: "I will show you the way," and ran upstairs while the invited guests followed more slowly; and, when they got upstairs, she stood on one side to let them pass, and they rolled their eyes and turned their heads in all directions to admire this mysterious and luxurious dwelling.

The table was laid in the drawing-room, as the dining-room had been thought too small. Extra knives, forks and spoons had been hired from a neighboring restaurant, and decanters stood full of wine under the rays of the sun which shone in through the window.

The ladies went into the bedroom to take off their shawls and bonnets, and Father Touchard, who was standing at the door, made funny and suggestive signs to the men, with many a wink and nod. Daddy Taille, who thought a great deal of himself, looked with fatherly pride at his child's well-furnished rooms and went from one to the other, holding his hat in his hand, making a mental inventory of everything, and walking like a verger in a church.

Anna went backward and forward, ran about giving orders and hurrying on the wedding feast. Soon she appeared at the door of the dining-room and cried: "Come here, all of you, for a moment," and as the twelve guests entered the room they saw twelve glasses of Madeira on a small table.

Rose and her husband had their arms round each other's waists and were kissing each other in every corner. Monsieur Sauvetanin never took his eyes off Anna.

They sat down, and the wedding breakfast began, the relations sitting at one end of the table and the young people at the other. Madame Touchard, the mother, presided on the right and the bride on the left. Anna looked after everybody, saw that the glasses were kept filled and the plates well supplied. The guests evidently felt a certain respectful embarrassment at the sight of all the sumptuousness of the rooms and at the lavish manner in which they were treated. They all ate heartily of the good things provided, but there were no jokes such as are prevalent. at weddings of that sort; it was all too grand, and it made them feel uncomfortable. Old Madame Touchard, who was fond of a bit of fun, tried to enliven matters a little, and at the beginning of the dessert she exclaimed: "I say, Philip, do sing us something." The neighbors in their street considered that he had the finest voice in all Havre.

The bridegroom got up, smiled, and, turning to his sister-in-law, from politeness and gallantry, tried to think of something suitable for the occasion, something serious and correct, to harmonize with the seriousness of the repast.

Anna had a satisfied look on her face, and leaned back in her chair to listen, and all assumed looks of attention, though prepared to smile should smiles he called for.

The singer announced “The Accursed Bread,” and, extending his right arm, which made his coat ruck up into his neck, he began.

It was decidedly long, three verses of eight lines each, with the last line and the last but one repeated twice.

All went well for the first two verses; they were the usual commonplaces about bread gained by honest labor and by dishonesty. The aunt and the bride wept outright. The cook, who was present, at the end of the first verse looked at a roll which she held in her hand, with streaming eyes, as if it applied to her, while all applauded vigorously. At the end of the second verse the two servants, who were standing with their backs to the wall, joined loudly in the chorus, and the aunt and the bride wept outright.

Daddy Taille blew his nose with the noise of a trombone, and old Touchard brandished a whole loaf half over the table, and the cook shed silent tears on the crust which she was still holding.

Amid the general emotion Monsieur Sauvetanin said:

“That is the right sort of song; very different from the nasty, risky things one generally hears at weddings.”

Anna, who was visibly affected, kissed her hand to her sister and pointed to her husband with an affectionate nod, as if to congratulate her.

Intoxicated by his success, the young man continued, and unfortunately the last verse contained words about the “bread of dishonor” gained by young girls who had been led astray. No one took up the refrain about this bread, supposed to be eaten with tears, except old Touchard and the two servants. Anna had grown deadly pale and cast down her eyes, while the bridegroom looked from one to the other without understanding the reason for this sudden coldness, and the cook hastily dropped the crust as if it were poisoned.

Monsieur Sauvetanin said solemnly, in order to save the situation: “That last couplet is not at all necessary”; and Daddy Taille, who had got red up to his ears, looked round the table fiercely.

Then Anna, her eyes swimming in tears, told the servants in the faltering voice of a woman trying to stifle her sobs, to bring the champagne.

All the guests were suddenly seized with exuberant joy, and all their faces became radiant again. And when old Touchard, who had seen, felt and understood nothing of what was going on, and pointing to the guests so as to emphasize his words, sang the last words of the refrain:

“Children, I warn you all to eat not of that bread,” the whole company, when they saw the champagne bottles, with their necks covered with gold foil, appear, burst out singing, as if electrified by the sight:

“Children, I warn you all to eat not of that bread.”

THE DOWRY

The marriage of Maitre Simon Lebrument with Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier was a surprise to no one. Maitre Lebrument had bought out the practice of Maitre Papillon; naturally, he had to have money to pay for it; and Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier had three hundred thousand francs clear in currency, and in bonds payable to bearer.

Maitre Lebrument was a handsome man. He was stylish, although in a provincial way; but, nevertheless, he was stylish — a rare thing at Boutigny-le-Rebours.

Mademoiselle Cordier was graceful and fresh-looking, although a trifle awkward; nevertheless, she was a handsome girl, and one to be desired.

The marriage ceremony turned all Boutigny topsy-turvy. Everybody admired the young couple, who quickly returned home to domestic felicity, having decided simply to take a short trip to Paris, after a few days of retirement.

This tete-a-tete was delightful, Maitre Lebrument having shown just the proper amount of delicacy. He had taken as his motto: “Everything comes to him who waits.” He knew how to be at the same time patient and energetic. His success was rapid and complete.

After four days, Madame Lebrument adored her husband. She could not get along without him. She would sit on his knees, and taking him by the ears she would say: “Open your mouth and shut your eyes.” He would open his mouth wide and partly close his eyes, and he would try to nip her fingers as she slipped some dainty between his teeth. Then she would give him a kiss, sweet and long, which would make chills run up and down his spine. And then, in his turn, he would not have enough caresses to please his wife from morning to night and from night to morning.

When the first week was over, he said to his young companion:

“If you wish, we will leave for Paris next Tuesday. We will be like two lovers, we will go to the restaurants, the theatres, the concert halls, everywhere, everywhere!"

She was ready to dance for joy.

"Oh! yes, yes. Let us go as soon as possible."

He continued:

"And then, as we must forget nothing, ask your father to have your dowry ready; I shall pay Maitre Papillon on this trip."

She answered:

"All right: I will tell him to-morrow morning."

And he took her in his arms once more, to renew those sweet games of love which she had so enjoyed for the past week.

The following Tuesday, father-in-law and mother-in-law went to the station with their daughter and their son-in-law who were leaving for the capital.

The father-in-law said:

"I tell you it is very imprudent to carry so much money about in a pocketbook." And the young lawyer smiled.

"Don't worry; I am accustomed to such things. You understand that, in my profession, I sometimes have as much as a million about me. In this manner, at least we avoid a great amount of red tape and delay. You needn't worry."

The conductor was crying:

"All aboard for Paris!"

They scrambled into a car, where two old ladies were already seated.

Lebrument whispered into his wife's ear:

"What a bother! I won't be able to smoke."

She answered in a low voice

"It annoys me too, but not an account of your cigar."

The whistle blew and the train started. The trip lasted about an hour, during which time they did not say very much to each other, as the two old ladies did not go to sleep.

As soon as they were in front of the Saint-Lazare Station, Maitre Lebrument said to his wife:

"Dearie, let us first go over to the Boulevard and get something to eat; then we can quietly return and get our trunk and bring it to the hotel."

She immediately assented.

"Oh! yes. Let's eat at the restaurant. Is it far?"

He answered:

"Yes, it's quite a distance, but we will take the omnibus."

She was surprised:

"Why don't we take a cab?"

He began to scold her smilingly:

"Is that the way you save money? A cab for a five minutes' ride at six cents a minute! You would deprive yourself of nothing."

"That's so," she said, a little embarrassed.

A big omnibus was passing by, drawn by three big horses, which were trotting along. Lebrument called out:

"Conductor! Conductor!"

The heavy carriage stopped. And the young lawyer, pushing his wife, said to her quickly:

"Go inside; I'm going up on top, so that I may smoke at least one cigarette before lunch."

She had no time to answer. The conductor, who had seized her by the arm to help her up the step, pushed her inside, and she fell into a seat, bewildered, looking through the back window at the feet of her husband as he climbed up to the top of the vehicle.

And she sat there motionless, between a fat man who smelled of cheap tobacco and an old woman who smelled of garlic.

All the other passengers were lined up in silence — a grocer's boy, a young girl, a soldier, a gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and a big silk hat, two ladies with a self-satisfied and crabbed look, which seemed to say: "We are riding in this thing, but we don't have to," two sisters of charity and an undertaker. They looked like a collection of caricatures.

The jolting of the wagon made them wag their heads and the shaking of the wheels seemed to stupefy them — they all looked as though they were asleep.

The young woman remained motionless.

"Why didn't he come inside with me?" she was saying to herself. An unaccountable sadness seemed to be hanging over her. He really need not have acted so.

The sisters motioned to the conductor to stop, and they got off one after the other, leaving in their wake the pungent smell of camphor. The bus started tip and soon stopped again. And in got a cook, red-faced and out of breath. She sat down and placed her basket of provisions on her knees. A strong odor of dish-water filled the vehicle.

“It’s further than I imagined,” thought Jeanne.

The undertaker went out, and was replaced by a coachman who seemed to bring the atmosphere of the stable with him. The young girl had as a successor a messenger, the odor of whose feet showed that he was continually walking.

The lawyer’s wife began to feel ill at ease, nauseated, ready to cry without knowing why.

Other persons left and others entered. The stage went on through interminable streets, stopping at stations and starting again.

“How far it is!” thought Jeanne. “I hope he hasn’t gone to sleep! He has been so tired the last few days.”

Little by little all the passengers left. She was left alone, all alone. The conductor cried:

“Vaugirard!”

Seeing that she did not move, he repeated:

“Vaugirard!”

She looked at him, understanding that he was speaking to her, as there was no one else there. For the third time the man said:

“Vaugirard!”

Then she asked:

“Where are we?”

He answered gruffly:

“We’re at Vaugirard, of course! I have been yelling it for the last half hour!”

“Is it far from the Boulevard?” she said.

“Which boulevard?”

“The Boulevard des Italiens.”

“We passed that a long time ago!”

“Would you mind telling my husband?”

“Your husband! Where is he?”

“On the top of the bus.”

“On the top! There hasn’t been anybody there for a long time.”

She started, terrified.

“What? That’s impossible! He got on with me. Look well! He must be there.”

The conductor was becoming uncivil:

"Come on, little one, you've talked enough! You can find ten men for every one that you lose. Now run along. You'll find another one somewhere."

Tears were coming to her eyes. She insisted:

"But, monsieur, you are mistaken; I assure you that you must be mistaken. He had a big portfolio under his arm."

The man began to laugh:

"A big portfolio! Oh, yes! He got off at the Madeleine. He got rid of you, all right! Ha! ha! ha!"

The stage had stopped. She got out and, in spite of herself, she looked up instinctively to the roof of the bus. It was absolutely deserted.

Then she began to cry, and, without thinking that anybody was listening or watching her, she said out loud:

"What is going to become of me?"

An inspector approached:

"What's the matter?"

The conductor answered, in a bantering tone of voice:

"It's a lady who got left by her husband during the trip."

The other continued:

"Oh! that's nothing. You go about your business."

Then he turned on his heels and walked away.

She began to walk straight ahead, too bewildered, too crazed even to understand what had happened to her. Where was she to go? What could she do? What could have happened to him? How could he have made such a mistake? How could he have been so forgetful?

She had two francs in her pocket. To whom could she go? Suddenly she remembered her cousin Barral, one of the assistants in the offices of the Ministry of the Navy.

She had just enough to pay for a cab. She drove to his house. He met her just as he was leaving for his office. He was carrying a large portfolio under his arm, just like Lebrument.

She jumped out of the carriage.

"Henry!" she cried.

He stopped, astonished:

"Jeanne! Here — all alone! What are you doing? Where have you come from?"

Her eyes full of tears, she stammered:

"My husband has just got lost!"

"Lost! Where?"

"On an omnibus."

"On an omnibus?"

Weeping, she told him her whole adventure.

He listened, thought, and then asked:

"Was his mind clear this morning?"

"Yes."

"Good. Did he have much money with him?"

"Yes, he was carrying my dowry."

"Your dowry! The whole of it?"

"The whole of it — in order to pay for the practice which he bought."

"Well, my dear cousin, by this time your husband must be well on his way to Belgium."

She could not understand. She kept repeating:

"My husband — you say— "

"I say that he has disappeared with your — your capital — that's all!"

She stood there, a prey to conflicting emotions, sobbing.

"Then he is — he is — he is a villain!"

And, faint from excitement, she leaned her head on her cousin's shoulder and wept.

As people were stopping to look at them, he pushed her gently into the vestibule of his house, and, supporting her with his arm around her waist, he led her up the stairs, and as his astonished servant opened the door, he ordered:

"Sophie, run to the restaurant and get a luncheon for two. I am not going to the office to-day."

HAUTOT SENIOR AND HAUTOT JUNIOR (1889)

I.

In front of the building, half farmhouse, half manor-house, one of those rural habitations of a mixed character which were all but seigneurial, and which are at the present time occupied by large cultivators, the dogs, lashed beside the apple-trees in the orchard near the house, kept barking and howling at the sight of the shooting-bags carried by the gamekeepers and the boys. In the spacious dining-room kitchen, Hautot Senior and Hautot Junior, M. Bermont, the tax-collector, and M. Mondaru, the notary, were taking a bite and drinking some wine before going out to shoot, for it was the opening day.

Hautot Senior, proud of all his possessions, talked boastfully beforehand of the game which his guests were going to find on his lands. He was a big Norman, one of those powerful, ruddy, bony men, who can lift wagonloads of apples on their shoulders. Half peasant, half gentleman, rich, respected, influential, invested with authority, he made his son César go as far as the third form at school, so that he might be an educated man, and there he had brought his studies to a stop for fear of his becoming a fine gentleman and paying no attention to the land.

César Hautot, almost as tall as his father, but thinner, was a good son, docile, content with everything, full of admiration, respect, and deference for the wishes and opinions of his sire.

M. Bermont, the tax-collector, a stout little man, who showed on his red cheeks a thin network of violet veins resembling the tributaries and the winding courses of rivers on maps, asked:

“And hares — are there any hares on it?”

Hautot Senior answered: “As many as you like, especially in the Puysatier lands.”

“Which direction shall we begin in?” asked the notary, a jolly notary, fat and pale, big-paunched too, and strapped up in an entirely new hunting costume bought at Rouen.

“Well, that way, through these grounds. We will drive the partridges into the plain, and we will beat there again.”

And Hautot Senior rose up. They all followed his example, took their guns out of the corners, examined the locks, stamped with their feet in order to feel themselves firmer in their boots which were rather hard, not having as yet been rendered flexible by the heat of the blood. Then they went out; and the dogs, standing erect at the ends of their leashes, gave vent to piercing howls while beating the air with their paws.

They set forth for the lands referred to. These consisted of a little glen, or rather a long undulating stretch of inferior soil, which had on that account remained uncultivated, furrowed with mountain-torrents, covered with ferns, an excellent preserve for game.

The sportsmen took up their positions at some distance from each other, Hautot Senior posting himself at the right, Hautot Junior at the left, and the two guests in the middle. The keeper and those who carried the game-bags followed. It was the anxious moment when the first shot is awaited, when the heart beats a little, while the nervous finger keeps feeling at the trigger every second.

Suddenly the shot went off. Hautot Senior had fired. They all stopped, and saw a partridge breaking off from a covey which was rushing along at great speed to fall down into a ravine under a thick growth of brushwood. The sportsman, becoming excited, rushed forward with rapid strides, thrusting aside the briers which stood in his path, and disappeared in his turn into the thicket in quest of his game.

Almost at the same instant, a second shot was heard.

“Ha! ha! the rascal!” exclaimed M. Bermont, “he will unearth a hare down there.”

They all waited, with their eyes riveted on the heap of branches through which their gaze failed to penetrate.

The notary, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, shouted:

“Have you got them?”

Hautot Senior made no response.

Then César, turning toward the keeper, said to him:

“Just go and assist him, Joseph. We must keep walking in a straight line. We’ll wait.”

And Joseph, an old stump of a man, lean and knotty, all of whose joints formed protuberances, proceeded at an easy pace down the ravine, searching at every opening through which a passage could be effected with the cautiousness of a fox. Then, suddenly, he cried:

"Oh! come! come! an unfortunate thing has occurred."

They all hurried forward, plunging through the briers.

The elder Hautot, who had fallen on his side, in a fainting condition, kept both his hands over his stomach, from which flowed down upon the grass through the linen vest torn by the lead, long streamlets of blood. As he was laying down his gun, in order to seize the partridge within reach of him, he had let the firearm fall, and the second discharge, going off with the shock, had torn open his entrails. They drew him out of the trench; they removed his clothes and they saw a frightful wound, through which the intestines came out. Then, after having bandaged him the best way they could, they brought him back to his own house, and awaited the doctor, who had been sent for, as well as a priest.

When the doctor arrived, he gravely shook his head, and, turning toward young Hautot, who was sobbing on a chair:

"My poor boy," said he, "this does not look well."

But, when the dressing was finished, the wounded man moved his fingers, opened his mouth, then his eyes, cast around him troubled, haggard glances, then appeared to search about in his memory, to recollect, to understand, and he murmured:

"Ah! good God! this has done for me!"

The doctor held his hand.

"Why no, why no, some days of rest merely — it will be nothing."

Hautot returned:

"It has done for me! My stomach is split open! I know it well."

Then, all of a sudden:

"I want to talk to the son, if I have the time."

Hautot Junior, in spite of himself, shed tears, and kept repeating like a little boy:

"P'pa, p'pa, poor p'pa!"

But the father, in a firmer tone:

"Come! stop crying — this is not the time for it. I have to talk to you. Sit down there quite close to me. It will be quickly done, and I shall be more calm. As for the rest of you, kindly give me one minute."

They all went out, leaving the father and son face to face.

As soon as they were alone:

"Listen, son! you are twenty-four years; one can say things like this to you. And then there is not such mystery about these matters as we import into them. You know well that your mother has been seven years dead, isn't that so? and that I am not more than forty-five years myself, seeing that I got married at nineteen? Is not that true?"

The son faltered:

"Yes, it is true."

"So then your mother has been seven years dead, and I have remained a widower. Well! a man like me cannot remain without a wife at thirty-eight, isn't that true?"

The son replied:

"Yes, it is true."

The father, out of breath, quite pale, and his face contracted with suffering, went on:

"God! what pain I feel! Well, you understand. Man is not made to live alone, but I did not want to take a successor to your mother, since I promised her not to do so. Then — you understand?"

"Yes, father."

"So, I kept a young girl at Rouen, Rue d'Eperlan 18, in the third story, the second door, — I tell you all this, don't forget, — but a young girl, who has been very nice to me, loving, devoted, a true woman, eh? You comprehend, my lad?"

"Yes, father."

"So then, if I am carried off, I owe something to her, something substantial, that will place her in a safe position. You understand?"

"Yes, father."

"I tell you that she is an honest girl, and that, but for you, and the remembrance of your mother, and again but for the house in which we three lived, I would have brought her here, and then married her, for certain — listen — listen, my lad. I might have made a will — I haven't done so. I did not wish to do so — for it is not necessary to write down things — things of this sort — it is too hurtful to the legitimate children — and then it embroils everything — it ruins everyone! Look you, the stamped paper, there's no need of it — never make use of it. If I am rich, it is because I have not made waste of what I have during my own life. You understand, my son?"

"Yes, father."

"Listen again — listen well to me! So then, I have made no will — I did not desire to do so — and then I knew what you were; you have a good heart; you are not niggardly, not too near, in any way; I said to myself that when my end approached I would tell you all about it, and that I would beg of you not to forget the girl. And then listen again! When I am gone, make your way to the place at once — and make such arrangements that she may not blame my memory. You have plenty of means. I leave it to you — I leave you enough. Listen! You won't find her at home every day in the week. She works at Madame Moreau's in the Rue Beauvoisine. Go there on a Thursday. That is the day she expects me. It has been my day for the past six years. Poor little thing! she will weep! — I say all this to you because I have known you so well, my son. One does not tell these things in public either to the notary or to the priest. They happen — everyone knows that — but they are not talked about, save in case of necessity. Then there is no outsider in the secret, nobody except the family, because the family consists of one person alone. You understand?"

"Yes, father."

"Do you promise?"

"Yes, father."

"Do you swear it?"

"Yes, father."

"I beg of you, I implore of you, so do not forget. I bind you to it."

"No, father."

"You will go yourself. I want you to make sure of everything."

"Yes, father."

"And, then, you will see — you will see what she will explain to you. As for me, I can say no more to you. You have vowed to do it."

"Yes, father."

"That's good, my son. Embrace me. Farewell. I am going to break up, I'm sure. Tell them they may come in."

Young Hautot embraced his father, groaning while he did so; then, always docile, he opened the door, and the priest appeared in a white surplice, carrying the holy oils.

But the dying man had closed his eyes and he refused to open them again, he refused to answer, he refused to show, even by a sign, that he understood.

He had spoken enough, this man; he could speak no more. Besides he now felt his heart calm; he wanted to die in peace. What need had he to make a confession to the deputy of God, since he had just done so to his son, who constituted his own family?

He received the last rites, was purified and absolved, in the midst of his friends and his servants on their bended knees, without any movement of his face indicating that he still lived.

He expired about midnight, after four hours' convulsive movements, which showed that he must have suffered dreadfully in his last moments.

II.

It was on the following Tuesday that they buried him; the shooting had opened on Sunday. On his return home, after having accompanied his father to the cemetery, César Hautot spent the rest of the day weeping. He scarcely slept at all on the following night, and he felt so sad on awakening that he asked himself how he could go on living.

However, he kept thinking until evening that, in order to obey the last wish of his father, he ought to repair to Rouen next day, and see this girl Catholine Donet, who resided in the Rue d'Eperlan in the third story, second door. He had repeated to himself in a whisper, just as a little boy repeats a prayer, this name and address a countless number of times, so that he might not forget them, and he ended by lisping them continually, without being able to stop or to think of what they were, so much were his tongue and his mind possessed by the commission.

Accordingly, on the following day, about eight o'clock, he ordered Graindorge to be yoked to the tilbury, and set forth at the quick trotting pace of the heavy Norman horse, along the highroad from Ainville to Rouen. He wore his black frock-coat, a tall silk hat on his head, and breeches with straps; and he did not, on account of the occasion, dispense with the handsome costume, the blue overalls which swelled in the wind, protecting the cloth from dust and from stains, and which was to be removed quickly the moment he jumped out of the coach.

He entered Rouen accordingly just as it was striking ten o'clock, drew up, as he had usually done, at the Hôtel des Bon-Enfants, in the Rue des Trois-Marcs, submitted to the hugs of the landlord and his wife and their five children, for they had heard the melancholy news. After that, he had to tell them all the particulars about the accident, which caused him to shed tears, to repel all the proffered attentions which they sought to thrust upon him merely because he was wealthy, and to decline even the breakfast they wanted him to partake of, thus wounding their sensibilities.

Then, having wiped the dust off his hat, brushed his coat and removed the mud stains from his boots, he set forth in search of the Rue d'Eperlan, without venturing to make inquiries from anyone, for fear of being recognized and arousing suspicions.

At length, being unable to find the place, he saw a priest passing by, and, trusting to the professional discretion which churchmen possess, he questioned the ecclesiastic.

He had only a hundred steps farther to go; it was exactly the second street to the right.

Then he hesitated. Up to that moment, he had obeyed, like a mere animal, the expressed wish of the deceased. Now he felt quite agitated, confused, humiliated, at the idea of finding himself — the son — in the presence of this woman who had been his father's mistress. All the morality which lies buried in our breasts, heaped up at the bottom of our sensuous emotions by centuries of hereditary instruction, all that he had been taught, since he had learned his catechism, about creatures of evil life, the instinctive contempt which every man entertains for them, even though he may marry one of them, all the narrow honesty of the peasant in his character, was stirred up within him and held him back, making him grow red with shame.

But he said to himself:

"I promised the father, I must not break my promise."

Then he gave a push to the door of the house bearing the number 18, which stood ajar, discovered a gloomy-looking staircase, ascended three flights, perceived a door, then a second door, came upon the string of a bell, and pulled it. The ringing, which resounded in the apartment before which he stood, sent a shiver through his frame. The door was opened, and he found himself facing a young lady very well dressed, a brunette with a fresh complexion, who gazed at him with eyes of astonishment.

He did not know what to say to her, and she, who suspected nothing, and who was waiting for him to speak, did not invite him to come in. They stood looking thus at one another for nearly half a minute, at the end of which she said in a questioning tone:

"You have something to tell me, Monsieur?"

He falteringly replied:

"I am M. Hautot's son."

She gave a start, turned pale, and stammered out as if she had known him for a long time:

"Monsieur César?"

"Yes."

"And what next?"

"I have come to speak to you on the part of my father."

She articulated:

"Oh, my God!"

She then drew back so that he might enter. He shut the door and followed her into the interior. Then he saw a little boy of four or five years playing with a cat, seated on the floor in front of a stove, from which rose the steam of dishes which were being kept hot.

"Take a seat," she said.

He sat down.

She asked:

"Well?"

He no longer ventured to speak, keeping his eyes fixed on the table which stood in the center of the room, with three covers laid on it, one of which was for a child. He glanced at the chair which had its back turned to the fire. They had been expecting him. That was his bread which he saw, and which he recognized near the fork, for the crust had been removed on account of Hautot's bad teeth. Then, raising his eyes, he noticed on the wall his father's portrait, the large photograph taken at Paris the year of the exhibition, the same as that which hung above the bed in the sleeping apartment at Ainville.

The young woman again asked:

"Well, Monsieur César?"

He kept staring at her. Her face was livid with anguish; and she waited, her hands trembling with fear.

Then he took courage.

"Well, Mam'zelle, papa died on Sunday last just after he had opened the shooting."

She was so much overwhelmed that she did not move. After a silence of a few seconds, she faltered in an almost inaudible tone:

"Oh! it is not possible!"

Then, on a sudden, tears showed themselves in her eyes, and covering her face with her hands, she burst out sobbing.

At that point the little boy turned round, and, seeing his mother weeping, began to howl. Then, realizing that this sudden trouble was brought about by the stranger, he rushed at César, caught hold of his breeches with one hand and with the other hit him with all his strength on the thigh. And César remained agitated, deeply affected, with this woman mourning for his father at one side of him, and the little boy defending his mother at the other. He felt their emotion taking possession of himself, and his eyes were beginning to brim over with the same sorrow; so, to recover his self-command, he began to talk:

"Yes," he said, "the accident occurred on Sunday, at eight o'clock— "

And he told, as if she were listening to him, all the facts without forgetting a single detail, mentioning the most trivial matters with the minuteness of a countryman. And the child still kept assailing him, making kicks at his ankles.

When he came to the time at which his father had spoken about her, her attention was caught by hearing her own name, and, uncovering her face, she said:

"Pardon me! I was not following you; I would like to know — if you do not mind beginning over again."

He related everything at great length, with stoppages, breaks, and reflections of his own from time to time. She listened to him eagerly now perceiving with a woman's keen sensibility all the sudden changes of fortune which his narrative indicated, and trembling with horror, every now and then, exclaiming:

"Oh, my God!"

The little fellow, believing that she had calmed down, ceased beating César, in order to catch his mother's hand, and he listened, too, as if he understood.

When the narrative was finished, young Hautot continued:

"Now, we will settle matters together in accordance with his wishes. Listen: I am well off, he has left me plenty of means. I don't want you to have anything to complain about— "

But she quickly interrupted him:

"Oh! Monsieur César, Monsieur César, not today. I am cut to the heart — another time — another day. No, not to-day. If I accept, listen! 'Tis not for myself — no, no, no, I swear to you. 'Tis for the child. Besides this provision will be put to his account."

Thereupon César scared, divined the truth, and stammering:

"So then— 'tis his — the child?"

"Why, yes," she said.

And Hautot Junior gazed at his brother with a confused emotion, intense and painful.

After a lengthened silence, for she had begun to weep afresh, César, quite embarrassed, went on:

"Well, then, Mam'zelle Donet, I am going. When would you wish to talk this over with me?"

She exclaimed:

"Oh! no, don't go! don't go! Don't leave me all alone with Emile. I would die of grief. I have no longer anyone, anyone but my child. Oh! what wretchedness, what wretchedness. Monsieur César! Stop! Sit down again. You will say something more to me. You will tell me what he was doing over there all the week."

And César resumed his seat, accustomed to obey.

She drew over another chair for herself in front of the stove, where the dishes had all this time been simmering, took Emile upon her knees, and asked César a thousand questions about his father with reference to matters of an intimate nature, which made him feel, without reasoning on the subject, that she had loved Hautot with all the strength of her frail woman's heart.

And, by the natural concatenation of his ideas — which were rather limited in number — he recurred once more to the accident, and set about telling the story over again with all the same details.

When he said: "He had a hole in his stomach — you could put your two fists into it," she gave vent to a sort of shriek, and the tears gushed forth again from her eyes.

Then, seized by the contagion of her grief, César began to weep, too, and as tears always soften the fibers of the heart, he bent over Emile whose forehead was close to his own mouth and kissed him.

The mother, recovering her breath, murmured:

"Poor lad, he is an orphan now!"

"And so am I," said César.

And they ceased to talk.

But suddenly the practical instinct of the housewife, accustomed to be thoughtful about many things, revived in the young woman's breast.

"You have perhaps taken nothing all the morning, Monsieur César."

"No, Mam'zelle."

"Oh! you must be hungry. You will eat a morsel."

"Thanks," he said, "I am not hungry; I have had too much trouble."

She replied:

"In spite of sorrow, we must live. You will not refuse to let me get something for you! And then you will remain a little longer. When you are gone I don't know what will become of me."

He yielded after some further resistance, and, sitting down with his back to the fire, facing her, he ate a plateful of tripe, which had been bubbling in the stove, and drank a glass of red wine. But he would not allow her to uncork the bottle of white wine. He several times wiped the mouth of the little boy, who had smeared all his chin with sauce.

As he was rising up to go, he asked:

"When would you like me to come back to speak about this business to you, Mam'zelle Donet?"

"If it is all the same to you, say next Thursday, Monsieur César. In that way I would lose none of my time, as I always have my Thursdays free."

"That will suit me — next Thursday."

"You will come to lunch. Won't you?"

"Oh! On that point I can't give you a promise."

"The reason I suggested it is that people can chat better when they are eating. One has more time, too."

"Well, be it so. About twelve o'clock, then." And he took his departure, after he had again kissed little Emile, and pressed Mademoiselle Donet's hand.

III.

The week appeared long to César Hautot. He had never before found himself alone, and the isolation seemed to him insupportable. Till now, he had lived at his father's side, just like his shadow, followed him into the fields, superintended the execution of his orders, and, when they had been a short time separated, again met him at dinner. They had spent the evenings smoking their pipes, face to face with one another, chatting about horses, cows, or sheep, and the grip of their hands when they rose up in the morning might have been regarded as a manifestation of deep family affection on both sides.

Now César was alone, he went vacantly through the process of dressing the soil in autumn, every moment expecting to see the tall gesticulating silhouette of his father rising up at the end of a plain. To kill time, he entered the houses of his neighbors, told about the accident to all who had not heard of it, and sometimes repeated it to the others. Then, after he had finished his occupations and his reflections, he would sit down at the side of the road, asking himself whether this kind of life was going to last forever.

He frequently thought of Mademoiselle Donet. He liked her. He considered her thoroughly respectable, a gentle and honest young woman, as his father had said. Yes, undoubtedly she was an honest girl. He resolved to act handsomely toward her, and to give her two thousand francs a year, settling the capital on the child. He even experienced a certain pleasure in thinking that he was going to see her on the following Thursday and arrange this matter with her. And then the notion of this brother, this little chap of five, who was his father's son, plagued him, annoyed him a little, and at the same time, excited him. He had, as it were, a family in this brat, sprung from a clandestine alliance, who would never bear the name of Hautot, a family which he might take or leave, just as he pleased, but which would recall his father.

And so, when he saw himself on the road to Rouen on Thursday morning, carried along by Graindorge trotting with clattering foot-beats, he felt his heart lighter, more at peace than he had hitherto felt it since his bereavement.

On entering Mademoiselle Donet's apartment, he saw the table laid as on the previous Thursday, with the sole difference that the crust had not been removed from the bread. He pressed the young woman's hand, kissed Emile on the cheeks, and sat down, more or less as if he were in his own house, his heart swelling in the same way. Mademoiselle Donet seemed to him a little thinner and paler. She must have grieved sorely. She wore now an air of constraint in his presence, as if she understood what she had not felt the week before under the first blow of her misfortune, and she exhibited an excessive deference toward him, a mournful humility, and made touching efforts to please him, as if to pay him back by her attentions for the kindness he had manifested toward her. They were a long time at lunch talking over the business which had brought him there. She did not want so much money. It was too much. She earned enough to live on herself, but she only wished that Emile might find a few sous awaiting him when he grew big. César held out, however, and even added a gift of a thousand francs for herself for the expense of mourning.

When he had taken his coffee, she asked:

“Do you smoke?”

“Yes — I have my pipe.”

He felt in his pocket. Good God! He had forgotten it! He was becoming quite woe-begone about it when she offered him a pipe of his father’s that had been shut up in a cupboard. He accepted it, took it up in his hand, recognized it, smelled it, spoke of its quality in a tone of emotion, filled it with tobacco, and lighted it. Then he set Emile astride on his knee, and made him play the cavalier, while she removed the tablecloth and put the soiled plates at one end of the sideboard in order to wash them as soon as he was gone.

About three o’clock, he rose up with regret, quite annoyed at the thought of having to go.

“Well! Mademoiselle Donet,” he said, “I wish you good evening, and am delighted to have found you like this.”

She remained standing before him, blushing, much affected, and gazed at him while she thought of the other.

“Shall we not see one another again?” she said.

He replied simply:

“Why, yes, Mam’zelle, if it gives you pleasure.”

“Certainly, Monsieur César. Will next Thursday suit you then?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle Donet.”

“You will come to lunch, of course?”

“Well — if you are so kind as to invite me, I can’t refuse.”

“It is understood, then, Monsieur César — next Thursday, at twelve, the same as to-day.”

“Thursday at twelve, Mam’zelle Donet!”

THE DIARY OF A MADMAN

He was dead — the head of a high tribunal, the upright magistrate whose irreproachable life was a proverb in all the courts of France. Advocates, young counsellors, judges had greeted him at sight of his large, thin, pale face lighted up by two sparkling deep-set eyes, bowing low in token of respect.

He had passed his life in pursuing crime and in protecting the weak. Swindlers and murderers had no more redoubtable enemy, for he seemed to read the most secret thoughts of their minds.

He was dead, now, at the age of eighty-two, honored by the homage and followed by the regrets of a whole people. Soldiers in red trousers had escorted him to the tomb and men in white cravats had spoken words and shed tears that seemed to be sincere beside his grave.

But here is the strange paper found by the dismayed notary in the desk where he had kept the records of great criminals! It was entitled: WHY?

20th June, 1851. I have just left court. I have condemned Blondel to death! Now, why did this man kill his five children? Frequently one meets with people to whom the destruction of life is a pleasure. Yes, yes, it should be a pleasure, the greatest of all, perhaps, for is not killing the next thing to creating? To make and to destroy! These two words contain the history of the universe, all the history of worlds, all that is, all! Why is it not intoxicating to kill?

25th June. To think that a being is there who lives, who walks, who runs. A being? What is a being? That animated thing, that bears in it the principle of motion and a will ruling that motion. It is attached to nothing, this thing. Its feet do not belong to the ground. It is a grain of life that moves on the earth, and this grain of life, coming I know not whence, one can destroy at one's will. Then nothing — nothing more. It perishes, it is finished.

26th June. Why then is it a crime to kill? Yes, why? On the contrary, it is the law of nature. The mission of every being is to kill; he kills to live, and he kills to kill. The beast kills without ceasing, all day, every instant of his existence. Man kills without ceasing, to nourish himself; but since he needs, besides, to kill for pleasure, he has invented hunting! The child kills the insects he finds, the little birds, all the little animals that come in his way. But this does not suffice for the irresistible need to massacre that is in us. It is not enough to kill beasts; we must kill man too. Long ago this need was satisfied by human sacrifices. Now the requirements of social life have made murder a crime. We condemn and punish the assassin! But as we cannot live without yielding to this natural and imperious instinct of death, we relieve ourselves, from time to time, by wars. Then a whole nation slaughters another nation. It is a feast of blood, a feast that maddens armies and that intoxicates civilians, women and children, who read, by lamplight at night, the feverish story of massacre.

One might suppose that those destined to accomplish these butcheries of men would be despised! No, they are loaded with honors. They are clad in gold and in resplendent garments; they wear plumes on their heads and ornaments on their breasts, and they are given crosses, rewards, titles of every kind. They are proud, respected, loved by women, cheered by the crowd, solely because their mission is to shed human blood; They drag through the streets their instruments of death, that the passer-by, clad in black, looks on with envy. For to kill is the great law set by nature in the heart of existence! There is nothing more beautiful and honorable than killing!

30th June. To kill is the law, because nature loves eternal youth. She seems to cry in all her unconscious acts: “Quick! quick! quick!” The more she destroys, the more she renews herself.

2d July. A human being — what is a human being? Through thought it is a reflection of all that is; through memory and science it is an abridged edition of the universe whose history it represents, a mirror of things and of nations, each human being becomes a microcosm in the macrocosm.

3d July. It must be a pleasure, unique and full of zest, to kill; to have there before one the living, thinking being; to make therein a little hole, nothing but a little hole, to see that red thing flow which is the blood, which makes life; and to have before one only a heap of limp flesh, cold, inert, void of thought!

5th August. I, who have passed my life in judging, condemning, killing by the spoken word, killing by the guillotine those who had killed by the knife, I, I, if I should do as all the assassins have done whom I have smitten, I — I — who would know it?

10th August. Who would ever know? Who would ever suspect me, me, me, especially if I should choose a being I had no interest in doing away with?

15th August. The temptation has come to me. It pervades my whole being; my hands tremble with the desire to kill.

22d August. I could resist no longer. I killed a little creature as an experiment, for a beginning. Jean, my servant, had a goldfinch in a cage hung in the office window. I sent him on an errand, and I took the little bird in my hand, in my hand where I felt its heart beat. It was warm. I went up to my room. From time to time I squeezed it tighter; its heart beat faster; this was atrocious and delicious. I was near choking it. But I could not see the blood.

Then I took scissors, short-nail scissors, and I cut its throat with three slits, quite gently. It opened its bill, it struggled to escape me, but I held it, oh! I held it — I could have held a mad dog — and I saw the blood trickle.

And then I did as assassins do — real ones. I washed the scissors, I washed my hands. I sprinkled water and took the body, the corpse, to the garden to hide it. I buried it under a strawberry-plant. It will never be found. Every day I shall eat a strawberry from that plant. How one can enjoy life when one knows how!

My servant cried; he thought his bird flown. How could he suspect me? Ah! ah!

25th August. I must kill a man! I must —

30th August. It is done. But what a little thing! I had gone for a walk in the forest of Vernes. I was thinking of nothing, literally nothing. A child was in the road, a little child eating a slice of bread and butter.

He stops to see me pass and says, “Good-day, Mr. President.”

And the thought enters my head, “Shall I kill him?”

I answer: “You are alone, my boy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All alone in the wood?”

“Yes, sir.”

The wish to kill him intoxicated me like wine. I approached him quite softly, persuaded that he was going to run away. And, suddenly, I seized him by the throat. He looked at me with terror in his eyes — such eyes! He held my wrists in his little hands and his body writhed like a feather over the fire. Then he moved no more. I threw the body in the ditch, and some weeds on top of it. I returned home, and dined well. What a little thing it was! In the evening I was very gay, light, rejuvenated; I passed the evening at the Prefect's. They found me witty. But I have not seen blood! I am tranquil.

31st August. The body has been discovered. They are hunting for the assassin. Ah! ah!

1st September. Two tramps have been arrested. Proofs are lacking.

2d September. The parents have been to see me. They wept! Ah! ah!

6th October. Nothing has been discovered. Some strolling vagabond must have done the deed. Ah! ah! If I had seen the blood flow, it seems to me I should be tranquil now! The desire to kill is in my blood; it is like the passion of youth at twenty.

20th October. Yet another. I was walking by the river, after breakfast. And I saw, under a willow, a fisherman asleep. It was noon. A spade was standing in a potato-field near by, as if expressly, for me.

I took it. I returned; I raised it like a club, and with one blow of the edge I cleft the fisherman's head. Oh! he bled, this one! Rose-colored blood. It flowed into the water, quite gently. And I went away with a grave step. If I had been seen! Ah! ah! I should have made an excellent assassin.

25th October. The affair of the fisherman makes a great stir. His nephew, who fished with him, is charged with the murder.

26th October. The examining magistrate affirms that the nephew is guilty. Everybody in town believes it. Ah! ah!

27th October. The nephew makes a very poor witness. He had gone to the village to buy bread and cheese, he declared. He swore that his uncle had been killed in his absence! Who would believe him?

28th October. The nephew has all but confessed, they have badgered him so. Ah! ah! justice!

15th November. There are overwhelming proofs against the nephew, who was his uncle's heir. I shall preside at the sessions.

25th January. To death! to death! to death! I have had him condemned to death! Ah! ah! The advocate-general spoke like an angel! Ah! ah! Yet another! I shall go to see him executed!

10th March. It is done. They guillotined him this morning. He died very well! very well! That gave me pleasure! How fine it is to see a man's head cut off!

Now, I shall wait, I can wait. It would take such a little thing to let myself be caught.

The manuscript contained yet other pages, but without relating any new crime.

Alienist physicians to whom the awful story has been submitted declare that there are in the world many undiscovered madmen as adroit and as much to be feared as this monstrous lunatic.

THE MASK

There was a masquerade ball at the Elysee-Montmartre that evening. It was the ‘Mi-Careme’, and the crowds were pouring into the brightly lighted passage which leads to the dance ball, like water flowing through the open lock of a canal. The loud call of the orchestra, bursting like a storm of sound, shook the rafters, swelled through the whole neighborhood and awoke, in the streets and in the depths of the houses, an irresistible desire to jump, to get warm, to have fun, which slumbers within each human animal.

The patrons came from every quarter of Paris; there were people of all classes who love noisy pleasures, a little low and tinged with debauch. There were clerks and girls — girls of every description, some wearing common cotton, some the finest batiste; rich girls, old and covered with diamonds, and poor girls of sixteen, full of the desire to revel, to belong to men, to spend money. Elegant black evening suits, in search of fresh or faded but appetizing novelty, wandering through the excited crowds, looking, searching, while the masqueraders seemed moved above all by the desire for amusement. Already the far-famed quadrilles had attracted around them a curious crowd. The moving hedge which encircled the four dancers swayed in and out like a snake, sometimes nearer and sometimes farther away, according to the motions of the performers. The two women, whose lower limbs seemed to be attached to their bodies by rubber springs, were making wonderful and surprising motions with their legs. Their partners hopped and skipped about, waving their arms about. One could imagine their panting breath beneath their masks.

One of them, who had taken his place in the most famous quadrille, as substitute for an absent celebrity, the handsome “Songe-au-Gosse,” was trying to keep up with the tireless “Arete-de-Veau” and was making strange fancy steps which aroused the joy and sarcasm of the audience.

He was thin, dressed like a dandy, with a pretty varnished mask on his face. It had a curly blond mustache and a wavy wig. He looked like a wax figure from the Musee Grevin, like a strange and fantastic caricature of the charming young man of fashion plates, and he danced with visible effort, clumsily, with a comical impetuosity. He appeared rusty beside the others when he tried to imitate their gambols: he seemed overcome by rheumatism, as heavy as a great Dane playing with greyhounds. Mocking bravos encouraged him. And he, carried away with enthusiasm, jigged about with such frenzy that suddenly, carried away by a wild spurt, he pitched head foremost into the living wall formed by the audience, which opened up before him to allow him to pass, then closed around the inanimate body of the dancer, stretched out on his face.

Some men picked him up and carried him away, calling for a doctor. A gentleman stepped forward, young and elegant, in well-fitting evening clothes, with large pearl studs. “I am a professor of the Faculty of Medicine,” he said in a modest voice. He was allowed to pass, and he entered a small room full of little cardboard boxes, where the still lifeless dancer had been stretched cut on some chairs. The doctor at first wished to take off the mask, and he noticed that it was attached in a complicated manner, with a perfect network of small metal wires which cleverly bound it to his wig and covered the whole head. Even the neck was imprisoned in a false skin which continued the chin and was painted the color of flesh, being attached to the collar of the shirt.

All this had to be cut with strong scissors. When the physician had slit open this surprising arrangement, from the shoulder to the temple, he opened this armor and found the face of an old man, worn out, thin and wrinkled. The surprise among those who had brought in this seemingly young dancer was so great that no one laughed, no one said a word.

All were watching this sad face as he lay on the straw chairs, his eyes closed, his face covered with white hair, some long, falling from the forehead over the face, others short, growing around the face and the chin, and beside this poor head, that pretty little, neat varnished, smiling mask.

The man regained consciousness after being inanimate for a long time, but he still seemed to be so weak and sick that the physician feared some dangerous complication. He asked: “Where do you live?”

The old dancer seemed to be making an effort to remember, and then he mentioned the name of the street, which no one knew. He was asked for more definite information about the neighborhood. He answered with a great slowness, indecision and difficulty, which revealed his upset state of mind. The physician continued:

"I will take you home myself."

Curiosity had overcome him to find out who this strange dancer, this phenomenal jumper might be. Soon the two rolled away in a cab to the other side of Montmartre.

They stopped before a high building of poor appearance. They went up a winding staircase. The doctor held to the banister, which was so grimy that the hand stuck to it, and he supported the dizzy old man, whose forces were beginning to return. They stopped at the fourth floor.

The door at which they had knocked was opened by an old woman, neat looking, with a white nightcap enclosing a thin face with sharp features, one of those good, rough faces of a hard-working and faithful woman. She cried out:

"For goodness sake! What's the matter?"

He told her the whole affair in a few words. She became reassured and even calmed the physician himself by telling him that the same thing had happened many times. She said: "He must be put to bed, monsieur, that is all. Let him sleep and tomorrow he will be all right."

The doctor continued: "But he can hardly speak."

"Oh! that's just a little drink, nothing more; he has eaten no dinner, in order to be nimble, and then he took a few absinthes in order to work himself up to the proper pitch. You see, drink gives strength to his legs, but it stops his thoughts and words. He is too old to dance as he does. Really, his lack of common sense is enough to drive one mad!"

The doctor, surprised, insisted:

"But why does he dance like that at his age?"

She shrugged her shoulders and turned red from the anger which was slowly rising within her and she cried out:

"Ah! yes, why? So that the people will think him young under his mask; so that the women will still take him for a young dandy and whisper nasty things into his ears; so that he can rub up against all their dirty skins, with their perfumes and powders and cosmetics. Ah! it's a fine business! What a life I have had for the last forty years! But we must first get him to bed, so that he may have no ill effects. Would you mind helping me? When he is like that I can't do anything with him alone."

The old man was sitting on his bed, with a tipsy look, his long white hair falling over his face. His companion looked at him with tender yet indignant eyes. She continued:

"Just see the fine head he has for his age, and yet he has to go and disguise himself in order to make people think that he is young. It's a perfect shame! Really, he has a fine head, monsieur! Wait, I'll show it to you before putting him to bed."

She went to a table on which stood the washbasin a pitcher of water, soap and a comb and brush. She took the brush, returned to the bed and pushed back the drunkard's tangled hair. In a few seconds she made him look like a model fit for a great painter, with his long white locks flowing on his neck. Then she stepped back in order to observe him, saying: "There! Isn't he fine for his age?"

"Very," agreed the doctor, who was beginning to be highly amused.

She added: "And if you had known him when he was twenty-five! But we must get him to bed, otherwise the drink will make him sick. Do you mind drawing off that sleeve? Higher-like that-that's right. Now the trousers. Wait, I will take his shoes off — that's right. Now, hold him upright while I open the bed. There — let us put him in. If you think that he is going to disturb himself when it is time for me to get in you are mistaken. I have to find a little corner any place I can. That doesn't bother him! Bah! You old pleasure seeker!"

As soon as he felt himself stretched out in his sheets the old man closed his eyes, opened them closed them again, and over his whole face appeared an energetic resolve to sleep. The doctor examined him with an ever-increasing interest and asked: "Does he go to all the fancy balls and try to be a young man?" "To all of them, monsieur, and he comes back to me in the morning in a deplorable condition. You see, it's regret that leads him on and that makes him put a pasteboard face over his own. Yes, the regret of no longer being what he was and of no longer making any conquests!"

He was sleeping now and beginning to snore. She looked at him with a pitying expression and continued: "Oh! how many conquests that man has made! More than one could believe, monsieur, more than the finest gentlemen of the world, than all the tenors and all the generals."

"Really? What did he do?"

"Oh! it will surprise you at first, as you did not know him in his palmy days. When I met him it was also at a ball, for he has always frequented them. As soon as I saw him I was caught — caught like a fish on a hook. Ah! how pretty he was, monsieur, with his curly raven locks and black eyes as large as saucers! Indeed, he was good looking! He took me away that evening and I never have left him since, never, not even for a day, no matter what he did to me! Oh! he has often made it hard for me!"

The doctor asked: "Are you married?"

She answered simply: "Yes, monsieur, otherwise he would have dropped me as he did the others. I have been his wife and his servant, everything, everything that he wished. How he has made me cry — tears which I did not show him; for he would tell all his adventures to me — to me, monsieur — without understanding how it hurt me to listen."

"But what was his business?"

"That's so. I forgot to tell you. He was the foreman at Martel's — a foreman such as they never had had — an artist who averaged ten francs an hour."

"Martel? — who is Martel?"

"The hairdresser, monsieur, the great hairdresser of the Opera, who had all the actresses for customers. Yes, sir, all the smartest actresses had their hair dressed by Ambrose and they would give him tips that made a fortune for him. Ah! monsieur, all the women are alike, yes, all of them. When a man pleases their fancy they offer themselves to him. It is so easy — and it hurt me so to hear about it. For he would tell me everything — he simply could not hold his tongue — it was impossible. Those things please the men so much! They seem to get even more enjoyment out of telling than doing.

"When I would see him coming in the evening, a little pale, with a pleased look and a bright eye, would say to myself: 'One more. I am sure that he has caught one more.' Then I felt a wild desire to question him and then, again, not to know, to stop his talking if he should begin. And we would look at each other.

"I knew that he would not keep still, that he would come to the point. I could feel that from his manner, which seemed to laugh and say: 'I had a fine adventure to-day, Madeleine.' I would pretend to notice nothing, to guess nothing; I would set the table, bring on the soup and sit down opposite him.

"At those times, monsieur, it was as if my friendship for him had been crushed in my body as with a stone. It hurt. But he did not understand; he did not know; he felt a need to tell all those things to some one, to boast, to show how much he was loved, and I was the only one he had to whom he could talk-the only one. And I would have to listen and drink it in, like poison.

"He would begin to take his soup and then he would say: 'One more, Madeleine.'

"And I would think: 'Here it comes! Goodness! what a man! Why did I ever meet him?'

"Then he would begin: 'One more! And a beauty, too.' And it would be some little one from the Vaudeville or else from the Varietes, and some of the big ones, too, some of the most famous. He would tell me their names, how their apartments were furnished, everything, everything, monsieur. Heartbreaking details. And he would go over them and tell his story over again from beginning to end, so pleased with himself that I would pretend to laugh so that he would not get angry with me.

"Everything may not have been true! He liked to glorify himself and was quite capable of inventing such things! They may perhaps also have been true! On those evenings he would pretend to be tired and wish to go to bed after supper. We would take supper at eleven, monsieur, for he could never get back from work earlier.

"When he had finished telling about his adventure he would walk round the room and smoke cigarettes, and he was so handsome, with his mustache and curly hair, that I would think: 'It's true, just the same, what he is telling. Since I myself am crazy about that man, why should not others be the same?' Then I would feel like crying, shrieking, running away and jumping out of the window while I was clearing the table and he was smoking. He would yawn in order to show how tired he was, and he would say two or three times before going to bed: 'Ah! how well I shall sleep this evening!'

"I bear him no ill will, because he did not know how he was hurting me. No, he could not know! He loved to boast about the women just as a peacock loves to show his feathers. He got to the point where he thought that all of them looked at him and desired him.

"It was hard when he grew old. Oh, monsieur, when I saw his first white hair I felt a terrible shock and then a great joy — a wicked joy — but so great, so great! I said to myself: 'It's the end-it's the end.' It seemed as if I were about to be released from prison. At last I could have him to myself, all to myself, when the others would no longer want him.

"It was one morning in bed. He was still sleeping and I leaned over him to wake him up with a kiss, when I noticed in his curls, over his temple, a little thread which shone like silver. What a surprise! I should not have thought it possible! At first I thought of tearing it out so that he would not see it, but as I looked carefully I noticed another farther up. White hair! He was going to have white hair! My heart began to thump and perspiration stood out all over me, but away down at the bottom I was happy.

"It was mean to feel thus, but I did my housework with a light heart that morning, without waking him up, and, as soon as he opened his eyes of his own accord, I said to him: 'Do you know what I discovered while you were asleep?'

"'No.'

"'I found white hairs.'

"He started up as if I had tickled him and said angrily: 'It's not true!'

"'Yes, it is. There are four of them over your left temple.'

"He jumped out of bed and ran over to the mirror. He could not find them. Then I showed him the first one, the lowest, the little curly one, and I said: 'It's no wonder, after the life that you have been leading. In two years all will be over for you.'

"Well, monsieur, I had spoken true; two years later one could not recognize him. How quickly a man changes! He was still handsome, but he had lost his freshness, and the women no longer ran after him. Ah! what a life I led at that time! How he treated me! Nothing suited him. He left his trade to go into the hat business, in which he ate up all his money. Then he unsuccessfully tried to be an actor, and finally he began to frequent public balls. Fortunately, he had had common sense enough to save a little something on which we now live. It is sufficient, but it is not enormous. And to think that at one time he had almost a fortune.

"Now you see what he does. This habit holds him like a frenzy. He has to be young; he has to dance with women who smell of perfume and cosmetics. You poor old darling!"

She was looking at her old snoring husband fondly, ready to cry. Then, gently tiptoeing up to him, she kissed his hair. The physician had risen and was getting ready to leave, finding nothing to say to this strange couple. Just as he was leaving she asked:

"Would you mind giving me your address? If he should grow worse, I could go and get you."

THE PENGUINS' ROCK

This is the season for penguins.

From April to the end of May, before the Parisian visitors arrive, one sees, all at once, on the little beach at Etretat several old gentlemen, booted and belted in shooting costume. They spend four or five days at the Hotel Hauville, disappear, and return again three weeks later. Then, after a fresh sojourn, they go away altogether.

One sees them again the following spring.

These are the last penguin hunters, what remain of the old set. There were about twenty enthusiasts thirty or forty years ago; now there are only a few of the enthusiastic sportsmen.

The penguin is a very rare bird of passage, with peculiar habits. It lives the greater part of the year in the latitude of Newfoundland and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. But in the breeding season a flight of emigrants crosses the ocean and comes every year to the same spot to lay their eggs, to the Penguins' Rock near Etretat. They are found nowhere else, only there. They have always come there, have always been chased away, but return again, and will always return. As soon as the young birds are grown they all fly away, and disappear for a year.

Why do they not go elsewhere? Why not choose some other spot on the long white, unending cliff that extends from the Pas-de-Calais to Havre? What force, what invincible instinct, what custom of centuries impels these birds to come back to this place? What first migration, what tempest, possibly, once cast their ancestors on this rock? And why do the children, the grandchildren, all the descendants of the first parents always return here?

There are not many of them, a hundred at most, as if one single family, maintaining the tradition, made this annual pilgrimage.

And each spring, as soon as the little wandering tribe has taken up its abode an the rock, the same sportsmen also reappear in the village. One knew them formerly when they were young; now they are old, but constant to the regular appointment which they have kept for thirty or forty years. They would not miss it for anything in the world.

It was an April evening in one of the later years. Three of the old sportsmen had arrived; one was missing — M. d’Arnelles.

He had written to no one, given no account of himself. But he was not dead, like so many of the rest; they would have heard of it. At length, tired of waiting for him, the other three sat down to table. Dinner was almost over when a carriage drove into the yard of the hotel, and the late corner presently entered the dining room.

He sat down, in a good humor, rubbing his hands, and ate with zest. When one of his comrades remarked with surprise at his being in a frock-coat, he replied quietly:

“Yes, I had no time to change my clothes.”

They retired on leaving the table, for they had to set out before daybreak in order to take the birds unawares.

There is nothing so pretty as this sport, this early morning expedition.

At three o’clock in the morning the sailors awoke the sportsmen by throwing sand against the windows. They were ready in a few minutes and went down to the beach. Although it was still dark, the stars had paled a little. The sea ground the shingle on the beach. There was such a fresh breeze that it made one shiver slightly in spite of one’s heavy clothing.

Presently two boats were pushed down the beach, by the sailors, with a sound as of tearing cloth, and were floated on the nearest waves. The brown sail was hoisted, swelled a little, fluttered, hesitated and swelling out again as round as a paunch, carried the boats towards the large arched entrance that could be faintly distinguished in the darkness.

The sky became clearer, the shadows seemed to melt away. The coast still seemed veiled, the great white coast, perpendicular as a wall.

They passed through the Manne-Porte, an enormous arch beneath which a ship could sail; they doubled the promontory of La Courtine, passed the little valley of Antifer and the cape of the same name; and suddenly caught sight of a beach on which some hundreds of seagulls were perched.

That was the Penguins’ Rock. It was just a little protuberance of the cliff, and on the narrow ledges of rock the birds’ heads might be seen watching the boats.

They remained there, motionless, not venturing to fly off as yet. Some of them perched on the edges, seated upright, looked almost like bottles, for their little legs are so short that when they walk they glide along as if they were on rollers. When they start to fly they cannot make a spring and let themselves fall like stones almost down to the very men who are watching them.

They know their limitation and the danger to which it subjects them, and cannot make up their minds to fly away.

But the boatmen begin to shout, beating the sides of the boat with the wooden boat pins, and the birds, in affright, fly one by one into space until they reach the level of the waves. Then, moving their wings rapidly, they scud, scud along until they reach the open sea; if a shower of lead does not knock them into the water.

For an hour the firing is kept up, obliging them to give up, one after another. Sometimes the mother birds will not leave their nests, and are riddled with shot, causing drops of blood to spurt out on the white cliff, and the animal dies without having deserted her eggs.

The first day M. d’Arnelles fired at the birds with his habitual zeal; but when the party returned toward ten o’clock, beneath a brilliant sun, which cast great triangles of light on the white cliffs along the coast he appeared a little worried, and absentminded, contrary to his accustomed manner.

As soon as they got on shore a kind of servant dressed in black came up to him and said something in a low tone. He seemed to reflect, hesitate, and then replied:

“No, to-morrow.”

The following day they set out again. This time M, d’Arnelles frequently missed his aim, although the birds were close by. His friends teased him, asked him if he were in love, if some secret sorrow was troubling his mind and heart. At length he confessed.

“Yes, indeed, I have to leave soon, and that annoys me.”

“What, you must leave? And why?”

“Oh, I have some business that calls me back. I cannot stay any longer.”

They then talked of other matters.

As soon as breakfast was over the valet in black appeared. M. d’Arnelles ordered his carriage, and the man was leaving the room when the three sportsmen interfered, insisting, begging, and praying their friend to stay. One of them at last said:

"Come now, this cannot be a matter of such importance, for you have already waited two days."

M. d'Arnelles, altogether perplexed, began to think, evidently baffled, divided between pleasure and duty, unhappy and disturbed.

After reflecting for some time he stammered:

"The fact is — the fact is — I am not alone here. I have my son-in-law."

There were exclamations and shouts of "Your son-in-law! Where is he?"

He suddenly appeared confused and his face grew red.

"What! do you not know? Why — why — he is in the coach house. He is dead."

They were all silent in amazement.

M. d'Arnelles continued, more and more disturbed:

"I had the misfortune to lose him; and as I was taking the body to my house, in Briseville, I came round this way so as not to miss our appointment. But you can see that I cannot wait any longer."

Then one of the sportsmen, bolder than the rest said:

"Well, but — since he is dead — it seems to me that he can wait a day longer."

The others chimed in:

"That cannot be denied."

M. d'Arnelles appeared to be relieved of a great weight, but a little uneasy, nevertheless, he asked:

"But, frankly — do you think— "

The three others, as one man, replied:

"Parbleu! my dear boy, two days more or less can make no difference in his present condition."

And, perfectly calmly, the father-in-law turned to the undertaker's assistant, and said:

"Well, then, my friend, it will be the day after tomorrow."

AN ARTIFICE

The old doctor sat by the fireside, talking to his fair patient who was lying on the lounge. There was nothing much the matter with her, except that she had one of those little feminine ailments from which pretty women frequently suffer — slight anaemia, a nervous attack, etc.

"No, doctor," she said; "I shall never be able to understand a woman deceiving her husband. Even allowing that she does not love him, that she pays no heed to her vows and promises, how can she give herself to another man? How can she conceal the intrigue from other people's eyes? How can it be possible to love amid lies and treason?"

The doctor smiled, and replied: "It is perfectly easy, and I can assure you that a woman does not think of all those little subtle details when she has made up her mind to go astray.

"As for dissimulation, all women have plenty of it on hand for such occasions, and the simplest of them are wonderful, and extricate themselves from the greatest dilemmas in a remarkable manner."

The young woman, however, seemed incredulous.

"No, doctor," she said; "one never thinks until after it has happened of what one ought to have done in a critical situation, and women are certainly more liable than men to lose their head on such occasions:"

The doctor raised his hands. "After it has happened, you say! Now I will tell you something that happened to one of my female patients, whom I always considered an immaculate woman.

"It happened in a provincial town, and one night when I was asleep, in that deep first sleep from which it is so difficult to rouse us, it seemed to me, in my dreams, as if the bells in the town were sounding a fire alarm, and I woke up with a start. It was my own bell, which was ringing wildly, and as my footman did not seem to be answering the door, I, in turn, pulled the bell at the head of my bed, and soon I heard a banging, and steps in the silent house, and Jean came into my room, and handed me a letter which said: ‘Madame Lelievre begs Dr. Simeon to come to her immediately.’

“I thought for a few moments, and then I said to myself: ‘A nervous attack, vapors; nonsense, I am too tired.’ And so I replied: ‘As Dr. Simeon is not at all well, he must beg Madame Lelievre to be kind enough to call in his colleague, Monsieur Bonnet.’ I put the note into an envelope and went to sleep again, but about half an hour later the street bell rang again, and Jean came to me and said: ‘There is somebody downstairs; I do not quite know whether it is a man or a woman, as the individual is so wrapped up, but they wish to speak to you immediately. They say it is a matter of life and death for two people.’ Whereupon I sat up in bed and told him to show the person in.

“A kind of black phantom appeared and raised her veil as soon as Jean had left the room. It was Madame Berthe Lelievre, quite a young woman, who had been married for three years to a large a merchant in the town, who was said to have married the prettiest girl in the neighborhood.

“She was terribly pale, her face was contracted as the faces of insane people are, occasionally, and her hands trembled violently. Twice she tried to speak without being able to utter a sound, but at last she stammered out: ‘Come — quick — quick, doctor. Come — my — friend has just died in my bedroom.’ She stopped, half suffocated with emotion, and then went on: ‘My husband will be coming home from the club very soon.’

“I jumped out of bed without even considering that I was only in my nightshirt, and dressed myself in a few moments, and then I said: ‘Did you come a short time ago?’ ‘No,’ she said, standing like a statue petrified with horror. ‘It was my servant — she knows.’ And then, after a short silence, she went on: ‘I was there — by his side.’ And she uttered a sort of cry of horror, and after a fit of choking, which made her gasp, she wept violently, and shook with spasmodic sobs for a minute: or two. Then her tears suddenly ceased, as if by an internal fire, and with an air of tragic calmness, she said: ‘Let us make haste.’

“I was ready, but exclaimed: ‘I quite forgot to order my carriage.’ ‘I have one,’ she said; ‘it is his, which was waiting for him!’ She wrapped herself up, so as to completely conceal her face, and we started.

“When she was by my side in the carriage she suddenly seized my hand, and crushing it in her delicate fingers, she said, with a shaking voice, that proceeded from a distracted heart: ‘Oh! if you only knew, if you only knew what I am suffering! I loved him, I have loved him distractedly, like a madwoman, for the last six months.’ ‘Is anyone up in your house?’ I asked. ‘No, nobody except those, who knows everything.’

“We stopped at the door, and evidently everybody was asleep. We went in without making any noise, by means of her latch-key, and walked upstairs on tiptoe. The frightened servant was sitting on the top of the stairs with a lighted candle by her side, as she was afraid to remain with the dead man, and I went into the room, which was in great disorder. Wet towels, with which they had bathed the young man’s temples, were lying on the floor, by the side of a washbasin and a glass, while a strong smell of vinegar pervaded the room.

“The dead man’s body was lying at full length in the middle of the room, and I went up to it, looked at it, and touched it. I opened the eyes and felt the hands, and then, turning to the two women, who were shaking as if they were freezing, I said to them: ‘Help me to lift him on to the bed.’ When we had laid him gently on it, I listened to his heart and put a looking-glass to his lips, and then said: ‘It is all over.’ It was a terrible sight!

“I looked at the man, and said: ‘You ought to arrange his hair a little.’ The girl went and brought her mistress’ comb and brush, but as she was trembling, and pulling out his long, matted hair in doing it, Madame Lelievre took the comb out of her hand, and arranged his hair as if she were caressing him. She parted it, brushed his beard, rolled his mustaches gently round her fingers, then, suddenly, letting go of his hair, she took the dead man’s inert head in her hands and looked for a long time in despair at the dead face, which no longer could smile at her, and then, throwing herself on him, she clasped him in her arms and kissed him ardently. Her kisses fell like blows on his closed mouth and eyes, his forehead and temples; and then, putting her lips to his ear, as if he could still hear her, and as if she were about to whisper something to him, she said several times, in a heartrending voice:

“‘Good-by, my darling!’

“Just then the clock struck twelve, and I started up. ‘Twelve o’clock!’ I exclaimed. ‘That is the time when the club closes. Come, madame, we have not a moment to lose!’ She started up, and I said:

“‘We must carry him into the drawing-room.’ And when we had done this, I placed him on a sofa, and lit the chandeliers, and just then the front door was opened and shut noisily. ‘Rose, bring me the basin and the towels, and make the room look tidy. Make haste, for Heaven's sake! Monsieur Lelievre is coming in.'

"I heard his steps on the stairs, and then his hands feeling along the walls. 'Come here, my dear fellow,' I said; 'we have had an accident.'

"And the astonished husband appeared in the door with a cigar in his mouth, and said: 'What is the matter? What is the meaning of this?' 'My dear friend,' I said, going up to him, 'you find us in great embarrassment. I had remained late, chatting with your wife and our friend, who had brought me in his carriage, when he suddenly fainted, and in spite of all we have done, he has remained unconscious for two hours. I did not like to call in strangers, and if you will now help me downstairs with him, I shall be able to attend to him better at his own house.'

"The husband, who was surprised, but quite unsuspicious, took off his hat, and then he took his rival, who would be quite inoffensive for the future, under the arms. I got between his two legs, as if I had been a horse between the shafts, and we went downstairs, while his wife held a light for us. When we got outside I stood the body up, so as to deceive the coachman, and said: 'Come, my friend; it is nothing; you feel better already I expect. Pluck up your courage, and make an effort. It will soon be over.' But as I felt that he was slipping out of my hands, I gave him a slap on the shoulder, which sent him forward and made him fall into the carriage, and then I got in after him. Monsieur Lelievre, who was rather alarmed, said to me: 'Do you think it is anything serious?' To which I replied: 'No,' with a smile, as I looked at his wife, who had put her arm into that of her husband, and was trying to see into the carriage.

"I shook hands with them and told my coachman to start, and during the whole drive the dead man kept falling against me. When we got to his house I said that he had become unconscious on the way home, and helped to carry him upstairs, where I certified that he was dead, and acted another comedy to his distracted family, and at last I got back to bed, not without swearing at lovers."

The doctor ceased, though he was still smiling, and the young woman, who was in a very nervous state, said: "Why have you told me that terrible story?"

He gave her a gallant bow, and replied:

"So that I may offer you my services if they should be needed."

DREAMS

They had just dined together, five old friends, a writer, a doctor and three rich bachelors without any profession.

They had talked about everything, and a feeling of lassitude came over them, that feeling which precedes and leads to the departure of guests after festive gatherings. One of those present, who had for the last five minutes been gazing silently at the surging boulevard dotted with gas-lamps, with its rattling vehicles, said suddenly:

“When you’ve nothing to do from morning till night, the days are long.”

“And the nights too,” assented the guest who sat next to him. “I sleep very little; pleasures fatigue me; conversation is monotonous. Never do I come across a new idea, and I feel, before talking to any one, a violent longing to say nothing and to listen to nothing. I don’t know what to do with my evenings.”

The third idler remarked:

“I would pay a great deal for anything that would help me to pass just two pleasant hours every day.”

The writer, who had just thrown his overcoat across his arm, turned round to them, and said:

“The man who could discover a new vice and introduce it among his fellow creatures, even if it were to shorten their lives, would render a greater service to humanity than the man who found the means of securing to them eternal salvation and eternal youth.”

The doctor burst out laughing, and, while he chewed his cigar, he said:

“Yes, but it is not so easy to discover it. Men have however crudely, been seeking for — and working for the object you refer to since the beginning of the world. The men who came first reached perfection at once in this way. We are hardly equal to them.”

One of the three idlers murmured:

“What a pity!”

Then, after a minute’s pause, he added:

“If we could only sleep, sleep well, without feeling hot or cold, sleep with that perfect unconsciousness we experience on nights when we are thoroughly fatigued, sleep without dreams.”

“Why without dreams?” asked the guest sitting next to him.

The other replied:

“Because dreams are not always pleasant; they are always fantastic, improbable, disconnected; and because when we are asleep we cannot have the sort of dreams we like. We ought to dream waking.”

“And what’s to prevent you?” asked the writer.

The doctor flung away the end of his cigar.

“My dear fellow, in order to dream when you are awake, you need great power and great exercise of will, and when you try to do it, great weariness is the result. Now, real dreaming, that journey of our thoughts through delightful visions, is assuredly the sweetest experience in the world; but it must come naturally, it must not be provoked in a painful, manner, and must be accompanied by absolute bodily comfort. This power of dreaming I can give you, provided you promise that you will not abuse it.”

The writer shrugged his shoulders:

“Ah! yes, I know — hasheesh, opium, green tea — artificial paradises. I have read Baudelaire, and I even tasted the famous drug, which made me very sick.”

But the doctor, without stirring from his seat, said:

“No; ether, nothing but ether; and I would suggest that you literary men should use it sometimes.”

The three rich bachelors drew closer to the doctor.

One of them said:

“Explain to us the effects of it.”

And the doctor replied:

“Let us put aside big words, shall we not? I am not talking of medicine or morality; I am talking of pleasure. You give yourselves up every day to excesses which consume your lives. I want to indicate to you a new sensation, possible only to intelligent men — let us say even very intelligent men — dangerous, like everything else that overexcites our organs, but exquisite. I might add that you would require a certain preparation, that is to say, practice, to feel in all their completeness the singular effects of ether.

"They are different from the effects of hasheesh, of opium, or morphia, and they cease as soon as the absorption of the drug is interrupted, while the other generators of day dreams continue their action for hours.

"I am now going to try to analyze these feelings as clearly as possible. But the thing is not easy, so facile, so delicate, so almost imperceptible, are these sensations.

"It was when I was attacked by violent neuralgia that I made use of this remedy, which since then I have, perhaps, slightly abused.

"I had acute pains in my head and neck, and an intolerable heat of the skin, a feverish restlessness. I took up a large bottle of ether, and, lying down, I began to inhale it slowly.

"At the end of some minutes I thought I heard a vague murmur, which ere long became a sort of humming, and it seemed to me that all the interior of my body had become light, light as air, that it was dissolving into vapor.

"Then came a sort of torpor, a sleepy sensation of comfort, in spite of the pains which still continued, but which had ceased to make themselves felt. It was one of those sensations which we are willing to endure and not any of those frightful wrenches against which our tortured body protests.

"Soon the strange and delightful sense of emptiness which I felt in my chest extended to my limbs, which, in their turn, became light, as light as if the flesh and the bones had been melted and the skin only were left, the skin necessary to enable me to realize the sweetness of living, of bathing in this sensation of well-being. Then I perceived that I was no longer suffering. The pain had gone, melted away, evaporated. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding what was said. At one time there were only indistinct sounds, at another time a word reached my ear. But I recognized that this was only the humming I had heard before, but emphasized. I was not asleep; I was not awake; I comprehended, I felt, I reasoned with the utmost clearness and depth, with extraordinary energy and intellectual pleasure, with a singular intoxication arising from this separation of my mental faculties.

"It was not like the dreams caused by hasheesh or the somewhat sickly visions that come from opium; it was an amazing acuteness of reasoning, a new way of seeing, judging and appreciating the things of life, and with the certainty, the absolute consciousness that this was the true way.

"And the old image of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, that all the mysteries were unveiled, so much did I find myself under the sway of a new, strange and irrefutable logic. And arguments, reasonings, proofs rose up in a heap before my brain only to be immediately displaced by some stronger proof, reasoning, argument. My head had, in fact, become a battleground of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with invincible intelligence, and I experienced a huge delight at the manifestation of my power.

"It lasted a long, long time. I still kept inhaling the ether from my flagon. Suddenly I perceived that it was empty."

The four men exclaimed at the same time:

"Doctor, a prescription at once for a liter of ether!"

But the doctor, putting on his hat, replied:

"As to that, certainly not; go and let some one else poison you!"

And he left them.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is your opinion on the subject?

THE CHILD

Lemonnier had remained a widower with one child. He had loved his wife devotedly, with a tender and exalted love, without a slip, during their entire married life. He was a good, honest man, perfectly simple, sincere, without suspicion or malice.

He fell in love with a poor neighbor, proposed and was accepted. He was making a very comfortable living out of the wholesale cloth business, and he did not for a minute suspect that the young girl might have accepted him for anything else but himself.

She made him happy. She was everything to him; he only thought of her, looked at her continually, with worshiping eyes. During meals he would make any number of blunders, in order not to have to take his eyes from the beloved face; he would pour the wine in his plate and the water in the salt-cellar, then he would laugh like a child, repeating:

“You see, I love you too much; that makes me crazy.”

She would smile with a calm and resigned look; then she would look away, as though embarrassed by the adoration of her husband, and try to make him talk about something else; but he would take her hand under the table and he would hold it in his, whispering:

“My little Jeanne, my darling little Jeanne!”

She sometimes lost patience and said:

“Come, come, be reasonable; eat and let me eat.”

He would sigh and break off a mouthful of bread, which he would then chew slowly.

For five years they had no children. Then suddenly she announced to him that this state of affairs would soon cease. He was wild with joy. He no longer left her for a minute, until his old nurse, who had brought him up and who often ruled the house, would push him out and close the door behind him, in order to compel him to go out in the fresh air.

He had grown very intimate with a young man who had known his wife since childhood, and who was one of the prefect's secretaries. M. Duretour would dine three times a week with the Lemonniers, bringing flowers to madame, and sometimes a box at the theater; and often, at the end of the dinner, Lemonnier, growing tender, turning towards his wife, would explain: "With a companion like you and a friend like him, a man is completely happy on earth."

She died in childbirth. The shock almost killed him. But the sight of the child, a poor, moaning little creature, gave him courage.

He loved it with a passionate and sorrowful love, with a morbid love in which stuck the memory of death, but in which lived something of his worship for the dead mother. It was the flesh of his wife, her being continued, a sort of quintessence of herself. This child was her very life transferred to another body; she had disappeared that it might exist, and the father would smother it in with kisses. But also, this child had killed her; he had stolen this beloved creature, his life was at the cost of hers. And M. Lemonnier would place his son in the cradle and would sit down and watch him. He would sit this way by the hour, looking at him, dreaming of thousands of things, sweet or sad. Then, when the little one was asleep, he would bend over him and sob.

The child grew. The father could no longer spend an hour away from him; he would stay near him, take him out for walks, and himself dress him, wash him, make him eat. His friend, M. Duretour, also seemed to love the boy; he would kiss him wildly, in those frenzies of tenderness which are characteristic of parents. He would toss him in his arms, he would trot him on his knees, by the hour, and M. Lemonnier, delighted, would mutter:

"Isn't he a darling? Isn't he a darling?"

And M. Duretour would hug the child in his arms and tickle his neck with his mustache.

Celeste, the old nurse, alone, seemed to have no tenderness for the little one. She would grow angry at his pranks, and seemed impatient at the caresses of the two men. She would exclaim:

"How can you expect to bring a child up like that? You'll make a perfect monkey out of him."

Years went by, and Jean was nine years old. He hardly knew how to read; he had been so spoiled, and only did as he saw fit. He was willful, stubborn and quick-tempered. The father always gave in to him and let him have his own way. M. Duretour would always buy him all the toys he wished, and he fed him on cake and candies. Then Celeste would grow angry and exclaim:

"It's a shame, monsieur, a shame. You are spoiling this child. But it will have to stop; yes, sir, I tell you it will have to stop, and before long, too."

M. Lemonnier would answer, smiling:

"What can you expect? I love him too much, I can't resist him; you must get used to it."

Jean was delicate, rather. The doctor said that he was anaemic, prescribed iron, rare meat and broth.

But the little fellow loved only cake and refused all other nourishment; and the father, in despair, stuffed him with cream-puffs and chocolate eclairs.

One evening, as they were sitting down to supper, Celeste brought on the soup with an air of authority and an assurance which she did not usually have. She took off the cover and, dipping the ladle into the dish, she declared:

"Here is some broth such as I have never made; the young one will have to take some this time."

M. Lemonnier, frightened, bent his head. He saw a storm brewing.

Celeste took his plate, filled it herself and placed it in front of him.

He tasted the soup and said:

"It is, indeed, excellent."

The servant took the boy's plate and poured a spoonful of soup in it. Then she retreated a few steps and waited.

Jean smelled the food and pushed his plate away with an expression of disgust. Celeste, suddenly pale, quickly stepped forward and forcibly poured a spoonful down the child's open mouth.

He choked, coughed, sneezed, spat; howling, he seized his glass and threw it at his nurse. She received it full in the stomach. Then, exasperated, she took the young shaver's head under her arm and began pouring spoonful after spoonful of soup down his throat. He grew as red as a beet, and he would cough it up, stamping, twisting, choking, beating the air with his hands.

At first the father was so surprised that he could not move. Then, suddenly, he rushed forward, wild with rage, seized the servant by the throat and threw her up against the wall stammering:

"Out! Out! Out! you brute!"

But she shook him off, and, her hair streaming down her back, her eyes snapping, she cried out:

"What's gettin' hold of you? You're trying to thrash me because I am making this child eat soup when you are filling him with sweet stuff!"

He kept repeating, trembling from head to foot:

"Out! Get out-get out, you brute!"

Then, wild, she turned to him and, pushing her face up against his, her voice trembling:

"Ah! — you think-you think that you can treat me like that? Oh! no. And for whom? — for that brat who is not even yours. No, not yours! No, not yours — not yours! Everybody knows it, except yourself! Ask the grocer, the butcher, the baker, all of them, any one of them!"

She was growling and mumbling, choked with passion; then she stopped and looked at him.

He was motionless livid, his arms hanging by his sides. After a short pause, he murmured in a faint, shaky voice, instinct with deep feeling:

"You say? you say? What do you say?"

She remained silent, frightened by his appearance. Once more he stepped forward, repeating:

"You say — what do you say?"

Then in a calm voice, she answered:

"I say what I know, what everybody knows."

He seized her and, with the fury of a beast, he tried to throw her down. But, although old, she was strong and nimble. She slipped under his arm, and running around the table once more furious, she screamed:

"Look at him, just look at him, fool that you are! Isn't he the living image of M. Durefour? just look at his nose and his eyes! Are yours like that? And his hair! Is it like his mother's? I tell you that everyone knows it, everyone except yourself! It's the joke of the town! Look at him!"

She went to the door, opened it, and disappeared.

Jean, frightened, sat motionless before his plate of soup.

At the end of an hour, she returned gently, to see how matters stood. The child, after doing away with all the cakes and a pitcher full of cream and one of syrup, was now emptying the jam-pot with his soup-spoon.

The father had gone out.

Celeste took the child, kissed him, and gently carried him to his room and put him to bed. She came back to the dining-room, cleared the table, put everything in place, feeling very uneasy all the time.

Not a single sound could be heard throughout the house. She put her ear against’s her master’s door. He seemed to be perfectly still. She put her eye to the keyhole. He was writing, and seemed very calm.

Then she returned to the kitchen and sat down, ready for any emergency. She slept on a chair and awoke at daylight.

She did the rooms as she had been accustomed to every morning; she swept and dusted, and, towards eight o’clock, prepared M. Lemonnier’s breakfast.

But she did not dare bring it to her master, knowing too well how she would be received; she waited for him to ring. But he did not ring. Nine o’clock, then ten o’clock went by.

Celeste, not knowing what to think, prepared her tray and started up with it, her heart beating fast.

She stopped before the door and listened. Everything was still. She knocked; no answer. Then, gathering up all her courage, she opened the door and entered. With a wild shriek, she dropped the breakfast tray which she had been holding in her hand.

In the middle of the room, M. Lemonnier was hanging by a rope from a ring in the ceiling. His tongue was sticking out horribly. His right slipper was lying on the ground, his left one still on his foot. An upturned chair had rolled over to the bed.

Celeste, dazed, ran away shrieking. All the neighbors crowded together. The physician declared that he had died at about midnight.

A letter addressed to M. Duretdur was found on the table of the suicide. It contained these words:

“I leave and entrust the child to you!”

A COUNTRY EXCURSION

For five months they had been talking of going to take luncheon in one of the country suburbs of Paris on Madame Dufour’s birthday, and as they were looking forward very impatiently to the outing, they rose very early that morning. Monsieur Dufour had borrowed the milkman’s wagon and drove himself. It was a very tidy, two-wheeled conveyance, with a cover supported by four iron rods, with curtains that had been drawn up, except the one at the back, which floated out like a sail. Madame Dufour, resplendent in a wonderful, cherry colored silk dress, sat by the side of her husband.

The old grandmother and a girl sat behind them on two chairs, and a boy with yellow hair was lying at the bottom of the wagon, with nothing to be seen of him except his head.

When they reached the bridge of Neuilly, Monsieur Dufour said: “Here we are in the country at last!” and at that signal his wife grew sentimental about the beauties of nature. When they got to the crossroads at Courbevoie they were seized with admiration for the distant landscape. On the right was Argenteuil with its bell tower, and above it rose the hills of Sannois and the mill of Orgemont, while on the left the aqueduct of Marly stood out against the clear morning sky, and in the distance they could see the terrace of Saint-Germain; and opposite them, at the end of a low chain of hills, the new fort of Cormeilles. Quite in the distance; a very long way off, beyond the plains and village, one could see the sombre green of the forests.

The sun was beginning to burn their faces, the dust got into their eyes, and on either side of the road there stretched an interminable tract of bare, ugly country with an unpleasant odor. One might have thought that it had been ravaged by a pestilence, which had even attacked the buildings, for skeletons of dilapidated and deserted houses, or small cottages, which were left in an unfinished state, because the contractors had not been paid, reared their four roofless walls on each side.

Here and there tall factory chimneys rose up from the barren soil. The only vegetation on that putrid land, where the spring breezes wafted an odor of petroleum and slate, blended with another odor that was even less agreeable. At last, however, they crossed the Seine a second time, and the bridge was a delight. The river sparkled in the sun, and they had a feeling of quiet enjoyment, felt refreshed as they drank in the purer air that was not impregnated by the black smoke of factories nor by the miasma from the deposits of night soil. A man whom they met told them that the name of the place was Bezons. Monsieur Dufour pulled up and read the attractive announcement outside an eating house: Restaurant Poulin, matelottes and fried fish, private rooms, arbors, and swings.

“Well, Madame Dufour, will this suit you? Will you make up your mind at last?”

She read the announcement in her turn and then looked at the house for some time.

It was a white country inn, built by the roadside, and through the open door she could see the bright zinc of the counter, at which sat two workmen in their Sunday clothes. At last she made up her mind and said:

“Yes, this will do; and, besides, there is a view.”

They drove into a large field behind the inn, separated from the river by the towing path, and dismounted. The husband sprang out first and then held out his arms for his wife, and as the step was very high Madame Dufour, in order to reach him, had to show the lower part of her limbs, whose former slenderness had disappeared in fat, and Monsieur Dufour, who was already getting excited by the country air, pinched her calf, and then, taking her in his arms, he set her on the ground, as if she had been some enormous bundle. She shook the dust out of the silk dress and then looked round to see in what sort of a place she was.

She was a stout woman, of about thirty-six, full-blown, and delightful to look at. She could hardly breathe, as her corsets were laced too tightly, and their pressure forced her superabundant bosom up to her double chin. Next the girl placed her hand on her father’s shoulder and jumped down lightly. The boy with the yellow hair had got down by stepping on the wheel, and he helped Monsieur Dufour to lift his grandmother out. Then they unharnessed the horse, which they had tied to a tree, and the carriage fell back, with both shafts in the air. The men took off their coats and washed their hands in a pail of water and then went and joined the ladies, who had already taken possession of the swings.

Mademoiselle Dufour was trying to swing herself standing up, but she could not succeed in getting a start. She was a pretty girl of about eighteen, one of those women who suddenly excite your desire when you meet them in the street and who leave you with a vague feeling of uneasiness and of excited senses. She was tall, had a small waist and large hips, with a dark skin, very large eyes and very black hair. Her dress clearly marked the outlines of her firm, full figure, which was accentuated by the motion of her hips as she tried to swing herself higher. Her arms were stretched upward to hold the rope, so that her bosom rose at every movement she made. Her hat, which a gust of wind had blown off, was hanging behind her, and as the swing gradually rose higher and higher, she showed her delicate limbs up to the knees each time, and the breeze from her flying skirts, which was more heady than the fumes of wine, blew into the faces of the two men, who were looking at her and smiling.

Sitting in the other swing, Madame Dufour kept saying in a monotonous voice:

“Cyprian, come and swing me; do come and swing me, Cyprian!”

At last he went, and turning up his shirt sleeves, as if undertaking a hard piece of work, with much difficulty he set his wife in motion. She clutched the two ropes and held her legs out straight, so as not to touch the ground. She enjoyed feeling dizzy at the motion of the swing, and her whole figure shook like a jelly on a dish, but as she went higher and higher; she became too giddy and was frightened. Each time the swing came down she uttered a piercing scream, which made all the little urchins in the neighborhood come round, and down below, beneath the garden hedge, she vaguely saw a row of mischievous heads making various grimaces as they laughed.

When a servant girl came out they ordered luncheon.

“Some fried fish, a rabbit saute, salad and dessert,” Madame Dufour said, with an important air.

“Bring two quarts of beer and a bottle of claret,” her husband said.

“We will have lunch on the grass,” the girl added.

The grandmother, who had an affection for cats, had been running after one that belonged to the house, trying to coax it to come to her for the last ten minutes. The animal, who was no doubt secretly flattered by her attentions, kept close to the good woman, but just out of reach of her hand,

and quietly walked round the trees, against which she rubbed herself, with her tail up, purring with pleasure.

"Hello!" suddenly exclaimed the young man with the yellow hair, who was wandering about. "Here are two swell boats!" They all went to look at them and saw two beautiful canoes in a wooden shed; they were as beautifully finished as if they had been ornamental furniture. They hung side by side, like two tall, slender girls, in their narrow shining length, and made one wish to float in them on warm summer mornings and evenings along the flower-covered banks of the river, where the trees dip their branches into the water, where the rushes are continually rustling in the breeze and where the swift kingfishers dart about like flashes of blue lightning.

The whole family looked at them with great respect.

"Oh, they are indeed swell boats!" Monsieur Dufour repeated gravely, as he examined them like a connoiseur. He had been in the habit of rowing in his younger days, he said, and when he had spat in his hands — and he went through the action of pulling the oars — he did not care a fig for anybody. He had beaten more than one Englishman formerly at the Joinville regattas. He grew quite excited at last and offered to make a bet that in a boat like that he could row six leagues an hour without exerting himself.

"Luncheon is ready," the waitress said, appearing at the entrance to the boathouse, and they all hurried off. But two young men had taken the very seats that Madame Dufour had selected and were eating their luncheon. No doubt they were the owners of the sculls, for they were in boating costume. They were stretched out, almost lying on the chairs; they were sun-browned and their thin cotton jerseys, with short sleeves, showed their bare arms, which were as strong as a blacksmith's. They were two strong, athletic fellows, who showed in all their movements that elasticity and grace of limb which can only be acquired by exercise and which is so different to the deformity with which monotonous heavy work stamps the mechanic.

They exchanged a rapid smile when they saw the mother and then a glance on seeing the daughter.

"Let us give up our place," one of them said; "it will make us acquainted with them."

The other got up immediately, and holding his black and red boating cap in his hand, he politely offered the ladies the only shady place in the garden.

With many excuses they accepted, and that it might be more rural, they sat on the grass, without either tables or chairs.

The two young men took their plates, knives, forks, etc., to a table a little way off and began to eat again, and their bare arms, which they showed continually, rather embarrassed the girl. She even pretended to turn her head aside and not to see them, while Madame Dufour, who was rather bolder, tempted by feminine curiosity, looked at them every moment, and, no doubt, compared them with the secret unsightliness of her husband. She had squatted herself on ground, with her legs tucked under her, after the manner of tailors, and she kept moving about restlessly, saying that ants were crawling about her somewhere. Monsieur Dufour, annoyed at the presence of the polite strangers, was trying to find a comfortable position which he did not, however, succeed in doing, and the young man with the yellow hair was eating as silently as an ogre.

“It is lovely weather, monsieur,” the stout lady said to one of the boating men. She wished to be friendly because they had given up their place.

“It is, indeed, madame,” he replied. “Do you often go into the country?”

“Oh, only once or twice a year to get a little fresh air. And you, monsieur?”

“I come and sleep here every night.”

“Oh, that must be very nice!”

“Certainly it is, madame.” And he gave them such a practical account of his daily life that it awakened afresh in the hearts of these shopkeepers who were deprived of the meadows and who longed for country walks, to that foolish love of nature which they all feel so strongly the whole year round behind the counter in their shop.

The girl raised her eyes and looked at the oarsman with emotion and Monsieur Dufour spoke for the first time.

“It is indeed a happy life,” he said. And then he added: “A little more rabbit, my dear?”

“No, thank you,” she replied, and turning to the young men again, and pointing to their arms, asked: “Do you never feel cold like that?”

They both began to laugh, and they astonished the family with an account of the enormous fatigue they could endure, of their bathing while in a state of tremendous perspiration, of their rowing in the fog at night; and they struck their chests violently to show how hollow they sounded.

“Ah! You look very strong,” said the husband, who did not talk any more of the time when he used to beat the English. The girl was looking at them sideways now, and the young fellow with the yellow hair, who had swallowed some wine the wrong way, was coughing violently and bespattering Madame Dufour’s cherry-colored silk dress. She got angry and sent for some water to wash the spots.

Meanwhile it had grown unbearably hot, the sparkling river looked like a blaze of fire and the fumes of the wine were getting into their heads. Monsieur Dufour, who had a violent hiccough, had unbuttoned his waistcoat and the top button of his trousers, while his wife, who felt choking, was gradually unfastening her dress. The apprentice was shaking his yellow wig in a happy frame of mind, and kept helping himself to wine, and the old grandmother, feeling the effects of the wine, was very stiff and dignified. As for the girl, one noticed only a peculiar brightness in her eyes, while the brown cheeks became more rosy.

The coffee finished, they suggested singing, and each of them sang or repeated a couplet, which the others applauded frantically. Then they got up with some difficulty, and while the two women, who were rather dizzy, were trying to get a breath of air, the two men, who were altogether drunk, were attempting gymnastics. Heavy, limp and with scarlet faces they hung or, awkwardly to the iron rings, without being able to raise themselves.

Meanwhile the two boating men had got their boats into the water, and they came back and politely asked the ladies whether they would like a row.

“Would you like one, Monsieur Dufour?” his wife exclaimed. “Please come!”

He merely gave her a drunken nod, without understanding what she said. Then one of the rowers came up with two fishing rods in his hands, and the hope of catching a gudgeon, that great vision of the Parisian shopkeeper, made Dufour’s dull eyes gleam, and he politely allowed them to do whatever they liked, while he sat in the shade under the bridge, with his feet dangling over the river, by the side of the young man with the yellow hair, who was sleeping soundly.

One of the boating men made a martyr of himself and took the mother.

“Let us go to the little wood on the Ile aux Anglais!” he called out as he rowed off. The other boat went more slowly, for the rower was looking at his companion so intently that by thought of nothing else, and his emotion seemed to paralyze his strength, while the girl, who was sitting in the bow, gave herself up to the enjoyment of being on the water. She felt a disinclination to think, a lassitude in her limbs and a total enervation, as if she were intoxicated, and her face was flushed and her breathing quickened. The effects of the wine, which were increased by the extreme heat, made all the trees on the bank seem to bow as she passed. A vague wish for enjoyment and a fermentation of her blood seemed to pervade her whole body, which was excited by the heat of the day, and she was also disturbed at this tete-a-tete on the water, in a place which seemed depopulated by the heat, with this young man who thought her pretty, whose ardent looks seemed to caress her skin and were as penetrating and pervading as the sun's rays.

Their inability to speak increased their emotion, and they looked about them. At last, however, he made an effort and asked her name.

"Henriette," she said.

"Why, my name is Henri," he replied. The sound of their voices had calmed them, and they looked at the banks. The other boat had passed them and seemed to be waiting for them, and the rower called out:

"We will meet you in the wood; we are going as far as Robinson's, because Madame Dufour is thirsty." Then he bent over his oars again and rowed off so quickly that he was soon out of sight.

Meanwhile a continual roar, which they had heard for some time, came nearer, and the river itself seemed to shiver, as if the dull noise were rising from its depths.

"What is that noise?" she asked. It was the noise of the weir which cut the river in two at the island, and he was explaining it to her, when, above the noise of the waterfall, they heard the song of a bird, which seemed a long way off.

"Listen!" he said; "the nightingales are singing during the day, so the female birds must be sitting."

A nightingale! She had never heard one before, and the idea of listening to one roused visions of poetic tenderness in her heart. A nightingale! That is to say, the invisible witness of her love trysts which Juliet invoked on her balcony; that celestial music which it attuned to human kisses, that eternal inspirer of all those languorous romances which open an ideal sky to all the poor little tender hearts of sensitive girls!

She was going to hear a nightingale.

“We must not make a noise,” her companion said, “and then we can go into the wood, and sit down close beside it.”

The boat seemed to glide. They saw the trees on the island, the banks of which were so low that they could look into the depths of the thickets. They stopped, he made the boat fast, Henriette took hold of Henri’s arm, and they went beneath the trees.

“Stoop,” he said, so she stooped down, and they went into an inextricable thicket of creepers, leaves and reed grass, which formed an undiscoverable retreat, and which the young man laughingly called “his private room.”

Just above their heads, perched in one of the trees which hid them, the bird was still singing. He uttered trills and roulades, and then loud, vibrating notes that filled the air and seemed to lose themselves on the horizon, across the level country, through that burning silence which weighed upon the whole landscape. They did not speak for fear of frightening it away. They were sitting close together, and, slowly, Henri’s arm stole round the girl’s waist and squeezed it gently. She took that daring hand without any anger, and kept removing it whenever he put it round her; without, however, feeling at all embarrassed by this caress, just as if it had been something quite natural, which she was resisting just as naturally.

She was listening to the bird in ecstasy. She felt an infinite longing for happiness, for some sudden demonstration of tenderness, for the revelation of superhuman poetry, and she felt such a softening at her heart, and relaxation of her nerves, that she began to cry, without knowing why. The young man was now straining her close to him, yet she did not remove his arm; she did not think of it. Suddenly the nightingale stopped, and a voice called out in the distance:

“Henriette!”

“Do not reply,” he said in a low voice; “you will drive the bird away.”

But she had no idea of doing so, and they remained in the same position for some time. Madame Dufour had sat down somewhere or other, for from time to time they heard the stout lady break out into little bursts of laughter.

The girl was still crying; she was filled with strange sensations. Henri’s head was on her shoulder, and suddenly he kissed her on the lips. She was surprised and angry, and, to avoid him, she stood up.

They were both very pale when they left their grassy retreat. The blue sky appeared to them clouded and the ardent sun darkened; and they felt the solitude and the silence. They walked rapidly, side by side, without speaking or touching each other, for they seemed to have become irreconcilable enemies, as if disgust and hatred had arisen between them, and from time to time Henriette called out: “Mamma!”

By and by they heard a noise behind a bush, and the stout lady appeared, looking rather confused, and her companion’s face was wrinkled with smiles which he could not check.

Madame Dufour took his arm, and they returned to the boats, and Henri, who was ahead, walked in silence beside the young girl. At last they got back to Bezons. Monsieur Dufour, who was now sober, was waiting for them very impatiently, while the young man with the yellow hair was having a mouthful of something to eat before leaving the inn. The carriage was waiting in the yard, and the grandmother, who had already got in, was very frightened at the thought of being overtaken by night before they reached Paris, as the outskirts were not safe.

They all shook bands, and the Dufour family drove off.

“Good-by, until we meet again!” the oarsmen cried, and the answer they got was a sigh and a tear.

Two months later, as Henri was going along the Rue des Martyrs, he saw Dufour, Ironmonger, over a door, and so he went in, and saw the stout lady sitting at the counter. They recognized each other immediately, and after an interchange of polite greetings, he asked after them all.

“And how is Mademoiselle Henriette?” he inquired specially.

“Very well, thank you; she is married.”

“Ah!” He felt a certain emotion, but said: “Whom did she marry?”

“That young man who accompanied us, you know; he has joined us in business.”

“I remember him perfectly.”

He was going out, feeling very unhappy, though scarcely knowing why, when madame called him back.

“And how is your friend?” she asked rather shyly.

“He is very well, thank you.”

“Please give him our compliments, and beg him to come and call, when he is in the neighborhood.”

She then added: “Tell him it will give me great pleasure.”

“I will be sure to do so. Adieu!”

“Do not say that; come again very soon.”

The next year, one very hot Sunday, all the details of that adventure, which Henri had never forgotten, suddenly came back to him so clearly that he returned alone to their room in the wood, and was overwhelmed with astonishment when he went in. She was sitting on the grass, looking very sad, while by her side, still in his shirt sleeves, the young man with the yellow hair was sleeping soundly, like some animal.

She grew so pale when she saw Henri that at first he thought she was going to faint; then, however, they began to talk quite naturally. But when he told her that he was very fond of that spot, and went there frequently on Sundays to indulge in memories, she looked into his eyes for a long time.

“I too, think of it,” she replied.

“Come, my dear,” her husband said, with a yawn. “I think it is time for us to be going.”

ROSE

The two young women appear to be buried under a blanket of flowers. They are alone in the immense landau, which is filled with flowers like a giant basket. On the front seat are two small hampers of white satin filled with violets, and on the bearskin by which their knees are covered there is a mass of roses, mimosas, pinks, daisies, tuberoses and orange blossoms, interwoven with silk ribbons; the two frail bodies seem buried under this beautiful perfumed bed, which hides everything but the shoulders and arms and a little of the dainty waists.

The coachman’s whip is wound with a garland of anemones, the horses’ traces are dotted with carnations, the spokes of the wheels are clothed in mignonette, and where the lanterns ought to be are two enormous round bouquets which look as though they were the eyes of this strange, rolling, flower-bedecked creature.

The landau drives rapidly along the road, through the Rue d’Antibes, preceded, followed, accompanied, by a crowd of other carriages covered with flowers, full of women almost hidden by a sea of violets. It is the flower carnival at Cannes.

The carriage reaches the Boulevard de la Fonciere, where the battle is waged. All along the immense avenue a double row of flower-bedecked vehicles are going and coming like an endless ribbon. Flowers are thrown from one to the other. They pass through the air like balls, striking fresh faces, bouncing and falling into the dust, where an army of youngsters pick them up.

A thick crowd is standing on the sidewalks looking on and held in check by the mounted police, who pass brutally along pushing back the curious pedestrians as though to prevent the common people from mingling with the rich.

In the carriages, people call to each other, recognize each other and bombard each other with roses. A chariot full of pretty women, dressed in red, like devils, attracts the eyes of all. A gentleman, who looks like the portraits of Henry IV., is throwing an immense bouquet which is held back by an elastic. Fearing the shock, the women hide their eyes and the men lower their heads, but the graceful, rapid and obedient missile describes a curve and returns to its master, who immediately throws it at some new face.

The two young women begin to throw their stock of flowers by handfuls, and receive a perfect hail of bouquets; then, after an hour of warfare, a little tired, they tell the coachman to drive along the road which follows the seashore.

The sun disappears behind Esterel, outlining the dark, rugged mountain against the sunset sky. The clear blue sea, as calm as a mill-pond, stretches out as far as the horizon, where it blends with the sky; and the fleet, anchored in the middle of the bay, looks like a herd of enormous beasts, motionless on the water, apocalyptic animals, armored and hump-backed, their frail masts looking like feathers, and with eyes which light up when evening approaches.

The two young women, leaning back under the heavy robes, look out lazily over the blue expanse of water. At last one of them says:

"How delightful the evenings are! How good everything seems! Don't you think so, Margot?"

"Yes, it is good. But there is always something lacking."

"What is lacking? I feel perfectly happy. I don't need anything else."

"Yes, you do. You are not thinking of it. No matter how contented we may be, physically, we always long for something more — for the heart."

The other asked with a smile:

"A little love?"

"Yes."

They stopped talking, their eyes fastened on the distant horizon, then the one called Marguerite murmured: "Life without that seems to me unbearable. I need to be loved, if only by a dog. But we are all alike, no matter what you may say, Simone."

"Not at all, my dear. I had rather not be loved at all than to be loved by the first comer. Do you think, for instance, that it would be pleasant to be loved by — by— "

She was thinking by whom she might possibly be loved, glancing across the wide landscape. Her eyes, after traveling around the horizon, fell on the two bright buttons which were shining on the back of the coachman's livery, and she continued, laughing: "by my coachman?"

Madame Margot barely smiled, and said in a low tone of voice:

"I assure you that it is very amusing to be loved by a servant. It has happened to me two or three times. They roll their eyes in such a funny manner — it's enough to make you die laughing! Naturally, the more in love they are, the more severe one must be with them, and then, some day, for some reason, you dismiss them, because, if anyone should notice it, you would appear so ridiculous."

Madame Simone was listening, staring straight ahead of her, then she remarked:

"No, I'm afraid that my footman's heart would not satisfy me. Tell me how you noticed that they loved you."

"I noticed it the same way that I do with other men — when they get stupid."

"The others don't seem stupid to me, when they love me."

"They are idiots, my dear, unable to talk, to answer, to understand anything."

"But how did you feel when you were loved by a servant? Were you — moved — flattered?"

"Moved? no, flattered — yes a little. One is always flattered to be loved by a man, no matter who he may be."

"Oh, Margot!"

"Yes, indeed, my dear! For instance, I will tell you of a peculiar incident which happened to me. You will see how curious and complex our emotions are, in such cases.

"About four years ago I happened to be without a maid. I had tried five or six, one right after the other, and I was about ready to give up in despair, when I saw an advertisement in a newspaper of a young girl knowing how to cook, embroider, dress hair, who was looking for a position and who could furnish the best of references. Besides all these accomplishments, she could speak English.

"I wrote to the given address, and the next day the person in question presented herself. She was tall, slender, pale, shy-looking. She had beautiful black eyes and a charming complexion; she pleased me immediately. I asked for her certificates; she gave me one in English, for she came, as she said, from Lady Rymwell's, where she had been for ten years.

"The certificate showed that the young girl had left of her own free will, in order to return to France, and the only thing which they had had to find fault in her during her long period of service was a little French coquettishness.

"This prudish English phrase even made me smile, and I immediately engaged this maid.

"She came to me the same day. Her name was Rose.

"At the end of a month I would have been helpless without her. She was a treasure, a pearl, a phenomenon.

"She could dress my hair with infinite taste; she could trim a hat better than most milliners, and she could even make my dresses.

"I was astonished at her accomplishments. I had never before been waited on in such a manner.

"She dressed me rapidly and with a surprisingly light touch. I never felt her fingers on my skin, and nothing is so disagreeable to me as contact with a servant's hand. I soon became excessively lazy; it was so pleasant to be dressed from head to foot, and from lingerie to gloves, by this tall, timid girl, always blushing a little, and never saying a word. After my bath she would rub and massage me while I dozed a little on my couch; I almost considered her more of a friend than a servant.

"One morning the janitor asked, mysteriously, to speak to me. I was surprised, and told him to come in. He was a good, faithful man, an old soldier, one of my husband's former orderlies.

"He seemed to be embarrassed by what he had to say to me. At last he managed to mumble:

"'Madame, the superintendent of police is downstairs.'

"I asked quickly:

"'What does he wish?'

"'He wishes to search the house.'

"Of course the police are useful, but I hate them. I do not think that it is a noble profession. I answered, angered and hurt:

"'Why this search? For what reason? He shall not come in.'

"The janitor continued:

"'He says that there is a criminal hidden in the house.'

"This time I was frightened and I told him to bring the inspector to me, so that I might get some explanation. He was a man with good manners and decorated with the Legion of Honor. He begged my pardon for disturbing me, and then informed me that I had, among my domestics, a convict.

"I was shocked; and I answered that I could guarantee every servant in the house, and I began to enumerate them.

"'The janitor, Pierre Courtin, an old soldier.'

"'It's not he.'

"'A stable-boy, son of farmers whom I know, and a groom whom you have just seen.'

"'It's not he.'

"'Then, monsieur, you see that you must be mistaken.'

"'Excuse me, madame, but I am positive that I am not making a mistake.

"As the conviction of a notable criminal is at stake, would you be so kind as to send for all your servants?"

"At first I refused, but I finally gave in, and sent downstairs for everybody, men and women.

"The inspector glanced at them and then declared:

"'This isn't all.'

"'Excuse me, monsieur, there is no one left but my maid, a young girl whom you could not possibly mistake for a convict.'

"He asked:

"'May I also see her?'

"'Certainly.'

"I rang for Rose, who immediately appeared. She had hardly entered the room, when the inspector made a motion, and two men whom I had not seen, hidden behind the door, sprang forward, seized her and tied her hands behind her back.

"I cried out in anger and tried to rush forward to defend her. The inspector stopped me:

"'This girl, madame, is a man whose name is Jean Nicolas Lecapet, condemned to death in 1879 for assaulting a woman and injuring her so that death resulted. His sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. He escaped four months ago. We have been looking for him ever since.'

"I was terrified, bewildered. I did not believe him. The commissioner continued, laughing:

"'I can prove it to you. His right arm is tattooed.'

"'The sleeve was rolled up. It was true. The inspector added, with bad taste:

“‘You can trust us for the other proofs.’

“And they led my maid away!

“Well, would you believe me, the thing that moved me most was not anger at having thus been played upon, deceived and made ridiculous, it was not the shame of having thus been dressed and undressed, handled and touched by this man — but a deep humiliation — a woman’s humiliation. Do you understand?”

“I am afraid I don’t.”

“Just think — this man had been condemned for — for assaulting a woman. Well! I thought of the one whom he had assaulted — and — and I felt humiliated — There! Do you understand now?”

Madame Margot did not answer. She was looking straight ahead, her eyes fastened on the two shining buttons of the livery, with that sphinx-like smile which women sometimes have.

ROSALIE PRUDENT

There was a real mystery in this affair which neither the jury, nor the president, nor the public prosecutor himself could understand.

The girl Prudent (Rosalie), servant at the Varambots', of Nantes, having become enceinte without the knowledge of her masters, had, during the night, killed and buried her child in the garden.

It was the usual story of the infanticides committed by servant girls. But there was one inexplicable circumstance about this one. When the police searched the girl Prudent's room they discovered a complete infant's outfit, made by Rosalie herself, who had spent her nights for the last three months in cutting and sewing it. The grocer from whom she had bought her candles, out of her own wages, for this long piece of work had come to testify. It came out, moreover, that the sage-femme of the district, informed by Rosalie of her condition, had given her all necessary instructions and counsel in case the event should happen at a time when it might not be possible to get help. She had also procured a place at Poissy for the girl Prudent, who foresaw that her present employers would discharge her, for the Varambot couple did not trifle with morality.

There were present at the trial both the man and the woman, a middle-class pair from the provinces, living on their income. They were so exasperated against this girl, who had sullied their house, that they would have liked to see her guillotined on the spot without a trial. The spiteful depositions they made against her became accusations in their mouths.

The defendant, a large, handsome girl of Lower Normandy, well educated for her station in life, wept continuously and would not answer to anything.

The court and the spectators were forced to the opinion that she had committed this barbarous act in a moment of despair and madness, since there was every indication that she had expected to keep and bring up her child.

The president tried for the last time to make her speak, to get some confession, and, having urged her with much gentleness, he finally made her understand that all these men gathered here to pass judgment upon her were not anxious for her death and might even have pity on her.

Then she made up her mind to speak.

"Come, now, tell us, first, who is the father of this child?" he asked.

Until then she had obstinately refused to give his name.

But she replied suddenly, looking at her masters who had so cruelly calumniated her:

"It is Monsieur Joseph, Monsieur Varambot's nephew."

The couple started in their seats and cried with one voice— "That's not true! She lies! This is infamous!"

The president had them silenced and continued, "Go on, please, and tell us how it all happened."

Then she suddenly began to talk freely, relieving her pent-up heart, that poor, solitary, crushed heart — laying bare her sorrow, her whole sorrow, before those severe men whom she had until now taken for enemies and inflexible judges.

"Yes, it was Monsieur Joseph Varambot, when he came on leave last year."

"What does Mr. Joseph Varambot do?"

"He is a non-commissioned officer in the artillery, monsieur. Well, he stayed two months at the house, two months of the summer. I thought nothing about it when he began to look at me, and then flatter me, and make love to me all day long. And I let myself be taken in, monsieur. He kept saying to me that I was a handsome girl, that I was good company, that I just suited him — and I, I liked him well enough. What could I do? One listens to these things when one is alone — all alone — as I was. I am alone in the world, monsieur. I have no one to talk to — no one to tell my troubles to. I have no father, no mother, no brother, no sister, nobody. And when he began to talk to me it was as if I had a brother who had come back. And then he asked me to go with him to the river one evening, so that we might talk without disturbing any one. I went — I don't know — I don't know how it happened. He had his arm around me. Really I didn't want to — no — no — I could not — I felt like crying, the air was so soft — the moon was shining. No, I swear to you — I could not — he did what he wanted. That went on three weeks, as long as he stayed. I could have followed him to the ends of the world. He went away. I did not know that I was enceinte. I did not know it until the month after— “

She began to cry so bitterly that they had to give her time to collect herself.

Then the president resumed with the tone of a priest at the confessional: “Come, now, go on.”

She began to talk again: “When I realized my condition I went to see Madame Boudin, who is there to tell you, and I asked her how it would be, in case it should come if she were not there. Then I made the outfit, sewing night after night, every evening until one o’clock in the morning; and then I looked for another place, for I knew very well that I should be sent away, but I wanted to stay in the house until the very last, so as to save my pennies, for I have not got very much and I should need my money for the little one.”

“Then you did not intend to kill him?”

“Oh, certainly not, monsieur!”

“Why did you kill him, then?”

“It happened this way. It came sooner than I expected. It came upon me in the kitchen, while I was doing the dishes. Monsieur and Madame Varambot were already asleep, so I went up, not without difficulty, dragging myself up by the banister, and I lay down on the bare floor. It lasted perhaps one hour, or two, or three; I don’t know, I had such pain; and then I pushed him out with all my strength. I felt that he came out and I picked him up.

“Ah! but I was glad, I assure you! I did all that Madame Boudin told me to do. And then I laid him on my bed. And then such a pain griped me again that I thought I should die. If you knew what it meant, you there, you would not do so much of this. I fell on my knees, and then toppled over backward on the floor; and it griped me again, perhaps one hour, perhaps two. I lay there all alone — and then another one comes — another little one — two, yes, two, like this. I took him up as I did the first one, and then I put him on the bed, the two side by side. Is it possible, tell me, two children, and I who get only twenty francs a month? Say, is it possible? One, yes, that can be managed by going without things, but not two. That turned my head. What do I know about it? Had I any choice, tell me?

“What could I do? I felt as if my last hour had come. I put the pillow over them, without knowing why. I could not keep them both; and then I threw myself down, and I lay there, rolling over and over and crying until I saw the daylight come into the window. Both of them were quite dead under the pillow. Then I took them under my arms and went down the stairs out in the vegetable garden. I took the gardener's spade and I buried them under the earth, digging as deep a hole as I could, one here and the other one there, not together, so that they might not talk of their mother if these little dead bodies can talk. What do I know about it?

"And then, back in my bed, I felt so sick that I could not get up. They sent for the doctor and he understood it all. I'm telling you the truth, Your Honor. Do what you like with me; I'm ready."

Half of the jury were blowing their noses violently to keep from crying. The women in the courtroom were sobbing.

The president asked her:

"Where did you bury the other one?"

"The one that you have?" she asked.

"Why, this one — this one was in the artichokes."

"Oh, then the other one is among the strawberries, by the well."

And she began to sob so piteously that no one could hear her unmoved.

The girl Rosalie Prudent was acquitted.

REGRET

Monsieur Saval, who was called in Mantes “Father Saval,” had just risen from bed. He was weeping. It was a dull autumn day; the leaves were falling. They fell slowly in the rain, like a heavier and slower rain. M. Saval was not in good spirits. He walked from the fireplace to the window, and from the window to the fireplace. Life has its sombre days. It would no longer have any but sombre days for him, for he had reached the age of sixty-two. He is alone, an old bachelor, with nobody about him. How sad it is to die alone, all alone, without any one who is devoted to you!

He pondered over his life, so barren, so empty. He recalled former days, the days of his childhood, the home, the house of his parents; his college days, his follies; the time he studied law in Paris, his father’s illness, his death. He then returned to live with his mother. They lived together very quietly, and desired nothing more. At last the mother died. How sad life is! He lived alone since then, and now, in his turn, he, too, will soon be dead. He will disappear, and that will be the end. There will be no more of Paul Saval upon the earth. What a frightful thing! Other people will love, will laugh. Yes, people will go on amusing themselves, and he will no longer exist! Is it not strange that people can laugh, amuse themselves, be joyful under that eternal certainty of death? If this death were only probable, one could then have hope; but no, it is inevitable, as inevitable as that night follows the day.

If, however, his life had been full! If he had done something; if he had had adventures, great pleasures, success, satisfaction of some kind or another. But no, nothing. He had done nothing, nothing but rise from bed, eat, at the same hours, and go to bed again. And he had gone on like that to the age of sixty-two years. He had not even taken unto himself a wife, as other men do. Why? Yes, why was it that he had not married? He might have done so, for he possessed considerable means. Had he lacked an opportunity? Perhaps! But one can create opportunities. He was indifferent;

that was all. Indifference had been his greatest drawback, his defect, his vice. How many men wreck their lives through indifference! It is so difficult for some natures to get out of bed, to move about, to take long walks, to speak, to study any question.

He had not even been loved. No woman had reposed on his bosom, in a complete abandon of love. He knew nothing of the delicious anguish of expectation, the divine vibration of a hand in yours, of the ecstasy of triumphant passion.

What superhuman happiness must overflow your heart, when lips encounter lips for the first time, when the grasp of four arms makes one being of you, a being unutterably happy, two beings infatuated with one another.

M. Saval was sitting before the fire, his feet on the fender, in his dressing gown. Assuredly his life had been spoiled, completely spoiled. He had, however, loved. He had loved secretly, sadly, and indifferently, in a manner characteristic of him in everything. Yes, he had loved his old friend, Madame Sandres, the wife of his old companion, Sandres. Ah! if he had known her as a young girl! But he had met her too late; she was already married. Unquestionably, he would have asked her hand! How he had loved her, nevertheless, without respite, since the first day he set eyes on her!

He recalled his emotion every time he saw her, his grief on leaving her, the many nights that he could not sleep, because he was thinking of her.

On rising in the morning he was somewhat more rational than on the previous evening.

Why?

How pretty she was formerly, so dainty, with fair curly hair, and always laughing. Sandres was not the man she should have chosen. She was now fifty-two years of age. She seemed happy. Ah! if she had only loved him in days gone by; yes, if she had only loved him! And why should she not have loved him, he, Saval, seeing that he loved her so much, yes, she, Madame Sandres!

If only she could have guessed. Had she not guessed anything, seen anything, comprehended anything? What would she have thought? If he had spoken, what would she have answered?

And Saval asked himself a thousand other things. He reviewed his whole life, seeking to recall a multitude of details.

He recalled all the long evenings spent at the house of Sandres, when the latter's wife was young, and so charming.

He recalled many things that she had said to him, the intonations of her voice, the little significant smiles that meant so much.

He recalled their walks, the three of them together, along the banks of the Seine, their luncheon on the grass on Sundays, for Sandres was employed at the sub-prefecture. And all at once the distinct recollection came to him of an afternoon spent with her in a little wood on the banks of the river.

They had set out in the morning, carrying their provisions in baskets. It was a bright spring morning, one of those days which intoxicate one. Everything smells fresh, everything seems happy. The voices of the birds sound more joyous, and-they fly more swiftly. They had luncheon on the grass, under the willow trees, quite close to the water, which glittered in the sun's rays. The air was balmy, charged with the odors of fresh vegetation; they drank it in with delight. How pleasant everything was on that day!

After lunch, Sandres went to sleep on the broad of his back. "The best nap he had in his life," said he, when he woke up.

Madame Sandres had taken the arm of Saval, and they started to walk along the river bank.

She leaned tenderly on his arm. She laughed and said to him: "I am intoxicated, my friend, I am quite intoxicated." He looked at her, his heart going pit-a-pat. He felt himself grow pale, fearful that he might have looked too boldly at her, and that the trembling of his hand had revealed his passion.

She had made a wreath of wild flowers and water-lilies, and she asked him: "Do I look pretty like that?"

As he did not answer — for he could find nothing to say, he would have liked to go down on his knees — she burst out laughing, a sort of annoyed, displeased laugh, as she said: "Great goose, what ails you? You might at least say something."

He felt like crying, but could not even yet find a word to say.

All these things came back to him now, as vividly as on the day when they took place. Why had she said this to him, "Great goose, what ails you? You might at least say something!"

And he recalled how tenderly she had leaned on his arm. And in passing under a shady tree he had felt her ear brushing his cheek, and he had moved his head abruptly, lest she should suppose he was too familiar.

When he had said to her: “Is it not time to return?” she darted a singular look at him. “Certainly,” she said, “certainly,” regarding him at the same time in a curious manner. He had not thought of it at the time, but now the whole thing appeared to him quite plain.

“Just as you like, my friend. If you are tired let us go back.”

And he had answered: “I am not fatigued; but Sandres may be awake now.”

And she had said: “If you are afraid of my husband’s being awake, that is another thing. Let us return.”

On their way back she remained silent, and leaned no longer on his arm. Why?

At that time it had never occurred to him, to ask himself “why.” Now he seemed to apprehend something that he had not then understood.

Could it?

M. Saval felt himself blush, and he got up at a bound, as if he were thirty years younger and had heard Madame Sandres say, “I love you.”

Was it possible? That idea which had just entered his mind tortured him. Was it possible that he had not seen, had not guessed?

Oh! if that were true, if he had let this opportunity of happiness pass without taking advantage of it!

He said to himself: “I must know. I cannot remain in this state of doubt. I must know!” He thought: “I am sixty-two years of age, she is fifty-eight; I may ask her that now without giving offense.”

He started out.

The Sandres’ house was situated on the other side of the street, almost directly opposite his own. He went across and knocked at the door, and a little servant opened it.

“You here at this hour, Saval! Has some accident happened to you?”

“No, my girl,” he replied; “but go and tell your mistress that I want to speak to her at once.”

“The fact is madame is preserving pears for the winter, and she is in the preserving room. She is not dressed, you understand.”

“Yes, but go and tell her that I wish to see her on a very important matter.”

The little servant went away, and Saval began to walk, with long, nervous strides, up and down the drawing-room. He did not feel in the least embarrassed, however. Oh! he was merely going to ask her something, as he would have asked her about some cooking recipe. He was sixty-two years of age!

The door opened and madame appeared. She was now a large woman, fat and round, with full cheeks and a sonorous laugh. She walked with her arms away from her sides and her sleeves tucked up, her bare arms all covered with fruit juice. She asked anxiously:

"What is the matter with you, my friend? You are not ill, are you?"

"No, my dear friend; but I wish to ask you one thing, which to me is of the first importance, something which is torturing my heart, and I want you to promise that you will answer me frankly."

She laughed, "I am always frank. Say on."

"Well, then. I have loved you from the first day I ever saw you. Can you have any doubt of this?"

She responded, laughing, with something of her former tone of voice.

"Great goose! what ails you? I knew it from the very first day!"

Saval began to tremble. He stammered out: "You knew it? Then . . ."

He stopped.

She asked:

"Then?"

He answered:

"Then — what did you think? What — what — what would you have answered?"

She broke into a peal of laughter. Some of the juice ran off the tips of her fingers on to the carpet.

"What?"

"I? Why, you did not ask me anything. It was not for me to declare myself!"

He then advanced a step toward her.

"Tell me — tell me . . . . You remember the day when Sandres went to sleep on the grass after lunch . . . when we had walked together as far as the bend of the river, below . . ."

He waited, expectantly. She had ceased to laugh, and looked at him, straight in the eyes.

"Yes, certainly, I remember it."

He answered, trembling all over:

"Well — that day — if I had been — if I had been — venturesome — what would you have done?"

She began to laugh as only a happy woman can laugh, who has nothing to regret, and responded frankly, in a clear voice tinged with irony:

"I would have yielded, my friend."

She then turned on her heels and went back to her jam-making.

Saval rushed into the street, cast down, as though he had met with some disaster. He walked with giant strides through the rain, straight on, until he reached the river bank, without thinking where he was going. He then turned to the right and followed the river. He walked a long time, as if urged on by some instinct. His clothes were running with water, his hat was out of shape, as soft as a rag, and dripping like a roof. He walked on, straight in front of him. At last, he came to the place where they had lunched on that day so long ago, the recollection of which tortured his heart. He sat down under the leafless trees, and wept.

A SISTER’S CONFESSION

Marguerite de Therelles was dying. Although she was-only fifty-six years old she looked at least seventy-five. She gasped for breath, her face whiter than the sheets, and had spasms of violent shivering, with her face convulsed and her eyes haggard as though she saw a frightful vision.

Her elder sister, Suzanne, six years older than herself, was sobbing on her knees beside the bed. A small table close to the dying woman’s couch bore, on a white cloth, two lighted candles, for the priest was expected at any moment to administer extreme unction and the last communion.

The apartment wore that melancholy aspect common to death chambers; a look of despairing farewell. Medicine bottles littered the furniture; linen lay in the corners into which it had been kicked or swept. The very chairs looked, in their disarray, as if they were terrified and had run in all directions. Death — terrible Death — was in the room, hidden, awaiting his prey.

This history of the two sisters was an affecting one. It was spoken of far and wide; it had drawn tears from many eyes.

Suzanne, the elder, had once been passionately loved by a young man, whose affection she returned. They were engaged to be married, and the wedding day was at hand, when Henry de Sampierre suddenly died.

The young girl’s despair was terrible, and she took an oath never to marry. She faithfully kept her vow and adopted widow’s weeds for the remainder of her life.

But one morning her sister, her little sister Marguerite, then only twelve years old, threw herself into Suzanne’s arms, sobbing: “Sister, I don’t want you to be unhappy. I don’t want you to mourn all your life. I’ll never leave you — never, never, never! I shall never marry, either. I’ll stay with you always — always!”

Suzanne kissed her, touched by the child’s devotion, though not putting any faith in her promise.

But the little one kept her word, and, despite her parents' remonstrances, despite her elder sister's prayers, never married. She was remarkably pretty and refused many offers. She never left her sister.

They spent their whole life together, without a single day's separation. They went everywhere together and were inseparable. But Marguerite was pensive, melancholy, sadder than her sister, as if her sublime sacrifice had undermined her spirits. She grew older more quickly; her hair was white at thirty; and she was often ill, apparently stricken with some unknown, wasting malady.

And now she would be the first to die.

She had not spoken for twenty-four hours, except to whisper at daybreak:

"Send at once for the priest."

And she had since remained lying on her back, convulsed with agony, her lips moving as if unable to utter the dreadful words that rose in her heart, her face expressive of a terror distressing to witness.

Suzanne, distracted with grief, her brow pressed against the bed, wept bitterly, repeating over and over again the words:

"Margot, my poor Margot, my little one!"

She had always called her "my little one," while Marguerite's name for the elder was invariably "sister."

A footstep sounded on the stairs. The door opened. An acolyte appeared, followed by the aged priest in his surplice. As soon as she saw him the dying woman sat up suddenly in bed, opened her lips, stammered a few words and began to scratch the bed-clothes, as if she would have made hole in them.

Father Simon approached, took her hand, kissed her on the forehead and said in a gentle voice:

"May God pardon your sins, my daughter. Be of good courage. Now is the moment to confess them — speak!"

Then Marguerite, shuddering from head to foot, so that the very bed shook with her nervous movements, gasped:

"Sit down, sister, and listen."

The priest stooped toward the prostrate Suzanne, raised her to her feet, placed her in a chair, and, taking a hand of each of the sisters, pronounced:

"Lord God! Send them strength! Shed Thy mercy upon them."

And Marguerite began to speak. The words issued from her lips one by one — hoarse, jerky, tremulous.

"Pardon, pardon, sister! pardon me! Oh, if only you knew how I have dreaded this moment all my life!"

Suzanne faltered through her tears:

"But what have I to pardon, little one? You have given me everything, sacrificed all to me. You are an angel."

But Marguerite interrupted her:

"Be silent, be silent! Let me speak! Don't stop me! It is terrible. Let me tell all, to the very end, without interruption. Listen. You remember — you remember — Henry— "

Suzanne trembled and looked at her sister. The younger one went on:

"In order to understand you must hear everything. I was twelve years old — only twelve — you remember, don't you? And I was spoilt; I did just as I pleased. You remember how everybody spoilt me? Listen. The first time he came he had on his riding boots; he dismounted, saying that he had a message for father. You remember, don't you? Don't speak. Listen. When I saw him I was struck with admiration. I thought him so handsome, and I stayed in a corner of the drawing-room all the time he was talking. Children are strange — and terrible. Yes, indeed, I dreamt of him.

"He came again — many times. I looked at him with all my eyes, all my heart. I was large for my age and much more precocious than — any one suspected. He came often. I thought only of him. I often whispered to myself:

"'Henry-Henry de Sampierre!'

"Then I was told that he was going to marry you. That was a blow! Oh, sister, a terrible blow — terrible! I wept all through three sleepless nights.

"He came every afternoon after lunch. You remember, don't you? Don't answer. Listen. You used to make cakes that he was very fond of — with flour, butter and milk. Oh, I know how to make them. I could make them still, if necessary. He would swallow them at one mouthful and wash them down with a glass of wine, saying: 'Delicious!' Do you remember the way he said it?

"I was jealous — jealous! Your wedding day was drawing near. It was only a fortnight distant. I was distracted. I said to myself: 'He shall not marry Suzanne — no, he shall not! He shall marry me when I am old enough! I shall never love any one half so much.' But one evening, ten days before the wedding, you went for a stroll with him in the moonlight before the house — and yonder — under the pine tree, the big pine tree — he kissed you — kissed you — and held you in his arms so long — so long! You remember, don't you? It was probably the first time. You were so pale when you came back to the drawing-room!

"I saw you. I was there in the shrubbery. I was mad with rage! I would have killed you both if I could!

"I said to myself: 'He shall never marry Suzanne — never! He shall marry no one! I could not bear it.' And all at once I began to hate him intensely.

"Then do you know what I did? Listen. I had seen the gardener prepare pellets for killing stray dogs. He would crush a bottle into small pieces with a stone and put the ground glass into a ball of meat.

"I stole a small medicine bottle from mother's room. I ground it fine with a hammer and hid the glass in my pocket. It was a glistening powder. The next day, when you had made your little cakes; I opened them with a knife and inserted the glass. He ate three. I ate one myself. I threw the six others into the pond. The two swans died three days later. You remember? Oh, don't speak! Listen, listen. I, I alone did not die. But I have always been ill. Listen — he died — you know — listen — that was not the worst. It was afterward, later — always — the most terrible — listen.

"My life, all my life — such torture! I said to myself: 'I will never leave my sister. And on my deathbed I will tell her all.' And now I have told. And I have always thought of this moment — the moment when all would be told. Now it has come. It is terrible — oh! — sister —

"I have always thought, morning and evening, day and night: 'I shall have to tell her some day!' I waited. The horror of it! It is done. Say nothing. Now I am afraid — I am afraid! Oh! Supposing I should see him again, by and by, when I am dead! See him again! Only to think of it! I dare not — yet I must. I am going to die. I want you to forgive me. I insist on it. I cannot meet him without your forgiveness. Oh, tell her to forgive me, Father! Tell her. I implore you! I cannot die without it."

She was silent and lay back, gasping for breath, still plucking at the sheets with her fingers.

Suzanne had hidden her face in her hands and did not move. She was thinking of him whom she had loved so long. What a life of happiness they might have had together! She saw him again in the dim and distant past-that past forever lost. Beloved dead! how the thought of them rends the heart!

Oh! that kiss, his only kiss! She had retained the memory of it in her soul. And, after that, nothing, nothing more throughout her whole existence!

The priest rose suddenly and in a firm, compelling voice said:

"Mademoiselle Suzanne, your sister is dying!"

Then Suzanne, raising her tear-stained face, put her arms round her sister, and kissing her fervently, exclaimed:

"I forgive you, I forgive you, little one!"

COCO

Throughout the whole countryside the Lucas farn, was known as “the Manor.” No one knew why. The peasants doubtless attached to this word, “Manor,” a meaning of wealth and of splendor, for this farm was undoubtedly the largest, richest and the best managed in the whole neighborhood.

The immense court, surrounded by five rows of magnificent trees, which sheltered the delicate apple trees from the harsh wind of the plain, inclosed in its confines long brick buildings used for storing fodder and grain, beautiful stables built of hard stone and made to accommodate thirty horses, and a red brick residence which looked like a little chateau.

Thanks for the good care taken, the manure heaps were as little offensive as such things can be; the watch-dogs lived in kennels, and countless poultry paraded through the tall grass.

Every day, at noon, fifteen persons, masters, farmhands and the women folks, seated themselves around the long kitchen table where the soup was brought in steaming in a large, blue-flowered bowl.

The beasts-horses, cows, pigs and sheep-were fat, well fed and clean. Maitre Lucas, a tall man who was getting stout, would go round three times a day, overseeing everything and thinking of everything.

A very old white horse, which the mistress wished to keep until its natural death, because she had brought it up and had always used it, and also because it recalled many happy memories, was housed, through sheer kindness of heart, at the end of the stable.

A young scamp about fifteen years old, Isidore Duval by name, and called, for convenience, Zidore, took care of this pensioner, gave him his measure of oats and fodder in winter, and in summer was supposed to change his pasturing place four times a day, so that he might have plenty of fresh grass.

The animal, almost crippled, lifted with difficulty his legs, large at the knees and swollen above the hoofs. His coat, which was no longer curried, looked like white hair, and his long eyelashes gave to his eyes a sad expression.

When Zidore took the animal to pasture, he had to pull on the rope with all his might, because it walked so slowly; and the youth, bent over and out of breath, would swear at it, exasperated at having to care for this old nag.

The farmhands, noticing the young rascal's anger against Coco, were amused and would continually talk of the horse to Zidore, in order to exasperate him. His comrades would make sport with him. In the village he was called Coco-Zidore.

The boy would fume, feeling an unholy desire to revenge himself on the horse. He was a thin, long-legged, dirty child, with thick, coarse, bristly red hair. He seemed only half-witted, and stuttered as though ideas were unable to form in his thick, brute-like mind.

For a long time he had been unable to understand why Coco should be kept, indignant at seeing things wasted on this useless beast. Since the horse could no longer work, it seemed to him unjust that he should be fed; he revolted at the idea of wasting oats, oats which were so expensive, on this paralyzed old plug. And often, in spite of the orders of Maitre Lucas, he would economize on the nag's food, only giving him half measure. Hatred grew in his confused, childlike mind, the hatred of a stingy, mean, fierce, brutal and cowardly peasant.

When summer came he had to move the animal about in the pasture. It was some distance away. The rascal, angrier every morning, would start, with his dragging step, across the wheat fields. The men working in the fields would shout to him, jokingly:

"Hey, Zidore, remember me to Coco."

He would not answer; but on the way he would break off a switch, and, as soon as he had moved the old horse, he would let it begin grazing; then, treacherously sneaking up behind it, he would slash its legs. The animal would try to escape, to kick, to get away from the blows, and run around in a circle about its rope, as though it had been inclosed in a circus ring. And the boy would slash away furiously, running along behind, his teeth clenched in anger.

Then he would go away slowly, without turning round, while the horse watched him disappear, his ribs sticking out, panting as a result of his unusual exertions. Not until the blue blouse of the young peasant was out of sight would he lower his thin white head to the grass.

As the nights were now warm, Coco was allowed to sleep out of doors, in the field behind the little wood. Zidore alone went to see him. The boy threw stones at him to amuse himself. He would sit down on an embankment about ten feet away and would stay there about half an hour, from time to time throwing a sharp stone at the old horse, which remained standing tied before his enemy, watching him continually and not daring to eat before he was gone.

This one thought persisted in the mind of the young scamp: “Why feed this horse, which is no longer good for anything?” It seemed to him that this old nag was stealing the food of the others, the goods of man and God, that he was even robbing him, Zidore, who was working.

Then, little by little, each day, the boy began to shorten the length of rope which allowed the horse to graze.

The hungry animal was growing thinner, and starving. Too feeble to break his bonds, he would stretch his head out toward the tall, green, tempting grass, so near that he could smell, and yet so far that he could not touch it.

But one morning Zidore had an idea: it was, not to move Coco any more. He was tired of walking so far for that old skeleton. He came, however, in order to enjoy his vengeance. The beast watched him anxiously. He did not beat him that day. He walked around him with his hands in his pockets. He even pretended to change his place, but he sank the stake in exactly the same hole, and went away overjoyed with his invention.

The horse, seeing him leave, neighed to call him back; but the rascal began to run, leaving him alone, entirely alone in his field, well tied down and without a blade of grass within reach.

Starving, he tried to reach the grass which he could touch with the end of his nose. He got on his knees, stretching out his neck and his long, drooling lips. All in vain. The old animal spent the whole day in useless, terrible efforts. The sight of all that green food, which stretched out on all sides of him, served to increase the gnawing pangs of hunger.

The scamp did not return that day. He wandered through the woods in search of nests.

The next day he appeared upon the scene again. Coco, exhausted, had lain down. When he saw the boy, he got up, expecting at last to have his place changed.

But the little peasant did not even touch the mallet, which was lying on the ground. He came nearer, looked at the animal, threw at his head a clump of earth which flattened out against the white hair, and he started off again, whistling.

The horse remained standing as long as he could see him; then, knowing that his attempts to reach the near-by grass would be hopeless, he once more lay down on his side and closed his eyes.

The following day Zidore did not come.

When he did come at last, he found Coco still stretched out; he saw that he was dead.

Then he remained standing, looking at him, pleased with what he had done, surprised that it should already be all over. He touched him with his foot, lifted one of his legs and then let it drop, sat on him and remained there, his eyes fixed on the grass, thinking of nothing. He returned to the farm, but did not mention the accident, because he wished to wander about at the hours when he used to change the horse's pasture. He went to see him the next day. At his approach some crows flew away. Countless flies were walking over the body and were buzzing around it. When he returned home, he announced the event. The animal was so old that nobody was surprised. The master said to two of the men:

"Take your shovels and dig a hole right where he is."

The men buried the horse at the place where he had died of hunger. And the grass grew thick, green and vigorous, fed by the poor body.

DEAD WOMAN’S SECRET

The woman had died without pain, quietly, as a woman should whose life had been blameless. Now she was resting in her bed, lying on her back, her eyes closed, her features calm, her long white hair carefully arranged as though she had done it up ten minutes before dying. The whole pale countenance of the dead woman was so collected, so calm, so resigned that one could feel what a sweet soul had lived in that body, what a quiet existence this old soul had led, how easy and pure the death of this parent had been.

Kneeling beside the bed, her son, a magistrate with inflexible principles, and her daughter, Marguerite, known as Sister Eulalie, were weeping as though their hearts would break. She had, from childhood up, armed them with a strict moral code, teaching them religion, without weakness, and duty, without compromise. He, the man, had become a judge and handled the law as a weapon with which he smote the weak ones without pity. She, the girl, influenced by the virtue which had bathed her in this austere family, had become the bride of the Church through her loathing for man.

They had hardly known their father, knowing only that he had made their mother most unhappy, without being told any other details.

The nun was wildly-kissing the dead woman’s hand, an ivory hand as white as the large crucifix lying across the bed. On the other side of the long body the other hand seemed still to be holding the sheet in the death grasp; and the sheet had preserved the little creases as a memory of those last movements which precede eternal immobility.

A few light taps on the door caused the two sobbing heads to look up, and the priest, who had just come from dinner, returned. He was red and out of breath from his interrupted digestion, for he had made himself a strong mixture of coffee and brandy in order to combat the fatigue of the last few nights and of the wake which was beginning.

He looked sad, with that assumed sadness of the priest for whom death is a bread winner. He crossed himself and approaching with his professional gesture: “Well, my poor children! I have come to help you pass these last sad hours.” But Sister Eulalie suddenly arose. “Thank you, father, but my brother and I prefer to remain alone with her. This is our last chance to see her, and we wish to be together, all three of us, as we — we — used to be when we were small and our poor mo — mother — — “

Grief and tears stopped her; she could not continue.

Once more serene, the priest bowed, thinking of his bed. “As you wish, my children.” He kneeled, crossed himself, prayed, arose and went out quietly, murmuring: “She was a saint!”

They remained alone, the dead woman and her children. The ticking of the clock, hidden in the shadow, could be heard distinctly, and through the open window drifted in the sweet smell of hay and of woods, together with the soft moonlight. No other noise could be heard over the land except the occasional croaking of the frog or the chirping of some belated insect. An infinite peace, a divine melancholy, a silent serenity surrounded this dead woman, seemed to be breathed out from her and to appease nature itself.

Then the judge, still kneeling, his head buried in the bed clothes, cried in a voice altered by grief and deadened by the sheets and blankets: “Mamma, mamma, mamma!” And his sister, frantically striking her forehead against the woodwork, convulsed, twitching and trembling as in an epileptic fit, moaned: “Jesus, Jesus, mamma, Jesus!” And both of them, shaken by a storm of grief, gasped and choked.

The crisis slowly calmed down and they began to weep quietly, just as on the sea when a calm follows a squall.

A rather long time passed and they arose and looked at their dead. And the memories, those distant memories, yesterday so dear, to-day so torturing, came to their minds with all the little forgotten details, those little intimate familiar details which bring back to life the one who has left. They recalled to each other circumstances, words, smiles, intonations of the mother who was no longer to speak to them. They saw her again happy and calm. They remembered things which she had said, and a little motion of the hand, like beating time, which she often used when emphasizing something important.

And they loved her as they never had loved her before. They measured the depth of their grief, and thus they discovered how lonely they would find themselves.

It was their prop, their guide, their whole youth, all the best part of their lives which was disappearing. It was their bond with life, their mother, their mamma, the connecting link with their forefathers which they would thenceforth miss. They now became solitary, lonely beings; they could no longer look back.

The nun said to her brother: “You remember how mamma used always to read her old letters; they are all there in that drawer. Let us, in turn, read them; let us live her whole life through tonight beside her! It would be like a road to the cross, like making the acquaintance of her mother, of our grandparents, whom we never knew, but whose letters are there and of whom she so often spoke, do you remember?”

Out of the drawer they took about ten little packages of yellow paper, tied with care and arranged one beside the other. They threw these relics on the bed and chose one of them on which the word “Father” was written. They opened and read it.

It was one of those old-fashioned letters which one finds in old family desk drawers, those epistles which smell of another century. The first one started: “My dear,” another one: “My beautiful little girl,” others: “My dear child,” or: “My dear (laughter).” And suddenly the nun began to read aloud, to read over to the dead woman her whole history, all her tender memories. The judge, resting his elbow on the bed, was listening with his eyes fastened on his mother. The motionless body seemed happy.

Sister Eulalie, interrupting herself, said suddenly:

“These ought to be put in the grave with her; they ought to be used as a shroud and she ought to be buried in it.” She took another package, on which no name was written. She began to read in a firm voice: “My adored one, I love you wildly. Since yesterday I have been suffering the tortures of the damned, haunted by our memory. I feel your lips against mine, your eyes in mine, your breast against mine. I love you, I love you! You have driven me mad. My arms open, I gasp, moved by a wild desire to hold you again. My whole soul and body cries out for you, wants you. I have kept in my mouth the taste of your kisses— “

The judge had straightened himself up. The nun stopped reading. He snatched the letter from her and looked for the signature. There was none, but only under the words, “The man who adores you,” the name “Henry.” Their father’s name was Rene. Therefore this was not from him. The son then quickly rummaged through the package of letters, took one out and read: “I can no longer live without your caresses.” Standing erect, severe as when sitting on the bench, he looked unmoved at the dead woman. The nun, straight as a statue, tears trembling in the corners of her eyes, was watching her brother, waiting. Then he crossed the room slowly, went to the window and stood there, gazing out into the dark night.

When he turned around again Sister Eulalie, her eyes dry now, was still standing near the bed, her head bent down.

He stepped forward, quickly picked up the letters and threw them pell-mell back into the drawer. Then he closed the curtains of the bed.

When daylight made the candles on the table turn pale the son slowly left his armchair, and without looking again at the mother upon whom he had passed sentence, severing the tie that united her to son and daughter, he said slowly: “Let us now retire, sister.”

A HUMBLE DRAMA

Meetings that are unexpected constitute the charm of traveling. Who has not experienced the joy of suddenly coming across a Parisian, a college friend, or a neighbor, five hundred miles from home? Who has not passed a night awake in one of those small, rattling country stage-coaches, in regions where steam is still a thing unknown, beside a strange young woman, of whom one has caught only a glimpse in the dim light of the lantern, as she entered the carriage in front of a white house in some small country town?

And the next morning, when one's head and ears feel numb with the continuous tinkling of the bells and the loud rattling of the windows, what a charming sensation it is to see your pretty neighbor open her eyes, startled, glance around her, arrange her rebellious hair with her slender fingers, adjust her hat, feel with sure hand whether her corset is still in place, her waist straight, and her skirt not too wrinkled.

She glances at you coldly and curiously. Then she leans back and no longer seems interested in anything but the country.

In spite of yourself, you watch her; and in spite of yourself you keep on thinking of her. Who is she? Whence does she come? Where is she going? In spite of yourself you spin a little romance around her. She is pretty; she seems charming! Happy he who . . . Life might be delightful with her. Who knows? She is perhaps the woman of our dreams, the one suited to our disposition, the one for whom our heart calls.

And how delicious even the disappointment at seeing her get out at the gate of a country house! A man stands there, who is awaiting her, with two children and two maids. He takes her in his arms and kisses as he lifts her out. Then she stoops over the little ones, who hold up their hands to her; she kisses them tenderly; and then they all go away together, down a path, while the maids catch the packages which the driver throws down to them from the coach.

Adieu! It is all over. You never will see her again! Adieu to the young woman who has passed the night by your side. You know her no more, you have not spoken to her; all the same, you feel a little sad to see her go. Adieu!

I have had many of these souvenirs of travel, some joyous and some sad.

Once I was in Auvergne, tramping through those delightful French mountains, that are not too high, not too steep, but friendly and familiar. I had climbed the Sancy, and entered a little inn, near a pilgrim's chapel called Notre-Dame de Vassiviere, when I saw a queer, ridiculous-looking old woman breakfasting alone at the end table.

She was at least seventy years old, tall, skinny, and angular, and her white hair was puffed around her temples in the old-fashioned style. She was dressed like a traveling Englishwoman, in awkward, queer clothing, like a person who is indifferent to dress. She was eating an omelet and drinking water.

Her face was peculiar, with restless eyes and the expression of one with whom fate has dealt unkindly. I watched her, in spite of myself, thinking: "Who is she? What is the life of this woman? Why is she wandering alone through these mountains?"

She paid and rose to leave, drawing up over her shoulders an astonishing little shawl, the two ends of which hung over her arms. From a corner of the room she took an alpenstock, which was covered with names traced with a hot iron; then she went out, straight, erect, with the long steps of a letter-carrier who is setting out on his route.

A guide was waiting for her at the door, and both went away. I watched them go down the valley, along the road marked by a line of high wooden crosses. She was taller than her companion, and seemed to walk faster than he.

Two hours later I was climbing the edge of the deep funnel that incloses Lake Pavin in a marvelous and enormous basin of verdure, full of trees, bushes, rocks, and flowers. This lake is so round that it seems as if the outline had been drawn with a pair of compasses, so clear and blue that one might deem it a flood of azure come down from the sky, so charming that one would like to live in a but on the wooded slope which dominates this crater, where the cold, still water is sleeping. The Englishwoman was standing there like a statue, gazing upon the transparent sheet down in the dead volcano. She was straining her eyes to penetrate below the surface down to the unknown depths, where monstrous trout which have devoured all the other fish are said to live. As I was passing close by her, it seemed to me that two big tears were brimming her eyes. But she departed at a great pace, to rejoin her guide, who had stayed behind in an inn at the foot of the path leading to the lake.

I did not see her again that day.

The next day, at nightfall, I came to the chateau of Murol. The old fortress, an enormous tower standing on a peak in the midst of a large valley, where three valleys intersect, rears its brown, uneven, cracked surface into the sky; it is round, from its large circular base to the crumbling turrets on its pinnacles.

It astonishes the eye more than any other ruin by its simple mass, its majesty, its grave and imposing air of antiquity. It stands there, alone, high as a mountain, a dead queen, but still the queen of the valleys stretched out beneath it. You go up by a slope planted with firs, then you enter a narrow gate, and stop at the foot of the walls, in the first inclosure, in full view of the entire country.

Inside there are ruined halls, crumbling stairways, unknown cavities, dungeons, walls cut through in the middle, vaulted roofs held up one knows not how, and a mass of stones and crevices, overgrown with grass, where animals glide in and out.

I was exploring this ruin alone.

Suddenly I perceived behind a bit of wall a being, a kind of phantom, like the spirit of this ancient and crumbling habitation.

I was taken aback with surprise, almost with fear, when I recognized the old lady whom I had seen twice.

She was weeping, with big tears in her eyes, and held her handkerchief in her hand.

I turned around to go away, when she spoke to me, apparently ashamed to have been surprised in her grief.

“Yes, monsieur, I am crying. That does not happen often to me.”

“Pardon me, madame, for having disturbed you,” I stammered, confused, not knowing what to say. “Some misfortune has doubtless come to you.”

“Yes. No — I am like a lost dog,” she murmured, and began to sob, with her handkerchief over her eyes.

Moved by these contagious tears, I took her hand, trying to calm her. Then brusquely she told me her history, as if no longer ably to bear her grief alone.

“Oh! Oh! Monsieur — if you knew — the sorrow in which I live — in what sorrow.

“Once I was happy. I have a house down there — a home. I cannot go back to it any more; I shall never go back to it again, it is too hard to bear.

“I have a son. It is he! it is he! Children don’t know. Oh, one has such a short time to live! If I should see him now I should perhaps not recognize him. How I loved him? How I loved him! Even before he was born, when I felt him move. And after that! How I have kissed and caressed and cherished him! If you knew how many nights I have passed in watching him sleep, and how many in thinking of him. I was crazy about him. When he was eight years old his father sent him to boarding-school. That was the end. He no longer belonged to me. Oh, heavens! He came to see me every Sunday. That was all!

“He went to college in Paris. Then he came only four times a year, and every time I was astonished to see how he had changed, to find him taller without having seen him grow. They stole his childhood from me, his confidence, and his love which otherwise would not have gone away from me; they stole my joy in seeing him grow, in seeing him become a little man.

“I saw him four times a year. Think of it! And at every one of his visits his body, his eye, his movements, his voice his laugh, were no longer the same, were no longer mine. All these things change so quickly in a child; and it is so sad if one is not there to see them change; one no longer recognizes him.

“One year he came with down on his cheek! He! my son! I was dumfounded — would you believe it? I hardly dared to kiss him. Was it really he, my little, little curly head of old, my dear; dear child, whom I had held in his diapers or my knee, and who had nursed at my breast with his little greedy lips — was it he, this tall, brown boy, who no longer knew how to kiss me, who seemed to love me as a matter of duty, who called me ‘mother’ for the sake of politeness, and who kissed me on the forehead, when I felt like crushing him in my arms?

“My husband died. Then my parents, and then my two sisters. When Death enters a house it seems as if he were hurrying to do his utmost, so as not to have to return for a long time after that. He spares only one or two to mourn the others.

“I remained alone. My tall son was then studying law. I was hoping to live and die near him, and I went to him so that we could live together. But he had fallen into the ways of young men, and he gave me to understand that I was in his way. So I left. I was wrong in doing so, but I suffered too much in feeling myself in his way, I, his mother! And I came back home.

“I hardly ever saw him again.

“He married. What a joy! At last we should be together for good. I should have grandchildren. His wife was an Englishwoman, who took a dislike to me. Why? Perhaps she thought that I loved him too much.

“Again I was obliged to go away. And I was alone. Yes, monsieur.

“Then he went to England, to live with them, with his wife’s parents. Do you understand? They have him — they have my son for themselves. They have stolen him from me. He writes to me once a month. At first he came to see me. But now he no longer comes.

“It is now four years since I saw him last. His face then was wrinkled and his hair white. Was that possible? This man, my son, almost an old man? My little rosy child of old? No doubt I shall never see him again.

“And so I travel about all the year. I go east and west, as you see, with no companion.

“I am like a lost dog. Adieu, monsieur! don’t stay here with me for it hurts me to have told you all this.”

I went down the hill, and on turning round to glance back, I saw the old woman standing on a broken wall, looking out upon the mountains, the long valley and Lake Chambon in the distance.

And her skirt and the queer little shawl which she wore around her thin shoulders were fluttering tike a flag in the wind.

MADEMOISELLE COCOTTE

We were just leaving the asylum when I saw a tall, thin man in a corner of the court who kept on calling an imaginary dog. He was crying in a soft, tender voice: “Cocotte! Come here, Cocotte, my beauty!” and slapping his thigh as one does when calling an animal. I asked the physician, “Who is that man?” He answered: “Oh! he is not at all interesting. He is a coachman named Francois, who became insane after drowning his dog.”

I insisted: “Tell me his story. The most simple and humble things are sometimes those which touch our hearts most deeply.”

Here is this man’s adventure, which was obtained from a friend of his, a groom:

There was a family of rich bourgeois who lived in a suburb of Paris. They had a villa in the middle of a park, at the edge of the Seine. Their coachman was this Francois, a country fellow, somewhat dull, kind-hearted, simple and easy to deceive.

One evening, as he was returning home, a dog began to follow him. At first he paid no attention to it, but the creature’s obstinacy at last made him turn round. He looked to see if he knew this dog. No, he had never seen it. It was a female dog and frightfully thin. She was trotting behind him with a mournful and famished look, her tail between her legs, her ears flattened against her head and stopping and starting whenever he did.

He tried to chase this skeleton away and cried:

“Run along! Get out! Kss! kss!” She retreated a few steps, then sat down and waited. And when the coachman started to walk again she followed along behind him.

He pretended to pick up some stones. The animal ran a little farther away, but came back again as soon as the man’s back was turned.

Then the coachman Francois took pity on the beast and called her. The dog approached timidly. The man patted her protruding ribs, moved by the beast’s misery, and he cried: “Come! come here!” Immediately she began to wag her tail, and, feeling herself taken in, adopted, she began to run along ahead of her new master.

He made her a bed on the straw in the stable, then he ran to the kitchen for some bread. When she had eaten all she could she curled up and went to sleep.

When his employers heard of this the next day they allowed the coachman to keep the animal. It was a good beast, caressing and faithful, intelligent and gentle.

Nevertheless Francois adored Cocotte, and he kept repeating: “That beast is human. She only lacks speech.”

He had a magnificent red leather collar made for her which bore these words engraved on a copper plate: “Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman Francois.”

She was remarkably prolific and four times a year would give birth to a batch of little animals belonging to every variety of the canine race. Francois would pick out one which he would leave her and then he would unmercifully throw the others into the river. But soon the cook joined her complaints to those of the gardener. She would find dogs under the stove, in the ice box, in the coal bin, and they would steal everything they came across.

Finally the master, tired of complaints, impatiently ordered Francois to get rid of Cocotte. In despair the man tried to give her away. Nobody wanted her. Then he decided to lose her, and he gave her to a teamster, who was to drop her on the other side of Paris, near Joinville-le-Pont.

Cocotte returned the same day. Some decision had to be taken. Five francs was given to a train conductor to take her to Havre. He was to drop her there.

Three days later she returned to the stable, thin, footsore and tired out.

The master took pity on her and let her stay. But other dogs were attracted as before, and one evening, when a big dinner party was on, a stuffed turkey was carried away by one of them right under the cook’s nose, and she did not dare to stop him.

This time the master completely lost his temper and said angrily to Francois: “If you don’t throw this beast into the water before — to-morrow morning, I’ll put you out, do you hear?”

The man was dumbfounded, and he returned to his room to pack his trunk, preferring to leave the place. Then he bethought himself that he could find no other situation as long as he dragged this animal about with him. He thought of his good position, where he was well paid and well fed, and he decided that a dog was really not worth all that. At last he decided to rid himself of Cocotte at daybreak.

He slept badly. He rose at dawn, and taking a strong rope, went to get the dog. She stood up slowly, shook herself, stretched and came to welcome her master.

Then his courage forsook him, and he began to pet her affectionately, stroking her long ears, kissing her muzzle and calling her tender names.

But a neighboring clock struck six. He could no longer hesitate. He opened the door, calling: “Come!” The beast wagged her tail, understanding that she was to be taken out.

They reached the beach, and he chose a place where the water seemed deep. Then he knotted the rope round the leather collar and tied a heavy stone to the other end. He seized Cocotte in his arms and kissed her madly, as though he were taking leave of some human being. He held her to his breast, rocked her and called her “my dear little Cocotte, my sweet little Cocotte,” and she grunted with pleasure.

Ten times he tried to throw her into the water and each time he lost courage.

But suddenly he made up his mind and threw her as far from him as he could. At first she tried to swim, as she did when he gave her a bath, but her head, dragged down by the stone, kept going under, and she looked at her master with wild, human glances as she struggled like a drowning person. Then the front part of her body sank, while her hind legs waved wildly out of the water. Finally those also disappeared.

Then, for five minutes, bubbles rose to the surface as though the river were boiling, and Francois, haggard, his heart beating, thought that he saw Cocotte struggling in the mud, and, with the simplicity of a peasant, he kept saying to himself: “What does the poor beast think of me now?”

He almost lost his mind. He was ill for a month and every night he dreamed of his dog. He could feel her licking his hands and hear her barking. It was necessary to call in a physician. At last he recovered, and toward the 2nd of June his employers took him to their estate at Biesard, near Rouen.

There again he was near the Seine. He began to take baths. Each morning he would go down with the groom and they would swim across the river.

One day, as they were disporting themselves in the water, Francois suddenly cried to his companion: “Look what’s coming! I’m going to give you a chop!”

It was an enormous, swollen corpse that was floating down with its feet sticking straight up in the air.

Francois swam up to it, still joking: “Whew! it’s not fresh. What a catch, old man! It isn’t thin, either!” He kept swimming about at a distance from the animal that was in a state of decomposition. Then, suddenly, he was silent and looked at it: attentively. This time he came near enough to touch, it. He looked fixedly at the collar, then he stretched out his arm, seized the neck, swung the corpse round and drew it up close to him and read on the copper which had turned green and which still stuck to the discolored leather: “Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman Francois.”

The dead dog had come more than a hundred miles to find its master.

He let out a frightful shriek and began to swim for the beach with all his might, still howling; and as soon as he touched land he ran away wildly, stark naked, through the country. He was insane!

THE CORSICAN BANDIT

The road ascended gently through the forest of Aitone. The large pines formed a solemn dome above our heads, and that mysterious sound made by the wind in the trees sounded like the notes of an organ.

After walking for three hours, there was a clearing, and then at intervals an enormous pine umbrella, and then we suddenly came to the edge of the forest, some hundred meters below, the pass leading to the wild valley of Niolo.

On the two projecting heights which commanded a view of this pass, some old trees, grotesquely twisted, seemed to have mounted with painful efforts, like scouts sent in advance of the multitude in the rear. When we turned round, we saw the entire forest stretched beneath our feet, like a gigantic basin of verdure, inclosed by bare rocks whose summits seemed to reach the sky.

We resumed our walk, and, ten minutes later, found ourselves in the pass.

Then I beheld a remarkable landscape. Beyond another forest stretched a valley, but a valley such as I had never seen before; a solitude of stone, ten leagues long, hollowed out between two high mountains, without a field or a tree to be seen. This was the Niolo valley, the fatherland of Corsican liberty, the inaccessible citadel, from which the invaders had never been able to drive out the mountaineers.

My companion said to me: “This is where all our bandits have taken refuge?”

Ere long we were at the further end of this gorge, so wild, so inconceivably beautiful.

Not a blade of grass, not a plant-nothing but granite. As far as our eyes could reach, we saw in front of us a desert of glittering stone, heated like an oven by a burning sun, which seemed to hang for that very purpose right above the gorge. When we raised our eyes towards the crests, we stood dazzled and stupefied by what we saw. They looked like a festoon of coral;

all the summits are of porphyry; and the sky overhead was violet, purple, tinged with the coloring of these strange mountains. Lower down, the granite was of scintillating gray, and seemed ground to powder beneath our feet. At our right, along a long and irregular course, roared a tumultuous torrent. And we staggered along under this heat, in this light, in this burning, arid, desolate valley cut by this torrent of turbulent water which seemed to be ever hurrying onward, without fertilizing the rocks, lost in this furnace which greedily drank it up without being saturated or refreshed by it.

But, suddenly, there was visible at our right a little wooden cross sunk in a little heap of stones. A man had been killed there; and I said to my companion.

"Tell me about your bandits."

He replied:

"I knew the most celebrated of them, the terrible St. Lucia. I will tell you his history.

"His father was killed in a quarrel by a young man of the district, it is said; and St. Lucia was left alone with his sister. He was a weak, timid youth, small, often ill, without any energy. He did not proclaim vengeance against the assassin of his father. All his relatives came to see him, and implored of him to avenge his death; he remained deaf to their menaces and their supplications.

"Then, following the old Corsican custom, his sister, in her indignation carried away his black clothes, in order that he might not wear mourning for a dead man who had not been avenged. He was insensible to even this affront, and rather than take down from the rack his father's gun, which was still loaded, he shut himself up, not daring to brave the looks of the young men of the district.

"He seemed to have even forgotten the crime, and lived with his sister in the seclusion of their dwelling.

"But, one day, the man who was suspected of having committed the murder, was about to get married. St. Lucia did not appear to be moved by this news, but, out of sheer bravado, doubtless, the bridegroom, on his way to the church, passed before the house of the two orphans.

"The brother and the sister, at their window, were eating frijoles, when the young man saw the bridal procession going by. Suddenly he began to tremble, rose to his feet without uttering a word, made the sign of the cross, took the gun which was hanging over the fireplace, and went out.

"When he spoke of this later on, he said: 'I don't know what was the matter with me; it was like fire in my blood; I felt that I must do it, that, in spite of everything, I could not resist, and I concealed the gun in a cave on the road to Corte.

"An hour later, he came back, with nothing in his hand, and with his habitual air of sad weariness. His sister believed that there was nothing further in his thoughts.

"But when night fell he disappeared.

"His enemy had, the same evening, to repair to Corte on foot, accompanied by his two groomsmen.

"He was walking along, singing as he went, when St. Lucia stood before him, and looking straight in the murderer's face, exclaimed: 'Now is the time!' and shot him point-blank in the chest.

"One of the men fled; the other stared at, the young man, saying:

"'What have you done, St. Lucia?' and he was about to hasten to Corte for help, when St. Lucia said in a stern tone:

"'If you move another step, I'll shoot you in the leg.'

"The other, aware of his timidity hitherto, replied: 'You would not dare to do it!' and was hurrying off when he fell instantaneously, his thigh shattered by a bullet.

"And St. Lucia, coming over to where he lay, said:

"'I am going to look at your wound; if it is not serious, I'll leave you there; if it is mortal I'll finish you off."

"He inspected the wound, considered it mortal, and slowly reloading his gun, told the wounded man to say a prayer, and shot him through the head.

"Next day he was in the mountains.

"And do you know what this St. Lucia did after this?

"All his family were arrested by the gendarmes. His uncle, the cure, who was suspected of having incited him to this deed of vengeance, was himself put in prison, and accused by the dead man's relatives. But he escaped, took a gun in his turn, and went to join his nephew in the brush.

"Next, St. Lucia killed, one after the other, his uncle's accusers, and tore out their eyes to teach the others never to state what they had seen with their eyes.

"He killed all the relatives, all the connections of his enemy's family. He slew during his life fourteen gendarmes, burned down the houses of his adversaries, and was, up to the day of his death, the most terrible of all the bandits whose memory we have preserved."

The sun disappeared behind Monte Cinto and the tall shadow of the granite mountain went to sleep on the granite of the valley. We quickened our pace in order to reach before night the little village of Albertaccio, nothing but a pile of stones welded into the stone flanks of a wild gorge. And I said as I thought of the bandit:

"What a terrible custom your vendetta is!"

My companion answered with an air of resignation:

"What would you have? A man must do his duty!"

THE GRAVE

The seventeenth of July, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-three, at half-past two in the morning, the watchman in the cemetery of Besiers, who lived in a small cottage on the edge of this field of the dead, was awakened by the barking of his dog, which was shut up in the kitchen.

Going down quickly, he saw the animal sniffing at the crack of the door and barking furiously, as if some tramp had been sneaking about the house. The keeper, Vincent, therefore took his gun and went out.

His dog, preceding him, at once ran in the direction of the Avenue General Bonnet, stopping short at the monument of Madame Tomoiseau.

The keeper, advancing cautiously, soon saw a faint light on the side of the Avenue Malenvers, and stealing in among the graves, he came upon a horrible act of profanation.

A man had dug up the coffin of a young woman who had been buried the evening before and was dragging the corpse out of it.

A small dark lantern, standing on a pile of earth, lighted up this hideous scene.

Vincent sprang upon the wretch, threw him to the ground, bound his hands and took him to the police station.

It was a young, wealthy and respected lawyer in town, named Courbataille.

He was brought into court. The public prosecutor opened the case by referring to the monstrous deeds of the Sergeant Bertrand.

A wave of indignation swept over the courtroom. When the magistrate sat down the crowd assembled cried: “Death! death!” With difficulty the presiding judge established silence.

Then he said gravely:

“Defendant, what have you to say in your defense?”

Courbataille, who had refused counsel, rose. He was a handsome fellow, tall, brown, with a frank face, energetic manner and a fearless eye.

Paying no attention to the whistlings in the room, he began to speak in a voice that was low and veiled at first, but that grew more firm as he proceeded.

"Monsieur le President, gentlemen of the jury: I have very little to say. The woman whose grave I violated was my sweetheart. I loved her.

"I loved her, not with a sensual love and not with mere tenderness of heart and soul, but with an absolute, complete love, with an overpowering passion.

"Hear me:

"When I met her for the first time I felt a strange sensation. It was not astonishment nor admiration, nor yet that which is called love at first sight, but a feeling of delicious well-being, as if I had been plunged into a warm bath. Her gestures seduced me, her voice enchanted me, and it was with infinite pleasure that I looked upon her person. It seemed to me as if I had seen her before and as if I had known her a long time. She had within her something of my spirit.

"She seemed to me like an answer to a cry uttered by my soul, to that vague and unceasing cry with which we call upon Hope during our whole life.

"When I knew her a little better, the mere thought of seeing her again filled me with exquisite and profound uneasiness; the touch of her hand in mine was more delightful to me than anything that I had imagined; her smile filled me with a mad joy, with the desire to run, to dance, to fling myself upon the ground.

"So we became lovers.

"Yes, more than that: she was my very life. I looked for nothing further on earth, and had no further desires. I longed for nothing further.

"One evening, when we had gone on a somewhat long walk by the river, we were overtaken by the rain, and she caught cold. It developed into pneumonia the next day, and a week later she was dead.

"During the hours of her suffering astonishment and consternation prevented my understanding and reflecting upon it, but when she was dead I was so overwhelmed by blank despair that I had no thoughts left. I wept.

"During all the horrible details of the interment my keen and wild grief was like a madness, a kind of sensual, physical grief.

"Then when she was gone, when she was under the earth, my mind at once found itself again, and I passed through a series of moral sufferings so terrible that even the love she had vouchsafed to me was dear at that price.

"Then the fixed idea came to me: I shall not see her again.

"When one dwells on this thought for a whole day one feels as if he were going mad. Just think of it! There is a woman whom you adore, a unique woman, for in the whole universe there is not a second one like her. This woman has given herself to you and has created with you the mysterious union that is called Love. Her eye seems to you more vast than space, more charming than the world, that clear eye smiling with her tenderness. This woman loves you. When she speaks to you her voice floods you with joy.

"And suddenly she disappears! Think of it! She disappears, not only for you, but forever. She is dead. Do you understand what that means? Never, never, never, not anywhere will she exist any more. Nevermore will that eye look upon anything again; nevermore will that voice, nor any voice like it, utter a word in the same way as she uttered it.

"Nevermore will a face be born that is like hers. Never, never! The molds of statues are kept; casts are kept by which one can make objects with the same outlines and forms. But that one body and that one face will never more be born again upon the earth. And yet millions and millions of creatures will be born, and more than that, and this one woman will not reappear among all the women of the future. Is it possible? It drives one mad to think of it.

"She lived for twenty-years, not more, and she has disappeared forever, forever, forever! She thought, she smiled, she loved me. And now nothing! The flies that die in the autumn are as much as we are in this world. And now nothing! And I thought that her body, her fresh body, so warm, so sweet, so white, so lovely, would rot down there in that box under the earth. And her soul, her thought, her love — where is it?

"Not to see her again! The idea of this decomposing body, that I might yet recognize, haunted me. I wanted to look at it once more.

"I went out with a spade, a lantern and a hammer; I jumped over the cemetery wall and I found the grave, which had not yet been closed entirely; I uncovered the coffin and took up a board. An abominable odor, the stench of putrefaction, greeted my nostrils. Oh, her bed perfumed with orris!

"Yet I opened the coffin, and, holding my lighted lantern down into it I saw her. Her face was blue, swollen, frightful. A black liquid had oozed out of her mouth.

"She! That was she! Horror seized me. But I stretched out my arm to draw this monstrous face toward me. And then I was caught.

"All night I have retained the foul odor of this putrid body, the odor of my well beloved, as one retains the perfume of a woman after a love embrace.

"Do with me what you will."

A strange silence seemed to oppress the room. They seemed to be waiting for something more. The jury retired to deliberate.

When they came back a few minutes later the accused showed no fear and did not even seem to think.

The president announced with the usual formalities that his judges declared him to be not guilty.

He did not move and the room applauded.

The Grave appeared in Gil Blas, July 29, 1883, under the signature of "Maufrigneuse."

OLD JUDAS

This entire stretch of country was amazing; it was characterized by a grandeur that was almost religious, and yet it had an air of sinister desolation.

A great, wild lake, filled with stagnant, black water, in which thousands of reeds were waving to and fro, lay in the midst of a vast circle of naked hills, where nothing grew but broom, or here and there an oak curiously twisted by the wind.

Just one house stood on the banks of that dark lake, a small, low house inhabited by Uncle Joseph, an old boatman, who lived on what he could make by his fishing. Once a week he carried the fish he caught into the surrounding villages, returning with the few provisions that he needed for his sustenance.

I went to see this old hermit, who offered to take me with him to his nets, and I accepted.

His boat was old, worm-eaten and clumsy, and the skinny old man rowed with a gentle and monotonous stroke that was soothing to the soul, already oppressed by the sadness of the land round about.

It seemed to me as if I were transported to olden times, in the midst of that ancient country, in that primitive boat, which was propelled by a man of another age.

He took up his nets and threw the fish into the bottom of the boat, as the fishermen of the Bible might have done. Then he took me down to the end of the lake, where I suddenly perceived a ruin on the other side of the bank a dilapidated hut, with an enormous red cross on the wall that looked as if it might have been traced with blood, as it gleamed in the last rays of the setting sun.

“What is that?” I asked.

“That is where Judas died,” the man replied, crossing himself.

I was not surprised, being almost prepared for this strange answer.

Still I asked:

“Judas? What Judas?”

“The Wandering Jew, monsieur,” he added.

I asked him to tell me this legend.

But it was better than a legend, being a true story, and quite a recent one, since Uncle Joseph had known the man.

This hut had formerly been occupied by a large woman, a kind of beggar, who lived on public charity.

Uncle Joseph did not remember from whom she had this hut. One evening an old man with a white beard, who seemed to be at least two hundred years old, and who could hardly drag himself along, asked alms of this forlorn woman, as he passed her dwelling.

“Sit down, father,” she replied; “everything here belongs to all the world, since it comes from all the world.”

He sat down on a stone before the door. He shared the woman’s bread, her bed of leaves, and her house.

He did not leave her again, for he had come to the end of his travels.

“It was Our Lady the Virgin who permitted this, monsieur,” Joseph added, “it being a woman who had opened her door to a Judas, for this old vagabond was the Wandering Jew. It was not known at first in the country, but the people suspected it very soon, because he was always walking; it had become a sort of second nature to him.”

And suspicion had been aroused by still another thing. This woman, who kept that stranger with her, was thought to be a Jewess, for no one had ever seen her at church. For ten miles around no one ever called her anything else but the Jewess.

When the little country children saw her come to beg they cried out: “Mamma, mamma, here is the Jewess!”

The old man and she began to go out together into the neighboring districts, holding out their hands at all the doors, stammering supplications into the ears of all the passers. They could be seen at all hours of the day, on by-paths, in the villages, or again eating bread, sitting in the noon heat under the shadow of some solitary tree. And the country people began to call the beggar Old Judas.

One day he brought home in his sack two little live pigs, which a farmer had given him after he had cured the farmer of some sickness.

Soon he stopped begging, and devoted himself entirely to his pigs. He took them out to feed by the lake, or under isolated oaks, or in the near-by valleys. The woman, however, went about all day begging, but she always came back to him in the evening.

He also did not go to church, and no one ever had seen him cross himself before the wayside crucifixes. All this gave rise to much gossip:

One night his companion was attacked by a fever and began to tremble like a leaf in the wind. He went to the nearest town to get some medicine, and then he shut himself up with her, and was not seen for six days.

The priest, having heard that the “Jewess” was about to die, came to offer the consolation of his religion and administer the last sacrament. Was she a Jewess? He did not know. But in any case, he wished to try to save her soul.

Hardly had he knocked at the door when old Judas appeared on the threshold, breathing hard, his eyes aflame, his long beard agitated, like rippling water, and he hurled blasphemies in an unknown language, extending his skinny arms in order to prevent the priest from entering.

The priest attempted to speak, offered his purse and his aid, but the old man kept on abusing him, making gestures with his hands as if throwing; stones at him.

Then the priest retired, followed by the curses of the beggar.

The companion of old Judas died the following day. He buried her himself, in front of her door. They were people of so little account that no one took any interest in them.

Then they saw the man take his pigs out again to the lake and up the hillsides. And he also began begging again to get food. But the people gave him hardly anything, as there was so much gossip about him. Every one knew, moreover, how he had treated the priest.

Then he disappeared. That was during Holy Week, but no one paid any attention to him.

But on Easter Sunday the boys and girls who had gone walking out to the lake heard a great noise in the hut. The door was locked; but the boys broke it in, and the two pigs ran out, jumping like gnats. No one ever saw them again.

The whole crowd went in; they saw some old rags on the floor, the beggar’s hat, some bones, clots of dried blood and bits of flesh in the hollows of the skull.

His pigs had devoured him.

“This happened on Good Friday, monsieur.” Joseph concluded his story, “three hours after noon.”

“How do you know that?” I asked him.

“There is no doubt about that,” he replied.

I did not attempt to make him understand that it could easily happen that the famished animals had eaten their master, after he had died suddenly in his hut.

As for the cross on the wall, it had appeared one morning, and no one knew what hand traced it in that strange color.

Since then no one doubted any longer that the Wandering Jew had died on this spot.

I myself believed it for one hour.

THE LITTLE CASK

He was a tall man of forty or thereabout, this Jules Chicot, the innkeeper of Spreville, with a red face and a round stomach, and said by those who knew him to be a smart business man. He stopped his buggy in front of Mother Magloire's farmhouse, and, hitching the horse to the gatepost, went in at the gate.

Chicot owned some land adjoining that of the old woman, which he had been coveting for a long while, and had tried in vain to buy a score of times, but she had always obstinately refused to part with it.

"I was born here, and here I mean to die," was all she said.

He found her peeling potatoes outside the farmhouse door. She was a woman of about seventy-two, very thin, shriveled and wrinkled, almost dried up in fact and much bent but as active and untiring as a girl. Chicot patted her on the back in a friendly fashion and then sat down by her on a stool.

"Well mother, you are always pretty well and hearty, I am glad to see."

"Nothing to complain of, considering, thank you. And how are you, Monsieur Chicot?"

"Oh, pretty well, thank you, except a few rheumatic pains occasionally; otherwise I have nothing to complain of."

"So much the better."

And she said no more, while Chicot watched her going on with her work. Her crooked, knotted fingers, hard as a lobster's claws, seized the tubers, which were lying in a pail, as if they had been a pair of pincers, and she peeled them rapidly, cutting off long strips of skin with an old knife which she held in the other hand, throwing the potatoes into the water as they were done. Three daring fowls jumped one after the other into her lap, seized a bit of peel and then ran away as fast as their legs would carry them with it in their beak.

Chicot seemed embarrassed, anxious, with something on the tip of his tongue which he could not say. At last he said hurriedly:

“Listen, Mother Magloire— “

“Well, what is it?”

“You are quite sure that you do not want to sell your land?”

“Certainly not; you may make up your mind to that. What I have said I have said, so don’t refer to it again.”

“Very well; only I think I know of an arrangement that might suit us both very well.”

“What is it?”

“Just this. You shall sell it to me and keep it all the same. You don’t understand? Very well, then follow me in what I am going to say.”

The old woman left off peeling potatoes and looked at the innkeeper attentively from under her heavy eyebrows, and he went on:

“Let me explain myself. Every month I will give you a hundred and fifty francs. You understand me! suppose! Every month I will come and bring you thirty crowns, and it will not make the slightest difference in your life — not the very slightest. You will have your own home just as you have now, need not trouble yourself about me, and will owe me nothing; all you will have to do will be to take my money. Will that arrangement suit you?”

He looked at her good-humoredly, one might almost have said benevolently, and the old woman returned his looks distrustfully, as if she suspected a trap, and said:

“It seems all right as far as I am concerned, but it will not give you the farm.”

“Never mind about that,” he said; “you may remain here as long as it pleases God Almighty to let you live; it will be your home. Only you will sign a deed before a lawyer making it over to me; after your death. You have no children, only nephews and nieces for whom you don’t care a straw. Will that suit you? You will keep everything during your life, and I will give you the thirty crowns a month. It is pure gain as far as you are concerned.”

The old woman was surprised, rather uneasy, but, nevertheless, very much tempted to agree, and answered:

“I don’t say that I will not agree to it, but I must think about it. Come back in a week, and we will talk it over again, and I will then give you my definite answer.”

And Chicot went off as happy as a king who had conquered an empire.

Mother Magloire was thoughtful, and did not sleep at all that night; in fact, for four days she was in a fever of hesitation. She suspected that there was something underneath the offer which was not to her advantage; but then the thought of thirty crowns a month, of all those coins clinking in her apron, falling to her, as it were, from the skies, without her doing anything for it, aroused her covetousness.

She went to the notary and told him about it. He advised her to accept Chicot's offer, but said she ought to ask for an annuity of fifty instead of thirty, as her farm was worth sixty thousand francs at the lowest calculation.

"If you live for fifteen years longer," he said, "even then he will only have paid forty-five thousand francs for it."

The old woman trembled with joy at this prospect of getting fifty crowns a month, but she was still suspicious, fearing some trick, and she remained a long time with the lawyer asking questions without being able to make up her mind to go. At last she gave him instructions to draw up the deed and returned home with her head in a whirl, just as if she had drunk four jugs of new cider.

When Chicot came again to receive her answer she declared, after a lot of persuading, that she could not make up her mind to agree to his proposal, though she was all the time trembling lest he should not consent to give the fifty crowns, but at last, when he grew urgent, she told him what she expected for her farm.

He looked surprised and disappointed and refused.

Then, in order to convince him, she began to talk about the probable duration of her life.

"I am certainly not likely to live more than five or six years longer. I am nearly seventy-three, and far from strong, even considering my age. The other evening I thought I was going to die, and could hardly manage to crawl into bed."

But Chicot was not going to be taken in.

"Come, come, old lady, you are as strong as the church tower, and will live till you are a hundred at least; you will no doubt see me put under ground first."

The whole day was spent in discussing the money, and as the old woman would not give in, the innkeeper consented to give the fifty crowns, and she insisted upon having ten crowns over and above to strike the bargain.

Three years passed and the old dame did not seem to have grown a day older. Chicot was in despair, and it seemed to him as if he had been paying that annuity for fifty years, that he had been taken in, done, ruined. From time to time he went to see the old lady, just as one goes in July to see when the harvest is likely to begin. She always met him with a cunning look, and one might have supposed that she was congratulating herself on the trick she had played him. Seeing how well and hearty she seemed he very soon got into his buggy again, growling to himself:

"Will you never die, you old hag?"

He did not know what to do, and he felt inclined to strangle her when he saw her. He hated her with a ferocious, cunning hatred, the hatred of a peasant who has been robbed, and began to cast about for some means of getting rid of her.

One day he came to see her again, rubbing his hands as he did the first time he proposed the bargain, and, after having chatted for a few minutes, he said:

"Why do you never come and have a bit of dinner at my place when you are in Spreville? The people are talking about it, and saying we are not on friendly terms, and that pains me. You know it will cost you nothing if you come, for I don't look at the price of a dinner. Come whenever you feel inclined; I shall be very glad to see you."

Old Mother Magloire did not need to be asked twice, and the next day but one, as she had to go to the town in any case, it being market day, she let her man drive her to Chicot's place, where the buggy was put in the barn while she went into the house to get her dinner.

The innkeeper was delighted and treated her like a lady, giving her roast fowl, black pudding, leg of mutton and bacon and cabbage. But she ate next to nothing. She had always been a small eater, and had generally lived on a little soup and a crust of bread and butter.

Chicot was disappointed and pressed her to eat more, but she refused, and she would drink little, and declined coffee, so he asked her:

"But surely you will take a little drop of brandy or liqueur?"

"Well, as to that, I don't know that I will refuse." Whereupon he shouted out:

"Rosalie, bring the superfine brandy — the special — you know."

The servant appeared, carrying a long bottle ornamented with a paper vine-leaf, and he filled two liqueur glasses.

"Just try that; you will find it first rate."

The good woman drank it slowly in sips, so as to make the pleasure last all the longer, and when she had finished her glass, she said:

"Yes, that is first rate!"

Almost before she had said it Chicot had poured her out another glassful. She wished to refuse, but it was too late, and she drank it very slowly, as she had done the first, and he asked her to have a third. She objected, but he persisted.

"It is as mild as milk, you know; I can drink ten or a dozen glasses without any ill effects; it goes down like sugar and does not go to the head; one would think that it evaporated on the tongue: It is the most wholesome thing you can drink."

She took it, for she really enjoyed it, but she left half the glass.

Then Chicot, in an excess of generosity, said:

"Look here, as it is so much to your taste, I will give you a small keg of it, just to show that you and I are still excellent friends." So she took one away with her, feeling slightly overcome by the effects of what she had drunk.

The next day the innkeeper drove into her yard and took a little iron-hooped keg out of his gig. He insisted on her tasting the contents, to make sure it was the same delicious article, and, when they had each of them drunk three more glasses, he said as he was going away:

"Well, you know when it is all gone there is more left; don't be modest, for I shall not mind. The sooner it is finished the better pleased I shall be."

Four days later he came again. The old woman was outside her door cutting up the bread for her soup.

He went up to her and put his face close to hers, so that he might smell her breath; and when he smelt the alcohol he felt pleased.

"I suppose you will give me a glass of the Special?" he said. And they had three glasses each.

Soon, however, it began to be whispered abroad that Mother Magloire was in the habit of getting drunk all by herself. She was picked up in her kitchen, then in her yard, then in the roads in the neighborhood, and she was often brought home like a log.

The innkeeper did not go near her any more, and, when people spoke to him about her, he used to say, putting on a distressed look:

"It is a great pity that she should have taken to drink at her age, but when people get old there is no remedy. It will be the death of her in the long run."

And it certainly was the death of her. She died the next winter. About Christmas time she fell down, unconscious, in the snow, and was found dead the next morning.

And when Chicot came in for the farm, he said:

"It was very stupid of her; if she had not taken to drink she would probably have lived ten years longer."

BOITELLE

Father Boitelle (Antoine) made a specialty of undertaking dirty jobs all through the countryside. Whenever there was a ditch or a cesspool to be cleaned out, a dunghill removed, a sewer cleansed, or any dirt hole whatever, he way always employed to do it.

He would come with the instruments of his trade, his sabots covered with dirt, and set to work, complaining incessantly about his occupation. When people asked him then why he did this loathsome work, he would reply resignedly:

“Faith, ’tis for my children, whom I must support. This brings me in more than anything else.”

He had, indeed, fourteen children. If any one asked him what had become of them, he would say with an air of indifference:

“There are only eight of them left in the house. One is out at service and five are married.”

When the questioner wanted to know whether they were well married, he replied vivaciously:

“I did not oppose them. I opposed them in nothing. They married just as they pleased. We shouldn’t go against people’s likings, it turns out badly. I am a night scavenger because my parents went against my likings. But for that I would have become a workman like the others.”

Here is the way his parents had thwarted him in his likings:

He was at the time a soldier stationed at Havre, not more stupid than another, or sharper either, a rather simple fellow, however. When he was not on duty, his greatest pleasure was to walk along the quay, where the bird dealers congregate. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a soldier from his own part of the country, he would slowly saunter along by cages containing parrots with green backs and yellow heads from the banks of the Amazon, or parrots with gray backs and red heads from Senegal, or enormous macaws, which look like birds reared in hot-houses, with their flower-like feathers, their plumes and their tufts. Parrots of every size, who seem painted with minute care by the miniaturist, God Almighty, and the little birds, all the smaller birds hopped about, yellow, blue and variegated, mingling their cries with the noise of the quay; and adding to the din caused by unloading the vessels, as well as by passengers and vehicles, a violent clamor, loud, shrill and deafening, as if from some distant forest of monsters.

Boitelle would pause, with wondering eyes, wide-open mouth, laughing and enraptured, showing his teeth to the captive cockatoos, who kept nodding their white or yellow topknots toward the glaring red of his breeches and the copper buckle of his belt. When he found a bird that could talk he put questions to it, and if it happened at the time to be disposed to reply and to hold a conversation with him he would carry away enough amusement to last him till evening. He also found heaps of amusement in looking at the monkeys, and could conceive no greater luxury for a rich man than to own these animals as one owns cats and dogs. This kind of taste for the exotic he had in his blood, as people have a taste for the chase, or for medicine, or for the priesthood. He could not help returning to the quay every time the gates of the barracks opened, drawn toward it by an irresistible longing.

On one occasion, having stopped almost in ecstasy before an enormous macaw, which was swelling out its plumes, bending forward and bridling up again as if making the court curtseys of parrot-land, he saw the door of a little cafe adjoining the bird dealer’s shop open, and a young negress appeared, wearing on her head a red silk handkerchief. She was sweeping into the street the corks and sand of the establishment.

Boitelle’s attention was soon divided between the bird and the woman, and he really could not tell which of these two beings he contemplated with the greater astonishment and delight.

The negress, having swept the rubbish into the street, raised her eyes, and, in her turn, was dazzled by the soldier’s uniform. There she stood facing him with her broom in her hands as if she were bringing him a rifle, while the macaw continued bowing. But at the end of a few seconds the soldier began to feel embarrassed at this attention, and he walked away quietly so as not to look as if he were beating a retreat.

But he came back. Almost every day he passed before the Cafe des Colonies, and often he could distinguish through the window the figure of the little black-skinned maid serving “bocks” or glasses of brandy to the sailors of the port. Frequently, too, she would come out to the door on seeing him; soon, without even having exchanged a word, they smiled at one another like acquaintances; and Boitelle felt his heart touched when he suddenly saw, glittering between the dark lips of the girl, a shining row of white teeth. At length, one day he ventured to enter, and was quite surprised to find that she could speak French like every one else. The bottle of lemonade, of which she was good enough to accept a glassful, remained in the soldier’s recollection memorably delicious, and it became a custom with him to come and absorb in this little tavern on the quay all the agreeable drinks which he could afford.

For him it was a treat, a happiness, on which his thoughts dwelt constantly, to watch the black hand of the little maid pouring something into his glass while her teeth laughed more than her eyes. At the end of two months they became fast friends, and Boitelle, after his first astonishment at discovering that this negress had as good principles as honest French girls, that she exhibited a regard for economy, industry, religion and good conduct, loved her more on that account, and was so charmed with her that he wanted to marry her.

He told her his intentions, which made her dance with joy. She had also a little money, left her by, a female oyster dealer, who had picked her up when she had been left on the quay at Havre by an American captain. This captain had found her, when she was only about six years old, lying on bales of cotton in the hold of his ship, some hours after his departure from New York. On his arrival in Havre he abandoned to the care of this compassionate oyster dealer the little black creature, who had been hidden on board his vessel, he knew not why or by whom.

The oyster woman having died, the young negress became a servant at the Colonial Tavern.

Antoine Boitelle added: “This will be all right if my parents don’t oppose it. I will never go against them, you understand, never! I’m going to say a word or two to them the first time I go back to the country.”

On the following week, in fact, having obtained twenty-four hours’ leave, he went to see his family, who cultivated a little farm at Tourteville, near Yvetot.

He waited till the meal was finished, the hour when the coffee baptized with brandy makes people more open-hearted, before informing his parents that he had found a girl who satisfied his tastes, all his tastes, so completely that there could not exist any other in all the world so perfectly suited to him.

The old people, on hearing this, immediately assumed a cautious manner and wanted explanations. He had concealed nothing from them except the color of her skin.

She was a servant, without much means, but strong, thrifty, clean, well-conducted and sensible. All these things were better than money would be in the hands of a bad housewife. Moreover, she had a few sous, left her by a woman who had reared her, a good number of sous, almost a little dowry, fifteen hundred francs in the savings bank. The old people, persuaded by his talk, and relying also on their own judgment, were gradually weakening, when he came to the delicate point. Laughing in rather a constrained fashion, he said:

"There's only one thing you may not like. She is not a white slip."

They did not understand, and he had to explain at some length and very cautiously, to avoid shocking them, that she belonged to the dusky race of which they had only seen samples in pictures at Epinal. Then they became restless, perplexed, alarmed, as if he had proposed a union with the devil.

The mother said: "Black? How much of her is black? Is the whole of her?"

He replied: "Certainly. Everywhere, just as you are white everywhere."

The father interposed: "Black? Is it as black as the pot?"

The son answered: "Perhaps a little less than that. She is black, but not disgustingly black. The cure's cassock is black, but it is not uglier than a surplice which is white."

The father said: "Are there more black people besides her in her country?"

And the son, with an air of conviction, exclaimed: "Certainly!"

But the old man shook his head.

"That must be unpleasant."

And the son:

"It isn't more disagreeable than anything else when you get accustomed to it."

The mother asked:

"It doesn't soil the underwear more than other skins, this black skin?"

"Not more than your own, as it is her proper color."

Then, after many other questions, it was agreed that the parents should see this girl before coming; to any decision, and that the young fellow, whose, term of military service would be over in a month, should bring her to the house in order that they might examine her and decide by talking the matter over whether or not she was too dark to enter the Boitelle family.

Antoine accordingly announced that on Sunday, the 22d of May, the day of his discharge, he would start for Tourteville with his sweetheart.

She had put on, for this journey to the house of her lover's parents, her most beautiful and most gaudy clothes, in which yellow, red and blue were the prevailing colors, so that she looked as if she were adorned for a national festival.

At the terminus, as they were leaving Havre, people stared at her, and Boitelle was proud of giving his arm to a person who commanded so much attention. Then, in the third-class carriage, in which she took a seat by his side, she aroused so much astonishment among the country folks that the people in the adjoining compartments stood up on their benches to look at her over the wooden partition which divides the compartments. A child, at sight of her, began to cry with terror, another concealed his face in his mother's apron. Everything went off well, however, up to their arrival at their destination. But when the train slackened its rate of motion as they drew near Yvetot, Antoine felt: ill at ease, as he would have done at a review when; he did not know his drill practice. Then, as he; leaned his head out, he recognized in the distance: his father, holding the bridle of the horse harnessed to a carryall, and his mother, who had come forward to the grating, behind which stood those who were expecting friends.

He alighted first, gave his hand to his sweetheart, and holding himself erect, as if he were escorting a general, he went to meet his family.

The mother, on seeing this black lady in variegated costume in her son's company, remained so stupefied that she could not open her mouth; and the father found it hard to hold the horse, which the engine or the negress caused to rear continuously. But Antoine, suddenly filled with unmixed joy at seeing once more the old people, rushed forward with open arms, embraced his mother, embraced his father, in spite of the nag's fright, and then turning toward his companion, at whom the passengers on the platform stopped to stare with amazement, he proceeded to explain:

"Here she is! I told you that, at first sight, she is not attractive; but as soon as you know her, I can assure you there's not a better sort in the whole world. Say good-morning to her so that she may not feel badly."

Thereupon Mere Boitelle, almost frightened out of her wits, made a sort of curtsy, while the father took off his cap, murmuring:

"I wish you good luck!"

Then, without further delay, they climbed into the carryall, the two women at the back, on seats which made them jump up and down as the vehicle went jolting along the road, and the two men in front on the front seat.

Nobody spoke. Antoine, ill at ease, whistled a barrack-room air; his father whipped the nag; and his mother, from where she sat in the corner, kept casting sly glances at the negress, whose forehead and cheekbones shone in the sunlight like well-polished shoes.

Wishing to break the ice, Antoine turned round.

"Well," said he, "we don't seem inclined to talk."

"We must have time," replied the old woman.

He went on:

"Come! Tell us the little story about that hen of yours that laid eight eggs."

It was a funny anecdote of long standing in the family. But, as his mother still remained silent, paralyzed by her emotion, he undertook himself to tell the story, laughing as he did so at the memorable incident. The father, who knew it by heart brightened at the opening words of the narrative; his wife soon followed his example; and the negress herself, when he reached the drollest part of it, suddenly gave vent to a laugh, such a loud, rolling torrent of laughter that the horse, becoming excited, broke into a gallop for a while.

This served to cement their acquaintance. They all began to chat.

They had scarcely reached the house and had all alighted, when Antoine conducted his sweetheart to a room, so that she might take off her dress, to avoid staining it, as she was going to prepare a nice dish, intended to win the old people's affections through their stomachs. He drew his parents outside the house, and, with beating heart, asked:

"Well, what do you say now?"

The father said nothing. The mother, less timid, exclaimed:

"She is too black. No, indeed, this is too much for me. It turns my blood."

"You will get used to it," said Antoine.

"Perhaps so, but not at first."

They went into the house, where the good woman was somewhat affected at the spectacle of the negress engaged in cooking. She at once proceeded to assist her, with petticoats tucked up, active in spite of her age.

The meal was an excellent one, very long, very enjoyable. When they were taking a turn after dinner, Antoine took his father aside.

“Well, dad, what do you say about it?”

The peasant took care never to compromise himself.

“I have no opinion about it. Ask your mother.”

So Antoine went back to his mother, and, detaining her behind the rest, said:

“Well, mother, what do you think of her?”

“My poor lad, she is really too black. If she were only a little less black, I would not go against you, but this is too much. One would think it was Satan!”

He did not press her, knowing how obstinate the old woman had always been, but he felt a tempest of disappointment sweeping over his heart. He was turning over in his mind what he ought to do, what plan he could devise, surprised, moreover, that she had not conquered them already as she had captivated himself. And they, all four, walked along through the wheat fields, having gradually relapsed into silence. Whenever they passed a fence they saw a countryman sitting on the stile, and a group of brats climbed up to stare at them, and every one rushed out into the road to see the “black” whore young Boitelle had brought home with him. At a distance they noticed people scampering across the fields just as when the drum beats to draw public attention to some living phenomenon. Pere and Mere Boitelle, alarmed at this curiosity, which was exhibited everywhere through the country at their approach, quickened their pace, walking side by side, and leaving their son far behind. His dark companion asked what his parents thought of her.

He hesitatingly replied that they had not yet made up their minds.

But on the village green people rushed out of all the houses in a flutter of excitement; and, at the sight of the gathering crowd, old Boitelle took to his heels, and regained his abode, while Antoine; swelling with rage, his sweetheart on his arm, advanced majestically under the staring eyes, which opened wide in amazement.

He understood that it was at an end, and there was no hope for him, that he could not marry his negress. She also understood it; and as they drew near the farmhouse they both began to weep. As soon as they had got back to the house, she once more took off her dress to aid the mother in the household duties, and followed her everywhere, to the dairy, to the stable, to the hen house, taking on herself the hardest part of the work, repeating always: “Let me do it, Madame Boitelle,” so that, when night came on, the old woman, touched but inexorable, said to her son: “She is a good girl, all the same. It’s a pity she is so black; but indeed she is too black. I could not get used to it. She must go back again. She is too, too black!”

And young Boitelle said to his sweetheart:

“She will not consent. She thinks you are too black. You must go back again. I will go with you to the train. No matter — don’t fret. I am going to talk to them after you have started.”

He then took her to the railway station, still cheering her with hope, and, when he had kissed her, he put her into the train, which he watched as it passed out of sight, his eyes swollen with tears.

In vain did he appeal to the old people. They would never give their consent.

And when he had told this story, which was known all over the country, Antoine Boitelle would always add:

“From that time forward I have had no heart for anything — for anything at all. No trade suited me any longer, and so I became what I am — a night scavenger.”

People would say to him:

“Yet you got married.”

“Yes, and I can’t say that my wife didn’t please me, seeing that I have fourteen children; but she is not the other one, oh, no — certainly not! The other one, mark you, my negress, she had only to give me one glance, and I felt as if I were in Heaven.”

A WIDOW

This story was told during the hunting season at the Chateau Baneville. The autumn had been rainy and sad. The red leaves, instead of rustling under the feet, were rotting under the heavy downfalls.

The forest was as damp as it could be. From it came an odor of must, of rain, of soaked grass and wet earth; and the sportsmen, their backs hunched under the downpour, mournful dogs, with tails between their legs and hairs sticking to their sides, and the young women, with their clothes drenched, returned every evening, tired in body and in mind.

After dinner, in the large drawing-room, everybody played lotto, without enjoyment, while the wind whistled madly around the house. Then they tried telling stories like those they read in books, but no one was able to invent anything amusing. The hunters told tales of wonderful shots and of the butchery of rabbits; and the women racked their brains for ideas without revealing the imagination of Scheherezade. They were about to give up this diversion when a young woman, who was idly caressing the hand of an old maiden aunt, noticed a little ring made of blond hair, which she had often seen, without paying any attention to it.

She fingered it gently and asked, “Auntie, what is this ring? It looks as if it were made from the hair of a child.”

The old lady blushed, grew pale, then answered in a trembling voice: “It is sad, so sad that I never wish to speak of it. All the unhappiness of my life comes from that. I was very young then, and the memory has remained so painful that I weep every time I think of it.”

Immediately everybody wished to know the story, but the old lady refused to tell it. Finally, after they had coaxed her for a long time, she yielded. Here is the story:

“You have often heard me speak of the Santeze family, now extinct. I knew the last three male members of this family. They all died in the same manner; this hair belongs to the last one. He was thirteen when he killed himself for me. That seems strange to you, doesn’t it?

“Oh! it was a strange family — mad, if you will, but a charming madness, the madness of love. From father to son, all had violent passions which filled their whole being, which impelled them to do wild things, drove them to frantic enthusiasm, even to crime. This was born in them, just as burning devotion is in certain souls. Trappers have not the same nature as minions of the drawing-room. There was a saying: ‘As passionate as a Santeze.’ This could be noticed by looking at them. They all had wavy hair, falling over their brows, curly beards and large eyes whose glance pierced and moved one, though one could not say why.

“The grandfather of the owner of this hair, of whom it is the last souvenir, after many adventures, duels and elopements, at about sixty-five fell madly in love with his farmer’s daughter. I knew them both. She was blond, pale, distinguished-looking, with a slow manner of talking, a quiet voice and a look so gentle that one might have taken her for a Madonna. The old nobleman took her to his home and was soon so captivated with her that he could not live without her for a minute. His daughter and daughter-in-law, who lived in the chateau, found this perfectly natural, love was such a tradition in the family. Nothing in regard to a passion surprised them, and if one spoke before them of parted lovers, even of vengeance after treachery, both said in the same sad tone: ‘Oh, how he must have suffered to come to that point!’ That was all. They grew sad over tragedies of love, but never indignant, even when they were criminal.

“Now, one day a young man named Monsieur de Gradelle, who had been invited for the shooting, eloped with the young girl.

“Monsieur de Santeze remained calm as if nothing had happened, but one morning he was found hanging in the kennels, among his dogs.

“His son died in the same manner in a hotel in Paris during a journey which he made there in 1841, after being deceived by a singer from the opera.

“He left a twelve-year-old child and a widow, my mother’s sister. She came to my father’s house with the boy, while we were living at Bertillon. I was then seventeen.

“You have no idea how wonderful and precocious this Santeze child was. One might have thought that all the tenderness and exaltation of the whole race had been stored up in this last one. He was always dreaming and walking about alone in a great alley of elms leading from the chateau to the forest. I watched from my window this sentimental boy, who walked with thoughtful steps, his hands behind his back, his head bent, and at times stopping to raise his eyes as if he could see and understand things that were not comprehensible at his age.

"Often, after dinner on clear evenings, he would say to me: 'Let us go outside and dream, cousin.' And we would go outside together in the park. He would stop quickly before a clearing where the white vapor of the moon lights the woods, and he would press my hand, saying: 'Look! look! but you don't understand me; I feel it. If you understood me, we should be happy. One must love to know! I would laugh and then kiss this child, who loved me madly.

"Often, after dinner, he would sit on my mother's knees. 'Come, auntie,' he would say, 'tell me some love-stories.' And my mother, as a joke, would tell him all the old legends of the family, all the passionate adventures of his forefathers, for thousands of them were current, some true and some false. It was their reputation for love and gallantry which was the ruin of every one of these-men; they gloried in it and then thought that they had to live up to the renown of their house.

"The little fellow became exalted by these tender or terrible stories, and at times he would clap his hands, crying: 'I, too, I, too, know how to love, better than all of them!'

"Then, he began to court me in a timid and tender manner, at which every one laughed, it was, so amusing. Every morning I had some flowers picked by him, and every evening before going to his room he would kiss my hand and murmur: 'I love you!'

"I was guilty, very guilty, and I grieved continually about it, and I have been doing penance all my life; I have remained an old maid — or, rather, I have lived as a widowed fiancee, his widow.

"I was amused at this childish tenderness, and I even encouraged him. I was coquettish, as charming as with a man, alternately caressing and severe. I maddened this child. It was a game for me and a joyous diversion for his mother and mine. He was twelve! think of it! Who would have taken this atom's passion seriously? I kissed him as often as he wished; I even wrote him little notes, which were read by our respective mothers; and he answered me by passionate letters, which I have kept. Judging himself as a man, he thought that our loving intimacy was secret. We had forgotten that he was a Santeze.

"This lasted for about a year. One evening in the park he fell at my feet and, as he madly kissed the hem of my dress, he kept repeating: 'I love you! I love you! I love you! If ever you deceive me, if ever you leave me for another, I'll do as my father did.' And he added in a hoarse voice, which gave me a shiver: 'You know what he did!'

"I stood there astonished. He arose, and standing on the tips of his toes in order to reach my ear, for I was taller than he, he pronounced my first name: 'Genevieve!' in such a gentle, sweet, tender tone that I trembled all over. I stammered: 'Let us return! let us return!' He said no more and followed me; but as we were going up the steps of the porch, he stopped me, saying: 'You know, if ever you leave me, I'll kill myself.'

"This time I understood that I had gone too far, and I became quite reserved. One day, as he was reproaching me for this, I answered: 'You are now too old for jesting and too young for serious love. I'll wait.'

"I thought that this would end the matter. In the autumn he was sent to a boarding-school. When he returned the following summer I was engaged to be married. He understood immediately, and for a week he became so pensive that I was quite anxious.

"On the morning of the ninth day I saw a little paper under my door as I got up. I seized it, opened it and read: 'You have deserted me and you know what I said. It is death to which you have condemned me. As I do not wish to be found by another than you, come to the park just where I told you last year that I loved you and look in the air.'

"I thought that I should go mad. I dressed as quickly as I could and ran wildly to the place that he had mentioned. His little cap was on the ground in the mud. It had been raining all night. I raised my eyes and saw something swinging among the leaves, for the wind was blowing a gale.

"I don't know what I did after that. I must have screamed at first, then fainted and fallen, and finally have run to the chateau. The next thing that I remember I was in bed, with my mother sitting beside me.

"I thought that I had dreamed all this in a frightful nightmare. I stammered: 'And what of him, what of him, Gontran?' There was no answer. It was true!

"I did not dare see him again, but I asked for a lock of his blond hair. Here — here it is!"

And the old maid stretched out her trembling hand in a despairing gesture. Then she blew her nose several times, wiped her eyes and continued:

“I broke off my marriage — without saying why. And I — I always have remained the — the widow of this thirteen-year-old boy.” Then her head fell on her breast and she wept for a long time.

As the guests were retiring for the night a large man, whose quiet she had disturbed, whispered in his neighbor’s ear: “Isn’t it unfortunate to, be so sentimental?”

THE ENGLISHMAN OF ETRETAT

A great English poet has just crossed over to France in order to greet Victor Hugo. All the newspapers are full of his name and he is the great topic of conversation in all drawing-rooms. Fifteen years ago I had occasion several times to meet Algernon Charles Swinburne. I will attempt to show him just as I saw him and to give an idea of the strange impression he made on me, which will remain with me throughout time.

I believe it was in 1867 or in 1868 that an unknown young Englishman came to Etretat and bought a little but hidden under great trees. It was said that he lived there, always alone, in a strange manner; and he aroused the inimical surprise of the natives, for the inhabitants were sullen and foolishly malicious, as they always are in little towns.

They declared that this whimsical Englishman ate nothing but boiled. roasted or stewed monkey; that he would see no one; that he talked to himself hours at a time and many other surprising things that made people think that he was different from other men. They were surprised that he should live alone with a monkey. Had it been a cat or a dog they would have said nothing. But a monkey! Was that not frightful? What savage tastes the man must have!

I knew this young man only from seeing him in the streets. He was short, plump, without being fat, mild-looking, and he wore a little blond mustache, which was almost invisible.

Chance brought us together. This savage had amiable and pleasing manners, but he was one of those strange Englishmen that one meets here and there throughout the world.

Endowed with remarkable intelligence, he seemed to live in a fantastic dream, as Edgar Poe must have lived. He had translated into English a volume of strange Icelandic legends, which I ardently desired to see translated into French. He loved the supernatural, the dismal and grewsome, but he spoke of the most marvellous things with a calmness that was typically English, to which his gentle and quiet voice gave a semblance of reality that was maddening.

Full of a haughty disdain for the world, with its conventions, prejudices and code of morality, he had nailed to his house a name that was boldly impudent. The keeper of a lonely inn who should write on his door: “Travellers murdered here!” could not make a more sinister jest. I never had entered his dwelling, when one day I received an invitation to luncheon, following an accident that had occurred to one of his friends, who had been almost drowned and whom I had attempted to rescue.

Although I was unable to reach the man until he had already been rescued, I received the hearty thanks of the two Englishmen, and the following day I called upon them.

The friend was a man about thirty years old. He bore an enormous head on a child’s body — a body without chest or shoulders. An immense forehead, which seemed to have engulfed the rest of the man, expanded like a dome above a thin face which ended in a little pointed beard. Two sharp eyes and a peculiar mouth gave one the impression of the head of a reptile, while the magnificent brow suggested a genius.

A nervous twitching shook this peculiar being, who walked, moved, acted by jerks like a broken spring.

This was Algernon Charles Swinburne, son of an English admiral and grandson, on the maternal side, of the Earl of Ashburnham.

He strange countenance was transfigured when he spoke. I have seldom seen a man more impressive, more eloquent, incisive or charming in conversation. His rapid, clear, piercing and fantastic imagination seemed to creep into his voice and to lend life to his words. His brusque gestures enlivened his speech, which penetrated one like a dagger, and he had bursts of thought, just as lighthouses throw out flashes of fire, great, genial lights that seemed to illuminate a whole world of ideas.

The home of the two friends was pretty and by no means commonplace. Everywhere were paintings, some superb, some strange, representing different conceptions of insanity. Unless I am mistaken, there was a water-color which represented the head of a dead man floating in a rose-colored shell on a boundless ocean, under a moon with a human face.

Here and there I came across bones. I clearly remember a flayed hand on which was hanging some dried skin and black muscles, and on the snow-white bones could be seen the traces of dried blood.

The food was a riddle which I could not solve. Was it good? Was it bad? I could not say. Some roast monkey took away all desire to make a steady diet of this animal, and the great monkey who roamed about among us at large and playfully pushed his head into my glass when I wished to drink cured me of any desire I might have to take one of his brothers as a companion for the rest of my days.

As for the two men, they gave me the impression of two strange, original, remarkable minds, belonging to that peculiar race of talented madmen from among whom have arisen Poe, Hoffmann and many others.

If genius is, as is commonly believed, a sort of aberration of great minds, then Algernon Charles Swinburne is undoubtedly a genius.

Great minds that are healthy are never considered geniuses, while this sublime qualification is lavished on brains that are often inferior but are slightly touched by madness.

At any rate, this poet remains one of the first of his time, through his originality and polished form. He is an exalted lyrical singer who seldom bothers about the good and humble truth, which French poets are now seeking so persistently and patiently. He strives to set down dreams, subtle thoughts, sometimes great, sometimes visibly forced, but sometimes magnificent.

Two years later I found the house closed and its tenants gone. The furniture was being sold. In memory of them I bought the hideous flayed hand. On the grass an enormous square block of granite bore this simple word: “Nip.” Above this a hollow stone offered water to the birds. It was the grave of the monkey, who had been hanged by a young, vindictive negro servant. It was said that this violent domestic had been forced to flee at the point of his exasperated master’s revolver. After wandering about without home or food for several days, he returned and began to peddle barley-sugar in the streets. He was expelled from the country after he had almost strangled a displeased customer.

The world would be gayer if one could often meet homes like that.

This story appeared in the “Gaulois,” November 29, 1882. It was the original sketch for the introductory study of Swinburne, written by Maupassant for the French translation by Gabriel Mourey of “Poems and Ballads.”

MAGNETISM

It was a men's dinner party, and they were sitting over their cigars and brandy and discussing magnetism. Donato's tricks and Charcot's experiments. Presently, the sceptical, easy-going men, who cared nothing for religion of any sort, began telling stories of strange occurrences, incredible things which, nevertheless, had really occurred, so they said, falling back into superstitious beliefs, clinging to these last remnants of the marvellous, becoming devotees of this mystery of magnetism, defending it in the name of science. There was only one person who smiled, a vigorous young fellow, a great ladies' man who was so incredulous that he would not even enter upon a discussion of such matters.

He repeated with a sneer:

"Humbug! humbug! humbug! We need not discuss Donato, who is merely a very smart juggler. As for M. Charcot, who is said to be a remarkable man of science, he produces on me the effect of those story-tellers of the school of Edgar Poe, who end by going mad through constantly reflecting on queer cases of insanity. He has authenticated some cases of unexplained and inexplicable nervous phenomena; he makes his way into that unknown region which men are exploring every day, and unable always to understand what he sees, he recalls, perhaps, the ecclesiastical interpretation of these mysteries. I should like to hear what he says himself."

The words of the unbeliever were listened to with a kind of pity, as if he had blasphemed in an assembly of monks.

One of these gentlemen exclaimed:

"And yet miracles were performed in olden times."

"I deny it," replied the other: "Why cannot they be performed now?"

Then, each mentioned some fact, some fantastic presentiment some instance of souls communicating with each other across space, or some case of the secret influence of one being over another. They asserted and maintained that these things had actually occurred, while the sceptic angrily repeated:

“Humbug! humbug! humbug!”

At last he rose, threw away his cigar, and with his hands in his pockets, said: “Well, I also have two stories to tell you, which I will afterwards explain. Here they are:

“In the little village of Etretat, the men, who are all seafaring folk, go every year to Newfoundland to fish for cod. One night the little son of one of these fishermen woke up with a start, crying out that his father was dead. The child was quieted, and again he woke up exclaiming that his father was drowned. A month later the news came that his father had, in fact, been swept off the deck of his smack by a billow. The widow then remembered how her son had woke up and spoken of his father’s death. Everyone said it was a miracle, and the affair caused a great sensation. The dates were compared, and it was found that the accident and the dream were almost coincident, whence they concluded that they had happened on the same night and at the same hour. And there is a mystery of magnetism.”

The story-teller stopped suddenly.

Thereupon, one of those who had heard him, much affected by the narrative, asked:

“And can you explain this?”

“Perfectly, monsieur. I have discovered the secret. The circumstance surprised me and even perplexed me very much; but you see, I do not believe on principle. Just as others begin by believing, I begin by doubting; and when I cannot understand, I continue to deny that there can be any telepathic communication between souls; certain that my own intelligence will be able to explain it. Well, I kept on inquiring into the matter, and by dint of questioning all the wives of the absent seamen, I was convinced that not a week passed without one of them, or one of their children dreaming and declaring when they woke up that the father was drowned. The horrible and continual fear of this accident makes them always talk about it. Now, if one of these frequent predictions coincides, by a very simple chance, with the death of the person referred to, people at once declare it to be a miracle; for they suddenly lose sight of all the other predictions of misfortune that have remained unfulfilled. I have myself known fifty cases where the persons who made the prediction forgot all about it a week after wards. But, if, then one happens to die, then the recollection of the thing is immediately revived, and people are ready to believe in the intervention of God, according to some, and magnetism, according to others."

One of the smokers remarked:

"What you say is right enough; but what about your second story?"

"Oh! my second story is a very delicate matter to relate. It happened to myself, and so I don't place any great value on my own view of the matter. An interested party can never give an impartial opinion. However, here it is:

"Among my acquaintances was a young woman on whom I had never bestowed a thought, whom I had never even looked at attentively, never taken any notice of.

"I classed her among the women of no importance, though she was not bad-looking; she appeared, in fact, to possess eyes, a nose, a mouth, some sort of hair — just a colorless type of countenance. She was one of those beings who awaken only a chance, passing thought, but no special interest, no desire.

"Well, one night, as I was writing some letters by my fireside before going to bed, I was conscious, in the midst of that train of sensuous visions that sometimes pass through one's brain in moments of idle reverie, of a kind of slight influence, passing over me, a little flutter of the heart, and immediately, without any cause, without any logical connection of thought, I saw distinctly, as if I were touching her, saw from head to foot, and disrobed, this young woman to whom I had never given more that three seconds' thought at a time. I suddenly discovered in her a number of qualities which I had never before observed, a sweet charm, a languorous fascination; she awakened in me that sort of restless emotion that causes one to pursue a woman. But I did not think of her long. I went to bed and was soon asleep. And I dreamed.

"You have all had these strange dreams which make you overcome the impossible, which open to you double-locked doors, unexpected joys, tightly folded arms?

"Which of us in these troubled, excising, breathless slumbers, has not held, clasped, embraced with rapture, the woman who occupied his thoughts? And have you ever noticed what superhuman delight these happy dreams give us? Into what mad intoxication they cast you! with what passionate spasms they shake you! and with what infinite, caressing, penetrating tenderness they fill your heart for her whom you hold clasped in your arms in that adorable illusion that is so like reality!

"All this I felt with unforgettable violence. This woman was mine, so much mine that the pleasant warmth of her skin remained in my fingers, the odor of her skin, in my brain, the taste of her kisses, on my lips, the sound of her voice lingered in my ears, the touch of her clasp still clung to me, and the burning charm of her tenderness still gratified my senses long after the delight but disillusion of my awakening.

"And three times that night I had the same dream.

"When the day dawned she haunted me, possessed me, filled my senses to such an extent that I was not one second without thinking of her.

"At last, not knowing what to do, I dressed myself and went to call on her. As I went upstairs to her apartment, I was so overcome by emotion that I trembled, and my heart beat rapidly.

"I entered the apartment. She rose the moment she heard my name mentioned; and suddenly our eyes met in a peculiar fixed gaze.

"I sat down. I stammered out some commonplaces which she seemed not to hear. I did not know what to say or do. Then, abruptly, clasping my arms round her, my dream was realized so suddenly that I began to doubt whether I was really awake. We were friends after this for two years."

"What conclusion do you draw from it?" said a voice.

The story-teller seemed to hesitate.

"The conclusion I draw from it — well, by Jove, the conclusion is that it was just a coincidence! And then — who can tell? Perhaps it was some glance of hers which I had not noticed and which came back that night to me through one of those mysterious and unconscious — recollections that often bring before us things ignored by our own consciousness, unperceived by our minds!"

"Call it whatever you like," said one of his table companions, when the story was finished; "but if you don't believe in magnetism after that, my dear boy, you are an ungrateful fellow!"

A FATHER'S CONFESSION

All Veziers-le-Rethel had followed the funeral procession of M. Badon-Leremince to the grave, and the last words of the funeral oration pronounced by the delegate of the district remained in the minds of all: "He was an honest man, at least!"

An honest man he had been in all the known acts of his life, in his words, in his examples, his attitude, his behavior, his enterprises, in the cut of his beard and the shape of his hats. He never had said a word that did not set an example, never had given an alms without adding a word of advice, never had extended his hand without appearing to bestow a benediction.

He left two children, a boy and a girl. His son was counselor general, and his daughter, having married a lawyer, M. Poirel de la Voulte, moved in the best society of Veziers.

They were inconsolable at the death of their father, for they loved him sincerely.

As soon as the ceremony was over, the son, daughter and son-in-law returned to the house of mourning, and, shutting themselves in the library, they opened the will, the seals of which were to be broken by them alone and only after the coffin had been placed in the ground. This wish was expressed by a notice on the envelope.

M. Poirel de la Voulte tore open the envelope, in his character of a lawyer used to such operations, and having adjusted his spectacles, he read in a monotonous voice, made for reading the details of contracts:

> My children, my dear children, I could not sleep the eternal sleep in peace if I did not make to you from the tomb a confession, the confession of a crime, remorse for which has ruined my life. Yes, I committed a crime, a frightful, abominable crime.
>
> I was twenty-six years old, and I had just been called to the bar in Paris, and was living the life off young men from the provinces who

are stranded in this town without acquaintances, relatives, or friends.

I took a sweetheart. There are beings who cannot live alone. I was one of those. Solitude fills me with horrible anguish, the solitude of my room beside my fire in the evening. I feel then as if I were alone on earth, alone, but surrounded by vague dangers, unknown and terrible things; and the partition that separates me from my neighbor, my neighbor whom I do not know, keeps me at as great a distance from him as the stars that I see through my window. A sort of fever pervades me, a fever of impatience and of fear, and the silence of the walls terrifies me. The silence of a room where one lives alone is so intense and so melancholy It is not only a silence of the mind; when a piece of furniture cracks a shudder goes through you for you expect no noise in this melancholy abode.

How many times, nervous and timid from this motionless silence, I have begun to talk, to repeat words without rhyme or reason, only to make some sound. My voice at those times sounds so strange that I am afraid of that, too. Is there anything more dreadful than talking to one’s self in an empty house? One’s voice sounds like that of another, an unknown voice talking aimlessly, to no one, into the empty air, with no ear to listen to it, for one knows before they escape into the solitude of the room exactly what words will be uttered. And when they resound lugubriously in the silence, they seem no more than an echo, the peculiar echo of words whispered by ones thought.

My sweetheart was a young girl like other young girls who live in Paris on wages that are insufficient to keep them. She was gentle, good, simple. Her parents lived at Poissy. She went to spend several days with them from time to time.

For a year I lived quietly with her, fully decided to leave her when I should find some one whom I liked well enough to marry. I would make a little provision for this one, for it is an understood thing in our social set that a woman’s love should be paid for, in money if she is poor, in presents if she is rich.

But one day she told me she was enceinte. I was thunderstruck, and saw in a second that my life would be ruined. I saw the fetter that I should wear until my death, everywhere, in my future family life, in my old age, forever; the fetter of a woman bound to my life through a child; the fetter of the child whom I must bring up, watch over, protect, while keeping myself unknown to him, and keeping him hidden from the world.

I was greatly disturbed at this news, and a confused longing, a criminal desire, surged through my mind; I did not formulate it, but I felt it in my heart, ready to come to the surface, as if some one hidden behind a portiere should await the signal to come out. If some accident might only happen! So many of these little beings die before they are born!

Oh! I did not wish my sweetheart to die! The poor girl, I loved her very much! But I wished, possibly, that the child might die before I saw it.

He was born. I set up housekeeping in my little bachelor apartment, an imitation home, with a horrible child. He looked like all children; I did not care for him. Fathers, you see, do not show affection until later. They have not the instinctive and passionate tenderness of mothers; their affection has to be awakened gradually, their mind must become attached by bonds formed each day between beings that live in each other’s society.

A year passed. I now avoided my home, which was too small, where soiled linen, baby-clothes and stockings the size of gloves were lying round, where a thousand articles of all descriptions lay on the furniture, on the arm of an easy-chair, everywhere. I went out chiefly that I might not hear the child cry, for he cried on the slightest pretext, when he was bathed, when he was touched, when he was put to bed, when he was taken up in the morning, incessantly.

I had made a few acquaintances, and I met at a reception the woman who was to be your mother. I fell in love with her and became desirous to marry her. I courted her; I asked her parents' consent to our marriage and it was granted.

I found myself in this dilemma: I must either marry this young girl whom I adored, having a child already, or else tell the truth and renounce her, and happiness, my future, everything; for her parents, who were people of rigid principles, would not give her to me if they knew.

I passed a month of horrible anguish, of mortal torture, a month haunted by a thousand frightful thoughts; and I felt developing in me a hatred toward my son, toward that little morsel of living, screaming flesh, who blocked my path, interrupted my life, condemned me to an existence without hope, without all those vague expectations that make the charm of youth.

But just then my companion's mother became ill, and I was left alone with the child.

It was in December, and the weather was terribly cold. What a night!

My companion had just left. I had dined alone in my little dining-room and I went gently into the room where the little one was asleep.

I sat down in an armchair before the fire. The wind was blowing, making the windows rattle, a dry, frosty wind; and I saw trough the window the stars shining with that piercing brightness that they have on frosty nights.

Then the idea that had obsessed me for a month rose again to the surface. As soon as I was quiet it came to me and harassed me. It ate into my mind like a fixed idea, just as cancers must eat into the flesh. It was there, in my head, in my heart, in my whole body, it seemed to me; and it swallowed me up as a wild beast might have. I endeavored to drive it away, to repulse it, to open my mind to other thoughts, as one opens a window to the fresh morning breeze to drive out the vitiated air; but I could not drive it from my brain, not even for a second. I do not know how to express this torture. It gnawed at my soul, and I felt a frightful pain, a real physical and moral pain.

My life was ruined! How could I escape from this situation? How could I draw back, and how could I confess?

And I loved the one who was to become your mother with a mad passion, which this insurmountable obstacle only aggravated.

A terrible rage was taking possession of me, choking me, a rage that verged on madness! Surely I was crazy that evening!

The child was sleeping. I got up and looked at it as it slept. It was he, this abortion, this spawn, this nothing, that condemned me to irremediable unhappiness!

He was asleep, his mouth open, wrapped in his bed-clothes in a crib beside my bed, where I could not sleep.

How did I ever do what I did? How do I know? What force urged me on? What malevolent power took possession of me? Oh! the temptation to crime came to me without any forewarning. All I recall is that my heart beat tumultuously. It beat so hard that I could hear it, as one hears the strokes of a hammer behind a partition. That is all I can recall — the beating of my heart! In my head there was a strange confusion, a tumult, a senseless disorder, a lack of presence of mind. It was one of those hours of bewilderment and hallucination when a man is neither conscious of his actions nor able to guide his will.

I gently raised the coverings from the body of the child; I turned them down to the foot of the crib, and he lay there uncovered and naked.

He did not wake. Then I went toward the window, softly, quite softly, and I opened it.

A breath of icy air glided in like an assassin; it was so cold that I drew aside, and the two candles flickered. I remained standing near the window, not daring to turn round, as if for fear of seeing what was doing on behind me, and feeling the icy air continually across my forehead, my cheeks, my hands, the deadly air which kept streaming in. I stood there a long time.

I was not thinking, I was not reflecting. All at once a little cough caused me to shudder frightfully from head to foot, a shudder that I feel still to the roots of my hair. And with a frantic movement I abruptly closed both sides of the window and, turning round, ran over to the crib.

He was still asleep, his mouth open, quite naked. I touched his legs; they were icy cold and I covered them up.

My heart was suddenly touched, grieved, filled with pity, tenderness, love for this poor innocent being that I had wished to kill. I kissed his fine, soft hair long and tenderly; then I went and sat down before the fire.

I reflected with amazement with horror on what I had done, asking myself whence come those tempests of the soul in which a man loses all perspective of things, all command over himself and acts as in a condition of mad intoxication, not knowing whither he is going — like a vessel in a hurricane.

The child coughed again, and it gave my heart a wrench. Suppose it should die! O God! O God! What would become of me?

I rose from my chair to go and look at him, and with a candle in my hand I leaned over him. Seeing him breathing quietly I felt reassured, when he coughed a third time. It gave me such a shock tat I started backward, just as one does at sight of something horrible, and let my candle fall.

As I stood erect after picking it up, I noticed that my temples were bathed in perspiration, that cold sweat which is the result of anguish of soul. And I remained until daylight bending over my son, becoming calm when he remained quiet for some time, and filled with atrocious pain when a weak cough came from his mouth.

He awoke with his eyes red, his throat choked, and with an air of suffering.

When the woman came in to arrange my room I sent her at once for a doctor. He came at the end of an hour, and said, after examining the child:

"Did he not catch cold?"

I began to tremble like a person with palsy, and I faltered:

"No, I do not think so."

And then I said:

"What is the matter? Is it serious?"

"I do not know yet," he replied. "I will come again this evening."

He came that evening. My son had remained almost all day in a condition of drowsiness, coughing from time to time. During the night inflammation of the lungs set in.

That lasted ten days. I cannot express what I suffered in those interminable hours that divide morning from night, right from morning.

He died.

And since — since that moment, I have not passed one hour, not a single hour, without the frightful burning recollection, a gnawing recollection, a memory that seems to wring my heart, awaking in me like a savage beast imprisoned in the depth of my soul.

Oh! if I could have gone mad!

M. Poirel de la Voulte raised his spectacles with a motion that was peculiar to him whenever he finished reading a contract; and the three heirs of the defunct looked at one another without speaking, pale and motionless.

At the end of a minute the lawyer resumed:

“That must be destroyed.”

The other two bent their heads in sign of assent. He lighted a candle, carefully separated the pages containing the damaging confession from those relating to the disposition of money, then he held them over the candle and threw them into the fireplace.

And they watched the white sheets as they burned, till they were presently reduced to little crumbling black heaps. And as some words were still visible in white tracing, the daughter, with little strokes of the toe of her shoe, crushed the burning paper, mixing it with the old ashes in the fireplace.

Then all three stood there watching it for some time, as if they feared that the destroyed secret might escape from the fireplace.

A MOTHER OF MONSTERS

I recalled this horrible story, the events of which occurred long ago, and this horrible woman, the other day at a fashionable seaside resort, where I saw on the beach a well-known young, elegant and charming Parisienne, adored and respected by everyone.

I had been invited by a friend to pay him a visit in a little provincial town. He took me about in all directions to do the honors of the place, showed me noted scenes, chateaux, industries, ruins. He pointed out monuments, churches, old carved doorways, enormous or distorted trees, the oak of St. Andrew, and the yew tree of Roqueboise.

When I had exhausted my admiration and enthusiasm over all the sights, my friend said with a distressed expression on his face, that there was nothing left to look at. I breathed freely. I would now be able to rest under the shade of the trees. But, all at once, he uttered an exclamation:

"Oh, yes! We have the 'Mother of Monsters'; I must take you to see her."

"Who is that, the 'Mother of Monsters'?" I asked.

"She is an abominable woman," he replied, "a regular demon, a being who voluntarily brings into the world deformed, hideous, frightful children, monstrosities, in fact, and then sells them to showmen who exhibit such things.

"These exploiters of freaks come from time to time to find out if she has any fresh monstrosity, and if it meets with their approval they carry it away with them, paying the mother a compensation.

"She has eleven of this description. She is rich.

"You think I am joking, romancing, exaggerating. No, my friend; I am telling you the truth, the exact truth.

"Let us go and see this woman. Then I will tell you her history."

He took me into one of the suburbs. The woman lived in a pretty little house by the side of the road. It was attractive and well kept. The garden was filled with fragrant flowers. One might have supposed it to be the residence of a retired lawyer.

A maid ushered us into a sort of little country parlor, and the wretch appeared. She was about forty. She was a tall, big woman with hard features, but well formed, vigorous and healthy, the true type of a robust peasant woman, half animal, and half woman.

She was aware of her reputation and received everyone with a humility that smacked of hatred.

“What do the gentlemen wish?” she asked.

“They tell me that your last child is just like an ordinary child, that he does not resemble his brothers at all,” replied my friend. “I wanted to be sure of that. Is it true?”

She cast on us a malicious and furious look as she said:

“Oh, no, oh, no, my poor sir! He is perhaps even uglier than the rest. I have no luck, no luck!

“They are all like that, it is heartbreaking! How can the good God be so hard on a poor woman who is all alone in the world, how can He?” She spoke hurriedly, her eyes cast down, with a deprecating air as of a wild beast who is afraid. Her harsh voice became soft, and it seemed strange to hear those tearful falsetto tones issuing from that big, bony frame, of unusual strength and with coarse outlines, which seemed fitted for violent action, and made to utter howls like a wolf.

“We should like to see your little one,” said my friend.

I fancied she colored up. I may have been deceived. After a few moments of silence, she said in a louder tone:

“What good will that do you?”

“Why do you not wish to show it to us?” replied my friend. “There are many people to whom you will show it; you know whom I mean.”

She gave a start, and resuming her natural voice, and giving free play to her anger, she screamed:

“Was that why you came here? To insult me? Because my children are like animals, tell me? You shall not see him, no, no, you shall not see him! Go away, go away! I do not know why you all try to torment me like that.”

She walked over toward us, her hands on her hips. At the brutal tone of her voice, a sort of moaning, or rather a mewing, the lamentable cry of an idiot, came from the adjoining room. I shivered to the marrow of my bones. We retreated before her.

“Take care, Devil” (they called her the Devil); said my friend, “take care; some day you will get yourself into trouble through this.”

She began to tremble, beside herself with fury, shaking her fist and roaring:

“Be off with you! What will get me into trouble? Be off with you, miscreants!”

She was about to attack us, but we fled, saddened at what we had seen. When we got outside, my friend said:

“Well, you have seen her, what do you think of her?”

“Tell me the story of this brute,” I replied.

And this is what he told me as we walked along the white high road, with ripe crops on either side of it which rippled like the sea in the light breeze that passed over them.

“This woman was one a servant on a farm. She was an honest girl, steady and economical. She was never known to have an admirer, and never suspected of any frailty. But she went astray, as so many do.

“She soon found herself in trouble, and was tortured with fear and shame. Wishing to conceal her misfortune, she bound her body tightly with a corset of her own invention, made of boards and cord. The more she developed, the more she bound herself with this instrument of torture, suffering martyrdom, but brave in her sorrow, not allowing anyone to see, or suspect, anything. She maimed the little unborn being, cramping it with that frightful corset, and made a monster of it. Its head was squeezed and elongated to a point, and its large eyes seemed popping out of its head. Its limbs, exaggeratedly long, and twisted like the stalk of a vine, terminated in fingers like the claws of a spider. Its trunk was tiny, and round as a nut.

“The child was born in an open field, and when the weeders saw it, they fled away, screaming, and the report spread that she had given birth to a demon. From that time on, she was called ‘the Devil.’

“She was driven from the farm, and lived on charity, under a cloud. She brought up the monster, whom she hated with a savage hatred, and would have strangled, perhaps, if the priest had not threatened her with arrest.

“One day some travelling showmen heard about the frightful creature, and asked to see it, so that if it pleased them they might take it away. They were pleased, and counted out five hundred francs to the mother. At first, she had refused to let them see the little animal, as she was ashamed; but when she discovered it had a money value, and that these people were anxious to get it, she began to haggle with them, raising her price with all a peasant's persistence.

"She made them draw up a paper, in which they promised to pay her four hundred francs a year besides, as though they had taken this deformity into their employ.

"Incited by the greed of gain, she continued to produce these phenomena, so as to have an assured income like a bourgeoise.

"Some of them were long, some short, some like crabs-all bodies-others like lizards. Several died, and she was heartbroken.

"The law tried to interfere, but as they had no proof they let her continue to produce her freaks.

"She has at this moment eleven alive, and they bring in, on an average, counting good and bad years, from five to six thousand francs a year. One, alone, is not placed, the one she was unwilling to show us. But she will not keep it long, for she is known to all the showmen in the world, who come from time to time to see if she has anything new.

"She even gets bids from them when the monster is valuable."

My friend was silent. A profound disgust stirred my heart, and a feeling of rage, of regret, to think that I had not strangled this brute when I had the opportunity.

I had forgotten this story, when I saw on the beach of a fashionable resort the other day, an elegant, charming, dainty woman, surrounded by men who paid her respect as well as admiration.

I was walking along the beach, arm in arm with a friend, the resident physician. Ten minutes later, I saw a nursemaid with three children, who were rolling in the sand. A pair of little crutches lay on the ground, and touched my sympathy. I then noticed that these three children were all deformed, humpbacked, or crooked; and hideous.

"Those are the offspring of that charming woman you saw just now," said the doctor.

I was filled with pity for her, as well as for them, and exclaimed: "Oh, the poor mother! How can she ever laugh!"

"Do not pity her, my friend. Pity the poor children," replied the doctor. "This is the consequence of preserving a slender figure up to the last. These little deformities were made by the corset. She knows very well that she is risking her life at this game. But what does she care, as long as he can be beautiful and have admirers!"

And then I recalled that other woman, the peasant, the “Devil,” who sold her children, her monsters.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED

One autumn I went to spend the hunting season with some friends in a chateau in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical jokes. I do not care to know people who are not.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once awakened suspicion in my mind. They fired off rifles, embraced me, made much of me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

“Look out, old ferret! They have something in store for you.”

During the dinner the mirth was excessive, exaggerated, in fact. I thought: “Here are people who have more than their share of amusement, and apparently without reason. They must have planned some good joke. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!”

During the entire evening every one laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I scented a practical joke in the air, as a dog scents game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word, or a meaning, or a gesture escape me. Every one seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour struck for retiring; and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why?

They called to me: “Good-night.” I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance round the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the keyhole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out and leave me in darkness."

Then I went across to the mantelpiece and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that I cast another glance around me without discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article, one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from outside.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, the night was advancing; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was foolish. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing immoderately at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure.

All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower both from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking to the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I considered insured safety. I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it toward me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bedclothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bed clothes.

For at least another hour I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the chateau. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top of my own, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down, almost deafened me.

I was smothering beneath the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whiskers. Then, with all my strength, I launched out a blow at this face. But I immediately received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my nightshirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.

Oh, heavens! it was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into my apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor and fallen on his stomach, spilling my breakfast over my face in spite of himself.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the practical joke I had been trying to avoid.

Oh, how they all laughed that day!

A PORTRAIT

"Hello! there's Milial!" said somebody near me. I looked at the man who had been pointed out as I had been wishing for a long time to meet this Don Juan.

He was no longer young. His gray hair looked a little like those fur bonnets worn by certain Northern peoples, and his long beard, which fell down over his chest, had also somewhat the appearance of fur. He was talking to a lady, leaning toward her, speaking in a low voice and looking at her with an expression full of respect and tenderness.

I knew his life, or at least as much as was known of it. He had loved madly several times, and there had been certain tragedies with which his name had been connected. When I spoke to women who were the loudest in his praise, and asked them whence came this power, they always answered, after thinking for a while: "I don't know — he has a certain charm about him."

He was certainly not handsome. He had none of the elegance that we ascribe to conquerors of feminine hearts. I wondered what might be his hidden charm. Was it mental? I never had heard of a clever saying of his. In his glance? Perhaps. Or in his voice? The voices of some beings have a certain irresistible attraction, almost suggesting the flavor of things good to eat. One is hungry for them, and the sound of their words penetrates us like a dainty morsel. A friend was passing. I asked him: "Do you know Monsieur Milial?"

"Yes."

"Introduce us."

A minute later we were shaking hands and talking in the doorway. What he said was correct, agreeable to hear; it contained no irritable thought. The voice was sweet, soft, caressing, musical; but I had heard others much more attractive, much more moving. One listened to him with pleasure, just as one would look at a pretty little brook. No tension of the mind was necessary in order to follow him, no hidden meaning aroused curiosity, no expectation awoke interest. His conversation was rather restful, but it did not awaken in one either a desire to answer, to contradict or to approve, and it was as easy to answer him as it was to listen to him. The response came to the lips of its own accord, as soon as he had finished talking, and phrases turned toward him as if he had naturally aroused them.

One thought soon struck me. I had known him for a quarter of an hour, and it seemed as if he were already one of my old friends, that I had known all about him for a long time; his face, his gestures, his voice, his ideas. Suddenly, after a few minutes of conversation, he seemed already to be installed in my intimacy. All constraint disappeared between us, and, had he so desired, I might have confided in him as one confides only in old friends.

Certainly there was some mystery about him. Those barriers that are closed between most people and that are lowered with time when sympathy, similar tastes, equal intellectual culture and constant intercourse remove constraint — those barriers seemed not to exist between him and me, and no doubt this was the case between him and all people, both men and women, whom fate threw in his path.

After half an hour we parted, promising to see each other often, and he gave me his address after inviting me to take luncheon with him in two days.

I forgot what hour he had stated, and I arrived too soon; he was not yet home. A correct and silent domestic showed me into a beautiful, quiet, softly lighted parlor. I felt comfortable there, at home. How often I have noticed the influence of apartments on the character and on the mind! There are some which make one feel foolish; in others, on the contrary, one always feels lively. Some make us sad, although well lighted and decorated in light-colored furniture; others cheer us up, although hung with sombre material. Our eye, like our heart, has its likes and dislikes, of which it does not inform us, and which it secretly imposes on our temperament. The harmony of furniture, walls, the style of an ensemble, act immediately on our mental state, just as the air from the woods, the sea or the mountains modifies our physical natures.

I sat down on a cushion-covered divan and felt myself suddenly carried and supported by these little silk bags of feathers, as if the outline of my body had been marked out beforehand on this couch.

Then I looked about. There was nothing striking about the room; everywhere were beautiful and modest things, simple and rare furniture, Oriental curtains which did not seem to come from a department store but from the interior of a harem; and exactly opposite me hung the portrait of a woman. It was a portrait of medium size, showing the head and the upper part of the body, and the hands, which were holding a book. She was young, bareheaded; ribbons were woven in her hair; she was smiling sadly. Was it because she was bareheaded, was it merely her natural expression? I never have seen a portrait of a lady which seemed so much in its place as that one in that dwelling. Of all those I knew I have seen nothing like that one. All those that I know are on exhibition, whether the lady be dressed in her gaudiest gown, with an attractive headdress and a look which shows that she is posing first of all before the artist and then before those who will look at her or whether they have taken a comfortable attitude in an ordinary gown. Some are standing majestically in all their beauty, which is not at all natural to them in life. All of them have something, a flower or, a jewel, a crease in the dress or a curve of the lip, which one feels to have been placed there for effect by the artist. Whether they wear a hat or merely their hair one can immediately notice that they are not entirely natural. Why? One cannot say without knowing them, but the effect is there. They seem to be calling somewhere, on people whom they wish to please and to whom they wish to appear at their best advantage; and they have studied their attitudes, sometimes modest, Sometimes haughty.

What could one say about this one? She was at home and alone. Yes, she was alone, for she was smiling as one smiles when thinking in solitude of something sad or sweet, and not as one smiles when one is being watched. She seemed so much alone and so much at home that she made the whole large apartment seem absolutely empty. She alone lived in it, filled it, gave it life. Many people might come in and converse, laugh, even sing; she would still be alone with a solitary smile, and she alone would give it life with her pictured gaze.

That look also was unique. It fell directly on me, fixed and caressing, without seeing me. All portraits know that they are being watched, and they answer with their eyes, which see, think, follow us without leaving us, from the very moment we enter the apartment they inhabit. This one did not see me; it saw nothing, although its look was fixed directly on me. I remembered the surprising verse of Baudelaire:

And your eyes, attractive as those of a portrait.

They did indeed attract me in an irresistible manner; those painted eyes which had lived, or which were perhaps still living, threw over me a strange, powerful spell. Oh, what an infinite and tender charm, like a passing breeze, like a dying sunset of lilac rose and blue, a little sad like the approaching night, which comes behind the sombre frame and out of those impenetrable eyes! Those eyes, created by a few strokes from a brush, hide behind them the mystery of that which seems to be and which does not exist, which can appear in the eyes of a woman, which can make love blossom within us.

The door opened and M. Milial entered. He excused himself for being late. I excused myself for being ahead of time. Then I said: “Might I ask you who is this lady?”

He answered: “That is my mother. She died very young.”

Then I understood whence came the inexplicable attraction of this man.

THE DRUNKARD

The north wind was blowing a hurricane, driving through the sky big, black, heavy clouds from which the rain poured down on the earth with terrific violence.

A high sea was raging and dashing its huge, slow, foamy waves along the coast with the rumbling sound of thunder. The waves followed each other close, rolling in as high as mountains, scattering the foam as they broke.

The storm engulfed itself in the little valley of Yport, whistling and moaning, tearing the shingles from the roofs, smashing the shutters, knocking down the chimneys, rushing through the narrow streets in such gusts that one could walk only by holding on to the walls, and children would have been lifted up like leaves and carried over the houses into the fields.

The fishing smacks had been hauled high up on land, because at high tide the sea would sweep the beach. Several sailors, sheltered behind the curved bottoms of their boats, were watching this battle of the sky and the sea.

Then, one by one, they went away, for night was falling on the storm, wrapping in shadows the raging ocean and all the battling elements.

Just two men remained, their hands plunged deep into their pockets, bending their backs beneath the squall, their woolen caps pulled down over their ears; two big Normandy fishermen, bearded, their skin tanned through exposure, with the piercing black eyes of the sailor who looks over the horizon like a bird of prey.

One of them was saying:

“Come on, Jeremie, let’s go play dominoes. It’s my treat.”

The other hesitated a while, tempted on one hand by the game and the thought of brandy, knowing well that, if he went to Paumelle’s, he would return home drunk; held back, on the other hand, by the idea of his wife remaining alone in the house.

He asked:

“Any one might think that you had made a bet to get me drunk every night. Say, what good is it doing you, since it’s always you that’s treating?”

Nevertheless he was smiling at the idea of all this brandy drunk at the expense of another. He was smiling the contented smirk of an avaricious Norman.

Mathurin, his friend, kept pulling him by the sleeve.

“Come on, Jeremie. This isn’t the kind of a night to go home without anything to warm you up. What are you afraid of? Isn’t your wife going to warm your bed for you?”

Jeremie answered:

“The other night I couldn’t find the door — I had to be fished out of the ditch in front of the house!”

He was still laughing at this drunkard’s recollection, and he was unconsciously going toward Paumelle’s Cafe, where a light was shining in the window; he was going, pulled by Mathurin and pushed by the wind, unable to resist these combined forces.

The low room was full of sailors, smoke and noise. All these men, clad in woolens, their elbows on the tables, were shouting to make themselves heard. The more people came in, the more one had to shout in order to overcome the noise of voices and the rattling of dominoes on the marble tables.

Jeremie and Mathurin sat down in a corner and began a game, and the glasses were emptied in rapid succession into their thirsty throats.

Then they played more games and drank more glasses. Mathurin kept pouring and winking to the saloon keeper, a big, red-faced man, who chuckled as though at the thought of some fine joke; and Jeremie kept absorbing alcohol and wagging his head, giving vent to a roar of laughter and looking at his comrade with a stupid and contented expression.

All the customers were going away. Every time that one of them would open the door to leave a gust of wind would blow into the cafe, making the tobacco smoke swirl around, swinging the lamps at the end of their chains and making their flames flicker, and suddenly one could hear the deep booming of a breaking wave and the moaning of the wind.

Jeremie, his collar unbuttoned, was taking drunkard’s poses, one leg outstretched, one arm hanging down and in the other hand holding a domino.

They were alone now with the owner, who had come up to them, interested.

He asked:

“Well, Jeremie, how goes it inside? Feel less thirsty after wetting your throat?”

Jeremie muttered:

“The more I wet it, the drier it gets inside.”

The innkeeper cast a sly glance at Mathurin. He said:

“And your brother, Mathurin, where’s he now?”

The sailor laughed silently:

“Don’t worry; he’s warm, all right.”

And both of them looked toward Jeremie, who was triumphantly putting down the double six and announcing:

“Game!”

Then the owner declared:

“Well, boys, I’m goin’ to bed. I will leave you the lamp and the bottle; there’s twenty cents’ worth in it. Lock the door when you go, Mathurin, and slip the key under the mat the way you did the other night.”

Mathurin answered:

“Don’t worry; it’ll be all right.”

Paumelle shook hands with his two customers and slowly went up the wooden stairs. For several minutes his heavy step echoed through the little house. Then a loud creaking announced that he had got into bed.

The two men continued to play. From time to time a more violent gust of wind would shake the whole house, and the two drinkers would look up, as though some one were about to enter. Then Mathurin would take the bottle and fill Jeremie’s glass. But suddenly the clock over the bar struck twelve. Its hoarse clang sounded like the rattling of saucepans. Then Mathurin got up like a sailor whose watch is over.

“Come on, Jeremie, we’ve got to get out.”

The other man rose to his feet with difficulty, got his balance by leaning on the table, reached the door and opened it while his companion was putting out the light.

As soon as they were in the street Mathurin locked the door and then said:

“Well, so long. See you to-morrow night!”

And he disappeared in the darkness.

Jeremie took a few steps, staggered, stretched out his hands, met a wall which supported him and began to stumble along. From time to time a gust of wind would sweep through the street, pushing him forward, making him run for a few steps; then, when the wind would die down, he would stop short, having lost his impetus, and once more he would begin to stagger on his unsteady drunkard's legs.

He went instinctively toward his home, just as birds go to their nests. Finally he recognized his door, and began to feel about for the keyhole and tried to put the key in it. Not finding the hole, he began to swear. Then he began to beat on the door with his fists, calling for his wife to come and help him:

"Melina! Oh, Melina!"

As he leaned against the door for support, it gave way and opened, and Jeremie, losing his prop, fell inside, rolling on his face into the middle of his room, and he felt something heavy pass over him and escape in the night.

He was no longer moving, dazed by fright, bewildered, fearing the devil, ghosts, all the mysterious beings of darkness, and he waited a long time without daring to move. But when he found out that nothing else was moving, a little reason returned to him, the reason of a drunkard.

Gently he sat up. Again he waited a long time, and at last, growing bolder, he called:

"Melina!"

His wife did not answer.

Then, suddenly, a suspicion crossed his darkened mind, an indistinct, vague suspicion. He was not moving; he was sitting there in the dark, trying to gather together his scattered wits, his mind stumbling over incomplete ideas, just as his feet stumbled along.

Once more he asked:

"Who was it, Melina? Tell me who it was. I won't hurt you!"

He waited, no voice was raised in the darkness. He was now reasoning with himself out loud.

"I'm drunk, all right! I'm drunk! And he filled me up, the dog; he did it, to stop my goin' home. I'm drunk!"

And he would continue:

"Tell me who it was, Melina, or somethin'll happen to you."

After having waited again, he went on with the slow and obstinate logic of a drunkard:

"He's been keeping me at that loafer Paumelle's place every night, so as to stop my going home. It's some trick. Oh, you damned carrion!"

Slowly he got on his knees. A blind fury was gaining possession of him, mingling with the fumes of alcohol.

He continued:

"Tell me who it was, Melina, or you'll get a licking — I warn you!"

He was now standing, trembling with a wild fury, as though the alcohol had set his blood on fire. He took a step, knocked against a chair, seized it, went on, reached the bed, ran his hands over it and felt the warm body of his wife.

Then, maddened, he roared:

"So! You were there, you piece of dirt, and you wouldn't answer!"

And, lifting the chair, which he was holding in his strong sailor's grip, he swung it down before him with an exasperated fury. A cry burst from the bed, an agonizing, piercing cry. Then he began to thrash around like a thresher in a barn. And soon nothing more moved. The chair was broken to pieces, but he still held one leg and beat away with it, panting.

At last he stopped to ask:

"Well, are you ready to tell me who it was?"

Melina did not answer.

Then tired out, stupefied from his exertion, he stretched himself out on the ground and slept.

When day came a neighbor, seeing the door open, entered. He saw Jeremie snoring on the floor, amid the broken pieces of a chair, and on the bed a pulp of flesh and blood.

THE WARDROBE

As we sat chatting after dinner, a party of men, the conversation turned on women, for lack of something else.

One of us said:

"Here's a funny thing that happened to me on, that very subject." And he told us the following story:

One evening last winter I suddenly felt overcome by that overpowering sense of misery and languor that takes possession of one from time to time. I was in my own apartment, all alone, and I was convinced that if I gave in to my feelings I should have a terrible attack of melancholia, one of those attacks that lead to suicide when they recur too often.

I put on my overcoat and went out without the slightest idea of what I was going to do. Having gone as far as the boulevards, I began to wander along by the almost empty cafes. It was raining, a fine rain that affects your mind as it does your clothing, not one of those good downpours which come down in torrents, driving breathless passers-by into doorways, but a rain without drops that deposits on your clothing an imperceptible spray and soon covers you with a sort of iced foam that chills you through.

What should I do? I walked in one direction and then came back, looking for some place where I could spend two hours, and discovering for the first time that there is no place of amusement in Paris in the evening. At last I decided to go to the Folies-Bergere, that entertaining resort for gay women.

There were very few people in the main hall. In the long horseshoe curve there were only a few ordinary looking people, whose plebeian origin was apparent in their manners, their clothes, the cut of their hair and beard, their hats, their complexion. It was rarely that one saw from time to time a man whom you suspected of having washed himself thoroughly, and his whole make-up seemed to match. As for the women, they were always the same, those frightful women you all know, ugly, tired looking, drooping, and walking along in their lackadaisical manner, with that air of foolish superciliousness which they assume, I do not know why.

I thought to myself that, in truth, not one of those languid creatures, greasy rather than fat, puffed out here and thin there, with the contour of a monk and the lower extremities of a bow-legged snipe, was worth the louis that they would get with great difficulty after asking five.

But all at once I saw a little creature whom I thought attractive, not in her first youth, but fresh, comical and tantalizing. I stopped her, and stupidly, without thinking, I made an appointment with her for that night. I did not want to go back to my own home alone, all alone; I preferred the company and the caresses of this hussy.

And I followed her. She lived in a great big house in the Rue des Martyrs. The gas was already extinguished on the stairway. I ascended the steps slowly, lighting a candle match every few seconds, stubbing my foot against the steps, stumbling and angry as I followed the rustle of the skirt ahead of me.

She stopped on the fourth floor, and having closed the outer door she said:

"Then you will stay till to-morrow?"

"Why, yes. You know that that was the agreement."

"All right, my dear, I just wanted to know. Wait for me here a minute, I will be right back."

And she left me in the darkness. I heard her shutting two doors and then I thought I heard her talking. I was surprised and uneasy. The thought that she had a protector staggered me. But I have good fists and a solid back. "We shall see," I said to myself.

I listened attentively with ear and mind. Some one was stirring about, walking quietly and very carefully. Then another door was opened and I thought I again heard some one talking, but in a very low tone.

She came back carrying a lighted candle.

"You may come in," she said.

She said "thou" in speaking to me, which was an indication of possession. I went in and after passing through a dining room in which it was very evident that no one ever ate, I entered a typical room of all these women, a furnished room with red curtains and a soiled eiderdown bed covering.

"Make yourself at home, 'mon chat'," she said.

I gave a suspicious glance at the room, but there seemed no reason for uneasiness.

As she took off her wraps she began to laugh.

"Well, what ails you? Are you changed into a pillar of salt? Come, hurry up."

I did as she suggested.

Five minutes later I longed to put on my things and get away. But this terrible languor that had overcome me at home took possession of me again, and deprived me of energy enough to move and I stayed in spite of the disgust that I felt for this association. The unusual attractiveness that I supposed I had discovered in this creature over there under the chandeliers of the theater had altogether vanished on closer acquaintance, and she was nothing more to me now than a common woman, like all the others, whose indifferent and complaisant kiss smacked of garlic.

I thought I would say something.

"Have you lived here long?" I asked.

"Over six months on the fifteenth of January."

"Where were you before that?"

"In the Rue Clauzel. But the janitor made me very uncomfortable and I left."

And she began to tell me an interminable story of a janitor who had talked scandal about her.

But, suddenly, I heard something moving quite close to us. First there was a sigh, then a slight, but distinct, sound as if some one had turned round on a chair.

I sat up abruptly and asked.

"What was that noise?"

She answered quietly and confidently:

"Do not be uneasy, my dear boy, it is my neighbor. The partition is so thin that one can hear everything as if it were in the room. These are wretched rooms, just like pasteboard."

I felt so lazy that I paid no further attention to it. We resumed our conversation. Driven by the stupid curiosity that prompts all men to question these creatures about their first experiences, to attempt to lift the veil of their first folly, as though to find in them a trace of pristine innocence, to love them, possibly, in a fleeting memory of their candor and modesty of former days, evoked by a word, I insistently asked her about her earlier lovers.

I knew she was telling me lies. What did it matter? Among all these lies I might, perhaps, discover something sincere and pathetic.

“Come,” said I, “tell me who he was.”

“He was a boating man, my dear.”

“Ah! Tell me about it. Where were you?”

“I was at Argenteuil.”

“What were you doing?”

“I was waitress in a restaurant.”

“What restaurant?”

“‘The Freshwater Sailor.’ Do you know it?”

“I should say so, kept by Bonanfan.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“And how did he make love to you, this boating man?”

“While I was doing his room. He took advantage of me.”

But I suddenly recalled the theory of a friend of mine, an observant and philosophical physician whom constant attendance in hospitals has brought into daily contact with girl-mothers and prostitutes, with all the shame and all the misery of women, of those poor women who have become the frightful prey of the wandering male with money in his pocket.

“A woman,” he said, “is always debauched by a man of her own class and position. I have volumes of statistics on that subject. We accuse the rich of plucking the flower of innocence among the girls of the people. This is not correct. The rich pay for what they want. They may gather some, but never for the first time.”

Then, turning to my companion, I began to laugh.

“You know that I am aware of your history. The boating man was not the first.”

“Oh, yes, my dear, I swear it:”

“You are lying, my dear.”

“Oh, no, I assure you.”

“You are lying; come, tell me all.”

She seemed to hesitate in astonishment. I continued:

“I am a sorcerer, my dear girl, I am a clairvoyant. If you do not tell me the truth, I will go into a trance sleep and then I can find out.”

She was afraid, being as stupid as all her kind. She faltered:

“How did you guess?”

“Come, go on telling me,” I said.

“Oh, the first time didn’t amount to anything.

“There was a festival in the country. They had sent for a special chef, M. Alexandre. As soon as he came he did just as he pleased in the house. He bossed every one, even the proprietor and his wife, as if he had been a king. He was a big handsome man, who did not seem fitted to stand beside a kitchen range. He was always calling out, ‘Come, some butter — some eggs — some Madeira!’ And it had to be brought to him at once in a hurry, or he would get cross and say things that would make us blush all over.

“When the day was over he would smoke a pipe outside the door. And as I was passing by him with a pile of plates he said to me, like that: ‘Come, girlie, come down to the water with me and show me the country.’ I went with him like a fool, and we had hardly got down to the bank of the river when he took advantage of me so suddenly that I did not even know what he was doing. And then he went away on the nine o’clock train. I never saw him again.”

“Is that all?” I asked.

She hesitated.

“Oh, I think Florentin belongs to him.”

“Who is Florentin?”

“My little boy.”

“Oh! Well, then, you made the boating man believe that he was the father, did you not?”

“You bet!”

“Did he have any money, this boating man?”

“Yes, he left me an income of three hundred francs, settled on Florentin.”

I was beginning to be amused and resumed:

“All right, my girl, all right. You are all of you less stupid than one would imagine, all the same. And how old is he now, Florentin?”

She replied:

“He is now twelve. He will make his first communion in the spring.”

“That is splendid. And since then you have carried on your business conscientiously?”

She sighed in a resigned manner.

“I must do what I can.”

But a loud noise just then coming from the room itself made me start up with a bound. It sounded like some one falling and picking themselves up again by feeling along the wall with their hands.

I had seized the candle and was looking about me, terrified and furious. She had risen also and was trying to hold me back to stop me, murmuring:

"That's nothing, my dear, I assure you it's nothing."

But I had discovered what direction the strange noise came from. I walked straight towards a door hidden at the head of the bed and I opened it abruptly and saw before me, trembling, his bright, terrified eyes opened wide at sight of me, a little pale, thin boy seated beside a large wicker chair off which he had fallen.

As soon as he saw me he began to cry. Stretching out his arms to his mother, he cried:

"It was not my fault, mamma, it was not my fault. I was asleep, and I fell off. Do not scold me, it was not my fault."

I turned to the woman and said:

"What does this mean?"

She seemed confused and worried, and said in a broken voice:

"What do you want me to do? I do not earn enough to put him to school! I have to keep him with me, and I cannot afford to pay for another room, by heavens! He sleeps with me when I am alone. If any one comes for one hour or two he can stay in the wardrobe; he keeps quiet, he understands it. But when people stay all night, as you have done, it tires the poor child to sleep on a chair.

"It is not his fault. I should like to see you sleep all night on a chair — you would have something to say."

She was getting angry and excited and was talking loud.

The child was still crying. A poor delicate timid little fellow, a veritable child of the wardrobe, of the cold, dark closet, a child who from time to time was allowed to get a little warmth in the bed if it chanced to be unoccupied.

I also felt inclined to cry.

And I went home to my own bed.

THE MOUNTAIN POOL

Saint Agnes, May 6.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

You asked me to write to you often and to tell you in particular about the things I might see. You also begged me to rummage among my recollections of travels for some of those little anecdotes gathered from a chance peasant, from an innkeeper, from some strange traveling acquaintance, which remain as landmarks in the memory. With a landscape depicted in a few lines, and a little story told in a few sentences you think one can give the true characteristics of a country, make it living, visible, dramatic. I will try to do as you wish. I will, therefore, send you from time to time letters in which I will mention neither you nor myself, but only the landscape and the people who move about in it. And now I will begin.

Spring is a season in which one ought, it seems to me, to drink and eat the landscape. It is the season of chills, just as autumn is the season of reflection. In spring the country rouses the physical senses, in autumn it enters into the soul.

I desired this year to breathe the odor of orange blossoms and I set out for the South of France just at the time that every one else was returning home. I visited Monaco, the shrine of pilgrims, rival of Mecca and Jerusalem, without leaving any gold in any one else's pockets, and I climbed the high mountain beneath a covering of lemon, orange and olive branches.

Have you ever slept, my friend, in a grove of orange trees in flower? The air that one inhales with delight is a quintessence of perfumes. The strong yet sweet odor, delicious as some dainty, seems to blend with our being, to saturate us, to intoxicate us, to enervate us, to plunge us into a sleepy, dreamy torpor. As though it were an opium prepared by the hands of fairies and not by those of druggists.

This is a country of ravines. The surface of the mountains is cleft, hollowed out in all directions, and in these sinuous crevices grow veritable forests of lemon trees. Here and there where the steep gorge is interrupted by a sort of step, a kind of reservoir has been built which holds the water of the rain storms.

They are large holes with slippery walls with nothing for any one to grasp hold of should they fall in.

I was walking slowly in one of these ascending valleys or gorges, glancing through the foliage at the vivid-hued fruit that remained on the branches. The narrow gorge made the heavy odor of the flowers still more penetrating; the air seemed to be dense with it. A feeling of lassitude came over me and I looked for a place to sit down. A few drops of water glistened in the grass. I thought that there was a spring near by and I climbed a little further to look for it. But I only reached the edge of one of these large, deep reservoirs.

I sat down tailor fashion, with my legs crossed under me, and remained there in a reverie before this hole, which looked as if it were filled with ink, so black and stagnant was the liquid it contained. Down yonder, through the branches, I saw, like patches, bits of the Mediterranean gleaming so that they fairly dazzled my eyes. But my glance always returned to the immense somber well that appeared to be inhabited by no aquatic animals, so motionless was its surface. Suddenly a voice made me tremble. An old gentleman who was picking flowers — this country is the richest in Europe for herbalists — asked me:

"Are you a relation of those poor children, monsieur?"

I looked at him in astonishment.

"What children, monsieur?"

He seemed embarrassed and answered with a bow:

"I beg your pardon. On seeing you sitting thus absorbed in front of this reservoir I thought you were recalling the frightful tragedy that occurred here."

Now I wanted to know about it, and I begged him to tell me the story.

It is very dismal and very heart-rending, my dear friend, and very trivial at the same time. It is a simple news item. I do not know whether to attribute my emotion to the dramatic manner in which the story was told to me, to the setting of the mountains, to the contrast between the joy of the sunlight and the flowers and this black, murderous hole, but my heart was wrung, all my nerves unstrung by this tale which, perhaps, may not appear so terribly harrowing to you as you read it in your room without having the scene of the tragedy before your eyes.

It was one spring in recent years. Two little boys frequently came to play on the edge of this cistern while their tutor lay under a tree reading a book. One warm afternoon a piercing cry awoke the tutor who was dozing and the sound of splashing caused by something falling into the water made him jump to his feet abruptly. The younger of the children, eight years of age, was shouting, as he stood beside the reservoir, the surface of which was stirred and eddying at the spot where the older boy had fallen in as he ran along the stone coping.

Distracted, without waiting or stopping to think what was best to do, the tutor jumped into the black water and did not rise again, having struck his head at the bottom of the cistern.

At the same moment the young boy who had risen to the surface was waving his stretched-out arms toward his brother. The little fellow on land lay down full length, while the other tried to swim, to approach the wall, and presently the four little hands clasped each other, tightened in each other's grasp, contracted as though they were fastened together. They both felt the intense joy of an escape from death, a shudder at the danger past.

The older boy tried to climb up to the edge, but could not manage it, as the wall was perpendicular, and his brother, who was too weak, was sliding slowly towards the hole.

Then they remained motionless, filled anew with terror. And they waited.

The little fellow squeezed his brother's hands with all his might and wept from nervousness as he repeated: "I cannot drag you out, I cannot drag you out." And all at once he began to shout, "Help! Help!" But his light voice scarcely penetrated beyond the dome of foliage above their heads.

They remained thus a long time, hours and hours, facing each other, these two children, with one thought, one anguish of heart and the horrible dread that one of them, exhausted, might let go the hands of the other. And they kept on calling, but all in vain.

At length the older boy, who was shivering with cold, said to the little one: "I cannot hold out any longer. I am going to fall. Good-by, little brother." And the other, gasping, replied: "Not yet, not yet, wait."

Evening came on, the still evening with its stars mirrored in the water. The older lad, his endurance giving out, said: "Let go my hand, I am going to give you my watch.” He had received it as a present a few days before, and ever since it had been his chief amusement. He was able to get hold of it, and held it out to the little fellow who was sobbing and who laid it down on the grass beside him.

It was night now. The two unhappy beings, exhausted, had almost loosened their grasp. The elder, at last, feeling that he was lost, murmured once more: “Good-by, little brother, kiss mamma and papa.” And his numbed fingers relaxed their hold. He sank and did not rise again . . . . The little fellow, left alone, began to shout wildly: “Paul! Paul!” But the other did not come to the surface.

Then he darted across the mountain, falling among the stones, overcome by the most frightful anguish that can wring a child’s heart, and with a face like death reached the sitting-room, where his parents were waiting. He became bewildered again as he led them to the gloomy reservoir. He could not find his way. At last he reached the spot. “It is there; yes, it is there!”

But the cistern had to be emptied, and the proprietor would not permit it as he needed the water for his lemon trees.

The two bodies were found, however, but not until the next day.

You see, my dear friend, that this is a simple news item. But if you had seen the hole itself your heart would have been wrung, as mine was, at the thought of the agony of that child hanging to his brother’s hands, of the long suspense of those little chaps who were accustomed only to laugh and to play, and at the simple incident of the giving of the watch.

I said to myself: “May Fate preserve me from ever receiving a similar relic!” I know of nothing more terrible than such a recollection connected with a familiar object that one cannot dispose of. Only think of it; each time that he handles this sacred watch the survivor will picture once more the horrible scene; the pool, the wall, the still water, and the distracted face of his brother-alive, and yet as lost as though he were already dead. And all through his life, at any moment, the vision will be there, awakened the instant even the tip of his finger touches his watch pocket.

And I was sad until evening. I left the spot and kept on climbing, leaving the region of orange trees for the region of olive trees, and the region of olive trees for the region of pines; then I came to a valley of stones, and finally reached the ruins of an ancient castle, built, they say, in the tenth century by a Saracen chief, a good man, who was baptized a Christian through love for a young girl. Everywhere around me were mountains, and before me the sea, the sea with an almost imperceptible patch on it: Corsica, or, rather, the shadow of Corsica. But on the mountain summits, blood-red in the glow of the sunset, in the boundless sky and on the sea, in all this superb landscape that I had come here to admire I saw only two poor children, one lying prone on the edge of a hole filled with black water, the other submerged to his neck, their hands intertwined, weeping opposite each other, in despair. And it seemed as though I continually heard a weak, exhausted voice saying: “Good-by, little brother, I am going to give you my watch.”

This letter may seem rather melancholy, dear friend. I will try to be more cheerful some other day.

A CREMATION

Last Monday an Indian prince died at Etretat, Bapu Sahib Khanderao Ghatay, a relation of His Highness, the Maharajah Gaikwar, prince of Baroda, in the province of Guzerat, Presidency of Bombay.

For about three weeks there had been seen walking in the streets about ten young East Indians, small, lithe, with dark skins, dressed all in gray and wearing on their heads caps such as English grooms wear. They were men of high rank who had come to Europe to study the military institutions of the principal Western nations. The little band consisted of three princes, a nobleman, an interpreter and three servants.

The head of the commission had just died, an old man of forty-two and father-in-law of Sampatro Kashivao Gaikwar, brother of His Highness, the Gaikwar of Baroda.

The son-in-law accompanied his father-in-law.

The other East Indians were called Ganpatrao Shravanrao Gaikwar, cousin of His Highness Khasherao Gadhav; Vasudev Madhav Samarth, interpreter and secretary; the slaves: Ramchandra Bajaji, Ganu bin Pukiram Kokate, Rhambhaji bin Fabji.

On leaving his native land the one who died recently was overcome with terrible grief, and feeling convinced that he would never return he wished to give up the journey, but he had to obey the wishes of his noble relative, the Prince of Baroda, and he set out.

They came to spend the latter part of the summer at Etretat, and people would go out of curiosity every morning to see them taking their bath at the Etablissment des Roches-Blanches.

Five or six days ago Bapu Sahib Khanderao Ghatay was taken with pains in his gums; then the inflammation spread to the throat and became ulceration. Gangrene set in and, on Monday, the doctors told his young friends that their relative was dying. The final struggle was already beginning, and the breath had almost left the unfortunate man’s body when his friends seized him, snatched him from his bed and laid him on the stone floor of the room, so that, stretched out on the earth, our mother, he should yield up his soul, according to the command of Brahma.

They then sent to ask the mayor, M. Boissaye, for a permit to burn the body that very day so as to fulfill the prescribed ceremonial of the Hindoo religion. The mayor hesitated, telegraphed to the prefecture to demand instructions, at the same time sending word that a failure to reply would be considered by him tantamount to a consent. As he had received no reply at 9 o'clock that evening, he decided, in view of the infectious character of the disease of which the East Indian had died, that the cremation of the body should take place that very night, beneath the cliff, on the beach, at ebb tide.

The mayor is being criticized now for this decision, though he acted as an intelligent, liberal and determined man, and was upheld and advised by the three physicians who had watched the case and reported the death.

They were dancing at the Casino that evening. It was an early autumn evening, rather chilly. A pretty strong wind was blowing from the ocean, although as yet there was no sea on, and swift, light, ragged clouds were driving across the sky. They came from the edge of the horizon, looking dark against the background of the sky, but as they approached the moon they grew whiter and passed hurriedly across her face, veiling it for a few seconds without completely hiding it.

The tall straight cliffs that inclose the rounded beach of Etretat and terminate in two celebrated arches, called “the Gates,” lay in shadow, and made two great black patches in the softly lighted landscape.

It had rained all day.

The Casino orchestra was playing waltzes, polkas and quadrilles. A rumor was presently circulated among the groups of dancers. It was said that an East Indian prince had just died at the Hotel des Bains and that the ministry had been approached for permission to burn the body. No one believed it, or at least no one supposed that such a thing could occur so foreign was the custom as yet to our customs, and as the night was far advanced every one went home.

At midnight, the lamplighter, running from street to street, extinguished, one after another, the yellow jets of flame that lighted up the sleeping houses, the mud and the puddles of water. We waited, watching for the hour when the little town should be quiet and deserted.

Ever since noon a carpenter had been cutting up wood and asking himself with amazement what was going to be done with all these planks sawn up into little bits, and why one should destroy so much good merchandise. This wood was piled up in a cart which went along through side streets as far as the beach, without arousing the suspicion of belated persons who might meet it. It went along on the shingle at the foot of the cliff, and having dumped its contents on the beach the three Indian servants began to build a funeral pile, a little longer than it was wide. They worked alone, for no profane hand must aid in this solemn duty.

It was one o'clock in the morning when the relations of the deceased were informed that they might accomplish their part of the work.

The door of the little house they occupied was open, and we perceived, lying on a stretcher in the small, dimly lighted vestibule the corpse covered with white silk. We could see him plainly as he lay stretched out on his back, his outline clearly defined beneath this white veil.

The East Indians, standing at his feet, remained motionless, while one of them performed the prescribed rites, murmuring unfamiliar words in a low, monotonous tone. He walked round and round the corpse; touching it occasionally, then, taking an urn suspended from three slender chains, he sprinkled it for some time with the sacred water of the Ganges, that East Indians must always carry with them wherever they go.

Then the stretcher was lifted by four of them who started off at a slow march. The moon had gone down, leaving the muddy, deserted streets in darkness, but the body on the stretcher appeared to be luminous, so dazzlingly white was the silk, and it was a weird sight to see, passing along through the night, the semi-luminous form of this corpse, borne by those men, the dusky skin of whose faces and hands could scarcely be distinguished from their clothing in the darkness.

Behind the corpse came three Indians, and then, a full head taller than themselves and wrapped in an ample traveling coat of a soft gray color, appeared the outline of an Englishman, a kind and superior man, a friend of theirs, who was their guide and counselor in their European travels.

Beneath the cold, misty sky of this little northern beach I felt as if I were taking part in a sort of symbolical drama. It seemed to me that they were carrying there, before me, the conquered genius of India, followed, as in a funeral procession, by the victorious genius of England robed in a gray ulster.

On the shingly beach the four bearers halted a few moments to take breath, and then proceeded on their way. They now walked quickly, bending beneath the weight of their burden. At length they reached the funeral pile. It was erected in an indentation, at the very foot of the cliff, which rose above it perpendicularly a hundred meters high, perfectly white but looking gray in the night.

The funeral pile was about three and a half feet high. The corpse was placed on it and then one of the Indians asked to have the pole star pointed out to him. This was done, and the dead Rajah was laid with his feet turned towards his native country. Then twelve bottles of kerosene were poured over him and he was covered completely with thin slabs of pine wood. For almost another hour the relations and servants kept piling up the funeral pyre which looked like one of those piles of wood that carpenters keep in their yards. Then on top of this was poured the contents of twenty bottles of oil, and on top of all they emptied a bag of fine shavings. A few steps further on, a flame was glimmering in a little bronze brazier, which had remained lighted since the arrival of the corpse.

The moment had arrived. The relations went to fetch the fire. As it was barely alight, some oil was poured on it, and suddenly a flame arose lighting up the great wall of rock from summit to base. An Indian who was leaning over the brazier rose upright, his two hands in the air, his elbows bent, and all at once we saw arising, all black on the immense white cliff, a colossal shadow, the shadow of Buddha in his hieratic posture. And the little pointed toque that the man wore on his head even looked like the head-dress of the god.

The effect was so striking and unexpected that I felt my heart beat as though some supernatural apparition had risen up before me.

That was just what it was — the ancient and sacred image, come from the heart of the East to the ends of Europe, and watching over its son whom they were going to cremate there.

It vanished. They brought fire. The shavings on top of the pyre were lighted and then the wood caught fire and a brilliant light illumined the cliff, the shingle and the foam of the waves as they broke on the beach.

It grew brighter from second to second, lighting up on the sea in the distance the dancing crest of the waves.

The breeze from the ocean blew in gusts, increasing the heat of the flame which flattened down, twisted, then shot up again, throwing out millions of sparks. They mounted with wild rapidity along the cliff and were lost in the sky, mingling with the stars, increasing their number. Some sea birds who had awakened uttered their plaintive cry, and, describing long curves, flew, with their white wings extended, through the gleam from the funeral pyre and then disappeared in the night.

Before long the pile of wood was nothing but a mass of flame, not red but yellow, a blinding yellow, a furnace lashed by the wind. And, suddenly, beneath a stronger gust, it tottered, partially crumbling as it leaned towards the sea, and the corpse came to view, full length, blackened on his couch of flame and burning with long blue flames:

The pile of wood having crumbled further on the right the corpse turned over as a man does in bed. They immediately covered him with fresh wood and the fire started up again more furiously than ever.

The East Indians, seated in a semi-circle on the shingle, looked out with sad, serious faces. And the rest of us, as it was very cold, had drawn nearer to the fire until the smoke and sparks came in our faces. There was no odor save that of burning pine and petroleum.

Hours passed; day began to break. Toward five o'clock in the morning nothing remained but a heap of ashes. The relations gathered them up, cast some of them to the winds, some in the sea, and kept some in a brass vase that they had brought from India. They then retired to their home to give utterance to lamentations.

These young princes and their servants, by the employment of the most inadequate appliances succeeded in carrying out the cremation of their relation in the most perfect manner, with singular skill and remarkable dignity. Everything was done according to ritual, according to the rigid ordinances of their religion. Their dead one rests in peace.

The following morning at daybreak there was an indescribable commotion in Etretat. Some insisted that they had burned a man alive, others that they were trying to hide a crime, some that the mayor would be put in jail, others that the Indian prince had succumbed to an attack of cholera.

The men were amazed, the women indignant. A crowd of people spent the day on the site of the funeral pile, looking for fragments of bone in the shingle that was still warm. They found enough bones to reconstruct ten skeletons, for the farmers on shore frequently throw their dead sheep into the sea. The finders carefully placed these various fragments in their pocketbooks. But not one of them possesses a true particle of the Indian prince.

That very night a deputy sent by the government came to hold an inquest. He, however, formed an estimate of this singular case like a man of intelligence and good sense. But what should he say in his report?

The East Indians declared that if they had been prevented in France from cremating their dead they would have taken him to a freer country where they could have carried out their customs.

Thus, I have seen a man cremated on a funeral pile, and it has given me a wish to disappear in the same manner.

In this way everything ends at once. Man expedites the slow work of nature, instead of delaying it by the hideous coffin in which one decomposes for months. The flesh is dead, the spirit has fled. Fire which purifies disperses in a few hours all that was a human being; it casts it to the winds, converting it into air and ashes, and not into ignominious corruption.

This is clean and hygienic. Putrefaction beneath the ground in a closed box where the body becomes like pap, a blackened, stinking pap, has about it something repugnant and disgusting. The sight of the coffin as it descends into this muddy hole wrings one’s heart with anguish. But the funeral pyre which flames up beneath the sky has about it something grand, beautiful and solemn.

MISTI

I was very much interested at that time in a droll little woman. She was married, of course, as I have a horror of unmarried flirts. What enjoyment is there in making love to a woman who belongs to nobody and yet belongs to any one? And, besides, morality aside, I do not understand love as a trade. That disgusts me somewhat.

The especial attraction in a married woman to a bachelor is that she gives him a home, a sweet, pleasant home where every one takes care of you and spoils you, from the husband to the servants. One finds everything combined there, love, friendship, even fatherly interest, bed and board, all, in fact, that constitutes the happiness of life, with this incalculable advantage, that one can change one's family from time to time, take up one's abode in all kinds of society in turn: in summer, in the country with the workman who rents you a room in his house; in winter with the townsfolk, or even with the nobility, if one is ambitious.

I have another weakness; it is that I become attached to the husband as well as the wife. I acknowledge even that some husbands, ordinary or coarse as they may be, give me a feeling of disgust for their wives, however charming they may be. But when the husband is intellectual or charming I invariably become very much attached to him. I am careful if I quarrel with the wife not to quarrel with the husband. In this way I have made some of my best friends, and have also proved in many cases the incontestable superiority of the male over the female in the human species. The latter makes all sorts of trouble-scenes, reproaches, etc.; while the former, who has just as good a right to complain, treats you, on the contrary, as though you were the special Providence of his hearth.

Well, my friend was a quaint little woman, a brunette, fanciful, capricious, pious, superstitious, credulous as a monk, but charming. She had a way of kissing one that I never saw in any one else — but that was not the attraction — and such a soft skin! It gave me intense delight merely to hold her hands. And an eye — her glance was like a slow caress, delicious and unending. Sometimes I would lean my head on her knee and we would remain motionless, she leaning over me with that subtle, enigmatic, disturbing smile that women have, while my eyes would be raised to hers, drinking sweetly and deliciously into my heart, like a form of intoxication, the glance of her limpid blue eyes, limpid as though they were full of thoughts of love, and blue as though they were a heaven of delights.

Her husband, inspector of some large public works, was frequently away from home and left us our evenings free. Sometimes I spent them with her lounging on the divan with my forehead on one of her knees; while on the other lay an enormous black cat called "Misti," whom she adored. Our fingers would meet on the cat's back and would intertwine in her soft silky fur. I felt its warm body against my cheek, trembling with its eternal purring, and occasionally a paw would reach out and place on my mouth, or my eyelid, five unsheathed claws which would prick my eyelids, and then be immediately withdrawn.

Sometimes we would go out on what we called our escapades. They were very innocent, however. They consisted in taking supper at some inn in the suburbs, or else, after dining at her house or at mine, in making the round of the cheap cafes, like students out for a lark.

We would go into the common drinking places and take our seats at the end of the smoky den on two rickety chairs, at an old wooden table. A cloud of pungent smoke, with which blended an odor of fried fish from dinner, filled the room. Men in smocks were talking in loud tones as they drank their petits verres, and the astonished waiter placed before us two cherry brandies.

She, trembling, charmingly afraid, would raise her double black veil as far as her nose, and then take up her glass with the enjoyment that one feels at doing something delightfully naughty. Each cherry she swallowed made her feel as if she had done something wrong, each swallow of the burning liquor had on her the affect of a delicate and forbidden enjoyment.

Then she would say to me in a low tone: "Let us go." And we would leave, she walking quickly with lowered head between the drinkers who watched her going by with a look of displeasure. And as soon as we got into the street she would give a great sigh of relief, as if we had escaped some terrible danger.

Sometimes she would ask me with a shudder:

"Suppose they, should say something rude to me in those places, what would you do?" "Why, I would defend you, parbleu!" I would reply in a resolute manner. And she would squeeze my arm for happiness, perhaps with a vague wish that she might be insulted and protected, that she might see men fight on her account, even those men, with me!

One evening as we sat at a table in a tavern at Montmartre, we saw an old woman in tattered garments come in, holding in her hand a pack of dirty cards. Perceiving a lady, the old woman at once approached us and offered to tell my friend's fortune. Emma, who in her heart believed in everything, was trembling with longing and anxiety, and she made a place beside her for the old woman.

The latter, old, wrinkled, her eyes with red inflamed rings round them, and her mouth without a single tooth in it, began to deal her dirty cards on the table. She dealt them in piles, then gathered them up, and then dealt them out again, murmuring indistinguishable words. Emma, turning pale, listened with bated breath, gasping with anxiety and curiosity.

The fortune-teller broke silence. She predicted vague happenings: happiness and children, a fair young man, a voyage, money, a lawsuit, a dark man, the return of some one, success, a death. The mention of this death attracted the younger woman's attention. "Whose death? When? In what manner?"

The old woman replied: "Oh, as to that, these cards are not certain enough. You must come to my place to-morrow; I will tell you about it with coffee grounds which never make a mistake."

Emma turned anxiously to me:

"Say, let us go there to-morrow. Oh, please say yes. If not, you cannot imagine how worried I shall be."

I began to laugh.

"We will go if you wish it, dearie."

The old woman gave us her address. She lived on the sixth floor, in a wretched house behind the Buttes-Chaumont. We went there the following day.

Her room, an attic containing two chairs and a bed, was filled with strange objects, bunches of herbs hanging from nails, skins of animals, flasks and phials containing liquids of various colors. On the table a stuffed black cat looked out of eyes of glass. He seemed like the demon of this sinister dwelling.

Emma, almost fainting with emotion, sat down on a chair and exclaimed:

"Oh, dear, look at that cat; how like it is to Misti."

And she explained to the old woman that she had a cat "exactly like that, exactly like that!"

The old woman replied gravely:

"If you are in love with a man, you must not keep it."

Emma, suddenly filled with fear, asked:

"Why not?"

The old woman sat down familiarly beside her and took her hand.

"It was the undoing of my life," she said.

My friend wanted to hear about it. She leaned against the old woman, questioned her, begged her to tell. At length the woman agreed to do so.

"I loved that cat," she said, "as one would love a brother. I was young then and all alone, a seamstress. I had only him, Mouton. One of the tenants had given it to me. He was as intelligent as a child, and gentle as well, and he worshiped me, my dear lady, he worshiped me more than one does a fetish. All day long he would sit on my lap purring, and all night long on my pillow; I could feel his heart beating, in fact.

"Well, I happened to make an acquaintance, a fine young man who was working in a white-goods house. That went on for about three months on a footing of mere friendship. But you know one is liable to weaken, it may happen to any one, and, besides, I had really begun to love him. He was so nice, so nice, and so good. He wanted us to live together, for economy's sake. I finally allowed him to come and see me one evening. I had not made up my mind to anything definite; oh, no! But I was pleased at the idea that we should spend an hour together.

"At first he behaved very well, said nice things to me that made my heart go pit-a-pat. And then he kissed me, madame, kissed me as one does when they love. I remained motionless, my eyes closed, in a paroxysm of happiness. But, suddenly, I felt him start violently and he gave a scream, a scream that I shall never forget. I opened my eyes and saw that Mouton had sprung at his face and was tearing the skin with his claws as if it had been a linen rag. And the blood was streaming down like rain, madame.

"I tried to take the cat away, but he held on tight, scratching all the time; and he bit me, he was so crazy. I finally got him and threw him out of the window, which was open, for it was summer.

"When I began to bathe my poor friend's face, I noticed that his eyes were destroyed, both his eyes!

"He had to go to the hospital. He died of grief at the end of a year. I wanted to keep him with me and provide for him, but he would not agree to it. One would have supposed that he hated me after the occurrence.

"As for Mouton, his back was broken by the fall, The janitor picked up his body. I had him stuffed, for in spite of all I was fond of him. If he acted as he did it was because he loved me, was it not?"

The old woman was silent and began to stroke the lifeless animal whose body trembled on its iron framework.

Emma, with sorrowful heart, had forgotten about the predicted death — or, at least, she did not allude to it again, and she left, giving the woman five francs.

As her husband was to return the following day, I did not go to the house for several days. When I did go I was surprised at not seeing Misti. I asked where he was.

She blushed and replied:

"I gave him away. I was uneasy."

I was astonished.

"Uneasy? Uneasy? What about?"

She gave me a long kiss and said in a low tone:

"I was uneasy about your eyes, my dear."

Misti appeared in. Gil Blas of January 22, 1884, over the signature of "MAUFRIGNEUSE."

MADAME HERMET

Crazy people attract me. They live in a mysterious land of weird dreams, in that impenetrable cloud of dementia where all that they have witnessed in their previous life, all they have loved, is reproduced for them in an imaginary existence, outside of all laws that govern the things of this life and control human thought.

For them there is no such thing as the impossible, nothing is improbable; fairyland is a constant quantity and the supernatural quite familiar. The old rampart, logic; the old wall, reason; the old main stay of thought, good sense, break down, fall and crumble before their imagination, set free and escaped into the limitless realm of fancy, and advancing with fabulous bounds, and nothing can check it. For them everything happens, and anything may happen. They make no effort to conquer events, to overcome resistance, to overturn obstacles. By a sudden caprice of their flighty imagination they become princes, emperors, or gods, are possessed of all the wealth of the world, all the delightful things of life, enjoy all pleasures, are always strong, always beautiful, always young, always beloved! They, alone, can be happy in this world; for, as far as they are concerned, reality does not exist. I love to look into their wandering intelligence as one leans over an abyss at the bottom of which seethes a foaming torrent whose source and destination are both unknown.

But it is in vain that we lean over these abysses, for we shall never discover the source nor the destination of this water. After all, it is only water, just like what is flowing in the sunlight, and we shall learn nothing by looking at it.

It is likewise of no use to ponder over the intelligence of crazy people, for their most weird notions are, in fact, only ideas that are already known, which appear strange simply because they are no longer under the restraint of reason. Their whimsical source surprises us because we do not see it bubbling up. Doubtless the dropping of a little stone into the current was sufficient to cause these ebullitions. Nevertheless crazy people attract me and I always return to them, drawn in spite of myself by this trivial mystery of dementia.

One day as I was visiting one of the asylums the physician who was my guide said:

“Come, I will show you an interesting case.”

And he opened the door of a cell where a woman of about forty, still handsome, was seated in a large armchair, looking persistently at her face in a little hand mirror.

As soon as she saw us she rose to her feet, ran to the other end of the room, picked up a veil that lay on a chair, wrapped it carefully round her face, then came back, nodding her head in reply to our greeting.

“Well,” said the doctor, “how are you this morning?”

She gave a deep sigh.

“Oh, ill, monsieur, very ill. The marks are increasing every day.”

He replied in a tone of conviction:

“Oh, no; oh, no; I assure you that you are mistaken.”

She drew near to him and murmured:

“No. I am certain of it. I counted ten pittings more this morning, three on the right cheek, four on the left cheek, and three on the forehead. It is frightful, frightful! I shall never dare to let any one see me, not even my son; no, not even him! I am lost, I am disfigured forever.”

She fell back in her armchair and began to sob.

The doctor took a chair, sat down beside her, and said soothingly in a gentle tone:

“Come, let me see; I assure you it is nothing. With a slight cauterization I will make it all disappear.”

She shook her head in denial, without speaking. He tried to touch her veil, but she seized it with both hands so violently that her fingers went through it.

He continued to reason with her and reassure her.

“Come, you know very well that I remove those horrid pits every time and that there is no trace of them after I have treated them. If you do not let me see them I cannot cure you.”

“I do not mind your seeing them,” she murmured, “but I do not know that gentleman who is with you.”

“He is a doctor also, who can give you better care than I can.”

She then allowed her face to be uncovered, but her dread, her emotion, her shame at being seen brought a rosy flush to her face and her neck, down to the collar of her dress. She cast down her eyes, turned her face aside, first to the right; then to the left, to avoid our gaze and stammered out:

“Oh, it is torture to me to let myself be seen like this! It is horrible, is it not? Is it not horrible?”

I looked at her in much surprise, for there was nothing on her face, not a mark, not a spot, not a sign of one, nor a scar.

She turned towards me, her eyes still lowered, and said:

“It was while taking care of my son that I caught this fearful disease, monsieur. I saved him, but I am disfigured. I sacrificed my beauty to him, to my poor child. However, I did my duty, my conscience is at rest. If I suffer it is known only to God.”

The doctor had drawn from his coat pocket a fine water-color paint brush.

“Let me attend to it,” he said, “I will put it all right.”

She held out her right cheek, and he began by touching it lightly with the brush here and there, as though he were putting little points of paint on it. He did the same with the left cheek, then with the chin, and the forehead, and then exclaimed:

“See, there is nothing there now, nothing at all!”

She took up the mirror, gazed at her reflection with profound, eager attention, with a strong mental effort to discover something, then she sighed:

“No. It hardly shows at all. I am infinitely obliged to you.”

The doctor had risen. He bowed to her, ushered me out and followed me, and, as soon as he had locked the door, said:

“Here is the history of this unhappy woman.”

Her name is Mme. Hermet. She was once very beautiful, a great coquette, very much beloved and very much in-love with life.

She was one of those women who have nothing but their beauty and their love of admiration to sustain, guide or comfort them in this life. The constant anxiety to retain her freshness, the care of her complexion, of her hands, her teeth, of every portion of body that was visible, occupied all her time and all her attention.

She became a widow, with one son. The boy was brought up as are all children of society beauties. She was, however, very fond of him.

He grew up, and she grew older. Whether she saw the fatal crisis approaching, I cannot say. Did she, like so many others, gaze for hours and hours at her skin, once so fine, so transparent and free from blemish, now beginning to shrivel slightly, to be crossed with a thousand little lines, as yet imperceptible, that will grow deeper day by day, month by month? Did she also see slowly, but surely, increasing traces of those long wrinkles on the forehead, those slender serpents that nothing can check? Did she suffer the torture, the abominable torture of the mirror, the little mirror with the silver handle which one cannot make up one's mind to lay down on the table, but then throws down in disgust only to take it up again in order to look more closely, and still more closely at the hateful and insidious approaches of old age? Did she shut herself up ten times, twenty times a day, leaving her friends chatting in the drawing-room, and go up to her room where, under the protection of bolts and bars, she would again contemplate the work of time on her ripe beauty, now beginning to wither, and recognize with despair the gradual progress of the process which no one else had as yet seemed to perceive, but of which she, herself, was well aware. She knows where to seek the most serious, the gravest traces of age. And the mirror, the little round hand-glass in its carved silver frame, tells her horrible things; for it speaks, it seems to laugh, it jeers and tells her all that is going to occur, all the physical discomforts and the atrocious mental anguish she will suffer until the day of her death, which will be the day of her deliverance.

Did she weep, distractedly, on her knees, her forehead to the ground, and pray, pray, pray to Him who thus slays his creatures and gives them youth only that he may render old age more unendurable, and lends them beauty only that he may withdraw it almost immediately? Did she pray to Him, imploring Him to do for her what He has never yet done for any one, to let her retain until her last day her charm, her freshness and her gracefulness? Then, finding that she was imploring in vain an inflexible Unknown who drives on the years, one after another, did she roll on the carpet in her room, knocking her head against the furniture and stifling in her throat shrieks of despair?

Doubtless she suffered these tortures, for this is what occurred:

One day (she was then thirty-five) her son aged fifteen, fell ill.

He took to his bed without any one being able to determine the cause or nature of his illness.

His tutor, a priest, watched beside him and hardly ever left him, while Mme. Hermet came morning and evening to inquire how he was.

She would come into the room in the morning in her night wrapper, smiling, all powdered and perfumed, and would ask as she entered the door:

"Well, George, are you better?"

The big boy, his face red, swollen and showing the ravages of fever, would reply:

"Yes, little mother, a little better."

She would stay in the room a few seconds, look at the bottles of medicine, and purse her lips as if she were saying "phew," and then would suddenly exclaim: "Oh, I forgot something very important," and would run out of the room leaving behind her a fragrance of choice toilet perfumes.

In the evening she would appear in a decollete dress, in a still greater hurry, for she was always late, and she had just time to inquire:

"Well, what does the doctor say?"

The priest would reply:

"He has not yet given an opinion, madame."

But one evening the abbe replied: "Madame, your son has got the small-pox."

She uttered a scream of terror and fled from the room.

When her maid came to her room the following morning she noticed at once a strong odor of burnt sugar, and she found her mistress, with wide-open eyes, her face pale from lack of sleep, and shivering with terror in her bed.

As soon as the shutters were opened Mme. Herrnet asked:

"How is George?"

"Oh, not at all well to-day, madame."

She did not rise until noon, when she ate two eggs with a cup of tea, as if she herself had been ill, and then she went out to a druggist's to inquire about prophylactic measures against the contagion of small-pox.

She did not come home until dinner time, laden with medicine bottles, and shut herself up at once in her room, where she saturated herself with disinfectants.

The priest was waiting for her in the dining-room. As soon as she saw him she exclaimed in a voice full of emotion:

"Well?"

"No improvement. The doctor is very anxious:"

She began to cry and could eat nothing, she was so worried.

The next day, as soon as it was light, she sent to inquire for her son, but there was no improvement and she spent the whole day in her room, where little braziers were giving out pungent odors. Her maid said also that you could hear her sighing all the evening.

She spent a whole week in this manner, only going out for an hour or two during the afternoon to breathe the air.

She now sent to make inquiries every hour, and would sob when the reports were unfavorable.

On the morning of the eleventh day the priest, having been announced, entered her room, his face grave and pale, and said, without taking the chair she offered him:

“Madame, your son is very ill and wishes to see you.”

She fell on her knees, exclaiming:

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God! I would never dare! My God! My God! Help me!”

The priest continued:

“The doctor holds out little hope, madame, and George is expecting you!”

And he left the room.

Two hours later as the young lad, feeling himself dying, again asked for his mother, the abbe went to her again and found her still on her knees, still weeping and repeating:

“I will not . . . . I will not. . . . I am too much afraid . . . . I will not. . . .”

He tried to persuade her, to strengthen her, to lead her. He only succeeded in bringing on an attack of “nerves” that lasted some time and caused her to shriek.

The doctor when he came in the evening was told of this cowardice and declared that he would bring her in himself, of her own volition, or by force. But after trying all manner of argument and just as he seized her round the waist to carry her into her son’s room, she caught hold of the door and clung to it so firmly that they could not drag her away. Then when they let go of her she fell at the feet of the doctor, begging his forgiveness and acknowledging that she was a wretched creature. And then she exclaimed: “Oh, he is not going to die; tell me that he is not going to die, I beg of you; tell him that I love him, that I worship him. . .”

The young lad was dying. Feeling that he had only a few moments more to live, he entreated that his mother be persuaded to come and bid him a last farewell. With that sort of presentiment that the dying sometimes have, he had understood, had guessed all, and he said: “If she is afraid to come into the room, beg her just to come on the balcony as far as my window so that I may see her, at least, so that I may take a farewell look at her, as I cannot kiss her.”

The doctor and the abbe, once more, went together to this woman and assured her: “You will run no risk, for there will be a pane of glass between you and him.”

She consented, covered up her head, and took with her a bottle of smelling salts. She took three steps on the balcony; then, all at once, hiding her face in her hands, she moaned: “No . . . no . . . I would never dare to look at him . . . never. . . . I am too much ashamed . . . too much afraid . . . . No . . . I cannot.”

They endeavored to drag her along, but she held on with both hands to the railings and uttered such plaints that the passers-by in the street raised their heads. And the dying boy waited, his eyes turned towards that window, waited to die until he could see for the last time the sweet, beloved face, the worshiped face of his mother.

He waited long, and night came on. Then he turned over with his face to the wall and was silent.

When day broke he was dead. The day following she was crazy.

THE MAGIC COUCH

The Seine flowed past my house, without a ripple on its surface, and gleaming in the bright morning sunlight. It was a beautiful, broad, indolent silver stream, with crimson lights here and there; and on the opposite side of the river were rows of tall trees that covered all the bank with an immense wall of verdure.

The sensation of life which is renewed each day, of fresh, happy, loving life trembled in the leaves, palpitated in the air, was mirrored in the water.

The postman had just brought my papers, which were handed to me, and I walked slowly to the river bank in order to read them.

In the first paper I opened I noticed this headline, "Statistics of Suicides," and I read that more than 8,500 persons had killed themselves in that year.

In a moment I seemed to see them! I saw this voluntary and hideous massacre of the despairing who were weary of life. I saw men bleeding, their jaws fractured, their skulls cloven, their breasts pierced by a bullet, slowly dying, alone in a little room in a hotel, giving no thought to their wound, but thinking only of their misfortunes.

I saw others seated before a tumbler in which some matches were soaking, or before a little bottle with a red label.

They would look at it fixedly without moving; then they would drink and await the result; then a spasm would convulse their cheeks and draw their lips together; their eyes would grow wild with terror, for they did not know that the end would be preceded by so much suffering.

They rose to their feet, paused, fell over and with their hands pressed to their stomachs they felt their internal organs on fire, their entrails devoured by the fiery liquid, before their minds began to grow dim.

I saw others hanging from a nail in the wall, from the fastening of the window, from a hook in the ceiling, from a beam in the garret, from a branch of a tree amid the evening rain. And I surmised all that had happened before they hung there motionless, their tongues hanging out of their mouths. I imagined the anguish of their heart, their final hesitation, their attempts to fasten the rope, to determine that it was secure, then to pass the noose round their neck and to let themselves fall.

I saw others lying on wretched beds, mothers with their little children, old men dying of hunger, young girls dying for love, all rigid, suffocated, asphyxiated, while in the center of the room the brasier still gave forth the fumes of charcoal.

And I saw others walking at night along the deserted bridges. These were the most sinister. The water flowed under the arches with a low sound. They did not see it . . . they guessed at it from its cool breath! They longed for it and they feared it. They dared not do it! And yet, they must. A distant clock sounded the hour and, suddenly, in the vast silence of the night, there was heard the splash of a body falling into the river, a scream or two, the sound of hands beating the water, and all was still. Sometimes, even, there was only the sound of the falling body when they had tied their arms down or fastened a stone to their feet. Oh, the poor things, the poor things, the poor things, how I felt their anguish, how I died in their death! I went through all their wretchedness; I endured in one hour all their tortures. I knew all the sorrows that had led them to this, for I know the deceitful infamy of life, and no one has felt it more than I have.

How I understood them, these who weak, harassed by misfortune, having lost those they loved, awakened from the dream of a tardy compensation, from the illusion of another existence where God will finally be just, after having been ferocious, and their minds disabused of the mirages of happiness, have given up the fight and desire to put an end to this ceaseless tragedy, or this shameful comedy.

Suicide! Why, it is the strength of those whose strength is exhausted, the hope of those who no longer believe, the sublime courage of the conquered! Yes, there is at least one door to this life we can always open and pass through to the other side. Nature had an impulse of pity; she did not shut us up in prison. Mercy for the despairing!

As for those who are simply disillusioned, let them march ahead with free soul and quiet heart. They have nothing to fear since they may take their leave; for behind them there is always this door that the gods of our illusions cannot even lock.

I thought of this crowd of suicides: more than eight thousand five hundred in one year. And it seemed to me that they had combined to send to the world a prayer, to utter a cry of appeal, to demand something that should come into effect later when we understood things better. It seemed to me that all these victims, their throats cut, poisoned, hung, asphyxiated, or drowned, all came together, a frightful horde, like citizens to the polls, to say to society:

“Grant us, at least, a gentle death! Help us to die, you who will not help us to live! See, we are numerous, we have the right to speak in these days of freedom, of philosophic independence and of popular suffrage. Give to those who renounce life the charity of a death that will not be repugnant nor terrible.”

I began to dream, allowing my fancy to roam at will in weird and mysterious fashion on this subject.

I seemed to be all at once in a beautiful city. It was Paris; but at what period? I walked about the streets, looking at the houses, the theaters, the public buildings, and presently found myself in a square where I remarked a large building; very handsome, dainty and attractive. I was surprised on reading on the facade this inscription in letters of gold, “Suicide Bureau.”

Oh, the weirdness of waking dreams where the spirit soars into a world of unrealities and possibilities! Nothing astonishes one, nothing shocks one; and the unbridled fancy makes no distinction between the comic and the tragic.

I approached the building where footmen in knee-breeches were seated in the vestibule in front of a cloak-room as they do at the entrance of a club.

I entered out of curiosity. One of the men rose and said:

“What does monsieur wish?”

“I wish to know what building this is.”

“Nothing more?”

“Why, no.”

“Then would monsieur like me to take him to the Secretary of the Bureau?”

I hesitated, and asked:

“But will not that disturb him?”

“Oh, no, monsieur, he is here to receive those who desire information.”

“Well, lead the way.”

He took me through corridors where old gentlemen were chatting, and finally led me into a beautiful office, somewhat somber, furnished throughout in black wood. A stout young man with a corporation was writing a letter as he smoked a cigar, the fragrance of which gave evidence of its quality.

He rose. We bowed to each other, and as soon as the footman had retired he asked:

“What can I do for you?”

“Monsieur,” I replied, “pardon my curiosity. I had never seen this establishment. The few words inscribed on the facade filled me with astonishment, and I wanted to know what was going on here.”

He smiled before replying, then said in a low tone with a complacent air:

“Mon Dieu, monsieur, we put to death in a cleanly and gentle — I do not venture to say agreeable manner those persons who desire to die.”

I did not feel very shocked, for it really seemed to me natural and right. What particularly surprised me was that on this planet, with its low, utilitarian, humanitarian ideals, selfish and coercive of all true freedom, any one should venture on a similar enterprise, worthy of an emancipated humanity.

“How did you get the idea?” I asked.

“Monsieur,” he replied, “the number of suicides increased so enormously during the five years succeeding the world exposition of 1889 that some measures were urgently needed. People killed themselves in the streets, at fetes, in restaurants, at the theater, in railway carriages, at the receptions held by the President of the Republic, everywhere. It was not only a horrid sight for those who love life, as I do, but also a bad example for children. Hence it became necessary to centralize suicides.”

“What caused this suicidal epidemic?”

“I do not know. The fact is, I believe, the world is growing old. People begin to see things clearly and they are getting disgruntled. It is the same to-day with destiny as with the government, we have found out what it is; people find that they are swindled in every direction, and they just get out of it all. When one discovers that Providence lies, cheats, robs, deceives human beings just as a plain Deputy deceives his constituents, one gets angry, and as one cannot nominate a fresh Providence every three months as we do with our privileged representatives, one just gets out of the whole thing, which is decidedly bad.”

“Really!”

“Oh, as for me, I am not complaining.”

“Will you inform me how you carry on this establishment?”

"With pleasure. You may become a member when you please. It is a club."

"A club!"

"Yes, monsieur, founded by the most eminent men in the country, by men of the highest intellect and brightest intelligence. And," he added, laughing heartily, "I swear to you that every one gets a great deal of enjoyment out of it."

"In this place?"

"Yes, in this place."

"You surprise me."

"Mon Dieu, they enjoy themselves because they have not that fear of death which is the great killjoy in all our earthly pleasures."

"But why should they be members of this club if they do not kill themselves?"

"One may be a member of the club without being obliged for that reason to commit suicide."

"But then?"

"I will explain. In view of the enormous increase in suicides, and of the hideous spectacle they presented, a purely benevolent society was formed for the protection of those in despair, which placed at their disposal the facilities for a peaceful, painless, if not unforeseen death."

"Who can have authorized such an institution?"

"General Boulanger during his brief tenure of power. He could never refuse anything. However, that was the only good thing he did. Hence, a society was formed of clear-sighted, disillusioned skeptics who desired to erect in the heart of Paris a kind of temple dedicated to the contempt for death. This place was formerly a dreaded spot that no one ventured to approach. Then its founders, who met together here, gave a grand inaugural entertainment with Mmes. Sarah Bernhardt, Judic, Theo, Granier, and twenty others, and Mme. de Reske, Coquelin, Mounet-Sully, Paulus, etc., present, followed by concerts, the comedies of Dumas, of Meilhac, Halevy and Sardon. We had only one thing to mar it, one drama by Becque which seemed sad, but which subsequently had a great success at the Comedie-Francaise. In fact all Paris came. The enterprise was launched."

"In the midst of the festivities! What a funereal joke!"

"Not at all. Death need not be sad, it should be a matter of indifference. We made death cheerful, crowned it with flowers, covered it with perfume, made it easy. One learns to aid others through example; one can see that it is nothing."

"I can well understand that they should come to the entertainments; but did they come to . . . Death?"

"Not at first; they were afraid."

"And later?"

"They came."

"Many of them?"

"In crowds. We have had more than forty in a day. One finds hardly any more drowned bodies in the Seine."

"Who was the first?"

"A club member."

"As a sacrifice to the cause?"

"I don't think so. A man who was sick of everything, a 'down and out' who had lost heavily at baccarat for three months."

"Indeed?"

"The second was an Englishman, an eccentric. We then advertised in the papers, we gave an account of our methods, we invented some attractive instances. But the great impetus was given by poor people."

"How do you go to work?"

"Would you like to see? I can explain at the same time."

"Yes, indeed."

He took his hat, opened the door, allowed me to precede him, and we entered a card room, where men sat playing as they, play in all gambling places. They were chatting cheerfully, eagerly. I have seldom seen such a jolly, lively, mirthful club.

As I seemed surprised, the secretary said:

"Oh, the establishment has an unheard of prestige. All the smart people all over the world belong to it so as to appear as though they held death in scorn. Then, once they get here, they feel obliged to be cheerful that they may not appear to be afraid. So they joke and laugh and talk flippantly, they are witty and they become so. At present it is certainly the most frequented and the most entertaining place in Paris. The women are even thinking of building an annex for themselves."

"And, in spite of all this, you have many suicides in the house?"

"As I said, about forty or fifty a day. Society people are rare, but poor devils abound. The middle class has also a large contingent.

"And how . . . do they do?"

"They are asphyxiated . . . very slowly."

"In what manner?"

"A gas of our own invention. We have the patent. On the other side of the building are the public entrances — three little doors opening on small streets. When a man or a woman present themselves they are interrogated. Then they are offered assistance, aid, protection. If a client accepts, inquiries are made; and sometimes we have saved their lives."

"Where do you get your money?"

"We have a great deal. There are a large number of shareholders. Besides it is fashionable to contribute to the establishment. The names of the donors are published in Figaro. Then the suicide of every rich man costs a thousand francs. And they look as if they were lying in state. It costs the poor nothing."

"How can you tell who is poor?"

"Oh, oh, monsieur, we can guess! And, besides, they must bring a certificate of indigency from the commissary of police of their district. If you knew how distressing it is to see them come in! I visited their part of our building once only, and I will never go again. The place itself is almost as good as this part, almost as luxurious and comfortable; but they themselves . . . they themselves!!! If you could see them arriving, the old men in rags coming to die; persons who have been dying of misery for months, picking up their food at the edges of the curbstone like dogs in the street; women in rags, emaciated, sick, paralyzed, incapable of making a living, who say to us after they have told us their story: 'You see that things cannot go on like that, as I cannot work any longer or earn anything.' I saw one woman of eighty-seven who had lost all her children and grandchildren, and who for the last six weeks had been sleeping out of doors. It made me ill to hear of it. Then we have so many different cases, without counting those who say nothing, but simply ask: 'Where is it?' These are admitted at once and it is all over in a minute."

With a pang at my heart I repeated:

"And . . . where is it?"

"Here," and he opened a door, adding:

"Go in; this is the part specially reserved for club members, and the one least used. We have so far had only eleven annihilations here."

"Ah! You call that an . . . annihilation!"

“Yes, monsieur. Go in.”

I hesitated. At length I went in. It was a wide corridor, a sort of greenhouse in which panes of glass of pale blue, tender pink and delicate green gave the poetic charm of landscapes to the inclosing walls. In this pretty salon there were divans, magnificent palms, flowers, especially roses of balmy fragrance, books on the tables, the Revue des Deuxmondes, cigars in government boxes, and, what surprised me, Vichy pastilles in a bonbonniere.

As I expressed my surprise, my guide said:

“Oh, they often come here to chat.” He continued: “The public corridors are similar, but more simply furnished.”

In reply to a question of mine, he pointed to a couch covered with creamy crepe de Chine with white embroidery, beneath a large shrub of unknown variety at the foot of which was a circular bed of mignonette.

The secretary added in a lower tone:

“We change the flower and the perfume at will, for our gas, which is quite imperceptible, gives death the fragrance of the suicide’s favorite flower. It is volatilized with essences. Would you like to inhale it for a second?”

“‘No, thank you,” I said hastily, “not yet . . . .”

He began to laugh.

“Oh, monsieur, there is no danger. I have tried it myself several times.”

I was afraid he would think me a coward, and I said:

“Well, I’ll try it.”

“Stretch yourself out on the ‘endormeuse.”’

A little uneasy I seated myself on the low couch covered with crepe de Chine and stretched myself full length, and was at once bathed in a delicious odor of mignonette. I opened my mouth in order to breathe it in, for my mind had already become stupefied and forgetful of the past and was a prey, in the first stages of asphyxia, to the enchanting intoxication of a destroying and magic opium.

Some one shook me by the arm.

“Oh, oh, monsieur,” said the secretary, laughing, “it looks to me as if you were almost caught.”

But a voice, a real voice, and no longer a dream voice, greeted me with the peasant intonation:

“Good morning, m’sieu. How goes it?”

My dream was over. I saw the Seine distinctly in the sunlight, and, coming along a path, the garde champetre of the district, who with his right hand touched his kepi braided in silver. I replied:

“Good morning, Marinel. Where are you going?”

“I am going to look at a drowned man whom they fished up near the Morillons. Another who has thrown himself into the soup. He even took off his trousers in order to tie his legs together with them.” his trousers in order to tie his legs together with them.”

NO QUARTER

OR

OLD MILON

The broad sunlight threw its burning rays on the fields, and under this shower of flame life burst forth in glowing vegetation from the earth. As far as the eye could see, the soil was green; and the sky was blue to the verge of the horizon. The Norman farms scattered through the plain seemed at a distance like little woods inclosed each in a circle of thin beech-trees. Coming closer, on opening the worm-eaten stile, one fancied that he saw a giant garden, for all the old apple-trees, as knotted as the peasants, were in blossom. The weather-beaten black trunks, crooked, twisted, ranged along the inclosure, displayed beneath the sky their glittering domes, rosy and white. The sweet perfume of their blossoms mingled with the heavy odors of the open stables and with the fumes of the steaming dunghill, covered with hens and their chickens. It was midday. The family sat at dinner in the shadow of the pear-tree planted before the door — the father, the mother, the four children, the two maidservants, and the three farm laborers. They scarcely uttered a word. Their fare consisted of soup and of a stew composed of potatoes mashed up in lard.

From time to time one of the maidservants rose up, and went to the cellar to fetch a pitcher of cider.

The husband, a big fellow of about forty, stared at a vine-tree, quite exposed to view, which stood close to the farmhouse, twining like a serpent under the shutters the entire length of the wall.

He said, after a long silence:

“The father’s vine-tree is blossoming early this year. Perhaps it will bear good fruit.”

The peasant's wife also turned round, and gazed at the tree without speaking.

This vine-tree was planted exactly in the place where the father of the peasant had been shot.

It was during the war of 1870. The Prussians were in occupation of the entire country. General Faidherbe, with the Army of the North, was at their head.

Now the Prussian staff had taken up its quarters in this farmhouse. The old peasant who owned it, Père Milon, received them, and gave them the best treatment he could.

For a whole month the German vanguard remained on the lookout in the village. The French were posted ten leagues away without moving, and yet, each night, some of the uhlans disappeared.

All the isolated scouts, those who were sent out on patrol, whenever they started in groups of two or three, never came back.

They were picked up dead in the morning in a field, near a farmyard, in a ditch. Their horses even were found lying on the roads with their throats cut by a saber stroke. These murders seemed to have been accomplished by the same men, who could not be discovered.

The country was terrorized. Peasants were shot on mere information, women were imprisoned, attempts were made to obtain revelations from children by fear.

But, one morning, Père Milon was found stretched in his stable with a gash across his face.

Two uhlans ripped open were seen lying three kilometers away from the farmhouse. One of them still grasped in his hand his blood-stained weapon. He had fought and defended himself.

A council of war having been immediately constituted, in the open air, in front of the farmhouse, the old man was brought before it.

He was sixty-eight years old. He was small, thin, a little crooked, with long hands resembling the claws of a crab. His faded hair, scanty and slight, like the down on a young duck, allowed his scalp to be plainly seen. The brown, crimpled skin of his neck showed the big veins which sank under his jaws and reappeared at his temples. He was regarded in the district as a miser and a hard man in business transactions.

He was placed standing between four soldiers in front of the kitchen table, which had been carried out of the house for the purpose. Five officers and the Colonel sat facing him. The Colonel was the first to speak.

"Père Milon," he said, in French, "since we came here we have had nothing to say of you but praise. You have always been obliging, and even considerate toward us. But to-day a terrible accusation rests on you, and the matter must be cleared up. How did you get the wound on your face?"

The peasant gave no reply.

The Colonel went on:

"Your silence condemns you, Père Milon. But I want you to answer me, do you understand? Do you know who has killed the two uhlans who were found this morning near the crossroads?"

The old man said in a clear voice:

"It was I!"

The Colonel, surprised, remained silent for a second, looking steadfully at the prisoner. Père Milon maintained his impassive demeanor, his air of rustic stupidity, with downcast eyes, as if he were talking to his cure. There was only one thing that could reveal his internal agitation, the way in which he slowly swallowed his saliva with a visible effort, as if he were choking.

The old peasant's family — his son Jean, his daughter-in-law, and two little children stood ten paces behind, scared and dismayed.

The Colonel continued:

"Do you know also who killed all the scouts of our army whom we have found every morning, for the past month, lying here and there in the fields?"

The old man answered with the same brutal impassiveness:

"It was I!"

"It is you, then, that killed them all?"

"All of them-yes, it was I."

"You alone?"

"I alone."

"Tell me the way you managed to do it?"

This time the peasant appeared to be affected; the necessity of speaking at some length incommoded him.

"I know myself. I did it the way I found easiest."

The Colonel proceeded:

"I warn you, you must tell me everything. You will do well, therefore, to make up your mind about it at once. How did you begin it?"

The peasant cast an uneasy glance toward his family, who remained in a listening attitude behind him. He hesitated for another second or so, then all of a sudden he came to a resolution on the matter.

"I came home one night about ten o'clock, and the next day you were here. You and your soldiers gave me fifty crowns for forage with a cow and two sheep. Said I to myself: 'As long as I get twenty crowns out of them, I'll sell them the value of it.' But then I had other things in my heart, which I'll tell you about now. I came across one of your cavalrymen smoking his pipe near my dike, just behind my barn. I went and took my scythe off the hook, and I came back with short steps from behind, while he lay there without hearing anything. And I cut off his head with one stroke, like a feather, while he only said 'Oof!' You have only to look at the bottom of the pond; you'll find him there in a coal bag with a big stone tied to it.

"I got an idea into my head. I took all he had on him from his boots to his cap, and I hid them in the bakehouse in the Martin wood behind the farmyard."

The old man stopped. The officers, speechless, looked at one another. The examination was resumed, and this is what they were told.

Once he had accomplished this murder, the peasant lived with only one thought: "To kill the Prussians!" He hated them with the sly and ferocious hatred of a countryman who was at the same time covetous and patriotic. He had got an idea into his head, as he put it. He waited for a few days.

He was allowed to go and come freely, to go out and return just as he pleased, as long as he displayed humility, submissiveness, and complaisance toward the conquerors.

Now, every evening he saw the cavalrymen bearing dispatches leaving the farmhouse; and he went out, one night, after discovering the name of the village to which they were going, and after picking up by associating with the soldiers the few words of German he needed.

He made his way through his farmyard, slipped into the wood, reached the bakehouse, penetrated to the end of the long passage, and having found the clothes of the soldier which he had hidden there, he put them on. Then he went prowling about the fields, creeping along, keeping to the slopes so as to avoid observation, listening to the least sounds, restless as a poacher.

When he believed the time had arrived he took up his position at the roadside, and hid himself in a clump of brushwood. He still waited. At length, near midnight, he heard the galloping of a horse's hoofs on the hard soil of the road. The old man put his ear to the ground to make sure that only one cavalryman was approaching; then he got ready.

The uhlan came on at a very quick pace, carrying some dispatches. He rode forward with watchful eyes and strained ears. As soon as he was no more than ten paces away, Père Milon dragged himself across the road, groaning: “Hilfe! hilfe!” (“Help! help!”).

The cavalryman drew up, recognized a German soldier dismounted, believed that he was wounded, leaped down from his horse, drew near the prostrate man, never suspecting anything, and, as he stooped over the stranger, he received in the middle of the stomach the long, curved blade of the saber. He sank down without any death throes, merely quivering with a few last shudders.

Then the Norman, radiant with the mute joy of an old peasant, rose up, and merely to please himself, cut the dead soldier’s throat. After that, he dragged the corpse to the dike and threw it in.

The horse was quietly waiting for its rider, Père Milon got on the saddle and started across the plain at the gallop.

At the end of an hour, he perceived two more uhlans approaching the staff-quarters side by side. He rode straight toward them, crying: “Hilfe! hilfe!” The Prussians let him come on, recognizing the uniform without any distrust.

And like a cannon ball the old man shot between the two, bringing both of them to the ground with his saber and a revolver. The next thing he did was to cut the throats of the horses — the German horses! Then, softly he re-entered the bakehouse and hid the horse he had ridden himself in the dark passage. There he took off the uniform, put on once more his own old clothes, and going to his bed, slept till morning.

For four days, he did not stir out, awaiting the close of the open inquiry as to the cause of the soldiers’ deaths; but, on the fifth day, he started out again, and by a similar stratagem killed two more soldiers.

Thenceforth, he never stopped. Each night he wandered about, prowled through the country at random, cutting down some Prussians, sometimes here, sometimes there, galloping through the deserted fields under the moonlight, a lost uhlan, a hunter of men. Then, when he had finished his task, leaving behind him corpses lying along the roads, the old horseman went to the bakehouse where he concealed both the animal and the uniform. About midday he calmly returned to the spot to give the horse a feed of oats and some water, and he took every care of the animal, exacting therefore the hardest work.

But, the night before his arrest, one of the soldiers he attacked put himself on his guard, and cut the old peasant’s face with a slash of a saber.

He had, however, killed both of them. He had even managed to go back and hide his horse and put on his everyday garb, but, when he reached the stable, he was overcome by weakness and was not able to make his way into the house.

He had been found lying on the straw, his face covered with blood.

When he had finished his story, he suddenly lifted his head and glanced proudly at the Prussian officers.

The Colonel, tugging at his mustache, asked:

“Have you anything more to say?”

“No, nothing more; we are quits. I killed sixteen, not one more, not one less.”

“You know you have to die?”

“I ask for no quarter!”

“Have you been a soldier?”

“Yes, I served at one time. And ’tis you killed my father, who was a soldier of the first Emperor, not to speak of my youngest son François, whom you killed last month near Evreux. I owed this to you, and I’ve paid you back. ’Tis tit for tat!”

The officers stared at one another.

The old man went on:

“Eight for my father, eight for my son — that pays it off! I sought for no quarrel with you. I don’t know you! I only know where you came from. You came to my house here and ordered me about as if the house was yours. I have had my revenge, and I’m glad of it!”

And stiffening up his old frame, he folded his arms in the attitude of a humble hero.

The Prussians held a long conference. A captain, who had also lost a son the month before defended the brave old farmer.

Then the Colonel rose up, and, advancing toward Père Milon, he said, lowering his voice:

“Listen, old man! There is perhaps one way of saving your life — it is— “

But the old peasant was not listening to him, and, fixing his eyes directly on the German officer, while the wind made the scanty hair move to and fro on his skull, he made a frightful grimace, which shriveled up his pinched countenance scarred by the saber-stroke, and, puffing out his chest, he spat, with all his strength, right into the Prussian’s face.

The Colonel, stupefied, raised his hand, and for the second time the peasant spat in his face.

All the officers sprang to their feet and yelled out orders at the same time.

In less than a minute the old man, still as impassive as ever, was stuck up against the wall and shot, while he cast a smile at Jean, his eldest son, and then at his daughter-in-law and the two children, who were staring with terror at the scene.

A LIVELY FRIEND

They had beer, constantly in each other's society for a whole winter in Paris. After having lost sight of each other, as generally happens in such cases, after leaving college, the two friends met again one night, long years after, already old and white-haired, the one a bachelor, the other married.

M. de Meroul lived six months in Paris and six months in his little château at Tourbeville. Having married the daughter of a gentleman in the district, he had lived a peaceful, happy life with the indolence of a man who has nothing to do. With a calm temperament and a sedate mind, without any intellectual audacity or tendency toward revolutionary independence of thought, he passed his time in mildly regretting the past, in deploring the morals and the institutions of to-day, and in repeating every moment to his wife, who raised her eyes to heaven, and sometimes her hands also, in token of energetic assent:

"Under what a government do we live, great God!"

Madame de Meroul mentally resembled her husband, just as if they had been brother and sister. She knew by tradition that one ought, first of all, to reverence the Pope and the King!

And she loved them and respected them from the bottom of her heart, without knowing them, with a poetic exaltation, with a hereditary devotion, with all the sensibility of a well-born woman. She was kindly in every feeling of her soul. She had no child, and was incessantly regretting it.

When M. de Meroul came across his old schoolfellow Joseph Mouradour at a ball, he experienced from this meeting a profound and genuine delight, for they had been very fond of one another in their youth.

After exclamations of astonishment over the changes caused by age in their bodies and their faces, they had asked one another a number of questions as to their respective careers.

Joseph Mouradour, a native of the south of France, had become a councillor-general in his own neighborhood. Frank in his manners, he spoke briskly and without any circumspection, telling all his thoughts with sheer indifference to prudential considerations. He was a Republican, of that race of good-natured Republicans who make their own ease the law of their existence, and who carry freedom of speech to the verge of brutality.

He called at his friend's address in Paris, and was immediately a favorite, on account of his easy cordiality, in spite of his advanced opinions. Madame de Meroul exclaimed:

"What a pity! such a charming man!"

M. de Meroul said to his friend, in a sincere and confidential tone: "You cannot imagine what a wrong you do to our country." He was attached to his friend nevertheless, for no bonds are more solid than those of childhood renewed in later life. Joseph Mouradour chaffed the husband and wife, called them "my loving turtles," and occasionally gave vent to loud declarations against people who were behind the age, against all sorts of prejudices and traditions.

When he thus directed the flood of his democratic eloquence, the married pair, feeling ill at ease, kept silent through a sense of propriety and good-breeding; then the husband tried to turn off the conversation in order to avoid any friction. Joseph Mouradour did not want to know anyone unless he was free to say what he liked.

Summer came round. The Merouls knew no greater pleasure than to receive their old friends in their country house at Tourbeville. It was an intimate and healthy pleasure, the pleasure of homely gentlefolk who had spent most of their lives in the country. They used to go to the nearest railway station to meet some of their guests, and drove them to the house in their carriage, watching for compliments on their district, on the rapid vegetation, on the condition of the roads in the department, on the cleanliness of the peasants' houses, on the bigness of the cattle they saw in the fields, on everything that met the eye as far as the edge of the horizon.

They liked to have it noticed that their horse trotted in a wonderful manner for an animal employed a part of the year in field-work; and they awaited with anxiety the newcomer's opinion on their family estate, sensitive to the slightest word, grateful for the slightest gracious attention.

Joseph Mouradour was invited, and he announced his arrival. The wife and the husband came to meet the train, delighted to have the opportunity of doing the honors of their house.

As soon as he perceived them, Joseph Mouradour jumped out of his carriage with a vivacity which increased their satisfaction. He grasped their hands warmly, congratulated them, and intoxicated them with compliments.

He was quite charming in his manner as they drove along the road to the house; he expressed astonishment at the height of the trees, the excellence of the crops, and the quickness of the horse.

When he placed his foot on the steps in front of the chateau, M. de Meroul said to him with a certain friendly solemnity:

"Now you are at home."

Joseph Mouradour answered: "Thanks, old fellow; I counted on that. For my part, besides, I never put myself out with my friends. That's the only hospitality I understand."

Then he went up to his own room, where he put on the costume of a peasant, as he was pleased to describe it, and he came down again not very long after, attired in blue linen, with yellow boots, in the careless rig-out of a Parisian out for a holiday. He seemed, too, to have become more common, more jolly, more familiar, having assumed along with his would-be rustic garb a free and easy swagger which he thought suited the style of dress. His new apparel somewhat shocked M. and Madame de Meroul, who even at home on their estate always remained serious and respectable, as the particle "de" before their name exacted a certain amount of ceremonial even with their intimate friends.

After lunch they went to visit the farms; and the Parisian stupefied the respectable peasants by talking to them as if he were a comrade of theirs.

In the evening, the curé dined at the house — a fat old priest, wearing his Sunday suit, who had been specially asked that day in order to meet the newcomer.

When Joseph saw him he made a grimace, then he stared at the priest in astonishment as if he belonged to some peculiar race of beings, the like of which he had never seen before at such close quarters. He told a few stories allowable enough with a friend after dinner, but apparently somewhat out of place in the presence of an ecclesiastic. He did not say, "Monsieur l'Abbé," but merely "Monsieur"; and he embarrassed the priest with philosophical views as to the various superstitions that prevailed on the surface of the globe.

He remarked:

"Your God, Monsieur, is one of those persons whom we must respect, but also one of those who must be discussed. Mine is called Reason; he has from time immemorial been the enemy of yours."

The Merouls, greatly put out, attempted to divert his thoughts. The curé left very early.

Then the husband gently remarked:

"You went a little too far with that priest."

But Joseph immediately replied:

"That's a very good joke, too! Am I to bother my brains about a devil-dodger? At any rate, do me the favor of not ever again having such an old fogy to dinner. Confound his impudence!"

"But, my friend, remember his sacred character."

Joseph Mouradour interrupted him:

"Yes, I know. We must treat them like girls who get roses for being well behaved! That's all right, my boy! When these people respect my convictions, I will respect theirs!"

This was all that happened that day.

Next morning Madame de Meroul, on entering her drawing-room, saw lying on the table three newspapers which made her draw back in horror, "Le Voltaire," "La République Française," and "La Justice."

Presently Joseph Mouradour, still in his blue blouse, appeared on the threshold, reading "L'Intransigéant" attentively. He exclaimed:

"Here is a splendid article by Rochefort. That fellow is marvelous."

He read the article in a loud voice, laying so much stress on its most striking passages that he did not notice the entrance of his friend.

M. de Meroul had a paper in each hand: "Le Gaulois" for himself and "Le Clarion" for his wife.

The ardent prose of the master-writer who overthrew the empire, violently declaimed, recited in the accent of the south, rang through the peaceful drawing-room, shook the old curtains with their rigid folds, seemed to splash the walls, the large upholstered chairs, the solemn furniture fixed in the same position for the past century, with a hail of words, rebounding, impudent, ironical, and crushing.

The husband and the wife, the one standing, the other seated, listened in a state of stupor, so scandalized that they no longer even ventured to make a gesture. Mouradour flung out the concluding passage in the article as one sets off a stream of fireworks; then in an emphatic tone he remarked:

"That's a stinger, eh?"

But suddenly he perceived the two prints belonging to his friend, and he seemed himself for a moment overcome with astonishment. Then he came across to his host with great strides, demanding in an angry tone:

"What do you want to do with these papers?"

M. de. Meroul replied in a hesitating voice:

"Why, these — these are my — my newspapers."

"Your newspapers! Look here, now, you are only laughing at me! You will do me the favor to read mine, to stir you up with a few new ideas, and, as for yours — this is what I do with them— "

And before his host, filled with confusion, could prevent him, he seized the two newspapers and flung them out through the window. Then he gravely placed "La Justice" in the hands of Madame de Meroul and "Le Voltaire" in those of her husband, himself sinking into an armchair to finish "L'Intransigéant."

The husband and the wife, through feelings of delicacy, made a show of reading a little, then they handed back the Republican newspapers which they touched with their finger-tips as if they had been poisoned.

Then Mouradour burst out laughing, and said:

"A week of this sort of nourishment, and I'll have you converted to my ideas."

At the end of a week, in fact, he ruled the house. He had shut the door on the curé, whom Madame de Meroul went to see in secret. He gave orders that neither the "Gaulois" nor the "Clarion" were to be admitted into the house, which a manservant went to get in a mysterious fashion at the post-office, and which, on his entrance, were hidden away under the sofa cushions. He regulated everything just as he liked, always charming, always good-natured, a jovial and all-powerful tyrant.

Other friends were about to come on a visit, religious people with Legitimist opinions. The master and mistress of the chateau considered it would be impossible to let them meet their lively guest, and not knowing what to do, announced to Joseph Mouradour one evening that they were obliged to go away from home for a few days about a little matter of business, and they begged of him to remain in the house alone.

He showed no trace of emotion, and replied:

"Very well; 'tis all the same to me; I'll wait here for you as long as you like. What I say is this — there need be no ceremony between friends.

You’re quite right to look after your own affairs — why the devil shouldn’t you? I’ll not take offense at your doing that, quite the contrary. It only makes me feel quite at my ease with you. Go, my friends — I’ll wait for you.”

M. and Madame de Meroul started next morning.

He is waiting for them.

HE?

My dear friend, you cannot understand it by any possible means, you say, and I perfectly believe you. You think I am going mad? It may be so, but not for the reasons which you suppose.

Yes, I am going to get married, and I will give you what has led me to take that step.

My ideas and my convictions have not changed at all. I look upon all legalized cohabitation as utterly stupid, for I am certain that nine husbands out of ten are cuckolds; and they get no more than their deserts for having been idiotic enough to fetter their lives, and renounce their freedom in love, the only happy and good thing in the world, and for having clipped the wings of fancy, which continually drives us on towards all women, &c., &c., &c. You know what I mean. More than ever I feel that I am incapable of loving one woman alone, because I shall always adore all the others too much. I should like to have a thousand arms, a thousand mouths, and a thousand — *temperaments*, to be able to strain an army of these charming creatures in my embrace at the same moment.

And yet I am going to get married!

I may add that I know very little of the girl who is going to become my wife to-morrow; I have only seen her four or five times. I know that there is nothing unpleasing about her, and that is enough for my purpose. She is small, fair, and stout; so of course the day after to-morrow I shall ardently wish for a tall, dark, thin woman.

She is not rich, and belongs to the middle-classes. She is a girl such as you may find by the gross, well adapted for matrimony, without any apparent faults, and with no particularly striking qualities. People say of her:

“Mlle. Lajolle is a very nice girl,” and to-morrow they will say: “What a very nice woman Madame Raymon is.” She belongs, in a word, to that immense number of girls whom one is glad to have for one’s wife till the moment comes, when one discovers that one happens to prefer all the other women to that particular woman whom one has married.

“Well,” you will say to me, “what on earth did you get married for?”

I hardly like to tell you the strange and seemingly improbable reason that urged me on to this senseless act; the fact, however, is that I am frightened of being alone!

I don’t know how to tell you or to make you understand me, but my state of mind is so wretched that you will pity me and despise me.

I do not want to be alone any longer at night; I want to feel that there is someone close to me, touching me, a being who can speak and say something, no matter what it be.

I wish to be able to awaken somebody by my side, so that I may be able to ask some sudden question, a stupid question even if I feel inclined, so that I may hear a human voice, and feel that there is some waking soul close to me, someone whose reason is at work; so that when I hastily light the candle I may see some human face by my side — because — because — I am ashamed to confess it — because I am afraid of being alone.

Oh! you don’t understand me yet.

I am not afraid of any danger; if a man were to come into the room I should kill him without trembling. I am not afraid of ghosts, nor do I believe in the supernatural. I am not afraid of dead people, for I believe in the total annihilation of every being that disappears from the face of this earth.

Well, — yes, well, it must be told; I am afraid of myself, afraid of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible fear.

You may laugh, if you like. It is terrible, and I cannot get over it. I am afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of the familiar objects, which are animated, as far as I am concerned, by a kind of animal life. Above all, I am afraid of my own dreadful thoughts, of my reason, which seems as if it were about to leave me, driven away by a mysterious and invisible agony.

At first I feel a vague uneasiness in my mind which causes a cold shiver to run all over me. I look round, and of course nothing is to be seen, and I wish there were something there, no matter what, as long as it were something tangible: I am frightened, merely because I cannot understand my own terror.

If I speak, I am afraid of my own voice. If I walk, I am afraid of I know not what, behind the door, behind the curtains, in the cupboard, or under my bed, and yet all the time I know there is nothing anywhere, and I turn round suddenly because I am afraid of what is behind me, although there is nothing there, and I know it.

I get agitated; I feel that my fear increases, and so I shut myself up in my own room, get into bed, and hide under the clothes, and there, cowering down rolled into a ball, I close my eyes in despair, and remain thus for an indefinite time, remembering that my candle is alight on the table by my bedside, and that I ought to put it out, and yet — I dare not do it!

It is very terrible, is it not, to be like that?

Formerly I felt nothing of all that; I came home quite comfortably, and went up and down in my rooms without anything disturbing my calmness of mind. Had anyone told me that I should be attacked by a malady — for I can call it nothing else — of most improbable fear, such a stupid and terrible malady as it is, I should have laughed outright. I was certainly never afraid of opening the door in the dark; I went to bed slowly without locking it, and never got up in the middle of the night to make sure that everything was firmly closed.

It began last year in a very strange manner, on a damp autumn evening. When my servant had left the room, after I had dined, I asked myself what I was going to do. I walked up and down my room for some time, feeling tired without any reason for it, unable to work, and even without energy to read. A fine rain was falling, and I felt unhappy, a prey to one of those fits of despondency, without any apparent cause which makes us feel inclined to cry, or to talk, no matter to whom, so as to shake off our depressing thoughts.

I felt that I was alone, and my rooms seemed to me to be more empty than they had ever done before, while I was surrounded by a sensation of infinite and overwhelming solitude. What was I to do? I sat down, but then a kind of nervous impatience agitated my legs, so I got up and began to walk about again. I was rather feverish, for my hands, which I had clasped behind me, as one often does when walking slowly, almost seemed to burn one another. Then suddenly a cold shiver ran down my back, and I thought the damp air might have penetrated into my room, so I lit the fire for the first time that year, and sat down again and looked at the flames. But soon I felt that I could not possibly remain quiet, and so I got up again and determined to go out, to pull myself together, and to find a friend to bear me company.

I could not find anyone, so I went on to the boulevards to try and meet some acquaintance or other there.

It was wretched everywhere, and the wet pavement glistened in the gaslight, while the oppressive warmth of the almost impalpable rain lay heavily over the streets and seemed to obscure the light from the lamps.

I went on slowly, saying to myself, “I shall not find a soul to talk to.”

I glanced into several cafés, from the Madeleine as far as the Faubourg Poissonière, and saw many unhappy-looking individuals sitting at the tables, who did not seem even to have enough energy left to finish the refreshments they had ordered.

For a long time I wandered aimlessly up and down, and about midnight I started off for home; I was very calm and very tired. My concierge opened the door at once, which was quite unusual for him, and I thought that another lodger had no doubt just come in.

When I go out I always double-lock the door of my room, and I found it merely closed, which surprised me; but I supposed that some letters had been brought up for me in the course of the evening.

I went in, and found my fire still burning, so that it lighted up the room a little, and, in the act of taking up a candle, I noticed somebody sitting in my armchair by the fire, warming his feet, with his back towards me.

I was not in the slightest degree frightened. I thought very naturally that some friend or other had come to see me. No doubt the porter, whom I had told when I went out, had lent him his own key. In a moment I remembered all the circumstances of my return, how the street door had been opened immediately, and that my own door was only latched, and not locked.

I could see nothing of my friend but his head, and he had evidently gone to sleep while waiting for me, so I went up to him to rouse him. I saw him quite clearly; his right arm was hanging down and his legs were crossed, while his head, which was somewhat inclined to the left of the armchair, seemed to indicate that he was asleep. “Who can it be?” I asked myself. I could not see clearly, as the room was rather dark, so I put out my hand to touch him on the shoulder, and it came in contact with the back of the chair. There was nobody there; the seat was empty.

I fairly jumped with fright. For a moment I drew back as if some terrible danger had suddenly appeared in my way; then I turned round again, impelled by some imperious desire of looking at the armchair again, and I remained standing upright, panting with fear, so upset that I could not collect my thoughts, and ready to drop.

But I am a cool man, and soon recovered myself. I thought: “It is a mere hallucination, that is all,” and I immediately began to reflect about this phenomenon. Thoughts fly very quickly at such moments.

I had been suffering from a hallucination, that was an incontestable fact. My mind had been perfectly lucid and had acted regularly and logically, so there was nothing the matter with the brain. It was only my eyes that had been deceived; they had had a vision, one of those visions which lead simple folk to believe in miracles. It was a nervous accident to the optical apparatus, nothing more; the eyes were rather congested, perhaps.

I lit my candle, and when I stooped down to the fire in so doing, I noticed that I was trembling, and I raised myself up with a jump, as if somebody had touched me from behind.

I was certainly not by any means quiet.

I walked up and down a little, and hummed a tune or two.

Then I double-locked my door, and felt rather reassured; now, at any rate, nobody could come in.

I sat down again, and thought over my adventure for a long time; then I went to bed, and blew out my light.

For some minutes all went well; I lay quietly on my back, but then an irresistible desire seized me to look round the room, and I turned on to my side.

My fire was nearly out, and the few glowing embers threw a faint light on to the floor by the chair, where I fancied I saw the man sitting again.

I quickly struck a match, but I had been mistaken, for there was nothing there; I got up, however, and hid the chair behind my bed, and tried to get to sleep as the room was now dark, but I had not forgotten myself for more than five minutes when in my dream I saw all the scene which I had witnessed as clearly as if it were reality. I woke up with a start, and having lit the candle, I sat up in bed, without venturing even to try and go to sleep again.

Twice, however, sleep overcame me for a few moments in spite of myself, and twice I saw the same thing again, till I fancied I was going mad; when day broke, however, I thought that I was cured, and slept peacefully till noon.

It was all past and over. I had been feverish, had had the nightmare; I don’t know what. I had been ill, in a word, but yet I thought that I was a great fool.

I enjoyed myself thoroughly that evening; I went and dined at a restaurant; afterwards I went to the theater, and then started home. But as I got near the house I was seized by a strange feeling of uneasiness once more; I was afraid of *seeing* him again. I was not afraid of him, not afraid of his presence, in which I did not believe; but I was afraid of being deceived again; I was afraid of some fresh hallucination, afraid lest fear should take possession of me.

Far more than an hour I wandered up and down the pavement; then I thought that I was really too foolish, and at last I returned home. I panted so that I could scarcely get upstairs, and I remained standing outside my door for more than ten minutes; then suddenly I took courage, and screwed myself together. I inserted my key into the lock, and went in with a candle in my hand. I kicked open my half-open bedroom door, and gave a frightened look towards the fireplace; there was nothing there. A — h!

What a relief and what a delight! What a deliverance! I walked up and down briskly and boldly, but I was not altogether reassured, and kept turning round with a jump; the very shadows in the corner disquieted me.

I slept badly, and was constantly disturbed by imaginary noises, but I did not see *him*; no, that was all over.

Since that time I have been afraid of being alone at night. I feel that the specter is there, close to me, around me; but it has not appeared to me again. And supposing it did, what would it matter, since I do not believe in it, and know that it is nothing?

It still worries me, however, because I am constantly thinking of it: *his right arm hanging down and his head inclined to the left like a man who was asleep*.... Enough of that, in Heaven’s name! I don’t want to think about it!

Why, however, am I so persistently possessed with this idea? His feet were close to the fire!

He haunts me; it is very stupid, but so it is. Who and what is HE? I know that he does not exist except in my cowardly imagination, in my fears, and in my agony! There — enough of that!...

Yes, it is all very well for me to reason with myself, *to stiffen myself*, so to say; but I cannot remain at home, because I know he is there. I know I shall not see him again; he will not show himself again; that is all over. But he is there all the same in my thoughts. He remains invisible, but that does not prevent his being there. He is behind the doors, in the closed cupboards, in the wardrobe, under the bed, in every dark corner. If I open the door or the cupboard, if I take the candle to look under the bed and throw a light on to the dark places, he is there no longer, but I feel that he is behind me. I turn round, certain that I shall not see him, that I shall never see him again; but he is, for all that, none the less behind me.

It is very stupid, it is dreadful; but what am I to do? I cannot help it.

But if there were two of us in the place, I feel certain that he would not be there any longer, for he is there just because I am alone; simply and solely because I am alone!

A PHILOSOPHER

Blérot had been my most intimate friend from childhood; we had no secrets from each other, and were united heart and soul by a brotherly intimacy and a boundless confidence in each other, and I had been intrusted with the secret of all his love affairs, as he had been with mine.

When he told me that he was going to get married I was hurt, just as if he had been guilty of a treacherous act with regard to me. I felt that it must interfere with that cordial and absolute affection which had united us hitherto. His wife would come between us. The intimacy of the marriage-bed establishes a kind of complicity of mysterious alliance between two persons, even when they have ceased to love each other. Man and wife are like two discreet partners who will not let anyone else into their secrets. But that close bond which the conjugal kiss fastens is widely loosened on the day on which the woman takes a lover.

I remember Blérot's wedding as if it were but yesterday. I would not be present at the signing of the marriage contract, as I have no particular liking for such ceremonies, but I only went to the civil wedding and to the church.

His wife, whom I had never seen before, was a tall, slight girl, with pale hair, pale cheeks, pale hands, and eyes to match. She walked with a slightly undulating motion, as if she were on board a ship, and seemed to advance with a succession of long, graceful curtsies.

Blérot seemed very much in love with her. He looked at her constantly, and I felt a shiver of an immoderate desire for her pass through my frame.

I went to see him in a few days, and he said to me:

"You do not know how happy I am; I am madly in love with her; but then she is ... she is ..." He did not finish his sentence, but he put the tips of his fingers to his lips with a gesture which signified:

"Divine! delicious! perfect!" and a good deal more besides.

I asked, laughing, "What! all that?"

"Everything that you can imagine," was his answer.

He introduced me to her. She was very pleasant, on easy terms with me, as was natural, and begged me to look upon their house as my own. I felt that he, Blérot, did not belong to me any longer. Our intimacy was altogether checked, and we hardly found a word to say to each other.

I soon took my leave, and shortly afterwards went to the East, and returned by way of Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Holland, after an absence of eighteen months from Paris.

The morning after my arrival, as I was walking along the boulevards to breathe the air once more, I saw a pale man with sunken cheeks coming towards me, who was as much like Blérot as it was possible for a physically emaciated man to be to a strong, ruddy, rather stout man. I looked at him in surprise, and asked myself: “Can it possibly be he?” But he saw me, and came towards me with outstretched arms, and we embraced in the middle of the boulevard.

After we had gone up and down once or twice from the Rue Druot to the Vaudeville Theater, just as we were taking leave of each other — for he already seemed quite done up with walking — I said to him:

“You don’t look at all well. Are you ill?”

“I do feel rather out of sorts,” was all he said.

He looked like a man who was going to die, and I felt a flood of affection for my old friend, the only real one that I had ever had. I squeezed his hands.

“What is the matter with you? Are you in pain?”

“A little tired; but it is nothing.”

“What does your doctor say?”

“He calls it anæmia, and has ordered me to eat no white meat and to take tincture of iron.”

A suspicion flashed across me.

“Are you happy?” I asked him.

“Yes, very happy; my wife is charming, and I love her more than ever.”

But I noticed that he grew rather red and seemed embarrassed, as if he was afraid of any further questions, so I took him by the arm and pushed him into a café, which was nearly empty at that time of day. I forced him to sit down, and looking him straight in the face, I said:

“Look here, old fellow, just tell me the exact truth.”

“I have nothing to tell you,” he stammered.

"That is not true," I replied firmly. "You are ill, mentally perhaps, and you dare not reveal your secret to anyone. Something or other is doing you harm, and I mean you to tell me what it is. Come, I am waiting for you to begin."

Again he got very red, stammered, and turning his head away, he said:

"It is very idiotic — but I — I am done for!"

As he did not go on, I said:

"Just tell me what it is."

"Well, I have got a wife who is killing me, that is all," he said abruptly, almost desperately.

I did not understand at first. "Does she make you unhappy? How? What is it?"

"No," he replied in a low voice, as if he were confessing some crime; "I love her too much, that is all."

I was thunderstruck at this brutal avowal, and then I felt inclined to laugh, but at length I managed to reply:

"But surely, at least so it seems to me, you might manage to — to love her a little less."

He had got very pale again, and at length made up his mind to speak to me openly, as he used to do formerly.

"No," he said, "that is impossible; and I am dying from it I know; it is killing me, and I am really frightened. Some days, like to-day, I feel inclined to leave her, to go away altogether, to start for the other end of the world, so as to live for a long time; and then, when the evening comes, I return home in spite of myself, but slowly, and feeling uncomfortable. I go upstairs hesitatingly and ring, and when I go in I see her there sitting in her easy chair, and she says, 'How late you are,' I kiss her, and we sit down to dinner. During the meal I think to myself: 'I will go directly it is over, and take the train for somewhere, no matter where;' but when we get back to the drawing-room I am so tired that I have not the courage to get up out of my chair, and so I remain, and then — and then — I succumb again."

I could not help smiling again. He saw it, and said: "You may laugh, but I assure you it is very horrible."

"Why don't you tell your wife?" I asked him. "Unless she be a regular monster she would understand."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is all very well for you to talk. I don't tell her because I know her nature. Have you ever heard it said of certain women, ‘She has just married a third time?’ Well, and that makes you laugh like you did just now, and yet it is true. What is to be done? It is neither her fault nor mine. She is so, because nature has made her so; I assure you, my dear old friend, she has the temperament of a Messalina. She does not know it, but I do; so much the worse for me. She is charming, gentle, tender, and thinks that our conjugal intercourse, which is wearing me out and killing me, is natural and quite moderate. She seems like an ignorant schoolgirl, and she really is ignorant, poor child.”

“Every day I form energetic resolutions, for you must understand that I am dying. But one look of her eyes, one of those looks in which I can read the ardent desire of her lips, is enough for me, and I succumb at once, saying to myself: ‘This is really the end; I will have no more of her death-giving kisses,’ and then, when I have yielded again, like I have to-day, I go out and walk on ahead, thinking of death, and saying to myself that I am lost, that all is over.”

“I am so mentally ill that I went for a walk to Père Lachaise cemetery yesterday. I looked at all the graves, standing in a row like dominoes, and I thought to myself: ‘I shall soon be there,’ and then I returned home, quite determined to pretend to be ill, and so escape, but I could not.”

“Oh! You don’t know what it is. Ask a smoker who is poisoning himself with nicotine whether he can give up his delicious and deadly habit. He will tell you that he has tried a hundred times without success, and he will, perhaps, add: ‘So much the worse, but I had rather die than go without tobacco.’ That is just the case with me. When once one is in the clutches of such a passion or such a vice, one must give oneself up to it entirely.”

He got up and gave me his hand. I felt seized with a tumult of rage, and with hatred for this woman, this careless, charming, terrible woman; and as he was buttoning up his coat to go out I said to him, brutally perhaps:

“But, in God’s name, why don’t you let her have a lover, rather than kill yourself like that?”

He shrugged his shoulders without replying, and went off.

For six months I did not see him. Every morning I expected a letter of invitation to his funeral, but I would not go to his house from a complicated feeling of contempt for him and for that woman; of anger, of indignation, of a thousand sensations.

One lovely spring morning I was walking in the Champs Elysées. It was one of those warm days which makes our eyes bright and stir up in us a tumultuous feeling of happiness from the mere sense of existence. Someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I saw my old friend, looking well, stout and rosy.

He gave me both hands, beaming with pleasure, and exclaimed:

“Here you are, you erratic individual!”

I looked at him, utterly thunderstruck.

“Well, on my word — yes. By Jove! I congratulate you; you have indeed changed in the last six months!”

He flushed scarlet, and said, with an embarrassed laugh:

“One can but do one’s best.”

I looked at him so obstinately that he evidently felt uncomfortable, so I went on:

“So — now — you are — completely cured?”

He stammered, hastily:

“Yes, perfectly, thank you.” Then changing his tone, “How lucky that I should have come across you, old fellow. I hope we shall often meet now.”

But I would not give up my idea; I wanted to know how matters really stood, so I asked:

“Don’t you remember what you told me six months ago? I suppose — I — eh — suppose you resist now?”

“Please don’t talk any more about it,” he replied, uneasily; “forget that I mentioned it to you; leave me alone. But, you know, I have no intention of letting you go; you must come and dine at my house.”

A sudden fancy took me to see for myself how matters stood, so that I might understand all about it, and I accepted.

His wife received me in a most charming manner, and she was, as a matter of fact, a most attractive woman. Her long hands, her neck and cheeks were beautifully white and delicate, and marked her breeding, and her walk was undulating and delightful.

René gave her a brotherly kiss on the forehead and said:

“Has not Lucien come yet?”

“Not yet,” she replied, in a clear, soft voice; “you know he is almost always rather late.”

At that moment the bell rang, and a tall man was shown in. He was dark, with a thick beard, and looked like a modern Hercules. We were introduced to each other; his name was Lucien Delabarre.

René and he shook hands in a most friendly manner, and then we went to dinner.

It was a most enjoyable meal, without the least constraint. My old friend spoke with me constantly, in the old familiar cordial manner, just as he used to do. It was: “You know, old fellow!”— “I say, old fellow!”— “Just listen a moment, old fellow!” Suddenly he exclaimed:

“You don’t know how glad I am to see you again; it takes me back to old times.”

I looked at his wife and the other man. Their attitude was perfectly correct, though I fancied once or twice that they exchanged a rapid and furtive look.

As soon as dinner was over René turned to his wife, and said:

“My dear, I have just met Pierre again, and I am going to carry him off for a walk and a chat along the boulevards to remind us of old times. I am leaving you in very good company.”

The young woman smiled, and said to me, as she shook hands with me:

“Don’t keep him too long.”

As we went along, arm-in-arm, I could not help saying to him, for I was determined to know how matters stood:

“I say, what has happened? Do tell me!”

He, however, interrupted me roughly, and answered like a man who has been disturbed without any reason.

“Just look here, old fellow leave one alone with your questions.”

Then he added, half aloud, as if talking to himself:

“After all, it would have been too stupid to have let oneself go to pot like that.”

I did not press him. We walked on quickly and began to talk. All of a sudden he whispered in my ear:

“I say, suppose we go and have a bottle of ‘fizz’ with some girls! Eh?”

I could not prevent myself from laughing heartily.

“Just as you like; come along, let us go.”

ALWAYS LOCK THE DOOR!

The four glasses which were standing in front of the diners were now still nearly half full, which is a sign, as a general rule, that the guests are quite so. They were beginning to speak without waiting for an answer; no one took any notice of anything except what was going on inside him, either in his mind or stomach; voices grew louder, gestures more animated, eyes brighter.

It was a bachelors' dinner of confirmed old bachelors. They had instituted this regular banquet twenty years before, christening it "The Celibate," and at the time there were fourteen of them, all fully determined never to marry. Now there were only four of them left; three were dead and the other seven were married.

These four stuck firmly to it, and, as far as lay in their power, they scrupulously observed the rules which had been laid down at the beginning of their curious association. They had sworn, hand-in-hand, to turn aside every woman they could from the right path, and their friends' wives for choice, and more especially those of their most intimate friends. For this reason, as soon as any of them left the society, in order to set up in domestic life for himself, he took care to quarrel definitely with all his former companions.

Besides this, they were pledged at every dinner to relate most minutely their last adventures, which had given rise to this familiar phrase amongst them:

"To lie like an old bachelor."

They professed, moreover, the most profound contempt for woman whom they talked of as an animal made solely for their pleasure. Every moment they quoted Schopenhauer, who was their god, and his well-known essay "On Women;" they wished that harems and towers might be reintroduced, and had the ancient maxim: "Mulier, perpetuus infans," woven into their table-linen, and below it, the line of Alfred de Vigny's:

La femme, enfant malade et douze fois impure.

So that by dint of despising women they lived only for them, while all their efforts and all their desires were directed towards them.

Those of them who had married called them old fops, made fun of them, and — feared them.

When they began to feel the exhilarating effects of the champagne, this was the moment that their old bachelor experiences began.

On the day in question, these old fellows, for they were old by this time, and the older they got the more extraordinary *good fortune* in the way of love affairs they had to relate, were quite inexhaustible. For the last month, to hear them, each of them had played the gallant with at least one woman a day; and what women! the youngest, the noblest, the richest, and the most beautiful!

After they had finished their tales, one of them, he who having spoken first had been obliged to listen to all the others, rose and said:

“Now that we have finished drawing the long-bow, I should like to tell you, not my last, but my first adventure, — I mean the first adventure of my life, my first fall, — for it is a moral fall after all, in the arms of Venus. Oh! I am not going to tell you my first — what shall I call it? — my first appearance; certainly not. The leap over the first hedge (I am speaking figuratively) has nothing interesting about it. It is generally rather a disagreeable one, and one picks oneself up rather abashed, with one charming illusion the less, with a vague feeling of disappointment and sadness. That *realization* of love the first time one experiences it is rather repugnant; we had dreamt of it as being so different, so delicate, so refined. It leaves a physical and moral sense of disgust behind it, just like as when one has happened to have put one’s hand into some clammy matter and feels in a hurry to *wash* it off. You may *rub* it as hard as you like, but the moral feeling remains.

“Yes! but one very soon gets quite used to it; there is no doubt about that. For my part, however, I am very sorry it was not in my power to give the Creator the benefit of my advice when He was arranging these little matters. I wonder what *I* should have done? I am not quite sure, but I think with the English savant, John Stuart Mill, I should have managed differently; I should have found some more convenient and more poetical combination; yes — more poetical.

“I really think that the Creator showed Himself to be too much of a naturalist ... too ... what shall I say? His invention lacks poetry.

“However, what I am going to tell you is about my first woman of the world, the first woman in society I ever made love to; — I beg your pardon, I ought to say the first woman of the world that ever triumphed over me. For at first it is *we* who allow ourselves to be taken, while, later on — well, then it is quite another matter.

“She was a friend of my mother’s, a charming woman in every way. When such women are chaste, it is generally from sheer stupidity, and when they are in love they are furiously so. And then — *we* are accused of corrupting *them*! Yes, yes, of course! With them it is always the rabbit that begins and never the sportsman. I know all about it; they don’t seem to put their fingers near us, but they do it all the same, and do what they like with us, without it being noticed, and then they actually accuse us of having ruined them, dishonored them, humiliated them, and all the rest of it.

“The woman in question certainly had a great desire to be humiliated by me. She may have been about thirty-five, while I was scarcely two-and-twenty. I no more thought of dishonoring her than I did of turning Trappist. Well, one day when I was calling on her, and while I was looking at her dress with considerable astonishment, for she had on a morning wrapper which was open as wide as a church-door when the bells are ringing for service, she took my hand and squeezed it — squeezed it, you know, like they will do at such moments — and said, with a deep sigh, one of those sighs, you know, which come from right down the bottom of the chest: ‘Oh! don’t look at me like that, child!’ I got as red as a tomato, and felt more nervous than usual, naturally. I was very much inclined to bolt, but she held my hand tightly, and putting it onto her well-developed bust, she said: ‘Just feel how my heart beats!’ Of course it was beating, and I began to understand what was the matter, but I did not know what to do. I have changed considerably since then.

“As I remained standing there, with one hand on the soft covering of her heart, while I held my hat in the other, and continuing to look at her with a confused, silly smile — a timid, frightened smile — she suddenly drew back, and said in an irritated voice:

“‘Young man, what are you doing? You are indecent and badly brought up.’

“You may be sure I took my hand away quickly, stopped smiling, and stammering out some excuse, I got up and took my leave as if I had lost my head.

“But I was caught, and dreamt of her. I thought her charming, adorable; I fancied that I loved her, that I had always loved her, and I determined to see her again.

“When I saw her again she gave me a little smile like an actress might behind the scenes. Oh, how that little smile upset me! And she shook hands with a long, significant pressure.

“From that day it seems that I made love to her; at least, she declared afterwards that I had ruined her, captured her, dishonored her, with rare Machiavelism, with consummate cleverness, with the perseverance of a mathematician, and the cunning of an Apaché Indian.

“But one thing troubled me strangely; where was my triumph to be accomplished? I lived with my family, and on this point my family was most particular. I was not bold enough to venture to go to an hotel in broad daylight with a woman on my arm, and I did not know whom to ask for advice.

“Now, my fair friend had often said in joke that every young man ought to have a room for himself somewhere or other from home. We lived in Paris, and this was a sort of inspiration. I took a room, and she came. She came one day in November; I should have liked to put off her visit because I had no fire, and I had no fire because the chimney smoked. The very evening before, I had spoken to my landlord, a retired shopkeeper, about it, and he had promised that he would send for the chimneysweep in a day or two to get it all put to rights.

“As soon as she came in, I said:

“‘There is no fire because my chimney smokes.’

“She did not even appear to hear me, but stammered: ‘That does not matter, I have ...;’ and when I looked surprised, she stopped short in confusion, and then went on: ‘I don’t know what I am saying; I am mad.... I have lost my head.... Oh! what am I doing? Why did I come? How unhappy I am! What a disgrace, what a disgrace!’ And she threw herself sobbing into my arms.

“I thought that she really felt remorse, and swore that I would respect her. Then, however, she sank down at my knees, sighing: ‘But don’t you see that

I love you, that you have overcome me, that it seems as though you had thrown a charm over me?’

“Then I thought it was about time to show myself a man. But she trembled, got up, ran and hid behind a wardrobe, crying out: ‘Oh! don’t look at me; no! no! If only you did not see me, if we were only in the dark! I am ashamed in the light. Cannot you imagine it? What a dreadful dream! Oh! this light, this light!’

“I rushed to the window; I closed the outside shutters, drew the curtains, and hung a coat over a ray of light that peeped in, and then, stretching out my hands so as not to fall over the chairs, with my heart beating, and felt for her, and found her.

“It was a fresh journey for the two of us then, groping our way, with our hands united, towards the other corner where the sofa stood. I don’t suppose we went straight, for first of all I knocked against the mantelpiece, and then against a chest of drawers, before finding what we wanted. After we sat down I forgot everything, and we almost went to sleep in each other’s arms.

“I was half dreaming; but in my dream I fancied that someone was calling me and crying for help; then I received a violent blow, and opened my eyes.

“‘O — h!’ The setting sun, magnificent and red, shone full into the room through the door, which was wide open, and seemed to look at us from the verge of the horizon, illuminating us both, especially my companion, who was screaming, struggling, and twisting, and trying with hands and feet to get under the sofa, while in the middle of the room stood my landlord by the side of the concierge and a chimneysweep, as black as the devil, who were looking at us with stupid eyes.

“I stood up in rage, ready to jump at his throat, and shouted:

“‘What the deuce are you doing in my room?’

“The chimneysweep laughed so that he let his brush fall on the floor. The porter looked as if he were going out of his mind, and the landlord stammered:

“‘But, Monsieur, it was — it was — about the chimney — the chimney, the chimney which— ‘

“‘Go to the devil!’ I roared. So he took off his hat, which he had kept on in his confusion, and said, in a confused but very civil manner:

“‘I beg your pardon, Monsieur; if I had known, I should not have disturbed you; I should not have come. The concierge told me you had gone out. Pray excuse me.’ And they all went out.

“Ever since that time I never draw the curtains but am always very careful to lock the door first.”

WHAT WAS REALLY THE MATTER WITH ANDREW

The lawyer’s house looked on to the Square. Behind it, there was a nice, well-kept garden, with a back entrance into a narrow street which was almost always deserted, and from which it was separated by a wall.

At the bottom of that garden Maitre Moreau’s wife had promised, for the first time, to meet Captain Sommerive, who had been making love to her for a long time.

Her husband had gone to Paris for a week, so she was quite free for the time being. The Captain had begged so hard, and had used such loving words, she was certain that he loved her so ardently, and she felt so isolated, so misunderstood, so neglected amidst all the law business which seemed to be her husband’s sole pleasure, that she had given away her heart without even asking herself whether it would give her anything else at some future time.

Then, after some months of platonic love, of pressing of hands, of kisses rapidly stolen behind a door, the Captain had declared that he would ask permission to exchange, and leave the town immediately, if she would not grant him a meeting, a real meeting, during her husband’s absence; and so at length she yielded to his importunity.

Just then she was waiting, close against the wall, with a beating heart, trembling at the slightest sound, and when at length she heard somebody climbing up the wall, she very nearly ran away.

Suppose it were not he, but a thief? But no; someone called out softly, “*Matilda*!” and when she replied, “*Etienne*!” a man jumped on to the path with a crash.

It was he, — and what a kiss!

For a long time they remained in each other’s arms, with united lips. But suddenly a fine rain began to fall, and the drops from the leaves fell on to her neck and made her start. Whereupon he said:

"Matilda, my adored one, my darling, my angel, let us go indoors. It is twelve o'clock, we can have nothing to fear; please let us go to your room."

"No, dearest; I am too frightened."

But he held her in his arms, and whispered in her ear:

"Your servants sleep on the third floor, looking on to the Square, and your room, on the first, looks on to the garden, so nobody can hear us. I love you so that I wish to love you entirely, from head to foot." And he embraced her vehemently.

She resisted still, frightened and even ashamed. But he put his arms round her, lifted her up, and carried her off under the rain, which was by this time descending in torrents.

The door was open; they groped their way upstairs; and when they were in the room he bolted the door while she lit a match.

Then she fell, half fainting, into a chair, while he knelt down beside her.

At last, she said, panting:

"No! no! Etienne, please let me remain a virtuous woman; I should be too angry with you afterwards; and after all, it is so horrid, so common. Cannot we love each other with a spiritual love only?... Oh! Etienne!"

But he was inexorable, and then she tried to get up and escape from his attacks.

In her fright she ran to the bed in order to hide herself behind the curtains; but it was a dangerous place of refuge, and he followed her. But in haste he took off his sword too quickly, and it fell on the floor with a crash.

And then — a prolonged, shrill child's cry came from the next room, the door of which had remained open.

"You have awakened the child," she whispered, "and perhaps he will not go to sleep again."

He was only fifteen months old, and slept in a room opening out of hers, so that she might be able to hear him.

The Captain exclaimed, ardently:

"What does it matter, Matilda? How I love you; you must come to me, Matilda."

But she struggled, and resisted in her fright.

"No! no! Just listen how he is crying; he will wake up the nurse, and what should we do if she were to come? We should be lost. Just listen to me, Etienne. When he screams at night his father always takes him into our bed, and he is quiet immediately; it is the only means of keeping him still. Do let me take him....”

The child roared, uttered shrill screams, which pierced the thickest walls, so as to be heard by passers-by in the streets.

In his consternation, the Captain got up, and Matilda jumped out and took the child into her bed, when he was quiet at once.

Etienne sat astride on a chair, and made a cigarette, and in about five minutes Andrew went to sleep again.

“I will take him back,” his mother said; and she took him back very carefully to his bed.

When she returned, the Captain was waiting for her with open arms, and put his arms round her in a transport of love, while she, embracing him more closely, said, stammering:

“Oh! Etienne, my darling, if you only knew how I love you; how....”

Andrew began to cry again, and he, in a rage, exclaimed:

“Confound it all, won’t the little brute be quiet?”

No, the little brute would not be quiet, but howled all the louder, on the contrary.

She thought she heard a noise downstairs; no doubt the nurse was coming, so she jumped up, and took the child into bed, and he grew quiet directly.

Three times she put him back, and three times she had to fetch him again, and an hour before daybreak the Captain had to go, swearing like the proverbial trooper; and, to calm his impatience, Matilda promised to receive him again the next night.

Of course he came, more impatient and ardent than ever, excited by the delay.

He took care to put his sword carefully into a corner; he took off his boots like a thief, and spoke so low that Matilda could hardly hear him. At last, he was just going to be really happy when the floor, or some piece of furniture, or perhaps the bed itself, creaked; it sounded as if something had broken; and in a moment a cry, feeble at first, but which grew louder every moment, made itself heard. Andrew was awake again.

He *yapped* like a fox, and there was not the slightest doubt that if he went on like that the whole house would awake; so his mother, not knowing what to do, got up and brought him. The Captain was more furious than ever, but did not move, and very carefully he put out his hand, took a small piece of the child’s skin between his two fingers, no matter where it was, the thighs or elsewhere, and pinched it. The little one struggled and screamed in a deafening manner, but his tormentor pinched everywhere furiously and more vigorously. He took a morsel of flesh and twisted and turned it, and then let go in order to take hold of another piece, and then another and another.

The child screamed like a chicken that is having its throat cut, or a dog that is being mercilessly beaten. His mother caressed him, kissed him, and tried to stifle his cries by her tenderness; but Andrew grew purple, as if he were going into convulsions, and kicked and struggled with his little arms and legs in an alarming manner.

The Captain said, softly:

“Try and take him back to his cradle; perhaps he will be quiet.”

And Matilda went into the other room with the child in her arms.

As soon as he was out of his mother’s bed he cried less loudly, and when he was in his own he was quiet, with exception of a few broken sobs.

The rest of the night was tranquil.

The next night he came again. As he happened to speak rather loudly, Andrew awoke again and began to scream. His mother went and fetched him immediately, but the Captain pinched so hard and long that the child was nearly suffocated by its cries, and its eyes turned in its head and it foamed at the mouth; as soon as it was back in its cradle it was quiet, and in four days Andrew did not cry any more to come into his mother’s bed.

On Saturday evening the lawyer returned, and took his place again at the domestic hearth and in the conjugal chamber.

As he was tired with his journey he went to bed early; but he had not long lain down when he said to his wife:

“Why, how is it that Andrew is not crying? Just go and fetch him, Matilda; I like to feel that he is between us.”

She got up and brought the child, but as soon as he saw that he was in that bed, in which he had been so fond of sleeping a few days previously, he wriggled and screamed so violently in his fright that she had to take him back to his cradle.

M. Moreau could not get over his surprise. “What a very funny thing! What is the matter with him this evening? I suppose he is sleepy?”

“He has been like that all the time that you were away; I have never been able to have him in bed with me once.”

In the morning the child woke up and began to laugh and play with his toys.

The lawyer, who was an affectionate man, got up, kissed his offspring, and took him into his arms to carry him to their bed. Andrew laughed, with that vacant laugh of little creatures whose ideas are still vague. He suddenly saw the bed and his mother in it, and his happy little face puckered up, till suddenly he began to scream furiously, and struggled as if he were going to be put to the torture.

In his astonishment his father said:

“There must be something the matter with the child,” and mechanically he lifted up his little nightshirt.

He uttered a prolonged “O — o — h!” of astonishment. The child’s calves, thighs, and buttocks were covered with blue spots as big as halfpennies.

“Just look, Matilda!” the father exclaimed; “this is horrible!” And the mother rushed forward in a fright. It was horrible; no doubt the beginning of some sort of leprosy, of one of those strange affections of the skin which doctors are often at a loss to account for.

The parents looked at one another in consternation.

“We must send for the doctor,” the father said.

But Matilda, pale as death, was looking at her child, who was spotted like a leopard. Then suddenly uttering a violent cry, as if she had seen something that filled her with horror, she exclaimed:

“Oh! the wretch!”

In his astonishment M. Moreau asked: “What are you talking about? What wretch?”

She got red up to the roots of her hair, and stammered:

“Oh, nothing! but I think I can guess — it must be — we ought to send for the doctor ... it must be that wretch of a nurse who has been pinching the poor child to make him keep quiet when he cries.”

In his rage the lawyer sent for the nurse, and very nearly beat her. She denied it most impudently, but was instantly dismissed, and the Municipality having been informed of her conduct, she will find it a hard matter to get another situation.

GROWING OLD

The two friends had finished dinner. From the window of the *café* they saw the Boulevard full of people. They felt the warm zephyrs which prevail in Paris on sweet summer nights and make travelers raises their heads and desire to go out, to go down, one knows not where, under the leaves, and dream of rivers lighted by the moon, of glowworms, and of nightingales.

One of them, Henry Simon, sighed profoundly and said:

"Ah! I am getting old. It is sad. Formerly on evenings like this I felt the devil in my body. Now, I feel only regrets. How quickly life goes!" He was already a little stout and very bald; he was perhaps forty-five years old.

The other, Peter Carnier, was older, but thinner and more lively; he replied:

"As for me, my friend, I have grown old without perceiving it the least in the world. I was always gay, a jolly fellow, vigorous and all the rest. Now, as one looks at himself each day in the mirror, he does not perceive the work that age is accomplishing, because it is slow and regular, and modifies his visage so gradually that the transition is unseen. Only for this we should die of chagrin after but two or three years' ravages. But we are not able to appreciate them. In order to take a reckoning it would be necessary to go six months without looking at ourselves; and then, what a blow!

"And the women, my dear, how I pity them, the poor beings. All their happiness; all their power, all their life is in their beauty, which lasts but ten years.

"I, then, grew old without suspecting it; I believed myself a young man, although I was nearly fifty years old. Never having felt an infirmity of any sort, I went along happy and tranquil.

"The revelation of my decadence came to me in a simple but terrible fashion, which made me downcast for nearly six months. Since then I have accepted the part.

“I have often been in love, like all men, but once in particular. I met her at the seashore at Etretat, about twelve years ago, a little after the war. There is nothing so pretty as this shore in the morning at the bathing hour. It is small, rounded like a horseshoe, incased in those high, white cliffs, pierced with those singular holes they call ports, one enormous one, extending into the sea like a giant’s leg, the other opposite squat and round. A crowd of women assembles here on the right side of the shuffleboard, which they cover like a bright garden with their brilliant costumes — this box between the high rocks.

The sun falls full upon the coast, upon umbrellas of all shades, upon the sea of a greenish blue. And all is gay, charming, smiling to the eyes. You seat yourself near the water to watch the bathers. They descend in a bathrobe of flannel which they throw off with a pretty motion upon reaching the fringe of the foam from the short waves; they go into the sea with a little rapid step which is arrested sometimes by a delicious cold shiver, or a slight suffocation.

“Few can stand this trial of the bath. It is there that one can judge them from the calf to the throat. The going out especially reveals the weak, although salt water may be a powerful help to flabby flesh.

“The first time that I saw this young woman thus, I was delighted, ravished. She held good, she held firm. Then there are some faces whose charm enters into us suddenly, invades us at a single blow. It seemed to me that I had found the woman that I was born to love. I had that sensation and it was like a shock.

“I had myself presented and was immediately captured as I never was before. She ravaged my heart. It is a frightful and delicious thing, the undergoing thus the domination of a woman. It is almost a punishment, and at the same time, an unbelievable happiness. Her look, her smile, her hair at the nape of the neck when the breeze moved it, all the little lines of her face, the least movement of her features delighted me, and made me extremely fond of her. She took possession of me through all my being, by her gestures, her attitudes, even by the things she carried, which became bewitching to me. I would wait to see her veil thrown upon some piece of furniture, her gloves upon an armchair. Her costumes seemed to me inimitable. No one had hats like hers.

“She was married and the husband came every Saturday to remain until Monday. He seemed to me very indifferent. I was not at all jealous of him; I know not why, but never a being seemed to have less importance in life, or attract less of my attention than this man.

"How I loved her! And how beautiful she was, and gracious and young! She was youth, elegance, and freshness, even. Never before had I felt what a pretty being a woman is, so distinguished and delicate, so full of charm and grace! Never had I understood what a seducing beauty there is in the curve of her cheek, in the movement of her lips, in the round folds of her little ear, in the form of that simple organ which we call the nose.

"This lasted three months and then I departed for America, my heart bruised and full of despair. But the thought of her remained in me persistent, triumphant. She possessed me at a distance as she had when I was near her.

"Some years passed. I had not forgotten her. Her charming image remained before my eyes and in my heart. My tenderness remained faithful to her, a tranquil tenderness now, something like a much-loved memory of the most beautiful, most attractive thing I had met in life.

"Twelve years are such a little thing in a man's existence! One scarcely feels them pass! They go one after another, these years, gently and quickly, slowly or hurriedly, each long but so soon finished!

And they add so rapidly and leave so little trace behind them; they vanish so completely that in looking back over the time passed one cannot perceive anything, and cannot comprehend how it is that they have made him old. It seemed to me truly, that only a few months separated me from that charming season on the beach at Etretat.

"Last spring I went to dine at Maisons-Lafitte at the house of some friends. Just as the train was starting, a large woman got into my car, followed by four little girls. I scarcely glanced at this large, round mother, with a face like a full moon incased in a be-ribboned hat.

"She breathed heavily, being out of breath from a quick walk. The children began to babble. I opened my newspaper and began to read.

"We were just passing Asnières, when my neighbor said to me suddenly:

"'Pardon me, sir, but are you not Mr. Carnier?'

"'Yes, Madame.'

"Then she began to laugh, the laugh of a contented, brave woman, but a little sad, nevertheless.

"'You do not recognize me?' said she.

"I hesitated. I fully believed that I had somewhere seen that face; but where? and when? I answered:

"'Yes — and no — I certainly do recognize you, but cannot recall your name.'

"She blushed a little as she said: 'Mrs. Julie Lefevre.'

"Never have I received such a blow. For a second it seemed to me that all was finished for me, I felt that a veil had been torn away from before my eyes and that I was about to discover something frightful and wounding.

"It was she! That great, gross, common woman, she? And she had borne these four girls since I had seen her. And these four beings astonished me as much as the mother herself. They had come from her; they were tall already, had taken her place in life. She no longer counted, she, that marvel of coquettish, refined grace. I had seen her yesterday, it seemed to me, and I found her again like this! Was it possible? A violent grief attacked my heart, and also a revolt against Nature, even, an unreasonable indignation against her brutal work, so infamous and destructive.

"I looked at her aghast. Then I took her by the hand, and the tears mounted to my eyes. I wept for her young, I wept for her dead. For I was not acquainted with this large lady.

"She, also affected, stammered:

"'I am much changed, am I not? What can we expect after so long? You see I have become a mother, nothing but a mother, a good mother. Adieu to all else, it is finished. Oh! I never thought that you would not recognize me if we met! And you, too, are changed; it took me some time to be sure that I was not deceived. You are quite gray. Think of it. Twelve years! twelve years! My eldest daughter is already ten years old.'

"I looked at the child. I found in her something of the former charm of her mother, but something still undecisive, not yet formed, but near at hand. And life appeared as rapid to me as a train which passes.

"We arrived at Maisons-Lafitte. I kissed the hand of my old friend. I had found nothing to say to her but the most frightful commonplaces. I was too upset to talk, "That evening, all alone in my room, I looked at myself for a long time in my glass. And I ended by recalling myself as I was, of looking back in thought to my brown mustache and my black hair and the physiognomy of my young face. Now I was old. Adieu!"

MY LANDLADY

At that time (George Kervelen said) I was living in furnished lodgings in the Rue des Saints-Pères.

When my father had made up his mind that I should go to Paris to continue my law studies, there had been a long discussion about settling everything. My allowance had been fixed at first at two thousand five hundred francs, but my poor mother was so anxious, that she said to my father that if I spent my money badly I might not take enough to eat, and then my health would suffer, and so it was settled that a comfortable boarding-house should be found for me, and that the amount should be paid to the proprietor himself, or herself, every month.

Some of our neighbors told us of a certain Mme. Kergaran, a native of Brittany, who took in boarders, and so my father arranged matters by letter with this respectable person, at whose house I and my luggage arrived one evening.

Mme. Kergaran was a woman of about forty. She was very stout, had a voice like a drill-sergeant, and decided everything in a very abrupt manner. Her house was narrow, with only one window opening on to the street on each story, which rather gave it the appearance of a ladder of windows, or better, perhaps, of a slice of a house sandwiched in between two others.

The landlady lived on the first floor with her servant, the kitchen and dining-room were on the second, and four boarders from Brittany lived on the third and fourth, and I had two rooms on the fifth.

A little dark corkscrew staircase led up to these attics. All day long Mme. Kergaran was up and down these stairs like a captain on board ship. Ten times a day she would go into each room, noisily superintending everything, seeing that the beds were properly made, the clothes well brushed, if the attendance were all that it should be; in a word, she looked after her boarders like a mother, and better than a mother.

I soon made the acquaintance of my four fellow-countrymen. Two were medical and two were law students, but all impartially endured the landlady's despotic yoke. They were as frightened of her as a boy robbing an orchard would be of a rural policeman.

I, however, immediately felt that I wished to be independent; it is my nature to rebel. I declared at once that I meant to come in at whatever time I liked, for Mme. Kergaran had fixed twelve o'clock at night as the limit. On hearing this she looked at me for a few moments, and then said:

"It is quite impossible; I cannot have Annette awakened at any hour of the night. You can have nothing to do out-of-doors at such a time."

I replied firmly that, according to the law, she was obliged to open the door for me at any time.

"If you refuse," I said, "I shall get a policeman to witness the fact, and go and get a bed at some hotel, at your expense, in which I shall be fully justified. You will, therefore, be obliged either to open the door for me or to get rid of me. Do which you please."

I laughed in her face as I told her my conditions. She could not speak for a moment for surprise, then she tried to negotiate, but I was firm, and she was obliged to yield; and so it was agreed that I should have a latchkey, on my solemn undertaking that no one else should know it.

My energy made such a wholesome impression on her that from that time she treated me with marked favor; she was most attentive, and even showed me a sort of rough tenderness which was not at all unpleasing. Sometimes when I was in a jovial mood I would kiss her by surprise, if only for the sake of getting the box on the ears which she gave me immediately afterwards. When I managed to duck my head quickly enough, her hand would pass over me as swiftly as a ball, and I would run away laughing, while she would call after me:

"Oh! you wretch, I will pay you out for that."

However, we soon became real friends.

It was not long before I made the acquaintance of a girl who was employed in a shop, and whom I constantly met. You know what such sort of love affairs are in Paris. One fine day, going to a lecture, you meet a work-girl going to work arm-in-arm with a friend. You look at her and feel that pleasant little shock which the eye of some women gives you. The next day at the same time, going through the same street, you meet her again, and the next, and the succeeding days. At last you speak, and the love affair follows its course just like an illness.

Well, by the end of three weeks I was on that footing with Emma which precedes a fall. The fall would indeed have taken place much sooner had I known where to bring it about. The girl lived at home, and utterly refused to go to an hotel. I did not know how to manage, but at last I took the desperate resolve to take her to my room some night at about eleven o'clock, under the pretense of giving her a cup of tea. Mme. Kergaran always went to bed at ten, so that we could get in by means of my latchkey without exciting any attention, and go down again in an hour or two in the same way.

After a good deal of entreaty on my part, Emma accepted my invitation.

I did not spend a very pleasant day, for I was by no means easy in my mind. I was afraid of complications, of a catastrophe, of some scandal. At night I went into a café, and drank two cups of coffee, and three or four glasses of cognac, to give me courage, and when I heard the clock strike half-past ten, I went slowly to the place of meeting, where she was already waiting for me. She took my arm in a coaxing manner, and we set off slowly towards my lodgings. The nearer we got to the door the more nervous I got, and I thought to myself— "If only Mme. Kergaran is in bed already."

I said to Emma two or three times:

"Above all things, don't make any noise on the stairs," to which she replied, laughing:

"Are you afraid of being heard?"

"No," I said, "but I am afraid of waking the man who sleeps in the room next to me, who is not at all well."

When I got near the house I felt as frightened as a man does who is going to the dentist's. All the windows were dark, so no doubt everybody was asleep, and I breathed again. I opened the door as carefully as a thief, let my fair companion in, shut it behind me, and went upstairs on tiptoe, holding my breath, and striking wax-matches lest the girl should make a false step.

As we passed the landlady's door I felt my heart beating very quickly, but we reached the second floor, then the third, and at last the fifth, and got into my room. Victory!

However, I only dared to speak in a whisper, and took off my boots so as not to make any noise. The tea, which I made over a spirit-lamp, was soon drunk, and then I became pressing, till little by little, as if in play, I, one by one, took off my companion's clothes, who yielded while resisting, blushing, confused.

She had absolutely nothing more on except a short white petticoat when my door suddenly opened, and Mme. Kergaran appeared with a candle in her hand, in exactly the same costume as Emma.

I jumped away from her and remained standing up, looking at the two women, who were looking at each other. What was going to happen?

My landlady said, in a lofty tone of voice which I had never heard from her before:

"Monsieur Kervelen, I will not have prostitutes in my house."

"But, Madame Kergaran," I stammered, "the young lady is a friend of mine. She just came in to have a cup of tea."

"People don't take tea in their chemise. You will please make this person go directly."

Emma, in a natural state of consternation, began to cry, and hid her face in her petticoat, and I lost my head, not knowing what to do or say. My landlady added, with irresistible authority:

"Help her to dress, and take her out at once."

It was certainly the only thing I could do, so I picked up her dress from the floor, put it over her head, and began to fasten it as best I could. She helped me, crying all the time, hurrying and making all sorts of mistakes and unable to find either buttonholes or laces, while Mme. Kergaran stood by motionless, with the candle in her hand, looking at us with the severity of a judge.

As soon as Emma was dressed, without even stopping to button her boots, she rushed past the landlady and ran down stairs. I followed her in my slippers and half undressed, and kept repeating: "Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!"

I felt that I ought to say something to her, but I could not find anything. I overtook her just by the street-door, and tried to take her into my arms, but she pushed me violently away, saying in a low, nervous voice:

"Leave me alone, leave me alone!" and so ran out into the street, closing the door behind her.

When I went upstairs again I found that Mme. Kergaran was waiting on the first landing, and I went up slowly, expecting, and ready for, anything.

Her door was open, and she called me in, saying in a severe voice:

"I want to speak to you, M. Kervelen."

I went in, with my head bent. She put her candle on the mantelpiece, and then, folding her arms over her expansive bosom, which a fine white dressing-jacket hardly covered, she said:

"So, Monsieur Kervelen, you think my house is a house of ill-fame?"

I was not at all proud. I murmured:

"Oh, dear, no! But, Mme. Kergaran, you must not be angry; you know what young men are."

"I know," was her answer, "that I will not have such creatures here, so you will understand that. I expect to have my house respected, and I will not have it lose its reputation, you understand me? I know...."

She went on thus for at least twenty minutes, overwhelming me with the good name of her house, with reasons for her indignation, and loading me with severe reproofs. I went to bed crestfallen, and resolved never again to try such an experiment, so long, at least, as I continued to be a lodger of Mme. Kergaran.

LOVE.
THREE PAGES FROM A SPORTSMAN'S BOOK

I have just read among the General News in one of the papers, a drama of passion. He killed her and then he killed himself, so he must have loved her. What matter He or She? Their love alone matters to me; and it does not interest me because it moves me or astonishes me, or because it softens me or makes me think, but because it recalls to my mind a remembrance of my youth, a strange recollection of a hunting adventure where Love appeared to me, as the Cross appeared to the early Christians, in the midst of the heavens.

I was born with all the instincts and the senses of primitive man, tempered by the arguments and the feelings of a civilized being. I am passionately fond of shooting, and the sight of the bleeding animal, with the blood on its feathers and on my hands, affect my heart so, as almost to make it stop.

That year the cold weather set in suddenly towards the end of autumn, and I was invited by one of my cousins, Karl de Rauville, to go with him and shoot ducks on the marshes, at daybreak.

My cousin, who was a jolly fellow of forty, with red hair, very stout and bearded, a country gentleman, an amiable semi-brute, of a happy disposition and endowed with that Gallic wit which makes even mediocrity agreeable, lived in a house, half farmhouse, half château, situated in a broad valley through which a river ran. The hills right and left were covered with woods, old seignorial woods where magnificent trees still remained, and where the rarest feathered game in that part of France was to be found. Eagles were shot there occasionally, and birds of passage, those which rarely come into our over-populated part of the country, almost infallibly stopped amid these branches, which were centuries old, as if they knew or recognized a little corner of a forest of ancient times which had remained there to serve them as a shelter during their short nocturnal halting place.

In the valley there were large meadows watered by trenches and separated by hedges; then, further on the river, which up to that point had been canalized, expanded into a vast marsh. That marsh, which was the best shooting ground which I ever saw, was my cousin’s chief care, who kept it like a park. Among the number of rushes that covered it, and made it living, rustling and rough, narrow passages had been made, through which the flat-bottomed boats, which were impelled and steered by poles, passed along silently over the dead water, brushed up against the reeds and made the swift fish take refuge among the weeds, and the wild fowl dive, whose pointed, black heads disappeared suddenly.

I am passionately fond of the water; the sea, although it is too vast, too full of movement, impossible to hold, the rivers, which are so beautiful, but which pass on, flee away and go, and above all the marshes, where the whole unknown existence of aquatic animals palpitates. The marsh is an entire world to itself on earth, a different world which has its own life, its settled inhabitants and its passing travelers, its voices, its noises, and above all its mystery. Nothing is more disturbing, nothing, more disquieting, more terrifying occasionally, than a fen. Why should this terror hang over these low plains covered with water? Is it the vague rustling of the rushes, the strange Will-o’-the-wisps, the profound silence which envelops them on calm nights, or is it the strange mists, which hang over the rushes like a shroud; or else it is the imperceptible splashing, so slight and so gentle, and sometimes more terrifying than the cannons of men or the thunders of skies, which make these marshes resemble countries which none has dreamed of, terrible countries concealing an unknown and dangerous secret.

No, something else belongs to it, another mystery, more profound and graver floats amid these thick mists, perhaps the mystery of the creation itself! For was it not in stagnant and muddy water, amid the heavy humidity of moist land under the heat of the sun, that the first germ of life vibrated and expanded to the day?

I arrived at my cousin’s in the evening. It was freezing hard enough to split stones.

During dinner, in the large room whose sideboards, walls and ceilings were covered with stuffed birds, with extended wings or perched on branches to which they were nailed, hawks, herons, owls, nightjars, buzzards, tiercels, vultures, falcons, my cousin, who himself resembled some strange animal from a cold country, dressed in a sealskin jacket, told me what preparations he had made for that same night.

We were to start at half past three in the morning, so as to arrive at the place which he had chosen for our watching place at about half past four. On that spot a hut had been built of lumps of ice, so as to shelter us somewhat from the terrible wind which precedes daybreak, that wind which is so cold that it tears the flesh as if with a saw, cuts it like the blade of a knife and pricks it like a poisoned sting, twists it like a pair of pincers, and burns it like fire.

My cousin rubbed his hands: “I have never known such a frost,” he said; “it is already twelve degrees below zero at six o’clock in the evening.”

I threw myself onto my bed immediately after we had finished our meal, and I went to sleep by the light of a bright fire burning in the grate.

At three o’clock he woke me. In my turn, I put on a sheepskin, and I found my cousin Karl covered with a bearskin. After having each of us swallowed two cups of scalding coffee, followed by glasses of liqueur brandy, we started, accompanied by a gamekeeper and our dogs, Plongeon and Pierrot.

From the first moment that I got outside, I felt chilled to the very marrow. It was one of those nights on which the earth seems dead with cold. The frozen air becomes resisting and palpable, such pain does it cause; no breath of wind moves it, it is fixed and motionless; it bites, pierces through you, dries, kills the trees, the plants, the insects, the small birds themselves that fall from the branches onto the hard ground, and become hard themselves under the grip of the cold.

The moon, which was in her last quarter and was inclining all to one side, seemed fainting in the midst of space, and so weak that she did not seem able to take her departure, and so she remained up yonder, also seized and paralyzed by the severity of the weather. She shed a cold, mournful light over the world, that dying and wan light which she gives us every month, at the end of her resurrection.

Karl and I went side by side, our backs bent, our hands in our pockets and our guns under our arms. Our boots, which were wrapped in wool, so that we might be able to walk without slipping on the frozen river, made no sound, and I looked at the white vapor which our dogs’ breath made.

We were soon on the edge of the marsh, and we went into one of these lanes of dry rushes which ran through this low forest.

Our elbows, which touched the long, ribbonlike leaves, left a slight noise behind us, and I was seized, as I had never been before, by the powerful singular emotion which marshes cause in me. This one was dead, dead from cold, since we were walking on it, in the middle of its population of dried rushes.

Suddenly, at the turn of one of the lanes, I perceived the ice-hut which had been constructed to shelter us. I went in, and as we had nearly an hour to wait before the wandering birds would awake, I rolled myself up in my rug in order to try and get warm.

Then, lying on my back, I began to look at the misshapen moon, which had four horns, through the vaguely transparent walls of this polar house.

But the frost of the frozen marshes, the cold of these walls, the cold from the firmament penetrated me so terribly, that I began to cough.

My cousin Karl became uneasy. “So much the worse if we do not kill much to-day,” he said, “I do not want you to catch cold; we will light a fire.” And he told the gamekeeper to cut some rushes.

We made a pile in the middle of our hut, which had a hole in the middle of the roof to let out the smoke, and when the red flames rose up to the clear, crystal cloisons they began to melt, gently, imperceptibly, as if these stones of ice had sweated. Karl, who had remained outside, called out to me: “Come and look here!” I went out of the hut and remained, struck with astonishment. Our hut, in the shape of a cone, looked like an enormous diamond with a heart of fire, which had been suddenly planted there in the midst of the frozen water of the marsh. And inside we saw two fantastic forms, those of our dogs, who were warming themselves at the fire.

But a peculiar cry, a lost, a wandering cry, passed over our heads, and the light from our hearth showed us the wild birds. Nothing moves one so much as the first clamor of life which one does not see, and which is passing through the somber air so quickly and so far off, before the first streak of the winter’s day appears on the horizon. It seems to me at this glacial hour of dawn, as if that passing cry which is carried away by the wings of a bird, is the sigh of a soul from the world!

“Put out the fire,” Karl said. “It is getting daylight.”

The sky was, in fact, beginning to grow pale, and the flights of ducks made long, rapid spots, which were soon obliterated, on the sky.

A stream of light burst out into the night; Karl had fired, and the two dogs ran forward.

And then, nearly every minute, now he, now I, aimed rapidly as soon as the shadow of a flying flock appeared above the rushes. And Pierrot and Plongeon, out of breath but happy, retrieved the bleeding birds for us, whose eyes still, occasionally, looked at us.

The sun had risen, and it was a bright day with a blue sky, and we were thinking of taking our departure, when two birds with extended necks and outstretched wings, glided rapidly over our heads. I fired, and one of them fell almost at my feet. It was a teal, with a silver breast, and then, in the blue space above me, I heard a voice, the voice of a bird. It was a short, repeated, heartrending lament; and the bird, the little animal that had been spared began to turn round in the blue sky, over our heads, looking at its dead companion which I was holding in my hand.

Karl was on his knees, his gun to his shoulder watching it eagerly, until it should be within shot. "You have killed the duck," he said, "and the drake will not fly away."

He certainly did not fly away; he turned round over our heads continually, and continued his cries. Never have any groans of suffering pained me so much as that desolate appeal, as that lamentable reproach of this poor bird which was lost in space.

Occasionally he took a flight under the menace of the gun which followed his flight, and seemed ready to continue his flight alone, but as he could not make up his mind to this, he soon returned to find his mate.

"Leave her on the ground," Karl said to me, "he will come within shot by and by." And he did indeed come near us, careless of danger, infatuated by his animals' love, by his affection for that other animal which I had just killed.

Karl fired, and it was as if somebody had cut the string which held the bird suspended. I saw something black descend, and I heard the noise of a fall among the rushes. And Pierrot brought it to me.

I put them — they were already cold — into the same bag, and I returned to Paris the same evening.

SAVED

The little Marquise de Rennedon came rushing in like a ball smashing a window, and she began to laugh before she spoke, to laugh until she cried, like she had done a month previously, when she had told her friend that she had betrayed the marquis in order to have her revenge, and only once, because he was really too stupid and too jealous.

The little Baroness de Grangerie had thrown the book which she was reading on the sofa, and looked at Annette curiously. She was already laughing herself, and at last she asked:

“What have you been doing now?” “Oh! ... my dear!... my dear! it is too funny ... too funny.... Just fancy ... I am saved!... saved!... saved!”... “How do you mean, saved!” “Yes, saved!” “From what?” “From my husband, my dear, saved! Delivered! free! free! free!” “How free? in what?” “In what? Divorce! Yes, a divorce! I have my divorce!” “You are divorced?” “No, not yet; how stupid you are! One does not get divorced in three hours! But I have my proofs that he has deceived me ... caught in the very act ... just think!... in the very act.... I have got him tight....” “Oh! do tell me all about it! So he deceived you?” “Yes, that is to say no ... yes and no ... I do not know. At any rate, I have proofs, and that is the chief thing.” “How did you manage it?”

“How did I manage it?... This is how! I have been energetic, very energetic. For the last three months he has been odious, altogether odious, brutal, coarse, a despot, in one word, vile. So I said to myself: This cannot last, I must have a divorce! But how? for it is not very easy? I tried to make him beat me, but he would not. He put me out from morning till night, made me go out when I did not wish to, and to remain at home when I wanted to dine out; he made my life unbearable for me from one week’s end to the other, but he never struck me.

“Then I tried to find out whether he had a mistress. Yes, he had one, but he took a thousand precautions in going to see her, and they could never be caught together. Guess what I did then?” “I cannot guess.” “Oh! you could never guess. I asked my brother to procure me a photograph of the creature.” “Of your husband’s mistress?” “Yes. It cost Jacques fifteen louis, the price of an evening, from seven o’clock until midnight, including a dinner, at three louis an hour, and he obtained the photograph into the bargain.” “It appears to me that he might have obtained it anyhow by means of some artifice and without ... without ... without being obliged to take the original at the same time.” “Oh! she is pretty, and Jacques did not mind the least. And then, I wanted some details about her, physical details about her figure, her breast, her complexion, a thousand things, in fact.”

“I do not understand you.” “You shall see. When I had learned all that I wanted to know, I went to a ... how shall I put it ... to a man of business ... you know ... one of those men who transact business of all sorts ... agents of ... of ... of publicity and complicity ... one of those men ... well, you understand what I mean.” “Pretty nearly, I think. And what did you say to him?” “I said to him, showing the photograph of Clarisse (her name is Clarisse): ‘Monsieur, I want a lady’s maid who resembles this photograph. I require one who is pretty, elegant, neat and sharp. I will pay her whatever is necessary, and if it costs me ten thousand francs so much the worse. I shall not require her for more than three months.’

“The man looked extremely astonished, and said: ‘Do you require a maid of an irreproachable character, Madame?’ I blushed, and stammered. ‘Yes, of course, for honesty.’ He continued: ... ‘And ... then ... as regards morals....’ I did not venture to reply, so I only made a sign with my head, which signified: *no*. Then suddenly, I comprehended that he had a horrible suspicion and losing my presence of mind, I exclaimed: ‘Oh, Monsieur, ... it is for my husband, in order that I may surprise him....’

“Then the man began to laugh, and from his looks I gathered that I had regained his esteem. He even thought I was brave, and I would willingly have made a bet that at that moment he was longing to shake hands with me. However, he said to me: ‘In a week, Madame, I shall have what you require; I will answer for my success, and you shall not pay me until I have succeeded. So this is a photograph of your husband’s mistress?’ ‘Yes, Monsieur,’ ‘A handsome woman, and not too stout. And what scent?’

“I did not understand, and repeated: ‘What scent?’ He smiled: ‘Yes, Madame, the perfume is essential to seduce a man, for it unconsciously brings to his mind certain reminiscences which dispose him to action; the perfume creates an obscure confusion in his mind, and disturbs and enervates him by recalling his pleasures to him. You must also try to find out what your husband is in the habit of eating when he dines with his lady, and you might give him the same dishes the day you catch him. Oh! we have got him, Madame, we have got him.’

“I went away delighted, for here I had lighted on a very intelligent man.

“Three days later, I saw a tall, dark girl arrive at my house; she was very handsome and her looks were modest and bold at the same time, the peculiar look of a female rake. She behaved very properly towards me, and as I did not exactly know what she was, I called her *Mademoiselle*, but she said immediately: ‘Oh! pray, Madame, only call me Rose.’ And she began to talk.

“‘Well, Rose, you know why you have come here?’ ‘I can guess it, Madame.’ ‘Very good, my girl ... and that will not ... be too much bother for you?’ ‘Oh! madame, this will be the eighth divorce that I shall have caused; I am used to it.’ ‘Why, that is capital. Will it take you long to succeed?’ ‘Oh! Madame, that depends entirely on Monsieur’s temperament. When I have seen Monsieur for five minutes alone I shall be able to tell you exactly.’ ‘You will see him soon, my child, but I must tell you that he is not handsome.’ ‘That does not matter to me, Madame. I have already separated some very ugly ones. But I must ask you, Madame, whether you have discovered his favorite perfume?’ ‘Yes, Rose, — verbena.’ ‘So much the better, Madame, for I am also very fond of that scent! Can you also tell me, Madame, whether Monsieur’s mistress wears silk underclothing and nightdresses?’ ‘No, my child, cambric and lace.’ ‘Oh! then she is altogether of superior station, for silk underclothing is getting quite common.’ ‘What you say is quite true!’ ‘Well, Madame, I will enter your service.’ And so, as a matter of fact, she did immediately, and as if she had done nothing else all her life.

“An hour later my husband came home. Rose did not even raise her eyes to him, but he raised his eyes to her. She already smelt strongly of verbena, and in five minutes she left the room, and he immediately asked me: ‘Who is that girl?’ ‘Why ... my new lady’s maid.’ ‘Where did you pick her up?’ ‘Baroness de Grangerie got her for me with the best references.’ ‘Ah! she is rather pretty!’ ‘Do you think so?’ ‘Why, yes ... for a lady’s maid.’

“I was delighted, for I felt that he was already biting, and that same evening Rose said to me: ‘I can now promise you that it will not take more than a fortnight. Monsieur is very easily caught!' 'Ah! you have tried already?' 'No, Madame, he only asked what my name was ... so that he might hear what my voice was like.' 'Very well, my dear Rose. Get on as quick as you can.' 'Do not be alarmed, Madame; I shall only resist long enough not to make myself depreciated.'

"At the end of a week my husband scarcely ever went out; I saw him roaming about the house the whole afternoon, and what was most significant in the matter was, that he no longer prevented me from going out. And I, I was out of doors nearly the whole day long, ... in order ... in order to leave him at liberty.

"On the ninth day, while Rose was undressing me, she said to me with a timid air: 'It happened this morning, Madame.' I was rather surprised, or rather overcome even, not at the part itself, but at the way in which she told me, and I stammered out: 'And ... and ... it went off well?' 'Oh! yes, very well, Madame. For the last three days he has been pressing me, but I did not wish matters to proceed too quickly. You will tell me when you want us to be caught, Madame.' 'Yes, certainly. Here!... let us say Thursday.' 'Very well, Madame, I shall grant nothing more until then, so as to keep Monsieur on the alert.' 'You are sure not to fail?' 'Oh! quite sure, Madame. I will excite him, so as to make him be there at the very moment which you may appoint.' 'Let us say five o'clock, then.' 'Very well, Madame, and where?' 'Well ... in my bedroom.' 'Very good, Madame, in your bedroom.'

"You will understand what I did then, my dear. I went and fetched Mamma and Papa first of all, and then my uncle d'Orvelin, the President, and Monsieur Raplet, the Judge, my husband's friend. I had not told them what I was going to show them, but I made them all go on tiptoe as far as the door of my room. I waited until five o'clock exactly, and oh! how my heart beat! I had made the porter come upstairs as well, so as to have an additional witness! And then ... and then at the moment when the clock began to strike, I opened the door wide.... Ah! ah! ah! Here he was evidently, ... it was quite evident, my dear.... Oh! what a face!... if you had only seen his face!... And he turned round, the idiot! Oh! how funny he looked.... I laughed, I laughed.... And papa was angry and wanted to give my husband a beating.... And the porter, a good servant, helped him to dress himself ... before us ... before us.... He buttoned his braces for him ... what a joke it was!... As for Rose, she was perfect, absolutely perfect.... She cried

... oh! she cried very well. She is an invaluable girl.... If you ever want her, don’t forget!

“And here I am.... I came immediately to tell you of the affair ... directly. I am free. Long live divorce!”

And she began to dance in the middle of the drawing-room, while the little baroness, who was thoughtful and vexed, said:

“Why did you not invite me to see it?”

THE SIGNAL

The little Marchioness de Rennedon was still asleep in her closed and perfumed bedroom, in her soft, low bed, between her sheets of delicate cambric, fine as lace and caressing as a kiss; she was sleeping alone and tranquil, the happy and profound sleep of divorced women.

She was awakened by loud voices in the little blue drawing-room, and she recognized her dear friend, the little Baroness de Grangerie, who was disputing with the lady's maid, because the latter would not allow her to go into her mistress' room. So the little Marchioness got up, opened the door, drew back the door-hangings and showed her head, nothing but her fair head, hidden under a cloud of hair.

"What is the matter with you, that you have come so early?" she asked. "It is not nine o'clock yet."

The little baroness who was very pale, nervous and feverish, replied: "I must speak to you. Something horrible has happened to me." "Come in, my dear."

She went in, they kissed each other, and the little Marchioness got back into her bed while the lady's maid opened the windows to let in light and air, and then when she had left the room, Madame de Rennedon went on: "Well, tell me what it is."

Madame de Grangerie began to cry, shedding those pretty, bright tears which make woman more charming, and she stammered without wiping her eyes, so as not to make them red: "Oh! my dear, what has happened to me is abominable, abominable. I have not slept all night, not a minute; do you hear, not a minute. Here, just feel my heart, how it is beating."

And, taking her friend's hand, she put it on her breast, on that firm, round covering of women's hearts which often suffices men, and prevents them from seeking beneath. But her breast was really beating violently.

She continued: "It happened to me yesterday during the day, at about four o'clock ... or half-past four; I cannot say exactly. You know my apartments, and you know that my little drawing-room, where I always sit, looks onto the Rue Saint-Lazare, and that I have a mania for sitting at the window to look at the people passing. The neighborhood of the railway station is very gay; so full of motion and lively.... Well, that is just what I like! So, yesterday, I was sitting in the low chair which I have placed in my window recess; the window was open and I was not thinking of anything; I was breathing the fresh air. You remember how fine it was yesterday!

"Suddenly, I remarked that there was also a woman sitting at the window, a woman in red; I was in mauve, you know, my pretty mauve costume. I did not know the woman, a new lodger, who had been there a month, and as it had been raining for a month, I had not yet seen her, but I saw immediately that she was a bad girl. At first I was very much shocked and disgusted that she should be at the window like I was; and then, by degrees, it amused me to examine her. She was resting her elbows on the window ledge, and looking at the men, and the men looked at her also, all or nearly all. One might have said that they were apprised beforehand by some means as they got near the house, which they scented as dogs scent game, for they suddenly raised their heads, and exchanged a swift look with her, a freemason's look. Hers said: 'Will you?'

"Theirs replied: 'I have no time,' or else: 'another day;' or else: 'I have not got a half penny;' or else: 'Will you hide yourself, you wretch!'

"You cannot imagine how funny it was to see her carrying on such a piece of work, though, after all, it is her regular business.

"Sometimes she shut the window suddenly, and I saw a gentleman go in. She had caught him like a fisherman hooks a gudgeon. Then I looked at my watch, and I found that they stopped from twelve to twenty minutes, never longer. In the end she really infatuated me, the spider! And then the creature is so ugly.

"I asked myself: How does she manage to make herself understood so quickly, so well and so completely? Does she add a sign of the head or a motion of the hands to her looks? And I took my opera-glasses to watch her proceedings. Oh! they were very simple: first of all a glance, then a smile, then a slight sign with the head, which meant: 'Are you coming up?' But it was so slight, so vague, so discreet, that it required a great deal of knack to succeed as she did. And I asked myself: 'I wonder if I could do that little movement, from below upwards, which was at the same time bold and pretty, as well as she does,' for her gesture was very pretty.

“I went and tried it before the looking-glass, and, my dear, I did it better than she, a great deal better! I was enchanted, and resumed my place at the window.

“She caught nobody more then, poor girl, nobody. She certainly had no luck. It must really be very terrible to earn one’s bread in that way, terrible and amusing occasionally, for really some of these men one meets in the street are rather nice.

“After that they all came on my side of the road and none on hers; the sun had turned. They came one after the other, young, old, dark, fair, gray, white. I saw some who looked very nice, really very nice, my dear, far better than my husband or than yours, I mean than your late husband, as you have got a divorce. Now you can choose.

“I said to myself! If I give them the sign, will they understand me, who am a respectable woman? And I was seized with a mad longing to make that sign to them. I had a longing, the longing of a pregnant woman ... a terrible longing; you know, one of those longings which one cannot resist! I have some like that occasionally. How stupid such things are, don’t you think so? I believe that we woman have the souls of monkeys. I have been told (and it was a physician who told me) that the brain of a monkey was very like ours. Of course we must imitate some one or other. We imitate our husbands, when we love them, during the first months after our marriage, and then our lovers, our female friends, our confessors, when they are nice. We assume their ways of thought, their manners of speech, their words, their gestures, everything. It is very stupid.

“However, as for me, when I am too much tempted to do a thing I always do it, and so I said to myself: ‘I will try it once, on one man only, just to see. What can happen to me? Nothing whatever! We shall exchange a smile and that will be all, and I shall deny it, most certainly.’

“So I began to make my choice. I wanted someone nice, very nice, and suddenly I saw a tall, fair, very good-looking fellow coming along. I like fair men, as you know. I looked at him, he looked at me; I smiled, he smiled; I made the movement; oh! but scarcely; he replied *yes* with his head, and there he was, my dear! He came in at the large door of the house.

“You cannot imagine what passed through my mind then! I thought I should go mad. Oh! how frightened I was. Just think, he will speak to the servants! To Joseph, who is devoted to my husband! Joseph would certainly think that I had known that gentleman for a long time.

"What could I do, just tell me? And he would ring in a moment. What could I do, tell me? I thought I would go and meet him, and tell him he had made a mistake, and beg him to go away. He would have pity on a woman, on a poor woman: So I rushed to the door and opened it, just at the moment when he was going to ring the bell, and I stammered out, quite stupidly: 'Go away, Monsieur, go away; you have made a mistake, a terrible mistake; I took you for one of my friends whom you are very like. Have pity on me, Monsieur.'

"But he only began to laugh, my dear, and replied: 'Good morning, my dear, I know all about your little story, you may be sure. You are married, and so you want forty francs instead of twenty, and you shall have them, so just show the way.'

"And he pushed me in, closed the door, and as I remained standing before him, horror-struck, he kissed me, put his arm round my waist and made me go back into the drawing-room, which had remained open. Then he began to look at everything, like an auctioneer, and continued: 'By Jove, it is very nice in your rooms, very well. You must be very down on your luck just now, to do the window business!'

"Then I began to beg him again: 'Oh! Monsieur, go away, please go away! My husband will be coming in soon, it is just his time. I swear that you have made a mistake!' But he answered quite coolly: 'Come, my beauty, I have had enough of this nonsense, and if your husband comes in, I will give him five francs to go and have a drink at the café opposite.' And then, seeing Raoul's photograph on the chimney-piece, he asked me: 'Is that your ... your husband?' 'Yes, that is he.' 'He looks a nice, disagreeable sort of fellow. And who is this? One of your friends?'

"It was your photograph, my dear, you know, the one in ball dress. I did not know any longer what I was saying, and I stammered: 'Yes, it is one of my friends.' 'She is very nice; you shall introduce me to her.'

"Just then the clock struck five, and Raoul comes home every day at half past! Suppose he were to come home before the other had gone, just fancy what would have happened! Then ... then ... I completely lost my head ... altogether.... I thought ... I thought ... that ... that ... the best thing would be ... to get rid ... of ... of this man ... as quickly as possible.... The sooner it was over ... you understand ... and ... and there ... as it must be done ... and I was obliged, my dear ... he would not have gone away without it.... Well I ... I locked the drawing-room door.... There!"

The little Marchioness de Rennedon had begun to laugh, to laugh madly, with her head buried in her pillow, so that the whole bed shook, and when she was a little calmer she asked: "And ... and ... was he good-looking?" "Yes." "And yet you complain?" "But ... but ... don't you see, my dear, he said ... he said ... he should come again to-morrow ... at the same time ... and I ... I am terribly frightened.... You have no idea how tenacious he is and obstinate.... What can I do ... tell me ... what can I do?"

The little Marchioness sat up in bed to reflect, and then she suddenly said: "Have him arrested!"

The little Baroness looked stupefied, and stammered out: "What do you say? What are you thinking of? Have him arrested? Under what pretext?" "That is very simple. Go to the Commissary of Police and say that a gentleman has been following you about for three months; that he had the insolence to go up to your apartments yesterday; that he has threatened you with another visit to-morrow, and that you demand the protection of the law, and they will give you two police officers, who will arrest him."

"But, my dear, suppose he tells...." "They will not believe him, you silly thing, if you have told your tale cleverly to the commissary, but they will believe you, who are an irreproachable woman, and in society." "Oh! I shall never dare to do it." "You must dare, my dear, or you are lost." "But think that he will ... he will insult me if he is arrested." "Very well, you will have witnesses, and he will be sentenced." "Sentenced to what?" "To pay damages. In such cases, one must be pitiless!" "Ah! speaking of damages.... There is one thing that worries me very much ... very much indeed.... He left me two twenty franc pieces on the mantelpiece." "Two twenty franc pieces?" "Yes." "No more?" "No." "That is very little. It would have humiliated me. Well?" "Well! What am I to do with that money?"

The little Marchioness hesitated for a few seconds, and then she replied in a serious voice:

"My dear ... you must make ... you must make your husband a little present with it.... That will be only fair!"

UGLY

Certainly, at this blessed epoch of Equality of mediocrity, of rectangular abomination, as Edgar Poe says, at this delightful period, when everybody dreams of resembling everybody else, so that it has become impossible to tell the President of the Republic from a waiter; in these days, which are the forerunners of that promising, blissful day, when everything in this world will be of a dully, neuter uniformity, certainly at such an epoch, one has the right, or rather it is one's duty, to be ugly.

He, however, assuredly, exercised that right with the most cruel vigor, and he fulfilled that duty with the fiercest heroism, and to make matters worse, the mysterious irony of fate had caused him to be born with the name of Lebeau, while an ingenious godfather, the unconscious accomplice of the pranks of destiny, had given him the Christian name of Antinous.

Even among our contemporaries, who were already on the high road to the coming ideal of universal ugliness, Antinous Lebeau was remarkable for his ugliness, and one might have said that he positively threw zeal, too much zeal, into the matter, though he was not hideous like Mirabeau, who made the people exclaim: "Oh! the beautiful monster!"

Alas! No. He was without any beauty, even without the beauty of ugliness. He was ugly, that was all; nothing more nor less; in short, he was uglily ugly. He was not humpbacked, nor knock-kneed, nor pot-bellied; his legs were not like a pair of tongs, and his arms were neither too long nor too short, and yet, there was an utter lack of uniformity about him, not only in painters' eyes, but also in everybody's, for nobody could meet him in the street without turning to look after him, and thinking: "Good heavens! What an object."

His hair was of no particular color; a light chestnut, mixed with yellow. There was not much of it, but still, he was not absolutely bald, but quite bald enough to allow his butter-colored pate to show. Butter-colored?

Hardly! The color of margarine would be more applicable, and such pale margarine.

His face was also like margarine, but of adulterated margarine, certainly. By the side of it, his *cranium*, the color of unadulterated margarine, looked almost like butter, by comparison.

There was very little to say about his mouth! Less than little; the sum total was — nothing. It was a chimerical mouth.

But take it, that I have said nothing about him, and let us replace this vain description by the useful formula: *Impossible to describe him*. But you must not forget that Antinous Lebeau was ugly, that the fact impressed everybody as soon as they saw him, and that nobody remembered ever having seen an uglier person; and let us add, that as the climax of his misfortune, he thought so himself.

From this you will see that he was not a fool, but, then, he was not ill-natured, either; but, of course, he was unhappy. An unhappy man thinks only of his wretchedness, and people take his night cap for a fool's cap, while, on the other hand, goodness is only esteemed when it is cheerful. Consequently, Antinous Lebeau passed for a fool, and an ill-tempered fool, and he was not even pitied because he was so ugly.

He had only one pleasure in life, and that was to go and roam about the darkest streets on dark nights, and to hear the street-walkers say:

"Come home with me, you handsome, dark man!"

It was, alas! a furtive pleasure, and he knew that it was not true. For, occasionally, when the woman was old or drunk and he profited by the invitation, as soon as the candle was lighted in the garret, they no longer murmured the fallacious: *handsome, dark man*; and when they saw him, the old women grew still older, and the drunken women got sober. And more than one, although hardened against disgust, and ready for all risks, said to him, and in spite of his liberal payment:

"My little man, you are most confoundedly ugly, I must say."

At last, however, he renounced even that lamentable pleasure, when he heard the still more lamentable words which a wretched woman could not help uttering when he went home with her:

"Well, he must have been very hungry!"

Alas! He was hungry, unhappy man; hungry for love, for something that should resemble love, were it ever so little; he longed not to live like a pariah any more, not to be exiled and proscribed in his ugliness. And the ugliest, the most repugnant woman would have appeared beautiful to him, if she would only have not consented to think him ugly, or, at any rate, not to tell him so, and not to let him see that she felt horror at him on that account.

The consequence was, that, when he one day met a poor, blear-eyed creature, with her face covered with scabs, and bearing evident signs of alcoholism, with a driveling mouth, and ragged and filthy petticoats, to whom he gave liberal alms, for which she kissed his hand, he took her home with him, had her clean dressed and taken care of, made her his servant, and then his housekeeper. Next he raised her to the rank of his mistress, and, finally, of course, he married her.

She was almost as ugly as he was! She really was; but only, almost. Almost, but certainly not quite; for she was hideous, and her hideousness had its charm and its beauty, no doubt; that something by which a woman can attract a man. And she had proved that by deceiving him, and she let him see it better still, by seducing another man.

That other was actually uglier than he was.

He was certainly uglier, that collection of every physical and moral ugliness, that companion of beggars whom she had picked up among her former vagrant associates, that jailbird, that dealer in little girls, that vagabond covered with filth, with legs like a toad's, with a mouth like a lamprey, and a death's head, in which the nose had been replaced by two holes.

"And you have wronged me with a wretch like that," the poor cuckold said. "And in my own house! and in such a manner that I might catch you in the very act! And why, why, you wretch? Why, seeing that he is uglier than I am?"

"Oh! no," she exclaimed. "You may say what you like, but do not say that he is uglier than you are."

And the unhappy man stood there, vanquished and overcome by her last words, which she uttered without understanding all the horror which he would feel at them.

"Because, you see, he has his own particular ugliness, while you are merely ugly like everybody else is."

WOMAN’S WILES

“Women?”

“Well, what do you say about women?”

“Well, there are no conjurors more subtle in taking us in at every available opportunity with or without reason, often for the sole pleasure of playing tricks on us. And they play these tricks with incredible simplicity, astonishing audacity, unparalleled ingenuity. They play tricks from morning till night, and they all do it — the most virtuous, the most upright, the most sensible of them. You may add that sometimes they are to some extent driven to do these things. Man has always idiotic fits of obstinacy and tyrannical desires. A husband is continually giving ridiculous orders in his own house. He is full of caprices; his wife plays on them even while she makes use of them for the purpose of deception. She persuades him that a thing costs so much because he would kick up a row if its price were higher. And she always extricates herself from the difficulty cunningly by a means so simple and so sly that we gape with amazement when by chance we discover them. We say to ourselves in a stupefied state of mind ‘How is it we did not see this till now?’”

The man who uttered the words was an ex-Minister of the Empire, the Comte de L —— , a thorough profligate, it was said, and a very accomplished gentleman. A group of young men were listening to him.

He went on:

“I was outwitted by an ordinary uneducated woman in a comic and thorough-going fashion. I will tell you about it for your instruction.

“I was at the time Minister for Foreign Affairs, and I was in the habit of taking a long walk every morning in the Champs Elysees. It was the month of May; I walked along, sniffing in eagerly that sweet odor of budding leaves.

"Ere long, I noticed, that I used to meet every day a charming little woman, one of those marvelous, graceful creatures, who bear the trademark of Paris. Pretty? Well, yes and no. Well-made? No, better than that: her waist was too slight, her shoulders too narrow, her breast too full, no doubt; but I prefer those exquisite human dolls to that great statuesque corpse, the Venus of Milo.

"And then this sort of woman trots along in an incomparable fashion, and the very rustle of her skirt fills the marrow of your bones with desire. She seemed to give me a side-glance as she passed me. But these women give you all sorts of looks — you never can tell....

"One morning, I saw her sitting on a bench with an open book between her hands. I came across, and sat down beside her. Five minutes later, we were friends. Then, each day, after the smiling salutation 'Good day, Madame,' 'Good day, Monsieur,' we began to chat. She told me that she was the wife of a Government clerk, that her life was a sad one, that in it pleasures were few and cares numerous, and a thousand other things.

"I told her who I was, partly through thoughtlessness, and partly perhaps through vanity. She pretended to be much astonished.

"Next day, she called at the Ministry to see me; and she came again there so often that the ushers, having their attention drawn to her appearance, used to whisper to one another, as soon as they saw her, the name with which they had christened her 'Madame Leon' that is my Christian name.

"For three months I saw her every morning without growing tired of her for a second, so well was she able incessantly to give variety and piquancy to her physical attractiveness. But one day I saw that her eyes were bloodshot and glowing with suppressed tears, that she could scarcely speak, so much was she preoccupied with secret troubles.

"I begged of her, I implored of her, to tell me what was the cause of her agitation.

"She faltered out at length with a shudder: 'I am — I am pregnant!'

"And she burst out sobbing. Oh! I made a dreadful grimace, and I have no doubt I turned pale, as men generally do at hearing such a piece of news. You cannot conceive what an unpleasant stab you feel in your breast at the announcement of an unexpected paternity of this kind. But you are sure to know it sooner or later. So, in my turn, I gasped: 'But — but — you are married, are you not?'

“She answered: ‘Yes, but my husband has been away in Italy for the last two months, and he will not be back for some time.’

“I was determined at any cost to get out of my responsibility.

“I said: ‘You must go and join him immediately.’

“She reddened to her very temples, and with downcast eyes, murmured: ‘Yes — but— ‘ She either dared not or would not finish the sentence.

“I understood, and I prudently enclosed her in an envelope the expenses of the journey.

“Eight days later, she sent me a letter from Genoa. The following week, I received one from Florence. Then letters reached me from Leghorn, Rome, and Naples.

“She said to me: ‘I am in good health, my dear love, but I am looking frightful. I would not care to have you see me till it is all over; you would not love me. My husband suspects nothing. As his business in this country will require him to stay there much longer, I will not return to France till after my confinement.’

“And, at the end of about eight months, I received from Venice these few words: ‘It is a boy.’

“Some time after, she suddenly entered my study one morning, fresher and prettier than ever, and flung herself into my arms.

“And our former connection was renewed.

“I left the Ministry, and she came to live in my house in the Rue de Grenelle. She often spoke to me about the child, but I scarcely listened to what she said about it; it did not concern me. Now and then I placed a rather large sum of money in her hand, saying: ‘Put that by for him.’

“Two more years glided by; and she was more eager to tell me some news about the youngster— ‘about Leon.’

“Sometimes she would say in the midst of tears: ‘You don’t care about him; you don’t even wish to see him. If you know what grief you cause me!’

“At last I was so much harassed by her that I promised, one day, to go, next morning, to the Champs Elysees, when she took the child there for an airing.

“But at the moment when I was leaving the house, I was stopped by a sudden apprehension. Man is weak and foolish. What if I were to get fond of this tiny being of whom I was the father — my son?

"I had my hat on my head, my gloves in my hands. I flung down the gloves on my desk, and my hat on a chair:

"No. Decidedly I will not go; it is wiser not to go.'

"My door flew open. My brother entered the room. He handed me an anonymous letter he had received that morning:

"'Warn the Comte de L —— , your brother, that the little woman of the Rue Casette is impudently laughing at him. Let him make some inquiries about her.'

"I had never told anybody about this intrigue, and I now told my brother the history of it from the beginning to the end. I added:

"For my part, I don't want to trouble myself any further about the matter; but will you, like a good fellow, go and find out what you can about her?

"When my brother had left me, I said to myself: 'In what way can she have deceived me? She has other lovers? What does it matter to me? She is young, fresh, and pretty; I ask nothing more from her. She seems to love me, and as a matter of fact, she does not cost me much. Really, I don't understand this business.'

"My brother speedily returned. He had learned from the police all that was to be known about her husband: 'A clerk in the Home Department, of regular habits and good repute, and, moreover, a thinking man, but married to a very pretty woman, whose expenses seemed somewhat extravagant for her modest position.' That was all.

"Now, my brother having sought for her at her residence, and finding that she was gone out, succeeded, with the assistance of a little gold, in making the doorkeeper chatter: 'Madame D —— , a very worthy woman, and her husband a very worthy man, not proud, not rich, but generous.'

"My brother asked for the sake of saying something:

"'How old is her little boy now?'

"'Why, she has not got any little boy, monsieur.'

"'What? Little Leon?'

"'No, monsieur, you are making a mistake.'

"'I mean the child she had while she was in Italy, two years ago?'

"'She has never been in Italy, monsieur; she has not quitted the house she is living in for the last five years.'

"My brother, in astonishment, questioned the doorkeeper anew, and then he pushed his investigation of the matter further. No child, no journey.

“I was prodigiously astonished, but without clearly understanding the final meaning of this comedy.

“‘I want,’ said I to him, ‘to have my mind perfectly clear about the affair. I will ask her to come here to-morrow. You shall receive her instead of me. If she has deceived me, you will hand her these ten thousand francs, and I will never see her again. In fact, I am beginning to find I have had enough of her.’

“Would you believe it? I had been grieved the night before because I had a child by this woman; and I was now irritated, ashamed, wounded at having no more of her. I found myself free, released from all responsibility, from all anxiety, and yet I felt myself raging at the position in which I was placed.

“Next morning my brother awaited her in my study. She came in as quickly as usual, rushing towards him with outstretched arms, but when she saw who it was she at once drew back.

“He bowed, and excused himself.

“‘I beg your pardon, madame, for being here instead of my brother, but he has authorized me to ask you for some explanations which he would find it painful to seek from you himself.’

“Then, fixing on her face a searching glance, he said abruptly:

“‘We know you have not a child by him.’

“After the first moment of stupor, she regained her composure, took a seat, and gazed with a smile at this man who was sitting in judgment on her.

“She answered simply:

“‘No; I have no child.’

“‘We know also that you have never been in Italy.’

“This time she burst out laughing in earnest.

“‘No, I have never been in Italy.’

“My brother, quite stunned, went on:

“‘The Comte has requested me to give you this money, and tell you that it is all broken off.’

“She became serious again, calmly putting the money into her pocket, and, in an ingenuous tone asked:

“‘And I am not, then, to see the Comte any more?’

“‘No, madame.’

“She appeared to be annoyed, and in a passionless voice she said:

“‘So much the worse; I was very fond of him.’

“Seeing that she had made up her mind on the subject so resolutely, my brother, smiling in his turn, said to her:

“‘Look here, now, tell me why you invented all this tricky yarn, complicating it by bringing in the sham journey to Italy and the child?’”

She gazed at my brother in amazement, as if he had asked her a stupid question, and replied:

“‘I say! How spiteful you are! Do you believe a poor little woman of the people such as I am — nothing at all — could have for three years kept on my hands the Comte de L —— , Minister, a great personage, a man of fashion, wealthy and seductive, if she had not taken a little trouble about it? Now it is all over. So much the worse. It couldn’t last for ever. None the less I succeeded in doing it for three years. You will say many things to him on my behalf.’

“She rose up. My brother continued questioning her:

“‘But — the child? You had one to show him?’

“‘Certainly — my sister’s child. She lent it to me. I’d bet it was she gave you the information.’

“‘Good! And all those letters from Italy?’

“She sat down again so as to laugh at her ease.

“‘Oh! those letters — well, they were a bit of poetry. The Comte was not a Minister of Foreign Affairs for nothing.’

“‘But — another thing?’

“Oh! the other thing is my secret. I don’t want to compromise anyone.’

“And bowing to him with a rather mocking smile, she left the room without any emotion, an actress who had played her part to the end.”

And the Comte de L —— added by way of moral:

“So take care about putting your trust in that sort of turtle dove!”

FLY

RECOLLECTIONS OF A BOATMAN

He said to us: “I saw some very funny things and some funny girls when I was a boatman, and I have often been tempted to write a little book to be called *On the Seine*, telling all about that careless and vigorous, that merry and poor life, a life of robust and noisy enjoyment, which I led from the time I was twenty until I was thirty.

“I was a mere understrapper without a half-penny, and now I am a man who has made his money, who has spent large sums on a momentary caprice. In my heart, I had a thousand modest and unrealizable desires which gilded my existence with imaginary hopes, though now, I really do not know that any fancy would make me get out of my armchair where I am dozing. How simple and nice and good it is to live like this, between my office in Paris, and the river at Argenteuil. For ten years, the Seine was my only, my absorbing passion. Ah! that beautiful, calm, diversified and stinking river, full of mirage and filth. I think I loved it so much because it seemed to give me a sense of life. Oh! what walks I had along the grassy banks, where my friends the frogs were dreaming on the leaf of a nenuphar, and where the coquettish and delicate water lilies suddenly opened to me, behind a willow, a leaf of a Japanese album, and when the kingfisher flashed past me like a blue flame! How I loved it all, with the instinctive love of eyes which seemed to be all over my body, and with a natural and profound joy.

“Just as other men keep the recollection of sweet and tender nights, so I remember sunrises in the morning mist, floating, wandering vapors, which were as pale as death, before the sun rose, and then as its first rays glided over the meadows, lighted up with a rosy tint, which delighted the heart. And then again, I have recollections of the moon silvering the running, trembling water, with a brightness which made dreams flourish. And all this, the symbol of eternal illusions, rose up in me on that turbid water, which was carrying all the filth of Paris towards the sea.

"And then, what a merry life it was, with my companions. There were five of us, a band of grave men we are now; and as we were all poor, we had founded an inexpressible colony in a horrible eating house at Argenteuil, and which possessed only one bedroom, where I have certainly spent some of the maddest nights of my life. We cared for nothing except for amusing ourselves and rowing, for we all worshiped the oar, with one exception. I remember such singular adventures, such unlikely tricks invented by those five rascals, that no one would believe them at present. People do not live like that any longer, even on the Seine, for our mad fancies which we kept up, have died out now.

"We five only possessed one boat, which we had bought with great difficulty, and on which we laughed, as we shall never laugh again. It was a large yawl, called *The Leaf Turned Upside Down*, rather heavy, but spacious and comfortable. I shall not describe my companions to you. There was one little fellow, called *Petit Bleu*, who was very sharp; a tall man, with a savage look, gray eyes and black hair, who was nick-named *Tomahawk*, the only one who never touched an oar, as he said he should upset the boat; a slender, elegant man, who was very careful about his person, and whom we called *Only-One-Eye*, in remembrance of a recent story about Cladel, and because he wore a single eyeglass, and, lastly, I, who had been baptized Joseph Prunier. We lived together in perfect harmony, and our only regret was that we had no boatwoman, for a woman's presence is almost indispensable on a boat, because it keeps the men's wits and hearts on the alert, because it animates them, and wakes them up and she looks well walking on the green banks with a red parasol. But we did not want an ordinary boatwoman for us five, for we were not very like the rest of the world. We wanted something unexpected, funny, ready for everything, something, in short, which it would be almost impossible to find. We had tried many without success, girls who had held the tiller, imbecile boatwomen who always preferred wine that intoxicates to water which flows and carries the yawls. We kept them for one Sunday, and then got rid of them in disgust.

"Well, one Saturday afternoon, Only-One-Eye brought us a little thin, lively, jumping, chattering girl, full of drollery, of that drollery which is the substitute for wit among the youthful male and female workpeople who have developed in the streets of Paris. She was nice looking without being pretty, the outline of a woman who had some of everything, one of those silhouettes which draftsmen draw in three strokes on the table in a café after dinner, between a glass of brandy and a cigarette. Nature is like that, sometimes.

"The first evening she surprised us, amused us, and we could not form any opinion about her, so unexpectedly had she come among us; but having fallen into this nest of men, who were all ready for any folly, she was soon mistress of the situation, and the very next day she made a conquest of each one of us. She was quite cracked, into the bargain, and must have been born with a glass of absinthe in her stomach, which her mother drank at the moment she was being delivered, and she never got sober since, for her wet nurse, so she said, recruited her strength with draughts of rum, and she never called the bottles which were standing in a line at the back of the wine merchant's shop anything but 'My holy family.'

"I do not know which of us gave her the name of *Fly*, nor why it was given her, but it suited her very well, and stuck to her, and our yawl every week carried five merry, strong young fellows on the Seine between Asnières and Maison Lafitte, who were ruled from under a parasol of colored paper, by a lively and madcap young person, who treated us like slaves whose business it was to row her about, and whom we were all very fond of.

"We were all very fond of her, for a thousand reasons first of all, but for only one, afterwards. In the stern of our boat, she was a kind of small word mill, chattering to the wind which blew on the water. She chattered ceaselessly, with that slight, continuous noise of those pieces of winged mechanism which turn in the breeze, and she thoughtlessly said the most unexpected, the funniest, the most astonishing things. In that mind, all the parts of which seemed dissimilar, like rags of all kinds and of every color, not sewn, but merely tacked together, there appeared to be as much imagination as in a fairy tale, a good deal of coarseness, indecency, impudence and of the unexpected, and as much breeziness and landscapes as in a balloon voyage.

"We put questions to her, in order to call forth answers which she had found, no one could tell where, and the one with which we teased her most frequently was: 'Why are you called Fly?' And she gave us such unlikely reasons that we left off rowing, in order to laugh. But she pleased us also as a woman; and La Toque, who never rowed, and who sat by her side at the tiller the whole day long, once replied to the usual question: ‘Why are you called Fly?’ ‘Because she is a little Spanish fly.’

“Yes, a little buzzing, exciting fly, not the classical, poisonous, brilliant and mantled Spanish fly, but a little Spanish fly with red wings, which began to disturb the whole crew of *The Leaf Turned Upside Down*. And what stupid jokes were also made about this leaf where this fly had alighted!

“Since the arrival of Fly on our boat, Only-One-Eye had taken a leading, superior part among us, the part of a gentleman who has a wife, towards four others who have not got one, and he abused that privilege so far as to kiss Fly in our presence, when he put her on his knee after meals, and by other prerogatives, which were as humiliating as they were irritating.

“They had been isolated in the sleeping-room by means of a curtain, but I soon perceived that my companions and I had the same arguments in our minds, in our solitude: ‘Why, and in virtue of what law of exception, or of what unacceptable principle, should Fly, who does not appear troubled by any prejudices, remain faithful to her lover, while wives in the best are not faithful to their husbands.’

“Our reflections were quite right, and we were soon convinced of it, and we ought only to have made them sooner, so as not to have needed to regret any lost time, for Fly deceived Only-One-Eye, with all the others of the crew of the *Leaf Turned Upside Down*, and she deceived him without making any difficulties, without any resistance, the first time any of us asked her.

“Of course, modest people will be terribly shocked! But why? What courtesan who happens to be in the fashion, but has a dozen lovers, and which of those lovers is stupid enough not to know it? Is it not the correct thing to have an evening at the house of a celebrated and marked courtesan, just as one has an evening at the *Opéra, the Théâtre Français or the Odeon*? Ten men subscribe together to keep a mistress just as they do to possess a race horse, which only one jockey mounts, and this is a correct picture of the favored lover who does not pay anything.

“From delicacy they left Fly to Only-One-Eye from Saturday night to Monday morning, and we only deceived him during the week, in Paris, from the Seine, which, for boatmen like us, was hardly deceiving him at all. The situation had this peculiarity, that the four freebooters of Fly’s favors were quite aware of this partition of her among themselves, and that they spoke of it to each other, and even then, with allusions that made her laugh very much. Only-One-Eye alone seemed to know nothing, and that peculiar position gave rise to some embarrassment between him and us, and seemed to separate him from us, to isolate him, to raise a barrier across our former confidence and our former intimacy. That gave him a difficult and a rather ridiculous part to play towards us, the part of a deceived lover, almost a husband's part.

"As he was very clever and gifted with the special faculty of not showing what he felt, we sometimes asked each other whether he did not guess anything, and he took care to let us know, in a manner that was painful for us. We were going to breakfast at Bougival, and we were rowing vigorously, when La Toque, who had, that morning, the triumphant look of a man who was satisfied, and who, sitting by the steers-woman, seemed to squeeze himself rather too close to her, in our estimation, stopped the rowing by calling out: 'Stop!'

"The four oars were drawn out of the water, and then, turning to his neighbor, he said to her: 'Why were you called Fly?' But before she could reply, the voice of Only-One-Eye, who was sitting in the bows, said dryly: 'Because she settles on all the carrion.'

"There was a dead silence, and an embarrassed pause, which was followed by an inclination to laugh, while Fly herself looked very much confused, and La Toque gave the order: 'Row on, all;' and the boat started again. The incident was closed, and light let in upon the subject, and that little adventure made no difference in our habits, but it only re-established cordiality between Only-One-Eye and us. He once more became the honored proprietor of the Fly from Saturday night until Monday morning, as his superiority over all of us had been thoroughly established by that definition, which, moreover, closed one of the questions about the word Fly. For the future we were satisfied with playing the secondary part of grateful and polite friends who profited discreetly by the week days, without any contention of any kind among ourselves.

"That answered very well for about three months, but then suddenly Fly assumed a strange attitude towards us. She was less merry, nervous, uneasy, and almost irritable, and we frequently asked her: 'What is the matter with you?' And she replied: 'Nothing; leave me alone.'

“Only-One-Eye told us what was the matter with her, one Saturday evening. We had just sat down to table in the little dining-room which our eating house keeper, Barbichon, reserved for us at his inn, and, the soup being finished, we were waiting for the fried fish, when our friend, who also appeared thoughtful, took Fly’s hand and said: ‘My dear comrades, I have a very grave communication to make to you, and one that may, perhaps, give rise to a prolonged discussion, but we shall have to argue between the courses. Poor Fly has announced a piece of disastrous news to me, and at the same time has asked me to tell it to you: She is pregnant, and I will only add two words. This is not the moment to abandon her, and it is forbidden to try and find out who is the father.’

“At first we were stupefied, and felt as if some disaster had befallen us, and we looked at each other with the longing to accuse some one, but whom? Oh! Which of us? I have never felt as I did at that moment, the perfidy of that cruel joke of nature, which never allows a man to know for certainty whether he is the father of his child. Then, however, by degrees a sort of feeling of consolation came over us and gave us comfort, which sprung from a confused idea of joint responsibility.

“Tomahawk, who spoke but little, formulated a beginning of reassurance by these words: ‘Well, so much the worse, by Jove: *Union is Strength*, however.’ At that moment a scullion brought in the fried gudgeons, but they did not fall to on them like they generally did, for they all had the same trouble on their mind, and Only-One-Eye continued: ‘Under these circumstances she has had the delicacy to confess everything to me. My friends, we are all equally guilty, so let us shake hands and adopt the child.’

“That was decided upon unanimously; they raised their hands to the dish of fried fish and swore: ‘We will adopt it.’ Then, when she was thus suddenly saved, and delivered from the weight of the terrible anxiety that had been tormenting her for a month, this pretty, crazy, poor child of love, Fly, exclaimed: ‘Oh! my friends! my friends! You have kind, good hearts ... good hearts.... Thank you, all of you!’ And she shed tears for the first time before us all.

“From that time we spoke in the boat about the child, as if it were already born, and each of us took an exaggerated interest, because of our share in the matter, in the slow and regular development of our mistress’s waist, and we stopped rowing in order to say: ‘Fly?’ ‘Here I am,’ she replied. ‘Boy or girl?’ ‘Boy.’ ‘What will he be when he grows up?’

“Then she indulged in the most fantastic flights of fancy. They were interminable stories, astounding inventions, from the day of his birth until his final triumph. In the unsophisticated, passionate and moving fancy of this extraordinary little creature, who now lived chastely in the midst of us five, whom she called ‘her five papas.’ She saw him as a sailor, and told us that he would discover another America; as a general, restoring Alsace and Lorraine to France, then as an emperor, founding a dynasty of wise and generous rulers who would bestow settled welfare on our country; then as a learned man and natural philosopher, revealing, first of all, the secret of the manufacture of gold, then that of living forever; then as an aeronaut, who invented the means of soaring up to the stars, and of making the skies an immense promenade for men; the realization of the most unforeseen and magnificent dreams.

“How nice and how amusing she was, poor little girl, until the end of the summer, but the twentieth of September dissipated her dream. We had come back from breakfasting at the Maison Lafitte and were passing Saint-Germain, when she felt thirsty and asked us to stop at Pecq.

“For some time past, she had been getting very heavy, and that inconvenienced her very much. She could not run about as she used to do, nor jump from the boat to the shore, as she had formerly done. She would try, in spite of our warnings and efforts to stop her, and she would have fallen a dozen times, had it not been that our restraining arms kept her back. On that day, she was imprudent enough to wish to land before the boat had stopped; it was one of those pieces of bravado by which athletes, who are ill or tired, sometimes kill themselves, and at the very moment when we were going to come alongside, she got up, took a spring and tried to jump onto the landing-stage. She was not strong enough, however, and only just touched the stones with her foot, struck the sharp angle with her stomach, uttered a cry and disappeared into the water.

“We all five plunged in at the same moment, and pulled out the poor, fainting woman, who was as pale as death, and was already suffering terrible pain, and we carried her as quickly as possible to the nearest inn, and sent for a medical man. For the six hours that her miscarriage lasted, she suffered the most terrible pain with the courage of a heroine, while we were grieving round her, feverish with anxiety and fear. Then she was delivered of a dead child, and for some days we were in the greatest fear for her life; at last, however, the doctor said to us one morning: ‘I think her life is saved. That girl is made of steel,’ and we all of us went into her room, with radiant hearts, and Only-One-Eye, as spokesman for us all, said to her: ‘The danger is all over, little Fly, and we are all happy again.’

“Then, for the second time, she wept in our presence, and, with her eyes full of tears, she said, hesitatingly:

“‘Oh! If you only knew, if you only knew ... what a grief it is ... what a grief it is to me ... I shall never get over it.’ ‘Over what, little Fly?’ ‘Over having killed it, for I did kill it! Oh! Without intending to! Oh! how grieved I am!...’

“She was sobbing, and we stood round, deeply touched, but without knowing what to say, and she went on: ‘Have you seen it?’ And we replied with one voice: ‘Yes.’ ‘It was a boy, was it not?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Beautiful, was it not?’ We hesitated a good deal, but Petit-Bleu, who was less scrupulous than the rest of us, made up his mind to affirm it, and said: ‘Very beautiful.’

“He committed a mistake, however, for she began to sob, and almost to scream with grief, and Only-One-Eye, who perhaps loved her more than the rest of us did, had a happy thought. Kissing her eyes, that were dimmed with tears, he said: ‘Console yourself, little Fly, console yourself; we will make another for you.’

“Her innate sense of the ridiculous was suddenly excited, and half-convinced, and half-joking, still tearful and her heart sore with grief, she said, looking at us all: ‘Do you really mean it?’ And we replied all at once:

“‘We really mean it.’”

THE MAD WOMAN

"I can tell you a terrible story about the Franco-Prussian war," Monsieur d'Endolin said to some friends assembled in the smoking-room of Baron de Ravot's château. "You know my house in the Faubourg de Cormeil. I was living there when the Prussians came, and I had for a neighbor a kind of a mad woman, who had lost her senses in consequence of a series of misfortunes, as at the age of seven and twenty she had lost her father, her husband and her newly born child, all in the space of a month.

"When death has once entered into a house, it almost invariably returns immediately, as if it knew the way, and the young woman, overwhelmed with grief, took to her bed and was delirious for six weeks. Then, a species of calm lassitude succeeded that violent crisis, and she remained motionless, eating next to nothing, and only moving her eyes. Every time they tried to make her get up, she screamed as if they were about to kill her, and so they ended by leaving her continually in bed, and only taking her out to wash her, to change her linen and to turn her mattress.

"An old servant remained with her, who gave her something to drink, or a little cold meat, from time to time. What passed in that despairing mind? No one ever knew, for she did not speak at all now. Was she thinking of the dead? Was she dreaming sadly, without any precise recollection of anything that had happened? Or was her memory as stagnant as water without any current? But however this may have been, for fifteen years she remained thus inert and secluded.

"The war broke out, and in the beginning of December the Germans came to Cormeil. I can remember it as if it were but yesterday. It was freezing hard enough to split the stones, and I, myself, was lying back in an armchair, being unable to move on account of the gout, when I heard their heavy and regular tread; I could see them pass, from my window.

"They defiled past interminably, with that peculiar motion of a puppet on wires, which belongs to them. Then the officers billeted their men on the inhabitants, and I had seventeen of them. My neighbor, the crazy woman, had a dozen, one of whom was the Commandant, a regular violent, surly swashbuckler.

"During the first few days everything went on as usual. The officers next door had been told that the lady was ill, and they did not trouble themselves about that in the least, but soon, that woman whom they never saw, irritated them. They asked what her illness was, and were told that she had been in bed for fifteen years, in consequence of terrible grief. No doubt they did not believe it, and thought that the poor mad creature would not leave her bed out of pride, so that she might not come near the Prussians, not speak to them, nor even see them.

"He insisted upon her receiving him, and he was shown into the room, and said to her roughly: 'I must beg you to get up, Madame, and to come downstairs so that we may all see you,' but she merely turned her vague eyes on him, without replying, and so he continued: 'I do not intend to tolerate any insolence, and if you do not get up of your own accord, I can easily find means to make you walk without any assistance.'

"But she did not give any signs of having heard him, and remained quite motionless, and then he got furious, as he took that calm silence for a mark of supreme contempt, and so he added: 'If you do not come downstairs to-morrow....' And then he left the room."

"The next day the terrified old servant wished to dress her, but the mad woman began to scream violently, and resisted with all her might. The officer ran upstairs quickly, and the servant threw herself at his feet and cried: 'She will not come down, Monsieur, she will not. Forgive her, for she is so unhappy.'

"The soldier was embarrassed, as in spite of his anger, he did not venture to order his soldiers to drag her out, but suddenly he began to laugh, and gave some orders in German, and soon a party of soldiers was seen coming out supporting a mattress as if they were carrying a wounded man. On that bed, which had not been unmade, the mad woman, who was still silent, was lying quite quietly, for she was quite indifferent to anything that went on, as long as they let her lie. Behind her, a soldier was carrying a parcel of feminine attire, and the officer said, rubbing his hands: 'We will just see whether you cannot dress yourself alone, and take a little walk.'

“And then the procession went off in the direction of the forest of Imauville; in two hours the soldiers came back alone, and nothing more was seen of the mad woman. What had they done with her? Where had they taken her to? No one knew.

“The snow was falling day and night, and enveloped the plain and the woods in a shroud of frozen foam, and the wolves came and howled at our very doors.

“The thought of that poor lost woman haunted me, and I made several applications to the Prussian authorities in order to obtain some information, and was nearly shot for doing so. When spring returned, the army of occupation withdrew, but my neighbor’s house remained closed; the grass grew thick in the garden walks. The old servant had died during the winter, and nobody troubled himself any longer about the occurrence; I alone thought about it constantly. What had they done with the woman? Had she escaped through the forest? Had somebody found her, and taken her to a hospital, without being able to obtain any information from her? Nothing happened to relieve my doubts; but, by degrees, time assuaged my fears.

“Well, in the following autumn the woodcock were very plentiful, and as my gout had left me for a time, I dragged myself as far as the forest. I had already killed four or five of the long-billed birds, when I knocked over one, which fell into a ditch full of branches, and I was obliged to get into it, in order to pick it up, and I found that it had fallen close to a dead human body, and immediately the recollection of the mad woman struck me, like a blow in the chest. Many other people had perhaps died in the wood during that disastrous year, but I do not know why, yet I was sure, sure, I tell you, that I should see the head of that wretched maniac.

“And suddenly I understood, I guessed everything. They had abandoned her on that mattress in the cold, deserted wood; and, faithful to her fixed idea, she had allowed herself to perish under that thick and light counterpane of snow, without moving either arms or legs.

“Then the wolves had devoured her, and the birds had built their nests with the wool from her torn bed, and I took charge of her remains, and I only pray that our sons may never see any wars again.”

THE WOODEN SHOES

The old priest was sputtering out the last words of his sermon over the white caps of the peasant women, and the rough or pomatumed heads of the men. The large baskets of the farmer's wives who had come from a distance to attend mass, were on the ground beside them, and the heavy heat of a July day caused them all to exhale a smell like that of cattle, or of a flock of sheep, and the cocks could be heard crowing through the large west door, which was wide open, as well as the lowing of the cows in a neighboring field.... "As God wishes. Amen!" the priest said. Then he ceased, opened a book, and, as he did every week, he began to give notice of all the small parish events for the following week. He was an old man with white hair who had been in the parish for over forty years, and from the pulpit he was in the habit of discoursing familiarly to them all, and so he went on: "I recommend Désiré Vallin, who is very ill, to your prayers, and also la Paumelle, who is not recovering from her confinement satisfactorily."

He had forgotten the rest, and so he looked for the slips of paper which were put away in a breviary, and at last he found two and continued: "I will not have the lads and the girls come into the churchyard in the evening, as they do; otherwise I shall inform the rural policeman. Monsieur Césaire Omont would like to find a respectable girl servant." He reflected for a few moments, and then added: "That is all, my brethren, and I wish that all of you may find the Divine mercy."

And he came down from the pulpit, to finish mass.

When the Malandains had returned to their cottage, which was the last in the village of La Sablière, on the road to Fourville, the father, a thin, wrinkled old peasant, sat down at the table, while his wife took the saucepan off the fire, and Adelaide, the daughter, took the glasses and plates out of the sideboard, and he said: "I think that place at Maître Omont's ought to be a good one, as he is a widower and his daughter-in-law does not like him. He is all alone and has money. I think it would be a good thing to send Adelaide there."

His wife put the black saucepan onto the table, took the lid off, and while the steam, which smelt strongly of cabbage, rose into the air she reflected, and he presently continued: "He has got some money, that is certain, but any one going there ought to be very sharp, and Adelaide is not that at all." And his wife replied: "I might go and see, all the same," and turning to her daughter, a strapping, silly looking girl with yellow hair and fat red cheeks like apples, she said: "Do you hear, you great silly? You are to go to Maître Omont's and offer yourself as his servant, and you will do whatever he tells you."

The girl began to laugh in a foolish manner, without replying, and then all the three began their dinner. In ten minutes, the father continued: "Listen to me, girl, and try not to make a mistake about what I am going to say to you ..." And slowly and minutely he laid down for her her line of conduct, anticipating the minutest details, and preparing her for the conquest of an old widower who was on unfriendly terms with his family. The mother ceased eating to listen to him, and she sat there, with her fork in her hand, looking at her husband and her daughter by turns, and following every word with concentrated and silent attention, while Adelaide remained listless, docile and stupid, with vague and wandering eyes.

As soon as their meal was over, her mother made her put her cap on, and they both started off to see Monsieur Césaire Omont. He lived in a small brick house adjoining his tenants' cottages, for he had retired, and was living by subdividing and letting his land.

He was about fifty-five years old, and was stout, jovial and rough mannered, as rich men often are. He laughed and shouted loud enough to make the walls fall down, drank brandy and cider by the glassful, and was still said to be of an amorous disposition, in spite of his age. He liked to walk about his fields with his hands behind his back, digging his wooden shoes into the fat soil, looking at the sprouting corn or the flowering colza with the eye of an amateur at his ease, who likes to see it, but does not trouble himself about it too much any longer, and they used to say of him: "There is a Mr. Merry-man, who does not get up in a good temper every day."

He received the two women, with his fat stomach against the table, as he was finishing his coffee, and turning round he said: "What do you want?"

The mother was spokeswoman. “This is our girl Adelaide, and I have come to ask you to take her as servant, as Monsieur le curé told us you wanted one.” Maître Omont looked at the girl, and then he said roughly: “How old is the great she-goat?” “Twenty last Michaelmas-Day, Monsieur Omont.” “That is settled, she will have fifteen francs a month and her food. I shall expect her to-morrow, to make my soup in the morning.” And he dismissed the two women.

The next day Adelaide entered upon her duties, and began to work hard, without saying a word, as she was in the habit of doing at home, and at about nine o’clock, as she was scrubbing the kitchen floor, Monsieur Omont called her: “Adelaide!” She came immediately, saying: “Here I am, master.” As soon as she was opposite him, with her red and neglected hands, and her troubled looks, he said: “Now just listen to me, so that there may be no mistake between us. You are my servant, but nothing else; you understand what I mean. We shall keep our shoes apart.” “Yes, master.” “Each in our own place, my girl, you in your kitchen; I in my dining room, and with that exception, everything will be for you just as it is for me. Is that settled?” “Yes, master.” “Very well; that is all right, and now go to your work.”

And she went out to attend to her duties and at midday she served up her master’s dinner in the little drawing-room with the flowered paper on the walls, and then, when the soup was on the table, she went to tell him. “Dinner is ready, master.”

He went in, and sat down, looked round, unfolded his table napkin, hesitated for a moment and then in a voice of thunder he shouted: “Adelaide!” She rushed in terribly frightened, for he had shouted as if he meant to murder her. “Well, in heaven’s name, where is your place?” “But, ... master ...” “I do not like to eat alone,” he roared; “you will sit there, or go to the devil, if you don’t choose to do so. Go and get your plate and glass.”

She brought them in, feeling very frightened, and stammered: “Here I am, master,” and then sat down opposite to him, and he grew jovial; clinked glasses with her, rapped the table, and told her stories to which she listened with downcast eyes, without daring to say a word, and from time to time she got up to fetch some bread, cider or plates. When she brought in the coffee she only put one cup before him, and then he grew angry again, and growled: “Well, what about yourself?” “I never take any, master.” “Why not?” “Because I do not like it.”

Then he burst out afresh: “I am not fond of having my coffee by myself, confound it! If you will not take it here, you can go to the devil. Go and get a cup, and make haste about it.”

So she went and fetched a cup, sat down again, tasted the black liquor and made faces over it, but swallowed it to the last drop, under her master’s furious looks. Then he made her also drink her first glass of brandy as an extra drop, the second as a livener and the third as a kick behind, and then he told her to go and wash up her plates and dishes, adding, that she was “a good sort of a girl.”

It was the same at dinner, and then she had to play dominoes with him, after which he sent her to bed, saying that he should come upstairs soon. And she went to her room, a garret under the roof, and after saying her prayers, she undressed and got into bed, but very soon she sprung up in a fright, for a furious shout had shaken the house. “Adelaide!” She opened her door, and replied from her attic: “Here I am, master.” “Where are you?” “In bed, of course, master.” Then he roared out: “Will you come downstairs, in heaven’s name? I do not like to sleep alone, and by G —— and if you object, you can just go at once.”

Then in her terror, she replied from upstairs: “I will come, master,” as she looked for her candle, and he heard her small clogs pattering down the stairs, and when she had got to the bottom steps, he seized her by the arm, and as soon as she had left her light wooden shoes by the side of her master’s heavy boots, he pushed her into his room, growling out: “Quicker than that, confound it!”

And she repeated continually, without knowing what she was saying: “Here I am, here I am, master.”

Six months later, when she went to see her parents one Sunday, her father looked at her curiously, and then said: “Are you not in the family way?” She remained thunderstruck, and looked at her waist, and then said: “No, I do not think so.”

Then he asked her, for he wanted to know everything: “Just tell me, didn’t you mix your clogs together, one night?” “Yes, I mixed them the first night, and then every other night.” “Well, then you are full, you great tub!”

On hearing that, she began to sob, and stammered: “How could I know? How was I to know?” Old Malandain looked at her knowingly, and appeared very pleased, and then he asked: “What did you not know?” And amid tears she replied: “How was I to know that children were made in that way?” And when her mother came back, the man said, without any anger: “There, she is in the family way, now.”

But the woman was furious, her woman’s instinct revolted, and she called her daughter, who was in tears, every name she could think of, “a trollop” and “a strumpet.” Then, however, the old man made her hold her tongue, and as he took up his cap to go and talk the matter over with Master Césaire Omont, he remarked: “She is actually more stupid than I thought she was; she did not even know what he was doing, the fool!”

On the next Sunday, after the sermon, the old *Curé* published the banns between Monsieur Onufre-Césaire Omont and Celesté-Adelaide Malandain.

A COCK CROWED

Madame Berthe d'Avancelles had up till that time resisted all the prayers of her despairing adorer, Baron Joseph de Croissard. He had pursued her ardently in Paris during the winter, and now he was giving fêtes and shooting parties in her honor at his Château at Carville, in Normandy.

Monsieur d'Avancelles, her husband, saw nothing and knew nothing, as usual. It was said that he lived apart from his wife on account of physical weakness, for which Madame d'Avancelles would not pardon him. He was a short, stout, bald man, with short arms, legs, neck, nose and everything else, while Madame d'Avancelles, on the contrary, was a tall, dark and determined young woman, who laughed in her husband's face with sonorous laughter, while he called her openly *Mrs. Housewife*, who looked at the broad shoulders, strong build and fair moustaches of her titled admirer, Baron Joseph de Croissard, with a certain amount of tenderness.

She had not, however, granted him anything as yet. The baron was ruining himself for her, and there was a constant round of fêting, hunting parties and new pleasures, to which he invited the neighboring nobility. All day long the hounds gave tongue in the woods, as they followed the fox or the wild boar, and every night dazzling fireworks mingled their burning plumes with the boars, while the illuminated windows of the drawing-room cast long rays of light onto the wide lawns, where shadows were moving to and fro.

It was autumn, the russet-colored season of the year, and the leaves were whirling about on the grass like flights of birds. One noticed the smell of damp earth in the air, of the naked earth, like one smells the odor of the bare skin, when a woman's dress falls off her, after a ball.

One evening, in the previous spring, during an entertainment, Madame d'Avancelles had said to Monsieur de Croissard, who was worrying her by his importunities: "If I do succumb to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf. I have too many things to do this summer to have any time for it.” He had not forgotten that bold and amusing speech, and every day he became more pressing, every day he pushed his approaches nearer — to use a military phrase — and gained a step in the heart of the fair, audacious woman, who seemed only to be resisting for form’s sake.

It was the day before a large wild-boar hunt, and in the evening Madame Berthe said to the baron with a laugh: “Baron, if you kill the brute, I shall have something to say to you.” And so, at dawn he was up and out, to try and discover where the solitary animal had its lair. He accompanied his huntsmen, settled the places for the relays, and organized everything personally to insure his triumph, and when the horns gave the signal for setting out, he appeared in a closely fitting coat of scarlet and gold, with his waist drawn in tight, his chest expanded, his eyes radiant, and as fresh and strong as if he had just got out of bed. They set off, and the wild boar set off through the underwood as soon as he was dislodged, followed by the hounds in full cry, while the horses set off at a gallop through the narrow sides cut in the forest, while the carriage which followed the chase at a distance, drove noiselessly along the soft roads.

From mischief, Madame d’Avancelles kept the baron by her side, and lagging behind at a walk in an interminably long and straight drive, over which four rows of oaks hung, so as to form almost an arch, while he, trembling with love and anxiety, listened with one ear to the young woman’s bantering chatter, while with the other he listened to the blast of the horns and to the cry of the hounds as they receded in the distance.

“So you do not love me any longer?” she observed. “How can you say such things?” he replied. And she continued: “But you seem to be paying more attention to the sport than to me.” He groaned, and said: “Did you not order me to kill the animal myself?” And she replied gravely: “Of course I reckon upon it. You must kill it under my eyes.”

Then he trembled in his saddle, spurred his horse until it reared, and, losing all patience, exclaimed: “But, by Jove, Madame, that is impossible if we remain here.” Then she spoke tenderly to him, laying her hand on his arm, or stroking his horse’s mane, as if from abstraction, and said with a laugh: “But you must do it ... or else ... so much the worse for you.”

Just then they turned to the right, into a narrow path which was overhung by trees, and suddenly, to avoid a branch which barred their way, she leaned towards him so closely, that he felt her hair tickling his neck, and he suddenly threw his arms brutally round her, and putting his thick moustache onto her forehead, he gave her a furious kiss.

At first she did not move, and remained motionless under that mad caress; then she turned her head with a jerk, and either by accident or design her little lips met his, under their wealth of light hair, and a moment afterwards, either from confusion or remorse, she struck her horse with her riding-whip, and went off at full gallop, and they rode on like that for some time, without exchanging a look.

The noise of the hunt came nearer, the thickets seemed to tremble, and suddenly the wild boar broke through the bushes, covered with blood, and trying to shake off the hounds who had fastened onto him, and the baron, uttering a shout of triumph, exclaimed: "Let him who loves me, follow me!" And he disappeared in the copse, as if the wood had swallowed him up.

When she reached an open glade a few minutes later, he was just getting up, covered with mud, his coat torn, and his hands bloody, while the brute was lying stretched out at full length, with the baron's hunting knife driven into its shoulder up to the hilt.

The quarry was cut at night by torchlight. It was a warm and dull evening, and the wan moon threw a yellow light onto the torches which made the night misty with their resinous smoke. The hounds devoured the wild boar's stinking entrails, and snarled and fought for them, while the prickers and the gentlemen, standing in a circle round the spoil, blew their horns as loud as they could. The flourish of the hunting-horns resounded beyond the woods on that still night and was repeated by the echoes of the distant valleys, awaking the timid stags, rousing the yelping foxes, and disturbing the little rabbits in their gambols at the edge of the rides.

The frightened night-birds flew over the eager pack of hounds, while the women, who were moved by all these gentle and violent things, leaned rather heavily on the men's arms; and turned aside into the forest rides, before the hounds had finished their meal, and Madame d'Avancelles, feeling languid after that day of fatigue and tenderness, said to the baron: "Will you take a turn in the park, my friend?" And without replying, but trembling and nervous, he went with her, and immediately they kissed each other. They walked slowly under the almost leafless trees through which the moonbeams filtered, and their love, their desires, their longing for a closer embrace became so vehement, that they nearly yielded to it at the foot of a tree.

The horns were not sounding any longer, and the tired hounds were sleeping in the kennels. “Let us return,” the young woman said, and they went back.

When they got to the château and before they went in, she said in a weak voice: “I am so tired that I shall go to bed, my friend.” And as he opened his arms for a last kiss, she ran away, saying as a last good-bye: “No.... I am going to sleep.... Let him who loves me follow me!”

An hour later, when the whole silent château seemed dead; the baron crept stealthily out of his room, and went and scratched at her door, and as she did not reply, he tried to open it, and found that it was not locked.

She was in a reverie, resting her arms against the window ledge, and he threw himself at her knees, which he kissed madly, through the nightdress. She said nothing, but buried her delicate fingers caressingly in his hair, and suddenly, as if she had formed some great resolution, she whispered with her daring look: “I shall come back, wait for me.” And stretching out her hand, she pointed with her finger to an indistinct white spot at the end of the room; it was her bed.

Then, with trembling hands and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he quickly undressed, got into the cool sheets, and stretching himself out comfortably, he almost forgot his love in the pleasure he found, tired out as he was, in the contact of the linen. She did not return, however, no doubt finding amusement in making him languish. He closed his eyes with a feeling of exquisite comfort, and reflected peaceably while waiting for what he so ardently longed for. But by degrees his limbs grew languid and his thoughts became indistinct and fleeting, until his fatigue gained the upper hand and he fell asleep.

He slept that unconquerable, heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter, and he slept until daylight; and then, as the window had remained half open, the crowing of a cock suddenly woke him, and the baron opened his eyes, and feeling a woman’s body against his, finding himself, much to his surprise, in a strange bed, and remembering nothing for a moment, he stammered:

“What? Where am I? What is the matter?”

Then she, who had not been asleep at all, looking at this unkempt man, with red eyes and swollen lips, replied in the haughty tone of voice in which she occasionally spoke to her husband:

“It is nothing; it is only a cock crowing. Go and sleep again, Monsieur, it has nothing to do with you.”

JULOT'S OPINION

The Duchess Huguette de Lionzac was very much infatuated with herself, but then she had a perfect right to be, and who, in her place, would not have shown a spice of conceit? There was no success which she had wished for, that she had not attained. She had received a medal for sculpture at the *Salon*, and at the *Exhibition of Excessives* she had shown a water-color which looked eccentric, even there.

She had published a collection of poems which was crowned by the French Academy, and a small volume of *Rhythmic Prose* of which the *Revue de lemain* said, "That it showed the most subtle and evanescent performance of those fugitive pieces which was sure to descend to posterity," and when she acted in private theatricals, some exclaimed:

"It is better than the *Comedié Française*," while others, who were more refined, went so far as to utter the supreme praise: "Better than the *Théâtre Libre*."

At one time, there had been a report, which had been propagated by the newspapers, that she was going to come out at the *Opéra Comique*, in a part that had been written especially for her extraordinary voice, for it appeared that Massenet would not hear of anybody else for the part.

She was the circus-rider, Miss Edith, who, under that assumed name gave that unique and never-to-be-forgotten exhibition of horsemanship, and you remember what cheers there were, and what quantities of flowers covered the arena! And you must not forget that this was before a *paying public*!

Then, it was notorious that she had carried off the lovers of several celebrated courtesans, which was not one of the smallest of her triumphs, for she had chosen as her rivals some of those terrible and hitherto unconquered women, of whom it was said:

"Oh! When she has got hold of a man, she does not let him go again. She has some secrets that attach them to her."

There was, therefore, nothing surprising in the fact that the Duchess Huguette should have been so proud of so many victories, and in such various sports; but now, for the first time, a doubt had entered her mind. In turning over the *Notules Psychologiques* of her favorite novel-writer, she had just read these two sentences which disturbed her:

"If anyone wishes to excel in an art, he must have gained a living by it."

"What pleases us in a woman of the world who gives herself up to debauchery, is the contrast between what she is, and what she would like to be."

And she asked herself whether she could really have lived by those arts in which she excelled, and whether the successes that she had obtained, did not chiefly depend on her charm of a woman of the world, who wished to be what she was not. The last *whether*, especially, made her anxious. For was not it precisely that special charm which had given her an advantage over courtesans who employed secrets?

Would she have been victorious if she had been deprived of that weapon? How could she find out?

"And yet," she said to herself, "I must know, for everything depends on this point. If I can win the game without playing that card, I am sure of all my other triumphs; my mind will be easy then, whatever it may cost."

She consulted her old god-father, Viscount Hugues de Pierras, on the subject, and, after a few complimentary words, as she had begged him to be sincere, he said:

"Good heavens! my dear child, I must confess that your psychologist is not altogether wrong, nor your apprehensions either. I have, before now, left many learned mistresses for women who were not in the least learned, and who pleased me all the better on that account. But that did not prevent the mistresses I had sacrificed from being women of incomprehensible talents, in spite of their defeat. But what does that matter? It ought to be enough for you, that you conquer, without troubling yourself about the means by which you obtain your victory. I do not suppose that you have any pretensions to being a *virtuosa* in ..."

"In everything, yes. Excuse me, god-father, I have such pretensions. And what I ask of you, is the means of obtaining absolute proof that my pretensions are justified."

"Hum! Hum!" the viscount said, in some embarrassment, "I do not know of any means, my dear child, unless we get together a jury...."

“Please do not joke about it!” Huguette exclaimed. “I am perfectly serious.”

“I am very serious also, I assure you, I think that a jury...”

“Composed of whom? Of men of the world, I suppose?”

“And what does this Julot do?”

“Oh! really, Duchess, you force me to speak of persons and things, which ...”

“Yes, yes, I force you to; we understand that. But tell me! Bluntly, without mincing matters, if necessary. You know that I have no objection to that sort of thing, so go on. Do not keep me in suspense like this. I am burning with curiosity. What does Julot do?”

“Very well, little volunteer, if you insist on knowing, I will tell you. Julot, generally called *Fine-Gueule*, is a trier of women.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I will explain it to you. There are a few of us old amateurs in Paris, who are too old and impatient to hunt for truffles, but who want them of such and such a flavor, exactly to our taste. Now, Julot knows our tastes, our various fancies, and he undertakes ...”

“Capital! Capital!”

MADEMOISELLE

He had been registered under the names of Jean Marie Mathieu Valot, but he was never called anything but *Mademoiselle*. He was the idiot of the district, but not one of those wretched, ragged idiots who live on public charity. He lived comfortably on a small income which his mother had left him, and which his guardian paid him regularly, and so he was rather envied than pitied. And then, he was not one of those idiots with wild looks, and the manners of an animal, for he was by no means an unpleasing object, with his half-open lips and smiling eyes, and especially in his constant make-up in female dress. For he dressed like a girl, and showed by that, how little he objected to being called *Mademoiselle*.

And why should he not like the nickname which his mother had given him affectionately, when he was a mere child, and so delicate and weak, with such a fair complexion, a poor little diminutive lad, that he was not as tall as many girls of the same age? It was in pure love that, in his earlier years, his mother whispered that tender *Mademoiselle* to him, while his old grandmother used to say jokingly:

"The fact is, that as for the *tip-cat* he has got, it is really not worth mentioning in a Christian. No offense to God in saying so." And his grandfather who was equally fond of a joke, used to add: "I only hope he will not lose it, as he grows bigger, like tadpoles do their tails!"

And they treated him as if he had really been a girl and coddled him, the more so as they were very prosperous, and did not require a man to keep things together.

When his mother and grandparents were dead, *Mademoiselle* was almost as happy with his paternal uncle, an unmarried man, who had carefully attended the idiot, and who had grown more and more attached to him by dint of looking after him; and the worthy man continued to call Jean Marie Mathieu Valot, *Mademoiselle*.

He was called so in all the country round as well, not with the slightest intention of hurting his feelings, but, on the contrary, because all thought they would please the poor gentle creature who harmed nobody.

The very street boys meant no harm by it, accustomed as they were to call the tall idiot in a frock and cap, so; but it would have struck them as very extraordinary, and would have led them to in rude fun, if they had seen him dressed like a boy.

Mademoiselle, however, took care of that, for his dress was as dear to him as his nickname. He delighted in wearing it, and, in fact, cared for nothing else, and what gave it a particular zest was, that he knew that he was not a girl, and that he was living in disguise. And this was evident, by the exaggerated feminine bearing and walk he put on, as if to show that it was not natural to him. His enormous, carefully frilled cap was adorned with large variegated ribbons. His petticoat, with numerous flounces, was distended behind by many hoops. He walked with short steps, and with exaggerated swaying of the hips, while his folded arms and crossed hands were distorted into pretensions of comical coquetry.

On such occasions, if anybody wished to make friends with him, it was necessary to say:

"Ah! *Mademoiselle*, what a nice girl you make."

That put him into a good humor, and he used to reply, much pleased:

"Don't I? But people can see I only do it for a joke."

But, nevertheless, when they were dancing at village festivals in the neighborhood, he would always be invited to dance as *Mademoiselle*, and would never ask any of the girls to dance with him; and one evening when somebody asked him the reason for this, he opened his eyes wide, laughed as if the man had said something very stupid, and replied:

"I cannot ask the girls because I am not dressed like a lad. Just look at my dress, you fool!"

As his interrogator was a judicious man, he said to him:

"Then dress like one, *Mademoiselle*."

He thought for a moment, and then said with a cunning look:

"But if I dress like a lad, I shall no longer be a girl; but then, I am a girl;" and he shrugged his shoulders as he said it.

But the remark seemed to make him think.

For some time afterwards, when he met the same person, he asked him abruptly:

"If I dress like a lad, will you still call me *Mademoiselle*?"

"Of course, I shall," the other replied. "You will always be called so."

The idiot appeared delighted, for there was no doubt that he thought more of his nickname than he did of his dress, and the next day he made his appearance in the village square without his petticoats and dressed as a man. He had taken a pair of trousers, a coat and a hat, from his guardian's clothes-press, and this created quite a revolution in the neighborhood, for the people, who had been in the habit of smiling at him kindly when he was dressed as a woman, looked at him in astonishment and almost in fear, while the indulgent could not help laughing, and visibly making fun of him.

The involuntary hostility of some, and the too evident ridicule of others, the disagreeable surprise of all, were too palpable for him not to see it, and to be hurt by it, and it was still worse when a street urchin said to him in a jeering voice, as he danced round him:

"Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*, you wear trousers! Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*!"

And it grew worse and worse, when a whole band of these vagabonds were on his heels, hooting and yelling after him, as if he had been somebody in a masquerading dress, during the carnival.

It was quite certain that the unfortunate creature looked much more as if he were in a disguise now than he had done formerly. By dint of living like a girl, and by even exaggerating the feminine walk and manners, he had totally lost all masculine looks and ways. His smooth face, his long flax like hair, required a cap with ribbons, and became a caricature under the high chimney-pot hat of the old doctor, his grandson.

Mademoiselle's shoulders, and especially her swelling stern danced about wildly in this old fashioned coat and wide trousers. And nothing was as funny as the contrast between his quiet dress and slow trotting pace, the winning way he combed his head, and the conceited movements of his hands, with which he fanned himself, like a silly girl.

Soon the older lads and the girls, the old women, men of ripe age and even the Judicial Councilor joined the little brats, and hooted *Mademoiselle*, while the astonished idiot ran away, and rushed into the house with terror. There he took his poor head between both hands, and tried to comprehend the matter. Why were they angry with him? For it was quite evident that they were angry with him. What wrong had he done, and whom had he injured, by dressing as a boy? Was he not a boy, after all? For the first time in his life, he felt a horror for his nickname, for had he not been insulted through it? But immediately he was seized with a horrible doubt.

"Suppose that, after all, I was a girl?"

He would have liked to ask his guardian about it but he did not want to, for he somehow felt, although only obscurely, that he, worthy man, might not tell him the truth, out of kindness. And, besides, he preferred to find out for himself, without asking anyone.

All his idiot's cunning, which had been lying latent up till then, because he never had any occasion to make use of it, now came out and urged him to a solitary and dark action.

The next day he dressed himself as a girl again, and made his appearance as if he had perfectly forgotten his escapade of the day before, but the people, especially the street boys, had not forgotten it. They looked at him sideways, and, even the best of them, could not help smiling, while the little blackguards ran after him and said:

"Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*, you had on a pair of breeches!"

But he pretended to hear, moreover, to guess to whom they were alluding. He seemed as happy, and glad to look about him as he usually did, with half open lips and smiling eyes. As usual, he wore an enormous cap with variegated ribbons, and large petticoats as usual, he walked with short, mincing steps, swaying and wriggling his hips and crupper, and he gesticulated like a coquette, and licked his lips, when they called him *Mademoiselle*, while in his head, he would have liked too have jumped at the throat of those who called him so.

Days and months passed, and by degrees these about him forgot all about his strange escapade, but he had never left off thinking about it, nor trying to find out, for which he was ever on the alert — how he could find out what were his qualities as a boy, and how could he assert them victoriously. Really innocent, he had reached the age of twenty without knowing anything about it, or without ever having any natural impulse to discover it, but being tenacious of purpose, curious and dissembling, he asked no questions, but observed all that was said and done.

Often at their village dances, he had heard young fellows boasting about girls whom they had seduced, and praising such and such a young fellow, and often, also, after a dance, he saw the couples go away together, with their arms round each other's waists. They had no suspicions of him, and he listened and watched, until, at last, he discovered what was going on.

And, then, one night, when dancing was over, and the couples were going away with their arms round each other’s waists, a terrible screaming was heard at the corner of the woods through which those going to the next village, had to pass. It was Josephine, pretty Josephine, for she was brave as well, and when her screams were heard, they ran to her assistance, and they arrived only just in time to rescue her, half strangled from *Mademoiselle’s* clutches.

The idiot had watched her, and had thrown himself upon her in order to treat her as the other young fellows did the girls, but she resisted him so stoutly that he took her by the throat and squeezed with all his might until she could not breathe, and was nearly dead.

In rescuing Josephine from him, they had thrown him on the ground, but he jumped up again immediately, foaming at the mouth and slobbering, and exclaimed:

“I am not a girl any longer, I am a young man, I am a young man, I tell you.”

And he proudly essayed to convince them that it was so, but the evidence that he could adduce was very slight.

THE MOUNTEBANKS

Compardin, the clever manage of the *Eden Réunis Théâtre*, as the theater critics invariably called him, was reckoning on a great success, and he had invested his last franc in the affair, without thinking of the morrow, or of the bad luck which had been pursuing him so inexorably for months past. For a whole week, the walls, the kiosks, shopfronts, and even the trees, had been placarded with flaming posters, and from one end of Paris to the other carriages were to be seen which were covered with fancy sketches of Chéret, that represented two strong, well-built men who looked like ancient athletes. The younger of them, who was standing with his arms folded, had the vacant smile of an itinerant mountebank on his face, and the other, who was dressed in what was supposed to be the costume of a Mexican trapper, held a revolver in his hand. There were large type advertisements in all the papers, that the Montefiores would appear without fail at the *Eden Réunis*, the next Monday.

Nothing else was talked about, for the puff and humbug attracted people. The Montefiores, like fashionable knicknacks, succeeded that whimsical jade, Rose Péché, who had gone off the preceding autumn, between the third and fourth acts of the burlesque, *Ousca Iscar*, in order to make a study of love in company of a young fellow of seventeen, who had just entered the university. The novelty and difficulty of their performance, revived and agitated the curiosity of the public, for there seemed to be an implied threat of death, or, at any rate, of wounds and of blood in it, and it seemed as if they defied danger with absolute indifference. And that always pleased women; it holds them and masters them, and they grow pale with emotion and cruel enjoyment. Consequently, all the seats in the large theater were let almost immediately, and were soon taken for several days in advance. And stout Compardin losing his glass of absinthe over a game of dominoes, was in high spirits, and saw the future through rosy glasses, and exclaimed in a loud voice: “I think I have turned up trumps, by George!”

The Countess Regina de Villégby was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, languidly fanning herself. She had only received three or four intimate friends that day, Saint Mars Montalvin, Tom Sheffield, and his cousin, Madame de Rhouel, a Creole, who laughed as incessantly as a bird sings. It was growing dusk, and the distant rumbling of the carriages in the Avenue of the Champs-Elysées sounded like some somnolent rhythm. There was a delicate perfume of flowers; the lamps had not been brought in yet, and chatting and laughing filled the room with a confused noise.

"Would you pour out the tea?" the Countess said, suddenly, touching Saint Mars' fingers, who was beginning an amorous conversation in a low voice, with her fan. And while he slowly filled the little china cup, he continued: "Are the Montefiores as good as the lying newspapers make out?"

Then Tom Sheffield and the others all joined in.

They had never seen anything like it, they declared; it was most exciting, and made one shiver unpleasantly, like when the *espada* comes to close quarters with the infuriated brute at a bull fight.

Countess Regina listened in silence, and nibbled the petals of a tea rose.

"How I should like to see them!" giddy Madame de Rhouel exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, cousin," the Countess said, in the solemn tones of a preacher, "a respectable woman dare not let herself be seen in improper places."

They all agreeing with her, nevertheless, Madame de Villégby was present at the Montefiores' performance two days later, dressed all in black, and wearing a thick veil, at the back of a stage box.

And that woman was as cold as a steel buckler, and had married as soon as she left the convent in which she had been to school, without any affection or even liking for her husband, whom the most skeptical respected as a saint, and who had a look of virgin purity on her calm face as she went down the steps of the Madeleine on Sundays, after high mass.

Countess Regina stretched herself nervously, grew pale, and trembled like the strings of a violin, on which an artist had been playing some wild symphony, and inhaled the nasty smell of the sawdust, as if it had been the perfume of a bouquet of unknown flowers, and clenched her hands, and gazed eagerly at the two mountebanks, whom the public applauded rapturously at every feat. And contemptuously and haughtily she compared those two men, who were as vigorous as wild animals that have grown up in the open air, with the rickety limbs, which look so awkward in the dress of an English groom, that had tried to inflame her heart.

Count de Villégby had gone back to the country, to prepare for his election as Councilor-General, and the very evening that he started, Regina again took the stage box at the *Eden Réunis*. Consumed by sensual ardor as if by some love philter, she scribbled a few words on a piece of paper — the eternal formula that women write on such occasions:

“A carriage will be waiting for you at the stage door after the performance — An unknown woman who adores you.”

And then she gave it to a box opener, who handed it to the Montefiore who was the champion pistol shot.

Oh! that interminable waiting in a malodorous cab, the overwhelming emotion, and the nausea of disgust, the fear, the desire of waking the coachman who was nodding on the box, of giving him her address, and telling him to drive her home. But she remained with her face against the window, mechanically looking at the dark passage, that was illuminated by a gas lamp, at the “actors’ entrance,” through which men were continually hurrying, who talked in a loud voice, and chewed the end of a cigar which had gone out. She remained as if she were glued to the cushions, and tapped impatiently on the bottom of the cab with her heels.

When the actor who thought it was a joke, made his appearance, she could hardly utter a word, for evil pleasure is as intoxicating as adulterated liquor, so face to face with this immediate surrender, and this unconstrained immodesty, he at first thought that he had to do with a street walker.

Regina felt various sensations, and a morbid pleasure throughout her whole person. She pressed close to him, and raised her veil to show how young, beautiful, and desirable she was. They did not speak a word, like wrestlers before a combat. She was eager to be locked up with him, to give herself to him, and, at last, to know that moral uncleanness, of which, she was, of course, ignorant, as a chaste wife; and when they left the room in the hotel together, where they had spent hours like amorous deer, the man dragged himself along, and almost groped his way like a blind man, while Regina was smiling, though nevertheless, she retained her serene candor of an unsullied virgin, like she did almost always on Sundays, after mass.

Then she took the second. He was very sentimental, and his head was full of romance. He thought the unknown woman, who merely used him as her plaything, really loved him, and he was not satisfied with furtive meetings. He questioned her, besought her, and the Countess made fun of him. Then she chose the two Mountebanks in turn. They did not know it, for she had forbidden them ever to talk about her to each other, under the penalty of never seeing her again, and one night the younger of them said with humble tenderness, as he knelt at her feet:

"How kind you are, to love and to want me! I thought that such happiness only existed in novels, and that ladies of rank only made fun of poor strolling Mountebanks, like us!"

Regina knitted her golden brows.

"Do not be angry," he continued, "because I followed you and found out where you lived, and your real name, and that you are a countess, and rich, very rich."

"You fool!" she exclaimed, trembling with anger. "People would make you believe things, as easily as they would a child!"

She had had enough of him; he knew her name, and might compromise her. The Count might possibly come back from the country before the elections, and then, the Mountebank began to love her. She no longer had any feeling, any desire for those two lovers, whom a fillip from her rosy fingers could bend to her will. It was time to go on to the next chapter, and to seek for fresh pleasures elsewhere.

"Listen to me," she said to the champion shot, the next night. "I would rather not hide anything from you. I like your comrade; I have given myself to him, and I do not want to have anything more to do with you."

"My comrade!" he repeated.

"Well, what then? The change amuses me!"

He uttered a furious cry, and rushed at Regina with clenched fists. She thought he was going to kill her, and closed her eyes, but he had not the courage to hurt that delicate body, which he had so often covered with caresses, and in despair, and hanging his head, he said hoarsely:

"Very well, we shall not meet again, since it is your wish."

The house at the *Eden Réunis* was as full as an over-filled basket The violins were playing a soft and delightful waltz of Gungl's, which the reports of a revolver accentuated.

The Montefiores were standing opposite to one another, like in Chéret's picture, and about a dozen yards apart, and an electric light was thrown on to the youngest, who was leaning against a large white target, and very slowly the other traced his living outline with bullet after bullet. He aimed with prodigious skill, and the black dots showed on the cardboard, and marked the shape of his body. The applause drowned the orchestra, and increased continually, when suddenly a shrill cry of horror resounded from one end of the hall to the other. The women fainted, the violins stopped, and the spectators jostled each other. At the ninth ball, the younger brother had fallen to the ground, an inert mass, with a gaping wound in his forehead. His brother did not move, and there was a look of madness on his face, while the Countess de Villégby leaned on the ledge of her box, and fanned herself calmly, as implacable as any cruel goddess of ancient mythology.

The next day, between four and five, when she was surrounded by her usual friends in her little, warm, Japanese drawing room, it was strange to hear in what a languid and indifferent voice she exclaimed:

“They say that an accident happened to one of those famous clowns, the Monta ... the Monti ... what is his name, Tom?”

“The Montefiores, Madame!”

And then they began to talk about the sale at Angéle Velours, who was going to buy the former follies, at the hotel Drouot, before marrying Prince Storbeck.

THE SEQUEL TO A DIVORCE

Certainly, although he had been engaged in the most extraordinary, most unlikely, most extravagant and funniest cases, and had won legal games without a trump in his hand, although he had worked out the obscure law of divorce, as if it had been a Californian gold mine Maitre Garrulier the celebrated, the only Garrulier, could not check a movement of surprise, nor a disheartening shake of the head, nor a smile when the Countess de Baudémont explained her affairs to him for the first time.

He had just opened his correspondence, and his long hands, on which he bestowed the greatest attention, buried themselves in a heap of female letters, and one might have thought oneself in the confessional of a fashionable preacher, so impregnated was the atmosphere with delicate perfumes.

Immediately, even before she had said a word, with the sharp glance of a practiced man of the world, that look which made beautiful Madame de Serpenoise say: “He strips your heart bare!” The lawyer had classed her in the third category. Those who suffer came into his first category, those who love, into the second, and those who are bored, into the third, and she belonged to the latter.

She was a pretty windmill, whose sails turned and flew round, and fretted the blue sky with a delicious shiver of joy, as it were. The brain of a bird, in which four correct and healthy ideas could not exist side by side, and in which all dreams and every kind of folly are engulfed, like a great crevice.

Incapable of hurting a fly, emotional, charitable, with a feeling of tenderness for the street girl who sold bunches of violets for a penny, for a cab horse, which a driver was ill using, for a melancholy pauper’s funeral, when the body, without friends or relations to follow it, was being conveyed to the common grave, doing anything that might afford five minutes’ amusement, not caring if she made men miserable for the rest of their days, and taking pleasure in kindling passions which consumed men’s whole being, looking upon life as too short to be anything else than one uninterrupted round of gaiety and enjoyment, she thought that people might find plenty of time for being serious and reasonable in the evening of life, when they are at the bottom of the hill, and their looking glass showed them a wrinkled face, surrounded with white hair.

A thoroughbred Parisian, whom one would follow to the end of the world like a poodle; a woman whom one adores with the head, the heart and the senses until one is nearly driven mad, as soon as one has inhaled the delicate perfume that emanates from her dress and hair, or touched her skin, and heard her laugh; a woman for whom one would fight a duel and risk one's life without a thought; for whom a man would remove mountains, and sell his soul to the devil several times over, if the devil were still in the habit of frequenting the places of bad repute on this earth.

She had perhaps come to see this Garrulier, whom she had so often heard mentioned at five o'clock tea, near, so as to be able to describe him to her female friends subsequently in droll phrases, to imitate his gestures and the unctuous inflections of his voice, perhaps, in order to experience some new sensation, or, perhaps, for the sake of dressing like a woman who was going to try for a divorce; and, certainly, the whole effect was perfect. She wore a splendid cloak embroidered with jet, which gave an almost serious effect to her golden hair, to her small slightly turned up nose, with its quivering nostrils, and to her long eyes, full of enigmas and fun; and a dark stuff dress, which was fastened at the neck by a sapphire and a diamond pin.

The barrister did not interrupt her, but allowed her to get excited and to chatter, to enumerate her causes for complaint against poor Count de Baudémont, who certainly had no suspicion of his wife's escapade, who would have been very much surprised if any one had told him of it at that moment, when he was taking his fencing lesson at the club.

When she had quite finished, he said coolly, as if he were throwing a pail of water on some burning straw.

"But, Madame, there is not the slightest pretext for a divorce in anything that you have told me, here...the judges would ask me whether I took the Law Courts for a theater, and intended to make fun of them."

And seeing how disheartened she was, and that she looked like a child whose favorite toy had been broken, and, also, because she was so pretty, that he would have liked to kiss her hands in his devotion, and as she seemed to be witty, and very amusing, and as, moreover, he had no objection to such visits being prolonged, when papers had to be looked over, while sitting close together, Maitre Garrulier appeared to be considering, and, taking his chin in his hand, he said:

"However, I will think it over...there is sure to be some dark spot that can be made out worse.... Write to me, and come and see me again..."

In the course of her visits, that black spot had increased so much, and Madame de Baudémont had followed her lawyer's advice so punctually, and had played on the various cords so skillfully, a few months later, that after a lawsuit, which is still spoken of in the Courts of Justice, and during the course of which, the President had to take off his spectacles, and to use his pocket-handkerchief noisily, the divorce was pronounced in favor of the Countess Marie Anne Nicole Bournet de Baudémont, *née* de Tanchart de Peothus.

The Count, who was nonplussed at such an adventure, which was turning out so seriously, first of all, flew into a terrible rage, and nearly rushed off to the lawyer's office, and threatened to cut off his knavish ears for him, but when his access of fury was over, and thinking better of it, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"All the better for her, if it amuses her!"

Then he bought Baron Silberstein's yacht, and with some friends, got up a cruise, to Ceylon and India.

Marie-Anne began by triumphing, and felt as happy as a schoolgirl going home for the holidays, who feels the bridle on her neck, committed every possible folly, and soon, tired, satiated, and disgusted, she began to yawn, cried and found out that she had sacrificed her happiness, like a millionaire who had gone mad, and who threw his banknotes and shares into the river, and that she was nothing more than a disabled waif and stray. Consequently, she now married again, as the solitude of her home made her morose from morning till night; and then, besides, a woman requires a mansion when she goes into society, to race meetings, or to the theater.

And so, while she became a marchioness, and pronounced her second "Yes," before a very few friends, at the office of the mayor of the English urban district, and malicious ones in the Faurbourg were making fun of the whole affair, and affirming this and that, whether rightly or wrongly, and compromising the present husband to the former one, even declaring that he had partially been the cause of the former divorce, Monsieur de Baudémont was wandering over the four quarters of the globe trying to overcome his homesickness, and to deaden his longing for love, which had taken possession of his heart and of his body, like a slow poison.

He traveled through the most out of the way places, and the most lovely countries, and spent months and months at sea, and plunged into every kind of dissipation and debauchery. But neither the supple backs nor the luxurious gestures of the *bayaderés*, nor the large, passive eyes of the Creoles, nor flirtations with English *missives* with hair the color of new cider, nor nights of waking dreams, when he saw new constellations in the sky, nor dangers during which a man thinks it is all over with him, and mutters a few words of prayer in spite of himself, when the waves are so high, and the sky so black, nothing was able to make him forget that little Parisian woman who smelled so delicious that she might have been taken for a bouquet of rare flowers; who was so coaxing, so curious, so funny; who never had the same caprice, the same smile, or the same look twice, and who, at bottom, was worth more than many others, than the saints and the sinless.

He thought of her constantly, during long hours of sleeplessness. He carried her portrait about with him in the pocket of his pea-jacket; a charming portrait in which she was smiling, and showing her white teeth between her half-open lips, and while her gentle eyes, with their magnetic look, had a happy, frank expression, and in which, from the mere reflection of her hair, one could see that she was fair among the fair.

And he used to kiss that portrait of the woman who had been his wife as if he wished to efface it, and would look at it for hours, and then throw himself down on the netting, and sob like a child as he looked at the infinite expanse before him, and seemed to see in their lost happiness the joys of their perished affections, and the divine remembrance of their love in the monotonous waste of green waters. And he tried to accuse himself for all that had occurred, and not to be angry with her, to think that his grievances were imaginary, and to adore her in spite of everything and always.

And that he roamed about the world, tossed to and fro, suffering, and hoping, he knew not what. He ventured into the greatest dangers, and sought for death just as a man seeks for his mistress, and death passed close to him without touching him, and was perhaps amused at his grief and misery.

For he was as wretched as a stone-breaker, as one of those poor devils who work and nearly break their backs over the hard flints the whole day long, under the scorching sun or the cold rain, and Marie-Anne herself was not happy, for she was pining for the past, and remembered their former love.

At last, however, he returned to France, changed, tamed by exposure, sun, and rain, and transformed as if by some witch's filter.

Nobody would have recognized the elegant and effeminate clubman in this species of corsair, with broad shoulders, a skin the color of blister, with very red lips, and who rolled a little in his walk; who seemed to be stifled in his black dress-coat, but who still retained his distinguished manners, the bearing of a nobleman of the last century, who, when he was ruined, fitted out a privateer, and fell upon the English wherever he met them, from St. Malo to Calcutta. And wherever he showed himself his friends exclaimed:

"Why! Is that you? I should never have known you again!"

He was very nearly starting off again immediately. He even telegraphed orders to Havre to get the steam-yacht ready for sea again directly, when he heard that Marie-Anne had married again.

He saw her in the distance, at the *Théâtre Français* one Tuesday, and when he noticed how pretty, how fair, how desirable she was, and looking so melancholy, with all the appearance of an unhappy soul that regrets something, his determination grew weaker, and he delayed his departure from week to week, and waited, without knowing why, until, at last, worn out with the struggle, watching her wherever she went, more in love with her than he had ever been before, he wrote her long, mad, ardent letters in which his passion overflowed like a stream of lava.

He altered his handwriting, as he remembered her restless brain and her many whims. He sent her the flowers which he knew she liked best, and told her that she was his life, that he was dying of waiting for her, of longing for her, for her, his idol.

At last, very much puzzled and surprised, guessing — who knows? — from the instinctive beating of her heart, and her general emotion, that it must be he this time, he whose soul she had tortured with such cold cruelty, and knowing that she could make amends for the past and bring back their former love, she replied to him, and granted him the meeting that he asked for. She fell into his arms, and they both sobbed with joy and ecstasy. Their kisses were those which lips only give when they have lost each other and found each other again at last, when they meet and exhaust themselves in each other's looks, thirsting for tenderness, love and enjoyment.

Last week Count de Baudémont carried off Marie-Anne quietly and coolly, just like one resumes possession of one's house on returning from a journey, and drives out the intruders. And when *Maitre* Garrulier was told of this unheard-of scandal, he rubbed his hands — his long, delicate hands of a sensual prelate — and exclaimed:

"That is absolutely logical, and I should like to be in their place."

THE MAN WITH THE DOGS

His wife, even when talking to him, always called him Monsieur Bistaud, but in all the country round, within a radius of ten leagues in France and Belgium, he was known as *cet homme aux chiens*. It was not a very valuable reputation, however, and "That man with the dogs" became a sort of pariah.

In Thierache they are not very fond of the custom-house officers, for everybody, high or low, profits by smuggling; thanks to which many articles, and especially coffee, gunpowder and tobacco are to be had cheap. It may here be stated that on that wooded, broken country, where the meadows are surrounded by brushwood, and the lanes are dark and narrow, smuggling is chiefly carried on by means of sporting dogs, who are broken in to become smuggling dogs. Scarcely an evening passes without some of them being seen, loaded with contraband, trotting silently along, pushing their noses through a hole in a hedge, with furtive and uneasy looks, and sniffing the air to scent the custom-house officers and their dogs. These dogs also are specially trained, and are very ferocious, and easily rip up their unfortunate congeners, who become the game instead of hunting for it.

Now, nobody was capable of imparting this unnatural education to them so well as "the man with his dogs," whose business consisted in breaking in dogs for the custom-house authorities, and everybody looked upon it as a dirty business, a business which could only be performed by a man without any proper feeling.

"He is a men's robber," the women said, "to take honest dogs into nurse, and to make a lot of Judas's out of them."

While the boys shouted insulting verses behind his back, the men and the women abused him, but no one ventured to do it to his face, for he was not very patient, and was always accompanied by one of his huge dogs, and that served to make him respected.

Certainly, without that bodyguard, he would have had a bad time of it, especially at the hands of the smugglers, who had a deadly hatred for him. By himself, and in spite of his quarrelsome looks, he did not appear very formidable, for he was short and thin, his back was round, his legs were bandy, and his arms were as long and as thin as spiders' legs, and he could easily have been knocked down by a back-handed blow or a kick. But then, he had those confounded dogs which interfered with the bravest smugglers. How could they risk even a thrust when he had those huge brutes, with their fierce and bloodshot eyes, and their square heads, whose jaws were like a vise, with enormous white teeth, that were as sharp as daggers, and whose huge molars crunched up beef-bones to a pulp with them? They were wonderfully broken in, were always by him, obeyed him by signs, and were taught, not only to worry the smugglers' dogs, but also to fly at the throats of the smugglers themselves.

The consequence was that both he and his dogs were left alone, and people were satisfied in calling them names and sending them all to Coventry. No peasant ever set foot in his cottage, although Bistaud's wife kept a small shop and was a handsome woman, and the only persons who went there were the custom-house officers. The others took their revenge on them all by saying that the man with the dogs sold his wife to the custom-house officers, like he did his dogs.

"He keeps her for them, as well as his dogs," they said jeeringly. "You can see that he is a born cuckold with his yellow beard and eyebrows, which stick up like a pair of horns."

His hair was certainly red, or rather yellow, his thick eyebrows were turned up in two points on his temples, and he used to twirl them mechanically as if they had been a pair of moustaches. And certainly, with his hair like that, and with his long beard and shaggy eyebrows, with his sallow face, blinking eyes, and dull looks, with his dogged mouth, thin lips, and his miserable, deformed body, he was not a pleasing object.

But he assuredly was not a complaisant cuckold, and those who have said that of him had never seen him at home. On the contrary, he was always jealous, and kept as sharp a lookout on his wife as he did on his dogs, and if he had broken her in at all, it was to be as faithful to him as they were.

She was a handsome, and what they call in the country, a fine body of a woman; tall, well-built, with a full bust and broad breech, and she certainly made more than one excise man squint at her, but it was no use for them to come and sniff round her too closely, or else there would have been blows. At least, that is what the custom-house officers said when anybody joked with them and said to them: “That does not matter, no doubt, you and she have hunted for your fleas together.”

It was no use for them to defend Madame Bistaud’s fierce virtue; nobody believed them, and the only answer they got was: “You are hiding your game, and are ashamed of going to seduce a woman who belongs to such a wretched creature.”

And, certainly, nobody would have believed that such a buxom woman, who looked as if her crupper were as warm as her looks, and who assuredly must have liked to be well attended to, could be satisfied with such a puny husband; with such an ugly, weak, red-headed fellow, who smelled of his own hair and of the mustiness of the carrion which he gave to his hounds.

But they did not know that “the man with the dogs” had some years before given her, once for all, a lesson in fidelity, and that for a mere trifle, and that for a venial sin! He had surprised her for allowing herself to be kissed by some gallant; that was all! He had not taken any notice, but when the man was gone he brought two of his hounds into the room, and said:

“If you do not want them to tear your inside out as they would a rabbit’s, go down on your knees so that I may thrash you!”

She obeyed in terror, and “the man with the dogs” had beaten her with a whip until his arm dropped with fatigue. And she did not venture to scream, although she was bleeding under the blows of the thong, which tore her dress, and cut into the flesh; all she dared to do was to utter low, hoarse groans; for while beating her, he kept on saying:

“Don’t make a noise, by —— ; don’t make a noise, or I will let the dogs fly at your stern.”

From that time she had been faithful to Bistaud, though she had naturally not told anyone the reason for it, nor for her hatred either, not even Bistaud himself, who thought that she was subdued for all time, and who always found her very submissive and respectful. But for six years she had nourished her hatred in her heart, feeding it on silent hopes and promises of revenge. And it was that flame of hope and that longing for revenge which made her so coquettish with the custom-house officers, for she hoped to find a possible avenger among her inflammable admirers.

At last she came across the right man. He was a splendid sub-officer of the customs, built like a Hercules, with fists like a butcher’s, and who had long leased four of his ferocious dogs from her husband.

As soon as they had grown accustomed to their new master, and especially after they had tasted flesh of the smugglers' dogs, they had, by degrees, become detached from their former master, who had reared them. No doubt they still recognized him a little, and would not have sprung at his throat as if he had been a perfect stranger, but still, they did not hesitate between his voice and that of their new master, and they obeyed the latter only.

Although the woman had often noticed this, she had not hitherto been able to make much use of the circumstance. A custom-house officer, as a rule, only keeps one dog, and this fellow always had half-a-dozen, at least, in training, without reckoning a personal guard which he kept for himself and which was the fiercest of all. Consequently, any duel between some lover assisted by only one dog, and the dog-breaker defended by his pack, was impossible.

But on that occasion, the chances were more equal. Just then he had only five dogs in the kennel, and two of them were quite young, though certainly old *Bourreau* counted for several, but after all, they could risk a battle against him and the other three, with the two couples of the custom-house officer, and they must profit by the occasion.

And one fine evening, as the brigadier of the custom-house officers was alone in the shop with Bistaud's wife and was squeezing her waist, she said to him abruptly:

"Do you really want to have something to do with me, *Môssieu* Fernand?"

He kissed her on the lips as he replied: "Do I really want to? I would give my stripes for it; so you see...."

"Very well," she replied, "do as I tell you, and upon my word, as an honest woman, I will be your commodity to do what you like with."

And laying a stress on that word *commodity*, which in that part of the country means mistress, she whispered hotly into his ear:

"A commodity who knows her business, I can tell you, for my beast of a husband has trained me up in such a way that I am now absolutely disgusted with him."

Fernand, who was much excited, promised her everything that she wished, and feverishly, malignantly, she told him how shamefully her husband had treated her a short time before, how her fair skin had been cut, told him her hatred and thirst for revenge; and the brigadier acquiesced, and that same evening he came to the cottage accompanied by his four hounds, with their spiked collars on.

“What are you going to do with them?” “the man with the dogs” asked.

“I have come to see whether you did not rob me when you sold them to me,” the brigadier replied.

“What do you mean by ‘robbed you’?”

“Well, robbed! I have been told that they could not tackle a dog like your *Bourreau*, and that many smugglers have dogs who are as good as he is.”

“Impossible.”

“Well, in case any of them should have one, I should like to see how the dogs that you sold me could tackle them.”

The woman laughed an evil laugh, and her husband grew suspicious, when he saw that the brigadier replied to it by a wink. But his suspicions came too late. The *breaker* had no time to go to the kennel to let out his pack, for *Bourreau* had been seized by the custom-house officer’s four dogs. At the same time the woman locked the door, and already her husband was lying motionless on the floor, while *Bourreau* could not go to his assistance, as he had enough to do to defend himself against the furious attack of the other dogs, who were almost tearing him to pieces, in spite of his strength and courage. Five minutes later two of the attacking hounds were totally disabled with the bowels protruding, but *Bourreau* himself was dying, with his throat gaping.

Then the woman and the custom-house officer kissed each other before the breaker whom they bound firmly, while the two dogs of the custom-house officer, that were still on their legs, were panting for breath, and the other three were wallowing in their own blood, and while the amorous couple were carrying on all sorts of capers, who were still further excited by the rage of the dog-breaker, who was forced to look at them, and who shouted in his despair:

“You wretches! You shall pay for this!” And the woman’s only reply was, to say: “Cuckold! Cuckold! Cuckold!”

When she was tired of larking, her hatred was not yet satisfied, and she said to the brigadier:

“Fernand, go to the kennels and shoot the five other brutes; otherwise he will make them kill me to-morrow. Off you go, old fellow!”

The brigadier obeyed, and immediately five shots were heard in the darkness. It did not take long, but that short time had been enough for "the man with the dogs" to show what he could do. While he was tied, the two dogs of the custom-house officer had gradually recognized him, and came and fondled him, and as soon as he was alone with his wife, as she was insulting him, he said, in his usual voice of command to the dogs:

"At her, Flanbard! At her, Garou!" And the two dogs sprang at the wretched woman, and one seized her by the throat, while the other caught her by the side.

When the brigadier came back, she was dying on the ground in a pool of blood, and "the man with the dogs" said with a laugh: "There, you see, that is the way I break in my dogs!"

The custom-house officer rushed out in horror, followed by his hounds who licked his hands as they ran, and made them quite red.

The next morning "the man with the dogs" was found still bound, but chuckling, in his hovel that was turned into a slaughter-house.

They were both arrested and tried, when "the man with the dogs" was acquitted, and the brigadier sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The matter gave much food for talk in the district, and is, indeed, still talked about, for "the man with the dogs" returned there, and is more celebrated than ever under his nickname, but his celebrity is not of a bad kind, for he is now just as much respected and liked as he was despised and hated formerly. He is still, as a matter of fact, "the man with the dogs," as he is rightly called, for he has not his equal as a dog-breaker for leagues around, but now he no longer breaks in mastiffs, as he has given up teaching honest dogs to "act the part of Judas," as he says, for those dirty custom-house officers, and now he only devotes himself to dogs to be used for smuggling, and he is worth listening to when he says:

"You may depend upon it, that I know how to punish such commodities as she was, where they have sinned!"

THE CLOWN

The hawkers' cottage stood at the end of the Esplanade, on the little promontory where the jetty is, where all the winds, all the rain, and all the spray met. The hut, both walls and roof, was built of old planks, more or less covered with tar, whose chinks were stopped with oakum, and dry wreckage was heaped up against it. In the middle of the room an iron pot stood on two bricks, and served as a stove, when they had any coal, but as there was no chimney, it filled the room, which was ventilated only by a low door, with smoke, and there the whole crew lived, eighteen men and one woman. Some had undergone various terms of imprisonment, and nobody knew what the others were, but though they were all, more or less, suffering from some physical defect and were nearly old men, they were still all strong enough for hauling. For the "Chamber of Commerce" tolerated them there, and allowed them that hovel to live in, on condition that they should be ready to haul, by day and by night.

For every vessel they hauled, each got a penny by day and two-pence by night, but that was not certain, on account of the competition of retired sailors, fishermen's wives, laborers who had nothing to do, but who were all stronger than those half-starved wretches in the hut.

And yet they lived there, those eighteen men and one woman. Were they happy? Certainly not. Hopeless? Not that, either; for they occasionally got a little besides their scanty pay, and then they stole occasionally, fish, lumps of coal, things without any value to those who lost them, but of great value to the poor, beggarly thieves.

The eighteen kept the woman, and there was no jealousy on her account. She had no special favorite among them.

She was a fat woman of about forty, chubby faced and puffy, and of whom Daddy La Bretagne, who was one of the eighteen, used to say: "She does us honor."

If she had had a favorite among them, Daddy La Bretagne would certainly have had the greatest right to that privilege, for although he was one of the most crippled among them, as he was partially paralyzed in his legs, he showed himself skillful and strong-armed as any of them, and in spite of his infirmities, he always managed to secure a good place in the row of haulers. None of them knew as well as he did how to inspire visitors with pity during the season, and to make them put their hands into the pockets, and he was a past master at cadging, so that among those empty stomachs and penniless rascals he had windfalls of victuals and coppers more frequently than fell to his share. But he did not make use of them in order to monopolize their common mistress.

"I am just," he used to say. "Let each of us have his spoonful in turn, and no more, when we are all eating out of the same dish."

With the coal he picked up, he used to make a good fire for the whole band under the iron pot, in which he cooked whatever he brought home with him, without any complaining about it, for he used to say:

"It gives you a good fire in which to warm yourselves, for nothing, and the smell of my stew into the bargain."

As for his money, he spent in drink with the trollop, and afterwards, what was left of it, with the other eighteen.

"You see," he used to say, "I am just, and more than just. I give her up to you, because it is your right."

The consequence was that they all liked Daddy La Bretagne, so that he gloried in it, and said proudly:

"What a pity that we are living under the Republic! These fellows would think nothing of making me king."

And one day, when he said this, his trollop replied: "The king is here, old fellow!" And at the same time she presented a new comrade to them, who was no less ragged or wretched looking than the eighteen, but quite young by the size of him. He was a tall, thin fellow of about forty, and without a white streak in his long hair. He was dressed only in a pair of trousers and a shirt, which he wore outside them, like a blouse, and the trollop said:

"Here, Daddy La Bretagne, you have two knitted vests on, so just give him one."

"Why should I?" the hauler asked.

"Because I choose you to," the woman replied. "I have been living with you set of old men for a long time, so now I want to have a young one;

there he is, so you must give him a vest, and keep him here, or I shall throw you up. You may take it or leave it, as you like. Do you understand me?"

The eighteen looked at each other open-mouthed, and good Daddy La Bretagne scratched his head, and then said:

"What she asks is quite right, and we must give way," he replied.

Then they explained themselves, and came to an understanding. The poor devil did not come like a conqueror, for he was a wretched clown who had just been released from prison, where he had undergone three years' hard labor for an attempted outrage on a girl, but, with one exception, the best fellow in the world, so the people declared.

"And something nice for me," the trollop added, "for I can assure you that I mean him to reward me for anything I may do for him."

From that time the household of eighteen persons consisted of nineteen, and at first all went well. The clown was very humble, and tried not to be burdensome to them. Fed, clothed and supplied with tobacco, he tried not to be too exacting in the other matter, and if needful, he would have hauled like the others, but the woman would not allow it.

"You shall not fatigue yourself, my little man," she said. "You must reserve yourself entirely for me."

And he did as she wished.

And soon, the eighteen, who had never been jealous of each other, grew jealous of the favored lover. Some tried to pick a quarrel with him. He resisted. The best fellow in the world, no doubt, but he was not going to be taken for a mussel shut up in its shell, for all that. Let them call him as lazy as a priest if they liked; he did not mind that, but when they put hairs into his coffee, armsful of rushes among his wreckage, and filth into his soup, they had better look out!

"None of that, all the lot of you, or you will see what I can do," he used to say.

They repeated the practical jokes, however, and he thrashed them. He did not try to find out who the culprits were, but attacked the first one he met, so much the worse for him. With a kick from his wooden clog (it was his specialty) he smashed their noses into a pulp, and having thus acquired the knowledge of his strength, and urged on by his trollop, he soon became a tyrant. The eighteen felt that they were slaves, and their former paradise where concord and perfect equality had reigned, became a hell, and that state of things could not last.

“Ah!” Daddy La Bretagne growled, “if only I were twenty years younger I would nearly kill him! I have my Breton’s hot head still, but my confounded legs are no good any longer.”

And he boldly challenged the clown to a duel, in which the latter was to have his legs tied, and then both of them were to sit on the ground and hack at each other with knives.

“Such a duel would be perfectly fair!” he replied, kicking him in the side with one of his clogs, and the woman burst out laughing, and said:

“At any rate, you cannot compete with him on equal terms as regards myself, so do not worry yourself about it.”

Daddy La Bretagne was lying in his corner and spitting blood, and none of the rest spoke. What could the others do, when he, the blustering of them all, had been served so? The jade had been right when she had brought in the intruder, and said:

“The king is here, old fellow.”

Only, she ought to have remembered that, after all, she alone kept her subjects in check, and as Daddy La Bretagne said, by a right object. With her to console them, they would no doubt have borne anything, but she was foolish enough to cut down their food, and not to fill their common dish as full as it used to be. She wanted to keep everything for her lover, and that raised the exasperation of the eighteen to its height, and so one night when she and the clown were asleep, among all these fasting men, the eighteen threw themselves upon them. They wrapped the despot’s arms and legs up in tarpaulin, and in the presence of the woman, who was firmly bound, they flogged him till he was black and blue.

“Yes,” old Bretagne said to me, himself, “yes, Monsieur, that was our revenge. The king was guillotined in 1793, and so we guillotined our king also.”

And he concluded with a sneer, and said: “Ah! We wished to be just, and as it was not his head that had made him our king, so, by Jove, we settled him.”

BABETTE

I was not very fond of going to inspect that asylum for old, infirm men, officially, as I was obliged to go over it in company of the superintendent, who was talkative, and a statistician. But then, the grandson of the foundress accompanied us, who was evidently pleased at that minute inspection, and he was a charming man, and the owner of a large forest, where he had given me permission to shoot, and I was, of course, obliged to pretend to be interested in his grandmother's philanthropic work. So with a smile on my lips I endured the superintendent's interminable discourse, punctuating it here and there, as best I could, by a:

"Ah! really! ... Very strange, indeed! ... I should never have believed it! ..."

I was absolutely ignorant of the matter to which I replied thus, for my thoughts were lulled to repose by the constant humming of our loquacious guide. I was only vaguely conscious that no doubt the persons and things would have appeared worthy of attention to me if I had been there alone as an idler, for in that case, I should certainly have asked the superintendent:

"Who is this Babette, whose name appears so constantly in the complaints of so many of the inmates?"

Quite a dozen men and women had spoken to us about her, now to complain of her, now to praise her; and especially the women, as soon as they saw the superintendent, cried out:

"M'sieur, Babette has again been ..."

"There! that will do, that will do!" he interrupted them, his gentle voice suddenly becoming harsh.

At other times he would amicably question some old man with a happy countenance, and say:

"Well, my friend! I suppose you are very happy here?"

Many replied with fervent expressions of gratitude, with which Babette's name was frequently mingled, and when he heard them speak so, the superintendent put on an ecstatic air; looking up to heaven with clasped hands, he said, slowly shaking his head: “Ah! Babette is a very precious woman, very precious!”

Yes, it would certainly interest one to know who that creature was, but not under present circumstances, and so, rather than to undergo any more of this, I made up my mind to remain in ignorance of who Babette was, for I could pretty well guess what she would be like. I pictured her to myself as a flower that had sprung up in a corner of these dull courtyards, like a ray of sun shining through the sepulchral gloom of these dismal passages.

I pictured her so clearly to myself that I did not even feel any wish to know her, but yet she was dear to me, because of the happy expression which they all put on when they spoke of her, and I was angry with the old women who spoke against her. One thing certainly puzzled me, and that was, that the superintendent was among those who went into ecstasies over her, and this made me strongly disinclined to question him about her, though I had no other reason for this feeling.

But all this passed through my mind in rather a confused manner, and without my taking the trouble to fix or to formulate any ideas and sensations, for I continued to dream, rather than to think effectively, and it is very probable that, when my visit was over, I should not have remembered much about it, not even with regard to Babette, if I had not been suddenly awakened by the sight of her in the person, and been quite upset by the difference that there was between my fancy and the reality.

We had just crossed a small back yard, and had gone into a very dark passage, when a door suddenly opened at the other end of it, and an unexpected apparition appeared through another door, and we could indistinctly see that it was the figure of a woman. At the same moment, the superintendent called out in a furious voice:

“Babette! Babette!”

He had mechanically quickened his pace, and almost ran, and we followed him, and he quickly opened the door through which the apparition had vanished, and which led on to a staircase, and he again called out, and a burst of stifled laughter was the only reply. I looked over the balusters, and saw a woman down below, who was looking at us fixedly.

She was an old woman; there could be no doubt of that, from her wrinkled face and her few straggling gray locks which appeared under her cap. But one did not think of that when one saw her eyes, which were wonderfully youthful, for then, one saw nothing but them. They were profound eyes, of a deep, almost violet blue; the eyes of a child.

Suddenly the superintendent called out to her: “You have been with *la Friezê* again!”

The old woman did not reply, but shook with laughter, as she had done just before, and then she ran off, giving the superintendent a look, which said as plainly as words could have done: “Do you think I care a fig for you?”

Those insulting words were clearly written in her face, and at the same time I noticed that the old woman’s eyes had utterly changed, for during that short moment of bravado the childish eyes had become the eyes of a monkey, of some ferocious, obstinate baboon.

That time, in spite of any dislike to question him further, I could not help saying to him: “That is Babette, I suppose?”

“Yes,” he replied, growing rather red, as if he guessed that I understood the old woman’s insulting looks.

“Is she the woman who is so precious?” I added, with a touch of irony, which made him grow altogether crimson.

“That is she,” he said, walking on quickly, so as to escape my further questions.

But I was egged on by curiosity, and I made a direct appeal to our host’s complaisance. “I should like to see this *Friezê*,” I said. “Who is *Friezê*?”

He turned round and said: “Oh! nothing, nothing, he is not at all interesting. What is the good of seeing him? It is not worth while.”

And he ran downstairs, two at a time. He who was usually so delicate, and so very careful to explain everything, was now in a hurry to get finished, and our visit was cut short.

The next day I had to leave that part of the country, without hearing anything more about Babette, but I came back about four months later, when the shooting season began. I had not forgotten her during that time, for nobody could ever forget her eyes, and so I was very glad to have as my traveling companion on my three hours’ diligence journey from the station to my friend’s house, a man who talked to me about her all the time.

He was a young magistrate whom I had already met, and who had much interested me by his wit and his close manner of observing things, and by his singularly refined casuistry, and, above all, by the contrast between his professional severity, and his tolerant philosophy.

But he never appeared so attractive to me as he did on that day, when he told me the history of that mysterious Babette.

He had inquired into it, and had applied all his faculties as an examining magistrate to it, for, like me, his visit to the asylum had roused his curiosity. This is what he had learned and what he told me.

When she was ten years old, Babette had been violated by her own father, and at thirteen she had been sent to the house of correction for vagabondage and debauchery. From the time she was twenty until she was forty she had been a servant in the neighborhood, frequently changing her situation, and being nearly everywhere her employer's mistress, and she had ruined several families without getting any money herself, or without gaining any definite position. A shopkeeper had committed suicide on her account, and a respectable young fellow had turned thief and incendiary, and had finished at the hulks.

She had been married twice, and had twice been left a widow, and for ten years, until she was fifty, she had been the only commodity in the district, for pleasure, to which five villages came to amuse themselves on holidays.

"She was very pretty, I suppose?"

"No; she never was that. It seems she was short, thin, with no bust or hips, at her best, I am told, and nobody can remember that she was pretty, even when she was young."

"Then how can you explain ...?"

"How?" the magistrate exclaimed. "Well! what about the eyes? You could not have looked at them?"

"Yes, yes, you are right," I replied. "Those eyes explain many things, certainly. They are the eyes of an innocent child."

"Ah!" he exclaimed again, enthusiastically, "Cleopatra, Diana of Poiters, Ninon de L'Enclos, all the queens of love who were adored when they were growing old, must have had eyes like hers. A woman who has such eyes can never grow old. But if Babette lives to be a hundred, she will always be loved as she has been, and as she is."

"As she is! Bah! By whom, pray?"

"By all the old men in the asylum, by all those who have preserved a fiber that can be touched, a corner of their heart that can be inflamed, or the least spark of desire left."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. And the superintendent loves her more than any of them do."

"Impossible!"

"I would stake my head on it."

"Well, after all, it is possible, and even probable; it is even certain. I now remember ..."

And again I saw the insulting, ferocious, familiar look which she had given the superintendent.

"And who is *la Friezê*?" I asked the magistrate "I suppose you know that also?"

"He is a retired butcher, who had both his legs frozen in the war of 1870, and whom she is very fond of. No doubt he is a cripple, with two wooden legs, but still a vigorous man enough, in spite of his fifty-three years. The loins of a Hercules and the face of a satyr. The superintendent is quite jealous of him!"

I thought the matter over again, and it seemed very probable to me. "Does she love *la Friezê*?"

"Yes; he is the chosen lover."

When we arrived at the host's house a short time afterwards, we were surprised to find everybody in a terrible state of excitement. A crime had been committed in the asylum; the gendarmes were there and our host was with them, so we instantly joined them. *La Friezê* had murdered the superintendent, and they gave us the details, which were horrible. The former butcher had hidden behind a door, and catching hold of the other, had rolled onto the ground with him and bitten him in the throat, tearing out his carotid, from which the blood spurted into the murderer's face.

I saw him, *la Friezê*. His fat face, which had been badly washed, was still blood-stained; he had a low forehead, square jaws, pointed ears, sticking out from his head, and flat nostrils, like the muzzle of some wild animal; but above all, I saw Babette.

She was smiling, and at that moment, her eyes had not their monkey-like and ferocious expression, but they were pleading and tender, with all of their sweetest childlike candor.

"You know," my host said to me in a low voice, "that the poor woman has fallen into senile imbecility, and that is the cause of her looks, which are so strange, considering the terrible sight she has seen.

"Do you think so?" the magistrate said. "You must remember that she is not yet sixty, and I do not think that it is a case of senile imbecility, but that she is quite conscious of the crime that has been committed."

"Then why should she smile?"

"Because she is pleased at what she has done."

"Oh! no; you are really too subtle!"

The magistrate suddenly turned to Babette, and, looking at her steadily, he said:

"I suppose you know what has happened, and why this crime was committed?"

She left off smiling, and her pretty, childlike eyes became her abominable monkey's eyes again, and then the answer was, suddenly to pull up her petticoats and to show us the lower part of her person. Yes, the magistrate had been quite right. That old woman had been a Cleopatra, a Diana, a Ninon de L'Enclos, and the rest of her body had remained like a child's, even more than her eyes. We were thunderstruck at the sight.

"Pigs! Pigs!" *la Friezê* shouted to us. "You also wanted to have something to do with her!"

And I saw that actually the magistrate's face was pale and contracted, and that his hands and lips trembled like those of a man caught in the act of doing wrong.

SYMPATHY

He was going up the *Rue des Martyrs* in a melancholy frame of mind, and in a melancholy frame of mind she also was going up the *Rue des Martyrs*. He was already old, nearly sixty, with a bald head under his seedy, tall hat, a gray beard, half buried in a high shirt collar, with dull eyes, an unpleasant mouth and yellow teeth.

She was past forty, with thin hair over her pads, and with a false plait; her linen was doubtful in color, and she had evidently bought her unfashionable dress at a *reach-me-down shop*. He was thin, while she was chubby. He had been handsome, proud, ardent, full of self-confidence, certain of his future, and seeming to hold in his hands all the trumps with which to win the game on the green table of Parisian life, while she had been pretty, sought after, fast, and in a fair way to have horses and carriages, and to win the first prize on the turf of gallantry, among the favorites of fortune.

At times, in his dark moments, he remembered the time when he had come to Paris from the country, with a volume of poetry and plays in his portmanteau, feeling a supreme contempt for all the writers who were then in vogue, and sure of supplanting them. She often, when she awoke in the morning to another day’s unhappiness, remembered that happy time when she had been launched onto the world, when she already saw that she was more sought after than Marie G. or Sophie N. or any other woman of that class, who had been her companions in vice, and whose lovers she had stolen from them.

He had had a splendid start. Not, indeed, as a poet and dramatist, as he had hoped at first, but thanks to a series of scandalous stories which had made a sensation on the boulevards, so that after an action for damages and several duels, he had become *our witty and brilliant colleague who, etc., etc.*

She had had her moments of extraordinary good luck, though she certainly did not eclipse Marie P. or Camille L., whom men compared to

Zenobia or Ninon de l'Enclos, but still enough to cause her to be talked about in the newspapers, and to cause a resolution at certain *tables-d'hòtes* at Montmarte. But one fine day, the newspaper in which *our brilliant and witty colleague who* ... used to write, became defunct, having been killed by a much more cynical rival, thanks to the much more venomous pen of a much more brilliant and witty colleague who .... Then, the insults of the latter having become pure and simple mud-pelting, his style soon became worn out, to the disgust of the public, and the celebrated *Mr. What's his name* had great difficulty in getting onto some obscure paper, where he was transformed into the obscure penny-a-liner *Machin*.

Now, one evening the quasi-rival of Marie X. and Camille L. had fallen ill, and consequently into pecuniary difficulties, and the prostitute *No-matter-who* was now on the lookout for a dinner, and would have been only too happy to get it at some *table-d'hòte* at Montmarte. Machin had had a return of ambition with regard to his poetry and his dramas, but then, his verses of former days had lost their freshness, and his youthful dramas appeared to him to be childish. He would have to write others, and, by Jove! he felt himself capably of doing it, for he had plenty of ideas and plans in his head, and he could easily demolish many successful writers if he chose to try! But then, the difficulty was, how to set about it, and to find the necessary leisure and time for thought. He had his daily bread to gain, and something besides: his coffee, his game of cards and other little requirements; and the incessant writing article upon article barely sufficed for that, and so days and years went by, and Machin was Machin still.

She also longed for former years, and surely it could not be so very hard to find a lover to start her on her career once more, for many of her female friends, who were not nearly so nice as she was, had unearthed one, so why should not she be equally fortunate? But there, her youth had gone and she had lost all her chances; other women had their fancy men, and she had to take them on, every day at reduced prices, so that she was reduced from taking up with any man she met, and so day after day and months and years passed, and the prostitute *No-matter-who* had remained the prostitute *No-matter-who*.

Often, in a fit of despondency, he used to say to himself, thinking of some one who had succeeded in life: "But, after all, I am cleverer than that fellow." And she always said to herself, when she got up to her miserable, daily round, when she thought of such and such a woman, who was now settled in life: “In what respect is that woman better than I am?”

And Machin, who was nearly sixty, and whose head was bald under his shabby tall hat, and whose gray beard was half-buried in a high shirt collar, who had dull eyes, an unpleasant mouth and yellow teeth, was mad with his fellow men, while the prostitute *No-matter-who*, with thin hair over her pads, and with a false plait, with her linen of a doubtful color, and with her unfashionable dress, which she had evidently bought at a *reach-me-down* shop, was enraged with society.

Ah! Those miserable, dark hours, and the wretched awakenings! And that evening he was more than usually wretched, as he had just lost all his pay for the next month, that miserable screw which he earned so hardly by almost editing the newspaper, for three hundred francs a month, in a brothel.

And that evening she was in a state of semi-stupidity, as she had had too many glasses of beer which a charitable female friend had given her, and was almost afraid to go back to her room, as her landlord had told her in the morning that unless she paid the fortnight’s back rent that she owed at the rate of a franc a day, he would turn her out of doors and keep her things.

And this was the reason why they were both going up the *Rue des Martyrs* in a melancholy frame of mind. There was scarcely a soul in the muddy streets; it was getting dark, and beginning to rain, and the drains smelled horribly.

He passed her, and in a mechanical voice she said: “Will you not come home with me, you handsome dark man?” “I have no money,” he replied. But she ran after him, and catching hold of his arm, she said: “Only a franc; that is having it for nothing.” And he turned round, looked at her, and seeing that she must have been pretty, and that she was still stout (and he was fond of fat women), he said: “Where do you live? Near here?” “In the *Rue Lepic*.” “Why! So do I.” “Then that is all right, eh? Come along, old fellow.”

He felt in his pockets and pulled out all the money he found there, which amounted to thirteen sous, and said: “That is all I have, upon my honor!” “All right,” she said; “come along.”

And they continued their melancholy walk along the *Rue des Martyrs*, side by side now, but without speaking, and without guessing that their two existences harmonized and corresponded with each other, and that by huddling up together, they would be merely accomplishing the acme of their twin destinies.

THE DEBT

"Pst! Pst! Come with me, you handsome, dark fellow. I am very nice, as you will see. Do come up. At any rate you will be able to warm yourself, for I have a capital fire at home."

But nothing enticed the foot-passengers, neither being called a handsome, dark fellow, which she applied quite impartially to old or fat men also, nor the promise of pleasure which was emphasized by a caressing ogle and smile, nor even the promise of a good fire, which was so attractive in the bitter December wind. And tall Fanny continued her useless walk, and the night advanced and foot-passengers grew scarcer. In another hour the streets would be absolutely deserted, and unless she could manage to pick up some belated drunken man, she would be obliged to return home alone.

And yet, tall Fanny was a beautiful woman! With her head like a *Bacchante*, and her body like a goddess, in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years, she deserved something better than this miserable pavement, where she could not even pick up the five francs which she wanted for the requirements of the next day. But there! In this infernal Paris, in this swarming crowd of competitors who all jostled each other, courtesans, like artists, did not attain to eminence until their later years. In that they resembled precious stones, as the most valuable of them are those that have been set the oftenest.

And that was why tall Fanny, who was later to become one of the richest and most brilliant stars of Parisian gallantry, was walking about the streets on this bitter December night, without a half-penny in her pocket, in spite of her head like a Bacchante, and her body like a goddess, and in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years.

However, it was too late now to hope to meet anybody; there was not a single foot passenger about; the street was decidedly empty, dull and lifeless. Nothing was to be heard, except the whistling of sudden gusts of wind, and nothing was to be seen, except the flickering gas lights, which looked like dying butterflies. Well! The only thing was to return home alone.

But suddenly, tall Fanny saw a human form standing on the pavement at the next crossing, and whoever it was, seemed to be hesitating and uncertain which way to go. The figure, which was very small and slight, was wrapped in a long cloak, which reached almost to the ground.

"Perhaps he is a hunchback," the girl said to herself. "They like tall women!" And she walked quickly towards him, from habit, already saying: "*Pst! Pst!* Come home with me, you handsome, dark fellow!" What luck! The man did not go away, but came towards Fanny, although somewhat timidly, while she went to meet him, repeating her wheedling words, so as to reassure him. She went all the quicker, as she saw that he was staggering with the zig-zag walk of a drunken man, and she thought to herself: "When once they sit down, there is no possibility of getting these beggars up again, and they want to go to sleep just where they are. I only hope I shall get to him before he tumbles down."

Luckily she reached him, just in time to catch him in her arms, but as soon as she had done so, she almost let him fall, in her astonishment. It was neither a drunken man nor a hunchback, but a child of twelve or thirteen in an overcoat, who was crying, and who said in a weak voice: "I beg your pardon, madame, I beg your pardon. If you only knew how hungry and cold I am! I beg your pardon! Oh! I am so cold."

"Poor child!" she said, putting her arms around him and kissing him. And she carried him off, with a full, but happy heart, and while he continued to sob, she said to him mechanically: "Don't be frightened, my little man. You will see how nice I can be! And then, you can warm yourself; I have a capital fire." But the fire was out; the room, however, was warm, and the child said, as soon as they got in: "Oh! How comfortable it is here! It is a great deal better than in the streets, I can tell you! And I have been living in the streets for six days." He began to cry again, and added: "I beg your pardon, madame. I have eaten nothing for two days."

Tall Fanny opened her cupboard, which had glass doors. The middle shelf held all her linen, and on the upper one there was a box of Albert biscuits, a drop of brandy at the bottom of a bottle, and a few small lumps of sugar in a cup. With that, and some water out of the bottle, she concocted a sort of broth, which he swallowed ravenously, and when he had done, he wished to tell his story, which he did, yawning all the time.

His grandfather, (the only one of his relations whom he had ever known,) who had been painter and decorator at Soisson, had died about a month before; but before his death he had said to him: “When I am gone, little man, you will find a letter to my brother, who is in business in Paris, among my papers. You must take it to him, and he will be certain to take care of you. However, in any case you must go to Paris, for you have an aptitude for painting, and only there can you hope to become an artist.”

When the old man was dead (he died in the hospital), the child started, dressed in an old coat of his grandfather’s and with thirty francs, which was all that the old man had left behind him in his pocket. But when he got to Paris, there was nobody of the name at the address mentioned on the letter. The dead man’s brother had left there six months before, and nobody knew where he had gone to, and so the child was alone, and for a few days he managed to exist on what he had over, after paying for his journey. After he had spent his last franc, he had wandered about the streets, as he had no money with which to pay for a bed, buying his bread by the half-penny-worth, until for the last forty-eight hours, he had been without anything, absolutely without anything.

He told her all this while he was half asleep, amidst sobs and yawns, so that the girl did not venture to ask him any more questions, in spite of her curiosity, but, on the contrary, cut him short, and undressed him while she listened, and only interrupted him to kiss him, and to say to him: “There, there, my poor child! You shall tell me the rest to-morrow. You cannot go on now, so go to bed and have a good sleep.” And as soon as he had finished, she put him to bed, where he immediately fell into a profound sleep. Then she undressed herself quickly, got into bed by his side, so she might keep him warm, and went to sleep, crying to herself, without exactly knowing why.

The next day they breakfasted and dined together at a common eating house, on money that she had borrowed, and when it was dark, she said to the child: “Wait for me here; I will come for you at closing time.” She came back sooner, however about ten o’clock. She had twelve francs, which she gave him, telling him that she had *earned them*, and she continued, with a laugh: “I feel that I shall make some more. I am in luck this evening, and you have brought it me. Do not be impatient, but have some milk-posset while you are waiting for me.”

She kissed him before she went, and the kind girl felt real maternal happiness as she went out. An hour later, however, she was *run in* by the police for having been found in a prohibited place, and off she went, game for *St. Lazare*.

And the child, who was turned out by the proprietor at closing time, and then driven from the furnished lodgings the next morning, where they told him that *Tall Fanny was in quod*, began his wretched vagabond life in the streets again, with only the twelve francs to depend on.

* * *

Fifteen years afterwards the newspapers announced one morning that the famous Fanny Clairet, the celebrated *horizontal*, whose caprices had caused a revolution in high life, that queen of frail beauties for whom three men had committed suicide, and so many others had ruined themselves, that incomparable living statue, who had attracted all Paris to the theater where she impersonated Venus in her transparent skin tights, made of woven air and knitted nothing had been shut up in a lunatic asylum. She had been seized suddenly; it was an attack of general paralysis, and as her debts were enormous, when her estate had been liquidated, she would have to end her days at *La Salpêtrière*.

"No, certainly not!" François Guerland, the painter, said to himself, when he read the notice of it in the papers. "No, the great Fanny shall certainly not end like that." For it was certainly she; there could be no doubt about it. For a long time after she had shown him that act of charity, which he could never forget, the child had tried to see his benefactress again. But Paris is a very mysterious place, and he himself had had many adventures before he grew up to be a man, and, eventually, almost somebody! But he only found her in the distance; he had recognized her at the theater, on the stage, or as she was getting into her carriage, which was fit for a princess. And how could he approach her then? Could he remind her of the time when her price was five francs? No, assuredly not; and so he had followed her, thanked her, and blessed her, from a distance.

But now the time had come for him to pay his debt, and he paid it. Although tolerably well known as a painter with a future in store for him, he was not rich. But what did that matter? He mortgaged that future which people prophesied for him, and gave himself over, bound hand and foot, to a picture dealer. Then he had the poor woman taken to an excellent asylum, where she could have not only every care, but every necessary comfort and even luxury. Alas! however, general paralysis never forgives. Sometimes it releases its prey, like the cruel cat releases the mouse, for a brief moment, only to lay hold of it again later, more fiercely than ever. Fanny had that period of abatement in her symptoms, and one morning the physician was able to say to the young man: “You are anxious to remove her? Very well! But you will soon have to bring her back, for the cure is only apparent, and her present state will only endure for a month, at most, and then, only if the patient is kept free from every excitement and excess!”

“And without that precaution?” Guerland asked him. “Then,” the doctor replied; “the final crisis will be all the nearer; that is all. But whether it would be nearer or more remote, it will not be the less fatal.” “You are sure of that?” “Absolutely sure.”

François Guerland took tall Fanny out of the asylum, installed her in splendid apartments, and went to live with her there. She had grown old, bloated, with white hair, and sometimes wandered in her mind, and she did not recognize in him the poor little lad on whom she had taken pity in the days gone by, nor did he remind her of the circumstance. He allowed her to believe that she was adored by a rich young man, who was passionately devoted to her. He was young, ardent, and caressing. Never had a mistress such a lover, and for three weeks, before she relapsed into the horrors of madness, which were happily soon terminated by her death, she intoxicated herself with the ecstasy of his kisses, and thus bade farewell to conscient life in an apotheosis of love.

The other day, at dessert, after an artists’ dinner, they were speaking of François Guerland, whose last picture at the *Salon* had been so deservedly praised. “Ah! yes,” one of them said, with a contemptuous voice and look. “That handsome fellow Guerland!” And another, accentuating the insinuation, added boldly: “Yes, that is exactly it! That handsome, too handsome fellow Guerland, the man who allows himself to be kept by women.”

AN ARTIST

"Bah! Monsieur," the old mountebank said to me; "it is a matter of exercise and habit, that is all! Of course, one requires to be a little gifted that way, and not to be butter-fingered, but what is chiefly necessary is patience and daily practice for long, long years."

His modesty surprised me all the more, because of all those performers who are generally infatuated with their own skill, he was the most wonderfully clever one that I had ever met. Certainly, I had frequently seen him, and everybody had seen him in some circus or other, or even in traveling shows, performing the trick that consists of putting a man or a woman with extended arms against a wooden target, and in throwing knives between their fingers and round their head, from a distance. There is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all, when one knows *the tricks of the trade*, and that the knives are not the least sharp, and stick into the wood at some distance from the flesh. It is the rapidity of the throws, the glitter of the blades, the curve which the handles make towards their living aim, which give an air of danger to an exhibition that has become commonplace, and only requires very middling skill.

But here there was no trick and no deception, and no dust thrown into the eyes. It was done in good earnest and in all sincerity. The knives were as sharp as razors, and the old mountebank planted them close to the flesh, exactly in the angle between the fingers, and surrounded the head with a perfect halo of knives, and the neck with a collar, from which nobody could have extricated himself without cutting his carotid artery, while to increase the difficulty, the old fellow went through the performance without seeing, his whole face being covered with a close mask of thick oil-cloth.

Naturally, like other great artists, he was not understood by the crowd, who confounded him with vulgar tricksters, and his mask only appeared to them a trick the more, and a very common trick into the bargain. "He must think us very stupid," they said. "How could he possibly aim without having his eyes open?” And they thought there must be imperceptible holes in the oil-cloth, a sort of lattice work concealed in the material. It was useless for him to allow the public to examine the mask for themselves before the exhibition began. It was all very well that they could not discover any trick, but they were only all the more convinced that they were being tricked. Did not the people know that they ought to be tricked?

I had recognized a great artist in the old mountebank, and I was quite sure that he was altogether incapable of any trickery, and I told him so, while expressing my admiration to him; and he had been touched, both by my admiration, and above all by the justice I had done him. Thus we became good friends, and he explained to me, very modestly, the real trick which the crowd cannot understand, the eternal trick compromised in these simple words: “To be gifted by nature, and to practice every day for long, long years.”

He had been especially struck by the certainty which expressed, that any trickery must become impossible to him. “Yes,” he said to me; “quite impossible! Impossible to a degree which you cannot imagine. If I were to tell you! But where would be the use?”

His face clouded over, and his eyes filled with tears, but I did not venture to force myself into his confidence. My looks, however, were no doubt not so discreet as my silence, and begged him to speak, and so he responded to their mute appeal. “After all,” he said: “why should I not tell you about it? You will understand me.” And he added, with a look of sudden ferocity: “She understood it at any rate!” “Who?” I asked. “My unfaithful wife,” he replied. “Ah! Monsieur, what an abominable creature she was, if you only knew! Yes, she understood it too well, too well, and that is why I hate her so; even more on that account, than for having deceived me. For that is a natural fault, is it not, and may be pardoned? But the other thing was a crime, a horrible crime.”

The woman who stood against the wooden target every night with her arms stretched out and her fingers extended, and whom the old mountebank fitted with gloves and with a halo formed of his knives which were as sharp as razors, and which he planted close to her, was his wife. She might have been a woman of forty, and must have been fairly pretty, but with perverse prettiness, an impudent mouth, a mouth that was at the same time sensual and bad, with the lower lip too thick for the thin, dry upper lip.

I had several times noticed that every time he planted a knife in the board, she uttered a laugh, so low as scarcely to be heard, but which was very significant when one heard it, for it was a hard and very mocking laugh, but I had always attributed that sort of reply to an artifice which the occasion required. It was intended, I thought, to accentuate the danger she incurred and the contempt that she felt for it, thanks to the sureness of the thrower's hands, and so I was very surprised when the mountebank said to me:

"Have you observed her laugh, I say? Her evil laugh which makes fun of me, and her cowardly laugh, which defies me? Yes, cowardly, because she knows nothing can happen to her, nothing, in spite of all she deserves, in spite of all that I ought to do to her, in spite of all that I want to do to her." "What do you want to do?" "Confound it! Cannot you guess? I want ... to kill her," "To kill her, because she has ..." "Because she has deceived me? No, no, not that, I tell you again. I have forgiven her for that, a long time ago, and I am too much accustomed to it! But the worst of it is, that the first time I forgave her, when I told her that all the same, I might some day have my revenge by cutting her throat, if I chose, without seeming to do it on purpose, as if it were an accident, mere awkwardness." "Oh! So you said that to her?" "Of course I did, and I meant it. I thought I might be able to do it, for you see I had the perfect right to do so. It was so simple, so easy, so tempting! Just think! A mistake of less than half an inch, and her skin would be cut at the neck where the jugular vein is, and the jugular would be severed. My knives cut very well! And when once the jugular is cut ... good-by. The blood would spurt out, and one, two, three red jets, and all would be over; she would be dead, and I should have had my revenge!"

"That is true, certainly, horribly true!" "And without any risk to me, eh? An accident, that is all; bad luck, one of those mistakes which happen every day in our business. What could they accuse me of? Whoever would think of accusing me, even? Homicide through imprudence, that would be all! They would even pity me, rather than accuse me. 'My wife! My poor wife!' I should say, sobbing. 'My wife, who is so necessary to me, who is half the bread-winner, who takes part in my performance!' You must acknowledge that I should be pitied!"

"Certainly; there is not the least doubt about that." "And you must allow that such a revenge would be a very nice revenge, the best possible revenge, which I could have with assured impunity?" "Evidently that is so." "Very well! But when I told her so, just as I have told you, and better still; threatening her, as I was mad with rage, and ready to do the deed that I had dreamt of, on the spot; what do you think she said?” “That you were a good fellow, and would certainly not have the atrocious courage to ...”

“Tut! tut! tut! I am not such a good fellow as you think. I am not frightened of blood, and that I have proved already, though it would be useless to tell you how and where. But I had no necessity to prove it to her, for she knows that I am capable of a good many things; even of crime; especially of a crime.” “And she was not frightened?” “No. She merely replied that I could not do what I said; you understand.” “That I could not do it!” “Why not?” “Ah! Monsieur, so you do not understand? Why do you not? Have I not explained to you by what constant, long, daily practice I have learnt to plant my knives without seeing what I am doing?” “Yes, well, what then?” “Well! Cannot you understand what she has understood with such terrible results, that now my hand would no longer obey me, if I wished to make a mistake as I threw?” “Is it possible?” “Nothing is truer, I am sorry to say. For I really have wished to have my revenge, which I have dreamt of, and which I thought so easy. Exasperated by that bad woman’s insolence and confidence in her own safety, I have several times made up my mind to kill her, and have exerted all my energy and all my skill, to make my knives fly aside when I threw them to make a border round her neck. I tried with all my might to make them deviate half an inch, just enough to cut her throat. I wanted to, and I have never succeeded, never. And always the horrible laugh makes fun of me, always, always.”

And with a deluge of tears, with something like a roar of unsatiated and muzzled rage, he ground his teeth as he wound up: “She knows me, the jade; she is in the secret of my work, of my patience, of my trick, routine, whatever you may call it! She lives in my innermost being, and sees into it more closely than you do, or than I do myself. She knows what a faultless machine I have become, the machine of which she makes fun, the machine which is too well wound up, the machine which cannot get out of order, and she knows that I *cannot* make a mistake.”

MAMMA STIRLING

Tall, slim, looking almost naked under her transparent dress of gauze, which fell in straight folds as far as the gold bracelets on her slender wrists, with languor in her rich voice, and something undulating and feline in the rhythmical swing of her wrist and hips. Tatia Caroly was singing one of those sweet Creole songs which call up some far distant fairy-like country, and unknown caresses, for which the lips remain always thirsting.

Footit, the clown, was leaning against the piano with a blackened face, and with his mouth that looked like a red gash from a saber cut, and his wide open eyes, he expressed feelings of the most extravagant emotion, while some niggers squatted on the ground, and accompanied the orchestra by strumming on some yellow, empty gourds.

But what made the woman and the children in the pantomime of the "New Circus" laugh most, was the incessant quarrel between an enormous Danish hound and a poor old supernumerary, who was blackened like a negro minstrel, and dressed like a Mulatto woman. The dog was always annoying him, followed him, snapped at his legs, and at his old wig, with his sharp teeth, and tore his coat and his silk pocket-handkerchief, whenever he could get hold of it, to pieces. And the man used positively to allow himself to be molested and bitten, played his part with dull resignation, with mechanical unconsciousness of a man who has come down in the world, and who gains his livelihood as best he can, and who has already endured worse things than that.

And when half turning round to the two club men, with whom she had just been dining at the *Café Anglais*, as she used her large fan of black feathers, in a pretty, supple pose, with the light falling on to the nape of her fair neck, Noele de Fréjus exclaimed: "Wherever did they unearth that horrible, grotesque figure?"

Lord Shelley, who was a pillar of the circuses, and who knew the performances, the length of time the acrobats had been performing, and the private history of all of them, whether clowns or circus riders, replied: "Do not you recognize him, my dear?" "That lump of soot?... Are you having a joke with me?"

"He certainly has very much changed, poor fellow, and not to his advantage...Nevertheless James Stirling was a model of manly beauty and elegance, and he led such an extravagant life that all sorts of stories were rife about him, and many people declared that he was some high-class adventurer...At any rate he thought no more of danger than he did of smoking a good cigar.

"Do you not remember him at the Hippodrome, when he stood on the bare back of a horse, and drove five other tandem fashion at full gallop and without making a mistake, but checking them, or urging them on with his thin, muscular hands, just as he pleased. And he seemed to be riveted on to the horse, and kept on it, as if he had been held on by invisible hands."

"Yes, I remember him...James Stirling," she said. "The circus rider, James Stirling, on whose account that tall girl Caro, who was also a circus rider, gave that old stager Blanche Taupin a cut right and left across the face with her riding-whip, because she had tried to get him from her...But what can have happened to him, to have brought him down to such a position?"

Horrible, hairy monkeys, grimacing under their red and blue masks, had invaded the arena, and with their hair hanging down on to their bare shoulders, looking very funny with their long tails, their gray skin tights and their velvet breeches, these female dancers twisted, jumped, hopped and drew their lascivious and voluptuous circle more closely round *Chocolat*, who shook the red skirts of his coat, rolled his eyes, and showed his large, white teeth in a foolish smile, as if he were the prey of irresistible desire, and yet terribly afraid of what might happen, and Lord Shelley taking some grapes out of a basket that Noele de Fréjus offered him, said: "It is not a very cheerful story, but then true stories rarely are. At the time when he was still unknown, and when he used to have to tighten his belt more frequently than he got enough to eat and drink, James Stirling followed the destinies of a circus which traveled with its vans from fair to fair and from place to place, and fell in love with a gipsy columbine, who also formed part of this wandering, half starved company.

"She was not twenty, and astonished the others by her rash boldness, her absolute contempt for danger and obstacles, and her strange and adroit strength. She charmed them also by a magic philter which came from her hair, which was darker that a starless night, from her large, black, coaxing, velvety eyes, that were concealed by the fringe of such long lashes that they curled upwards, from her scented skin, that was as soft as rice paper, and every touch of which was a suggestive and tempting caress, from her firm, full, smiling, childlike mouth, which uttered nothing but laughter, jokes, and love songs, and gave promise of kisses.

"She rode bare-backed horses, without bit or bridle, stretched herself out on their backs, as if on a bed, and mingled her disheveled hair with their manes, swaying her supple body to their most impetuous movements, and at other times standing almost on their shoulders or on the crupper, while she juggled with looking-glasses, brass balls, knives that flashed as they twirled rapidly round in the smoky light of the paraffin lamps that were fastened to the tent poles.

"Her name was *Sacha*, that pretty Slavonic name which has such a sweet and strange sound, and she gave herself to him entirely, because he was handsome, strong, and spoke to women very gently, like one talks to quite little children, who are so easily frightened, and made to cry, and it was on her account that in a quarrel in Holland he knocked down an Italian wild beast tamer, by a blow between the two eyes.

"They adored each other so, that they never thought of their poverty, but redoubled their caresses when they had nothing to eat, not even an unripe apple stolen from an orchard, nor a lump of bread which they had begged on the road, of some charitable soul. And they embraced each other more ardently still, when they were obliged to stop for the night in the open country, and shivered in the old, badly-closed vans, and had to be very sparing with the wood, and could not illuminate the snow with those large bivouac fires, whose smoke rises in such fantastic, spiral curls, and whose flames look like a spot of blood, at a distance, seen through the mist.

"It was one of those Bohemian quasi-matrimonial arrangements, which are often more enduring than ours, and in which a man and a woman do not part for a mere caprice, a dream, or a piece of folly.

"But by-and-bye she was no longer good for anything, and had to give up appearing on the program, for she was in the family way. James Stirling worked for both, and thought that he should die of grief when she was brought to bed, and after three days of intense suffering, died with her hand in his.

“And now, all alone, crushed by grief, so ill that at times he thought his heart had stopped, the circus rider lived for the child which the dead woman had left him as a legacy. He bought a goat, so that it might have pure milk, and brought it up with such infinite, deep, womanly tenderness, that the child called him ‘Mamma,’ and in the circus they nick-named him: *Mamma Stirling*.

“The boy was like his mother, and one might have said that he had brought James luck, for he had made his mark, was receiving a good income, and appeared in every performance. Well-made and agile, and profiting by the lessons which he received at the circus, little Stirling was soon fit to appear on the posters, and the night when he made his first appearance at Franconi’s, old Tom Pears, the clown, who understood such matters better than most, exclaimed: ‘My boy, you will make your way, if you don’t break your neck first!’ ‘I will take care of that, Monsieur Pears,’ the lad replied, with a careless shrug of the shoulder.

“He was extremely daring, and when he threw himself from one trapeze to the other, in a bold flight through the air, one might almost have fancied in the silvery electric light, that he was some fabulous bird with folded wings, and he executed all his feats with unequalled, natural grace, without seeming to make an effort, but he unbraced his limbs of steel, and condensed all his strength in one supreme, mad leap. His chest, under its pearl-gray tights, hardly rose, and there was not a drop of perspiration on his forehead, among the light curls which framed it, like a golden halo.

“He had an almost disdainful manner of smiling at the public, as if he had been working like an artist, who loves his profession, and who is amused at danger, rather than like an acrobat who is paid to amuse people after dinner; and during his most difficult feats he often uttered a shrill cry, like that of some wild beast which defies the sportsman, as it falls on its prey. But that sportsman is always on the alert, and he is the *Invisible*, which closes the brightest eyes, and the most youthful lips for ever.

“And in spite of oneself, one was excited by it, and could have wished, from a superstitious instinct, that he would not continually have that defiant cry, which seemed to give him pleasure, on his lips. James Stirling watched over him like the mother of an actress does, who knows that she is in some corner, and fears dangerous connections, in which the strongest are entangled and ruined, and they lived together in a boarding-house near the *Arc de Triumph*.

“It was a very simple apartment, with immense posters of every color and in every language pinned to the wall, on which the name of Stirling appeared in large, striking letters; photographs with inscriptions, and tinsel wreaths, though there were two of real laurel, that were covered with dust, and were gradually falling to pieces.

“One night, the young fellow for the first time did not come home, and only returned in time for rehearsal, tired, with blue rims under his eyes, his lips cracked with feverish heat, and with pale cheeks, but with such a look of happiness, and such a peculiar light in his eyes, that *Mamma Stirling* felt as if he had been stabbed, and had not the strength to find fault with him; and emboldened, radiant, longing to give vent to the mad joy which filled his whole being, to express his sensations, and recount his happiness, like a lad talking to his elder brother, he told James Stirling his love intrigue from beginning to end, and how much in love he was with the light-haired girl who had clasped him in her arms, and initiated him into the pleasures of the flesh.

“It had been coming for some time, he said. She went to every performance, and always occupied the same box. She used to send him letters by the boxopener, letters which smelt like bunches of violets, and always smiled at him when he came into the ring to bow to the public, amidst the applause and recalls, and it was that smile, those red, half-open lips, which seemed to promise so many caresses and delicious words, that had attracted him like some strange, fragrant fruit. Sometimes she came with gentlemen in evening dress, and with gardenias in their button-holes, who seemed to bore her terribly, if not to disgust her. And he was happy, although he had never yet spoken to her, that she had not that smile for them which she had for him, and that she appeared dull and sad, like somebody who is homesick, or who has got a great longing for something.

“On other evenings, she used to be quite alone, with black pearls in the lobes of her small ears, that were like pink shells, and got up and left her box as soon as he had finished his performance on the trapeze ... while the evening before she carried him off almost forcibly in her carriage, without even giving him time to get rid of his tights, and the india-rubber armlets that he wore on his wrists. Oh! that return to the cold, in the semi-obscurity, through which the trembling light of the street lamps shone, that warm, exciting clasp of her arms round him, which imprisoned him, and by degrees drew him close to that warm body, whose slightest throb and shiver he felt, as if she had been clothed in impalpable gauze, and whose odor mounted to his head like fumes of whisky, an odor in which there was something of everything, of the animal, of the woman, of spices, of flowers, and something that he did not yet know.

“And they were despotic, imperious, divine kisses, when she put her lips to his and kept them there, as if to make him dream of an eternity of bliss, sucking in his breath, hurting his lips, intoxicating, overwhelming him with delight, exhausting him, while she held his head in both her hands, as if in a vice. And the carriage rolled on at a quick trot, through the silence of the snow, and they did not even hear the noise of the wheels, which buried themselves in that white carpet, as if it had been cotton-wool. Suddenly, however, tired and exhausted she leant against him with closed eyes and moist lips, and then they talked at random, like people who are not quite themselves, and who have uncorked too many bottles of champagne on a benefit night.

“She questioned him, and laughed at his theatrical slang, wrapped her otter-skin rug round his legs, and murmured: ‘Come close to me, darling; at any rate, you are not cold, I hope?’ When they reached her pretty little house, with old tapestry and delicate colored plush hangings, they found supper waiting for them, and she amused herself by attending to him herself, with the manners of a saucy waitress... And then there were kisses, constant, insatiable, maddening kisses, and the lad exclaimed, with glistening eyes, at the thoughts of future meetings: ‘If you only knew how pretty she is! And then, it is nicer than anything else in the world to obey her, to do whatever she wants, and to allow oneself to be loved as she wishes!’

“*Mamma Stirling* was very uneasy, but resigned himself to the inevitable, and seeing how infatuated the boy was, he took care not to be too sharp with him, or to keep too tight a hand upon the reins. The woman who had debauched the lad was a fast woman, and nothing else, and after all, the old stager preferred that to one of those excitable women who are as dangerous for a man as the plague, whereas a girl of that sort can be taken and left again, and one does not risk one’s heart at the same time as one does one’s skin, for a man knows what they are worth. He was mistaken, however. Nelly d’Argine, she is married to a Yankee, now, and has gone to New York with him, was one of those vicious women whom a man can only wish his worst enemy to have, and she had merely taken a fancy to the young fellow because she was bored to death, and because her senses were roused like the embers which break out again, when a fire is nearly out.

"Unfortunately, he had taken the matter seriously, and was very jealous, and as suspicious as a deer, and had never imagined that this love affair could come to an end, and proud, with his hot gipsy blood, he wished to be the only lover, the only master who paid, and who could not be shown the door, like a troublesome and importunate parasite.

"Stirling had saved some money, by dint of a hard struggle, and had invested it in the Funds against a rainy day, when he should be too old to work, and to gain a livelihood, and when he saw how madly in love his son was, and how obstinate in his lamentable folly, he gave him all his savings and deprived himself of his stout and gin, so that the boy might have money to give to his mistress, and might continue to be happy, and not have any cares, and so between them, they kept Nelly.

"Stirling's debts accumulated, and he mortgaged his salary for years in advance to the usurers who haunt circuses as if they were gambling hells, who are on the watch for passions, poverty and disappointments, who keep plenty of ready stamped bill paper in their pockets, as well as money, which they haggle over, coin by coin. But in spite of all this, the lad sang, made a show, and amused himself, and used to say to him, as he kissed him on both cheeks: 'How kind you are, in spite of everything!'

"In a month's time, as he was becoming too exacting, he followed her, questioned her and worried her with perpetual scenes, Nelly found that she had had enough of her gymnast; he was a toy which she had done with and worn out, and which was now only in her way, and only worth throwing into the gutter. She was satiated with him, and became once more the tranquil woman whom nothing can move, and who baits her ground quite calmly, in order to find a husband and to make a fresh start. And so she turned the young fellow out of doors, as if he had been some beggar soliciting alms. He did not complain, however, and did not say anything to *Mamma Stirling*, but worked as he had done in the past, and mastered himself with superhuman energy, so as to hide the grief that was gnawing at his heart and killing him, and the disenchantment with everything that was making him sick of life.

"Some time afterwards, when there was to be a special display for the officers, seeing Nelly d'Argine there in a box surrounded by her usual admirers, appearing indifferent to everything that was going on, and not even apparently noticing that he was performing, and was being heartily applauded, he threw his trapeze forward as far as he could, at the end of his performance, and exerting all his strength, and certain that he should fall beyond the protecting net, he flung himself furiously into space.

"A cry of horror resounded from one end of the house to the other, when he was picked up disfigured, and with nearly every bone in his body broken. The unfortunate young fellow was no longer breathing, his chest was crushed in, and blood-stained froth was issuing from his lips, and Nelly d'Argine made haste to leave the house with her friends, saying in a very vexed voice:

"'It is very disgusting to come in the hopes of being amused, and to witness an accident!'

"And *Mamma Stirling*, who was ruined and in utter despair, and who cared for nothing more in this world, after that took to drinking, used to get constantly drunk, and rolled from public-house to public-house, and bar to bar, and as the worst glass of vitrol still cost a penny, he became reduced to undertaking the part which you have seen, to dabble in the water, to blacken himself, and to allow himself to be bitten.

"Ah! What a wretched thing life is for those who are kind, and who have too much heart!"

LILIE LALA

"When I saw her for the first time," Louis d'Arandel said, with the look of a man who was dreaming and trying to recollect something, "I thought of some slow and yet passionate music that I once heard, though I do not remember who was the composer, where there was a fair-haired woman, whose hair was so silky, so golden, and so vibrating, that her lover had it cut off after her death, and had the strings of the magic bow of a violin made out of it, which afterwards emitted such superhuman complaints and love melodies that they made its hearers love until death.

"In her eyes there lay the mystery of deep waters, and one was lost in them, drowned in them like in fathomless depths, and at the corners of her mouth there lurked that despotic and merciless smile of those women who do not fear that they may be conquered, who rule over men like cruel queens, whose hearts remain as virgin as those of the strictest Carmelite nuns, amidst a flood of lewdness.

"I have seen her angelic head, the bands of her hair, that looked like plates of gold, her tall, graceful figure, her white, slender, childish hands, in stained glass windows in churches. She suggested pictures of the Annunciation, where the Archangel Gabriel descends with ultra-marine colored wings, and Mary is sitting at her spinning-wheel and spinning, while uttering pious prayers, and looks like the tall sister of the white lilies that are growing beside her and the roses.

"When she went through the acacia alley, she appeared on some First Night in the stage box at one of the theaters, nearly always alone, and apparently feeling life a great burden, and angry because she could not change the eternal, dull round of human enjoyment, nobody would have believed that she went in for a fast life, and that in the annals of gallantry she was catalogued under the strange name of *Lilie Lala*, and that no man could rub against her without being irretrievably caught, and spending his last half-penny on her.

“But with all that, Lilie had the voice of a schoolgirl, of some little innocent creature who still uses a skipping-rope and wears short dresses, and had that clear, innocent laugh which reminds people of wedding bells. Sometimes, for fun, I would kneel down before her, like before the statue of a saint, and clasping my hands as if in prayer, I used to say: ‘*Sancta Lilie, ora pro nobis!*’

“One evening, at Biarritz, when the sky had the dull glare of intense heat and the sea was of a sinister, inky black, and was swelling and rolling enormous phosphorescent waves onto the beach at *Port-Vieux*, Lilie, who was listless and strange, and was making holes in the sand with the heels of her boots, suddenly exclaimed in one of those longings for confidence which women sometimes feel, and for which they are sorry as soon as their story is done:

“‘Ah! My dear fellow, I do not deserve to be canonized, and my life is rather a subject for a drama than a chapter from the Gospels or the Golden Legend. As long as I can remember anything, I can remember seeing myself wrapped in lace, being carried by a woman, and continually being made a fuss with, like children are who have been waited for for a long time, and who are spoiled more than others.

“‘Those kisses were so nice, that I still seem to feel their sweetness, and I preserve the remembrance of them in a little place in my heart, like one preserves some lucky talisman in a reliquary. I still seem to remember an indistinct landscape lost in the mist, outlines of trees which frightened me as they creaked and groaned in the wind, and ponds on which swans were sailing. And when I look in the glass for a long time, merely for the sake of seeing myself, it seems to me as if I recognized the woman who formerly used to kiss me most frequently, and speak to me in a more loving voice than anyone else did. But what happened afterwards?

“‘Was I carried off, or sold to some strolling circus owner by a dishonest servant? I do not know; I have never been able to find out; but I remember that my whole childhood was spent in a circus which traveled from fair to fair, and from place to place, with files of vans, processions of animals, and noisy music.

“‘I was as tiny as an insect, and they taught me difficult tricks, to dance on the tight-rope and to perform on the slack-rope.... I was beaten as if I had been a bit of plaster, and I more frequently had a piece of dry bread to gnaw, than a slice of meat. But I remember that one day I slipped under one of the vans, and stole a basin of soup as my share, which one of the clowns was carefully making for his three learned dogs.

"'I had neither friends nor relations; I was employed on the dirtiest jobs, like the lowest stable-help, and I was tattooed with bruises and scars. Of the whole company, however, the one who beat me the most, who was the least sparing of his thumps, and who continually made me suffer, as if it gave him pleasure, was the manager and proprietor, a kind of old, vicious brute, whom everybody feared like the plague, a miser who was continually complaining of the receipts, who hid away the crown pieces in his mattress, invested his money in the funds, and cut down the salary of everybody, as far as he could.

"'His name was Rapha Ginestous. Any other child, but myself, would have succumbed to such constant martyrdom, but I grew up, and the more I grew, the prettier and more desirable I became, so that when I was fifteen, men were already beginning to write love letters to me, and to throw bouquets to me in the arena. I felt also that all the men in the company were watching me, and were coveting me as their prey; that their lustful looks rested on my pink tights, and followed the graceful outlines of my body when I was posing on the rope that stretched from one end of the circus to the other, or jumped through the paper hoops at full gallop.

"'They were no longer the same, and spoke to me in a totally different tone of voice.... They tried to come into my dressing-room when I was changing my dress, and Rapha Ginestous seemed to have lost his head, and his heart throbbed audibly when he came near me. Yes, he had the audacity to propose bargains to me which covered my cheeks and forehead with blushes, and which filled me with disgust, and as I felt a fierce hatred for him, and detested him with all my soul and all my strength, as I wished to make him suffer the tortures which he had inflicted upon me, a hundred fold, I used him as the target at which I was constantly aiming.

"'Instinctively, I employed every cunning perfidy, every artful coquetry, every lie, every artifice which upsets the strongest and most skeptical, and places them at our mercy, like submissive animals. He loved me, he really loved me, that lascivious goat, who had never seen anything in a woman except a soft palliasse, and an instrument of convenience and of forgetfulness. He loved me like old men do love, with frenzy, with degrading transports, and with the prostration of his will and of his strength.... I held him like in a leash, and did whatever I liked with him.

"'I was much more manageress than he was manager, and the poor wretch wasted away in vain hopes and in useless transports; he had not even touched the tips of my fingers, and was reduced to bestowing his caresses on my columbine shoes, my tights, and my wigs. And I care not *that* for it, you understand! Not the slightest familiarity, and he began to grow thin over it, fell ill, and almost became idiotic. And while he implored me, and promised to marry me, with his eyes full of tears, I shouted with laughter; I reminded him of how he had beaten, abused, and humiliated me, and had often made me wish for death. And as soon as he left me, he emptied bottles of gin and whisky, and got so abominably drunk that he rolled under the table, in order to drown his sorrow and forget his desire.

"'He covered me with jewels, and tried everything he could to tempt me to become his wife, and in spite of my inexperience in life, he consulted me with regard to everything he undertook, and one evening, after I had stroked his face with my hand, I persuaded him without any difficulty, to make his will, by which he left me all his savings, and the circus and everything belonging to it.

"'It was in the middle of winter, near Moscow; it snowed continually, and one almost burned oneself at the stoves in trying to keep warm. Rapha Ginestous had had supper brought into the largest van, which was his, after the performance, and for hours we ate and drank. I was very nice towards him, and filled his glass every moment; I even sat on his knee and kissed him. And all his love, and the fumes of the alcohol of the wine mounted to his head, and gradually made him so helplessly intoxicated, that he fell from his chair inert, and as if he had been struck by lightning, without opening his eyes or saying a word.

"'The rest of the troupe were asleep, and the lights were out in all the little windows, and not a sound was to be heard, while the snow continued to fall in large flakes. So having put out the petroleum lamp, I opened the door, and taking the drunkard by the feet, as if he had been a bale of goods, I threw him out into that white shroud.

"'The next morning the stiff and convulsed body of Rapha Ginestous was picked up, and as everybody knew his inveterate drinking habits, no one thought of instituting an inquiry, or of accusing me of a crime, and thus I was avenged, and had a yearly income of nearly fifteen thousand francs. What, after all, is the good of being honest, and of pardoning our enemies, as the Gospel bids us?'

“And now,” Louis d’Arandal said in conclusion, “suppose we go and have a cocktail or two at the Casino, for I do not think that I have ever talked so much in my life before.”

THE BANDMASTER’S SISTER

“What a joke!” the bandmaster said, twirling his moustache with the foolish smile of a good-looking man, who dangles after women’s petticoats, in order that he may get on all the quicker.

His comrades’ equivocal allusions puzzled him, though they flattered him like applause, and he stealthily looked in the large mirrors at the new lyres embroidered in gold on the collar of his tunic. They fascinated him by their glitter, and half intoxicated by the doubtful champagne that he had drunk during dinner, and by the glasses of chartreuse and of Bavarian beer which he had imbibed afterwards, and excited by the songs, he was indulging in his usual dreams of success.

He saw himself on the platform of a public garden, standing before his musicians in a flood of light, and he fancied already that he could hear the whispers of women, and feel the caress of their look upon him.

He would be invited even into the drawing-rooms of the *Faubourg Saint Germain*, which was so difficult of access. With his handsome, pale face, and his wonderful manner of playing Chopin’s music, he would penetrate every where, and perhaps some romantic heiress would fall in love with him, and consent to forget that he was only a poor musician, the son of small shopkeepers, who were still in trade at Bayeux.

Lieutenant Varache, who was stirring the punch, shrugged his shoulders, and continued in a bantering voice:

“Yes, Monsieur Parisel, they are sure to ask you whether you have just joined the regiment, or whether you have a mistress ...”

“What do I know?”

“But they say that you have, and that her eyes grow so bright when she speaks to you, that a man would forfeit three months’ pay for a glance of them, by Jove!”

Another traced her likeness in a few words, and described her as if she had been some knick-knack for sale at an auction. Her hair came low on her forehead like a golden net, her skin was dazzlingly white, while her bright eyes threw out glances that were like those flashes of summer lightning which dart across the sky on a calm night in June.

Her delicate figure, and she did not look very strong, recalled a plant that has grown too rapidly. She was a droll creature, on the whole, who at times looked as if she had made a mistake in the door, who buried herself in the shade, hid herself, and did not surrender either her heart or her body, and only left the impression of a statue on the bed in which she slept, who appeared delighted with the ignoble business she carried on, and who allured men, and surpassed the common streetwalkers in shamelessness.

Parisel, however, was not listening to them any longer.

He was terribly vexed at meeting with such a common-place adventure at the first start, and to come across that girl on his road, who would make him loose, and soil him with unclean love. She would lower him, and bring him down to the level of rollicking troopers, who are welcome guests in houses of bad character.

“Well,” one of them said suddenly, “suppose we go and finish the night at that establishment; it will be far jollier, and the chief will not be obliged to cudgel his brains to remember the name of the girl he loves!”

The officers pushed open the door of the saloon, where a servant was lighting the chandelier, and Marchessy called out in a loud voice, and amidst bursts of laughter:

“Here, Lucie! We have brought your sweetheart to you!”

She came in first, slowly, and wrapped in a transparent muslin dressing-gown, and stopped, as if the beating of her heart were choking her. The bandmaster did not move or say a word; he resembled a duellist, who sees his adversary advancing towards him and taking aim at him, and who is waiting for death.

Great drops of perspiration rolled down his face, and all the blood had left it, while the woman looked at him, and did not appear to recognize him, although her eyes wore a look of triumphant pleasure, and when he started back, and turned his head away, she said to him, in a mocking voice:

“What, my dear, are you not going to kiss me, after a whole year? ... I must have altered very much, very much indeed ... Do not my mouth, and this mark by the side of my ear, bring something to your mind?”

And Varache, who had just lit a cigar, muttered: “Are you going to act a play until to-morrow?”

Then Lucie threw herself on to a sofa, and with her chin in her hands, and in the posture of a chimera on the look out for the pleasures she wishes, continued gravely:

“We lived at the end of a quiet street behind the cathedral, a street in which pots of carnations stood on the window ledges, through which the seminarists went twice a day, as if it had been a procession, and where I was bored to death. Our parents’ shop was cold and dark; my mother thought of nothing but of going to all the services, and of attending the *novenas*, while my father bent over the counter. There was nobody to pet me, to advise me, or to teach me what life really was, and besides that, I had the instinctive feeling that they cared for nobody in this world but my brother.

“The first kiss that touched my lips nearly sent me mad, and I had not the force to resist or to say *no*. I did not even ask the man who seduced me to marry me, to promise me what men do promise girls. We met in a booth at the fair, and I used to go to meet him every evening in a meadow bordered by poplar trees. He had a situation as clerk or collector, I believe, and when he was sent to another town, I was already three months in the family way. My people soon found it out, and forced me to acknowledge everything, and they locked me up like a prisoner who wished to escape from jail.

“My brother was home for his holidays — do you remember now, Monsieur Parisel? He had just been appointed second head clerk, was reckoning on still further speedy advancement, and was bursting with pride. He was harder and more inexorable than the two old people towards me, poor forsaken girl as I was, although they had never left their home. He spoke about his future, which would be compromised, of the disgrace which would fall on all the family, went into a rage, arid pitied neither my tears nor my prayers, and treated me with the cruelty of a hangman.

“And they sent me a long way off, like a servant who has committed a theft, and condemned me to be confined at a farm in a village, where the peasants treated me harshly. The child died, but the mother lived through everything.

“One does not have good luck very frequently, confound it, and the only thing that I could do was to return evil, to strike at the coward whom I hated, to dishonor and to lower his name, to stick to the fellow who strutted about in his uniform, and who had won the game, from garrison to garrison, as if I had been vermin. That is why I, of my own accord, came to this house, where one belongs to everybody, and have become almost more vicious than any of the other girls, and why I have told you this unentertaining story.

"I say, you fellows, who will pay ten francs for the bandmaster's sister? Upon my honor, you will not regret your money!"

His comrades got Parisel out of the house. He resisted for a week, but then sold everything he had, borrowed the money to pay Lucie's debts, and tried in vain to free himself from that weight, and to get her expelled from the town, but she always returned. She was as implacable towards him as a gerfalcon that is devouring its prey, and as the adventure had got wind, and was even talked about at the soldiers' mess, and as the scandal increased every day, the colonel forced the bandmaster to resign.

When Lucie heard the news, she looked vexed, and, said spitefully:

"I had hoped that he would have blown his brains out!"

FALSE ALARM

"I have a perfect horror of pianos," Frémecourt said, "of those hateful boxes that fill up a drawing-room, and which have not even the soft sound and the queer shape of the mahogany or veneered spinets, to which our grandmothers sighed out exquisite, long-forgotten ballads, and allowed their fingers to run over the keys, while around them there floated a delicate odor of powder and muslin, and some little *Abbé* or other turned over the leaves, and was continually making mistakes, as he was looking at the patches close to the lips on the white skin of the player instead of at the music.

"I wish there were a tax upon them, or that some evening, during a riot, the people would make huge bonfires of them, which would illuminate the whole town. They simply exasperate me, and affect my nerves, and make me think of the tortures those poor girls must suffer, who are condemned not to stir for hours, but to keep on constantly strumming away at the chromatic scales and monotonous arpeggios, and to have no other object in life except to win a prize at the *Conservatoire*.

"Their incoherent music suggests to me the sufferings of those who are ill, abandoned, wounded, as it proceeds from every floor of every house, and irritates you, nearly drives you mad, and makes you break out into ironical fits of laughter.

"And yet when that madcap Lâlie Spring honored me with her love, as I never can refuse anything to a woman who smells of fresh scent, and who has a large store of promises in her looks, and who puts out her red, smiling lips immediately, as if she were going to offer you handsel money, I bought a piano, so that she might strum upon it to her heart's content. I got it, however, on the hire-purchase system, and paid so much a month, like *grisettes* do for their furniture.

"At that time, I had the apartments I had so long dreamed of: warm, elegant, light, well-arranged, with two entrances, and an incomparable porter’s wife; she had been canteen-keeper in a Zouave regiment, and knew everything and understood everything at a wink.

“It was the kind of apartment from which a woman has not the courage to escape, so as to avoid temptation, but becomes weak, and rolls herself up on the soft, eider down cushions like a cat, and so is appeased, and in spite of herself, thinks of sin at the sight of the low, wide couch, which is so suitable for caresses, of the heavy curtains, which quite deaden the sound of voices and of laughter, and of the flowers that scent the air, and whose smell lingers on the folds of the hangings.

“They were rooms in which a woman forgets time, where she begins by accepting a cup of tea and nibbling a sweet cake, and abandons her fingers timidly and with regret to other fingers which tremble, and are hot, and so by degrees she loses her head and succumbs.

“I do not know whether the piano brought us ill luck, but Lâlie had not even time to learn four songs before she disappeared like the wind, just as she had come, *flick-flack*, good-night, good-bye; perhaps from spite, because she had found letters from other women on my table, perhaps to renew her advertisement, as she was not one of those to hang onto one man and become a fixture.

“I had not been in love with her, certainly, but yet it always has some effect on a man; it breaks a spring when a woman leaves you, and you think that you must start again, risk it, and go in for forbidden sport in which one is exposed to knocks, common sport that one has been through a hundred times before, and which provides you with nothing to show for it.

“Nothing is more unpleasant than to lend your apartments to a friend, to have to say to yourself that someone is going to disturb the mysterious intimacy which really exists between the actual owner and his furniture, the soul of those past kisses which floats in the air; that the room whose tints you connect with some recollection, some dream, some sweet vision, and whose colors you have tried to make harmonize with certain fair-haired, pink-skinned girls, is going to become a common-place lodging, like the rooms in an ordinary lodging house, which are suitable to hidden crime and to evanescent love affairs.

“However, poor Stanis had begged me so urgently to do him that service; he was so very much in love with Madame de Fréjus, and among the characters in the play there was a brute of a husband who was terribly jealous and suspicious; one of those Othellos who have always a flea in their ear, and come back unexpectedly from shooting or the club, who pick up pieces of torn paper, listen at doors, smell out meetings with the nose of a detective, and seem to have been sent into the world only to be cuckolds, but who know better than most how to lay a snare, and to play a nasty trick — that when I went to Venice, I consented to let him have my room.

"I will leave you to guess whether they made up for lost time, although, after all, it is no business of yours. My journey, however, which was only to have lasted a few weeks — just long enough to benefit by the change of air, to rid my brain of the image of my last mistress, and perhaps to find another among that strange mixture of society which one meets there, a medley of American, Slav, Viennese and Italian women, who instill a little artificial life into that old city, which is asleep amidst the melancholy silence of the lagoons — was prolonged, and Stanis was as much at home in my rooms as he was in his own.

"Madame Piquignolles, the retired canteen-keeper, took great interest in this adventure, watched over their little love affair, and, as she used to say, she was on guard as soon as they arrived one after the other, the marchioness covered with a thick veil, and slipping in as quickly as possible, always uneasy, and afraid that Monsieur de Fréjus might be following her, and Stanis with the assured and satisfied look of an amorous husband, who is going to meet his little wife after having been away from home for a few days.

"Well, one day during one of those calm moments when his beloved one, fresh from her bath, and impregnated with the coolness of the water, was pressing close to her lover, reclining in his arms, and smiling at him with half closed eyes, at one of those moments when people do not speak, but continue their dream, the sentinel, without even asking leave, suddenly burst into the room, for worthy Madame Piquignolles was in a terrible fright.

"A few minutes before, a well-dressed gentleman, followed by two others of seedy appearance, but who looked very strong, and fit to knock anybody down, had questioned her in a rough manner, and cross-questioned her, and tried to turn her inside out, as she said, asking her whether Monsieur de Fréjus lived on the first floor, without giving her any explanation, and when she declared that there was nobody occupying the apartments then, as her lodger was not in France, Monsieur de Fréjus — for it could certainly be nobody but he — had burst out into an evil laugh, and said: 'Very well; I shall go and fetch the Police Commissary of the district, and he will make you let us in!'

"And as quickly as possible, while she was telling her story, now in a low, and then in a shrill voice, the woman picked up the marchioness' dress, cloak, lace-edged drawers, silk petticoat, and little varnished shoes, pulled her out of bed, without giving her time to let her know what she was doing, or to moan, or to have a fit of hysterics, and carried her off, as if she had been a doll, with all her pretty toggery, to a large, empty cupboard in the dining room, that was concealed by Flemish tapestry. 'You are a man... Try to get out of the mess,' she said to Stanis as she shut the door; 'I will be answerable for Madame.' And the enormous woman, who was out of breath by hurrying upstairs as she had done, and whose kind, large red face was dripping with perspiration, while her ample bosom shook beneath her loose jacket, took Madame de Fréjus onto her knees as if she had been a baby, whose nurse was trying to quiet her.

"She felt the poor little culprit's heart beating as if it were going to burst, while shivers ran over her skin, which was so soft and delicate that the porter's wife was afraid that she would hurt it with her coarse hands. She was struck with wonder at the cambric chemise, which a gust of wind would have carried off as if it had been a pigeon's feather, and by the delicate odor of that scarce flower which filled the narrow cupboard, and which rose up in the darkness from that supple body, that was impregnated with the warmth of the bed.

"She would have liked to be there, in that profaned room, and to tell them in a loud voice — with her hands upon her lips like at the time when she used to serve brandy to her comrades at *Daddy l'Arb's* — that they had no common sense, that they were none of them good for much, neither the Police Commissary, the husband nor the subordinates, to come and torment a pretty young thing, who was having a little bit of fun, like that. It was a nice job, to get over the wall in that way, to be absent from the second call of names, especially when they were all of the same sort, and were glad of five francs an hour! She had certainly done quite right to get out sometimes and to have a sweetheart, and she was a charming little thing, and that she would say, if she were called before the Court as a witness!

"And she took Madame de Fréjus in her arms to quiet her, and repeated the same thing a dozen times, whispered pretty things to her, and interrupted her occasionally to listen whether they were not searching all the nooks and corners of the apartment. ‘Come, come,’ she said, 4 do not distress yourself. Be calm, my dear...It hurts me to hear you cry like that.... There will be no mischief done, I will vouch for it.’

“The marchioness, who was nearly fainting, and who was prostrate with terror, could only sob out: ‘Good heavens! Good heavens!’

“She scarcely seemed to be conscious of anything; her head seemed vacant, her ears buzzed, and she felt benumbed, like one does when one goes to sleep in the snow.

“Oh! Only to forget everything, as her love dream was over, to go out quickly, like those little rose-colored tapers at Nice, on Shrove Tuesday evening.

“Oh! Not to awake any more, as the to-morrow would come in, black and sad, because a whole array of barristers, ushers, solicitors and judges would be against her, and disturb her usual quietude, would torment her, cover her with mud, as her delicious, amorous adventure — her first — which had been so carefully enveloped in mystery, and had been kept so secret behind closed shutters and thick veils, would become an everyday episode of adultery, which would get wind, and be discussed from door to door; the lilac had faded, and she was obliged to bid farewell to happiness, as if to an old friend who was going far, very far away, never to return!

“Suddenly, however, she started and sat up, with her neck stretched out and her eyes fixed, while the excanteen-keeper, who was trembling with emotion, put her hands to her left ear, which was her best, like a speaking trumpet, and tried to hear the cries which succeeded each other from room to room, amidst a noise of opening and shutting of doors.

“‘Ah! upon my word, I am not blind....It is Monsieur de Tavernay who is applying again, and making all that noise....Don’t you hear, *Mame Piquignolles, Mame Piquignolles!* Saved, saved!’ And she dashed out of the cupboard like an unwieldy mass, with her cap all on one side, an anxious look and heavy legs.

“Tavernay was still quite pale, and in a panting voice he cried out to them: ‘Nothing serious, only that fool Frémecourt, who lent me the rooms, has forgotten to pay for his piano for the last five months, a hundred francs a month....You understand ...they came to claim it, and as we did not reply ...why, they fetched the Police Commissary, and so, in the name of the law....

"'A nice fright to give one!' Madame Piquignolles said, throwing herself onto a chair. 'Confound the nasty piano!'

"It may be useless to add, that the marchioness has quite renounced *trifles*, as our forefathers used to say, and would deserve a prize for virtue, if the Academy would only show itself rather more gallant towards pretty women, who take crossroads in order to become virtuous.

"Emotions like that cure people of running risks of that kind!"

WIFE AND MISTRESS

It was not only her long, silky curls, which covered her small, fairy-like head, like a golden halo, nor her beautiful complexion, nor her mouth, which was like some delicate shell, nor was it her supreme innocence, which was shown by her sudden blushes, and by her somewhat awkward movements, nor was it her ingenious questions which had assailed and conquered George d'Harderme's heart. He had a peculiar temper, and any appearance of a yoke frightened him and put him to flight immediately, and his unstable heart was ready to yield to any temptation, and he was incapable of any lasting attachment, while a succession of women had left no more traces on it than on the seashore, which is constantly being swept by the waves.

It was not the dream of a life of affection, of peace, the want of loving and of being loved, which a fast man so often feels between thirty and forty. His insurmountable lassitude of that circle of pleasure in which he has turned, like a horse in a circus, the voids in his existence which the marriage of his bachelor friends cause, and which in his selfishness he looks upon as desertion, and whom he, nevertheless, envies, which had at last induced him to listen to the prayers and advice of his old mother, and to marry Mademoiselle Suzanne de Gouvres; but the vision that he had had when he saw her playing with quite little children, covering them with kisses, and looking at them with ecstacy in her limpid eyes, and in hearing her talk of the pleasures and the anguish that they must feel who are mothers in the fullest sense of the word-the vision of a happy home where a man feels that he is living again in others of that house, which is full of laughter and of song, and seems as if it were full of birds.

As a matter of fact, he loved children, like some men love animals, and he was interested in them, as in some delightful spectacle, and they attracted him.

He was very gentle, kind and thoughtful with them, invented games for them, took them on his knees, was never tired of listening to their chatter, or of watching the development of their instincts, of their intellect, and of their little, delicate souls.

He used to go and sit in the Parc Monceau, and in the squares, to watch them playing and romping and prattling round him, and one day, as a joke, somebody, a jealous mistress, or some friends in joke, had sent him a splendid wet nurse's cap, with long, pink ribbons.

At first, he was under the influence of the charm that springs from the beginning of an intimacy, from the first kisses, and devoted himself altogether to that amorous education which revealed a new life to him, as it were, and enchanted him.

He thought of nothing except of increasing the ardent love that his wife bestowed on him, and lived in a state of perpetual adoration. Suzanne's feelings, the metamorphosis of that virginal heart, which was beginning to glow with love, and which vibrated, her passion, her modesty, her sensations, were all delicious surprises to him.

He felt that feverish pleasure of a traveler who has discovered some marvelous Eden, and loses his head over it, and, at times, with a long affectionate and proud look at her, which grew even warmer on looking into Suzanne's limpid, blue eyes, he would put his arms round her waist, and pressing her to him so strongly that it hurt the young woman, he exclaimed:

"Oh! I am quite sure that nowhere on earth are there two people who love each other as we do, and who are as happy as you and I are, my darling!"

Months of uninterrupted possession and enchantment succeeded each other without George altering, and without any lassitude mingling with the ardor of their love, or the fire of their affection dying out.

Then, however, suddenly he ceased to be happy, and, in spite of all his efforts to hide his invincible lowness of spirits, he became another man, restless, being irritated at nothing, morose, and bored at everything and everywhere; whimsical, and never knowing what he wanted.

But there was certainly something that was now poisoning that affection which had formerly been his delight, which was coming more and more between him and his wife every day, and which was giving him a distaste for home.

By degrees, that vague suffering assumed a definite shape in his heart, got implanted and fixed there, like a nail. He had not attained his object, and he felt the weight of chains, understood that he could never get used to such an existence, that he could not love a woman who seemed incapable of becoming a mother, who lowered herself to the part of a lawful mistress, and who was not faithful to him.

Alas! To awake from such a dream, to say to himself that he was reduced to envying the good fortune of others, that he should never cover a little, curly, smiling head with kisses, where some striking likeness, some undecided gleams of growing intellect fill a man with joy, but that he would be obliged to take the remainder of his journey in solitude, heart-broken, with nothing but old age around him; that no branch would again spring from the family tree, and that on his death-bed he should not have that last consolation of pressing his dear ones, for whom he struggled and made so many sacrifices, in his failing arms, and who were sobbing with grief, but that soon he should be the prey of indifferent and greedy heirs, who were discounting his approaching death like some valuable security!

George had not told Suzanne the feelings which were tormenting him, and took care that she should not see his state of unhappiness, and he did not worry her with trying questions, that only end in some violent and distressing scene.

But she was too much of a woman, and she loved her husband too much, not to guess what was making him so gloomy, and was imperiling their love.

And every month there came a fresh disappointment, and hope was again deferred. She, however, persisted in believing that their wish would be granted, and grew ill with this painful waiting, and refused to believe that she should never be a mother.

She would have looked upon it as a humiliation either to consult a medical man, or to make a pilgrimage to some shrine, like so many women did, in their despair, and her proud, loyal and loving nature at last rebelled against that hostility, which showed itself in the angry outbursts, the painful silence, and the haughty coldness of the man who could, however, have done anything he liked with her, by a little kindness.

With death in her soul, she had a presentiment of the way of the cross, which is an end of love, of all the bitterness, which sooner or later would end in terrible quarrels, and in words which would put an impassable barrier between them.

At last, one evening, when George d’Hardermes had lost his temper, had wounded her by equivocal words and bad jokes, Suzanne, who was very pale, and who was clutching the arms of her easy chair convulsively, interrupted him with the accents of farewell in her melancholy face:

“As you do not love me any more, why not tell me so, at once, instead of wounding me like this by small, traitorous blows, and, above all, why continue to live together?...You want your liberty, and I will give it to you; you have your fortune, and I have mine. Let us separate without a scandal and without a lawsuit, so that, at least, a little friendship may survive our love...I shall leave Paris and go and live in the country with my mother.... God is my witness, however, that I still love you, my poor George, as much as ever, and that I shall remain your wife, whether I am with you, or separated from you!”

George hesitated for a few moments before replying, with an uneasy, sad look on his face, and then said, turning away his head:

“Yes, perhaps it will be best for both of us!”

They voluntarily broke their marriage contract, as she had heroically volunteered to do. She kept her resolution, exiled herself, buried herself in obscurity, accepted the trial with calm fortitude, and was as resigned as only faithful and devoted souls can be.

They wrote to each other, and she deluded herself, pursued the chimera that George would return to her, would call her back to his side, would escape from his former associates, would understand of what deep love he had voluntarily deprived himself, and would love her again as he had formerly loved her; and she resisted all the entreaties and the advice of her friends, to cut such a false position short, and to institute a suit for divorce against her husband, as the issue would be certain.

He, at the end of a few months of solitude, of evanescent love affairs, when to beguile his loneliness, a man passes from the arms of one woman to those of another, had set up a new home, and had tied himself to a woman whom he had accidentally met at a party of friends, and who had managed to please him and to amuse him.

His deserted wife was naturally not left in ignorance of the fact, and, stifling her jealousy and her grief, she put on a smile, and thought that it would be the same with this one as it had been with all his other ephemeral mistresses, whom her husband had successively got rid of.

Was not that, after all, the best thing to bring about the issue which she longed and hoped for? Would not that doubtful passion, that close intimacy certainly make Monsieur d'Hardermes compare the woman he possessed with the woman he had formerly had, and cause him to invoke that lost paradise and that heart full of forgiveness, of love and of goodness, which had not forgotten him, but which would respond to his first appeal?

And that confidence of hers in a happier future, which neither all the proofs of that connection, in which Monsieur d'Hardermes was becoming more and more involved, and which her friends so kindly furnished her with, nor the disdainful silence with which he treated all her gentle, indulgent letters could shake, had something touching, angelic in it, and reminded those who knew her well, of certain passages in the *Lives of the Saints*.

At length, however, the sympathy of those who had so often tried to save the young woman, to cure her, and to open her eyes, became exhausted, and, left to herself, Suzanne proudly continued her dream, and absorbed herself in it.

Two interminable years had passed since she had lived with Monsieur d'Hardermes, and since he had put that hateful mistress in her place. She had lost all trace of them, knew nothing about him, and, in spite of everything, did not despair of seeing him again, and regaining her hold over him, who could tell when, or by what miracle, but surely before those eyes which he had so loved were tired of shedding tears, and her fair hair, which he had so often covered with kisses, had grown white.

And the arrival of the postman every morning and evening, made her start and shiver with nervousness.

One day, however, when she was going to Paris, Madame d'Hardermes found herself alone in the ladies' carriage, into which she had got in a hurry, with a peasant woman in her Sunday best, who had a child with pretty pink cheeks and rosy lips, and which was like the dimpled cherubs that one sees in pictures of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, on her lap.

The nurse said affectionate words to the child in a coaxing voice, wrapped it up in the folds of her large cloak, sometimes gave it a noisy, hearty kiss, and it beat the air with little hands, and crowed and laughed with those pretty, attractive babyish movements, that Suzanne could not help exclaiming: "Oh! the pretty little thing!" and taking it into her arms.

At first the child was surprised at the strange face, and for a moment, seemed as if it were going to cry; but it became reassured immediately, smiled at the stranger who looked at it so kindly, inhaled the delicate scent of the iris in the bodice of her dress, with dilated nostrils, and cuddled up against her.

The two women began to talk, and, without knowing why, Madame d'Hardermes questioned the nurse, asked her where she came from, and where she was taking the little thing to.

The other, rather flattered that Suzanne admired the child and took an interest in it, replied, somewhat vaingloriously, that she lived at *Bois-le-Roy*, and that her husband was a wagoner.

The child had been entrusted to their care by some people in Paris, who appeared very happy, and extremely well off. And the nurse added in a drawling voice:

"Perhaps, Madame, you know my master and mistress, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

Suzanne started with surprise and grief, and grew as pale as if all her blood were streaming from some wound, and thinking that she had not heard correctly, with a fixed look and trembling lips, she said, slowly, as if every word hurt her throat:

"You said, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

"Yes; do you know them?"

"I, yes...formerly...but it is a long time ago."

She could scarcely speak, and was as pale as death; she hardly knew what she was saying, with her eyes on this pretty child, which George must be so fond of.

She saw him, as if in a window which had suddenly been lifted up, where everything had been dark before, with their arms round each other, and radiant with happiness, with that fair head, that divine dawn, the living, smiling proof of their love, between them.

They would never leave each other; they were already almost as good as married, and were robbing her of the name which she had defended and guarded as a sacred deposit.

She would never succeed in breaking such bonds. It was a shipwreck where nothing could survive, and where the waves did not even drift some shapeless waif and stray ashore.

And great tears rolled down her cheeks, one by one, and wet her veil.

The train stopped at the station, and the nurse scarcely liked to ask Suzanne for the child, who was holding it against her heaving bosom, and kissing it as if she intended to smother it, and she said:

"I suppose the baby reminds you of one you have lost, my poor, dear lady, but the loss can be repaired at your age, surely; a second is as good as a first, and if one does not do oneself justice..."

Madame d'Hardermes gave her back the child, and hurried out straight ahead of her, like a hunted animal, and threw herself into the first cab that she saw...

She sued for a divorce, and obtained it.

MAD

PART I

For days and days, nights and nights, I had dreamt of that first kiss, which was to consecrate our engagement, and I knew not on what spot I should put my lips, that were madly thirsting for her beauty and her youth. Not on her forehead, that was accustomed to family caresses, nor on her light hair, which mercenary hands had dressed, nor on her eyes, whose turned up lashes looked like little wings, because that would have made me think of the farewell caress which closes the eyelids of some dead woman whom one has adored, nor her lovely mouth, which I will not, which I must not possess until that divine moment when Elaine will at last belong to me altogether and for always, but on that delicious little dimple which comes in one of her cheeks when she is happy, when she smiles, and which excited me as much as her voice did with languorous softness, on that evening when our flirtation began, at the Souverette's.

Our parents had gone away, and were walking slowly under the chestnut trees in the garden, and had left us alone together for a few minutes. I went up to her and took both her hands into mine, which were trembling, and gently drawing her close to me, I whispered:

"How happy I am, Elaine, and how I love you!" and I kissed her almost timidly, on the dimple. She trembled, as if from the pain of a burn, blushed deeply and with an affectionate look, she said: "I love you also, Jacques, and I am very happy!"

That embarrassment, that sudden emotion which revealed the perfect spotlessness of a pure mind, the instinctive recoil of virginity, that childlike innocence, that blush of modesty, delighted me above everything as a presage of happiness. It seemed to me as if I were unworthy of her; I was almost ashamed of bringing her, and of putting into her small, saint-like hands the remains of a damaged heart, that had been polluted by debauchery, that miserable thing which had served as a toy for unworthy mistresses, which was intoxicated with lies, and felt as if it would die of bitterness and disgust....

PART II

How quickly she has become accustomed to me, how suddenly she has turned into a woman and become metamorphosed; already she no longer is at all like the artless girl, the sensitive child, to whom I did not know what to say, and whose sudden questions disconcerted me!

She is coquettish, and there is seduction in her attitudes, in her gestures, in her laugh and in her touch. One might think that she was trying her power over me, and that she guesses that I no longer have any will of my own. She does with me whatever she likes, and I am quite incapable of resisting the beautiful charm that emanates from her, and I feel carried away by her caressing hands, and so happy that I am at times frightened at the excess of my own felicity.

My life now passes amidst the most delicious of punishments, those afternoons and evenings that we spend together, those unconstrained moments when, sitting on the sofa together, she rests her head on my shoulder, holds my hands and half shuts her beautiful eyes while we settle what our future life shall be, when I *cover* her with kisses and inhale the odor of all those little hairs that are as fine as silk and are like a halo round her imperial brow, excite me, unsettle me, kill me, and yet I feel inclined to shed tears, when the time comes for us to part, and I really only exist when I am with Elaine.

I can scarcely sleep; I see her rise up in the darkness, delicate, fair and pink, so supple, so elegant with her small waist and tiny hands and feet, her graceful head and that look of mockery and of coaxing which lies in her smile, that brightness of dawn which illuminates her looks, that when I think that she is going to become my wife, I feel inclined to sing, and to shout out my amorous folly into the silence of the night.

Elaine also seems to be at the end of her strength, has grown languid and nervous; she would like to wipe out the fortnight that we still have to wait, and so little does she hide her longing, that one of her uncles, Colonel d’Orthez, said after dinner the other evening: “By Jove, my children, one would take you for two soldiers who are looking forward to their furlough!”

PART III

I do not know what I felt, or whence those fears came which so suddenly assailed me, and took possession of my whole being like a flight of poisoned arrows. The nearer the day approached that I am so ardently longing for, on which Elaine would take my name and belong to me, the more anxious, nervous and tormented by the uncertainty of the morrow, I feel.

I love, and I am passionately loved, and few couples start on the unknown journey of a totally new life and enter into matrimony with such hopes, and the same assurance of happiness, as we two.

I have such faith in the girl I am going to marry, and have made her such vows of love, that I should certainly kill myself without a moment's hesitation if anything were to happen to separate us, to force us to a correct but irremediable rupture, or if Elaine were seized by some illness which carried her off quickly; and yet I hesitate, I am afraid, for I know that many others have made shipwreck, lost their love on the way, disenchanted their wives and have themselves been disenchanted in those first essays of possession, during that first night of tenderness and of intimacy.

What does Elaine expect in her vague innocence, which has been lessened by the half confidences of married friends, by semi-avowals, by all the kisses of this sort of apprenticeship which is a court of love; what does she possess, what does she hope for? Will her refined, delicate, vibrating nature bend to the painful submission of the initial embrace; will she not rebel against that ardent attack that wounds and pains? Oh! to have to say to oneself that it must come to that, to lower the most ideal of affections, to think that one is risking one's whole future happiness at such a hazardous game, that the merest trifle might make a woman completely ridiculous or hopeful, and make an idolized woman laugh or cry!

I do not know a more desirable, prettier or more attractive being in the whole world than Elaine; I am worn out by feverish love, I thirst for her lips and I wish every particle of her being to belong to me; I love her ardently, but I would willingly give half that I possess to have got through this ordeal, to be a week older, *and still happy*!...

PART IV

My mother-in-law took me aside yesterday, while they were dancing, and with tears in her eyes, she said in a tremulous voice:

"You are going to possess the most precious object that we possess here, and what we love best.... I beg you to always spare the slightest unhappiness, and to be kind and gentle towards her.... I count on your uprightness and affection to guide her and protect her in this dangerous life in Paris."... And then, giving way to her feelings more and more, she added: "I do not think that you suppose that I have tried to instruct her in her new duties or to disturb her charming innocence, which has been my work; when two persons worship each other like you two do, a girl learns what she is ignorant of, so quickly and so well!"

I very nearly burst out laughing in her face, for such a theatrical phrase appeared to me both ridiculous and doubtful. So that respectable woman had always been a passive, pliable, inert object, who never had one moment of vibration, of tender emotion in her husband's arms, and I understood why, as I wasted at the clubs, he escaped from her as soon as possible and made other connections which cost him dear, but in which he found at least some appearance of love.

Oh! to call that supreme bliss of possession, which makes human beings divine and which transports them far from everything, that despotic pain of virginity, which guesses, which waits, which longs for those mysterious, unknown, brief sufferings that contain the germs of future pleasure, the only happiness of which one never tires, a duty!

And that piece of advice, at the last moment, which was as commonplace and natural, and which I ought to have expected, enervated me, and, in spite of myself, plunged me into a state of perplexity, from which I could not extricate myself. I remembered those absurd stories which we hear among friends, after a good dinner. What would be that last trial of our love for her and for me, and could that love which then was my whole life, come out of the ordeal lessened or increased tenfold? And when I looked at the couch on which Elaine, my adored Elaine, was sitting, with her head half-hidden behind the feathers of her fan, she whispered in a rather vexed voice:

"How cross you look, my dear Jacques? Is the fact of your getting married the cause of it? And you have such a mocking look on your face. If the thought of it terrifies you too much, there is still time to say no!"

And delighted, bewitched by her caressing looks, I said in a low voice, almost into her small ear:

"I adore you; and these last moments that still separate us from each other, seem centuries to me, my dear Elaine!"

PART V

There were tiresome ceremonies yesterday, and to-day, which I went through almost mechanically.

First, there is the yes before the mayor at the civil ceremony, like some everyday response in church, which one is in a hurry to get over, and which has almost the suggestion of an imperious law, to which one is bound to submit, and of a state of bondage, which will, perhaps, be very irksome, since the whole of existence is made up of chances.

And then the service in church, with the decorated altar, the voices of the choir, the solemn music of the organ, the unctuous address of the old priest who marks his periods, who seemed quite proud of having prepared Elaine for confirmation, and then the procession to the vestry, the shaking hands, and the greetings of people whom you scarcely see, and whom you do, or do not recognize.

Under the long tulle veil, which almost covered her, with the symbolical orange flowers on her bright, light hair, in her white dress, with her downcast eyes and her graceful figure, Elaine looked to me like a *Psyche*, whose innocent heart was vowed to love. I felt how vain and artificial all this form was, how little this show counted before this *Kiss*, the triumphant, revealing, maddening Kiss, which rivets the flesh of the wife to the lips and all the flesh of the husband, which turns the Immaculate youth of the virgin into a woman, and consecrates it to tender caresses, to dreams and to future ecstacies, through the sufferings of a rape.

PART VI

Elaine loves me, as much as I adore her.

She left her parental abode, as if she was going to some festivity, without turning round toward all that she had left behind her in the way of affection and recollection, and without even a farewell tear, which the first kiss effaces, on her long turned-up lashes.

She looked like a bird which had escaped from its cage, and does not know where to settle, which beats its wings in the intoxication of the light, and which warbles incessantly. She repeated the same words, as if she had been rather intoxicated, and her laugh sounded like the cooing of a pigeon, and looking into my eyes, with her eyes full of languor, and her arms round my neck like a bracelet, and with her burning cheek against mine, she suddenly exclaimed:

"I say, my darling, would you not give ten years of your life to have already got to the end of the journey?"

And that passionate question so disconcerted me, that I did not know what to reply, and my brain reeled, as if I had been at the edge of a precipice. Did she already know what her mother had not told her? Had she already learned what she ought to have been ignorant of? And had that heart, which I used to compare to *the Vessel of Election*, of which the litanies of Our Lady speak, already been damaged?

Oh! white veils, that hide the blushes, the half-closed eyes and the trembling lips of some *Psyche*, oh! little hands which you raised in an attitude of prayer toward the lighted and decorated altar, oh! innocent and charming questions, which delighted me to the depths of my being, and which seemed to me to be an absolute promise of happiness, were you nothing but a lie, and a wonderfully well acted piece of trickery?

But was I not wrong, and an idiot, to allow such thoughts to take possession of me, and to poison my deep, absorbing love, which was now my only law and my only object, by odious and foolish suggestions? What an abject and miserable nature I must have, for such a simple, affectionate, natural question to disturb me so, when I ought immediately to have replied to Elaine's question, with all my heart that belonged to hear:

"Yes, ten or twenty years, because you are my happiness, my desire, my love!"

PART VII

I did not choose to wait until she woke up, I sprang from the bed, where Elaine was still sleeping, with her disheveled hair lying on the lace-edged pillows. Her complexion was almost transparent, her lips were half open, as if she were dreaming, and she seemed so overcome with sleep, that I felt much emotion when I looked at her.

I drank four glasses of mild champagne, one after the other, as quickly as I could, but it did not quench my thirst. I was feverish and would have given anything in the world for something to interest me suddenly and have absorbed me and lifted me out of that slough in which my heart and my brain were being engulfed, as if in a quicksand. I did not venture to avow to myself what was making me so dejected, what was torturing me and driving me mad with grief, or to scrutinize the muddy bottom of my present thoughts sincerely and courageously, to question myself and to pull myself together.

It would have been so odious, so infamous, to harbor such suspicions unjustly, to accuse that adorable creature who was not yet twenty, whom I loved, and *who seemed to love me*, without having certain proofs, that I felt that I was blushing at the idea that I had any doubt of her innocence. Ah! Why did I marry?

I had a sufficient income to enable me to live as I liked, to pay beautiful women who pleased me, whom I chanced to meet, and who amused me, and who sometimes gave me unexpected proofs of affection, but I had never allowed myself to be caught altogether, and in order to keep my heart warm, I had some romantic and sentimental friendships with women in society, some of those delightful flirtations which have an appearance of love, which fill up the idleness of a useless life with a number of unexpected sensations, with small duties and vague subtle pleasures!

And was I now going to be like one of those ships which an unskillful turn of the helm runs ashore as it is leaving the harbor? What terrible trials were awaiting me, what sorrows and what struggles?

A chaffing friend said to me one night in joke at the club, when I had just broken one of those banks, which form an epoch in a player’s life:

“If I were in your place, Jacques, I should distrust such runs of luck as that, for one always has to pay for them sooner or later!”

Sooner or later!

I half opened the bedroom door gently. Elaine was in one of those heavy sleeps that follow intoxication. Who could tell whether, when she opened her eyes and called me, surprised at not finding herself in my arms, her whole being would not become languid, and suddenly sink into a state of prostration? I wanted to reason with myself, and bring myself face to face with those cursed suggestions, as one does with a skittish horse before some object that frightens it, and to evoke the recollection of every hour, every minute of that first night of love, and to extract the secret from her....

Elaine’s looks and radiant smile were overflowing with happiness, and she had the air of a conqueror who is proud of his triumph, for she was now a *woman* already, and we had *at least been alone* in this modernized country house, which had been redecorated and smartened up to serve as the frame for our affection! She hardly seemed to know what she was saying or doing, and ran from room to room in her light morning dress of mauve crape, without exactly knowing where to sit, and almost dazzled by the light of the lamps that had large shades in the shape of rose leaves over them.

There was no embarrassment, no hesitation, no shamefaced looks, no recoiling from the arms that were stretched out to her, or from the lips that begged; none of those delightful little pieces of awkwardness which show a virgin soul free from all perversion, in her manner of sitting on my knees, or putting her bare arms round my neck, and of offering me the back of her neck and her lips to kiss, but she laughed nervously, and her supple form trembled when I kissed her passionately on various places, and she said things to me that were suitable for being whispered on the pillows, while a strange languor overshadowed her eyes, and dilated her nostrils.

And suddenly with a mocking gesture, which seemed to bid defiance to the supper that was laid on a small table, cold meat of various kinds, plates of fruit and of cakes, the ice pail, from which the neck of a bottle of champagne protruded, she said merrily:

“I am not at all hungry, dear; let us have supper later! what do you say?”

She half turned round to the large bed, which seemed to be quite ready for us, and which looked white in the shadow of the recess in which it stood, with its two white, untouched, almost solemn pillows. She was not smiling any more; there was a bluish gleam in her eyes, like that of burning alcohol, and I lost my head. Elaine did not try to escape, and did not utter a complaint.

Oh! that night of torture and delight, that night which ought never to have ended!

I determined that I would be as patient as a policeman who is trying to discover the traces of a crime, that I would investigate the past of this girl, about which I knew nothing, as I should be sure to discover some proof, some important reminiscence, some servant who had been her accomplice.

And yet I adored her, my pretty, my divine Elaine, and I would consent no matter to what if only she were what I dreamt her, what I wished her to be, if only this nightmare would go and no longer rise up between her and me.

When she woke up, she spoke to me in her coaxing voice.... Oh! her kisses, again her kisses, always her kisses, in spite of everything!

Oh! to have believed blindly, to have believed on my knees that she was not lying, that she was not making a mockery of my tenderness, and that she had never belonged, and never would belong, to any one but me!

PART VIII

I wished that I could have transformed myself into one of those crafty, unctuous priests, to whom women confess their most secret faults, to whom they entrust their souls and frequently ask for advice, and that Elaine would have come and knelt at the grating of the confessional, where I should press her closely with questions, and gradually extract sincere confidences from her.

As soon as I am by the side of a young or old woman now, I try to give our conversation a ticklish turn; I forget all reserve and I try to make her talk of those jokes which nettle, those words of double meaning which excite, and to lead her up to the only subject that interests and holds me, to find out what she feels in her body as well as in her heart, on that night, when for the first time, she has to undergo the nuptial ordeal. Some do not appear to understand me, blush, leave me as if I were some unpleasant, ill-mannered person, and had offended them; as if I had tried to force open the precious casket in which they keep their sweetest recollections.

Others, on the other hand, understand me only too well, scent something equivocal and ridiculous, though they do not exactly know what, make me go on, and finally get out of the difficulty by some subtle piece of impertinence, and a burst of chaffing laughter.

Two or three at most, and they were those pretty little upstarts who talk at random, and brag about their vice, and whom one could soon not leave a leg to stand upon, were one to take the trouble, have related their impressions to me with ironical complaisance, and I found nothing in what they told me that reassured me, nor could I discover anything serious, true or moving in it.

That supreme initiation amused them as much as if it had been a scene from a comedy; the small amount of affection that they felt for the man with whom their existence had been associated grew less and evaporated altogether — and they remembered nothing about it except its ridiculous and hateful side, and described it as a sort of pantomime in which they played a bad part. But these did not love and were not adored like Elaine was. They married either from interest, or that they might not remain old maids, that they might have more liberty and escape from troublesome guardianship.

Foolish dolls, without either heart or head, they had neither that almost diseased nervosity, nor that requirement for affection, nor that instinct of love which I discovered in my wife's nature, and which attracted me, at the same time that it terrified me.

Besides, who could convince me of my errors? Who could dissipate that darkness in which I was lost? What miracle could restore *all* my belief in her again?

PART IX

Elaine felt that I was hiding something from her, that I was unhappy, that, as it were, some threatening obstacle had risen up between her and me, that some insupportable suspicion was oppressing me, torturing me and keeping me from her arms, was poisoning and disturbing that affection in which I had hoped to find fresh youth, absolute happiness, my dream of dreams.

She never spoke to me about it, however, but seemed to recoil from a definite explanation, which might make shipwreck of her love. She surrounded me with endearing attentions, and appeared to be trying to make my life so pleasant to me, that nothing in the world could draw me from it! And she would certainly cure me, if this madness of mine, were not, alas! like those wounds which are constantly reopening, and which no balm can heal.

But, at times, I lived again, I imagined that her caresses had exorcised me, that I was saved, that doubt was no longer gnawing at my heart, that I was going to adore her again, like I used to adore her. I used to throw myself at her knees and put my lips on her little hands which she abandoned to me, I looked at her lovely, limpid eyes as if they had been a piece of a blue sky that appeared amidst black storm clouds, and I whispered, with something like a sob in my throat:

“You love me, do you not, with all your heart; you love me as much as I love you; tell me so again, my dear love; tell me that, and nothing but that!”

And she used to reply eagerly, with a smile of joy on her lips:

“Do you not know it? Do you not see every moment that I love you, that you have taken entire possession of me, and that I only live for you and by you?”

And her kisses gave me new life, and intoxicated me, like when one returns from a long journey and had been in peril and is despaired of ever seeing some beloved object again, and one meets with a sort of frenzied embrace, and forgets everything in that divine feeling that one is going to die of happiness....

PART X

But these were only ephemeral clear spots in our sky, and the cries which accompanied them only grew more bitter and terrible. I knew that Elaine was growing more and more uneasy at the apparent strangeness of my character, that she suffered from it and that it affected her nerves, that the existence to which I was condemning her in spite of myself, that all this immoderate love of mine, followed by fits of inexplicable coldness and of low spirits, disconcerted her, so that she was no longer the same, and kept away from me. She could not hide her grief, and was continually worrying me with questions of affectionate pity. She repeated the same things over and over again, with hateful persistence. She had vexed me, without knowing it! Was I already tired of my married life, and did I regret my lost liberty? Had I any private troubles which I had not told her of; heavy debts which I did not know how to pay; was it family matters or some former connection with a woman that I had broken off suddenly, and that now threatened to create a scandal? Was I being worried by anonymous letters? What was it, in a word; what was it?

My denials only exasperated her, so that she sulked in silence, while her brain worked and her heart grew hard towards me; but could I, as a matter of fact, tell her of my suspicions which were filling my life with gloom and annihilating me? Would it not be odious and vile to accuse her of such a fall, without any proofs or any clue, and would she ever forget such an insult?

I almost envied those unfortunate wretches who had the right to be jealous, who had to fight against a woman’s coquettes and light behavior, and who had to defend their honor that was threatened by some poacher on the preserves of love. They had a target to aim at; they knew their enemies and knew what they were doing, while I was wounding in a land of terrible mirages, was struggling in the midst of vague suppositions, and was causing my own troubles and was enraged with her past, which was, I felt sure, as white and pure as any bridal veil.

Ah! It would be better to blow my brains out, I thought to myself, than to prolong such a situation! I had had enough of it. I scarcely lived, and I wished to know all that Elaine had done before we became engaged. I wanted to know whether I was the first or the second, and I determined to know it, even if I had to sacrifice years of my life in inquiry, and to lower myself to compromising words and acts, and to every species of artifice and to spend everything that I possessed!

She might believe whatever she liked, for after all, I should only laugh at it. We might have been so happy, and there were so many who envied me, and who would gladly have consented to take my place!

PART XI

I no longer knew where I was going, but was like a train going at full speed through a dense fog, and which in vain disturbs the perfect silence of the sleeping country with its puffing and shrill whistles; when the driver cannot distinguish the changing lights of the discs, nor the signals, and when soon some terrible crash will send the train off the rails, and the carriages will become a heap of ruins.

I was afraid of going mad, and at times I asked myself whether any of my family had shown any signs of mental aberration, and had been locked up in a lunatic asylum, and whether the life of constant fast pleasures, of turning night into day and of frequent violent emotions, that I had led for years, had not at last affected my brain. If I had believed in anything, and in the science of the occult, which haunts so many restless brains, I should have imagined that some enemy was bewitching me and laying invisible snares for me, that he was suggesting those actions which were quite unworthy of the frank, upright and well-bred man that I was, and was trying to destroy the happiness of which she and I had dreamt.

For a whole week I devoted myself to that hateful business of playing the spy, and to those inquiries which were killing me. I had succeeded in discovering the lady’s maid who had been in Elaine’s service before we were married, and whom she loved as if she had been her foster sister, who used to accompany her whenever she went out, when she went to visit the poor and when she went for a walk, who used to wake her every morning, do her hair and dress her. She was young and rather pretty, and one saw that Paris had improved her and given her a polish, and that she knew her difficult business from end to end.

I had found out, however, that her virtue was only apparent, especially since she had changed employers; that she was fond of going to the public balls, and that she divided her favors between a man who came from her part of the country, and who was a sergeant in a dragoon regiment, and a footman, and that she spent all her money on horse races and on dress. I felt sure that I should be able to make her talk and get the truth out of her, either by money or cunning, and so I asked her to meet me early one morning in a quiet square.

She listened to me first of all in astonishment, without replying yes or no, as if she did not understand what I was aiming at, or with what object I was asking her all these questions about her former mistress; but when I offered her a few hundred francs to loosen her tongue, as I was impatient to get the matter over and pretended to know that she had managed interviews for Elaine with her lovers, that they were known and being followed, that she was in the habit of frequenting quiet bachelors' quarters, from which she returned late, the sly little wench frowned angrily, shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed:

"What pigs some men are to have such ideas, and cause such an excellent person as Mademoiselle Elaine any unhappiness. Look here, you disgust me with your banknotes and your dirty stories, and I don't choose to say what you ought to wear on your head!"

She turned her back on me and hurried off, and her insolence, that indignant reply which she had given me, rejoiced me to the depths of my heart, like soothing balm that lulls the pain.

I should have liked to have called her back, and told her that it was all a joke, that I was devotedly in love with my wife, that I was always on the watch to hear her praised, but she was already out of sight, and I felt that I was ridiculous and mean, that I had lowered myself by what I had done, and I swore that I would profit by such a humiliating lesson, and for the future show myself to Elaine as the trusting and ardent husband that she deserved, and I thought myself cured, altogether cured....

And yet, I was again the prey to the same bad thoughts, to the same doubts, and persuaded that that girl had lied to me just like all other women lie when they are on the defensive, that she made fun of me, that perhaps *some one* had foreseen this scene and had told her what to say and made sure of her silence, just as her complicity had been gained. Thus I shall always knock up against some barrier, and struggle in this wretched darkness, and this mire from which I cannot extricate myself!

PART XII

Nobody knew anything. Neither the Superior of the Convent where she had been brought up until she was sixteen, nor the servants who had waited on her, nor the governesses who had finished her education, could remember that Elaine had been difficult to check or teach, or that she had had any other ideas than those of her age. She had certainly shown no precocious coquetry and disquieting instincts; she had had no equivocal cousinly relationships, when if the bridle is left on their neck at all, and one of them has learned at school what love is, the two big children yield to the fatal law of sex, and begin the inevitable eclogue of Daphne and Chole over again.

However, Oh! I felt it too much for it to be nothing but a chimera and a mirage, it was no *virgin* who threw her arms round my neck so lovingly, and who returned my first kisses so *deliciously*, who was attracted by my society, who gave no signs of surprise and uttered no complaint, who appeared to forget everything when in my society. No, no, a thousand times no, that could not have been a pure woman.

I ought to have cast off that intoxication which was bewitching me, and to have rushed out of the room where such a lie was being consummated; I ought to have profited by her moments of amiable weakness, while she was incapable of collecting her thoughts, when she would with tears have confessed an old fault, for which the unhappy girl had not, perhaps, been altogether responsible. Perhaps by my entreaties, or even perhaps by violence, in terror at my furious looks, when my features would have been distorted by rage, and my hands clenched in spite of myself in a gesture of menace and of murder, I might have forced her to open her heart, to show me its defilement, and to tell me this sad love episode.

How do I know whether her disconsolateness might not have moved me to pity, whether I should not have wept with her at the heavy cross that we both of us had to bear, whether I should not have forgiven her and opened my arms wide, so that she might have thrown herself into them like into a peaceful refuge?

Would not any man, or vicious collegian on the lookout for innocent girls, have perceived her nervousness, her vice? Would he not have hypnotized her, as it were, by amorous touches, by skillful caresses and reduced her to the absolute passiveness of an animal, who had been taken unawares, without any care for the morrow, or what the consequences of such a fault might be?

Or was I completely her dupe and the dupe of a villain? Had she loved, and did she still love the man who had first possessed her, who had been her first lover? Who could tell me, or come to my aid? Who could give me the proofs, the real, undeniable proofs, either that I was an infamous wretch to suspect Elaine, whom I ought to have worshiped with my eyes shut, or that she was guilty, that she had lied, and that I had the right to cast her out of my life and to treat her like a worthless woman!

PART XIII

If I had married when I was quite young, before I had wallowed in the mire of Paris, from which one can never afterwards free oneself, for heart and body both retain indelible marks of it, if I had not been the plaything of a score of mistresses, who disgusted me with belief in any woman, if I had not been weaned from supreme illusions, and surfeited with everything to the marrow, should I have these abominable ideas?

I waited almost until I was beginning to decline in life, before I took the right path and sought refuge in port; before going to what is pure and virtuous, and before listening to the continual advice of those who love me, I passed too suddenly from those lies, from those ephemeral enjoyments, from that satiety which depraves us, from vice in which one tries to acquire renewed strength and vigor, and to discover some new and unknown sensation, to the pure sentimentalities of an engagement, to the unspeakable delights of a life that was common to two, to that kind of amorous first communion which ought to constitute married life.

If, instead of getting involved in an engagement and forming any resolution so quickly, as I had been afraid that somebody else would be beforehand with me and to rob me of Elaine’s heart, or of relapsing into my former habits, if instead of lacking moral strength and character enough, in case I might have had to wait, if I had backed out without entering into any engagement and without having bound my life to that of the adorable girl whom chance had thrown in my way, it would surely have been far better if I had waited, prepared myself, questioned myself, and accustomed myself to that metamorphosis; if I had purified myself and forgotten the past, like in those retreats which precede the solemn ceremony, when pious souls pronounce their indissoluble vows?

The reaction had been too sudden and violent for such a convalescent as I was. I worked myself up, and pictured to myself something so white, so virginal, so paradisical, such complete ignorance, such unconquerable modesty and such delicious awkwardness, that Elaine's gayety, her unconstraint, her fearlessness, and her passionate kisses bewildered me, roused my suspicions and filled me with anguish.

And yet I know how all, or nearly all, girls are educated in these days, and that the ignorant, simple ones only exist on the stage, and I know also that they hear and learn too many things both at home and in society, not to have the intuition of the results of love.

Elaine loves me with all her heart, for she has told me so time after time, and she repeats it to me more ardently than ever when I take her into my arms and appear happy. She must have seen that her beauty had, in a manner, converted me; that in order to possess her I had renounced many seductions and a long life of enjoyment; and, perhaps, she would no longer please me if she was *too much of the little girl*, and that she would appear ridiculous to me if she showed her fears by any entreaty, and gesture, or any sigh.

As the people in the South say, she would have acted the brave woman, and boasted, so that no complaint might betray her, and have imparted the wild tenderness of a jealous heart to her kisses, and have attempted a struggle, which would certainly have been useless, against those recollections of mine, with which she thought I must be filled, in spite of myself.

I accused myself, so that I might no longer accuse her. I studied my malady; I knew quite well that I was wrong, and I wished to be wrong, I measured the stupidity and the disgrace of such suspicions, and, nevertheless, in spite of everything, they assailed me again, watched me traitorously and I was carried away and devoured by them.

Ah! Was there in the whole world, even among the most wretched beggars that were dying of starvation, whom nature squeezes in a vice, as it were, or among the victims of love, anybody who could say that he was more wretched than I?

PART XIV

This morning Count de Saulnac, who was lunching here, told us a terrible story of a rape, for which a man is to be tried in a few days.

A charming girl of eighteen grew languid, and became so pale and morose, her cheeks were so wax-like, her eyes so sunken and she had altogether such a look of anemia, that her parents grew uneasy and took her to a doctor who lived near them. He examined her carefully, said vaguely what was the matter with her, spoke of an illness that required assiduous care and attention, and advised the worthy couple to bring the poor girl to him every day for a month.

As they were not well off enough to keep a servant, and each had their work to attend to, the husband as an employee in a public office and his wife as cashier in a milliner’s shop, and did not dream of any evil, and were further reassured by the charitable, unctuous and austere looks of the doctor, they allowed their daughter to go and consult him by herself.

The old man made much of her, tried to make her get over her shyness, adroitly made her tell him all about her usual life, took a long time in sounding her chest, helped her to dress and undress, in a very paternal way, gave her a potion and was so thoughtful and caressing, that the poor girl blushed and felt quite uncomfortable at it all. He soon saw that he should obtain nothing from her innocence, but that she would resist his slightest attempts at improper familiarity, and as he was extremely taken with the delicate and amusing girl, and with her charming person, the wretch sent her to sleep with a few magnetic passes, and outraged her.

She awoke without being conscious of what had happened, and only felt rather more listless than usual, like she used to do when there was thunder in the air. From that time, the doctor put longer intervals between her visits, and soon, after having prescribed insignificant remedies for her, he told her that she was quite cured, and that there was no occasion for her to come and see him any more. Two months passed, and the girl, who at first had seemed much better and more lively, relapsed into a state of prostration which had so alarmed them, dragged herself about more than she walked, and seemed to be succumbing under some heavy burden.

As they had not paid the old doctor’s bill, and as they were afraid that he would ask them for it if they went to see him again, her father took the girl to Beaujon, and they thought that he should have gone mad with despair and shame when one of the house-surgeons, without mincing his words, told them in a chaffing manner, that she was in the family way.

In the family way! What did he mean by that? And by whom?

They were small, thoroughly respectable and upright shopkeepers, and this made them cruel. They tormented the poor girl, to make her acknowledge her fault and tell them the name of her seducer. It was of no use for her to bemoan herself, to throw herself at their feet, to tear her hair in desperation, and to swear that no man in the world had ever touched her lips; in vain, did she exclaim indignantly that it was impossible that such a dreadful thing could be; that the man had made a mistake or was joking with them. In vain, did she try to calm them, and to soften them by her entreaties; they turned away their heads, and had only one reply to make:

“His name, his name!”

When she saw that her figure was altering, she was at length undeceived, and became like an imprisoned animal, did not speak and cowered motionless in the darkest corners, and did not even rebel at the blows, which marked her pale, passive face. She carefully thought over every minute in the past few months, and did her utmost to fill up the voids in her memory, and at last she guessed who the guilty person was.

Then, in despair, she scribbled on a scrap of paper:

“I swear to you, my dear parents, that I have nothing to reproach myself with. The old doctor treated me so strangely, that I often felt inclined to run out of the consulting room. One day he put me to sleep, and perhaps it was he who....”

And not having the courage to finish the lamentable sentence, she went and drowned herself, and the parents had the doctor, who had forgotten all about that old story, arrested, and in his examination he confessed the crime....

With an evil look on her face, such as I have never seen before, and with vibrating nostrils, Elaine exclaimed in a hard voice:

“To think that such a monster was not sent to the guillotine!”

Can she also have suffered the same thing?

PART XV

But unless Elaine was a monster of wickedness, unless she had no heart and knew how to lie and to deceive as well as a girl whose only pleasure consists in making all those who are captivated by her beauty, play the laughable part of dupes, unless that mask of youth concealed a most polluted soul, if there had been any unhappy episode in her life, if she had endured the horrors of violation, and gone through all the horrors of desolation, fear and shame, would not something visible, something disgusting, attacks of low spirits, and of gloom, and disgust with everything have remained, which would have shown the progress of some mysterious malady, the gradual weakening of the brain and the enlargement of an incurable wound?

She would have cried occasionally, would have been lost in thought and become confused when spoken to, she would scarcely have taken any interest in anything that happened, either at home or elsewhere. Kisses would have become torture to her, and would have only excited a fever of revolt in her inanimate being.

I fancy that I can see such a victim of inexorable Destiny, as if she were a consumptive woman whose days are numbered, and who knows it. She smiles feebly when any one tries to get her out of her torpor, to amuse her and to instill a little hope into her soul. She does not speak, but remains sitting silently at a window for whole days together, and one might think that her large, dreamy eyes are looking at strange sights in the depths of the sky, and see a long, attractive road there. But Elaine, on the contrary, thought of nothing but of amusing herself, of enjoying life and of laughing, and added all the tricks of a girl who has just left school, to her seductive grace of a young woman. She carried men away with her; she was most seductive, and loving seemed to be her creation. She thought of nothing but of little coquettish acts that made her more adorable, and of tender innuendos that triumph over everything, that bring men to their knees and tempt them.

It was thus that I formerly dreamt of the woman who was to be my wife, and this was the manner in which I looked on life in common; and now this perpetual joy irritates me like a challenge, like some piece of insolent boasting, and those lips that seek mine, and which offer themselves so alluringly and coaxingly to me, make me sad and torture me, as if they breathed nothing but a Lie.

Ah! If she had been the lover of another man before marriage, if she had belonged to some one else besides me, it could only have been from love, without altogether knowing what she wanted or what she was doing! And, now, because she had acquired a name by marriage, because she had accidentally extricated herself from that false step and thought she had won the game, now that she fancied that I had not perceived anything, that I adored her and possessed her absolutely!

How wretched I was! Should I never be able to escape from that night which was growing darker and darker, which was imprisoning me, driving me mad and raising an increasing and impenetrable barrier between Elaine and me. Would not she, in the end, be the stronger, she whom I loved so dearly, would not she envelope me in so much love, that at last I should again find the happiness that I had lost, as if it were a calm, sunlit haven, and thus forget this horrible nightmare when I fell on my knees before her beauty, with a contrite heart and pricked by remorse, and happy to give myself to her for ever, altogether and more passionately than at the divine period of our betrothal.

PART XVI

Even the sight of our bedroom became painful to me. I was frightened of it; I was uncomfortable there, and felt a kind of repulsion in going there. It seemed to me as if Elaine were repeating a part that someone else had taught her, and I almost hoped that in a moment of forgetfulness she would allow her secret to escape her, and pronounce some name that was not mine, and I used to keep awake, with my ears on the alert, in the hope that she might betray herself in her sleep and murmur some revealing word, as she recalled the past, and my temples throbbed and my whole body trembled with excitement.

But when this was over and I saw her sleeping peacefully as a little girl who was tired with playing, with parted lips and disheveled hair, and measured the full extent of the stupidity of my hatred and the sacrilegious madness of my jealousy, my heart softened and I fell into such a state of profound and absolute distress that I thought I should have died of it, and large drops of cold perspiration ran down my cheeks and tears fell from my eyes, and I got up, so that my sobs might not disturb her rest and wake her.

As this could not continue, however, I told her one day that I felt so exhausted and ill that I should prefer to sleep in my own room. She appeared to believe me and merely said:

"As you please, my dear!" but her blue eyes suddenly assumed such an anxious, such a grieved look, that I turned my head aside, so as not to see them....

PART XVII

I was again in the old house, *and without her*, in the old house where Elaine used to spend all her holidays, in the room whose shutters had not been opened since our departure, seven months ago.

Why did I go there, where the calm of the country, the silence of the solitude and my recollections, irritated me and recalled my trouble, where I suffered even more than I did in Paris, and where I thought of Elaine every moment I seemed to see her and to hear her, in a species of hallucination.

What did her letters that I had taken out of her writing table, which she had used as a girl, what did her ball cards which were stuck round her looking glass, in which she used to admire herself formerly, what did her dresses, her dressing gowns, and the dusty furniture whose repose my trembling hands violated, tell me? Nothing, and always nothing.

At table, I used to speak with the worthy couple who had never left the mansion and who appeared to look upon themselves as its second masters, with the apparent good nature of a man who was in love with his wife and who wished only to speak about her, who took an interest in the smallest detail of her childhood and youth, with all the jovial familiarity which encourages peasants to talk, and when a few glasses of white wine had loosened their tongues they would talk about her, whom they loved as if she had been their child, and at other times I used to question the farmers, when they came to settle their accounts.

Had Elaine the bridle on her neck like so many girls had; did she like the country, were the peasants fond of her, and did she show any preference for one or the other? Were many people invited for the shooting, and did she visit much with the other ladies in the neighborhood?

And they drank with their elbows resting on the table in front of me, uttered her praises in a voice as monotonous as a spinning wheel, lost themselves in endless, senseless chatter which made me yawn in spite of myself, and told me her girlish tricks which certainly did not disclose what was haunting me, the traces of that first love, that perilous flirtation, that foolish escapade in which Elaine might have been seduced.

Old and young men and women, spoke of her with something like devotion, and all said how kind and charitable she was, and as merry as a bird on a bright day; they said she pitied their wretchedness and their troubles, and was still the young girl in spite of her long dresses, and fearing nothing, while even the animals loved her.

She was almost always alone, and was never troubled with any companions; she seemed to shun the house, hide herself in the park when the bell announced some unexpected visits, and when one of her aunts, Madame de Pleissac, said to her one day:

“Do you think that you will ever find a husband with your stand-offish manners?”

She replied with a burst of laughter:

“Oh! Very well, then, Auntie, I shall do without one!”

She had never given a hand to spiteful chatter or to slander, and had not flirted with the best looking young man in the neighborhood, any more than she had with the officers who stayed at the *château* during the maneuver, or the neighbors, who came to see her parents. And some of them even old men, whom years of work had bent like vine-stalks and had tanned like the leather bottles which are used by caravans in the East, used to say with tears in their dim eyes:

“Ah! When you married our young lady, we all said that there would not be a happier man in the whole world than you!”

Ought I to have believed them? Were they not simple, frank souls, who were ignorant of wiles and of lies, who had no interest in deceiving me, who had lived near Elaine while she was growing up and becoming a woman, and who had been familiar with her?

Could I be the only one who doubted Elaine, the only one who accused her and suspected her, I who loved her so madly, I, whose only hope, only desire, only happiness she was? May heaven guide me on this bad road on which I have lost my way, where I am calling for help and where my misery is increasing every day, and grant me the infinite pleasure of being able to enjoy her caresses without any ill feeling, and to be able to love her, as she loves me. And if I must expiate my old faults, and this infamous doubt which I am ashamed of not being immediately able to cast from me, if I must pay for my unmerited happiness with usury, I hope that I may be given to death as a prey, only provided that I might belong to her, idolize her, believe in her kisses, believe in her beauty and in her love, for one hour, for even a few moments!

PART XVIII

To-day I suddenly remembered a funny evening which I spent when I was a bachelor, at Madame d'Ecoussens, where all of us, some with secret and insurmountable agony, and others with absolute indifference, went into one of the small rooms where a female professor of palmistry, who was then in vogue, and whose name I have forgotten, had installed herself.

When it came to my turn to sit opposite to her, as if I had been going to make my confession, she took my hands into her long, slender fingers, felt them, squeezed them and triturated them, as if they had been a lump of wax, which she was about to model into shape.

Severely dressed in black, with a pensive face, thin lips and almost copper-colored eyes and neither young nor old, this woman had something commanding, imperious, disturbing about her, and I must confess that my heart beat more violently than usual while she looked at the lines in my left hand through a strong magnifying glass, where the mysterious characters of some satanic conjuring look appear, and form a capital M.

She was interesting, occasionally discovered fragments of my past and gave mysterious hints, as if her looks were following the strange roads of Destiny in those unequal, confused curves. She told me in brief words that I should have and had had some opportunities, that I was wasting my physical, more than my moral strength in all kinds of love affairs that did not last long, and that the day when I really loved, or when, to use her expression, I was fairly caught, would be to me the prelude of intense sufferings, a real way of the Cross and of an illness of which I should never be cured. Then, as she examined my line of life, that which surrounds the thick part of the thumb, the lady in black suddenly grew gloomy, frowned and appeared to hesitate to go on to the end and continue my horoscope, and said very quickly:

"Your line of life is magnificent, monsieur; you will live to be sixty at least, but take care not to spend it too freely or to use it immoderately; beware of strong emotions and of any passional crisis, for I remark a gap there in the full vigor of your age, and that gap, that incurable malady which I mentioned to you, in the line of your heart...."

I mastered myself, in order not to smile, and took my leave of her, but everything that she foretold has been realized, and I dare not look at that sinister gap which she saw in my line of life, *for that gap can only mean madness*!

Madness, my poor, dear adored Elaine!

PART XIX

I became as bad and spiteful as if the spirit of hatred had possession of me, and envied those whose life was too happy, and who had no cares to trouble them. I could not conceal my pleasure when one of those domestic dramas occurred, in which hearts bleed and are broken, in which odious treachery and bitter sufferings are brought to light.

Divorce proceedings with their miserable episodes, with the wranglings of the lawyers and all the unhappiness that they revealed and which exposed the vanity of dreams, the tricks of women, the lowness of some minds, the foul animal that sits and slumbers in most hearts, attracted me like a delightful play, a piece which rivets one from the first to the last act. I listened greedily to passionate letters, those mad prayers whose secrets some lawyer violates and which he reads aloud in a mocking tone, and which he gives pell-mell to the bench and to the public, who have come to be amused or excited and to stare at the victims of love.

I followed those romances of adultery which were unfolded chapter by chapter, in their brutal reality, of things that had actually occurred, and for the first time I forgot my own unhappiness in them. Sometimes the husband and wife were there, as if they wished to defy each other, to meet in some last encounter, and pale and feverish they watched each other, devoured each other with their eyes, hiding their grief and their misery. Sometimes again, the lover or the mistress were there and tore their gloves in their rage, wishing to rush at the bar to defend their love, to bring forward accusations in their turn, and would tell the advocate that he was lying, and would threaten him and revile him with all their indignant nature. Friends, however, would restrain them, would whisper something to them in a low voice, press their hands like after a funeral, and try to appease them.

It seemed to me, as if I were looking at a heap of ruins, or breathing in the odor of an ambulance, in which dying men were groaning, and that those unhappy people were assuaging my trouble somewhat, and taking their share of it.

I used to read the advertisements in the Agony Columns in the newspapers, where the same exalted phrases used to recur, where I read the same despairing *adieux*, earnest requests for a meeting, echoes of past affection, and vain vows; and all this relieved me, vaguely appeased me, and made me think less about myself, that hateful, incurable *I* which I longed to destroy!

PART XX

As the heat was very oppressive, and there was not a breath of wind, after dinner she wanted to go for a drive in the *Bois de Boulogne* and we drove in the victoria towards the bridge at Suresne.

It was getting late, and the dark drives looked like deserted labyrinths, and cool retreats where one would have liked to have stopped late, where the very rustle of the leaves seems to whisper amorous temptations, and there was seduction in the softness of the air and in the infinite music of the silence.

Occasionally, lights were to be seen among the trees, and the crescent of the new moon shone like a half-opened gold bracelet in the serene sky, and the green sward, the copses and the small lakes, which gave an uncertain reflection of the surrounding objects, came into sight suddenly, out of the shade, and the intoxicating smell of the hay and of the flower beds rose from the earth as if from a sachet.

We did not speak, but the jolts of the carriage occasionally brought us quite close together, and as if I were being attracted by some irresistible force, I turned to Elaine and saw that her eyes were filled with tears, and that she was very pale, and my whole body trembled when I looked at her. Suddenly, as if she could not bear this state of affairs any longer, she threw her arms round my neck, and with her lips almost touching mine, she said:

“Why do you not love me any longer? Why do you make me so unhappy? What have I done to you, Jacques?”

She was at my mercy, she was undergoing the influence of the charm of one of those moonlight nights which unbrace women’s nerves, make them languid, and leave them without a will and without strength, and I thought that she was going to tell me everything and to confess everything to me, and I had to master myself, not to kiss her on her sweet coaxing lips, but I only replied coldly:

“Do you not know, Elaine?... Did you not think that sooner or later I should discover everything that you have been trying to hide from me?”

She sat up in terror, and repeated as if she were in a profound stupor:

“What have I been trying to hide from you?”

I had said too much, and was bound to go on to the end and to finish, even though I repented of it ever afterwards, and amidst the noise of the carriage I said in a hoarse voice:

“Is it not your fault if I have become estranged from you, shall not I be the only one to be unhappy, I who loved you so dearly, who believed in you, and whom you have deceived, and condemned to take another man’s mistress?”

Elaine closed my mouth with my fingers, and panting, with dilated eyes and with such a pale face that I thought she was going to faint, she said hoarsely:

“Be quiet, be quiet, you are frightening me,... frightening me as if you were a madman....”

Those words froze me, and I shivered as if some phantoms were appearing among the trees and showing me the place that had been marked out for me by Destiny, and I felt inclined to jump from the carriage and to run to the river, which was calling to me yonder in a maternal voice, and inviting me to an eternal sleep, eternal repose, but Elaine called out to the coachman:

“We will go home, Firmin; drive as fast as you can!”

We did not exchange another word, and during the whole drive Elaine sobbed convulsively, though she tried to hide the sound with her pocket handkerchief, and I understood that it was all finished *and that I had killed our love....*

PART XXI

Yes, all was finished and stupidly finished, without the decisive explanation, in which I should find strength to escape from a hateful yoke, and to repudiate the woman who had allured me with false caresses, and who no longer ought to bear my name.

It was either that, or else, who knows, the happiness, the peace, the love which was not troubled by any evil afterthoughts, that absolute love that I dreamt of between Elaine and myself when I asked for her hand, and which

I was still continually dreaming of with the despair of a condemned soul far from Paradise, and from which I was suffering, and which would kill me.

She prevented me from speaking; with her trembling hand she checked that flow of frenzied words which were about to come from my pained heart, those terrible accusations which an imperious, resistless force incited me to utter, and those terrified words which escaped from her pale lips, froze me again, and penetrated to my marrow as if they had been some piercing wind.

In spite of it all, I was in full possession of my reason, I was not in a passion, and I could not have looked like a fool.

What could she have seen unusual in my eyes that frightened her, what inflections were there in my voice for such an idea suddenly to arise in her brain? Suppose she had not make a mistake, suppose I no longer knew what I was saying nor what I was doing, and really had that terrible malady that she had mentioned, and which I cannot repeat!

It seems to me now as if I could see myself in a mirror of anguish, altogether changed, as if my head were a complete void at times and became something sonorous, and then was struck violent, prolonged blows from a heavy clapper, as if it had been a bell, which fills it with tumultuous deafening vibrations, from a kind of loud tocsin and from monotonous peals, that were succeeded by the silence of the grave.

And the voice of recollection, a voice which tells me Elaine’s mysterious history, which speaks to me only of her, which recalls that initial night, that strange night of happiness and of grief, when I doubted her fidelity, when I doubted her heart as well as I did herself, passes slowly through this silence all at once, like the voice of distant music.

Alas! Suppose she had not made a mistake!

PART XXII

I must be an object of hatred to her, and I left home without writing her a line, without trying to see her, without wishing her good-bye. She may pity me or she may hate me, but she certainly does not love me any longer, and I have myself buried that love, for which I would formerly have given my whole life. As she is young and pretty, however, Elaine will soon console herself for these passing troubles with some soul that is the shadow of her own, and will replace me, if she has not done that already, and will seek happiness in adultery.

What are she and her lover plotting? What will they try to do to prevent me from interfering with them? What snares will they set for me so that I may go and end my miserable life in some dungeon, from which there is no release?

But that is impossible; it can never be; Elaine belongs to me altogether and forever; she is my property, my chattel, my happiness. I adore her, I want her all to myself, *even though she be guilty*, and I will never leave her again for a moment, I will still stick to her petticoats, I will roll at her feet, and ask her pardon, for I thirst for her kisses and her love.

To-night in a few hours, I shall be with her, I shall go into *our* room and lie in *our* bed, and I will cover the cheeks of my fair-haired darling with such kisses, that she will no longer think me mad, and if she cries out, if she defends herself and spurns me, I shall kill her; I have made up my mind to that.

I know that I shall strike her with the Arab knife that is on one of the console-tables, in our room among other knick-knacks. I see the spot where I shall plunge in the sharp blade, into the nape of her neck, which is covered with little soft pale golden curls, that are the same color as the hair of her head. It attracted me so at one time, during the chaste period of our engagement, that I used to wish to bite it, as if it had been some fruit. I shall do it some day in the country, when she is bathed in a ray of sunlight, which makes her look dazzling in her pink muslin dress, some day on a towing-path, when the nightingales are singing, and the dragonflies, with their reflections of blue and silver are flying about.

There, there, I shall skillfully plunge it in up to the hilt, like those who know how to kill....

PART XXIII

And after I had killed her, what then?

As the judges would not be able to explain such an extraordinary crime to themselves, they would of course say that I was mad, medical men would examine me and would immediately agree that I ought at once to be kept under supervision, taken care of and placed in a lunatic asylum.

And for years, perhaps, because I was strong, and because such a vigorous animal would survive the calamity intact, although my intellect might give way, I should remain a prey to these chimeras, carry that fixed idea of her lies, her impurity and her shame about with me, that would be my one recollection, and I should suffer unceasingly.

I am writing all this perfectly coolly and in full possession of my reason; I have perfect prescience of what my resolve entails, and of this blind rush towards death. I feel that my very minutes are numbered, and that I no longer have anything in my skull, in which some fire, though I do not quite know what it is, is burning, except a few particles of what used to be my brain.

Just as a short time ago, I should certainly have murdered Elaine, if she had been with me, when invisible hands seemed to be pushing me towards her, inaudible voices ordered me to commit that murder, it is surely most probable that I shall have another crisis, and will there be any awakening from that?

Ah! It will be a thousand times better, since Destiny has left me a half-open door, to escape from life before it is too late, before the free, sane, strong man that I am at present, becomes the most pitiable, the most destructive, the most dangerous of human wrecks!

May all these notes of my misery fall into Elaine’s hands some day, may she read them to the end, pity and absolve me, and for a long time mourn for me!

(Here ends Jacques’ Journal.)

AN UNFORTUNATE LIKENESS

During one of those sudden changes of the electric light, which at one time throws rays of exquisite pale pink, at another a liquid gold, as if it had been filtered through the light hair of a woman, and at another, rays of a bluish hue with strange tints, such as the sky assumes at twilight, in which the women with their bare shoulders looked like living flowers — it was on the night of the first of January at Montonirail's, the refined painter of great undulating *poses* figures, of brilliant dresses, of Parisian prettiness — that tall Pescarelle, whom some called *Pussy*, though I do not know why, suddenly said in a low voice:

"Well, people were not altogether mistaken, in fact, were only half wrong when they coupled my name with that of pretty Lucy Plonelle. She had captivated my heart, just as a bird-catcher on a frosty morning catches an imprudent wren on a limed twig, and she might have done whatever she liked with me.

"I was under the charm of her enigmatical and mocking smile, where her teeth had a cruel look between her red lips, and glistened as if they were ready to bite and to heighten the pleasure of the most delightful, the most voluptuous kiss, by pain.

"I loved everything in her, her feline suppleness, her slow looks, which seemed to glide from her half-closed lids, full of promises and temptation, her somewhat extreme elegance, and her hands, her long, delicate, white hands, with blue veins, like the bloodless hands of a female saint in a stained glass window, and her slender fingers, on which only the large drops of blood of a ruby glittered.

"I would have given her all my remaining youth and vigor to have laid my burning hands onto the nape of her cool round neck, and to feel that bright, silky, golden mane enveloping me and caressing my skin. I was never tired of hearing her disdainful, petulant voice, those vibrations which sounded as if they proceeded from clear glass, and that music, which at times, became hoarse, harsh and fierce, like the loud, sonorous calls of the Valkyries.

"Oh! Good heavens! to be her lover, to be her chattel, to belong to her, to devote one's whole existence to her, to spend one's last half-penny and to go under in misery, only to have the glory, the happiness of possessing the splendid beauty, the sweetness of her kisses, the pink, and the white of her demon-like soul all to myself, were it only for a few months!

"It makes you laugh, I know, to think that I should have been caught like that, I who give such good, prudent advice to my friends, who fear love as I do those quicksands and shoals which appear at low tide and in which one is swallowed up and disappears!

"But who can answer for himself, who can defend himself against such a danger, against the magnetic attraction that comes from such a woman? Nevertheless, I got cured, and perfectly cured, and that, quite accidentally, and this is how the enchantment, which was apparently so infrangible, was broken.

"On the first night of a play, I was sitting in the stalls close to Lucy, whose mother had accompanied her, as usual, and they occupied the front of a box, side by side. From some insurmountable attraction, I never ceased looking at the woman whom I loved with all the force of my being. I feasted my eyes on her beauty, I saw nobody except her in the theater, and did not listen to the piece that was being performed on the stage.

"Suddenly, however, I felt as if I had received a blow from a dagger in my heart, and I had an insane hallucination. Lucy had moved and her pretty head was in profile, in the same attitude and with the same lines as her mother. I do not know what shadow, or what play of light had hardened and altered the color of her delicate features and destroyed their ideal prettiness, but the more I looked at them both, the one who was young, and the one who was old, the greater that distressing resemblance became.

"I saw Lucy growing older and older, striving against those accumulating years which bring wrinkles in the face, produce a double chin and crow's feet, and spoil the mouth. *They almost looked like twins.*

"I suffered so that I almost thought I should have gone mad, and, in spite of myself, instead of shaking off this feeling and make my escape out of the theater, far away into the noise and life on the boulevards, I persisted in looking at the other, at the old one, in scanning her over, in judging her, in dissecting her with my eyes; I got excited over her flabby cheeks, over those ridiculous dimples, that were half-filled up, over that treble chin, that hair which must have been dyed, those eyes which had no more brightness in them, and that nose which was a caricature of Lucy's beautiful, attractive little nose.

"I had the prescience of the future. I loved her, and I should love her more and more every day, that little sorceress who had so despotically and so quickly conquered me. I should not allow any participation or any intrigue from the day she gave herself to me, and when once we had been so intimately connected, who could tell whether, just as I was defending myself against it most, the legitimate termination — marriage — might not come?

"Why not give one's name to a woman whom one loves, and of whom one is sure? The reason was, that I should be tied to a disfigured, ugly creature with whom I should not venture to be seen in public, as my friends would leer at her with laughter in their eyes, and with pity in their hearts for the man who was accompanying those remains."

"And so, as soon as the curtain had fallen, without saying good-day or good-evening, I had myself driven to the *Moulin Rouge*, and there I picked up the first woman I came across, and remained in her company until late next day."

"Well," Florise d'Anglet exclaimed, "I shall never take Mamma to the theater with me again, for men are really getting too mad!"

THE NEW SENSATION

That little Madame d’Ormonde certainly had the devil in her, but above all, a fantastic, baffling brain, through which the most unheard of caprices passed, in which ideas danced and jostled each other, like those pieces of different colored glass in a kaleidoscope, which form such strange figures when they have been shaken, in which *Parisine* was fermenting to such an extent — you know, *Parisine*, the analysis of which Roqueplan lately gave — that the most learned members of *The Institute* would have wasted his science and his wisdom if he had tried to follow her slips and her subterfuges.

That was, very likely, the reason why she attracted, retained and infatuated even those who had paid their debt to implacable love, who thought that they were strong and free from those passions under the influence of which men lose their heads, and that they were beyond the reach of woman’s perfidious snares. Or, perhaps, it was her small, soft, delicate, white hands, which always smelled of some subtle, delicious perfume, and whose small fingers men kissed almost with devotion, almost with absolute pleasure. Or, was it her silky, golden hair, her large, blue eyes, full of enigmas, of curiosity, of desire, her changeable mouth, which was quite small and infantine at one moment, when she was pouting, and smiling and as open as a rose that is unfolding in the sun, when she opened it in a laugh, and showed her pearly teeth, so that it became a target for kisses? Who will ever be able to explain that kind of magic and sorcery which some *Chosen Women* exercise over all men, that despotic authority, against which nobody would think of rebelling?

Among the numerous men who had entreated her, who were anxiously waiting for that wonderful moment when her heart would beat, when his mocking companion would grow tired and abandon herself to the pleasure of loving and of being loved, would become intoxicated with the honey of caresses, and would no longer refuse her lips to kisses, like some restive animal that fears the yoke, none had so made up his mind to win the game, and to pursue this deceptive siege, as much as Xavier de Fontrailles. He marched straight for his object with a patient energy and a strength of will which no checks could weaken, and with the ardent fervor of a believer who has started on a long pilgrimage, and who supports all the suffering of the long journey with the fixed and consoling idea that one day he will be able to throw himself on his knees at the shrine where he wishes to worship, and to listen to the divine words which will be a Paradise to him.

He gave way to Madame d’Ormonde’s slightest whims, and did all he could never to bore her, never to hurt her feelings, but really to become a friend whom she could not do without, and of whom, in the end, a woman grows more jealous than she does of her husband, and to whom she confesses everything, her daily worries and her dreams of the future.

She would very likely have suffered and wept, and have felt a great void in her existence if they had separated for ever, if he had disappeared, and she would not have hesitated to defend him, even at the risk of compromising herself, and of passing as his mistress, if any one had attacked him in her presence, and sometimes she used to say with a sudden laughing sadness in her voice:

“If I were really capable of loving for five minutes consecutively, I should love you.”

And when they were walking in the *Bois de Boulogne*, while the Victoria was waiting near Armenonville, during their afternoon talks when, as he used to say, they were hanging over the abyss until they both grew giddy, and spoke of love madly and ceaselessly — returning to the subject constantly, and impregnating themselves with it — Madame d’Ormonde would occasionally produce one of her favorite theories. Yes, she certainly understood possession of the beloved object, that touch of madness which seizes you from head to foot, which makes your blood hot, and which makes you forget everything else in a man’s embraces, in that supreme pleasure which overwhelms you, and which rivets two beings together for ever, by the heart and by the brain. But only at some unexpected moment, in a strange place, with a touch of something novel about it, which one would remember all one’s life, something amusing and almost maddening, which one had been in search of for a long time, and which imparted a flavor of curry, as it were, into the common-place flavor of immorality.

And Xavier de Fontrailles did all he could to discover such a place, but failed successively in a bachelor's lodgings with silk tapestry, like a boudoir of the seventeenth century, in a villa hidden like a nest among trees and rose bushes, with a Japanese house furnished in an extraordinary fashion and very expensively, with latticed windows from which one could see the sea, in an old melancholy palace, from which one could see the Grand Canal, in rooms, in hotels, in queer quarters, in private rooms, in restaurants, and in small country houses in the recesses of woods.

Madame d'Ormonde went on her way without turning her head, but Xavier, alas! became more and more amorous, as amorous as an overgrown schoolboy who has never hitherto had any conversation with a woman, and who is amorous enough to pick up the flowers that fall from her bodice, and to be lost and unhappy as soon as he does not see her, or hear her soft, cooing voice, and see her smile....

One evening, however, he had gone with her to the fair at Saint Cloud, and went into three shows, deafened by the noise of the organs, the whistling of the machinery of the round-abouts, and the hubbub of the crowd that came and went among the booths that were illuminated by paraffin lamps. As they were passing in front of a somnambulist's van, Monsieur de Fontrailles stopped and said to Madame d'Ormonde:

"Would you like to have our fortune told?"

It was a very fine specimen of its kind, and had, no doubt, been far and wide. Placards and portraits, bordered by advertisements, hung above the shaky steps, and the small windows with their closed shutters, were almost hidden by boxes of sweet basil and mignonette, while an old, bald parrot, with her feathers all ruffled, was asleep just outside.

The fortune teller was sitting on a chair, quietly knitting a stocking, and on their approach she got up, went up to Madame d'Ormonde and said in an unctuous voice:

"I reveal the present, the past and the future, and even the name of the future husband or wife, and of deceased relations, as well as my client's present and future circumstances. I have performed before crowned heads. The Emperor of Brazil came to me, with the illustrious poet, Victor Hugo.... My charge is five francs for telling your fortune from the cards or by your hand, and twenty francs for the whole lot.... Would you like the lot, Madame?"

Madame d’Ormonde gave vent to a burst of sonorous laughter, like a street girl, who is amusing herself, but they went in and Monsieur de Fontrailles opened the glass door which was covered by a heavy red curtain. When they got in, the young woman uttered an exclamation of surprise. The interior of the van was full of roses, arranged in the most charming manner as if for a lovers’ meeting. On a table covered with a damask cloth, and which was surrounded by piles of cushions, a supper was waiting for chance comers, and at the other end, concealed by heavy hangings, one could see a large, wide bed, one of those beds which give rise to sinister suggestions!

Xavier had shut the door again, and Madame d’Ormonde looked at him in a strange manner, with rather flushed cheeks, palpitating nostrils, and a look in her eyes, such as he had never seen in them before, and in a very low voice, while his heart beat violently, and he whispered into her ear:

“Well, does the decoration please you this time?”

She replied by holding up her lips to him, and then filled two glasses with extra dry champagne, which was as pale as the skin of a fair woman, and said almost as if she had already been rather drunk:

“I am decidedly worth a big stake!”

It was in this fashion that Madame d’Ormonde, for the first and last time, deceived her husband; and it was at the fair at Saint Cloud, in a somnambulist’s van.

THE VIATICUM

“After all,” Count d’Avorsy said, stirring his tea with the slow movements of a prelate, “what truth was there in anything that was said at Court, almost without any restraint, and did the Empress, whose beauty has been ruined by some secret grief, who will no longer see anyone and who soothes her continual mental weariness by some journeys without an object and without a rest, in foggy and melancholy islands, and did she really forget Caesar’s wife ought not even to be suspected, did she really give herself to that strange and attractive corrupter, Ladislas Ferkoz?”

The bright night seemed to be scattering handfuls of stars into the placid sea, which was as calm as a blue pond, slumbering in the depths of a forest. Among the tall climbing roses, which hung a mantle of yellow flowers to the fretted baluster of the terrace, there stood out in the distance the illuminated fronts of the hotels and villas, and occasionally women’s laughter was heard above the dull, monotonous sound of surf and the noise of the fog-horns.

Then Captain Sigmund Oroshaz, whose sad and pensive face of a soldier who has seen too much slaughter and too many charnel houses, was marked by a large scar, raised his head and said in a grave, haughty voice:

“Nobody has lied in accusing Maria-Gloriosa of adultery, and nobody has calumniated the Empress and her minister, whom God has damned in the other world. Ladislas Ferkoz was his sovereign’s lover until he died, and made his august master ridiculous and almost odious, for the man, no matter who he be, who allows himself to be flouted by a creature who is unworthy of bearing his name and of sharing his bread; who puts up with such disgrace, who does not crush the guilty couple with all the weight of his power, is not worth pity, nor does he deserve to be spared the mockery. And if I affirm that so harshly, my dear Count — although years and years have passed since the sponge passed over that old story — the reason is that I saw the last chapter of it, quite in spite of myself, however, for I was the officer who was on duty at the palace, and obliged to obey orders, just as if I had been on the field of battle — and on that day I was on duty near Maria-Gloriosa."

Madame de Laumières, who had begun an animated conversation on crinolines, admist the fragrant odor of Russian cigarettes, and who was making fun of the striking toilets, with which she had amused herself by scanning through her opera glass a few hours previously at the races, stopped, for even when she was talking most volubly she always kept her ears open to hear what was being said around her, and as her curiosity was aroused, she interrupted Sigmund Oroshaz.

"Ah! Monsieur," she said, "you are not going to leave our curiosity unsatisfied.... A story about the Empress puts all our scandals on the beach, and all our questions of dress into the shade, and, I am sure," she added with a smile at the corners of her mouth, "that even our friend, Madame d'Ormonde will leave off flirting with Monsieur Le Brassard to listen to you."

Captain Oroshaz continued, with his large blue eyes full of recollections:

"It was in the middle of a grand ball that the Emperor was giving on the occasion of some family anniversary, though I forget exactly what, and where Maria-Gloriosa, who was in great grief, as she had heard that her lover was ill and his life almost despaired of, far from her, was going about with her face as pale as that of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, seemed to be a soul in affliction, appeared to be ashamed of her bare shoulders, as if she were being made a parade of in the light, while he, the adored of her heart, was lying on a bed of sickness, getting weaker every moment, longing for her and perhaps calling for her in his distress. About midnight, when the violins were striking up the quadrille, which the Emperor was to dance with the wife of the French Ambassador, one of the ladies of honor, Countess Szegedin, went up to the Empress, and whispered a few words to her, in a very low voice. Maria-Gloriosa grew still paler, but mastered her emotion and waited until the end of the last figure. Then, however, she could not restrain herself any longer, and even without giving any pretext for running away in such a manner, and leaning on the arm of her lady of honor, she made her way through the crowd as if she were in a dream and went to her own apartments. I told you that I was on duty that evening at the door of her rooms, and according to etiquette, I was going to salute her respectfully, but she did not give me time.

"'Captain,' she said excitedly and vehemently, 'give orders for my own private coachman, Hans Hildersheim, to get a carriage ready for me immediately,' but thinking better of it immediately she went on: 'But no, we should only lose time, and every minute is precious; give me a cloak quickly, Madame, and a lace veil; we will go out of one of the small doors in the park, and take the first conveyance we see."

"She wrapped herself in her furs, hid her face in her mantilla, and I accompanied her, without at first knowing what this mystery was, and where we were going to, on this mad expedition. I hailed a cab that was dawdling by the side of the pavement, and when the Empress gave me the address of Ladislas Ferkoz, the Minister of State, in a low voice, in spite of my usual phlegm, I felt a vague shiver of emotion, one of those movements of hesitation and recoil, from which the bravest are not exempt at times. But how could I get out of this unpleasant part of acting as her companion, and how show want of politeness to a sovereign who had completely lost her head? Accordingly, we started, but the Empress did not pay any more attention to me than if I had not been sitting by her side in that narrow conveyance, but stifled her sobs with her pocket handkerchief, muttered a few incoherent words, and occasionally trembled from head to foot. Her lover's name rose to her lips as if it had been a response in a litany, and I thought that she was praying to the Virgin that she might not arrive too late to see Ladislas Ferkoz again in the possession of his faculties, and keep him alive for a few hours. Suddenly, as if in reply to herself, she said: 'I will not cry any more; he must see me looking beautiful, so that he may remember me, even in death!'

"When we arrived, I saw that we were expected, and that they had not doubted that the Empress would come to close her lover's eyes with a last kiss. She left me there, and hurried to Ladislas Ferkoz's room, without even shutting the doors behind her, where his beautiful, sensual, gipsy head stood out from the whiteness of the pillows; but his face was quite bloodless, and there was no life left in it, except in his large, strange eyes, that were striated with gold, like the eyes of an astrologer or of a bearded vulture.

"The cold numbness of the death struggle had already laid hold of his robust body and paralyzed his lips and arms, and he could not reply even by a sound of tenderness to Maria-Gloriosa's wild lamentations and amorous cries. Neither reply nor smile, alas! But his eyes dilated, and glistened like the last flame that shoots up from an expiring fire, and filled them with a world of dying thoughts, of divine recollections, of delirious love. They appeared to envelope her in kisses, they spoke to her, they thanked her, they followed her movements, and seemed delighted at her grief. And as if she were replying to their mute supplications, as if she had understood them, Maria-Gloriosa suddenly tore off her lace, threw aside her fur cloak, stood erect beside the dying man, whose eyes were radiant, desirable in her supreme beauty with her bare shoulders, her bust like marble and her fair hair, in which diamonds glistened, surrounding her proud head, like that of the Goddess Diana, the huntress, and with her arms stretched out towards him in an attitude of love, of embrace and of blessing. He looked at her in ecstacy, he feasted on her beauty, and seemed to be having a terrible struggle with death, in order that he might gaze at her, that apparition of love, a little longer, see her beyond eternal sleep and prolong this unexpected dream. And when he felt that it was all over with him, and that even his eyes were growing dim, two great tears rolled down his cheeks....

"When Maria-Gloriosa saw that he was dead, she piously and devoutly kissed his lips and closed his eyes, like a priest who closes the gold tabernacle after service, on an evening after benediction, and then, without exchanging a word, we returned through the darkness to the palace where the ball was still going on."

There was a minute's silence, and while Madame de Laumières, who was very much touched by this story and whose nerves were rather highly strung, was drying her tears behind her open fan, suddenly the harsh and shrill voices of the fast women who were returning from the Casino, by the strange irony of fate, struck up an idiotic song which was then in vogue: "*Oh! the poor, oh! the poor, oh! the poor, dear girl!*"

THE RELICS

They had given him a grand public funeral, like they do victorious soldiers who have added some dazzling pages to the glorious annals of their country, who have restored courage to desponding heads and cast over other nations the proud shadow of their country's flag, like a yoke under which those went who were no longer to have a country, or liberty.

During a whole bright and calm night, when falling stars made people think of unknown metamorphoses and the transmigration of souls, who knows whether tall cavalry soldiers in their cuirasses and sitting as motionless as statues on their horses, had watched by the dead man's coffin, which was resting, covered with wreaths, under the porch of the heroes, every stone of which is engraved with the name of a brave man, and of a battle.

The whole town was in mourning, as if it had lost the only object that had possession of its heart, and which it loved. The crowd went silently and thoughtfully down the avenue of the *Champs Elysées*, and they almost fought for the commemorative medals and the common portraits which hawkers were selling, or climbed upon the stands which street boys had erected here and there, and whence they could see over the heads of the crowd. The *Place de la Concorde* had something solemn about it, with its circle of statues hung from head to foot with long crape coverings, which looked in the distance like widows, weeping and praying.

According to his last wish, Jean Ramel had been conveyed to the Pantheon in the wretched paupers' hearse, which conveys them to the common grave at the shambling trot of some thin and broken-winded horse.

That dreadful, black conveyance without any drapery, without plumes and without flowers, which was followed by Ministers and deputies, by several regiments with their bands, and their flags flying above the helmets and the sabers, by children from the national schools, by delegates from the provinces, and an innumerable crowd of men in blouses, of women, of shop-keepers from every quarter, had a most theatrical effect, and while standing on the steps of the Pantheon, at the foot of the massive columns of the portico, the orators successively discanted on his apotheosis, tried to make their voices predominate over the noise, emphasized their pompous periods, and finished the performance by a poor third act, which makes people yawn and gradually empties the theater, people remembered who that man had been, on whom such posthumous honors were being bestowed, and who was having such a funeral: it was Jean Ramel.

Those three sonorous syllables called up a lionine head, with white hair thrown back in disorder, like a mane, with features that looked as if they had been cut out with a bill-hook, but which were so powerful, and in which there lay such a flame of life, that one forgot their vulgarity and ugliness; with black eyes under bushy eyebrows, which dilated and flashed like lightning, now were veiled as if in tears and then were filled with serene mildness, with a voice which now growled so as almost to terrify its hearers, and which would have filled the hall of some working men's club, full of the thick smoke from strong pipes without being affected by it, and then would be soft, coaxing, persuasive and unctuous like that of a priest who is holding out promises of Paradise, or giving absolution for our sins.

He had had the good luck to be persecuted, to be in the eyes of the people, the incarnation of that lying formula which appears on every public edifice, of those three words of the *Golden Age*, which make those who think, those who suffer and those who govern, smile somewhat sadly, *Liberty, Fraternity, Equality*. Luck had been kind to him, had sustained, had pushed him on by the shoulders, and had set him up on his pedestal again when he had fallen down, like all idols do.

He spoke and he wrote, and always in order to announce the good news to all the multitudes who suffered — no matter to what grade of society they might belong — to hold out his hand to them and to defend them, to attack the abuses of the *Code* — that book of injustice and severity — to speak the truth boldly, even when it lashed his enemies as if it had been a whip.

His books were like Gospels, which are read chapter by chapter, and warmed the most despairing and the most sorrowing hearts, and brought comfort, hope and dreams to each.

He had lived very modestly until the end, and appeared to spend nothing; and he only kept one old servant, who spoke to him in the Basque dialect.

That chaste philosopher, who had all his life long feared women's snares and wiles, who had looked upon love as a luxury made only for the rich and idle, which unsettles the brain and interferes with acuteness of thought, had allowed himself to be caught like an ordinary man, late in life, when his hair was white and his forehead deeply wrinkled.

It was not, however, as happens in the visions of solitary ascetics, some strange queen or female magician, with stars in her eyes and witchery in her voice, some loose woman who held up the symbolical lamp immodestly, to light up her radiant nudity, and the pink and white bouquet of her sweet-smelling skin, some woman in search of voluptuous pleasures, whose lascivious appeals it is impossible for any man to listen to, without being excited to the very depths of his being. Neither a princess out of some fairy tale, nor a frail beauty who was an expert in the art of reviving the ardor of old men, and of leading them astray, nor a woman who was disgusted with her ideals, that always turned out to be alike, and who dreamt of awakening the heart of one of those men who suffer, who have afforded so much alleviation to human misery, who seemed to be surrounded by a halo, and who never knew anything but the true, the beautiful and the good.

It was only a little girl of twenty, who was as pretty as a wild flower, who had a ringing laugh, white teeth, and a mind that was as spotless as a new mirror, in which no figure has been reflected as yet.

He was in exile at the time for having given public expression to what he thought, and he was living in an Italian village which was buried in chestnut trees and situated on the shores of a lake that was narrow and so transparent that it might have been taken for some nobleman's fish pond that was like an emerald in a large park. The village consisted of about twenty red-tiled houses. Several paths paved with flint led up the side of the hill among the vines where the Madonna, full of grace and goodness extended her indulgence.

For the first time in his life Ramel remarked that there were some lips that were more desirable, more smiling than others, that there was hair in which it must be delicious to bury the fingers like in fine silk, and which it must be delightful to kiss, and that there were eyes which contained an infinitude of caresses, and he had spelled right through the eclogue, which at length revealed true happiness to him, and he had had a child, a son, by her.

This was the only secret that Ramel jealously concealed, and which no more than two or three of his oldest friends knew anything about, and while he hesitated about spending twopence on himself, and went to the Institute and to the Chamber of Deputies outside an omnibus, Pepa led the happy life of a millionaire who is not frightened of the to-morrow, and brought up her son like a little prince, with a tutor and three servants, who had nothing to do but to look after him.

All that Ramel made went into his mistress's hands, and when he felt that his last hour was approaching, and that there was no hope of his recovery — in full possession of his faculties and joy in his dull eyes — he gave his name to Pepa, and made her his lawful widow, in the presence of all his friends. She inherited everything that her former lover left behind, a considerable income from his share of the annual profits on his books, and also his pension, which the State continued to pay to her.

Little Ramel throve wonderfully amidst all this luxury, and gave free scope to his instincts and his caprices, without his mother ever having the courage to reprove him in the least, and he did not bear the slightest resemblance to Jean Ramel.

Full of pranks, effeminate, a superfine dandy, and precociously vicious, he suggested the idea of those pages at the Court of Florence, whom we frequently meet with in *The Decameron*, and who were the playthings for the idle hands and tips of the patrician ladies.

He was very ignorant and lived at a great rate, bet on races, and played cards for heavy stakes with seasoned gamblers, old enough to be his father. And it was distressing to hear this lad joke about the memory of him whom he called *the old man*, and persecute his mother because of the worship and adoration which she felt for Jean Ramel, whom she spoke of as if he had become a demigod when he died, like in Roman theogony.

He would have liked altogether to have altered the arrangement of that kind of sanctuary, the drawing-room, where Pepa kept some of her husband's manuscripts, the furniture that he had most frequently used, the bed on which he had died, his pens, his clothes and his weapons. And one evening, not knowing how to dress himself up more originally than the rest for a masked ball that stout Toinette Danicheff was going to give as her house-warming, without saying a word to his mother, he took down the Academician's dress, the sword and cocked hat that had belonged to Jean Ramel, and put it on as if it had been a disguise on Shrove Tuesday.

Slightly built and with thin arms and legs, the wide clothes hung on him, and he was a comical sight with the embroidered skirt of his coat sweeping the carpet, and his sword knocking against his heels. The elbows and the collar were shiny and greasy from wear, for the *Master* had worn it until it was threadbare, to avoid having to buy another, and had never thought of replacing it.

He made a tremendous hit, and fair Liline Ablette laughed so at his grimaces and his disguise, that that night she threw over Prince Noureddin for him, although he had paid for her house, her horses and everything else, and allowed her six thousand francs a month — £240 — for extras and pocket money.

A RUPTURE

"It is just as I tell you, my dear fellow, those two poor things whom we all of us envied, who looked like a couple of pigeons when they are billing and cooing, and were always spooning until they made themselves ridiculous, now hate each other just as much as they used to adore each other. It is a complete break, and one of those which cannot be mended like you can an old plate! And all for a bit of nonsense, for something so funny that it ought to have brought them closer together and have made them amuse themselves together until they were ill. But how can a man explain himself when he is dying of jealousy, and when he keeps repeating to his terrified mistress, 'You are lying! you are lying!' When he shakes her, interrupts her while she is speaking, and says such hard things to her that at last she flies into a rage, has enough of it, becomes hard and mad, and thinks of nothing but of giving him tit for tat and of paying him out in his own coin; does not care a straw about destroying his happiness, sends everything to the devil, and talks a lot of bosh which she certainly does not believe. And then, because there is nothing so stupid and so obstinate in the whole world as lovers, neither he nor she will take the first steps, and own to having been in the wrong, and regret having gone too far; but both wait and watch and do not even write a few lines about nothing, which would restore peace. No, they let day succeed day, and there are feverish and sleepless nights when the bed seems so hard, so cheerless and so large, and habits get weakened and the fire of love that was still smoldering at the bottom of the heart evaporates in smoke. By degrees both find some reason for what they wished to do, they think themselves idiots to lose the time which will never return in that fashion, and so good-bye, and there you are! That is how Josine Cadenette and that great idiot Servance separated."

Lalie Spring had lighted a cigarette, and the blue smoke played about her fine, fair hair, and made one think of those last rays of the setting sun which pierce through the clouds at sunset, and resting her elbows on her knees, and with her chin in her hand in a dreamy attitude, she murmured:

“Sad, isn’t it?”

“Bah!” I replied, “at their age people easily console themselves, and everything begins over again, even love!”

“Well, Josine had already found somebody else....”

“And did she tell you her story?”

“Of course she did, and it is such a joke!... You must know that Servance is one of those fellows like one would wish to have when one has time to amuse oneself, and so self-possessed that he would be capable of ruining all the older ones in a girls’ school, and given to trifling as much as most men, so that Josine calls him ‘perpetual motion.’ He would have liked to have gone on with his fun until the Day of Judgment, and seemed to fancy that beds were not made to sleep in at all, but she could not get used to being deprived of nearly all her rest, and it really made her ill. But as she wished to be as conciliatory as possible, and to love and to be loved as ardently as in the past, and also to sleep off the effects of her happiness peacefully, she rented a small room in a distant quarter, in a quiet, shady street giving out that she had just come from the country, and put hardly any furniture into it except a good bed and a dressing table. Then she invented an old aunt for the occasion, who was ill and always grumbling, and who suffered from heart disease and lived in one of the suburbs, and so several times a week Josine took refuge in her sleeping place, and used to sleep late there as if it had been some delicious abode where one forgets the whole world. Sometimes they forgot to call her at the proper time; she got back late, tired, with red and swollen eyelids, involved herself in lies, contradicted herself and looked so much as if she had just come from the confessional, feeling horribly ashamed of herself, or, as if she had hurried home from some assignation, that at last Servance worried himself about it, thought that he was being made a fool of like so many of his comrades were, got into a rage and made up his mind to set the matter straight, and so discover who this aunt of his mistress’s was, who had so suddenly fallen from the skies.

“He necessarily applied to an obliging agency, where they excited his jealousy, exasperated him day after day by making him believe that Josine Cadenette was making an absolute fool of him, had no more a sick aunt than she had any virtue, but that during the day she continued the little debaucheries which she committed with him at night, and that she shamelessly frequented some discreet bachelor's lodgings, where more than probably one of his own best friends was amusing himself at his expense, and having his share of the cake. He was fool enough to believe these fellows, instead of going and watching Josine himself, putting his nose into the business and going and knocking at the door of her room. He wanted to hear no more, and would not listen to her. For a trifle, in spite of her tears, he would have turned the poor thing into the streets, as if she had been a bundle of dirty linen. You may guess how she flew out at him and told him all sorts of things to annoy him; she let him believe he was not mistaken, that she had had enough of his affection, and that she was madly in love with another man. He grew very pale when she said that, looked at her furiously, clenched his teeth and said in a hoarse voice:

"'Tell me his name, tell me his name!'

"'Oh!' she said, chaffingly, 'you know him very well!' and if I had not happened to have gone in I think there would have been a tragedy.... How stupid they are, and they were so happy and loved each other so.... And now Josine is living with fat Schweinsshon, a low scoundrel who will live upon her and Servance has taken up with Sophie Labisque, who might easily be his mother; you know her, that bundle of red and yellow, who has been at that kind of thing for eighteen years, and whom Laglandee has christened, '*Saecula saeculorum*!'"

"By Jove! I should rather think I did!"

A USEFUL HOUSE

Royamount’s fat sides shook with laughter at the mere recollection of the funny story that he had promised to his friends, and throwing himself back in the great arm-chair, which he completely filled, *that picker up of bits of pinchbeck*, as they called him at the club, at last said:

“It is perfectly true, Bordenave does not owe anyone a penny and can go through any street he likes and publish those famous memoirs of sheriff’s officers, which he has been writing for the last ten years, when he did not dare to go out, and in which he carefully brought out the characters and peculiarities of all those generous distributors of stamped paper with whom he had had dealings, their tricks and wiles, their weaknesses, their jokes, their manner of performing their duties, sometimes with brutal rudeness and at others with cunning good nature, now embarrassed and almost ashamed of their work, and again ironically jovial, as well the artifices of their clerks to get a few crumbs from their employer’s cake. The book will soon be published and Machin, the Vaudeville writer, has promised him a preface, so that it will be a most amusing work. You are surprised, eh? Confess that you are absolutely surprised, and I will lay you any bet you like that you will not guess how our excellent friend, whose existence is an inexplicable problem, has been able to settle with his creditors, and suddenly produce the requisite amount.”

“Do get to the facts, confound it,” Captain Hardeur said, who was growing tired of all this verbiage.

“All right, I will get to them as quickly as possible,” Royaumont replied, throwing the stump of his cigar into the fire. “I will clear my throat and begin. I suppose all of you know that two better friends than Bordenave and Quillanet do not exist; neither of them could do without the other, and they have ended by dressing alike, by having the same gestures, the same laugh, the same walk and the same inflections of voice, so that one would think that some close bond united them, and that they had been brought up together from childhood. There is, however, this great difference between them, that Bordenave is completely ruined and that all that he possesses are bundles of mortgages, laughable parchments which attest his ancient race, and chimerical hopes of inheriting money some day, though these expectations are already heavily hypothecated. Consequently, he is always on the look-out for some fresh expedients for raising money, though he is superbly indifferent about everything, while Sebastien Quillanet, of the banking house of Quillanet Brothers, must have an income of eight thousand francs a year, but is descended from an obscure laborer who managed to secure some of the national property, then he became an army contractor, speculated on defeat as well as victory, and does not know now what to do with his money. But the millionaire is timid, dull and always bored, the ruined spendthrift amuses him by his impertinent ways, and his libertine jokes; he prompts him when he is at a loss for an answer, extricates him out of his difficulties, serves as his guide in the great forests of Paris which is strewn with so many pit-falls, and helps him to avoid those vulgar adventures which socially ruins a man, no matter how well ballasted he may be. Then he points out to him what women would make suitable mistresses for him, who make a man noted, and have the effect of some rare and beautiful flower pinned into his buttonhole. He is the confidant of his intrigues, his guest when he gives small, special entertainments, his daily familiar table companion, and the buffoon whose sly humor one stimulates, and whose worst witticisms one tolerates."

"Really, really," the captain interrupted him, "you have been going on for more than a quarter of an hour without saying anything."

So Royaumont shrugged his shoulders and continued: "Oh you can be very tiresome when you please, my dear fellow!... Last year, when he was at daggers drawn with his people, who were deafening him with their recriminations, were worrying him and threatening him with a lot of annoyance, Quillanet got married. A marriage of reason, and which apparently changed his habits and his tastes, more especially as the banker was at that time keeping a perfect little marvel of a woman, a Parisian jewel of unspeakable attractions and of bewitching delicacy, that adorable Suzette Marly who is just like a pocket Venus, and who in some prior stage of her existence must have been Phryne or Lesbia. Of course he did not get rid of her, but as he was bound to take some judicious precautions, which are necessary for a man who is deceiving his wife, he rented a furnished house with a courtyard in front, and a garden at the back, which one might think had been built to shelter some amorous folly. It was the nest that he had dreamt of, warm, snug, elegant, the walls covered with silk hangings of subdued tints, large pier-glasses, allegorical pictures, and filled with luxurious, low furniture that seemed to invite caresses and embraces. Bordenave occupied the ground floor, and the first floor served as a shrine for the banker and his mistress. Well, just a week ago, in order to hide the situation better, Bordenave asked Quillanet and some other friends to one of those luncheons which he understands so well how to order, such a delicious luncheon, that before it was quite over, every man had a woman on his knees already, and was asking himself whether a kiss from coaxing and naughty lips, was not a thousand times more intoxicating than the finest old brandy or the choicest vintage wines, and was looking at the bedroom door wishing to escape to it, although the Faculty altogether forbids that fashion of digesting a dainty repast, when the butler came in with an embarrassed look, and whispered something to him.

“Tell the gentleman that he has made a mistake, and ask him to leave me in peace,” Bordenave replied to him in an angry voice. The servant went out and returned immediately to say that the intruder was using threats, that he refused to leave the house, and even spoke of having recourse to the commissary of police. Bordenave frowned, threw his table napkin down, upset two glasses and staggered out with a red face, swearing and stammering out:

“This is rather too much, and the fellow shall find out what going out of the window means, if he will not leave by the door.” But in the ante-room he found himself face to face with a very cool, polite, impassive gentleman, who said very quietly to him:

“You are Count Robert de Bordenave, I believe. Monsieur?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“And the lease that you signed at the lawyer’s, Monsieur Albin Calvert, in the *Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière*, is in your name, I believe?”

“Certainly, Monsieur.”

“Then I regret extremely to have to tell you that if you are not in a position to pay the various accounts which different people have intrusted to me for collection here, I shall be obliged to seize all the furniture, pictures, plate, clothes etc., which are here, in the presence of two witnesses who are waiting for me downstairs in the street.”

"I suppose this is some joke, Monsieur?"

"It would be a very poor joke, Monsieur le Comte, and one which I should certainly not allow myself towards you!"

The situation was absolutely critical and ridiculous, the more so, that in the dining-room the women who were slightly *elevated*, were tapping the wine glasses with their spoons, and calling for him. What could he do except to explain his misadventure to Quillanet, who became sobered immediately, and rather than see his shrine of love violated, his secret sin disclosed and his pictures, ornaments and furniture sold, gave a check in due form for the claim there and then, though with a very wry face. And in spite of this, some people will deny that men who are utterly cleared out, often have a stroke of luck.

THE ACCENT

It was a large, upholstered house, with long white terraces shaded by vines, from which one could see the sea. Large pines stretched a dark dome over the sacked facade, and there was a look of neglect, of want and wretchedness about it all, such as irreparable losses, departures to other countries, and death leave behind them.

The interior wore a strange look, with half unpacked boxes serving for wardrobes, piles of band boxes, and for seats there was an array of worm-eaten armchairs, into which bits of velvet and silk, which had been cut from old dresses, had been festooned anyhow, and along the walls there were rows of rusty nails which made one think of old portraits and of pictures full of associations, which had one by one been bought for a low price by some second-hand furniture broker.

The rooms were in disorder and furnished no matter how, while velvets were hanging from the ceilings and in the corners, and seemed to show that as the servants were no longer paid except by hopes, they no longer did more than give them an accidental, careless touch with the broom occasionally. The drawing-room, which was extremely large, was full of useless knick-knacks, rubbish which is put up for sale at stalls at watering places, daubs, they could not be called paintings of portraits and of flowers, and an old piano with yellow keys.

Such is the home where she, who had been called the handsome Madame de Maurillac, was spending her monotonous existence, like some unfortunate doll which inconstant, childish hands have thrown into a corner in a loft, she who, almost passed for a professional seductress, and whose coquetries, at least so the Faithful ones of the Party said, had been able to excite a passing and last spark of desire in the dull eyes of the Emperor.

Like so many others, she and her husband had waited for his return from Elba, had discounted a fresh, immediate chance, had kept up boldly and spent the remains of his fortune at that game of luxury.

On the day when the illusion vanished, and he was forced to awake from his dream, Monsieur de Maurillac, without considering that he was leaving his wife and daughter behind him almost penniless, but not being able to make up his mind to come down in the world, to vegetate, to fight against his creditors, to accept the derisive alms of some sinecure, poisoned himself, like a shop girl who is forsaken by her lover.

Madame de Maurillac did not mourn for him, and as this lamentable disaster had made her interesting, and as she was assisted and supported by unexpected acts of kindness, and had a good adviser in one of those old Parisian lawyers who would get anybody out of the most inextricable difficulties, she managed to save something from the wreck, and to keep a small income. Then reassured and emboldened, and resting her ultimate illusions and her chimerical hopes on her daughter's radiant beauty, and preparing for that last game in which they would risk everything, and perhaps also hoping that she might herself marry again, the ancient flirt arranged a double existence.

For months and months she disappeared from the world, and as a pretext for her isolation and for hiding herself in the country, she alleged her daughter's delicate health, and also the important interests she had to look after in the South of France.

Her frivolous friends looked upon that as a great act of heroism, as something almost super-human, and so courageous, that they tried to distract her by their incessant letters, religiously kept her up in all the scandal, and love adventures, in the falls, as well as in the apotheosis of the capital.

The difficult struggle which Madame de Maurillac had to keep up in order to maintain her rank, was really as fine as any of those campaigns in the twilight of glory, as those slow retreats where men only give way inch by inch and fight until the last cartridge is expended, until at last fresh troops arrive, reinforcement which bar the way to the enemy, and save the threatened flag.

Broken in by the same discipline, and haunted by the same dream, mother and daughter lived on almost nothing in the dull, dilapidated house which the peasants called the *château*, and economized like poor people who only have a few hundred francs a year to live on. But Fabienne de Maurillac developed well in spite of everything, and grew up into a woman like some rare flower which is preserved from all contact with the outer air and is reared in a hot-house.

In order that she might not lose her Parisian accent by speaking too much with the servants, who had remained peasants under their livery, Madame de Maurillac, who had not been able to bring a lady's maid with her, on account of the extra cost which her traveling expenses and wages would have entailed, and who, moreover, was afraid that some indiscretion might betray her maneuvers and cover her with ridicule, made up her mind to wait on her daughter herself. And Fabienne talked with nobody but her, saw nobody but her, and was like a little novice in a convent. Nobody was allowed to speak to her, or to interfere with her walks in the large garden, or on the white terraces that were reflected in the blue water.

As soon as the season for the country and the seaside came, however, they packed up their trunks, and locked the doors of their house of exile. As they were not known, and taking those terrible trains which stop at every station, and by which travelers arrive at their destination in the middle of the night, with the certainty that nobody will be waiting for you, and see you get out of the carriage, they traveled third class, so that they might have a few bank notes the more, with which to make a show.

A fortnight in Paris in the family house at Auteuil, a fortnight in which to try on dresses and bonnets and to show themselves, and then Trouville, Aix or Biarritz, the whole show complete, with parties succeeding parties, money was spent as if they did not know its value, balls at the Casinos, constant flirtations, compromising intimacies, and those kind of admirers who immediately surround two pretty women, one in the radiant beauty of her eighteen years, and the other in the brightness of that maturity, which beautiful September days bring with them.

Unfortunately, however, they had to do the same thing over again every year, and as if bad luck were continuing to follow them implacably, Madame de Maurillac and her daughter did not succeed in their endeavors, and did not manage during her usual absence from home, to pick up some nice fellow who fell in love immediately, who took them seriously, and asked for Fabienne's hand, consequently, they were very unhappy. Their energies flagged, and their courage left them like water that escapes, drop by drop, through a crack in a jug. They grew low-spirited and no longer dared to be open towards each other and to exchange confidences and projects.

Fabienne, with her pale cheeks, her large eyes with blue circles round them and her tight lips, looked like some captive princess who is tormented by constant ennui, and troubled by evil suggestions; who dreams of flight, and of escape from that prison where fate holds her captive.

One night, when the sky was covered with heavy thunderclouds and the heat was most oppressive, Madame de Maurillac called her daughter whose room was next to hers. After calling her loudly for some time in vain, she sprang out of bed in terror and almost broke open the door with her trembling hands. The room was empty, and the pillows untouched.

Then, nearly mad and foreseeing some irreparable misfortune, the poor woman ran all over the large house, and then rushed out into the garden, where the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. She had the appearance of some wild animal that is being pursued by a pack of hounds, tried to penetrate the darkness with her anxious looks, and gasped as if some one were holding her by the throat; but suddenly she staggered, uttered a painful cry and fell down in a fit.

There before her, in the shadow of the myrtle trees, Fabienne was sitting on the knees of a man — of the gardener — with both her arms round his neck and kissing him ardently, and as if to defy her, and to show her how vain all her precautions and her vigilance had been, the girl was telling her lover in the country dialect, and in a cooing and delightful voice, how she adored him and that she belonged to him....

Madame de Maurillac is in a lunatic asylum, and Fabienne has married the gardener.

What could she have done better?

GHOSTS

Just at the time when the *Concordat* was in its most flourishing condition, a young man belonging to a wealthy and highly respected middle class family went to the office of the head of the police at P —— , and begged for his help and advice, which was immediately promised him.

“My father threatens to disinherit me,” the young man then began, “although I have never offended against the laws of the State, of morality or of his paternal authority, merely because I do not share his blind reverence for the Catholic Church and her Ministers. On that account he looks upon me, not merely as Latitudinarian, but as a perfect Atheist, and a faithful old manservant of ours, who is much attached to me, and who accidentally saw my father’s will, told me in confidence that he had left all his property to the Jesuits. I think this is highly suspicious, and I fear that the priests have been maligning me to my father. Until less than a year ago, we used to live very quietly and happily together, but ever since he has had so much to do with the clergy, our domestic peace and happiness are at an end.”

“What you have told me,” the official replied, “is as likely as it is regrettable, but I fail to see how I can interfere in the matter. Your father is in the full possession of all his mental faculties, and can dispose of all his property exactly as he pleases. I also think that your protest is premature; you must wait until his will can legally take effect, and then you can invoke the aid of justice; I am sorry to say that I can do nothing for you.”

“I think you will be able to,” the young man replied; “for I believe that a very clever piece of deceit is being carried on here.”

“How? Please explain yourself more clearly.”

“When I remonstrated with him, yesterday evening, he referred to my dead mother, and at last assured me, in a voice of the deepest conviction, that she had frequently appeared to him, and had threatened him with all the torments of the damned, if he did not disinherit his son, who had fallen away from God, and leave all his property to the Church. Now I do not believe in ghosts."

"Neither do I," the police director replied; "but I cannot well do anything on this dangerous ground, if I had nothing but superstitions to go upon. You know how the Church rules all our affairs since the *Concordat* with Rome, and if I investigate this matter, and obtain no results, I am risking my post. It would be very different if you could adduce any proofs for your suspicions. I do not deny that I should like to see the clerical party, which will, I fear, be the ruin of Austria, receive a staggering blow; try, therefore, to get to the bottom of this business, and then we will talk it over again."

About a month passed, without the young Latitudinarian being heard of; but then he suddenly came one evening, evidently in a great state of excitement, and told him that he was in a position to expose the priestly deceit which he had mentioned, if the authorities would assist him. The police director asked for further information.

"I have obtained a number of important clues," the young man said. "In the first place, my father confessed to me, that my mother did not appear to him in our house, but in the churchyard where she is buried. My mother was consumptive for many years, and a few weeks before her death she went to the village of S —— , where she died and was buried. In addition to this, I found out from our footman, that my father has already left the house twice, late at night, in company of X —— , the Jesuit priest, and that on both occasions he did not return till morning. Each time he was remarkably uneasy and low-spirited after his return, and had three masses said for my dead mother. He also told me just now, that he has to leave home this evening on business, but immediately he told me that, our footman saw the Jesuit go out of the house. We may, therefore, assume that he intends this evening to consult the spirit of my dead mother again, and this would be an excellent opportunity for getting on the track of the matter, if you do not object to opposing the most powerful force in the Empire, for the sake of such an insignificant individual as myself."

"Every citizen has an equal right to the protection of the State," the police director replied; "and I think that I have shown often enough, that I am not wanting in courage to perform my duty, no matter how serious the consequences may be; but only very young men act without any prospects of success, as they are carried away by their feelings. When you came to me the first time, I was obliged to refuse your request for assistance, but to-day your shares have risen in value. It is now eight o'clock, and I shall expect you in two hours' time, here in my office. At present, all you have to do is to hold your tongue; everything else is my affair."

As soon as it was dark, four men got into a closed carriage in the yard of the police office, and were driven in the direction of the village of S —— ; their carriage, however, did not enter the village, but stopped at the edge of a small wood in the immediate neighborhood. Here they all four alighted; they were the police director, accompanied by the young Latitudinarian, a police sergeant and an ordinary policeman, who was, however, dressed in plain clothes.

"The first thing for us to do is to examine the locality carefully," the police director said; "it is eleven o'clock and the exorcisers of ghosts will not arrive before midnight, so we have time to look round us, and to take our measure."

The four men went to the churchyard, which lay at the end of the village, near the little wood. Everything was as still as death, and not a soul was to be seen. The sexton was evidently sitting in the public house, for they found the door of his cottage locked, as well as the door of the little chapel that stood in the middle of the churchyard.

"Where is your mother's grave?" the police director asked; but as there were only a few stars visible, it was not easy to find it, but at last they managed it, and the police director looked about in the neighborhood of it.

"The position is not a very favorable one for us," he said at last; "there is nothing here, not even a shrub, behind which we could hide."

But just then the policeman said that he had tried to get into the sexton's hut through the door or the window, and that at last he had succeeded in doing so by breaking open a square in a window, which had been mended with paper, and that he had opened it and obtained possession of the key, which he brought to the police director.

His plans were very quickly settled. He had the chapel opened and went in with the young Latitudinarian; then he told the police sergeant to lock the door behind him and to put the key back where he had found it, and to shut the window of the sexton's cottage carefully. Lastly, he made arrangements as to what they were to do, in case anything unforeseen should occur, whereupon the sergeant and the constable left the churchyard, and lay down in a ditch at some distance from the gate, but opposite to it.

Almost as soon as the clock struck half-past eleven, they heard steps near the chapel, whereupon the police director and the young Latitudinarian went to the window, in order to watch the beginning of the exorcism, and as the chapel was in total darkness, they thought that they should be able to see, without being seen; but matters turned out differently from what they expected.

Suddenly, the key turned in the lock, and they barely had time to conceal themselves behind the altar, before two men came in, one of whom was carrying a dark lantern. One was the young man's father, an elderly man of the middle class, who seemed very unhappy and depressed, the other the Jesuit father K —— , a tall, thin, big-boned man, with a thin, bilious face, in which two large gray eyes shone restlessly under their bushy, black eyebrows. He lit the tapers, which were standing on the altar, and then began to say a *Requiem Mass*; while the old man knelt on the altar steps and served him.

When it was over, the Jesuit took the book of the Gospels and the holy water sprinkler, and went slowly out of the chapel, while the old man followed him, with the holy water basin in one hand and a taper in the other. Then the police director left his hiding place, and stooping down, so as not to be seen, he crept to the chapel window, where he cowered down carefully, and the young man followed his example. They were now looking straight on his mother's grave.

The Jesuit, followed by the superstitious old man, walked three times round the grave; then he remained standing before it, and by the light of the taper, he read a few passages from the Gospel; then he dipped the holy water sprinkler three times into the holy water basin, and sprinkled the grave three times; then both returned to the chapel, knelt down outside it with their faces towards the grave, and began to pray aloud, until at last the Jesuit sprang up, in a species of wild ecstasy, and cried out three times in a shrill voice:

"Exsurge! Exsurge! Exsurge!"

Scarcely had the last word of the exorcism died away, when thick, blue smoke rose out of the grave, which rapidly grew into a cloud, and began to assume the outlines of a human body, until at last a tall, white figure stood behind the grave, and beckoned with its hand.

"Who art thou?" the Jesuit asked solemnly, while the old man began to cry.

"When I was alive, I was called Anna Maria B —— ," the ghost replied in a hollow voice.

"Will you answer all my questions?" the priest continued.

"As far as I can."

"Have you not yet been delivered from purgatory by our prayers, and all the masses for your soul, which we have said for you?"

"Not yet, but soon, soon I shall be."

"When?"

"As soon as that blasphemer, my son, has been punished."

"Has that not already happened? Has not your husband disinherited his lost son, and made the Church his heir, in his place?"

"That is not enough."

"What must he do besides?"

"He must deposit his will with the Judicial Authorities, as his last will and testament, and drive the reprobate out of his house."

"Consider well what you are saying. Must this really be?"

"It must, or otherwise I shall have to languish in purgatory much longer," the sepulchral voice replied with a deep sigh; but the next moment it yelled out in terror:

"Oh! Good Lord!" and the ghost began to run away as fast as it could. A shrill whistle was heard, and then another, and the police director laid his hand on the shoulder of the exorcisor, accompanied with the remark:

"You are in custody."

Meanwhile, the police sergeant and the policeman, who had come into the churchyard, had caught the ghost, and dragged it forward. It was the sexton, who had put on a flowing, white dress, and who wore a wax mask, which bore striking resemblance to his mother, as the son declared.

When the case was heard, it was proved that the mask had been very skillfully made from a portrait of the deceased woman. The Government gave orders that the matter should be investigated as secretly as possible, and left the punishment of Father K —— to the spiritual authorities, which was a matter of course, at a time when priests were outside the jurisdiction of the Civil Authorities; and it is needless to say that he was very comfortable during his imprisonment, in a monastery in a part of the country which abounded with game and trout.

The only valuable result of the amusing ghost story was, that it brought about a reconciliation between father and son, and the former, as a matter of fact, felt such deep respect for priests and their ghosts in consequence of the apparition, that a short time after his wife had left purgatory for the last time, in order to talk with him, he turned *Protestant*.

CRASH

Love is stronger than death, and consequently also, than the greatest crash.

A young, and by no means bad-looking son of Palestine, and one of the barons of the Almanac of the *Ghetto*, who had left the field covered with wounds in the last general engagement on the Stock Exchange, used to go very frequently to the Universal Exhibition in Vienna in 1873, in order to divert his thoughts, and to console himself amidst the varied scenes, and the numerous objects of attraction there. One day he met a newly married couple in the Russian section, who had a very old coat of arms, but on the other hand, a very modest income.

This latter circumstance had frequently emboldened the stockbroker to make secret overtures to the delightful little lady; overtures which might have fascinated certain Viennese actresses, but which were sure to insult a respectable woman. The baroness, whose name appeared in the *Almanack de Gotha*, therefore felt something very like hatred for the man from the *Ghetto*, and for a long time her pretty little head had been full of various plans of revenge.

The stockbroker, who was really, and even passionately in love with her, got close to her in the Exhibition buildings, which he could do all the more easily, since the little woman’s husband had taken to flight, foreseeing mischief, as soon as she went up to the show-case of a Russian fur dealer, before which she remained standing in rapture.

“Do look at that lovely fur,” the baroness said, while her dark eyes expressed her pleasure; “I must have it.”

But she looked at the white ticket on which the price was marked.

“Four thousand roubles,” she said in despair; “that is about six thousand florins.”

“Certainly,” he replied, “but what of that? It is a sum not worth mentioning in the presence of such a charming lady.”

“But my husband is not in a position ...”

“Be less cruel than usual for once,” the man from the *Ghetto* said to the young woman in a low voice, “and allow me to lay this sable skin at your feet.”

“I presume that you are joking.”

“Not I ...”

“I think you must be joking, as I cannot think that you intend to insult me.”

“But, Baroness, I love you....”

“That is one reason more why you should not make me angry.”

“But ...”

“Oh! I am in such a rage,” the energetic little woman said; “I could flog you like *Venus in the Fur* did her slave.”

“Let me be your slave,” the Stock Exchange baron replied ardently, “and I will gladly put up with everything from you. Really, in this sable cloak, and with a whip in your hand, you would make a most lovely picture of the heroine of that story.”

The baroness looked at the man for a moment with a peculiar smile.

“Then if I were to listen to you favorably, you would let me flog you?” she said after a pause.

“With pleasure.”

“Very well,” she replied quickly. “You will let me give you twenty-five cuts with a whip, and I will be yours after the twenty-fifth blow.”

“Are you in earnest?”

“Fully.”

The man from the *Ghetto* took her hand, and pressed it ardently to his lips.

“When may I come?”

“To-morrow evening at eight o’clock.”

“And I may bring the sable cloak and the whip with me?”

“No, I will see about that myself.”

The next evening the enamored stockbroker came to the house of the charming little Baroness, and found her alone, lying on a couch, wrapped in a dark fur, while she held a dog whip in her small hand, which the man from the *Ghetto* kissed.

“You know our agreement,” she began.

“Of course I do,” the Stock Exchange baron replied. “I am to allow you to give me twenty-five cuts with the whip, and after the twenty-fifth you will listen to me."

"Yes, but I am going to tie your hands first of all."

The amorous baron quietly allowed this new Delila to tie his hands behind him, and then at her bidding, he knelt down before her, and she raised her whip and hit him hard.

"Oh! That hurts me most confoundedly," he exclaimed.

"I mean it to hurt you," she said with a mocking laugh, and went on thrashing him without mercy. At last the poor fool groaned with pain, but he consoled himself with the thought that each blow brought him nearer to his happiness.

At the twenty-fourth cut, she threw the whip down.

"That only makes twenty-four," the beaten would-be, *Don Juan*, remarked.

"I will make you a present of the twenty-fifth," she said with a laugh.

"And now you are mine, altogether mine," he exclaimed ardently.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Have I not let you beat me?"

"Certainly; but I promised you to grant your wish after the twenty-fifth blow, and you have only received twenty-four," the cruel little bit of virtue cried, "and I have witnesses to prove it."

With these words, she drew back the curtains over the door, and her husband, followed by two other gentlemen came out of the next room, smiling. For a moment the stockbroker remained speechless on his knees before the beautiful woman; then he gave a deep sigh, and sadly uttered that one, most significant word:

"Crash!"

AN HONEST IDEAL

Among my numerous friends in Vienna, there is one who is an author, and who has always amused me by his childish idealism.

Not by his idealism from an abstract point of view, for in spite of my Pessimism I am an absurd Idealist, and because I am perfectly well aware of this, I as a rule never laugh at people's Idealism, but his sort of Idealism was really too funny.

He was a serious man of great capabilities who only just fell short of being learned, with a clear, critical intellect; a man without any illusions about Society, the State, Literature, or anything else, and especially not about women; but yet he was the craziest Optimist as soon as he got upon the subject of actresses, theatrical princesses and heroines; he was one of those men, who, like Hackländer, cannot discover the Ideal of Virtue anywhere, except in a ballet girl.

My friend was always in love with some actress or other; of course only Platonically, and from preference with some girl of rising talent, whose literary knight he constituted himself, until the time came when her admirers laid something much more substantial than laurel wreaths at her feet; then he withdrew and sought for fresh talent which would allow itself to be patronized by him.

He was never without the photograph of his ideal in his breast pocket, and when he was in a good temper he used to show me one or other of them, whom I had never seen, with a knowing smile, and once, when we were sitting in a *café* in the *Prater*, he took out a portrait without saying a word, and laid it on the table before me.

It was the portrait of a beautiful woman, but what struck me in it first of all was not the almost classic cut of her features, but her white eyes.

"If she had not the black hair of a living woman, I should take her for a statue," I said.

“Certainly,” my friend replied; “for a statue of Venus, perhaps for the Venus of Milo, herself.”

“Who is she?”

“A young actress.”

“That is a matter of course in your case; what I meant was, what is her name?”

My friend told me, and it was a name which is at present one of the best known on the German stage, with which a number of terrestrial adventures are connected, as every Viennese knows, with which those of Venus herself were only innocent toying, but which I then heard for the first time.

My idealist described her as a woman of the highest talent, which I believed, and as an angel of purity, which I did not believe; on that particular occasion, however, I at any rate did not believe the contrary.

A few days later, I was accidentally turning over the leaves of the portrait album of another intimate friend of mine, who was a thoroughly careless, somewhat dissolute Viennese, and I came across that strange female face with the dead eyes again.

“How did you come by the picture of this Venus?” I asked him.

“Well, she certainly is a Venus,” he replied, “but one of that cheap kind who are to be met with in the *Graben*, which is their ideal grove....”

“Impossible!”

“I give you my word of honor it is so.”

I could say nothing more after that. So my intellectual friend’s new ideal, that woman of the highest dramatic talent, that wonderful woman with the white eyes, was a street Venus!

But my friend was right in one respect. He had not deceived himself with regard to her wonderful dramatic gifts, and she very soon made a career for herself; far from being a mute character on a suburban stage, she rose in two years to be the leading actress at one of the principal theaters.

My friend interested himself on her behalf with the manager of it, who was not blinded by any prejudices. She acted in a rehearsal, and pleased him; whereupon he sent her to star in the provinces, and my friend accompanied her, and took care she was well puffed.

She went on the boards as Schiller’s *Marie Stuart*, and achieved the most brilliant success, and before she had finished her starring tour, she obtained an engagement at a large theater in a Northern town, where her appearance was the signal for a triumphant success.

Her reputation, that is, her reputation as a most gifted actress, grew very high in less than a year, and the manager of the Court theater invited her to star at the Court theater.

She was received with some suspicion at first, but she soon overcame all prejudices and doubts; the applause grew more and more vehement at every act, and at the close of the performance, her future was decided. She obtained a splendid engagement, and soon afterwards became an actress at the Court theater.

A well-known author wrote a racy novel, of which she was the heroine; one of the leading bankers and financiers was at her feet; she was the most popular personage, and the lioness of the capital; she had splendid apartments, and all her surroundings were of the most luxurious character, and she had reached that height in her career at which my idealistic friend, who had constituted himself her literary knight, quietly took his leave of her, and went in search of fresh talent.

But the beautiful woman with the dead eyes and the dead heart seemed to be destined to be the scourge of the Idealists, quite against her will, for scarcely had one unfolded his wings and flown away from her, than another fell out of the nest into her net.

A very young student, who was neither handsome, nor of good family, and certainly not rich or even well off, but who was enthusiastic, intellectual and impressionable, saw her as *Marie Stuart* in *The Maid of Orleans, The Lady with the Camelias*, and most of the plays of the best French play writers, for the manager was making experiments with her, and she was doing the same with her talents.

The poor student was enraptured with the celebrated actress, and at the same time conceived a passion for the woman, which bordered on madness.

He saved up penny by penny, he nearly starved himself, only in order that he might be able to pay for a seat in the gallery whenever she acted, and be able to devour her with his eyes. He always got a seat in the front row, for he was always outside three hours before the doors opened, so as to be one of the first to gain his Olympus, the seat of the theatrical enthusiasts; he grew pale, and his heart beat violently when she appeared; he laughed when she laughed, shed tears when she wept, applauded her, as if he had been paid to do it by the highest favors that a woman can bestow, and yet she did not know him, and was ignorant of his very existence.

The regular frequenters of the Court theater noticed him at last, and spoke about his infatuation for her, until at last she heard about him, but still did not know him, and although he could not send her any costly jewelry, and not even a bouquet, yet at last he succeeded in attracting her attention.

When she had been acting and the theater had been empty for a long time, and she left it, wrapped in valuable furs and got into the carriage of her banker, which was waiting for her at the stage door, he always stood there, often up to his ankles in snow, or in the pouring rain.

At first she did not notice him, but when her maid said something to her in a whisper on one occasion, she looked round in surprise, and he got a look from those large eyes, which were not dead then, but dark and bright; a look which recompensed him for all his sufferings and filled him with proud hopes, which constantly gained more power over the young Idealist, who was usually so modest.

At last there was a thorough, silent understanding between the theatrical princess and the dumb adorer. When she put her foot on the carriage step, she looked round at him, and every time he stood there, devouring her with his eyes; she saw it and got contentedly into her carriage, but she did not see how he ran after the carriage, and how he reached her house, panting for breath, when she did, nor how he lay down outside after the door had closed behind her.

One stormy summer night, when the wind was howling in the chimneys, and the rain was beating against the windows and on the pavement, the poor student was again lying on the stone steps outside her house, when the front door was opened very cautiously and quietly; for it was not the banker who was leaving the house, but a wealthy young officer whom the girl was letting out; he kissed the pretty little Cerebus as he put a gold coin into her hand, and then accidentally trod on the Idealist, who was lying outside.

They all three simultaneously uttered a cry; the girl blew out the candle, the officer instinctively half drew his sword, and the student ran away.

Ever since that night, the poor, crazy fellow went about with a dagger, which he concealed in his belt, and it was his constant companion to the theater, and the stage door, when the actress's carriage used to wait for her, and to her house, where he nightly kept his painful watch.

His first idea was to kill his fortunate rival, then himself, then the theatrical princess, but at last, he lay down again outside her door, or stood on the pavement and watched the shadows, that flitted hither and thither on her window, turned by the magic spell of the lovely actress.

And then, the most incredible thing happened, something which he could never have hoped for, and which he scarcely believed when it did occur.

One evening, when she had been playing a very important part, she kept the carriage waiting much longer than usual; but at last she appeared, and got into it; she did not shut the door, however, but beckoned to the young Idealist to follow her.

He was almost delirious with joy, just as a moment before he had been almost mad from despair, and obeyed her immediately, and during the drive he lay at her feet and covered her hands with kisses. She allowed it quietly and even merrily, and when the carriage stopped at her door, she let him lift her out of the carriage, and went upstairs leaning on his arm.

There, the lady's maid showed him into a luxuriously furnished drawing-room, while the actress changed her dress.

Presently she appeared in her dressing gown, sat down carelessly in an easy chair, and asked him to sit down beside her.

"You take a great interest in me?" she said.

"You are my ideal!" the student cried enthusiastically.

The theatrical princess smiled, and said:

"Well, I will at any rate be an honest ideal; I will not deceive you, and you shall not be able to say that I have misused your youthful enthusiasm. I will give myself to you...."

"Oh! Heavens!" the poor Idealist exclaimed, throwing himself at her feet.

"Wait a moment! Wait a moment!" she said with a smile. "I have not finished yet. I can only love a man who is in a position to provide me with all those luxuries which an actress, or, if you like, which I cannot do without. As far as I know, you are poor, but I will belong to you, only for to-night, however, and in return you must promise me not to rave about me, or to follow me, from to-night. Will you do this?"

The wretched Idealist was kneeling before her; he was having a terrible mental struggle.

"Will you promise me to do this?" she said again.

"Yes," he said, almost groaning.

The next morning a man, who had buried his Ideal, tottered downstairs. He was pale enough; almost as pale as a corpse; but in spite of this, he is still alive, and if he has any Ideal at all at present, it is certainly not a theatrical princess.

STABLE PERFUME

Three ladies belonging to that class of society which has nothing useful to do, and therefore does not know how to employ its time sensibly, were sitting on a bench in the shade of some pine trees at Ischl, and were talking incidentally of their preference for all sorts of smells.

One of the ladies, Princess F —— , a slim, handsome brunette, declared there was nothing like the smell of Russian leather; she wore dull brown Russian leather boots, a Russian leather dress suspender, to keep her petticoats out of the dirt and dust, a Russian leather belt which spanned her wasp-like waist, carried a Russian leather purse, and even wore a brooch and bracelet of gilt Russian leather; people declared that her bedroom was papered with Russian leather, and that her lover was obliged to wear high Russian leather boots and tight breeches, but that on the other hand, her husband was excused from wearing anything at all in Russian leather.

Countess H —— , a very stout lady, who had formerly been very beautiful and of a very loving nature, but loving after the fashion of her time *à la* Parthenia and Griseldis, could not get over the vulgar taste of the young Princess. All she cared for was the smell of hay, and she it was who brought the scent *New Mown Hay* into fashion. Her ideal was a freshly mown field in the moonlight, and when she rolled slowly along, she looked like a moving haystack, and exhaled an odor of hay all about her.

The third lady's taste was even more peculiar than Countess H — — 's, and more vulgar than the Princess's, for the small, delicate, light-haired Countess W —— lived only for — the smell of stables. Her friends could absolutely not understand this; the Princess raised her beautiful, full arm with its broad bracelet to her Grecian nose and inhaled the sweet smell of the Russian leather, while the sentimental hay-rick exclaimed over and over again:

"How dreadful! What dost thou say to it, chaste moon?"

The delicate little Countess seemed very much embarrassed at the effect that her confession had had, and tried to justify her taste.

"Prince T —— told me that that smell had quite bewitched him once," she said; "it was in a Jewish town in Gallicia, where he was quartered once with his hussar regiment, and a number of poor, ragged circus riders, with half-starved horses came from Russia and put up a circus with a few poles and some rags of canvas, and the Prince went to see them, and found a woman among them, who was neither young nor beautiful, but bold and impudent; and the impudent woman wore a faded, bright red jacket, trimmed with old, shabby, imitation ermine, and that jacket stank of the stable, as the Prince expressed it, and she bewitched him with that odor, so that every time that the shameless wretch lay in his arms, and laughed impudently, and smelled abominably of the stable, he felt as if he were magnetized.

"How disgusting!" both the other ladies said, and involuntarily held their noses.

"What dost thou say to it, chaste moon?" the haystack said with a sigh, and the little light-haired Countess was abashed and held her tongue.

At the beginning of the winter season the three friends were together again in the gay, imperial city on the blue Danube. One morning the Princess accidentally met the enthusiast for the hay at the house of the little light-haired Countess, and the two ladies were obliged to go after her to her private riding-school, where she was taking her daily lesson. As soon as she saw them, she came up, and beckoned her riding-master to her to help her out of the saddle. He was a young man of extremely good and athletic build, which was set off by his tight breeches and his short velvet coat, and he ran up and took his lovely burden into his arms with visible pleasure, to help her off the quiet, perfectly broken horse.

When the ladies looked at the handsome, vigorous man, it was quite enough to explain their little friend's predilection for the smell of a stable, but when the latter saw their looks, she blushed up to the roots of her hair, and her only way out of the difficulty was to order the riding-master, in a very authoritative manner, to take the horse back to the stable. He merely bowed, with an indescribable smile, and obeyed her.

A few months afterwards, Viennese society was alarmed at the news that Countess W —— had been divorced from her husband. The event was all the more unexpected, as they had apparently always lived very happily together, and nobody was able to mention any man on whom she had bestowed even the most passing attention, beyond the requirements of politeness.

Long afterwards, however, a strange report became current. A chattering lady's maid declared that the handsome riding-master had once so far forgotten himself as to strike the Countess with his riding-whip; a groom had told the Count of the occurrence, and when he was going to call the insolent fellow to account for it, the Countess covered him with her own body, and thus gave occasion for the divorce.

Years had passed since then and the Countess H —— had grow stouter and more sentimental. Ischl and hayricks were not enough for her any longer; she spent the winter on lovely *Lago Maggoire*, where she walked among laurel bushes and cypress trees, and was rowed about on the luke warm, moonlight nights.

One evening she was returning home in the company of an English lady who was also a great lover of nature, from *Isola Bella*, when they met a beautiful private boat in which a very unusual couple were sitting; a small, delicate, light-haired woman, wrapped in a white burnoose, and a handsome, athletic man, in tight, white breeches, a short, black velvet coat trimmed with sable, a red fez on his head, and a riding whip in his hand.

Countess K —— involuntarily uttered a loud exclamation.

"What is the matter with you?" the English lady asked. "Do you know those people?"

"Certainly! She is a Viennese lady," Countess H —— whispered; "Countess W —— ."

"Oh! Indeed you are quite mistaken; it is a Count Savelli and his wife. They are a handsome couple, don't you think so?"

When the boat came nearer, she saw that in spite of that, it was little Countess W —— and that the handsome man was her former riding-master, whom she had married, and for whom she had bought a title from the Pope; and as the two boats passed each other, the short sable cloak, which was thrown carelessly over his shoulders, exhaled, like the old cat's skin jacket of that impudent female circus rider, a strong *stable perfume*.

THE ILL-OMENED GROOM

An impudent theft, to a very large amount, had been committed in the Capital. Jewels, a valuable watch set with diamonds, his wife's miniature in a frame enchased with brilliants, and a considerable sum in money, the whole amounting in value to a hundred and fifteen thousand florins, had been stolen. The banker himself went to the Director of Police to give notice of the robberies, but at the same time he begged as a special favor that the investigation might be carried on as quietly and considerately as possible, as he declared that he had not the slightest ground for suspecting anybody in particular, and did not wish any innocent person to be accused.

"First of all, give me the names of all the persons who regularly go into your bedroom," the police director said.

"Nobody, except my wife, my children, and Joseph, my valet, a man for whom I would answer as I would for myself."

"Then you think him absolutely incapable of committing such a deed?"

"Most decidedly I do," the banker replied.

"Very well; then can you remember whether on the day on which you first missed the articles that have been stolen, or on any days immediately preceding it, anybody who was not a member of your household, happened by chance to go to your bedroom?"

The banker thought for a moment, and then said with some hesitation:

"Nobody, absolutely nobody."

The experienced official, however, was struck by the banker's slight embarrassment and momentary blush, so he took his hand, and looking him straight in the face, he said:

"You are not quite candid with me; somebody was with you, and you wish to conceal the fact from me. You must tell me everything."

"No, no; indeed there was nobody here." "Then at present, there is only one person on whom any suspicion can rest — and that is your valet."

"I will vouch for his honesty," the banker replied immediately.

"You may be mistaken, and I shall be obliged to question the man."

"May I beg you to do it with every possible consideration?"

"You may rely upon me for that."

An hour later, the banker's valet was in the police director's private room, who first of all looked at his man very closely, and then came to the conclusion that such an honest, unembarrassed face, and such quiet, steady eyes could not possibly belong to a criminal.

"Do you know why I have sent for you?"

"No, your Honor."

"A large theft has been committed in your master's house," the police director continued, "from his bedroom. Do you suspect anybody? Who has been into the room, within the last few days?"

"Nobody but myself, except my master's family."

"Do you not see, my good fellow, that by saying that, you throw suspicion on yourself?"

"Surely, sir," the valet exclaimed, "you do not believe..."

"I must not believe anything; my duty is merely to investigate and to follow up any traces that I may discover," was the reply. "If you have been the only person to go into the room within the last few days, I must hold you responsible."

"My master knows me..."

The police director shrugged his shoulders: "Your master has vouched for your honesty, but that is not enough for me. You are the only person on whom, at present, any suspicion rests, and therefore I must — sorry as I am to do so — have you arrested."

"If that is so," the man said, after some hesitation, "I prefer to speak the truth, for my good name is more to me than my situation. Somebody was in my master's apartments yesterday."

"And this somebody was...?"

"A lady."

"A lady of his acquaintance?"

The valet did not reply for some time.

"It must come out," he said at length. "My master keeps a woman — you understand, sir, a pretty, fair woman; and he has furnished a house for her and goes to see her, but secretly of course, for if my mistress were to find it out, there would be a terrible scene. This person was with him yesterday."

"Were they alone?"

“I showed her in, and she was in his bedroom with him; but I had to call him out after a short time, as his confidential clerk wanted to speak to him, and so she was in the room alone for about a quarter of an hour.”

“What is her name?”

“Cæcelia K —— ; she is a Hungarian.” At the same time the valet gave him her address.

Then the director of police sent for the banker, who, on being brought face to face with his valet, was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the facts which the latter had alleged, painful as it was for him to do so; whereupon orders were given to take Cæcelia K —— into custody.

In less than half an hour, however, the police officer who had been dispatched for that purpose, returned and said that she had left her apartments, and most likely the Capital also, the previous evening. The unfortunate banker was almost in despair. Not only had he been robbed of a hundred and fifty thousand florins, but at the same time he had lost the beautiful woman, whom he loved with all the passion of which he was capable. He could not grasp the idea that a woman whom he had surrounded with Asiatic luxury, whose strangest whims he had gratified, and whose tyranny he had borne so patiently, could have deceived him so shamefully, and now he had a quarrel with his wife, and an end of all domestic peace, into the bargain.

The only thing the police could do was to raise the hue and cry after the lady, who had denounced herself by her flight, but it was all of no use. In vain did the banker, in whose heart hatred and thirst for revenge had taken the place of love, implore the Director of Police to employ every means to bring the beautiful criminal to justice, and in vain did he undertake to be responsible for all the costs of her prosecution, no matter how heavy they might be. Special police officers were told off to try and discover her, but Cæcelia K —— was so rude as not to allow herself to be caught.

Three years had passed, and the unpleasant story appeared to have been forgotten. The banker had obtained his wife’s pardon and — what he cared about a good deal more — he had found another charming mistress, and the police did not appear to trouble themselves about the beautiful Hungarian any more.

We must now change the scene to London. A wealthy lady who created much sensation in society, and who made many conquests both by her beauty and her free behavior, was in want of a groom. Among the many applicants for the situation, there was a young man, whose good looks and manners gave people the impression that he must have been very well educated. This was a recommendation in the eyes of the lady's maid, and she took him immediately to her mistress's boudoir. When he entered, he saw a beautiful, voluptuous looking woman, at most, twenty-five years of age, with large, bright eyes and blue-black hair, which seemed to increase the brilliancy of her fair complexion, lying on a sofa. She looked at the young man, who also had thick black hair, and who turned his glowing black eyes to the ground, beneath her searching gaze, with evident satisfaction, and she seemed particularly taken with his slender, athletic build, and then she said half lazily and half proudly:

"What is your name?"

"Lajos Mariassi."

"A Hungarian?"

And there was a strange look in her eyes.

"Yes."

"How did you come here?"

"I am one of the many emigrants who have forfeited their country and their life; and I, who come of a good family, and who was an officer of the Honveds, must now ... go into service, and thank God if I find a mistress who is at the same time beautiful and an aristocrat, as you are."

Miss Zoë — that was the lovely woman's name — smiled, and at the same time showed two rows of pearly teeth.

"I like your looks," she said, "and I feel inclined to take you into my service, if you are satisfied with my terms."

"A lady's whim," her maid said to herself, when she noticed the ardent looks which Miss Zoë gave her manservant, "which will soon pass away." But that experienced female was mistaken that time.

Zoë was really in love, and the respect with which Lajos treated her, put her into a very bad temper. One evening, when she intended to go to the Italian Opera, she countermanded her carriage, and refused to see her noble adorer, who wished to throw himself at her feet, and ordered her groom to be sent up to her boudoir.

"Lajos," she began, "I am not at all satisfied with you."

"Why, Madame?"

"I do not wish to have you about me any longer; here are your wages for three months. Leave the house immediately." And she began to walk up and down the room, impatiently.

"I will obey you, Madame," the groom replied, "but I shall not take my wages."

"Why not?" she asked hastily.

"Because then I should be under your authority for three months," Lajos said, "and I intend to be free, this very moment, so that I may be able to tell you that I entered your service, not for the sake of your money, but because I love and adore a beautiful woman in you."

"You love me!" Zoë exclaimed. "Why did you not tell me sooner? I merely wished to banish you from my presence, because I love you, and did not think that you loved me. But you shall smart for having tormented me so. Come to my feet immediately."

The groom knelt before the lovely girl, whose moist lips sought his at the same instant.

From that moment Lajos became her favorite. Of course he was not allowed to be jealous, as the young lord was still her official lover, who had the pleasure of paying everything for that licentious beauty, and besides him, there was a whole army of so-called "good friends," who were fortunate enough to obtain a smile now and then, and occasionally, something more, and who, in return, had permission to present her with rare flowers, a parrot or diamonds.

The more intimate Zoë became with Lajos, the more uncomfortable she felt when he looked at her, as he frequently did, with undisguised contempt. She was wholly under his influence and was afraid of him, and one day, while he was playing with her dark curls, he said jeeringly:

"It is usually said that contrasts usually attract each other, and yet you are as dark as I am."

She smiled, and then tore off her black curls, and immediately the most charming, fair-haired woman was sitting by the side of Lajos, who looked at her attentively, but without any surprise.

He left his mistress at about midnight, in order to look after the horses, as he said, and she put on a very pretty nightdress and went to bed. She remained awake for fully an hour, expecting her lover, and then she went to sleep, but in two hours' time she was roused from her slumbers, and saw a police inspector and two constables by the side of her magnificent bed.

"Whom do you want?" she cried.

"Cæcelia K —— ."

"I am Miss Zoë."

"Oh! I know you," the Inspector said with a smile; "be kind enough to take off your dark locks, and you will be Cæcelia K —— . I arrest you in the name of the law."

"Good heavens!" she stammered, "Lajos has betrayed me."

"You are mistaken, Madame," the Inspector replied; "he has merely done his duty."

"What? Lajos . . . my lover?"

"No, Lajos, the detective."

Cæcelia got out of bed, and the next moment she sank fainting onto the floor.

AN EXOTIC PRINCE

In the forthcoming reminiscences, a lady will frequently be mentioned who played a great part in the annals of the police from 1848 to 1866, and we will call her *Wanda von Chabert*. Born in Galicia of German parents, and carefully brought up in every way, she married a rich and handsome officer of noble birth, from love, when she was sixteen. The young couple, however, lived beyond their means, and when her husband died suddenly, two years after they were married, she was left anything but well off.

As Wanda had grown accustomed to luxury and amusement, the quiet life in her parents' house did not suit her any longer, and even while she was still in mourning for her husband, she allowed a Hungarian magnate to make love to her, and she went off with him at a venture, and continued the same extravagant life which she had led when her husband was alive, at her own authority. At the end of two years, however, her lover left her in a town in North Italy, almost without means, and she was thinking of going on the stage, when chance provided her with another resource, which enabled her to reassure her position in society. She became a secret police agent, and soon was one of their most valuable members. In addition to the proverbial charms and wit of a Polish woman, she also possessed high linguistic attainments, and she spoke Polish, Russian, French, German, English and Italian, almost equally fluently and correctly; then she had also that encyclopædic polish, which impresses most people much more than the most profound learning of a specialist. She was very attractive in appearance, and she knew how to set off her good looks by all the arts of dress and coquetry.

In addition to this, she was a woman of the world in the widest sense of the term; pleasure-loving, faithless, unstable, and therefore never in any danger of really losing her heart, and consequently her head. She used to change the place of her abode, according to what she had to do. Sometimes she lived in Paris among the Polish emigrants, in order to find out what they were doing, and maintained intimate relations with the Tuileries and the Palais Royal at the same time; then she went to London for a short time, or hurried off to Italy, to watch the Hungarian exiles, only to reappear suddenly in Switzerland, or at one of the fashionable German watering-places.

In revolutionary circles, she was looked upon as an active member of the great *League of Freedom*, and diplomatists regarded her as an influential friend of Napoleon III.

She knew every one, but especially those men whose names were to be met with every day, in the papers, and she reckoned Victor Emmanuel, Rouher, Gladstone, and Gortschakoff among her friends, as well as Mazzini, Kossuth, Garibaldi, Mieroslawsky and Bakunin.

In the spring of 185- she was at Vevey, on the lovely lake of Geneva, and went into raptures when talking to an old German diplomatist about the beauties of nature, and about Calame, Stifter and Turgenev, whose “Diary of a Hunter” had just become fashionable.

One day a man appeared at the *table d’hôte*, who excited unusual attention, and hers especially, so that there was nothing strange in her asking the proprietor of the hotel what his name was; and she was told that he was a wealthy Brazilian, and that his name was Don Escovedo.

Whether it was an accident, or whether he responded to the interest which the young woman felt for him, at any rate she constantly met him wherever she went, when she was taking a walk, or was on the lake, or was looking at the newspapers in the reading room; and at last she was obliged to confess to herself that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen. Tall, slim, and yet muscular, the young, beardless Brazilian had a head which any woman might envy him; features which were not only beautiful and noble, but were also extremely delicate, with dark eyes which possessed a wonderful charm, and thick, auburn curly hair, which completed the attractiveness and the strangeness of his appearance.

They soon became acquainted, through a Prussian officer, whom the Brazilian had requested to introduce him to the beautiful Polish lady — for Frau von Chabert was taken for one in Vevey — and she, cold and designing as she was, blushed slightly when he stood before her for the first time; and when he gave her his arm he could feel her hand tremble slightly on it. The same evening they went out riding together, the next he was lying at her feet, and on the third she was his. For four weeks the lovely Wanda and the Brazilian lived together as if they had been in Paradise, but he could not deceive her searching eyes any longer.

For her sharp and practiced gaze had already discovered in him that indefinable something which makes a man appear a suspicious character. Any other woman would have been pained and horrified at such a discovery, but she found the strange consolation in it, that her handsome adorer had promised also to become a very interesting object for her pursuit, and so she began systematically to watch the man who lay unsuspectingly at her feet.

She soon found out that he was no conspirator, but she asked herself in vain whether she was to look for a common swindler, an impudent adventurer or perhaps even a criminal in him. The day that she had foreseen soon came; the Brazilian's banker "unaccountably" had omitted to send him any money, and so he borrowed some of her. "So he is a male courtesan," she said to herself; and the handsome man soon required money again, and she lent it to him, until at last he left suddenly, and nobody knew where he had gone to; only this much, that he had left Vevey as the companion of an old but wealthy Wallachian lady; and so this time, clever Wanda was duped.

A year afterwards she met the Brazilian unexpectedly at Lucca, with an insipid-looking, light-haired, thin Englishwoman on his arm. Wanda stood still and looked at him steadily, but he glanced at her quite indifferently; he did not choose to know her again.

The next morning, however, his valet brought her a letter from him, which contained the amount of his debt in Italian hundred liri notes, which were accompanied by a very cool excuse. Wanda was satisfied, but she wished to find out who the lady was, in whose company she constantly saw Don Escovedo.

"Don Escovedo."

An Austrian count, who had a loud and silly laugh, said:

"Who has saddled you with that yarn? The lady is Lady Nitingsdale, and his name is Romanesco."

"Romanesco?"

"Yes, he is a rich Boyar from Moldavia, where he has extensive estates."

Romanesco kept a faro bank in his apartments, and he certainly cheated, for he nearly always won; it was not long, therefore, before other people in good society at Lucca shared Madame von Chabert's suspicions, and consequently Romanesco thought it advisable to vanish as suddenly from

Lucca as Escovedo had done from Vevey, and without leaving any more traces behind him.

Some time afterwards, Madame von Chabert was on the island of Heligoland, for the sea-bathing; and one day she saw Escovedo-Romanesco sitting opposite to her at the *table d'hôte*, in very animated conversation with a Russian lady; only his hair had turned black since she had seen him last. Evidently his light hair had become too compromising for him.

"The sea water seems to have a very remarkable effect upon your hair," Wanda said to him spitefully, in a whisper.

"Do you think so?" he replied, condescendingly.

"I fancy that at one time your hair was fair."

"You are mistaking me for somebody else," the Brazilian replied, quietly.

"I am not."

"For whom do you take me, pray?" he said with an insolent smile.

"For Don Escovedo."

"I am Count Dembizki from Valkynia," the former Brazilian said with a bow; "perhaps you would like to see my passport."

"Well, perhaps...."

And at last, he had the impudence to show her his false passport.

A year afterwards, Wanda met Count Dembizki in Baden, near Vienna. His hair was still black, but he had a magnificent, full, black beard; he had become a Greek prince, and his name was Anastasio Maurokordatos. She met him once in one of the side walks in the park, where he could not avoid her. "If it goes on like this," she called out to him in a mocking voice, "the next time I see you, you will be king of some negro tribe or other."

That time, however, the Brazilian did not deny his identity; on the contrary, he surrendered at discretion, and implored her not to betray him, and as she was not revengeful, she pardoned him, after enjoying his terror for a time, and promised him that she would hold her tongue, as long as he did nothing contrary to the laws.

"First of all, I must beg you not to gamble."

"You have only to command; and we do not know each other in future?"

"I must certainly insist on that," she said maliciously.

The Exotic Prince had, however, made the conquest of the charming daughter of a wealthy Austrian Count, and had cut out an excellent young officer who was wooing her; and he, in his despair began to make love to

Frau von Chabert, and at last told her he loved her, but she only laughed at him.

"You are very cruel," he stammered in confusion.

"I? What are you thinking about?" Wanda replied, still smiling; "all I mean is, that you have directed your love to the wrong address, for Countess...."

"Do not speak of her; she is engaged to another man."

"As long as I choose to permit it," she said; "but what will you do, if I bring her back to your arms? Will you still call me cruel?"

"Can you do this?" the young officer asked, in great excitement.

"Well, supposing I can do it, what shall I be then?"

"An angel, whom I shall thank on my knees."

A few days later, the rivals met at a coffee house; the Greek prince began to lie and boast, and the Austrian officer gave him the lie direct, and in consequence, it was arranged that they should fight a duel with pistols next morning in a wood close to Baden. But as the officer was leaving the house with his second the next morning, a Police Commissary came up to him and begged him not to trouble himself any further about the matter, but another time to be more careful before accepting a challenge.

"What does it mean?" the officer asked, in some surprise.

"It means that this Maurokordatos is a dangerous swindler and adventurer, whom we have just taken into custody."

"He is not a prince?"

"No; a circus rider."

An hour later the officer received a letter from the charming Countess, in which she humbly begged for pardon; the happy lover set off to go and see her immediately, but on the way a sudden thought struck him, and so he turned back in order to thank beautiful Wanda, as he had promised, on his knees.

VIRTUE IN THE BALLET

It is a strange feeling of pleasure that the writer about the stage and the characters of the theatrical feels, when he occasionally discovers a good, honest human heart in the twilight behind the scenes. Of all the witches and semi-witches of that eternal *Walpurgis night*, whose boards represent the world, the ladies of the ballet have at all times and in all places been regarded at least like saints, although Hackländer repeatedly told in vain in his earlier novels, to convince us that true virtue appears in tights and short petticoats and is only to be found in ballet girls. I fear that the popular voice is right as a general rule, but is equally true that here and there one finds a pearl in the dust, and even in the dirt, and the short story that I am about to relate, will best illustrate my assertion.

Whenever a new, youthful dancer appeared at the Vienna Opera House, the *habitués* began to go after her, and did not rest, until the fresh young rose had been plucked by some hand or other, though often it was old and trembling. For how could those young and pretty, sometimes even beautiful girls who, with every right to life, love and pleasure, were poor and had to subsist on a very small salary, resist the seduction of the smell of flowers and of the flash of diamonds? And if one resisted it, it was love, some real, strong passion, that gave her the strength for this, generally, however, only to go after luxury all the more shamelessly and selfishly, when her lover forsook her.

At the beginning of the winter season of 185 — the pleasing news was spread among the *habitués*, that a girl of dazzling beauty was going to appear very shortly in the ballet at the Court Theater. When the evening came, nobody had yet seen that much discussed phenomenon, but report spread her name from mouth to mouth; it was Satanella. The moment when the troop of elastic figures in fluttering petticoats jumped onto the stage, every opera-glass in the boxes and stalls was directed on the stage, and at the same instant the new dancer was discovered, although she timidly kept in the background.

She was one of those girls who are surrounded by the bright halo of virginity, but who at the same time present a splendid type of womanhood; she had the voluptuous form of Rubens' second wife, whom they called, not untruly, the risen Green Helen, and her head with its delicate nose, its small full mouth, and its dark inquiring eyes, reminded people of the celebrated picture of the Flemish Venus in the *Belvedere* in Vienna.

She took the old guard of the Vienna Court Theater by storm, and the very next morning a perfect shower of *billets doux*, jewels and bouquets fell into the poor ballet girl's attic. For a moment she was dazzled by all this splendor and looked at the gold bracelets, the brooches set with rubies and emeralds, and at the sparkling earrings, with flushed cheeks, but then an unspeakable terror of being lost and of sinking into degradation, seized her, and she pushed the jewels away and was about to send them back. But as is usual in such cases, her mother intervened in favor of *the generous gentlemen*, and so the jewels were accepted, but the notes which accompanied them were not answered at present. A second and a third discharge of Cupid's artillery followed, without making any impression on that virtuous girl; in consequence a greater number of her admirers grew quiet, though some continued to send her presents, and to assail her with love letters, and one had the courage to go still further.

He was a wealthy banker, who had just called on the mother of Henrietta, as we will call the fair-haired ballet girl, and then one evening, quite unexpectedly, on the girl herself. He by no means met with the reception which he had expected from the pretty girl in a faded cotton gown; Henrietta treated him with a certain amount of good humored respect, which had a much more unpleasant effect on him than that coldness and prudery, which is so often synonymous with coquetry and selfish speculation, among a certain class of women. In spite of everything, however, he soon went to see her daily, and lavished his wealth, without her asking him for anything, on the beautiful dancer, and he gave her no chance of refusing, for he relied on the mother for everything. She took pretty, small apartments for her daughter and herself in the *Kärntnerstrasse* and furnished them elegantly, hired a cook and housemaid, made an arrangement with a fly-driver, and lastly clothed her daughter's lovely limbs in silk, velvet and valuable lace.

Henrietta persistently held her tongue at all this; only once she said to her mother in the presence of the Stock Exchange *Jupiter*:

"Have you won a prize in the lottery?"

"Of course, I have," her mother replied with a laugh.

The girl, however, had given away her heart long before, and quite contrary to all precedent, to a man whose very name she was ignorant of, and who sent her no diamonds, and not even any flowers. But he was young and good-looking, and stood so retiringly, and so evidently in love, at the small side door of the Opera House every night, when she got out of her antediluvian rickety fly, and also when she got into it again after the performance, that she could not help noticing him. Soon, he began to follow her wherever she went, and once he summoned up courage to speak to her, when she had been to see a friend in a remote suburb. He was very nervous, but she thought all that he said very clear and logical, and she did not hesitate for a moment to confess that she returned his love.

"You have made me the happiest, and at the same time the most wretched of men," he said after a pause.

"What do you mean?" she said innocently.

"Do you not belong to another man?" he asked her in a sad voice.

She shook her abundant, light curls.

"Up till now, I have belonged to myself alone, and I will prove it to you, by requesting you to call upon me frequently and without restraint. Everyone shall know that we are lovers. I am not ashamed of belonging to an honorable man, but I will not sell myself."

"But your splendid apartments, and your dresses," her lover interposed shyly, "you cannot pay for them out of your salary."

"My mother has won a large prize in the lottery, or made a hit on the Stock Exchange." And with these words, the determined girl cut short all further explanations.

That same evening the young man paid his first visit, to the horror of the girl's mother, who was so devoted to the Stock Exchange, and he came again the next day, and nearly every day. Her mother's reproaches were of no more avail than Jupiter's furious looks, and when the latter one day asked for an explanation as to *certain visits*, the girl said proudly:

"That is very soon explained. He loves me as I love him, and I presume you can guess the rest."

And he certainly did guess the rest, and disappeared, and with him the shower of gold ceased.

The mother cried and the daughter laughed. “I never gave the worn out old rake any hopes, and what does it matter to me, what bargain you made with him? I always thought that you had been lucky on the Stock Exchange. Now, however, we must seriously consider about giving up our apartments, and make up our minds to live as we did before.”

“Are you really capable of making such a sacrifice for me, to renounce luxury and to have my poverty?” her lover said.

“Certainly I am! Is not that a matter of course when one loves?” the ballet girl replied in surprise.

“Then let me inform you, my dear Henrietta,” he said, “that I am not so poor as you think; I only wished to find out, whether I could make myself loved for my own sake, I have done so. I am Count L —— , and though I am a minor and dependent on my parents, yet I have enough to be able to retain your pretty rooms for you, and to offer you, if not a luxurious, at any rate a comfortable existence.”

On hearing this, Mamma dried her tears immediately. Count L —— became the girl’s acknowledged lover, and they passed the happiest hours together. Unselfish as the girl was, she was yet such a thoroughly ingenuous Viennese, that, whenever she saw anything that took her fancy, whether it was a dress, a cloak or one of those pretty little ornaments for a side table, she used to express her admiration in such terms, as forced her lover to make her a present of the object in question. In this way, Count L —— incurred enormous debts, which his father paid repeatedly; at last, however, he inquired into the cause of all this extravagance, and when he discovered it, he gave his son the choice of giving up his connection with the dancer, or of relinquishing all claims on the paternal money box.

It was a sorrowful evening, when Count L —— told his mistress of his father’s determination.

“If I do not give you up, I shall be able to do nothing for you,” he said at last, “and I shall not even know how I should manage to live myself, for my father is just the man to allow me to want, if I defy him. That, however, is a very secondary consideration; but as a man of honor, I cannot bind you, who have every right to luxury and enjoyment, to myself, from the moment when I cannot even keep you from want, and so I must set you at liberty.”

“But I will not give you up,” Henrietta said proudly.

The young Count shook his head sadly.

“Do you love me?” the ballet girl said, quickly.

“More than my life.”

“Then we will not separate, as long as I have anything,” she continued.

And she would not give up her connection with him, and when his father actually turned Count L —— into the street, she took her lover into her own lodgings. He obtained a situation as a copyist clerk in a lawyer’s office, and she sold her valuable dresses and jewels, and so they lived for more than a year.

The young man’s father did not appear to trouble his head about them, but nevertheless he knew everything that went on in their small home, and knew every article that the ballet girl sold; until at last, softened by such love and strength of character, he himself made the first advances to a reconciliation with his son.

At the present time, Henrietta wears the diamonds which formerly belonged to the old Countess, and it is long since she was a ballet girl, for now she sits by the side of her husband in a carriage on whose panels their armorial bearings are painted.

IN HIS SWEETHEART’S LIVERY

At present she is a great lady, an elegant, intellectual woman, a celebrated actress; but in the year 1847, when our story begins, she was a beautiful, but not very moral girl, and then it was that the young, talented Hungarian poet, who was the first to discover her gifts for the stage, made her acquaintance.

The slim, ardent girl, with her bright, brown hair and her large blue eyes, attracted the careless poet, and he loved her, and all that was good and noble in her nature, put forth fresh buds and blossoms in the sunshine of his poetic love.

They lived in an attic in the old Imperial city on the Danube, and she shared his poverty, his triumphs and his pleasures, and she would have become his true and faithful wife, if the Hungarian revolution had not torn him from her arms.

The poet became the soldier of freedom, and followed the Magyar tricolor, and the Honved drums, while she was carried away by the current of the movement in the capital, and she might have been seen discharging her musket, like a brave Amazon, at the Croats, who were defending the town against Görgey’s assaulting battalions.

But at last Hungary was subdued, and was governed as if it had been a conquered country.

It was said that the young poet had fallen at Temesvar, and his mistress wept for him, and married another man, which was nothing either new or extraordinary. Her name was now Frau von Kubinyi, but her married life was not happy; and one day it occurred to her that her lover had told her that she had talent for the stage, and whatever he said, had always proved correct, so she separated from her husband, studied a few parts, appeared on the stage, and the public, the critics, actors and literature were lying at her feet.

She obtained a very profitable engagement, and her reputation increased with every part she played; and before the end of a year after her first appearance, she was the lioness of society. Everybody paid homage to her, and the wealthiest men tried to obtain her favors; but she remained cold and reserved, until the General commanding the district, who was a handsome man of noble bearing, and a gentleman in the highest sense of the word, approached her.

Whether she was flattered at seeing that powerful man, before whom millions trembled, and who had to decide over the life and death, the honor and happiness of so many thousands, fettered by her soft curls, or whether her enigmatical heart for once really felt what true love was, suffice it to say, that in a short time she was his acknowledged mistress, and her princely lover surrounded her with the luxury of an Eastern queen.

But just then a miracle occurred — the resurrection of a dead man. Frau von Kubinyi was driving through the *Corso* in the General's carriage; she was lying back negligently in the soft cushions, and looking carelessly at the crowd on the pavement. Then, she caught sight of a common Austrian soldier and screamed out aloud.

Nobody heard that cry, which came from the depths or a woman's heart, nobody saw how pale and how excited that woman was, who usually seemed made of marble, not even the soldier who was the cause of it. He was a Hungarian poet, who, like so many other *Honveds*, now wore the uniform of an Austrian soldier.

Two days later, to his no small surprise he was told to go to the General in command, as orderly, and when he reported himself to the adjutant, he told him to go to Frau von Kubinyi's, and to await her orders.

Our poet only knew her by report, but he hated and despised the beautiful woman, who had sold herself to the enemy of the country, most intensely; he had no choice, however, but to obey.

When he arrived at her house, he seemed to be expected, for the porter knew his name, took him into his lodge, and without any further explanation, told him immediately to put on the livery of his mistress, which was lying there ready for him. He ground his teeth, but resigned himself without a word to his wretched, though laughable fate; it was quite clear that the actress had some purpose in making the poet wear her livery. He tried to remember whether he could formerly have offended her by his notices as a theatrical critic, but before he could arrive at any conclusion, he was told to go and show himself to Frau von Kubinyi.

She evidently wished to enjoy his humiliation.

He was shown into a small drawing-room, which was furnished with an amount of taste and magnificence such as he had never seen before, and was told to wait. But he had not been alone many minutes, before the door-curtains were parted and Frau von Kubinyi came in, calm but deadly pale, in a splendid dressing gown of some Turkish material, and he recognized his former mistress.

"Irma!" he exclaimed.

The cry came from his heart, and it also affected the heart of the woman, who was surfeited with pleasure, so greatly that the next moment she was lying on the breast of the man whom she had believed to be dead, but only for a moment, and then he freed himself from her.

"We are fated to meet again thus!" she began.

"Not through any fault of mine," he replied bitterly.

"And not through mine either," she said quickly; "everybody thought that you were dead, and I wept for you; that is my justification."

"You are really too kind," he replied sarcastically. "How can you condescend to make any excuses to me? I wear your livery, and you have to order, and I have to obey; our relative positions are clear enough."

Frau von Kubinyi turned away to hide her tears.

"I did not intend to hurt your feelings," he continued: "but I must confess that it would have been better for both of us, if we had not met again. But what do you mean by making me wear your livery? It is not enough that I have been robbed of my happiness? Does it afford you any pleasure to humiliate me as well?"

"How can you think that?" the actress exclaimed. "Oh! Ever since I have discovered your unhappy lot, I have thought of nothing but the means of delivering you from it, and until I succeed in doing this, however, I can at least make it more bearable for you."

"I understand," the unhappy poet said with a sneer. "And in order to do this, you have begged your present worshiper, to turn your former lover into a footman."

"What a thing to say to me!"

"Can you find any other plea?"

"You wish to punish me for having loved you, idolized you, I suppose?" the painter continued. "So exactly like a woman! But I can perfectly well understand that the situation promises to have a fresh charm for you..."

Before he could finish what he was saying, the actress quickly left the room; he could hear her sobbing, but he did not regret his words, and his contempt and hatred for her only increased, when he saw the extravagance and the princely luxury with which she was surrounded. But what was the use of his indignation? He was wearing her livery, he was obliged to wait upon her and to obey her, for she had the corporal's cane at her command, and it really seemed as if he incurred the vengeance of the offended woman; as if the General's insolent mistress wished to make him feel her whole power; as if he were not to be spared the deepest humiliation.

The General and two of Frau von Kubinyi's friends, who were servants of the Muses like she was, for one was a ballet dancer, and the two others were actresses, had come to tea, and he was to wait on them.

While it was getting ready, he heard them laughing in the next room, and the blood flew to his head, and when the butler opened the door Frau von Kubinyi appeared on the General's arm; she did not, however, look at her new footman, her former lover, triumphantly or contemptuously, but she gave him a glance of the deepest commiseration.

Could he after all have wronged her?

Hatred and love, contempt and jealousy were struggling in his breast, and when he had to fill the glasses, the bottle shook in his hand.

"Is this the man?" the General said, looking at him closely.

Frau von Kubinyi nodded.

"He was evidently not born for a footman," the General added.

"And still less for a soldier," the actress observed.

These words fell heavily on the unfortunate poet's heart, but she was evidently taking his part, and trying to rescue him from his terrible position.

Suspicion, however, once more gained the day.

"She is tired of all pleasures, and satisfied with enjoyment," he said to himself; "she requires excitement and it amuses her to see the man whom she formerly loved, and who, as she knows, still loves her, tremble before her. And when she pleases she can see me tremble; not for my life, but for fear of the disgrace which she can inflict upon me at the moment if it should give her any pleasure."

But suddenly the actress gave him a look which was so sad and so imploring, that he looked down in confusion.

From that time he remained in her house without performing any duties, and without receiving any orders from her; in fact he never saw her, and did not venture to ask after her, and two months had passed in this way, when the General unexpectedly sent for him. He waited, with many others, in the ante-room, and when the General came back from parade, he saw him and beckoned him to follow, and as soon as they were alone, he said:

“You are free, as you have been allowed to purchase your discharge.”

“Good heavens!” the poet stammered, “how am I to ...”

“That is already done,” the General replied. “You are free.”

“How is it possible? How can I thank your Excellency!”

“You owe me no thanks,” he replied; “Frau von Kubinyi bought you out.”

The poor poet’s heart seemed to stop; he could not speak, nor even stammer a word; but with a low bow, he rushed out and tore wildly through the streets, until he reached the mansion of the woman whom he had so misunderstood, quite out of breath; he must see her again, and throw himself at her feet.

“Where are you going to?” the porter asked him.

“To Frau von Kubinyi’s.”

“She is not here.”

“Not here?”

“She has gone away.”

“Gone away? Where to?”

“She started for Paris two hours ago.”

DELILA

In a former reminiscence, we made the acquaintance of a lady, who had done the police many services in former years, and whom we called Wanda von Chabert. It is no exaggeration, if we say that she was at the same time the cleverest, the most charming and the most selfish woman whom one could possibly meet. She was certainly not exactly what is called beautiful, for neither her face nor her figure were symmetrical enough for that, but if her head was not beautiful in the style of the antique, neither like the *Venus* of Milo nor Ludoirsi's *Juno*, it was, on the other hand, in the highest sense delightful like the ladies whom Wateau and Mignard painted. Everything in her little face, and in its frame of soft brown hair was attractive and seductive, her low, Grecian forehead, her bright, almond shaped eyes, her small nose, and her full, voluptuous lips, her middling height and her small waist with its, perhaps, almost too full bust, and above all her walk, that half indolent, half coquettish swaying of her broad hips, were all maddeningly alluring.

And this woman, who was born for love, was as eager for pleasure and as amorous as few other women have even been, but for that very reason she never ran any danger of allowing her victims to escape her from pity; on the contrary, she soon grew tired of each of her favorites, and her connection with the police was then extremely useful to her, in order to get rid of an inconvenient, or jealous lover.

Before the war between Austria and Italy in 1859, Frau von Chabert was in London, where she lived alone in a small, one-storied house with her servants, and was in constant communication with emigrants from all countries.

She herself was thought to be a Polish refugee, and the luxury by which she was surrounded, and a fondness for sport, and above all for horses, which was remarkable even in England, made people give her the title of Countess. At that period Count T —— was one of the most prominent members of the Hungarian propaganda, and Frau von Chabert was commissioned to pay particular attention to all he said and did; but in spite of all the trouble she took, she had not hitherto even succeeded in making his acquaintance. He lived the life of a misanthrope, quite apart from the great social stream of London, and he was not believed to be either gallant, or ardent in love. Fellow-countrymen of his, who had known him formerly, during the Magyar revolution, described him as very cautious, cold and silent, so that if any man possessed a charm against the toils, which she set for him, it was he.

Just then it happened that as Wanda was riding in Hyde Park quite early one morning before there were many people about, her thoroughbred English mare took fright, and threatened to throw the plucky rider, who did not for a moment lose her presence of mind, from the saddle. Before her groom had time to come to her assistance, a man in a Hungarian braided coat rushed from the path, and caught hold of the animal's reins. When the mare had grown quite quiet, he was about to go away with a slight bow, but Frau von Chabert detained him, so that she might thank him, and so had leisure to examine him more closely. He was neither young nor handsome, but was well-made, like all Hungarians are, and had an interesting and very expressive face. He had a sallow complexion, which was set off by a short, black full beard, and he looked as if he were suffering, while he fixed two, great, black fanatical eyes on the beautiful young woman, who was smiling at him so amiably, and it was the strange look in those large eyes which aroused in the soul of the woman who was so excitable, that violent, but passing feeling which she called *love*. She turned her horse and accompanied the stranger on his side, and he seemed to be even more charmed by her chatter than by her appearance, for his grave face grew more and more animated, and at last he himself became quite friendly and talkative. When he took leave of her, Wanda gave him her card, on the back of which her address was written, and he immediately gave her his in return.

She thanked him and rode off, looking at his name as she did so; it was Count T —— .

She felt inclined to give a shout of pleasure when she found that the noble quarry, which she had been hunting so long, had at last come into her preserves, but she did not even turn her head round to look at him, such was the command which that woman had over herself and her movements.

Count T —— called upon her the very next day, soon he came every day, and in less than a month after that innocent adventure in Hyde Park, he was at her feet; for when Frau von Chabert made up her mind to be loved, nobody was able to withstand her. She became the Count's confidante almost as speedily as she had become his mistress, and every day, and almost every hour, she, with the most delicate coquetry, laid fresh fetters on the Hungarian Samson. Did she love him?

Certainly she did, after her own fashion, and at first she had not the remotest idea of betraying him; she even succeeded in completely concealing her connection with him, not only in London but also in Vienna.

Then the war of 1859 broke out, and like most Hungarian and Polish refugees, Count T —— hurried off to Italy, in order to place himself at the disposal of that great and patriotic Piedmontese statesman, Cavour.

Wanda went with him, and took the greatest interest in his revolutionary intrigues in Turin; for some time she seemed to be his right hand, and it looked as if she had become unfaithful to her present patrons. Through his means, she soon became on intimate terms with Piedmontese government circles, and that was his destruction.

A young Italian diplomatist, who frequently negotiated with Count T —— , or in his absence, with Wanda, fell madly in love with the charming Polish woman, and she, who was never cruel, more especially when she herself had caught fire, allowed herself to be conquered by the handsome, intellectual, daring man. In measure as her passion for the Italian increased, so her feelings for Count T —— declined, and at last she felt that her connection with him was nothing but a hindrance and a burden, and as soon as Wanda had reached that point, her adorer was as good as lost.

Count T —— was not a man whom she could just coolly dismiss, or with whom she might venture to trifle, and that she knew perfectly well; so in order to avoid a catastrophe, the consequences of which might be incalculable for her, she did not let him notice the change in her feelings towards him at first, and kept the Italian, who belonged to her, at a proper distance.

When peace had been concluded, and the great, peaceful revolution, which found its provisional settlement in the Constitution of February and in the Hungarian agreement, began in Austria, the Hungarian refugees determined to send Count T —— to Hungary, that he might assume the direction of affairs there. But as he was still an outlaw, and as the death sentence of Arab hung over his head like the sword of Damocles, he consulted with Wanda about the ways and means of reaching his fatherland unharmed and of remaining there undiscovered. Although that clever woman thought of a plan immediately, yet she told Count T —— that she would think the matter over, and she did not bring forward her proposition for a few days, which was then, however, received by the Count and his friends with the highest approval, and was immediately carried into execution. Frau von Chabert went to Vienna as Marchioness Spinola, and T —— accompanied her as her footman; he had cut his hair short, and shaved off his beard; so that in his livery, he was quite unrecognizable. They passed the frontier in safety, and reached Vienna without any interference from the authorities; and there they first of all went to a small hotel, but soon took a small, handsome flat in the center of the town. Count T —— immediately hunted up some members of his party, who had been in constant communication with the emigrants, since Vilagos, and the conspiracy was soon in excellent train, while Wanda whiled away her time with a hussar officer, without, however, losing sight of her lover and of his dangerous activity, for a moment, on that account.

And at last, when the fruit was ripe for falling into her lap, she was sitting in the private room of the Minister of Police, opposite to the man with whom she was going to make the evil compact.

“The emigrants must be very uneasy and disheartened at an agreement with, and reconciliation to, Hungary,” he began.

“Do not deceive yourself,” Frau von Chabert replied; “nothing is more dangerous in politics than optimism, and the influence of the revolutionary propaganda was never greater than it is at present. Do not hope to conciliate the Magyars by half concessions, and, above all things, do not underestimate the movement, which is being organized openly, in broad daylight.”

“You are afraid of a revolution?”

“I know that they are preparing for one, and that they expect everything from that alone.”

The skeptical man smiled.

“Give me something besides views and opinions, and then I will believe...”

“I will give you the proof,” Wanda said, “but before I do you the greatest service that lies in my power, I must be sure that I shall be rewarded for all my skill and trouble."

"Can you doubt it?"

"I will be open with you," Wanda continued.

"During the insurrectionary war in Transylvania, Urban had excellent spies, but they have not been paid to this day. I want money...."

"How much?"

With inimitable ease, the beautiful woman mentioned a very considerable sum. The skeptical man got up to give a few orders, and a short time afterwards the money was in Wanda's hands.

"Well?"

"The emigrants have sent one of their most influential and talented members to organize the revolution in Hungary."

"Have they sent him already?"

"More than that, for Count T —— is in Vienna at this moment."

"Do you know where he is hiding?"

"Yes."

"And you are sure that you are not mistaken?"

"I am most assuredly not mistaken," she replied with a frivolous laugh; "Count T —— , who was my admirer in London and Turin, is here in my house, as my footman."

An hour later, the Count was arrested. But Wanda only wished to get rid of her tiresome adorer, and not to destroy him. She had been on the most intimate terms with him long enough, and had taken part in his political plans and intrigues, to be able to give the most reliable information about him personally, as well as about his intentions, and that information was such that, in spite of the past, and of the Count's revolutionary standpoint, they thought they had discovered in him the man who was capable of bringing about a real reconciliation between the monarch and his people. In consequence of this, T —— , who thought that he had incurred the gallows, stood in the Emperor's presence, and the manner in which the latter expressed his generous intentions with regard to Hungary, carried the old rebel away, and he gave him his word of honor that he would bring the nation back to him, reconciled. And he kept his word, although, perhaps, not exactly in the sense in which he gave it.

He was allowed full liberty in going to Hungary, and Wanda accompanied him. He had no suspicion that even in his mistress's arms he was under police supervision, and from the moment when he made his appearance in his native land officially, as the intermediary between the crown and the people, she had a fresh interest in binding a man of such importance, whom everybody regarded as Hungary's future Minister-President, to herself.

He began to negotiate, and at first everything went well, but soon the yielding temper of the government gave rise continually to fresh demands, and before long, what one side offered and the other side demanded, was so far apart, that no immediate agreement could be thought of. The Count's position grew more painful every day; he had pledged himself too deeply to both sides, and in vain he sought for a way out of the difficulty.

Then one day the Minister of Police unexpectedly received a letter from Wanda, in which she told him that T —— , urged on by his fellow-countrymen, and branded as a traitor by the emigrants, was on the point of heading a fresh conspiracy.

Thereupon, the government energetically reminded that thoroughly honest and noble man of his word of honor, and T —— , who saw that he was unable to keep it, ended his life by a pistol bullet.

Frau von Chabert left Hungary immediately after the sad catastrophe, and went to Turin, where new lovers, new splendors and new laurels awaited her.

We may, perhaps, hear more of her.

A MESALLIANCE

It is a generally acknowledged truth, that the prerogatives of the nobility are only maintained at the present time through the weakness of the middle classes, and many of these who have established themselves and their families by their intellect, industry and struggles, get into a state of bliss, which reminds those who see it, of intoxication, as soon as they are permitted to enter aristocratic circles, or can be seen in public with barons and counts; and above all, when these treat them in a friendly manner, no matter from what motive, or when they see a prospect of a daughter of theirs driving in a carriage with armorial bearings on the panels, as a countess.

Many women and girls of the citizen class would not hesitate for a moment to refuse an honorable, good-looking man of their own class, in order to go to the altar with the oldest, ugliest and stupidest dotard among the aristocracy.

I shall never forget saying in a joke to a young, well-educated girl of a wealthy, middle-class family, who had the figure and bearing of a queen, shortly before her marriage, not to forget an ermine cloak in her trousseau.

“I know it would suit me capitally,” she replied in all seriousness, “and I should certainly have worn one, if I had married Baron R —— , which I was nearly doing, as you know, but it is not suitable for the wife of a government official.”

When a girl of the middle classes wanders from the paths of virtue, her fall may, as a rule, be rightly ascribed to her hankering after the nobility.

In a small German town there lived, some years ago, a tailor, whom we will call Löwenfuss, a man who, like all knights of the shears, was equally full of aspirations after culture and liberty. After working for one master for some time as a poor journeyman, he married his daughter, and after his father-in-law’s death, he succeeded to his business, and as he was industrious, lucky and managed it well, he soon grew very well off, and was in a position to give his daughters an education, for which many a nobleman's daughters might have envied them; for they learned, not only French and music, but had also acquired many more solid branches of knowledge, and as they were both pretty and charming girls, they soon became very much thought of and sought after.

Fanny, the eldest, especially, was her father's pride and the favorite of society; she was of middle height, slim, with a thoroughly maidenly figure, and with almost an Italian face, in which two large, dark eyes seemed to ask for love and submission at the same time; and yet the girl with the plentiful, black hair was not in the least intended to command, for she was one of those romantic women who will give themselves, or even throw themselves, away, but who can never be subjugated. A young physician fell in love with her, and wished to marry her; Fanny returned his love, and her parents gladly accepted him as a son-in-law, but she made it a condition that he should visit her freely and frequently for two years, before she would consent to become his wife, and she declared that she would not go to the altar with him, until she was convinced that not only their hearts, but also that their characters harmonized. He agreed to her wish, and became a regular visitor at the house of the educated tailor; they were happy hours for the lovers; they played, sang and read together, and he told the girl some things from his medical experiences, which excited and moved her.

Just then, one day an officer went to the tailor's house, to order some civilian's clothes. This was not an unusual event in itself, but it was soon to be the cause of one; for accidentally the daughter of *the artist in clothes* came into the shop, just as the officer was leaving it, and on seeing her, he let go of the door-handle, and asked the tailor who the young lady was.

"My daughter," the tailor said, proudly.

"May I beg you to introduce me to the young lady, Herr Löwenfuss?" the hussar said.

"I feel flattered at the honor you are doing me," the tailor replied, with evident pleasure.

"Fanny, the Captain wishes to make your acquaintance; this is my daughter, Fanny, Captain ..."

"Captain Count Kasimir W —— ," the hussar interrupted him, as he went up to the pretty girl, and paid her a compliment or two. They were very commonplace, stale, everyday phrases, but in spite of this, they flattered the girl, intelligent as she was, extremely, because it was a cavalry officer and a

Count to boot who addressed them to her. And when, at last, the Captain, in the most friendly manner, asked the tailor's permission to be allowed to visit at the house, both father and daughter granted it to him most readily.

The very next day Count W —— paid his visit, in full dress uniform, and when Mamma Löwenfuss made some observations about it, how handsome it was, and how well it became him, he told them that he should not wear it much longer, as he intended to quit the service soon, and to look for a wife, in whom birth and wealth were matters of secondary consideration, while a good education and a knowledge of domestic matters were of paramount importance; adding that as soon as he had found one, he meant to retire to his estates.

From that moment, Papa and Mamma Löwenfuss looked upon the Count as their daughter's suitor; it is certain that he was madly in love with Fanny; he used to go to their house every evening, and made himself so liked by all of them, that the young doctor soon felt himself to be superfluous, and so his visits became rarer and rarer. The Count confessed his love to Fanny on a moonlight night, while they were sitting in an arbor covered with honeysuckle, which formed nearly the whole of Herr Löwenfuss' garden; he swore that he loved, that he adored her, and when at last she lay trembling in his arms he tried to take her by storm, but that bold cavalry-exploit did not succeed, and the good-looking hussar found out, for the first time in his life, that a woman can at the same time be romantic, passionately in love, and yet virtuous.

The next morning, the tailor called on the Count, and begged him very humbly to state what his intentions with regard to Fanny were. The enamored hussar declared that he was determined to make the tailor's little daughter, Countess W —— . Herr Löwenfuss was so much overcome by his feelings, that he showed great inclination to embrace his future son-in-law, The Count, however, laid down certain conditions. The whole matter must be kept a profound secret, for he had every prospect of inheriting half a million of florins, on the death of an aunt, who was already eighty years old, which he should risk by a mesalliance.

When they heard this, the girl's parents certainly hesitated for a time, to give their consent to the marriage, but the handsome hussar, whose ardent passion carried Fanny away, at last gained the victory. The doctor received a pretty little note from the tailor's daughter, in which she told him that she gave him back his promise, as she had not found her ideal in him. Fanny then signed a deed, by which she formerly renounced all claims to her father's property, in favor of her sister, and left her home and her father's house with the Count under cover of the night, in order to accompany him to Poland, where the marriage was to take place in his castle.

Of course malicious tongues declared that the hussar had abducted Fanny, but her parents smiled at such reports, for they knew better, and the moment when their daughter would return as Countess W —— would amply recompense them for everything.

Meanwhile, the Polish Count and the romantic German girl were being carried by the train through the dreary plains of Masovia. They stopped in a large town to make some purchases, and the Count, who was very wealthy and liberal, provided his future wife with everything that befits a Countess, and which a girl could fancy, and then they continued their journey. The country grew more picturesque, but more melancholy, as they went further East; the somber Carpathians rose from the snow-covered plains and villages, surrounded by white glistening walls, and stunted willows stood by the side of the roads, ravens sailed through the white sky, and here and there a small peasant's sledge shot by, drawn by two thin horses.

At last they reached the station, where the Count's steward was waiting for them with a carriage and four, which brought them to their destination almost as swiftly as the iron steed.

The numerous servants were drawn up in the yard of the ancient castle to receive their master and mistress, and they gave loud cheers for her, for which she thanked them smilingly. When she went into the dim, arched passages, and the large rooms, for a moment she felt a strange feeling of fear, but she quickly checked it, for was not her most ardent wish to be fulfilled in a couple of hours?

She put on her bridal attire, in which a half comical, half sinister-looking old woman with a toothless mouth and a nose like an owl's, assisted her, and just as she was fixing the myrtle wreath onto her dark curls, the bell began to ring, which summoned her to her wedding. The Count himself, in full uniform, led her to the chapel of the castle, where the priest, with the steward and the castellan as witnesses, and the footmen in grand liveries, were awaiting the handsome young couple.

After the wedding, the marriage certificate was signed in the vestry, and a groom was sent to the station, where he dispatched a telegram to her parents, to the effect that the hussar had kept his word, and that Fanny Löwenfuss had become Countess Faniska W —— .

Then the newly-married couple sat down to a beautiful little dinner in company of the chaplain, the steward and the castellan; the champagne made them all very cheerful, and at last the Count knelt down before his young and beautiful wife, boldly took her white satin slipper off her foot, filled it with wine, and emptied it to her health.

At length night came, a thorough, Polish wedding night, and Faniska had just finished dressing and was looking at herself with proud satisfaction in the great mirror that was fastened into the wall, from top to bottom. A white satin train flowed down behind her like rays from the moon, a half-open jacket of bright green velvet, trimmed with valuable ermine, covered her voluptuous, virgin bust and her classic arms, only to show them all the more seductively at the slightest motion, while the wealth of her dark hair, in which diamonds hung here and there like glittering dew-drops, fell down her neck and mingled with the white fur. The Count came in a red velvet dressing gown trimmed with sable; at a sign from him, the old woman who was waiting on his wife's divinity left the room, and the next moment he was lying like a slave at the feet of his lovely young wife, who raised him up, and was pressing him to her heaving bosom, when a noise which she had never heard before, a wild howling, startled the loving woman in the midst of her highest bliss.

"What was that?" she asked, trembling.

The Count went to the window without speaking, and she followed him, with her arms round him, and looked half timidly, half curiously out into the darkness, where large bright spots were moving about in pairs, in the park at her feet.

"Are they will-o'-the-wisps?" she whispered.

"No, my child, they are wolves," the Count replied, fetching his double-barreled gun, which he loaded, and went out on the snow-covered balcony, while she drew the fur more closely over her bosom, and followed him.

"Will you shoot?" the Count asked her in a whisper, and when she nodded, he said: "Aim straight at the first pair of bright spots that you see; they are the eyes of those amiable brutes."

Then he handed her the gun and pointed it for her.

"That is the way — are you pointing straight?"

"Yes."

“Then fire.”

A flash, a report, which the echo from the hills repeats four times, and two of the unpleasant-looking lights had vanished.

Then the Count fired, and by that time their people were all awake; they drove away the wolves with torches and shouts, and laid the two large animals, the spoils of a Polish wedding night, at the feet of their young mistress.

And the days that followed resembled that night. The Count showed himself the most attentive husband, as his wife’s knight and slave, and she felt quite at home in that dull castle; she rode, drove, smoked, read French novels and beat her servants as well as any Polish Countess could have done. In the course of a few years, she presented the Count with two children, and although he appeared very happy at that, yet, like most husbands, he grew continually cooler, more indolent, and neglectful of her. From time to time he left the castle, to see after his affairs in the capital, and the intervals between those journeys became continually shorter. Faniska felt that her husband was tired of her, and much as it grieved her, she did not let him notice it; she was always the same.

But at last the Count remained away altogether; at first he used to write, but at last the poor, weeping woman did not even receive letters to comfort her in her unhappy solitude, and his lawyer sent the money that she and her children required.

She conjectured, hoped and doubted, suffered and wept for more than a year; then she suddenly went to the capital and appeared unexpectedly in his apartments. Painful explanations followed, until at last the Count told her that he no longer loved her, and could not live with her for the future, and when she wished to make him do so by legal means, and entrusted her case to a celebrated lawyer, *the Count denied that she was his wife*. She produced her marriage certificate, when the most infamous fraud came to light. A confidential servant of the Count had acted the part of the priest, and the tailor’s beautiful daughter had, as a matter of fact, merely been the Count’s mistress, and her children were bastards.

The virtuous woman then saw, when it was too late, that it was *she* who had formed a mesalliance. Her parents would have nothing to do with her, and at last it turned out in the bargain that the Count was married long before he knew her, but that he did not live with his wife.

Then Fanny applied to the police magistrates; she wanted to appeal to justice, but she was dissuaded from taking criminal proceedings; for although they would certainly lead to the punishment of her daring seducer, they would also bring about her own total ruin.

At last, however, her lawyer effected a settlement between them, which was favorable to Fanny, and which she accepted for the sake of her children. The Count paid her a considerable sum down, and gave her the gloomy castle to live in. Thither she returned with a broken heart, and from that time she lived alone, a sullen misanthrope, a fierce despot.

From time to time, a stranger wandering through the Carpathians, meets a pale woman of demonic beauty, wearing a magnificent sable skin jacket and with a gun over her shoulder, in the forest, or in the winter in a sledge, driving her foaming horses until they nearly drop from fatigue, while the sleigh bells utter a melancholy sound, and at last die away in the distance, like the weeping of a solitary, deserted human heart.

A NIGHT IN WHITECHAPEL

My friend Ledantec and I were twenty-five and we had come to London for the first time in our lives. It was a Saturday evening in December, cold and foggy, and I think that all that combined is more than enough to explain why my friend Ledantec and I were most abominably drunk, though, to tell the truth, we did not feel any discomfort from it. On the contrary, we were floating in an atmosphere of perfect bliss. We did not speak, certainly, for we were incapable of doing so, but then we had no inclination for conversation. What would be the good of it? We could so easily read all our thoughts in each others eyes! And all our thoughts consisted in the sweet and unique knowledge, that we were thinking about nothing whatever.

It was not, however, in order to arrive at that state of delicious, intellectual nihility, thai we had gone to mysterious Whitechapel. We had gone into the first public-house we saw, with the firm intention of studying manners and customs, — not to mention morals, — there as spectators, artists and philosophers, but in the second public-house we entered, we ourselves became like the objects of our investigations, that is to say, sponges soaked in alcohol. Between one public-house and the other, the outer air seemed to squeeze those sponges, which then got just as dry as before, and thus we rolled from public-house to public-house, until at last the sponges could not hold any more.

Consequently, we had for some time bidden farewell to our studies in morals, and now they were limited to two impressions: *zig-zags* through the darkness outside, and a gleam of light outside the public-houses. As to the inhibition of brandies, whiskies and gins, that was done mechanically, and our stomachs scarcely noticed it.

But what strange beings we had elbowed with during our long stoppages! What a number of faces to be remembered, what clothes, what attitudes, what talk and what rags!

At first we tried to note them exactly in our memory, but there were so many of them, and our brain got mixed so quickly, that at present we had no very clear recollection of anything or anybody. Even objects that were immediately before us appeared to us in a vague, dusky phantasmagoria and got confounded with precious objects in an inextricable manner. The world became a sort of kaleidoscope to us, seen in a dream through the penumbra of an aquarium.

Suddenly we were aroused from this state of somnolence, awakened as if by a blow in the chest, and imperiously forced to fix our attention on what we saw, for amidst this whirl of strange sights, one stranger than all attracted our eyes and seemed to say to us: “Look at me.”

It was at the open door of a public-house. A ray of light streamed into the street through the half-open door, and that brutal ray fell right onto the specter that had just risen up there, dumb and motionless.

For it was indeed a specter, pitiful and terrible, and, above all, most real, as it stood out boldly against the dark background of the street, which it made darker still behind it!

Young, yes; the woman was certainly young; there could be no doubt about that, when one looked at her smooth skin, her smiling mouth which showed her white teeth, and firm bust which could be plainly noted under her thin dress.

But then, how explain her perfectly white hair, not gray or growing gray, but absolutely white, as white as any octogenarian’s?

And then her eyes, her eyes beneath her smooth brow, were surely the eyes of an old woman? Certainly they were, and of a woman one could not tell how old, for it must have taken years of trouble and sorrow, of tears and of sleepless nights, and a whole long existence, thus to dull, to wear out and to roughen those vitreous pupils.

Vitreous? Not exactly that. For roughened glass still retains a dull and milky brightness, a recollection, as it were, of its former transparency. But her eyes seemed rather to have been made of metal, which had turned rusty, and really if pewter could rust I should have compared them to pewter covered with rust. They had the dead color of pewter, and at the same time, they emitted a glance which was the color of reddish water.

But it was not until some time later that I tried to define them thus approximately by retrospective analysis. At that moment, being altogether incapable of such an effort, I could only establish in my own mind the idea of extreme decrepitude and horrible old age, which they produced in my imagination.

Have I said that they were set in very puffy eyelids, which had no lashes whatever, and on her forehead without wrinkles there was not a vestige of eyebrow? When I tell you this, and considering their dull look beneath the hair of an octogenarian, it is not surprising that Ledantec and I said in a low voice at the sight of this woman, who was evidently young:

"Oh! poor, poor old woman!"

Her great age was further accentuated by the terrible poverty that was revealed by her dress. If she had been better dressed, her youthful looks would, perhaps, have struck us more, but her thin shawl, which was all that she had over her chemise, her single petticoat which was full of holes, and almost in rags, and which did not nearly reach to her bare feet, her straw hat with ragged feathers and with ribbons of no particular color through age, it all seemed so ancient, so prodigiously antique!

From what remote superannuated, abolished period did they all spring? One did not venture to guess, and by a perfectly natural association of ideas, one seemed to infer that the unfortunate creature herself, was as old as her clothes were. Now, by *one*, I mean by Ledantec and myself, that is to say, by two men who were abominably drunk and who were arguing with the special logic of intoxication.

It was also under the softening influence of alcohol that we looked at the vague smile on those lips with the teeth of a child, without stopping to reflect on the beauty of those youthful teeth, and seeing nothing except her fixed and almost idiotic smile, which no longer contrasted with the dull expression of her looks, but, on the contrary, strengthened them. For in spite of her teeth, it was the smile of an old woman in our imagination, and as for me, I was really pleased at the thought of being so acute when I inferred that this grandmother with such pale lips, had the set of teeth of a young girl, and still, thanks to the softening influence of alcohol, I was not angry with her for this artifice. I even thought it particularly praiseworthy, since, after all, the poor creature thus carried out her calling conscientiously, which was to seduce us. For there was no possible doubt about the matter, that this grandmother was nothing more nor less than a prostitute.

And then, drunk! Horribly drunk, much more drunk than Ledantec and I were, for we really could manage to say: "Oh! Pity the poor, poor old woman!" While she was incapable of articulating a single syllable, of making a gesture, or even of imparting a gleam of promise, a furtive flash of allurement to her eyes. With her hands crossed on her stomach, and resting against the front of the public-house, with her whole body as stiff as if she had been in a state of catalepsy, she had nothing alluring about her, except her sad smile, and that inspired us with all the more pity because she was even more drunk than we were, and so, by identical, spontaneous movement, we each of us seized her by an arm, to take her into the public-house with us.

To our great astonishment she resisted, sprang back, and so was in the shadow again, out of the ray of light which came through the door, while, at the same time, she began to walk through the darkness and to drag us with her, for she was clinging to our arms. We followed her without speaking and without knowing where we were going, but without the least uneasiness on that score. Only, when she suddenly burst into violent sobs as she walked, Ledantec and I began to sob in unison.

The cold and the fog had suddenly congested our brains again, and we had again lost all precise consciousness of our acts, of our thoughts and of our sensations. Our sobs had nothing of grief in them, but we were floating in an atmosphere of perfect bliss, and I can remember that at that moment it was no longer the exterior world which seemed to me as if I were looking at it through the penumbra of an aquarium; it was I myself, an *I* composed of three, which was changing into something that was floating adrift in something, though what it was I did not know, composed of palpable fog and intangible water, and it was exquisitely delightful.

From that moment I remember nothing more until what follows, and which had the effect of a clap of thunder on me, and made me rise up from the bottom of the depth to which I had descended.

Ledantec was standing in front of me, his face convulsed with horror, his hair standing on end and his eyes staring out of his head, and he shouted to me: —

“Let us escape! Let us escape!” Whereupon I opened my eyes wide, and found myself lying on the ground, in a room into which daylight was shining. I saw some rags hanging against the wall, two chairs, a broken jug lying on the floor by my side, and in a corner a wretched bed on which a woman was lying, who was no doubt dead, for her head was hanging over the side, and her long white hair reached almost to my feet.

With a bound I was up, like Ledantec.

"What!" I said to him, while my teeth chattered: "Did you kill her?"

"No, no," he replied. "But that makes no difference; let us be off."

I felt completely sober by that time, but I did think that he was still suffering somewhat from the effects of last night's drunk; otherwise, why should he wish to escape? while the remains of pity for the unfortunate woman forced me to say: —

"What is the matter with her? If she is ill, we must look after her."

And I went to the wretched bed, in order to put her head back on the pillow, but I discovered that she was neither dead nor ill, but only sound asleep, and I also noticed that she was quite young. She still wore that idiotic smile, but her teeth were her own and those of a girl. Her smooth skin and her firm bust showed that she was not more than sixteen; perhaps not so much.

"There! You see it, you can see it!" Ledantec said. "Let us be off."

He tried to drag me out, and he was still drunk; I could see it by his feverish movements, his trembling hands and his nervous looks. Then he implored me and said: —

"I slept beside the old woman; but she is not old. Look at her; look at her; yes, she is old after all!"

And he lifted up her long hair by handfuls; it was like handfuls of white silk, and then he added, evidently in a sort of delirium, which made me fear an attack of *delirium tremens*: "To think that I have begotten children, three, four children. Who knows how many children, all in one night! And they were born immediately, and have grown up already! Let us be off."

Decidedly it was an attack of madness. Poor Ledantec! What could I do for him? I took his arm and tried to calm him, but he thought that I was going to try and make him go to bed with her again, and he pushed me away and exclaimed with tears in his voice: "If you do not believe me, look under the bed; the children are there; they are there, I tell you. Look here, just look here."

He threw himself down, flat on his stomach, and actually pulled out one, two, three, four children, who had hidden under the bed. I do not exactly know whether they were boys or girls, but all, like the sleeping woman, had white hair, the hair of an octogenarian.

Was I still drunk, like Ledantec, or was I mad? What was the meaning of this strange hallucination? I hesitated for a moment, and shook myself to be sure that it was I.

No, no, I had all my wits about me, and I in reality saw that horrible lot of little brats; they all had their faces in their hands, and were crying and squalling, and then suddenly one of them jumped onto the bed; all the others followed his example, and the woman woke up.

And then we stood, while those five pairs of eyes, without eyebrows or eyelashes, eyes with the dull color of pewter, and whose pupils had the color of red water, were steadily fixed on us.

"Let us be off! let us be off!" Ledantec repeated, leaving go of me, and at that time I paid attention to what he said, and, after throwing some small change onto the floor, I followed him, to make him understand, when he should be quite sober, that he saw before him a poor Albino prostitute, who had several brothers and sisters.

COUNTESS SATAN

I

They were discussing dynamite, the social revolution, Nihilism, and even those who cared least about politics, had something to say. Some were alarmed, others philosophized, while others again, tried to smile.

“Bah!” N —— said, “when we are all blown up, we shall see what it is like. Perhaps, after all, it may be an amusing sensation, provided one goes high enough.”

“But we shall not be blown up at all,” G —— the optimist, said, interrupting him. “It is all a romance.”

“You are mistaken, my dear fellow,” Jules de C —— replied. “It is like a romance, but with that confounded Nihilism, everything seems like one, but it would be a mistake to trust to it. Thus, I myself, the manner in which I made Bakounine’s acquaintance ...”

They knew that he was a good narrator, and it was no secret that his life had been an adventurous one, so they drew closer to him, and listened religiously. This is what he told them.

II

“I met Countess Nioska W —— , that strange woman who was usually called Countess Satan, in Naples; I immediately attached myself to her out of curiosity, and I soon fell in love with her. Not that she was beautiful, for she was a Russian who had all the bad characteristics of the Russian type. She was thin and squat, at the same time, while her face was sallow and puffy, with high cheek bones and a Cossack’s nose. But her conversation bewitched every one.

“She was many-sided, learned, a philosopher, scientifically depraved, satanic. Perhaps the word is rather pretentious, but it exactly expresses what

I want to say, for in other words, she loved evil for the sake of evil. She rejoiced in other people's vices, and liked to sow the seeds of evil, in order to see it flourish. And that on a fraud, on an enormous scale. It was not enough for her to corrupt individuals; she only did that to keep her hand in; what she wished to do, was to corrupt the masses. By slightly altering it after her own fashion, she might have adopted the famous saying of Caligula. She also wished that the whole human race had but one head; but not in order that she might cut it off, but that she might make the philosophy of *Nihility* flourish there.

"What a temptation to become the lord and master of such a monster! And I allowed myself to be tempted, and undertook the adventure. The means came unsought for by me, and the only thing that I had to do, was to show myself more perverted and satanical that she was herself. — And so I played the devil.

"'Yes,' I said, 'we writers are the best workmen for doing evil, as our books may be bottles of poison. The so-called men of action, only turn the handle of the mitrailleuse which we have loaded. Formulas will destroy the world, and it is we who invent them.'

"'That is true,' she said, 'and that is what is wanting in Bakounine, I am sorry to say.'

"That name was constantly in her mouth, and so I asked her for details, which she gave me, as she knew the man intimately.

"'After all,' she said, with a contemptuous grimace, 'he is only a kind of Garibaldi.'

"She told me, although she made fun of him as she did so, about his Odyssey of the barricades and of the hulks which made up Bakounine's legend, and which is, nevertheless, only the exact truth; his part of chief of the insurgents, at Prague and then at Dresden; his first death sentence; about his imprisonment at Olmütz and in the casemates of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul; in a subterranean dungeon at Schüsselburg; about his exile to Siberia and his wonderful escape down the river Amour, on a Japanese coasting-vessel by way of Yokohama and San Francisco, and about his final arrival in London, whence he was directing all the operations of Nihilism.

"'You see,' she said, 'he is a thorough adventurer, and now all his adventures are over. He got married at Tobolsk and became a mere respectable, middle-class man. And then, he has no individual ideas. Herzen, the phamphleteer of *Kolokol* inspired him with the only fertile phrase that he ever uttered: *Land and Liberty!* But that is not yet the definite formula, the general formula; what I will call, the dynamite formula. At best, Bakounine would become an incendiary, and burn down cities. And what is that, I ask you? Bah? A second-hand Rostopchin! He wants a prompter, and I offered to become his but he did not take me seriously.' ...

"It would be useless to enter into all the Psychological details which marked the course of my passion for the Countess, and to explain to you more fully the attraction of curiosity which she offered me more and more every day. It was getting exasperating, and the more so, as she resisted me as stoutly as the shyest of innocents could have done, but at the end of a month of mad Satanism, I saw what her game was. Do you know what she had thought of? She meant to make me Bakounine's prompter, or, at any rate, that is what she said. But no doubt she reserved the right to herself, and that is how I understood her, to prompt the prompter, and my passion for her, which she purposely left unsatisfied, assured her that absolute power over me.

"All this may appear madness to you, but it is, nevertheless, the exact truth, and, in short, one morning she bluntly made the offer: 'Become Bakounine's soul, and you shall have me.'

"Of course, I accepted, for it was too fantastically strange to refuse; do you think so? What an adventure! What luck! A number of letters between the Countess and Bakounine prepared the way; I was introduced to him at his house, and they discussed me there. I became a sort of Western prophet, a mystic charmer who was ready to nihilate the Latin races, the Saint Paul of the new religion of nothingness, and at last a day was fixed for us to meet in London. He lived in a small, one-storied house in Pimlico, with a tiny garden in front, and nothing noticeable about it.

"We were first of all shown into the commonplace parlor of all English homes, and then upstairs. The room where the Countess and I were left, was small, and very badly furnished, with a square table with writing materials on it, in the middle. That was his sanctuary; the deity soon appeared, and I saw him in flesh and bone; especially in flesh, for he was enormously stout. His broad face, with prominent cheek-bones, in spite of the fat; and with a nose like a double funnel, with small, sharp eyes, which had a magnetic look, proclaimed the Tartar, the old Turanian blood, which produced the Attilas, the Gengis-Khams, the Tamerlanes. The obesity, which is characteristic of the nomad races, who are always on horseback or driving, added to his Asiatic look. The man was certainly not a European, a slave, a descendant of the deistic Aryans, but a descendant of the Atheistic hordes, who had several times already almost overrun Europe, and who, instead of any ideas of progress, have the belief in nihility, at the bottom of their hearts.

"I was astonished, for I had not expected that the majesty of a whole race, could be thus revived in a man, and my stupefaction increased after an hour's conversation. I could quite understand why such a Colossus had not wished for the Countess as his Egeria; she was a mere silly child to have dreamt of acting such a part to such a thinker. She had not felt the profoundness of that horrible philosophy which was hidden under that material activity, nor had she seen the prophet under that man of the barricades. Or, perhaps, he had not thought it advisable to reveal himself to her like that; but he revealed himself to me, and inspired me with terror.

"A prophet? Oh! yes. He thought himself an Attila, and foresaw the consequences of his revolution; it was not only from instinct, but also from theory that he urged a nation on to nihilism. The phrase is not his, but Tourgueneff's, I believe, but the idea certainly belongs to him. He got his program of agricultural communism from Herzen, and his destructive radicalism from Pougatcheff, but he did not stop there. I mean that he went on to evil for the sake of evil. Herzen wished for the happiness of the Slav peasant; Pougatcheff wanted to be elected Emperor, but all that Bakounine wanted, was to overthrow the actual order of things, no matter by what means, and to replace social concentration by a universal upheaval.

"It was the dream of a Tartar; it was true nihilism pushed to extreme practical conclusions. It was, in a word, the applied philosophy of chance, the indeterminateism of anarchy. Monstrous it may be, but grand in its monstrosity.

"And you must note, that the man of action who was so despised by the Countess, discovered in Bakounine the gigantic dreamer whom I have just shown you, and his dream did not remain a dream, but began to be realized. It was by the care of that organizer that the Nihilistic party assumed a body; a party in which there is a little of everything, you know; but on the whole, a formidable party, on account of the advanced guard in true Nihilism, whose object is nothing less than to destroy the Western world, to see it blossom from under the ruins of a general dispersion, which is the last conception of modern Tartarism.

"I never saw Bakounine again, for the Countess's conquest would have been too dearly bought by any attempt to act a comedy with this *Old-Man-of-the-Mountains*. And besides that, after this visit, poor Countess Satan appeared to me quite silly. Her famous Satanism was nothing but the flicker of a spirit-lamp, after the general conflagration of which the other had dreamt, and she had certainly shown herself very silly, when she could not understand that prodigious monster. And as she had seduced me, only by her intellect and her perversity, I was disgusted as soon as she laid aside that mask. I left her without telling her of my intention, and never saw her again, either.

"No doubt they both took me for a spy from the *Third section of the Imperial Chancellery*. In that case, they must have thought me very strong to have resisted, and all I have to do is to look out, if any affiliated members of their society recognize me!..."

III

Then he smiled, and turning to the waiter who had just come in, he said: "Meanwhile, open us another bottle of champagne, and make the cork pop! It will, at any rate, somewhat accustom us to the day when we shall all be blown up with dynamite ourselves."

KIND GIRLS

Every Friday, regularly, at about eleven o’clock in the morning, he came into the courtyard, put down his soft hat at his feet, struck a few chords on his guitar and then began a ballad in his full, rich voice. And soon at every window in the four sides of that dull, barrack-like building, some girls appeared, one in an elegant dressing gown, another in a little jacket, most of them with their breasts and arms bare, all of them just out of bed, with their hair hastily twisted up, their eyes blinking in the sudden blaze of sunlight, their complexions dull and their eyes still heavy from want of sleep.

They swayed themselves backwards and forwards to his slow melody, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of it, and coppers, and even silver, poured into the handsome singer’s hat, and more than one of them would have liked to have followed the penny which she threw to him, and to have gone with the singer who had the voice of a siren, and who seemed to say to all these amorous girls; “Come, come to my retreat, where you will find a palace of crystal and gold, and wreaths which are always fresh, and happiness and love which never die.”

That was what they seemed to hear, those unhappy girls, when they heard him sing the songs of the old legends, which they had formerly believed. That was what they understood by the foolish words of the ballad. Then and nothing else, for how could any one doubt it, on seeing the fresh roses on their cheeks, and the tender flame which flickered like a mystic night-light in their eyes, which had, for the moment, become the eyes of innocent young girls again? But of young girls, who had grown up very quickly, alas! who were very precocious, and who very soon became the women that they were, poor vendors of love, always in search of love for which they were paid.

That was why, when he had finished his second ballad, and sometimes even sooner, concupiscent looks appeared in their eyes. The boatman of their dreams, the water-sprite of fairy tales, vanished in the mist of their childish recollections, and the singer re-assumed his real shape, that of musician and strolling player, whom they wished to pay, to be their lover. And the coppers and small silver were showered on him again, with engaging smiles, with the leers of a street-walker, even with: “*p’st, p’st*,” which soon transformed the barrack-like courtyard into an enormous cage full of twittering birds, while some of them could not restrain themselves, but said aloud, rolling their eyes with desire: “How handsome the creature is! Good heavens, how handsome he is!”

He was really handsome, and nobody could deny it, and even too handsome, with a regular beauty which almost palled on people. He had large, almond-shaped, gentle eyes, a Grecian nose, a bow-shaped mouth, hidden by a heavy moustache, and long, black, curly hair; in short, a head fit to be put into a hair-dresser’s window, or, better still, perhaps, onto the front page of the ballads which he was singing. But what made him still handsomer, was that his self-conceit had a look of sovereign indifference for he was not satisfied with not replying to the smiles, the ogles, and the *p’st, p’st’s*, by taking no notice of them; but when he had finished he shrugged his shoulders, he winked mischievously, and turned his lips contemptuously, which said very clearly: “The stove is not being heated for you, my little kittens!”

Often, one might have thought that he expressly wished to show his contempt, and that he tried to make himself thought unpoetical in the eyes of all those amorous girls, and to check their love, for he cleared his throat ostentatiously and offensively, more than was necessary, after singing, as if he would have liked to spit at them. But all that did not make him unpoetical in their eyes, and many of them, most of them, who were absolutely mad on him, went so far as to say that *he did it like a swell*!

The girl, who in her enthusiasm had been the first to utter that exclamation of intense passion, and who, after throwing him small silver, had thrown him a twenty-franc gold piece, at last made up her mind to have an explanation. Instead of a *p’st, p’st*, she spoke to him boldly one morning, in the presence of all the others, who religiously held their tongues.

“Come up here,” she called out to him, and from habit she added: “I will be very nice, you handsome dark fellow.”

At first they were dumbfounded at her audacity, and then all their cheeks flushed with jealousy, and the flame of mad desire shot from their eyes, from every window there came a perfect torrent of:

“Yes, come up, come up.” “Don’t go to her! Come to me.”

And, meanwhile, there was a shower of half-pence, of francs, of gold coins, as well as of cigars and oranges, while lace pocket handkerchiefs, silk neckties, and scarfs fluttered in the air and fell round the singer, like a flight of many colored butterflies.

He picked up the spoil calmly, almost carelessly, stuffed the money into his pocket, made a bundle of the furbelows, which he tied up as if they had been soiled linen, and then raising himself up, and putting his felt hat on his head, he said:

“Thank you, ladies, but indeed I cannot.”

They thought that he did not know how to satisfy so many demands at once, and one of them said: “Let him choose.”

“Yes, yes, that is it!” they all exclaimed unanimously.

But he repeated: “I tell you, I cannot.”

They thought he was excusing himself out of gallantry, and several of them exclaimed, almost with tears of emotion: “Women are all heart!” And the same voice that had spoken before, (it was one of the girls who wished to settle the matter amicably), said: “We must draw lots.”

“Yes, yes, that is it,” they all cried. And again there was a religious silence, more religious than before, for it wras caused by anxiety, and the beatings of their hearts may have been heard.

The singer profited by it, to say slowly: “I cannot have that either; nor all of you at once, nor one after the other; nothing! I tell you that I cannot.”

“Why? Why?” And now they were almost screaming, for they were angry and sorry at the same time. Their cheeks had gone from scarlet to livid, their eyes flashed fire, and some shook their fists menacingly.

“Silence!” the girl cried, who had spoken first. “Be quiet, you pack of huzzys! Let him explain himself, and tell us why!”

“Yes, yes, let us be quiet! Make him explain himself in God’s name!”

Then, in the fierce silence that ensued, the singer said, opening his arms wide, with a gesture of despairing inability to do what they wanted:

“What do you want? It is very amusing, but I cannot do more. I have two girls of my own already, at home.”

PROFITABLE BUSINESS

He certainly did not think himself a saint, nor had he any hypocritical pretensions to virtue, but, nevertheless, he thought as highly of himself as much as he did of anybody else, and perhaps, even a trifle more highly. And that, quite impartially, without any more self love than was necessary, and without his having to accuse himself of being self conceited. He did himself justice, that was all, for he had good moral principles, and he applied them, especially, if the truth must be told, not only to judging the conduct of others, but also, it must be allowed, in a measure for regulating his own conduct, as he would have been very vexed if he had been able to think of himself:

“On the whole, I am what people call a perfectly honorable man.”

Luckily, he had never (oh! never), been obliged to doubt that excellent opinion which he had of himself, which he liked to express thus, in his moments of rhetorical expansion:

“My whole life gives me the right to shake hands with myself.”

Perhaps a subtle psychologist would have found some flaws in this armor of integrity, which was sanctimoniously satisfied with itself. It was, for example, quite certain that our friend had no scruples in making profit out of the vices or misfortunes of his neighbors, provided that he was not in his own opinion, the person who was solely, or chiefly responsible for them. But, on the whole, it was only one manner of looking at it, nothing more, and there were plenty of materials for casuistic arguments in it. This kind of discussion is particularly unpleasant to such simple natures as that of his worthy fellow, who would have replied to the psychologist.

“Why go on a wild goose chase? As for me, I am perfectly sincere.”

You must not, however, believe that this perfect sincerity prevented him from having elevated views. He prided himself on having a weakness for imagination and the unforeseen, and if he would have been offended at being called a dishonorable man, he would, perhaps have been still more hurt if anybody had attributed middle-class tastes to him.

Accordingly, in love affairs, he expressed a most virtuous horror of adultery, for if he had committed it, it would not have been able to bear that testimony to himself, which was so sweet to his conscience:

“Ah! As for me, I can declare that I never wronged anybody!”

While, on the other hand, he was not satisfied with pleasure which was paid for by the hour, and which debases *the noblest desires of the heart*, to the vulgar satisfaction of a physical requirement. What he required, so he used to say, while lifting his eyes up to heaven was:

“Something rather more ideal than that!”

That search after the ideal did not, indeed, cost him any great effort, as it was limited to not going to licensed houses of ill-fame, and to not accosting streetwalkers with the simple words: “How much?”

It consisted chiefly in wishing to be gallant even with such women, and in trying to persuade himself that they liked him for his own sake, and in preferring those whose manner, dress and looks allowed room for suppositions and romantic illusions, such as:

“She might be taken for a little work-girl who has not yet lost her virtue.”

“No, I rather think she is a widow, who has met with misfortunes.”

“What if she be a fashionable lady in disguise!”

And other nonsense, which he knew to be such, even while imagining it, but whose imaginary flavor was very pleasant to him, all the same.

With such tastes, it was only natural that this pilgrim followed and pushed up against women in the large shops, and whenever there was a crowd, and that he especially looked out for those ladies of easy virtue, for nothing is more exciting than those half-closed shutters, behind which a face is indistinctly seen, and from which one hears a furtive: *“P’st! P’st!”*

He used to say to himself: “Who is she? Is she young and pretty? Is she some old woman, who is terribly skillful at her business, but who yet does not venture to show herself any longer? Or is she some new beginner, who has not yet acquired the boldness of an old hand? In any case, it is the unknown, perhaps, that is my ideal during the time it takes me to find my way upstairs;” and always as he went up, his heart beat, as it does at a first meeting with a beloved mistress.

But he had never felt such a delicious shiver as he did on the day on which he penetrated into that old house in the blind alley in Ménilmontant.

He could not have said why, for he had often gone after so-called love in much stranger places; but now, without any reason, he had a presentiment that he was going to meet with an adventure, and that gave him a delightful sensation.

The woman who had made the sign to him, lived on the third floor, and all the way upstairs his excitement increased, until his heart was beating violently when he reached the landing. At the same time, he was going up, he smelt a peculiar odor, which grew stronger and stronger, and which he had tried in vain to analyze, though all he could arrive at was, that it smelt like a chemist's shop.

The door on the right, at the end of the passage, was opened as soon as he put his foot on the landing, and the woman said, in a low voice:

"Come in, my dear."

A whiff of a very strong smell met his nostrils through the open door, and suddenly he exclaimed:

"How stupid I was! I know what it is now; it is carbolic acid, is it not?"

"Yes," the woman replied. "Don't you like it, dear? It is very wholesome, you know."

The woman was not ugly, although not young; she had very good eyes, although they were sad and sunken in her head; evidently she had been crying, very much quite recently, and that imparted a special spice to the vague smile which she put on, so as to appear more amiable.

Seized by his romantic ideas once more, and under the influence of the presentiment which he had had just before, he thought — and the idea filled him with pleasure:

"She is some widow, whom poverty has forced to sell herself."

The room was small, but very clean and tidy, and that confirmed him in his conjecture, as he was curious to verify its truth, he went into the three rooms which opened into one another. The bedroom, came first; next there came a kind of a drawing-room, and then a dining-room, which evidently served as a kitchen, for a Dutch tiled stove stood in the middle of it, on which a stew was simmering, but the smell of carbolic acid was even stronger in that room. He remarked on it, and added with a laugh:

"Do you put it with your soup?"

And as he said this, he laid hold of the handle of the door which led into the next room, for he wanted to see everything, even that nook, which was apparently a store cupboard, but the woman seized him by the arm, and pulled him violently back.

"No, no," she said, almost in a whisper, and in a hoarse and suppliant voice, "no, dear, not there, not there, you must not go in there."

"Why?" he said, for his wish to go in had only become stronger.

"Because if you go in there, you will have no inclination to remain with me, and I so want you to stay. If you only knew!"

"Well, what?" And with a violent movement, he opened the glazed door, when the smell of carbolic acid seemed almost to strike him in the face, but what he saw, made him recoil still more, for on a small iron bedstead, lay the dead body of a woman fantastically illuminated by a single wax candle, and in horror he turned to make his escape.

"Stop, my dear," the woman sobbed; and clinging to him, she told him amidst a flood of tears, that her friend had died two days previously, and that there was no money to bury her. "Because," she said, "you can understand that I want it to be a respectable funeral, we were so very fond of each other! Stop here, my dear, do stop. I only want ten francs more. Don't go away."

They had gone back into the bedroom, and she was pushing him towards the bed:

"No," he said, "let me go. I will give you the ten francs, but I will not stay here; I cannot."

He took his purse out of his pocket, extracted a ten-franc piece, put it on the table, and then went to the door; but when he had reached it, a thought suddenly struck him, as if somebody were reasoning with him, without his knowledge.

"Why lose these ten francs? Why not profit by this woman's good intentions. She certainly did her business bravely, and if I had not known about the matter, I should certainly not have gone away for some time ... Well then?"

But other obscurer suggestions whispered to him:

"She was her friend! ... They were so fond of each other! Was it friendship or love? Oh! love apparently. Well, it would surely be avenging morality, if this woman were forced to be faithless to that monstrous love?" And suddenly the man turned round and said in a low and trembling voice: "Look here! If I give you twenty francs instead of ten, I suppose you could buy some flowers for her, as well?"

The unhappy woman’s face brightened with pleasure and gratitude.

“Will you really give me twenty?”

“Yes,” he replied, “and more perhaps. It quite depends upon yourself.”

And with the quiet conscience of an honorable man who, at the same time, is not a fool he said gravely:

“You need only be very complaisant.”

And he added, mentally: “Especially as I deserve it, as in giving you twenty francs I am performing a good action.”

VIOLATED

"Really," Paul repeated, "really!"

"Yes, I who am here before you have been violated, and violated by!... But if I were to tell you immediately by whom, there would be no story, eh? And as you want a story, eh? And as you want a story, I will tell you all about it from beginning to end, and I shall begin at the beginning.

"I had been shooting over the waste land in the heart of Brittany for a week, which borders on the Black Mountain. It is a desolate and wild country, but it abounds in game. One can walk for hours without meeting a human being, and when one meets anybody, it is just the same as if one had not, for the people are absolutely ignorant of French, and when I got to an inn at night, I had to employ signs to let the people know that I wanted supper and bed.

"As I happened to be in a melancholy frame of mind at the time, that solitude delighted me, and my dog's companionship was quite enough for me, and so you may guess my irritation when I perceived one morning that I was being followed, absolutely followed, by another sportsman who seemed to wish to enter into conversation with me. The day before, I had already noticed him obstructing the horizon several times, and I had attributed it to the chances of sport, which brought us both to the same likely spots for game, but now I could not be mistaken! The fellow was evidently following me, and was stretching his little pair of compasses as much as he could, so as to keep up with my long strides, and took short cuts, so as to catch me up at the half circle.

"As he seemed bent upon the matter, I naturally grew obstinate also, and he spent his whole day in trying to catch me up, while I spent mine in trying to baffle him, and we seemed to be playing at *hide-and-seek*; the consequences were, that when it was getting dark, I had completely lost myself in the most deserted part of the moor. There was no cottage near, and not even a church spire in the distance. The only land-mark, was the hateful outline of that cursed man, about five hundred yards off.

"Of course he had won the game! I should have to put a good face on the matter, and allow him to join me, or rather I should have to join him myself, if I did not wish to sleep in the open air and with an empty stomach, and so I went up to him, and asked my way in a half-surly manner.

"He replied very affably, that there was no inn in the neighborhood, as the nearest village was five leagues off, but that he lived only about an hour's walk off, and that he considered himself very fortunate in being able to offer me hospitality.

"I was utterly done up, and how could I refuse? So we went off through the heather and furze; I walking slowly because I was so tired, and he went tripping along merrily with his legs like a basset hound's, which seemed untirable.

"And yet he was an old man, and not strongly built, for I could have knocked him over by blowing on him; but how he could walk, the beast!

"But he was not a troublesome companion, as I imagined he would have been, and he did not at all seem to wish to enter into conversation with me, as I feared he would. When he had given his invitation, and I had accepted it and thanked him in a few words, he did not open his lips again, and we walked on in silence, and only his glances worried me, for I felt them on me, as if he wished to force me into an intimacy, which my closed lips refused. But on the whole, his tenacious looks, which I noticed furtively, appeared sympathetic and even admiring — yes; really admiring!

"But I could not give him as good as he brought, for he was certainly not handsome; his legs were short, and rather bandy and he was thin and narrow-chested. His face was like a bit of parchment, furrowed and wrinkled, without a hair on it to hide the folds in his skin. His hair resembled that of an *Ignorantin* brother, with its gray locks falling onto his greasy collar; he had a nose like a ferret, and rat's eyes, but he was able to offer me food and quarters for the night, and it was not requisite that he should be handsome, in order to do that.

"Capital food, and very comfortable quarters! A manorial dwelling, a real old, well-furnished manor-house; and in the large dining-room, in front of the huge fireplace, where a large fire was blazing, dinner was laid; I will say no more than that! A hotch-potch, which had been stewing since morning, no doubt! A *salmis* of woodcock, in defense of which angels would have taken up arms; buckwheat cakes, in cream, flavored with aniseed, and a cheese, which is a rare thing and hardly ever to be found in Brittany, a cheese to make any one eat a four pound loaf if he only smelt the rind! The whole washed clown by Chambertin, and then brandy distilled by cider, which was so good that it made a man fancy that he had swallowed a deity in velvet breeches; not to mention the cigars, pure, smuggled havannahs; large, strong, not dry but green, on the contrary, which made a strong and intoxicating smoke.

"And how the little old gentleman stuffed, and drank and smoked! He was an ogre, a choirister, a sapper, and so was I, I must confess, and, upon my word, I cannot remember what we talked about during our Gargantuan feed! But we certainly talked, but what about? About shooting, certainly, and about women most probably. Confound it! Among men, after drinking! Yes, yes, about women, I am quite sure, and he told some funny stories, did the little old man! Especially about a portrait which was hanging over the large fireplace, and which represented his grandmother, a marchioness of the old régime. She was a woman who had certainly played some pranks, and they said that she was still frisky and had good legs and thighs when she was seventy.

"'It is extraordinary,' I remarked, 'how like you are to that portrait.'

"'Yes,' the old man replied with a smile; and then he added in his harsh, tremulous voice: 'I resemble her in everything. I am only sixty, and I feel as if I should have lusty, hot blood in me until I am seventy.'

"And then suddenly, very much moved, and looking at me admiringly, as he had done once before, he said to the portrait:

"'I say, marchioness, what a pity that you did not know this handsome young fellow!'

"I remembered that apostrophe and that look very well, when I went to bed about an hour later, nearly drunk, in the large room papered in white and gold, to which I was shown by a tall, broad-shouldered footman, who wished me good-night in Breton.

"*Good-night*, yes! But that implied going to sleep, which was just what I could not do. The Chambertin, the cider brandy and the cigars had certainly made me drunk, but not so as to overcome me altogether. On the contrary, I was excited, my nerves were highly strung, my blood was heated, and I was in a half-sleep in which I felt that I was very much alive, and my whole being was in a vibration and expansion, just as if I had been smoking hashecah.

"Of course! That was it; I was dreaming while I was awake; but I saw the door open and the marchioness come in, who had stepped down, out of her frame. She had taken off her furbelows, and was in her nightgown. Her high head-dress was replaced by a simple knot of ribbon, which confined her powdered hair into a small chignon, but I recognized her quite plainly, by the trembling light of the candle which she was carrying. It was her face with its piercing eyes, its pointed nose and its smiling and sensual mouth. She did not look so young to me as she appeared in her portrait. Bah! Perhaps that was merely caused by the feeble, flickering light! But I had not even time to account for it, not to reflect on the strangeness of the sight, nor to discuss the matter with myself and to say: 'Am I dead drunk, or is it a ghost?'

"No, I had no time, and that is the fact, for the candle was suddenly blown out and the marchioness was in my bed and holding me in her arms, and one fixed idea, the only one that I had, haunted me, which was:

"'Had the marchioness good limbs, and was she still frisky at seventy?' And I did not care much if she was seventy and if she was a ghost or not; I only thought of one thing: 'Has she really good limbs?'"

"By Jove, yes! She did not speak. Oh, marchioness! marchioness! And suddenly in spite of myself and to convince myself that it was not a mere fantastic dream, I exclaimed:

"'Why, good heavens! I am not dreaming!'

"'No, you are not dreaming,' two lips replied, trying to press themselves against mine.

"But, oh! horror! The mouth smelt of cigars and brandy! The voice was that of the little old man!

"With a bound I sent him flying on to the ground, and jumped out of bed, shouting:

"'Beast! beast!'

"Then I heard the door slam, and bare feet pattering on the stairs as he ran away; so I dressed hastily in the dark and went downstairs, still shouting.

"In the hall below, where I could see through the upper windows that the dawn was breaking, I met the broad-shouldered footman, who was holding a great cudgel in his hand. He was bawling also, in Breton, and pointed to the open door, outside where my dog was waiting. What could I say to this savage who did not speak French? Should I face his cudgel? There was no reason for doing so; and besides, I was even more ashamed than furious; so I hastily took up my gun and my game-bag, which were in the hall, and went off without turning round.

"Disgusted with sport in that part of the country, I returned to Brest the same day, and there, timidly and with many precautions, I tried to find out something about the little old man....

"'Oh, I know!' somebody replied at last to my question; 'you are speaking of the manor-house at Hervénidozse, where the old countess lives, who dresses like a man and sleeps with her coachman.'

"And with a deep sigh of relief, and much to the astonishment of my informant, I replied:

"'Oh! so much the better!'"

JEROBOAM

Anyone who said, or even insinuated, that the Reverend William Greenfield, Vicar of St. Sampson’s, Tottenham, did not make his wife Anna perfectly happy, would certainly have been very malicious. In their twelve years of married life, he had honored her with twelve children, and could anybody decently ask anything more of a saintly man?

Saintly to heroism in truth! For his wife Anna, who was endowed with invaluable virtues, which made her a model among wives and a paragon among mothers, had not been equally endowed physically, for, in one word, she was hideous. Her hair, which was coarse though it was thin, was the color of the national *half-and-half*, but of thick *half-and-half* which looked as if it had been already swallowed several times, and her complexion, which was muddy and pimply, looked as if it were covered with sand mixed with brickdust. Her teeth, which were long and protruding, seemed as if they were about to start out of their sockets in order to escape from that mouth with scarcely any lips, whose sulphurous breath had turned them yellow. They were evidently suffering from bile.

Her china-blue eyes looked vaguely, one very much to the right and the other very much to the left, with a divergent and frightened squint; no doubt in order that they might not see her nose, of which they felt ashamed. And they were quite right! Thin, soft, long, pendant, sallow, and ending in a violet knob, it irresistibly reminded those who saw it of something which cannot be mentioned except in a medical treatise. Her body, through the inconceivable irony of nature, was at the same time thin and flabby, wooden and chubby, without having either the elegance of slimness or the rounded gracefulness of stoutness. It might have been taken for a body which had formerly been adipose, but which had now grown thin, while the covering had remained floating on the framework.

She was evidently nothing but skin and bones, but then she had too many bones and too little skin.

It will be seen that the reverend gentleman had done his duty, his whole duty, more than his duty, in sacrificing a dozen times on this altar. Yes, a dozen times bravely and loyally! A dozen times, and his wife could not deny it nor dispute the number, because the children were there to prove it. A dozen times, and not one less!

And alas! not once more; and that was the reason why, in spite of appearances, Mrs. Anna Greenfield ventured to think, in the depths of her heart, that the Reverend William Greenfield, Vicar of St. Sampson's, Tottenham, had not made her perfectly happy; and she thought so all the more as, for four years now, she had been obliged to renounce all hope of that annual sacrifice, which was so easy and so fugitive formerly, but which had now fallen into disuse. In fact, at the birth of the twelfth child, the reverend gentleman had expressly said to her:

"God has greatly blessed our union, my dear Anna. We have reached the sacred number of the twelve tribes of Israel, and were we now to persevere in the works of the flesh, it would be mere debauchery, and I cannot suppose that you would wish me to end my exemplary life in lustful practices."

His wife blushed and looked down, and the holy man, with the legitimate pride of virtue which is its own reward, audibly thanked Heaven that he was "not as other men are."

A model among wives and the paragon of mothers, Anna lived with him for four years on those terms, without complaining to anyone, and contented herself by praying fervently to God that He would mercifully inspire her husband with the desire to begin a second series of the twelve tribes. At times even, in order to make her prayers more efficacious, she tried to compass that end by culinary means. She spared no pains, and gorged the reverend gentleman with highly-seasoned dishes. Hare soup, ox-tails stewed in sherry, the green fat in turtle soup, stewed mushrooms, Jerusalem artichokes, celery, and horse-radish; hot sauces, truffles, hashes with wine and cayenne pepper in them, curried lobsters, pies made of cocks' combs, oysters, and the soft roe of fish; and all these dishes were washed down by strong beer and generous wines, Scotch ale, Burgundy, dry champagne, brandy, whiskey and gin; in a word, by that numberless array of alcoholic drinks with which the English people love to heat their blood.

And, as a matter of fact, the reverend gentleman's blood became very heated, as was shown by his nose and cheeks, but in spite of this, the powers above were inexorable, and he remained quite indifferent as regards his wife, who was unhappy and thoughtful at the sight of that protruding nasal appendage, which, alas! was alone in its glory.

She became thinner, and at the same time, flabbier than ever, and almost began to lose her trust in God, when, suddenly, she had an inspiration. Was it not, perhaps, the work of devil?

She did not care to inquire too closely into the matter, as she thought it a very good idea, and it was this:

"Go to the Universal Exhibition in Paris, and there, perhaps, you will discover the secret to make yourself loved."

Decidedly luck favored her, for her husband immediately gave her permission to go, and as soon as she got into the *Esplanade des Invalides*, she saw the Algerian dancers, and she said to herself.

"Surely this would inspire William with the desire to be the father of the thirteenth tribe!"

But how could she manage to get him to be present at such abominable orgies? For she could not hide from herself that it was an abominable exhibition, and she knew how scandalized he would be at their voluptuous movements. She had no doubt that the devil had led her there, but she could not take her eyes off the scene, and it gave her an idea; and so for nearly a fortnight you might have seen the poor, unattractive woman sitting, and attentively and curiously watching the swaying hips of the Algerian women. She was learning.

The very evening of her return to London, she rushed into her husband's bedroom, disrobed herself in an instant, except for a thin gauze covering, and for the first time in her life appeared before him in all the ugliness of her semi-nudity.

"Come, come," the saintly man stammered out, "are you — are you mad, Anna! What demon has possessed you? Why inflict the disgrace of such a spectacle on me?"

But she did not listen to him, and did not reply, but suddenly she also began to sway her hips about like an almah. The reverend gentleman could not believe his eyes, and in his stupefaction, he did not think of covering them with his hands or even of shutting them. He looked at her, stupefied and dumbfounded, a prey to the hypnotism of ugliness. He watched her as she came forward and retired, and went up and down, as she skipped and wriggled, and threw herself into extraordinary attitudes. For a long time he sat motionless and almost unable to speak. He only said in a low voice:

"Oh, Lord! To think that twelve times!... twelve times!... a whole dozen!"

However, she fell into a chair, panting and worn out, and said to herself:

"Thank Heaven! William looks like he used to do formerly on the days that he honored me. Thank Heaven! There will be a thirteenth tribe, and then a fresh series of tribes, for William is very methodical in all that he does!"

But William merely took a blanket off the bed and threw it over her, saying in a voice of thunder:

"Your name is no longer Anna, Mrs. Greenfield; for the future you shall be called Jezabel. I only regret that I have twelve times mingled my blood with your impure blood." And then, seized by pity, he added: "If you were only in a state of inebriety, of intoxication, I could excuse you."

"Well, yes, yes!" she exclaimed, repentantly, "yes, I am in that state ... Forgive me, William — forgive a poor drunken woman!"

"I will forgive you, Anna," he replied, and he gave her a wash-hand basin, saying: "Cold water will do you good, and when your head is clear, remember the lesson which you must learn from this occurrence."

"What lesson?" she asked, humbly.

"That people ought never to depart from their usual habits."

"But why, then, William," she asked, timidly, "have you changed your habits?"

"Hold your tongue!" he cried— "hold your tongue, Jezabel! Have you not got over your intoxication yet? For twelve years I certainly followed the divine precept: *increase and multiply*, once a year. But since then, I have grown accustomed to something else, and I do not wish to alter my habits."

And the Reverend William Greenfield, Vicar of St. Sampson's, Tottenham, the saintly man whose blood was inflamed by heating food and liquor, whose ears were like full-blown poppies and who had a nose like a tomato, left his wife and, as had been his habit for four years, went to make love to Polly, the servant.

"Now, Polly," he said, "you are a clever girl, and I mean, through you, to teach Mrs. Greenfield a lesson she will never forget. I will try and see what I can do for you."

And in order to this, he called her his little Jezabel, and said to her, with an unctuous smile:

“Call me Jeroboam! You don’t understand why? Neither do I, but that does not matter. Take off all your things, Polly, and show yourself to Mrs. Greenfield.”

The servant did as she was bidden, and the result was that Mrs. Greenfield never again hinted to her husband the desirability of laying the foundation of a thirteenth tribe.

MARGOT’S TAPERS

I

Margot Fresquyl had allowed herself to be tempted for the first time by the delicious intoxication of the mortal sin of loving, on the evening of Midsummer Day.

While most of the young people were holding each others’ hands and dancing in a circle round the burning logs, the girl had slyly taken the deserted road which led to the wood, leaning on the arm of her partner, a tall, vigorous farm servant, whose Christian name was Tiennou, which, by the way, was the only name he had borne from his birth. For he was entered on the register of births with this curt note: *Father and mother unknown*; he having been found on St. Stephen’s Day under a shed on a farm, where some poor, despairing wretch had abandoned him, perhaps even without turning her head round to look at him.

For months Tiennou had madly worshiped that fair, pretty girl, who was now trembling as he clasped her in his arms, under the sweet coolness of the leaves. He religiously rememberd how she had dazzled him — like some ecstastic vision, the recollection of which always remains imprinted on the eyes — the first time that he saw her in her father’s mill, where he had gone to ask for work. She stood out all rosy from the warmth of the day, amidst the impalpable clouds of flour, which diffused an indistinct whiteness through the air. With her hair hanging about her in untidy curls, as if she had just awakened from a profound sleep, she stretched herself lazily, with her bare arms clasped behind her head, and yawned so as to show her white teeth, which glistened like those of a young wolf, and her maiden nudity appeared beneath her unbuttoned bodice with innocent immodesty. He told her that he thought her adorable, so stupidly, that she made fun of him and scourged him with her cruel laughter; and, from that day he spent his life in Margot’s shadow. He might have been taken for one of those wild beasts ardent with desire, which ceaselessly utter maddened cries to the stars on nights when the constellations bathe the dark coverts in warm light. Margot met him wherever she went, and seized with pity, and by degrees agitated by his sobs, by his dumb entreaties, by the burning looks which flashed from his large eyes, she had returned his love; she had dreamt restlessly that during a whole night she had been in his vigorous arms which pressed her like corn that is being crushed in the mill, that she was obeying a man who had subdued her, and learning strange things which the other girls talked about in a low voice when they were drawing water at the well.

She had, however, been obliged to wait until Midsummer Day, for the miller watched over his heiress very carefully.

The two lovers told each other all this as they were going along the dark road, and innocently giving utterance to words of happiness, which rise to the lips like the forgotten refrain of a song. At times they were silent, not knowing what more to say, and not daring to embrace each other any more. The night was soft and warm, the warmth of a half-closed alcove in a bedroom, and which had the effect of a tumbler of new wine.

The leaves were sleeping motionless and in supreme peace, and in the distance they could hear the monotonous sound of the brooks as they flowed over the stones. Amidst the dull noise of the insects, the nightingales were answering each other from tree to tree, and everything seemed alive with hidden life, and the sky was bright with such a shower of falling stars, that they might have been taken for white forms wandering among the dark trunks of the trees.

“Why have we come?” Margot asked, in a panting voice. “Do you not want me any more, Tiennou?”

“Alas! I dare not,” he replied. “Listen: you know that I was picked up on the high road, that I have nothing in the world except my two arms, and that Miller Fresquyl will never let his daughter marry a poor devil like me.”

She interrupted him with a painful gesture, and putting her lips to his, she said:

“What does that matter? I love you, and I want you ... Take me ...”

And it was thus, on St. John’s night, Margot Fresquyl for the first time yielded to the mortal sin of love.

II

Did the miller guess his daughter’s secret, when he heard her singing merrily from dawn till dusk, and saw her sitting dreaming at her window instead of sewing as she was in the habit of doing?

Did he see it when she threw ardent kisses from the tips of her fingers to her lover at a distance?

However that might have been, he shut poor Margot in the mill as if it had been a prison. No more love or pleasure, no more meetings at night at the verge of the wood. When she chatted with the passers-by, when she tried furtively to open the gate of the enclosure and to make her escape, her father beat her as if she had been some disobedient animal, until she fell on her knees on the floor with clasped hands, scarcely able to move and her whole body covered with purple bruises.

She pretended to obey him, but she revolted in her whole being, and the string of bitter insults which he heaped upon her rang in her head. With clenched hands, and a gesture of terrible hatred, she cursed him for standing in the way of her love, and at night, she rolled about on her bed, bit the sheets, moaned, stretched herself out for imaginary embraces, maddened by the sensual heat with which her body was still palpitating. She called out Tiennou’s name aloud, she broke the peaceful stillness of the sleeping house with her heartrending sobs, and her dejected voice drowned the monotonous sound of the water that was dripping under the arch of the mill, between the immovable paddles of the wheel.

III

Then there came that terrible week in October when the unfortunate young fellows who had drawn bad numbers had to join their regiments. Tiennou was one of them, and Margot was in despair to think that she should not see him for five interminable years, that they could not even, at that hour of sad farewells, be alone and exchange those consoling words which afterwards alleviate the pain of absence.

Tiennou prowled about the house, like a starving beggar, and one morning, while the miller was mending the wheel, he managed to see Margot.

“I will wait for you in the old place to-night,” he whispered, in terrible grief. “I know it is the last time ... I shall throw myself into some deep hole in the river if you do not come! ...”

“I will be there, Tiennou,” she replied, in a bewildered manner. “I swear I will be there ... even if I have to do something terrible to enable me to come!”

* * *

The village was burning in the dark night, and the flames, fanned by the wind, rose up like sinister torches. The thatched roofs, the ricks of corn, the haystacks, and the barns fell in, and crackled like rockets, while the sky looked as if they were illuminated by an *aurora borealis*. Fresquyl’s mill was smoking, and its calcined ruins were reflected on the deep water. The sheep and cows were running about the fields in terror, the dogs were howling, and the women were sitting on the broken furniture, and were crying and wringing their hands; while during all this time Margot was abandoning herself to her lover’s ardent caresses, and with her arms round his neck, she said to him, tenderly:

“You see that I have kept my promise ... I set fire to the mill so that I might be able to get out. So much the worse if all have suffered. But I do not care as long as you are happy in having me, and love me!”

And pointing to the fire which was still burning fiercely in the distance, she added with a burst of savage laughter:

“Tiennou, we shall not have such beautiful tapers at out wedding Mass when you come back from your regiment!”

And thus it was that for the second time Margot Fresquyl yielded to the mortal sin of love.

CAUGHT IN THE VERY ACT

“It is certain,” Sulpice de Laurièr said, “that I had absolutely forgotten the date on which I was to allow myself to be taken in the very act, with a mistress for the occasion. As neither my wife nor I had any serious nor plausible reason for a divorce, not even the slightest incompatibility of temper, and as there is always a risk of not softening the heart of even the most indulgent judge when he is told that the parties have agreed to drag their load separately, each for themselves, that they are too frisky, too fond of pleasure and of wandering about from place to place to continue the conjugal experiment, we between us got up the ingenious stage arrangement of, ‘a serious wrong...’

“This was funnier than all the rest, and under any other circumstances it would have been repugnant to me to mix up our servants in the affair like so many others do, or to distress that pretty little, fair and delicate Parisian woman, even though it were only in appearance and to pass as a common *Sganarelle* with the manners of a carter, in the eyes of some scoundrel of a footman, or of some lady’s maid. And so when Maître Le Chevrier, that kind lawyer who certainly knows more female secrets than the most fashionable confessor, gave a startled exclamation on seeing me still in my dressing-gown, and slowly smoking a cigar like an idler who has no engagements down on his tablets, and who is quietly waiting for the usual time for dressing and going to dine at his club, he exclaimed:

“‘Have you forgotten that this is the day, at the *Hôtel de Bade*, between five and six o’clock? In an hour, Madame de Laurière will be at the office of the Police Commissary in the Rue de Provence, with her uncle and Maître Cantenac ...’

“An hour; I only had an hour, sixty short minutes to dress in, to take a room, find a woman and persuade her to go with me immediately, and to excite her feelings, so that this extravagant adventure might not appear too equivocal to the Commissary of Police. One hour in which to carry out such a program was enough to make a man lose his head. And there were no possible means of putting off that obligatory entertainment, to let Madame Le Laurière know in time, and to gain a few minutes more.

"'Have you found a woman, at any rate?' Maître de Chevrier continued anxiously.

"'No, my dear sir!'

"I immediately began to think of the whole string of my dear female friends. Should I choose Liline Ablette, who could refuse me nothing, Blanch Rebus, who was the best comrade a man ever had, or Lalie Spring, that luxurious creature, who was constantly in search of something new? Neither one nor the other of them, for it was ninety-nine chances to one that all these confounded girls were in the *Bois de Boulogne*, or at their dressmakers!"

"'Bah! Just pick up the first girl you meet on the pavement.'

"And before the hour was up, I was bolting the door of a room, which looked out onto the boulevard.

"The woman whom I had picked up, as she was walking past the *cafés*, from the *Vaudeville* to *Tortoni's*, was twenty at the most. She had an impudent, snub nose, as if it had been turned up in fun by a fillip, large eyes with-deep rims round them; her lips were too red, and she had the slow, indolent walk of a girl who goes in for debauchery too freely and who began too soon, but she was pretty, and her linen was very clean and neat. And she was evidently used to chance love-making, and had a way of undressing herself in two or three rapid movements, of throwing her toggery to the right and left, until she was extremely lightly clad, and of throwing herself onto the bed which astonished me as a sight that was well worth seeing.

"She did not talk much, though she began by saying: 'Pay up at once, old man ... You don't look like a fellow who would bilk a girl, but it puts me into better trim when I have been paid.'

"I gave her two napoleons, and she eyed me with gratitude and respect at the same time, but also with that uneasy look of a girl who asks herself: 'What does this tool expect for it?'

"The whole affair began to amuse me, and I must confess that I was rather taken with her, for she had a beautiful figure and complexion, and I was hoping that the Commissary would not come directly, when there was a loud rapping at the door.

“She sat up with a start, and grew so pale that one would have said she was about to faint.

“‘What a set of pigs, to come and interrupt people like this!’ she muttered between her teeth; while I affected the most complete calm.

“‘Somebody who has made a mistake in the room, my dear,’ I said.

“But this noise increased, and suddenly I heard a man’s voice saying clearly and authoritatively:

“‘Open the door, in the name of the law!’

“On hearing that, one would have thought that she had received a shock from an electric battery, by the nimble manner in which she jumped out of bed; and quickly putting on her stays and her dress anyhow, she endeavored to discover a way out in every corner of the room, like a wild beast, trying to escape from its cage. I thought that she was going to throw herself out of the window, so I seized hold of her to prevent her.

“The unfortunate creature acted like a madwoman, and when she felt my arm round her waist, she cried in a hoarse voice:

“‘I see it ... You have sold me ... You thought that I should expose myself.... Oh! you filthy brutes — you filthy brutes!’

“And suddenly, passing from abuse to entreaties, pale and with chattering teeth, she threw herself at my feet, and said, in a low voice:

“‘Listen to me, my dear: you don’t look a bad sort of fellow, and you would not like them to lock me up. I have a kid and the old woman to keep. Hide me behind the bed, do, and please don’t give me up.... I will make it up to you, and you shall have no cause for grumbling....’

“At that moment however, the lock which they had unscrewed fell onto the floor with a metallic sound, and Madame de Laurière and the Police Commissary, wearing his tricolored scarf, appeared in the door, while behind them the heads of the uncle and of the lawyer could be seen indistinctly in the background.

“The girl had uttered a cry of terror and going up to the Commissary she said, panting:

“‘I swear to you that I am not guilty, that I was not ... I will tell you everything if you will promise me not to tell them that I spilt, for they would pay me out....’

“The Commissary, who was surprised, but who guessed that there was something which was not quite clear behind all this, forgot to draw up his report, and so the lawyer went up to him and said:

"'Well, monsieur, what are we waiting for?'

"But he paid no attention to anything but the woman, and looking at her sharply and suspiciously through his gold-rimmed spectacles, he said to her in a hard voice:

"'Your names and surnames?'

"'Juliette Randal, or as I am generally called, Jujutte Pipehead.'

"'So you will swear you were not— '

"She interrupted him eagerly:

"'I swear it, monsieur, and I know that my little man had nothing to do with it either. He was only keeping a look-out while the others collared the swag. ... I will swear that I can account for every moment of my time that night. Roquin was drunk, and told me everything.... They got five thousand francs from Daddy Zacharias, and of course Roquin had his share, but he did not work with his partners. It was Minon Ménilmuche, whom they call *Drink-without-Thirst*, who held the gardener's hands, and who bled him with a blow from his knife.'

"The Commissary let her run on, and when she had finished, he questioned me, as if I had belonged to Jujutte's band.

"'Your name, Christian name, and profession?'

"'Marquis Sulpice de Laurièr, living on my own private income, at 24, Rue de Galilee.'

"'De Laurièr? Oh, very well.... Excuse me, monsieur, but at Madame de Laurière's request, I declare formally before these gentlemen, who will be able to give evidence, that the girl Juliette Randal, whom they call *Jujutte Tête-de-Pipe*, is your mistress. You are at liberty to go, Monsieur le Marquis, and you, girl Randal answer my questions.'

"Thus, by the most extraordinary chance, our divorce suit created a sensation which I had certainly never foreseen. I was obliged to appear in the Assize Court as a witness in the celebrated case of those burglars, when three of them were condemned to death, and to undergo the questioning of the idiotic Presiding Judge, who tried by all means in his power to make me acknowledge that I was Jujutte Tête-de-Pipe's regular lover; and in consequence, ever since then I have passed as an ardent seeker after novel sensations, and a man who wallows in the lowest depths of the Parisian dunghill.

"I cannot say that this unjust reputation has brought me any pleasant love affairs. Women are so perverse, so absurd, and so curious!"

MOHAMMED FRIPOULI

"Shall we have our coffee on the roof?" asked the captain.

I answered: "Yes, certainly."

He rose. It was already dark in the room which was lighted only by the interior court, after the fashion of Moorish houses. Before the high, ogive windows, convolvulus vines hung from the gnat terrace, where they passed the hot summer evenings. There only remained upon the table some grapes, big as plums, some fresh figs of a violet hue, some yellow pears, some long, plump bananas, and some Tougourt dates in a basket of *alfa.*

The Moor who waited on them opened the door and I went upstairs to the azure walls which received from above the soft light of the dying day.

And soon as I gave a deep sigh of happiness, on reaching the terrace. It overlooked Algiers, the harbor, the roadstead, and the distant shores.

The house, bought by the captain, was a former Arab residence, situated in the midst of the old city, among those labyrinthine little streets, where swarm the strange population of the African coasts.

Beneath us, the flat, square roofs descended, like steps of giants, to the pointed roofs of the European quarter of the city. Behind these might be perceived the flags of the boats at anchor, then the sea, the open sea, blue and calm under the blue and calm sky.

We stretched ourselves upon the mats, our heads resting upon cushions, and while leisurely sipping the savory coffee of the locality, I gazed at the first stars in the dark azure. They were hardly perceptible, so far away, so pale as yet giving scarcely any light.

A light heat, a winged heat, caressed our skins. And at times the warm, heavy air, in which there was a vague odor, the odor of Africa, seemed the hot breath of the desert, coming over the peaks of Atlas. The captain, lying on his back, said:

"What a country, my dear boy! How soft life is here! How peculiar and delicious repose is in this land! How the nights seem to be made for dreams."

I looked at the stars coming out with a lazy, yet active, curiosity, with a drowsy happiness.

I murmured:

"You might tell me something of your life in the south."

Captain Marret was one of the oldest officers in the army of Africa, an officer of fortune, a former *spahi,* who had cut his way to his present rank.

Thanks to him, to his relations and friendships, I had been able to accomplish a superb trip to the desert, and I had come that evening to thank him before going to France.

He said: "What kind of a story do you want? I have had so many adventures during twelve years of sand, that I can't think of a single one." And I replied: "Well, tell me of the Arabian women." He did not reply. He remained stretched out with his arms bent, and his hands under his head, and I noticed at times the odor of his cigar, the smoke of which went straight up into the sky, so breezeless was the night.

And all of a sudden he began to laugh.

"Ah! yes, I'll tell you about a queer affair which occurred in my first days in Algeria.

"We had then in the army of Africa some extraordinary types, such as have not been seen since, types which would have amused you, so much in fact, that you would have wanted to spend all your life in this country.

"I was a simple *spahi*, a little *spahi,* twenty years old, light-haired, swaggering, supple, and strong. I was attached to a military command at Boghar. You know Boghar, which they call the balcony of the south. You have seen from the top of the fort the beginning of this land of fire, devoured, naked, tormented, stony, and red. It is really the antechamber to the desert, the broiling and superb frontier of the immense region of yellow solitudes.

"Well, there were forty of us *spahis* at Boghar, a company of *joyeux,* and a squadron of Chasseurs d'Afrique, when it was learned that the tribe of the Ouled-Berghi had assassinated an English traveler, come, no man knows how, into the country, for the English have the devil in their bodies.

"Punishment had to be given for the crime against a European; but the commanding officer hesitated at sending a column, thinking, in truth, that one Englishman wasn't worth so much of a movement.

“Now, as he was talking of this affair with the captain and the lieutenant, a quartermaster of *spahis* who was waiting for orders proposed all at once to go and punish the tribe if they would give him only six men. You know that in the south they are more free than in the city garrisons and there exists between officer and soldier a sort of comradeship which is not found elsewhere.

“The captain began to laugh:

“‘You, my good man?’

“‘Yes, captain, and if you desire it, I will bring you back the whole tribe as prisoners.’

“The commandant, who had fantastic ideas, took him at his word.

“‘You will start to-morrow morning with six men of your own selection, and if you don’t accomplish your purpose, look out for yourself.’

“The sub officer smiled in his mustache.

“‘Fear nothing, commandant. My prisoners shall be here Wednesday noon at latest.’

“The quartermaster, Mohammed Fripouli, as he was called, was a Turk, a true Turk, who had entered the service of France, after a life which had been very much knocked about and not altogether too clean. He had traveled in many places, in Greece, in Asia Minor, in Egypt, in Palestine, and he had been forced to pay a good many forfeits on the way. He was an ex-Bashi-Bazouk, bold, ferocious, and gay, with the calm gaiety of the Oriental. He was stout, very stout, but supple as a monkey and he rode a horse marvelously well. His mustache, incredibly thick and long, always aroused in me a confused idea of the crescent moon and a scimiter. He hated the Arabs with a deadly hatred, and he pursued them with frightful cruelty, continually inventing new tricks, calculated and terrible perfidies. He was possessed, too, of incredible strength and inconceivable audacity.

“The commandant said to him: ‘Choose your men, my blade.’

“Mohammed took me. He had confidence in me, the brave man, and I was grateful to him, body and soul, for this choice, which gave me as much pleasure as the Cross of Honor later.

“So we started the next morning, at dawn, all seven of us, and nobody else. My comrades were composed of those bandits, those plunderers, who, after marauding and playing the vagabond in all possible countries, finish by taking service in some foreign legion. Our army in Africa was then full of these rascals, excellent soldiers, but not at all scrupulous.

“Mohammed had given to each to carry ten pieces of rope about a meter in length. I was charged, besides as being the youngest and the least heavy, with a piece about a hundred meters long. When he was asked what he was going to do with all that rope, he answered with his sly and placid air:

“‘It is to fish for the Arabs.’

“And he winked his eye mischievously, an action which he had learned from an old Chasseur d’Afrique from Paris.

“He marched in front of our squad, his head wrapped in a red turban, which he always wore in a campaign, and he smiled with cunning chuckles in his enormous mustache.

“He was truly handsome, this big Turk, with his powerful paunch, his shoulders of a colossus and his tranquil air. He rode a white horse of medium height, but strong; and the rider seemed ten times too big for his mount.

“We were passing through a long, dry ravine, bare and yellow, in the valley of the Chelif, and we talked of our expedition. My companions had all possible accents, there being among them a Spaniard, a Greek, an American, and two Frenchmen. As for Mohammed Fripouli, he spoke with an incredibly thick tongue.

“The sun, the terrible sun, the sun of the south, which no one knows anything about on the other side of the Mediterranean, fell upon our shoulders, and we advanced at a walk, as they always do in that country.

“All day we marched without meeting a tree or an Arab.

“Toward one o’clock in the afternoon, we had eaten, near a little spring which flowed between the rocks, the bread and dried mutton which we had brought in our knapsacks; then after twenty minutes’ rest, went out again on our way.

“Toward six o’clock in the evening, finally, after a long detour which our leader had forced us to make, we discovered behind a knob, a tribe encamped. The brown, low tents made dark spots on the yellow earth, looking like great mushrooms growing at the foot of this red hill which was burned by the sun.

“They were our game. A little further away, on the edge of a meadow of *alfa* of a dark green color, the tied horses were pasturing.

“‘Gallop!’ ordered Mohammed, and we arrived like a whirlwind in the midst of the camp. The women, terrified, covered with white rags which hung floating upon them, ran quickly to their canvas huts, cringing and crouching and crying like hunted beasts. The men, on the contrary, came from all sides to defend themselves. We struck right for the tallest tent, that of the *agha.*

“We kept our sabers in the scabbards, after the example of Mohammed, who galloped in a singular fashion. He sat absolutely motionless, erect upon his small horse, which strove under him madly to carry such a weight. And the tranquillity of the rider with his long mustache contracted strangely with the liveliness of the animal.

“The native chief came out of his tent as we arrived before it. He was a tall, thin man, dark, with a gleaming eye, full forehead, and arched eyebrows.

“He cried in Arabic:

“‘What do you want?’

“Mohammed, stopping his horse short, replied in his language: ‘Was it you who killed the English traveler?’

“The *agha* said in a strong voice:

“‘I am not going to be examined by you!’

“There was around us, as it were, a rumbling tempest. The Arabs ran up from all sides, pressing and surrounding us, all the time vociferating loudly.

“They had the air of ferocious birds of prey, with their big curved noses, their thin faces with high cheek-bones, their flowing garments, agitated by their gestures.

“Mohammed smiled, his turban crooked, his eye excited, and I saw shivers of pleasure on his cheeks which were pendulous, fleshy, and wrinkled.

“He replied in a thunderous voice:

“‘Death to him who has given death!’

“And he pointed his revolver at the brown face of the *agha.* I saw a little smoke leap from the muzzle; then a red foam of blood and brains spurted from the forehead of the chief. He fell, like a block, on his back, spreading out his arms, which lifted like wings the folds of his burnous.

“Truly, I thought my last day had come, such a terrible tumult rose about us.

“Mohammed had drawn his saber. We unsheathed ours, like him. He cried, whirling away the men, who were pressing him the closest:

“‘Life to those who submit. Death to all others.’

"And seizing the nearest in his herculean grasp, he dragged him to his saddle, tied his hands, yelling to us:

"'Do as I, and saber those who resist.'

"In five minutes, we had captured twenty Arabs, whose wrists we securely bound. Then we pursued the fleeing ones, for there had been a perfect rout around us at the sight of the naked sabers. We captured about twenty more men.

"Over all the plains might be seen white objects which were running. The women were dragging along their children and uttering piercing cries. The yellow dogs, like jackals, barked around us, and showed us their white fangs.

"Mohammed, who seemed mad with joy, leaped from his horse at a bound and seizing the cord which I had brought:

"'Attention!' he cried, 'two men to the ground.' "Then he made a terrible and peculiar thing — a string of prisoners, or rather a string of hanged men. He had firmly tied the two wrists of the first captive, then he made a running knot around his neck with the same cord, which bound again the arm of the next and twisted it around his neck. Our fifty prisoners soon found themselves fastened in such a way that the slightest movement of one to flee would strangle him as well as his two neighbors. Every gesture they made pulled on the noose around their necks, and they had to march with the same step with but a pace separating from one another, under the penalty of falling immediately, like a hare in a snare.

"When this strange deed was done, Mohammed began to laugh, with his silent laughter, which shook his stomach without a sound leaving his mouth. "'That's an Arabian chain.' said he.

"We began to twist and turn before the terrified and piteous faces of the prisoners.

"'Now,' cried our chief, 'at each end fix me that.' "A stake was fastened at each end of this ribbon of white-clad captives, like phantoms, who stood motionless as if they had been changed into stones.

"'Now, let us dine!' said the Turk. A fire was made and a sheep was cooked, which we ate with our fingers. Then we had some dates which we found in the trees; drank some milk obtained in the Arab tents; and we picked up a few silver trinkets forgotten by the fugitives. We were tranquilly finishing our repast, when I perceived, on the hill opposite, a singular gathering. It was the women who had just now fled, nothing but women. They came running toward us. I pointed them out to Mohammed Fripouli.

"He smiled:

"'It is the dessert!' said he.

"'Ah! yes! the dessert.'

"They approached, running like mad women, and soon we were peppered with stones which they hurled at us without stopping their pace; then we saw that they were armed with knives, tent stakes, and old utensils.

"'To horse!' cried Mohammed. It was time. The attack was terrible. They came to free the prisoners and tried to cut the rope. The Turk, understanding the danger, became furious and shouted: 'Saber them! Saber them! Saber them!' And as we stood motionless, disturbed by this new kind of charge, hesitating at killing women, he threw himself upon the advancing band.

"He charged all alone, this battalion of women, in tatters, and he began to saber them, the wretch, like a madman, with such rage and fury, that a white body might be seen to fall at every stroke of his arm.

"He was so terrible, that the women, terrified, fled as quickly as they had come, leaving on the ground a dozen dead and wounded, whose crimson blood stained their white garments.

"And Mohammed, frowning, turned toward us, exclaiming:

"'Start, start, my sons! They will come back.'

"And we beat a retreat, conducting at a slow step our prisoners, who were paralyzed by fear of strangulation.

"The next day, noon struck as we arrived at Boghar with our chain of hanged men. Only six died on the way. But it had often been necessary to loosen the knots from one end of the convoy to the other, for every shock half strangled ten captives at once."

The captain was silent. I did not say anything in reply. I thought of the strange country where such things could be seen and I gazed at the innumerable and shining flock of stars in the dark sky.

THE CONFESSION

Monsieur de Champdelin had no reason to complain of his lot as a married man; nor could he accuse destiny of having played him in a bad turn, as it does so many others, for it would have been difficult to find a more desirable, merrier, prettier little woman, or one who was easier to amuse and to guide than his wife. To see the large, limpid eyes which illuminated her fair, girlish face, one would think that her mother must have spent whole nights before her birth, in looking dreamily at the stars, and so had become, as it were, impregnated with their magic brightness. And one did not know which to prefer — her bright, silky hair, or her slightly *restroussé* nose, with its vibrating nostrils, her red lips, which looked as alluring as a ripe peach, her beautiful shoulders, her delicate ears, which resembled mother-of-pearl, or her slim waist and rounded figure, which would have delighted and tempted a sculptor.

And then she was always merry, overflowing with youth and life, never dissatisfied, only wishing to enjoy herself, to laugh, to love and be loved, and putting all the house into a tumult, as if it had been a great cage full of birds. In spite of all this, however, that worn out fool, Champdelin, had never cared much about her, but had left that charming garden lying waste, and almost immediately after their honeymoon, he had resumed is usual bachelor habits, and had begun to lead the same fast life that he had done of old.

It was stronger than he, for his was one of those libertine natures which are constant targets for love, and which never resign themselves to domestic peace and happiness. The last woman who came across him, in a love adventure, was always the one whom he loved best, and the mere contact with a petticoat inflamed him, and made him commit the most imprudent actions.

As he was not hard to please, he fished, as it were, in troubled waters, went after the ugly ones and the pretty ones alike, was bold even to impudence, was not to be kept off by mistakes, nor anger, nor modesty, nor threats, though he sometimes fell into a trap and got a thrashing from some relative or jealous lover; he withstood all attempts to get hush-money out of him, and became only all the more enamored of vice and more ardent in his lures and pursuit of love affairs on that account.

But the work-girls and the shop-girls and all the tradesmen's wives in Saint Martéjoux knew him, and made him pay for their whims and their coquetry, and had to put up with his love-making. Many of them smiled or blushed when they saw him under the tall plane-trees in the public garden, or met him in the unfrequented, narrow streets near the Cathedral, with his thin, sensual face, whose looks had something satyr-like about them, and some of them used to laugh at him and make fun of him, though they ran away when he went up to them. And when some friend or other, who was sorry that he could forget himself so far, used to say to him, when he was at a loss for any other argument: "And your wife, Champdelin? Are you not afraid that she will have her revenge and pay you out in your own coin?" his only reply was a contemptuous and incredulous shrug of the shoulders.

She deceive him, indeed; she, who was as devout, as virtuous, and as ignorant of forbidden things as a nun, who cared no more for love than she did for an old slipper! She, who did not even venture on any veiled allusions, who was always laughing, who took life as it came, who performed her religious duties with edifying assiduity, she to pay him back, so as to make him look ridiculous, and to gad about at night? Never! Anyone who could think such a thing must have lost his senses.

However, one summer day, when the roofs all seemed red-hot, and the whole town appeared dead, Monsieur de Champdelin had followed two milliner's girls, with bandboxes in their hands from street to street, whispering nonsense to them, and promising beforehand to give them anything they asked him for, and had gone after them as far as the Cathedral. In their fright, they took refuge there, but he followed them in, and, emboldened by the solitude of the nave, and by the perfect silence in the building, he became more enterprising and bolder. They did not know how to defend themselves, or to escape from him, and were trembling at his daring attempts, and at his kisses, when he saw a confessional whose doors were open, in one of the side chapels. "We should be much more comfortable in there, my little dears," he said, going into it, as if to get such an unexpected nest ready for them.

But they were quicker than he, and throwing themselves against the grated door, they pushed it to before he could turn round, and locked him in. At first he thought it was only a joke, and it amused him; but when they began to laugh heartily and putting their tongues at him, as if he had been a monkey in a cage, and overwhelmed him with insults, he first of all grew angry, and then humble, offering to pay well for his ransom, and he implored them to let him out, and tried to escape like a mouse does out of a trap. They, however, did not appear to hear him, but naively bowed to him ceremoniously, wished him good night, and ran out as fast as they could.

Champdelin was in despair; he did not know what to do, and cursed his bad luck. What would be the end of it? Who would deliver him from that species of prison, and was he going to remain there all the afternoon and night, like a portmanteau that had been forgotten at the lost luggage office? He could not manage to force the lock, and did not venture to knock hard against the sides of the confessional, for fear of attracting the attention of some beadle or sacristan. Oh! those wretched girls, and how people would make fun of him and write verses about him, and point their fingers at him, if the joke were discovered and got noised abroad!

By and by, he heard the faint sound of prayers in the distance and through the green serge curtain that concealed him Monsieur Champdelin heard the rattle of the beads on the chaplets, as the women repeated their *Ave Maria's*, and the rustle of dresses and the noise of footsteps on the pavement.

Suddenly, he felt a tickling in his throat that nearly choked him, and he could not altogether prevent himself from coughing, and when at last it passed off, the unfortunate man was horrified at hearing some one come into the chapel and up to the confessional. Whoever it was, knelt down, and gave a discreet knock at the grating which separated the priest from his penitents, so he quickly put on the surplice and stole which were hanging on a nail, and covering his face with his handkerchief, and sitting back in the shade, he opened the grating.

It was a woman, who was already saying her prayers and he gave the responses as well as he could, from his boyish recollections, and was somewhat agitated by the delicious scent that emanated from her half-raised veil and from her bodice; but at her first words he started so, that he almost fainted. He had recognized his wife's voice, and it felt to him as if his seat were studded with sharp nails, that the sides of the confessional were closing in on him, and as if the air were growing rarified.

He now collected himself, however, and regaining his self-possession, he listened to what she had to say with increasing curiosity, and with some uncertain, and necessary interruptions. The young woman sighed, was evidently keeping back something, spoke about her unhappiness, her melancholy life, her husband’s neglect, the temptations by which she was surrounded, and which she found it so difficult to resist; her conscience seemed to be burdened by an intolerable weight, though she hesitated to accuse herself directly. And in a low voice, with unctuous and coaxing tones, and mastering himself, Champdelin said:

“Courage, my child; tell me everything; the divine mercy is infinite; tell me all, without hesitation.”

Then, all at once, she told him everything that was troubling her; how passion and desire had thrown her into the arms of one of her husband’s best friends, the exquisite happiness that they felt when they met every day, his delightful tenderness, which she could no longer resist, the sin which was her joy, her only object, her consolation, her dream. She grew excited, sobbed, seemed enervated and worn out, as if she were still burning from her lover’s kisses, hardly seemed to know what she was saying, and begged for temporary absolution from her sins; but then Champdelin, in his exasperation, and unable to restrain himself any longer, interrupted her in a furious voice:

“Oh! no! Oh! no; this is not at all funny ... keep such sort of things to yourself, my dear!”

Poor little Madame de Champdelin nearly went out of her mind with fright and astonishment, and they are now waiting for the decree which will break their chains and let them part.

WAS IT A DREAM?

OR

THE DEAD GIRL

“I had loved her madly! Why does one love? Why does one love? How queer it is to see only one being in the world, to have only one thought in one’s mind, only one desire in the heart, and only one name on the lips; a name which comes up continually, which rises like the water in a spring, from the depths of the soul, which rises to the lips, and which one repeats over and over again which one whispers ceaselessly, everywhere, like a prayer.

“I am going to tell you our story, for love only has one, which is always the same. I met her and loved her; that is all. And for a whole year I have lived on her tenderness, on her caresses, in her arms, in her dresses, on her words, so completely wrapped up, bound, imprisoned in everything which came from her, that I no longer knew whether it was day or night, if I was dead or alive, on this old earth of ours, or elsewhere.

“And then she died. How? I do not know. I no longer know; but one evening she came home wet, for it was raining heavily, and the next day she coughed, and she coughed for about a week, and took to her bed. What happened I do not remember now, but doctors came, wrote and went away. Medicines were brought, and some women made her drink them. Her hands were hot, her forehead was burning, and her eyes bright and sad. When I spoke to her, she answered me, but I do not remember what we said. I have forgotten everything, everything, everything! She died, and I very well remember her slight, feeble sigh. The nurse said: ‘Ah! and I understood, I understood!’

“I knew nothing more, nothing. I saw a priest, who said: ‘Your mistress?’ and it seemed to me as if he were insulting her. As she was dead, nobody had the right to know that any longer, and I turned him out. Another came who was very kind and tender, and I shed tears when he spoke to me about her.

“They consulted me about the funeral, but I do not remember anything that they said, though I recollected the coffin, and the sound of the hammer when they nailed her down in it. Oh! God, God!

“She was buried! Buried! She! In that hole! Some people came — female friends. I made my escape, and ran away; I ran, and then I walked through the streets, and went home, and the next day I started on a journey.”

“Yesterday I returned to Paris, and when I saw my room again — our room, our bed, our furniture, everything that remains of the life of a human being after death, I was seized by such a violent attack of fresh grief, that I was very near opening the window and throwing myself out into the street. As I could not remain any longer among these things, between these walls which had enclosed and sheltered her, and which retained a thousand atoms of her, of her skin and of her breath in their imperceptible crevices, I took up my hat to make my escape, and just as I reached the door, I passed the large glass in the hall, which she had put there so that she might be able to look at herself every day from head to foot as she went out, to see if her toilet looked well, and was correct and pretty, from her little boots to her bonnet.

“And I stopped short in front of that looking-glass in which she had so often been reflected. So often, so often, that it also must have retained her reflection. I was standing there, trembling, with my eyes fixed on the glass — on that flat, profound, empty glass — which had contained her entirely, and had possessed her as much as I had, as my passionate looks had. I felt as if I loved that glass. I touched it, it was cold. Oh! the recollection! sorrowful mirror, burning mirror, horrible mirror, which makes us suffer such torments! Happy are the men whose hearts forget everything that it has contained, everything that has passed before it, everything that has looked at itself in it, that has been reflected in its affection, in its love! How I suffer!

“I went on without knowing it, without wishing it; I went towards the cemetery. I found her simple grave, a white marble cross, with these few words:

"'*She loved, was loved, and died.*'

"She is there, below, decayed! How horrible! I sobbed with my forehead on the ground, and I stopped there for a long time, a long time. Then I saw that it was getting dark, and a strange, a mad wish, the wish of a despairing lover seized me. I wished to pass the night, the last night in weeping on her grave. But I should be seen and driven out. How was I to manage? I was cunning, and got up, and began to roam about in that city of the dead. I walked and walked. How small this city is, in comparison with the other, the city in which we live: And yet, how much more numerous the dead are than the living. We want high houses, wide streets, and much room for the four generations who see the daylight at the same time, drink water from the spring, and wine from the vines, and eat the bread from the plains.

"And for all the generations of the dead, for all that ladder of humanity that has descended down to us, there is scarcely anything afield, scarcely anything! The earth takes them back, oblivion effaces them. Adieu!

"At the end of the abandoned cemetery, I suddenly perceived that the one where those who have been dead a long time finish mingling with the soil, where the crosses themselves decay, where the last comers will be put to-morrow. It is full of untended roses, of strong and dark cypress trees, a sad and beautiful garden, nourished on human flesh.

"I was alone, perfectly alone, and so I crouched in a green tree, and hid myself there completely among the thick and somber branches, and I waited, clinging to the stem, like a shipwrecked man does to a plank.

"When it was quite dark, I left my refuge and began to walk softly, slowly, inaudibly, through that ground full of dead people, and I wandered about for a long time, but could not find her again. I went on with extended arms, knocking against the tombs with my hands, my feet, my knees, my chest, even with my head, without being able to find her. I touched and felt about like a blind man groping his way, I felt the stones, the crosses, the iron railings, the metal wreaths, and the wreaths of faded flowers! I read the names with my fingers, by passing them over the letters. What a night! What a night! I could not find her again!

"There was no moon. What a night! I am frightened, horribly frightened in these narrow paths, between two rows of graves. Graves! graves! graves! nothing but graves! On my right, on my left, in front of me, around me, everywhere there were graves! I sat down on one of them, for I could not walk any longer, my knees were so weak. I could hear my heart beat! And I could hear something else as well. What? A confused, nameless noise. Was the noise in my head in the impenetrable night, or beneath the mysterious earth, the earth sown with human corpses? I looked all around me, but I cannot say how long I remained there; I was paralyzed with terror, drunk with fright, ready to shout out, ready to die.

"Suddenly, it seemed to me as if the slab of marble on which I was sitting, was moving. Certainly, it was moving, as if it were being raised. With a bound, I sprang on to the neighboring tomb, and I saw, yes, I distinctly saw the stone which I had just quitted, rise upright, and the dead person appeared, a naked skeleton, which was pushing the stone back with its bent back. I saw it quite clearly, although the night was so dark. On the cross I could read:

"'*Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He loved his family, was kind and honorable, and died in the grace of the Lord.*'

"The dead man also read what was inscribed on his tombstone; then he picked up a stone off the path, a little, pointed stone, and began to scrape the letters carefully. He slowly effaced them altogether, and with the hollows of his eyes he looked at the places where they had been engraved, and, with the tip of the bone, that had been his forefinger, he wrote in luminous letters, like those lines which one traces on walls with the tip of a lucifer match:

"'*Here reposes Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He hastened his father's death by his unkindness, as he wished to inherit his fortune, he tortured his wife, tormented his children, deceived his neighbors, robbed everyone he could, and died wretched.*'

"When he had finished writing, the dead man stood motionless, looking at his work, and on turning round I saw that all the graves were open, that all the dead bodies had emerged from them, and that all had effaced the lies inscribed on the gravestones by their relations, and had substituted the truth instead. And I saw that all had been tormentors of their neighbors — malicious, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, rogues, calumniators, envious; that they had stolen, deceived, performed every disgraceful, every abominable action, these good fathers, these faithful wives, these devoted sons, these chaste daughters, these honest tradesmen, these men and women who were called irreproachable, and they were called irreproachable, and they were all writing at the same time, on the threshold of their eternal abode, the truth, the terrible and the holy truth which everybody is ignorant of, or pretends to be ignorant of, while the others are alive.

“I thought that *she* also must have written something on her tombstone, and now, running without any fear among the half-open coffins, among the corpses and skeletons, I went towards her, sure that I should find her immediately. I recognized her at once, without seeing her face, which was covered by the winding-sheet, and on the marble cross, where shortly before I had read: ‘*She loved, was loved, and died*,’ I now saw: ‘*Having gone out one day, in order to deceive her lover, she caught cold in the rain and died.*’”

“It appears that they found me at daybreak, lying on the grave unconscious.”

THE LAST STEP

Monsier de Saint-Juéry would not have deceived his old mistress for anything in the world: perhaps from an instinctive fear that he had heard of adventures that turn out badly, make a noise, and bring about hateful family quarrels, crises from which one emerges enervated and exasperated with destiny, and, as it were, with the weight of a bullet on one’s feet, and also from his requirement for a calm, sheep-like existence, whose monotony was never disturbed by any shock, and perhaps from the remains of the love which had so entirely made him, during the first years of their connection, the slave of the proud, dominating beauty, and of the enthralling charm of that woman.

He kept out of the way of temptation almost timidly, and was faithful to her, and as submissive as a spaniel. He paid her every attention, did not appear to notice that the outlines of her figure, which had formerly been so harmonious and supple, were getting too full and puffy, that her face, which used to remind him of a blush rose, was getting wrinkled, and that her eyes were getting dull. He admired her in spite of everything, almost blindly, and clothed her with imaginary charms, with an autumnal beauty, with the majestic and serene softness of an October twilight, and with the last blossoms which unfold by the side of the walks, strewn with dead leaves.

But although their connection had lasted for many years, though they were as closely bound to each other as if they had been married, and although Charlotte Guindal pestered him with entreaties, and upset him with continual quarrels on the subject, and, in spite of the fact that he believed her to be absolutely faithful to him, and worthy of his most perfect confidence and love, yet Monsieur de Saint-Juéry had never been able to make up his mind to give her his name, and to put their false position on a legal footing.

He really suffered from this, but remained firm and defended his position, quibbled, sought for subterfuges, replied by the eternal and vague: “What would be the good of it," which nearly sent Charlotte mad, made her furious and caused her to say angry and ill-tempered things. But he remained passive and listless, with his back bent like a restive horse under the whip.

He asked her whether it was really necessary to their happiness, as they had no children? Did not everybody think that they were married? Was not she everywhere called Madame de Saint-Juéry, and had their servants any doubt that they were in the service of respectable, married people? Was not the name which had been transmitted to a man from father to son, intact, honored, and often with a halo of glory round it, a sacred trust which no one had a right to touch? What would she gain if she bore it legitimately? Did she for a moment suppose that she would rise higher in people's estimation, and be more admitted into society, or that people would forget that she had been his regular mistress before becoming his wife? Did not everybody know that formerly, before he rescued her from that Bohemian life in which she had been waiting for her chance in vain, and was losing her good looks, Charlotte Guindal frequented all the public balls, and showed her legs liberally at the *Moulin-Rouge*.

Charlotte knew his crabbed, though also kindly character, which was at the same time logical and obstinate, too well to hope that she would ever be able to overcome his opposition and scruples, except by some clever woman's trick, some well-acted scene in a comedy; so she appeared to be satisfied with his reasons, and to renounce her bauble, and outwardly she showed an equable and conciliatory temper, and no longer worried Monsieur de Saint-Juéry with her recriminations, and thus the time went by, in calm monotony, without fruitless battles or fierce assaults.

Charlotte Guindal's medical man was Doctor Rabatel, one of those clever men who appear to know everything, but whom a country bone-setter would reduce to a "why?" by a few questions; one of those men who wish to impress everybody with their apparent value, and who make use of their medical knowledge as if it were some productive commercial house, which carried on a suspicious business; who can scent out those persons whom they can manage as they please, as if they were a piece of soft wax, who keep them in a continual state of terror, by keeping the idea of death constantly before their eyes.

They soon manage to obtain the mastery over such persons, scrutinize their consciences as well as the cleverest priest could do, make sure of being well paid for their complicity as soon as they have obtained a footing anywhere, and drain their patients of their secrets, in order to use them as a weapon for extorting money on occasions. He felt sure immediately that this middle-aged lady wanted something of him, as by some extraordinary perversion of taste, he was rather fond of the remains of a good-looking woman, if they were well got up, and offered to him; of that high flavor which arises from soft lips, which had been made tender through years of love, from gray hair powdered with gold, from a body engaged in its last struggle, and which dreams of one more victory before abdicating power altogether, he did not hesitate to become his new patient's lover.

When winter came, however, a thorough change took place in Charlotte's health, that had hitherto been so good. She had no strength left, she felt ill after the slightest exertion, complained of internal pains, and spent whole days lying on the couch, with set eyes and without uttering a word, so that everybody thought that she was dying of one of those mysterious maladies which cannot be coped with, but which, by degrees, undermines the whole system. It was sad to see her rapidly sinking, lying motionless on her pillows, while a mist seemed to have come over her eyes, and her hands lay helplessly on the bed and her mouth seemed sealed by some invisible finger. Monsieur de Saint-Juéry was in despair; he cried like a child, and he suffered as if somebody had plunged a knife into him, when the doctor said to him in his unctuous voice:

"I know that you are a brave man, my dear sir, and I may venture to tell you the whole truth.... Madame de Saint-Juéry is doomed, irrevocably doomed.... Nothing but a miracle can save her, and alas! there are no miracles in these days. The end is only a question of a few hours, and may come quite suddenly...."

Monsieur de Saint-Juéry had thrown himself into a chair, and was sobbing bitterly, covering his face with his hands.

"My poor dear, my poor darling," he said, through his tears.

"Pray compose yourself, and be brave," the doctor continued, sitting down by his side, "for I have to say something serious to you, and to convey to you our poor patient's last wishes.... A few minutes ago, she told me the secret of your double life, and of your connection with her.... And now, in view of death, which she feels approaching so rapidly, for she is under no delusion, the unhappy woman wishes to die at peace with heaven, with the consolation of having regulated her equivocal position, and of having become your wife."

Monsieur de Saint-Juéry sat upright, with a bewildered look, while he moved his hands nervously; in his grief he was incapable of manifesting any will of his own, or of opposing this unexpected attack.

"Oh! anything that Charlotte wishes, doctor; anything, and I will myself go and tell her so, on my knees!"

The wedding took place discreetly, with something funereal about it, in the darkened room, where the words which were spoken had a strange sound, almost of anguish. Charlotte, who was lying in bed, with her eyes dilated through happiness, had put both trembling hands into those of Monsieur de Saint-Juéry, and she seemed to expire with the word: "Yes" on her lips. The doctor looked at the moving scene, grave and impassive, with his chin buried in his white cravat, and his two arms resting on the mantelpiece, while his eyes twinkled behind his glasses....

The next week, Madame de Saint-Juéry began to get better, and that wonderful recovery about which Monsieur de Saint-Juéry tells everybody with effusive gratitude, who will listen to him, has so increased Doctor Rabatel's reputation, that at the next election he will be made a member of the Academy of Medicine.

ONE EVENING

The steamboat *Kleber* had stopped, and I was admiring the beautiful bay of Bougie, that was opened out before us. The high hills were covered with forests, and in the distance the yellow sands formed a beach of powdered gold, while the sun shed its fiery rays on the white houses of the town.

The warm African breeze blew the odor of that great, mysterious continent into which men of the Northern races but rarely penetrate, into my face. For three months I had been wandering on the borders of that great, unknown world, on the outskirts of that strange world of the ostrich, the camel, the gazelle, the hippopotamus, the gorilla, the lion and the tiger, and the negro. I had seen the Arab galloping like the wind, and passing like a floating standard, and I had slept under those brown tents, the moving habitation of those white birds of the desert, and I felt, as it were, intoxicated with light, with fancy, and with space.

But now, after this final excursion, I should have to start, to return to France and to Paris, that city of useless chatter, of commonplace cares, and of continual hand-shaking, and I should bid adieu to all that I had got to like so much, which was so new to me, which I had scarcely had time to see thoroughly, and which I so much regretted to leave.

A fleet of small boats surrounded the steamer, and, jumping into one rowed by a negro lad, I soon reached the quay near the old Saracen gate, whose gray ruins at the entrance of the Kabyle town, looked like an old escutcheon of nobility. While I was standing by the side of my portmanteau, looking at the great steamer lying at anchor in the roads, and filled with admiration at that unique shore, and that semi-circle of hills, bathed in blue light, which were more beautiful than those of Ajaccio, or of Porto, in Corsica, a heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and on turning round I saw a tall man with a long beard, dressed in white flannel, and wearing a straw hat, standing by my side, and looking at me with his blue eyes.

“Are you not an old school-fellow of mine?” he said.

“It is very possible. What is your name?”

“Trémoulin.”

“By Jove! You were in the same class as I was.”

“Ah! Old fellow, I recognized you immediately.”

He seemed so pleased, so happy at seeing me, that in an outburst of friendly selfishness, I shook both the hands of my former school-fellow heartily, and felt very pleased at meeting him thus.

For four years Trémoulin had been one of the best and most intimate school friends, one of those whom we are too apt to forget as soon as we leave. In those days he had been a tall, thin fellow, whose head seemed to be too heavy for his body; it was a large, round head, and hung sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, onto his chest. Trémoulin was very clever, however, and had a marvelous aptitude for learning, and had an instinctive intuition for all literary studies, and gained nearly all the prizes in our class.

We were fully convinced at school, that he would turn out a celebrated man, a poet, no doubt, for he wrote verses, and was full of ingeniously sentimental ideas. His father, who kept a chemist’s shop near the *Panthéon*, was not supposed to be very well off, and I had lost sight of him as soon as he had taken his bachelor’s degree, and now I naturally asked him what he was doing there.

“I am a planter,” he replied.

“Bah! You really plant?”

“And I have my harvest.”

“What is it?”

“Grapes, from which I make wine.”

“Is your wine-growing a success?”

“A great success.”

“So much the better, old fellow.”

“Were you going to the hotel?”

“Of course I was.”

“Well, then, you must just come home with me, instead!”

“But! ...”

“The matter is settled.”

And he said to the young negro who was watching our movements: “Take that home, Al.”

And the lad put my portmanteau on his shoulder, and set off, raising the dust with his black feet, while Trémoulin took my arm and led me off. First of all, he asked me about my journey, and what impressions it had had on me, and seeing how enthusiastic I was about it, he seemed to like me better than ever. He lived in an old Moorish house, with an interior courtyard, without any windows looking into the street, and commanded by a terrace, which, in its turn, commanded those of the neighboring houses, as well as the bay, and the forests, the hill, and the open sea, and I could not help exclaiming:

"Ah! That is what I like; the whole of the East lays hold of me in this place. You are indeed lucky to be living here! What nights you must spend upon that terrace! Do you sleep there?"

"Yes, in the summer. We will go onto it this evening. Are you fond of fishing?"

"What kind of fishing?"

"Fishing by torchlight."

"Yes, I am particularly fond of it."

"Very well, then, we will go after dinner, and we will come back and drink sherbet on my roof."

After I had had a bath, he took me to see the charming Kabyle town, a veritable cascade of white houses toppling down to the sea, and then, when it was getting dusk, we went in, and after an excellent dinner, we went down to the quay, and we saw nothing except the fires and the stars, those large, bright, scintillating African stars. A boat was waiting for us, and as soon as we had got in, a man whose face I could not distinguish, began to row, while my friend was getting ready the brazier which he would light later, and he said to me: "You know I have a mania for a fish-spear, and nobody can handle it better than I can."

"Allow me to compliment you on your skill." We had rowed round a kind of mole, and now we were in a small bay full of high rocks, whose shadows looked like towers built in the water, and I suddenly perceived that the sea was phosphorescent, and as the oars moved gently, they seemed to light up moving flames, that followed in our wake, and then died out, and I leant over the side of the boat and watched it, as we glided over that glimmer in the darkness.

Where were we going to? I could not see my neighbors; in fact, I could see nothing but the luminous ripple, and the sparks of water dropping from the oars; it was hot, very hot, and the darkness seemed as hot as a furnace, and this mysterious motion with these two men in that silent boat, had a peculiar effect upon me.

Suddenly the rower stopped. Where were we? I heard a slight scratching noise close to me, and I saw a hand, nothing but a hand applying a lighted match to the iron grating which was fastened over the bows of the boat, which was covered with wood, as if it had been a floating funeral pile, and which soon was blazing brightly and illuminating the boat and the two men, an old, thin, pale, wrinkled sailor, with a pocket-handkerchief tied round his head, instead of a cap, and Trémoulin, whose fair beard glistened in the light.

The other began to row again, while Trémoulin kept throwing wood onto the brazier, which burnt red and brightly. I leant over the side again, and could see the bottom, and a few feet below us there was that strange country of the water, which vivifies plants and animals, just like the air of heaven does. Trémoulin, who was standing in the bows with his body bent forward, and holding the sharp-pointed trident in his hand, was on the look-out with the ardent gaze of a beast of prey watching for its spoil, and, suddenly, with a swift movement, he darted his forked weapon into the sea so vigorously that it secured a large fish swimming near the bottom. It was a conger eel, which managed to wriggle, half dead as it was, into a puddle of the brackish water.

Trémoulin again threw his spear, and when he pulled it up, I saw a great lump of red flesh which palpitated, moved, rolled and unrolled, long, strong, soft feelers round the handle of the trident. It was an octopus, and Trémoulin opened his knife, and with a swift movement plunged it between the eyes, and killed it. And so our fishing continued until the wood began to run short. When there was not enough left to keep up the fire, Trémoulin dipped the braziers into the sea, and we were again buried in darkness.

The old sailor began to row again, slowly and regularly, though I could not tell where the land or where the port was. By-and-bye, however, I saw lights. We were nearing the harbor.

“Are you sleepy?” my friend said to me.

“Not the slightest.”

“Then we will go and have a chat on the roof.”

“I shall be delighted.”

Just as we got onto the terrace, I saw the crescent moon rising behind the mountains, and around us, the white houses, with their flat roofs, descending down towards the sea, while human forms were standing or lying on them, sleeping or dreaming under the stars; whole families wrapped in long gowns, and resting in the calm night, after the heat of the day.

It suddenly seemed to me as if the Eastern mind were taking possession of me, the poetical and legendary spirit of a people with simply and flowery thoughts. My head was full of the Bible and of *The Arabian Nights*; I could hear the prophets proclaiming miracles, and I could see princesses wearing silk drawers on the roofs of the palaces, while delicate perfumes, whose smoke assumed the forms of genii, were burning on silver dishes, and I said to Trémoulin:

"You are very fortunate in living here."

"I came here quite by accident," he replied.

"By accident?"

"Yes, accident and unhappiness brought me here."

"You have been unhappy?"

"Very unhappy."

He was standing in front of me, wrapped in his bournoose, and his voice had such a painful ring in it that it almost made me shiver; after a moment's silence, he continued:

"I will tell you what my troubles have been; perhaps it will do me good to speak about them."

"Let me hear them."

"Do you really wish it?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. You remember what I was at school; a sort of poet, brought up in a chemist's shop. I dreamt of writing books, and I tried it, after taking my degree, but I did not succeed. I published a volume of verse, and then a novel, and neither of them sold, and then I wrote a play, which was never acted."

"Next, I lost my heart, but I will not give you an account of my passion. Next door to my father's shop, there was a tailor's, who had a daughter, with whom I fell in love. She was very clever, and had obtained her certificates for higher education, and her mind was bright and active, quite in keeping indeed with her body. She might have been taken for fifteen, although she was two-and-twenty. She was very small, with delicate features, outlines and tints, just like some beautiful water color. Her nose, her mouth, her blue eyes, her light hair, her smile, her waist, her hands, all looked as if they were fit for a stained window, and not for everyday life, but she was lively, supple, and incredibly active, and I was very much in love with her. I remember two or three walks in the Luxembourg Garden, near the *Medices* fountain, which were certainly the happiest hours of my life. I dare say you have known that foolish condition of tender madness, which causes us to think of nothing but of acts of adoration! One really becomes possessed, haunted by a woman, and nothing exists for us, by the side of her.

"We soon became engaged, and I told her my projects of the future, which she did not approve of. She did not believe that I was either a poet, a novelist, or a dramatic author, and thought a prosperous business could afford perfect happiness. So I gave up the idea of writing books, and resigned myself to selling them, and I bought a bookseller's business at Marseilles, the owner of which had just died.

"I had three very prosperous years. We had made our shop into a sort of literary drawing-room, where all the men of letters in the town used to come and talk. They came in, as if it had been a club, and exchanged ideas on books, on poets, and especially on politics. My wife, who took a very active part in the business, enjoyed quite a reputation in the town, but, as for me, while they were all talking downstairs, I was working in my studio upstairs, which communicated with the shop by a winding staircase. I could hear their voices, their laughter, and their discussions, and sometimes I left off writing in order to listen. I kept in my own room to write a novel — which I never finished.

"The most regular frequenters of the shop were Monsieur Montina, a man of good private means, a tall, handsome man, like one meets with in the South of France, with an olive skin, and dark, expressive eyes; Monsieur Barbet, a magistrate; two merchants, who were partners, Messrs. Faucil and Labarrègue, and General, the Marquis de la Flèche, the head of the Royalist party, the principal man in the whole district, an old fellow of sixty-six.

"My business prospered, and I was happy, very happy. One day, however, about three o'clock, when I was out on business, as I was going through the *Rue Saint Ferréol*, I suddenly saw a woman come out of a house, whose figure and appearance were so much like my wife's that I should have said to myself: ‘There she is!’ if I had not left her in the shop half an hour before, suffering from a headache. She was walking quickly on before me, without turning round, and, in spite of myself, I followed her, as I felt surprised and uneasy. I said to myself: ‘It it she; no, it is quite impossible, as she has a sick headache. And then, what could she have to do in that house?’ However, as I wished to have the matter cleared up, I made haste after her. I do not know whether she felt or guessed that I was behind her, or whether she recognized my step, but she turned round suddenly. It was she! When she saw me, she grew very red and stopped, and then, with a smile, she said: ‘Oh! Here you are!’ I felt choking.

“‘Yes; so you have come out? And how is your headache?’

“‘It is better, and I have been out on an errand.’

“‘Where?’

“‘To Lacaussade’s, in the Rue Cassinelli, to order some pencils,’

“She looked me full in the face. She was not flushed now, but rather pale, on the contrary. Her clear, limpid eyes — ah! those women’s eyes! — appeared to be full of truth, but I felt vaguely and painfuly that they were full of lies. I was much more confused and embarrassed than she was herself, without venturing to suspect, but sure that she was lying, though I did not know why, and so I merely said:

“‘You were quite right to go out, if you felt better.’

“‘Oh! yes; my head is much better.’

“‘Are you going home?’

“‘Yes, of course I am.’

“I left her, and wandered about the streets by myself. What was going on? While I was talking to her, I had an intuitive feeling of her falseness, but now I could not believe that it was so, and when I returned home to dinner, I was angry for having suspected her, even for a moment.

“Have you ever been jealous? It does not matter whether you have or not, but the first drop of jealousy had fallen into my heart, and that is always like a spark of fire. It did not formulate anything, and I did not think anything; I only knew that she had lied. You must remember that every night, after the customers and clerks had left, we were alone, and either strolled as far as the harbor, when it was fine, or remained talking in my office, if the weather was bad, and I used to open my heart to her without any reserve, because I loved her. She was part of my life, the greater part, and all my happiness, and in her small hands she held my trusting, faithful heart captive.

"During those first days, those days of doubt, and before my suspicions increased and assumed a precise shape, I felt as depressed and chilly as when we are going to be seriously ill. I was continually cold, really cold, and could neither eat nor sleep. Why had she told me a lie? What was she doing in that house? I went there, to try and find out something, but I could discover nothing. The man who rented the first floor, and who was an upholsterer, had told me all about his neighbors, but without helping me the least. A midwife had lived on the second floor, a dressmaker and a manicure and chiropodist on the third, and two coachmen and their families in the attics.

"Why had she told me a lie? It would have been so easy for her to have said that she had been to the dressmaker's or the chiropodist's. Oh! How I longed to question them, also! I did not say so, for fear that she might guess my suspicions. One thing, however, was certain; she had been into that house, and had concealed the fact from me, so there was some mystery in it. But what? At one moment, I thought there might be some laudable purpose in it, some charitable deed that she wished to hide, some information which she wished to obtain, and I found fault with myself for suspecting her. Have not all of us the right of our little, innocent secrets, a kind of second, interior life, for which one ought not to be responsible to anybody? Can a man, because he has taken a girl to be his companion through life, demand that she shall neither think nor do anything without telling him, either before or afterwards? Does the word marriage mean renouncing all liberty and independence? Was it not quite possible that she was going to the dressmaker's without telling me, or that she was going to assist the family of one of the coachmen? Or she might have thought that I might criticize, if not blame, her visit to the house. She knew me thoroughly, and my slightest peculiarities, and perhaps she feared a discussion, even if she did not think that I should find fault with her. She had very pretty hands, and I ended by supposing that she was having them secretly attended to by the manicure in the house which I suspected, and that she did not tell me of it, for fear that I should think her extravagant. She was very methodical and economical, +and looked after all her household duties most carefully, and no doubt she thought that she should lower herself in my eyes, were she to confess that slight piece of feminine extravagance. Women have very many subtleties and innate tricks in their soul!

"But none of my own arguments reassured me. I was jealous, and I felt that my suspicion was affecting me terribly, that I was being devoured by it. I felt secret grief and anguish, and a thought which I still veiled, and I did not dare to lift the veil, for beneath it I should find a terrible doubt.... A lover! ... Had not she a lover? ... It was unlikely, impossible.... A mere dream ... and yet? ...

"I continually saw Montina's face before my eyes. I saw the tall, silly-looking, handsome man, with his bright hair, smiling into her face, and I said to myself: 'He is the one!' I concocted a story of their intrigues. They had talked a book over together, had discussed the love ventures it contained, had found something in it that resembled them, and they had turned that analogy into reality. And so I watched them, a prey to the most terrible sufferings that a man can endure. I bought shoes with india-rubber soles, so that I might be able to walk about the house without making any noise, and I spent half my time in going up and down my little spiral staircase, in the hope of surprising them, but I always found that the clerk was with them.

"I lived in a constant state of suffering. I could no longer work, nor attend to my business. As soon as I went out, as soon as I had walked a hundred yards along the street, I said to myself: 'He is there!' and when I found he was not there, I went out again! But almost immediately I went back again, thinking: 'He has come now!' and that went on every day.

"At night it was still worse, for I felt her by my side in bed asleep, or pretending to be asleep! Was she really sleeping? No, most likely not. Was that another lie?

"I remained motionless on my back, hot from the warmth of her body, panting and tormented. Oh! how intensely I longed to get up, to get a hammer and to split her head open, so as to be able to see inside it! I knew that I should have seen nothing except what is to be found in every head, and I should have discovered nothing, for that would have been impossible. And her eyes! When she looked at me, I felt furious with rage. I looked at her ... she looked at me! Her eyes were transparent, candid ... and false, false! Nobody could tell what she was thinking of, and I felt inclined to run pins into them, and to destroy those mirrors of falseness.

"Ah! how well I could understand the Inquisition! I would have applied the torture, the boot.... Speak!...Confess!...You will not? ...Then wait!...And I would have seized her by the throat until I choked her.... Or else I would have held her fingers into the fire. ...Oh! how I should have enjoyed doing it! ...Speak!...Speak!...You will not? I would have held them on the coals, and when the tips were burnt, she would have confessed... certainly she would have confessed!"

Trémoulin was sitting up, shouting, with clenched fists. Around us, on the neighboring roofs, people awoke and sat up, as he was disturbing their sleep. As for me, I was moved and powerfully interested, and in the darkness I could see that little woman, that little, fair, lively, artful woman, as if I had known her personally. I saw her selling her books, talking with the men whom her childish ways attracted, and in her delicate, doll-like head, I could see little crafty ideas, silly ideas, the dreams which a milliner smelling of musk attached to all heroes of romantic adventures. I suspected her just like he did, I hated and detested her, and would willingly have burnt her fingers and made her confess.

Presently, he continued more calmly: "I do not know why I have told you all this, for I have never mentioned it to anyone, but then, I have not seen anybody or spoken to anybody for two years! And it was seething in my heart like a fermenting wine. I have got rid of it, and so much the worse for you. Well, I had made a mistake, but it was worse than I thought, much worse. Just listen. I employed the means which a man always does under such circumstances, and pretended that I was going to be away from home for a day, and whenever I did this my wife went out to lunch. I need not tell you how I bribed a waiter in the restaurant to which they used to go, so that I might surprise them.

"He was to open the door of their private room for me and I arrived at the appointed time, with the fixed determination of killing them both. I could see the whole scene, just as if it had already occurred! I could see myself going in. A small table covered with glasses, bottles and plates separated her from Montina, and they would be so surprised when they saw me, that they would not even attempt to move, and without a word, I should bring down the loaded stick which I had in my hand, on the man's head. Killed by one blow, he would fall with his head on the table, and then, turning towards her, I should leave her time — a few moments — to understand it all and to stretch out her arms towards me, mad with terror, before dying in her turn. Oh! I was ready, strong, determined, and pleased, madly pleased at the idea. The idea of the terrified look that she would throw at my raised stick, of her arms that she would stretch out to me, of her horrified cry, of her livid and convulsed looks, avenged me beforehand. I would not kill her at one blow! You will think me cruel, I dare say; but you do not know what a man suffers. To think that a woman, whether she be wife or mistress, whom one loves, gives herself to another, yields herself up to him as she does to you, and receives kisses from his lips, as she does from yours! It is a terrible, an atrocious thing to think of. When one feels that torture, one is ready for anything. I only wonder that more women are not murdered, for every man who has been deceived longs to commit murder, has dreamt of it in the solitude of his own room, or on a deserted road, and has been haunted by the one fixed idea of satisfied vengeance.

"I arrived at the restaurant, and asked whether they were there. The waiter whom I had bribed replied: 'Yes, Monsieur,' and taking me upstairs, he pointed to a door, and said: 'That is the room!' So I grasped my stick, as if my fingers had been made of iron, and went in. I had chosen a most appropriate moment, for they were kissing most lovingly, but it was not Montina; it was General de la Fléche, who was sixty-six years old, and I had so fully made up my mind that I should find the other one there, I was motionless from astonishment.

"And then ... and then, I really do not quite know what I thought; no, I really do not know. If I had found myself face to face with the other, I should have been convulsed with rage, but on seeing this old man, with a fat stomach and pendulous cheeks, I was nearly choked with disgust. She, who did not look fifteen, small and slim as she was, had given herself to this fat man, who was nearly paralyzed, because he was a marquis and a general, the friend and representative of dethroned kings. No, I do not know what I felt, nor what I thought. I could not have lifted my hand against this old man; it would have been a disgrace to me, and I no longer felt inclined to kill my wife, but all women who could be guilty of such things! I was no longer jealous, but felt distracted, as if I had seen the horror of horrors!

"Let people say what they like of men, they are not so vile as that! If a man is known to have given himself up to an old woman in that fashion, people point their fingers at him. The husband or lover of an old woman is more despised than a thief. We men are a decent lot, as a rule, but many women, especially in Paris, are absolutely bad. They will give themselves to all men, old or young, from the most contemptible and different motives, because it is their profession, their vocation, and their function. They are the eternal, unconscious, and serene prostitutes, who give up their bodies, because they are the merchandise of love, which they sell or give, to the old man who frequents the pavements with money in his pocket, or else for glory, to a lecherous old king, or to a celebrated and disgusting old man."

He vociferated like a prophet of old, in a furious voice, under the starry sky, and with the rage of a man in despair, he repeated all the glorified disgrace of all the mistresses of old kings, the respectable shame of all those virgins who marry old husbands, the tolerated disgrace of all those young women who accept old kisses with a smile.

I could see them, as he evoked their memory, since the beginning of the world, surging round us in that Eastern night, girls, beautiful girls, with vile souls, who, like the lower animals, who know nothing of the age of the male, are docile to senile desires. They rose up before one, the handmaids of the patriarchs, who are mentioned in the Bible, Hagar, Ruth, the daughters of Lot, Abigail, Abishag, the virgin of Shunam, who reanimated David with her caresses when he was dying, and the others, young, stout, white, patricians or plebeians, irresponsible females belonging to a master, and submissive slaves, whether caught by the attraction of royalty, or bought as slaves!

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I went away," he replied simply. And we remained sitting side by side for a long time without speaking, only dreaming! ...

I have retained an impression of that evening that I can never forget. All that I saw, felt, and heard, our fishing excursion, the octopus also, perhaps that harrowing story, amidst those white figures on the neighboring roofs, all seemed to concur in producing a unique sensation. Certain meetings, certain inexplicable combinations of things, decidedly contain a larger quantity of the secret quintessence of life, than that which is spread over the ordinary events of our days, without anything exceptional happening to them.

THE HERMAPHRODITE

"Upon my word, I laughed at it as much as the rest," Navarette exclaimed; "I laughed at it with that profound, cruel pitilessness which we all of us, who are well made and vigorous, feel for those whom their step-mother, Nature, has disfigured in some way or other, for those laughable, feeble creatures who are, however, more to be pitied than those poor deformed wretches from whom we turn away in spite of ourselves.

"I had been the first to make fun of him at the club, to find those easy words which are remembered, and to turn that smooth, flabby, pink, ugly face, like that of an old woman, and of a Levantine eunuch in which the mouth is like a piece of inert flesh, and where the small eyes glisten with concentrated cunning, and remind us of the watchful, angry eyes of a gorilla, at the same time, into ridicule. I knew that he was selfish, without any affection, unreliable, full of whims, turning like a weathercock with every wind that blows, and caring for nothing in the world except gambling and old Dresden china.

"However, our intercourse was invariably limited to a careless, 'Good morning,' and to the usual shake of the hands which men exchange when they meet at the theater or the club, and so I had neither to defend him, nor to uphold him as a friend. But I can swear to you that now I reproach myself for all these effusive jeers and bitter things, and they weigh on my conscience now that I have been told the other side, the equivocal enigma of that existence."

"A Punch and Judy secret," Bob Shelley said, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire.

"Oh! yes; we were a hundred miles from the truth when we merely supposed that he was unfit for service. This unhappy Lantosque, a well-born, clever man, and very rich to boot, might have exhibited himself in some traveling booth, for he was an hermaphrodite; do you understand? an hermaphrodite. And his whole life was one of long, incessant torture, of physical and moral suffering, which was more maddening than that which Tantalus endured on the banks of the river Acheron. He had nearly everything of the woman about him; he was a ridiculous caricature of our sex, with his shrill voice, his large hips, his bust concealed by a loose, wide coat, his cheeks, his chin, and upper lip without a vestige of hair, and he had to appear like a man, to restrain and stifle his instincts, his tastes, desires, and dreams, to fight ceaselessly against himself, and never to allow anything of that which he endured, nor what he longed for, nor that which was sapping his very life, to be discovered.

"Once only he was on the point of betraying himself, in spite of himself. He ardently loved a man, as Chloe must have loved Daphnis. He could not master himself, or calm his feverish passion, and went towards the abyss as if seized by mental giddiness. He could imagine nothing handsomer, more desirable, or more charming than that chance friend. He had sudden transports, fits of surprise, tenderness, curiosity, jealousy, the ardent longings of an old maid who is afraid of dying a virgin, who is waiting for love as for her deliverance, who attaches herself and devotes herself to a lover with her whole being, and who grows emaciated and dries up, and remains misunderstood and despised.

"And as they have both disappeared now, the lover dead from a sword thrust in the middle of the chest, at Milan, on account of some ballet girl, and as he certainly died without knowing that he had inspired such a passion, I may tell you his name.

"He was Count Sebinico, who used to deal at faro with such delicate, white hands, and who wore rings on nearly every finger, who had such a musical voice, and who, with his wavy hair, and his delicate profile, looked like a handsome, Florentine Condottiere.

"It must be very terrible to be thus ashamed of oneself, to have that longing for kisses which console the most wretched in their misery, which satisfy hunger and thirst, and assuage pain; that illusion of delicious, intoxicating kisses, the delight and the balm of which such a person can never know; the horror of that dishonor of being pointed at, made fun of, driven away like unclean creatures that prostitute their sex, and make love vile by unmentionable rites; oh! the constant bitterness of seeing that the person we love makes fun of us, ill-uses us, and does not show us even the slightest friendship!"

"Poor devil!" Jean d'Orthyse said, in a sad and moved voice. "In his place, I should have blown my brains out."

"Everybody says that, my dear fellow, but how few there are who venture to forestall that intruder, who always come too quickly."

"Lantosque had splendid health, and declared that he had never put a penny into a doctor's pocket, and if he had allowed himself to have been looked after when he was confined to his bed two months before, by an attack of influenza, we should still be hearing him propose a game of poker before dinner, in his shrill voice. His death, however, was as tragic and mysterious as all those tales from beyond the grave are, on which the Invisible rests."

"Although he had a cough, which threatened to tear his chest to pieces, and although he was haunted by the fear of death, of that great depth of darkness in which we lose ourselves in the abyss of Annihilation and Oblivion, he obstinately refused to have his chest sounded, and repulsed Doctor Pertuzés almost furiously, who thought he had gone out of his mind."

"He cowered down, and covered himself with the bed-clothes up to his chin, and found strength enough to tear up the prescriptions, and to drive everyone, whether friend or relation, who tried to make him listen to reason, and who could not understand his attacks of rage and neurosis from his bedside. He seemed to be possessed by some demon, like those women in hysterical convulsions, whom the bishops used formerly to exorcise writh much pomp. It was painful to see him."

"That went on for a week, during which time the pneumonia had ample opportunities for ravaging and giving the finishing stroke to his body, which had been so robust and free from ailments hitherto, and he died, trying to utter some last words which nobody understood, and endeavoring to point out one particular article of furniture in the room."

"His nearest relation was a cousin, the Marquis de Territet, a skeptic, who lived in Burgundy, and whom all this disturbance had upset in his habits, and whose only desire was to get it all over, the legal formalities, the funeral, and all the rest of it, as soon as possible.

"Without reflecting on the strange suggestiveness of that death-bed, and without looking to see whether there might not be, somehow or other, a will in which Lantosque expressed his last wishes, he wanted to spare his corpse the contact of mercenary hands, and to lay him out himself.

“You may judge of his surprise when, on throwing back the bed-clothes, he first of all saw that Lantosque was dressed from head to foot in tights, which accentuated, rather than otherwise, his female form.

“Much alarmed, feeling that he must have been violating some supreme order, and comprehending it all, he went to his cousin’s writing-table, opened it, and successively searched every drawer, and soon found an envelope fastened with five seals, and addressed to him. He broke them and read as follows, written on a sheet of black-edged paper:

“‘This is my only will. I leave all that I possess to my cousin, Roland de Territet, on condition that he will undertake my funeral; that in his own presence, he will have me wrapped up in the sheets of the bed on which I die, and have me put into the coffin so, without any further preparations. I wish to be cremated at *Père-Lachaise*, and not to be subjected to any examination, or *post-mortem*, whatever may happen.’”

“And how came the marquis to betray the secret?” Bob Shelley asked.

“The marquis is married to a charming Parisian woman, and was any married man, who loved his wife, ever known to keep a secret from her?”

MARROCA

You ask me, my dear friend, to send you my impressions of Africa, my adventures, and especially an account of my love affairs in this country which has attracted me for so long. You laughed a great deal beforehand at my dusky sweethearts, as you called them, and declared that you could see me returning to France, followed by a tall, ebony-colored woman, with a yellow silk handkerchief round her head, and wearing voluminous bright-colored trousers.

No doubt the Moorish women will have their turn, for I have seen several of them who have made me feel very much inclined to have to fall in love with them; but by way of making a beginning, I came across something better, and very original.

In your last letter to me, you say: “When I know how people love in a country, I know that country well enough to describe it, although I may never have seen it.” Let me tell you, then, that here they love furiously. From the very first moment, one feels a sort of trembling ardor, of constant desire, to the very tips of the fingers, which over-excites our amorous powers, and all our faculties of physical sensation, from the simple contact of the hands, down to that unnamable requirement which makes us commit so many follies.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not know whether you call love of the heart, love of the soul, whether sentimental idealism, Platonic love, in a word, can exist on this earth; I doubt it, myself. But that other love, sensual love, which has something good, a great deal of good about it, is really terrible in this climate. The heat, the burning atmosphere which makes you feverish, those suffocating blasts of wind from the south, those waves of fire which come from the desert which is so near us, that oppressive sirocco, which is more destructive and withering than fire, that perpetual conflagration of an entire continent, that is burnt even to its stones by a fierce and devouring sun, inflame the blood, excite the flesh, and make brutes of us.

But to come to my story, I shall not tell you about the beginning of my stay in Africa. After going to Bona, Constantine, Biskara and Setif, I went to Bougie through the defiles of Chabet, by an excellent road through a large forest, which follows the sea at a height of six hundred feet above it, as far as that wonderful bay of Bougie, which is as beautiful as that of Naples, of Ajaccio, or of Douarnenez, which are the most lovely that I know.

Far away in the distance, before one goes round the large inlet where the water is perfectly calm, one sees the Bougie. It is built on the steep sides of a high hill, which is covered with trees, and forms a white spot on that green slope; it might almost be taken for the foam of a cascade, falling into the sea.

I had no sooner set foot in that delightful, small town, than I knew that I should stay for a long time. In all directions the eye rests on rugged, strangely shaped hill-tops, which are so close together that one can hardly see the open sea, so that the gulf looks like a lake. The blue water is wonderfully transparent, and the azure sky, a deep azure, as if it had received two coats of paint, expands its wonderful beauty above it. They seem to be looking at themselves in a glass, and to be a reflection of each other.

Bougie is a town of ruins, and on the quay, when one arrives, one sees such a magnificent ruin, that one might imagine one was at the opera. It is the old Saracen Gate, overgrown with ivy, and there are ruins in all directions on the hills round the town, fragments of Roman walls, bits of Saracen monuments, the remains of Arabic buildings.

I had taken a small, Moorish house, in the upper town. You know those dwellings, which have been described so often. They have no windows on the outside; but they are lighted from top to bottom, by an inner court. On the first floor, they have a large, cool room, in which one spends the days, and a terrace on the roof, on which one spends the nights.

I at once fell in with the custom of all hot countries, that is to say, of having a siesta after lunch. That is the hottest time in Africa, the time when one can scarcely breathe; when the streets, the fields, and the long, dazzling, white roads are deserted, when everyone is asleep, or at any rate, trying to sleep, attired as scantily as possible.

In my drawing-room, which had columns of Arabic architecture, I had placed a large, soft couch, covered with a carpet from Djebel Amour, very nearly in the costume of Assan, but I could not sleep, as I was tortured by my continence. There are two forms of torture on this earth, which I hope you will never know: the want of water, and the want of women, and I do not know which is the worst. In the desert, men would commit any infamy for the sake of a glass of clean, cold water, and what would one not do in some of the towns of the littoral, for a handsome, fleshy, healthy girl? For there is no lack of girls in Africa; on the contrary, they abound, but to continue my comparison, they are as unwholesome and decayed as the muddy water in the wells of Sahara.

Well, one day when I was feeling more enervated than usual, I was trying in vain to close my eyes. My legs twitched as if they were being pricked, and I tossed about uneasily on my couch, until at last, unable to bear it any longer, I got up and went out. It was a terribly hot day, in the middle of July, and the pavement was hot enough to bake bread on. My shirt, which was soaked with perspiration immediately, clung to my body, and on the horizon there was a slight, white vapor, which seemed to be palpable heat.

I went down to the sea, and going round the port, I went along the shore of the pretty bay where the baths are. There was nobody about, and nothing was stirring; not a sound of bird or of beast was to be heard, the very waves did not lap, and the sea appeared to be asleep in the sun.

Suddenly, behind one of the rocks, which were half covered by the silent water, I heard a slight movement, and on turning round, I saw a tall, naked girl, sitting up to her breasts in the water, taking a bath; no doubt she reckoned on being alone, at that hot period of the day. Her head was turned towards the sea, and she was moving gently up and down, without seeing me.

Nothing could be more surprising than that picture of the beautiful woman in the water, which was as clear as crystal, under a blaze of light. For she was a marvelously beautiful woman, tall, and modeled like a statue. She turned round, uttered a cry, and half swimming, half walking, she went and hid altogether behind her rock; but as she must necessarily come out, I sat down on the beach and waited. Presently, she just showed her head, which was covered with thick black plaits. She had a rather large mouth, with full lips, large, bold eyes, and her skin, which was rather tanned by the climate, looked like a piece of old, hard, polished ivory.

She called out to me: “Go away!” and her full voice, which corresponded to her strong build, had a guttural accent, and as I did not move, she added: “It is not right of you to stop there, monsieur.” I did not move, however, and her head disappeared. Ten minutes passed, and then her hair, then her forehead, and then her eyes reappeared, but slowly and prudently, as if she were playing at hide-and-seek, and were looking to see who was near. This time she was furious, and called out: “You will make me get some illness, and I shall not come out as long as you are there.” Thereupon, I got up and went away, but not without looking round several times. When she thought I was far enough off, she came out of the water; bending down and turning her back to me, she disappeared in a cavity in the rock, behind a petticoat that was hanging up in front of it.

I went back the next day. She was bathing again, but she had a bathing costume, and she began to laugh, and showed her white teeth. A week later we were friends, and in another week we were eager lovers. Her name was Marroca, and she pronounced it as if there were a dozen *r's* in it. She was the daughter of Spanish colonists, and had married a Frenchman, whose name was Pontabeze. He was in government employ, though I never exactly knew what his functions were. I found out that he was always very busy, and I did not care for anything else.

She then altered her time for having her bath, and came to my house every day, to have a siesta there. What a siesta! It could scarcely be called reposing! She was a splendid girl, of a somewhat animal, but superb type. Her eyes were always glowing with passion; her half-open mouth, her sharp teeth, and even her smiles, had something ferociously loving about them; and her curious, long and straight breasts, which were as pointed as if they had been pears of flesh, and as elastic as if they contained steel springs, gave her whole body something of the animal, made her a sort of inferior and magnificent being, a creature who was destined for unbridled love, and which roused in me the idea of those ancient deities, who gave expression to their tenderness on the grass and under the trees.

And then, her mind was as simple as two and two are four, and a sonorous laugh served her instead of thought.

Instinctively proud of her beauty, she hated the slightest covering, and ran and frisked about my house with daring and unconscious immodesty. When she was at last overcome and worn out by her cries and movements, she used to sleep soundly and peacefully while the overwhelming heat brought out minute spots of perspiration on her brown skin, and from under her arms.

Sometimes she returned in the evening, when her husband was on duty somewhere, and we used to lie on the terrace, scarcely covered by some fine, gauzy, Oriental fabric. When the full moon lit up the town and the gulf, with its surrounding frame of hills, we saw on all the other terraces what looked like an army of silent phantoms lying, who would occasionally get up, change their places, and lie down again, in the languorous warmths of the starry sky.

But in spite of the brightness of African nights, Marroca would insist on stripping herself almost naked in the clear rays of the moon; she did not trouble herself much about anybody who might see us, and often, in spite of my fears and entreaties, she uttered long, resounding cries, which made the dogs in the distance howl.

One night, when I was sleeping under the starry sky, she came and knelt down on my carpet, and putting her lips, which curled slightly, close to my face, she said: “You must come and stay at my house.” I did not understand her, and asked: “What do you mean?” “Yes, when my husband has gone away; you must come and be with me.”

I could not help laughing, and said: “Why, as you come here?” And she went on almost talking into my mouth, sending her hot breath into my throat, and moistening my moustache with her lips: “I want it as a remembrance.” Still I did not grasp her meaning; she put her arms round my neck. “When you are no longer here, I shall think of it.”

I was touched and amused at the same time, and said: “You must be mad. I would much rather stop here.”

As a matter of fact, I have no liking for assignations under the conjugal roof; they are mouse-traps, in which the unwary are always caught. But she begged and prayed, and even cried, and at last said: “You shall see how I will love you there.” Her wish seemed so strange that I could not explain it to myself; but on thinking it over, I thought I could discern a profound hatred for her husband, the secret vengeance of a woman who takes a pleasure in deceiving him, and who, moreover, wishes to deceive him in his own house.

“Is your husband very unkind to you?” I asked her. She looked vexed, and said: “Oh! No, he is very kind.” “But you are not fond of him?” She looked at me with astonishment in her large eyes. “Indeed, I am very fond of him, very; but not so fond as I am of you.”

I could not understand it all, and while I was trying to get at her meaning, she pressed one of those kisses, whose power she knew so well, onto my lips, and whispered: “But you will come, will you not?” I resisted, however, and so she got up immediately, and went away; nor did she come back for a week. On the eighth day she came back, stopped gravely at the door of my room, and said: “Are you coming to my house to-night? ... If you refuse, I shall go away.” Eight days is a very long time, my friend, and in Africa those eight days are as good as a month. “Yes,” I said, and opened my arms, and she threw herself into them.

At night she waited for me in a neighboring street, and took me to their house, which was very small, and near the harbor. I first of all went through the kitchen, where they had their meals, and then into a very tidy, whitewashed room, with photographs on the walls, and paper flowers under a glass case. Marroca seemed beside herself with pleasure, and she jumped about, and said: “There, you are at home, now.” And I certainly acted as though I had been, though I felt rather embarrassed and somewhat uneasy.

Suddenly a loud knocking at the door made us start, and a man’s voice called out: “Marroca, it is I.” She started: “My husband! ... Here, hide under the bed, quickly.” I was distractedly looking for my overcoat, but she gave me a push, and panted out: “Come along, come along.”

I lay down flat on my stomach, and crept under the bed without a word, while she went into the kitchen. I heard her open a cupboard, and then shut it again, and she came back into the room, carrying some object which I could not see, but which she quickly put down; and as her husband was getting impatient, she said, calmly: “I cannot find the matches.” Then suddenly she added: “Oh! Here they are; I will come and let you in.”

The man came in, and I could see nothing of him but his feet, which were enormous. If the rest of him was in proportion, he must have been a giant.

I heard kisses, a little pat on her naked flesh, and a laugh, and he said, in a strong Marseilles accent: “I forgot my purse, so I was obliged to come back; you were sound asleep, I suppose.” He went to the cupboard, and was a long time in finding what he wanted; and as Marocca had thrown herself onto a bed, as if she were tired out, he went up to her, and no doubt tried to caress her, for she flung a volley of angry *r’s* at him. His feet were so close to me that I felt a stupid, inexplicable longing to catch hold of them, but I restrained myself, and when he saw that he could not succeed in his wish, he got angry, and said: “You are not at all nice, to-night. Good-bye.” I heard another kiss, then the big feet turned, and I saw the nails in the soles of his shoes as he went into the next room, the front door was shut, and I was saved!

I came slowly out of my retreat, feeling rather humiliated, and while Marroca danced a jig round me, shouting with laughter, and clapping her hands, I threw myself heavily into a chair. But I jumped up with a bound, for I had sat down on something cold, and as I was no more dressed than my accomplice was, the contact made me start, and I looked round. I had sat down on a small axe, used for cutting wood, and as sharp as a knife. How had it got there? ... I had certainly not seen it when I went in; but Marroca seeing me jump up, nearly choked with laughter, and coughed with both hands on her stomach.

I thought her amusement rather out of place; we had risked our lives stupidly, and I still felt a cold shiver down my back, and I was rather hurt at her foolish laughter. “Supposing your husband had seen me?” I said. “There was no danger of that,” she replied. “What do you mean? ... No danger? That is a good joke! ... If he had stooped down, he must have seen me.”

She did not laugh any more; she only looked at me with her large eyes, which were bright with merriment. “He would not have stooped.” “Why?” I persisted. “Just suppose that he had let his hat fall, he would have been sure to pick it up, and then... I was well prepared to defend myself, in this costume!” She put her two strong, round arms about my neck, and, lowering her voice, as she did when she said: “I *adorre* you,” she whispered: “Then he would *never* have got up again.” I did not understand her, and said: “What do you mean?”

She gave me a cunning wink, and put out her hand to the chair on which I had sat down, and her outstretched hands, her smile, her half-open lips, her white, sharp, and ferocious teeth, all drew my attention to the little axe which was used for cutting wood, whose sharp blade was glistening in the candle-light, and while she put out her hand as if she were going to take it, she put her left arm round me, and drawing me to her, and putting her lips against mine, with her right arm she made a motion as if she were cutting off the head of a kneeling man!

This, my friend, is the manner in which people here understand conjugal duties, love, and hospitality!

THE ASSIGNATION

Although she had her bonnet and jacket on, with a black veil over her face, and another in her pocket, which she would put on over the other as soon as she had got into the cab, she was beating +the top of her little boot with the point of her parasol, and remained sitting in her room, without being able to make up her mind to keep this appointment.

And yet, how many times within the last two years had she dressed herself thus, when she knew that her husband would be on the Stock Exchange, in order to go to the bachelor chambers of her lover, the handsome Viscount de Martelet.

The clock behind her was ticking loudly, a book which she had half read through was lying open on a little rosewood writing-table between the windows, and a strong, sweet smell of violets from two bunches which were in a couple of Dresden china vases, mingled with a vague smell of verbena which came through the half-open door of her dressing-room.

The clock struck three, she rose up from her chair, she turned round to look at herself in the glass and smiled. “He is already waiting for me, and will be getting tired.”

Then she left the room, told her footman that she would be back in an hour, at the latest — which was a lie; went downstairs and ventured into the street on foot.

It was towards the end of May, that delightful time of the year, when the spring seems to be besieging Paris, and to conquer it over its roofs, invading the houses through their walls, and making it look gay, shedding brightness over its stone façades, the asphalt of its pavements, the stones on the roads, bathing it and intoxicating it with sap, like a forest putting on its spring verdure.

Madame Haggan went a few steps to the right, intending, as usual, to go along the Parade Provence, where she would hail a cab; but the soft air, that feeling of summer which penetrates our breast on some days, now took possession of her so suddenly that she changed her mind, and went down the Rue de la Chausée d'Antin, without knowing why, but vaguely attracted by a desire to see the trees in the *Square de la Trinité*.

"He may just wait ten minutes longer for me," she said to herself. And that idea pleased her also as she walked slowly through the crowd. She fancied that she saw him growing impatient, looking at the clock, opening the window, listening at the door, sitting down for a few moments, getting up again, and not daring to smoke, as she had forbidden him to do so when she was coming to him, and throwing despairing looks at his box of cigarettes.

She walked slowly, interested in what she saw, the shops and the people she met, walking slower and slower, and so little eager to get to her destination that she only sought for some pretext for stopping, and at the end of the street, in the little square, the verdure attracted her so much, that she went in, took a chair, and, sitting down, watched the hands of the clock as they moved.

Just then, the half hour struck, and her heart beat with pleasure when she heard the chimes. She had gained half-an-hour; then it would take her a quarter of an hour to reach the Rue Miromesnil, and a few minutes more in strolling along — an hour! a whole hour saved from her *rendez-vous*! She would not stop three-quarters of an hour, and that business would be finished once more.

Oh! she disliked going there! Just like a patient going to the dentist, so she had the intolerable recollection of all their past meetings, one a week on an average, for the last two years; and the thought that another was going to take place immediately made her shiver with misery from head to foot. Not that it was exactly painful, like a visit to the dentist, but it was wearisome, so wearisome, so complicated, so long, so unpleasant, that anything, even a visit to the dentist would have seemed preferable to her. She went on, however, but very slowly, stopping, sitting down, going hither and thither, but she went. Oh! how she would have liked to miss this meeting, but she had left the unhappy viscount in the lurch, twice following, during the last month, and she did not dare to do it again so soon. Why did she go to see him? Oh! why? Because she had acquired the habit of doing it, and had no reason to give poor Martelet when he wanted to know *the why*! Why had she begun it? Why? She did not know herself, any longer. Had she been in love with him? Very possibly! Not very much, but a little, a long time ago!

He was very nice, sought after, perfectly dressed, most courteous, and after the first glance, he was a perfect lover for a fashionable woman. He had courted her for three months — the normal period, an honorable strife and sufficient resistances — and then she had consented, and with what emotion, what nervousness, what terrible, delightful fear, and that first meeting in his small, ground-floor bachelor rooms, in the Rue de Miromesnil. Her heart? What did her little heart of a woman who had been seduced, vanquished, conquered, feel when she for the first time entered the door of that house which was her nightmare? She really did not know! She had quite forgotten. One remembers a fact, a date, a thing, but one hardly remembers, after the lapse of two years, what an emotion, which soon vanished, because it was very slight, was like. But, oh! she had certainly not forgotten the others, that rosary of meetings, that road to the cross of love, and those stations, which were so monotonous, so fatiguing, so similar to each other, that she felt a nauseating taste in her mouth at what was going to happen so soon.

And the very cabs were not like the other cabs which one makes use of for ordinary purposes! Certainly, the cabmen guessed. She felt sure of it, by the very way they looked at her, and the eyes of these Paris cabmen are terrible! When one remembers they are constantly remembering, in the Courts of Justices, after a lapse of several years, faces of criminals whom they have only driven once, in the middle of the night, from some street or other to a railway station, and that they have to do with almost as many passengers as there are hours in the day, and that their memory is good enough for them to declare: “That is the man whom I took up in the Rues des Martyrs, and put down at the Lyons Railway Station, at 12 o’clock at night, on July 10, last year!” Is it not terrible when one risks what a young woman risks when she is going to meet her lover, and has to trust her reputation to the first cabman she meets? In two years she had employed at least a hundred to a hundred and twenty in that drive to the Rue Miromesnil, reckoning only one a week, and they were so many witnesses, who might appear against her at a critical moment.

As soon as she was in the cab, she took another veil, which was as thick and dark as a domino mask, out of her pocket, and put it on. That hid her face, but what about the rest, her dress, her bonnet, and her parasol? They might be remarked; they might, in fact, have been seen already. Oh! I What misery she endured in this Rue de Miromesnil! She thought that she recognized all the foot-passengers, the servants, everybody, and almost before the cab had stopped, she jumped out and ran past the porter who was standing outside his lodge. He must know everything, everything! — her address, her name, her husband's profession — everything, for those porters are the most cunning of policemen! For two years she had intended to bribe him, to give him (to throw at him one day as she passed him) a hundred-franc bank-note, but she had never once dared to do it. She was frightened! What of? She did not know! Of his calling her back, if he did not understand? Of a scandal? Of a crowd on the stairs? Of being arrested, perhaps? To reach the Viscount's door, she had only to ascend a half a flight of stairs, and it seemed to her as high as the tower of Saint Jacques' Church.

As soon as she had reached the vestibule, she felt as if she were caught in a trap, and the slightest noise before or behind her, nearly made her faint. It was impossible for her to go back, because of that porter who barred her retreat; and if anyone came down at that moment she would not dare to ring at Martelet's door, but would pass it as if she had been going elsewhere! She would have gone up, and up, and up! She would have mounted forty flights of stairs! Then, when everything would seem quiet again down below, she would run down, feeling terribly frightened, lest she would not recognize the lobby.

He was there in a velvet coat lined with silk, very stylish, but rather ridiculous, and for two years he had never altered his manner of receiving her, not in a single movement! As soon as he had shut the door, he used to say this: "Let me kiss your hands, my dear, dear friend!" Then he followed her into the room, when with closed shutters and lighted candles, out of refinement, no doubt, he knelt down before her and looked at her from head to foot with an air of adoration. On the first occasion that had been very nice and very successful; but now it seemed to her as if she saw Monsieur Delauney acting the last scene of a successful piece for the hundred and twentieth time. He might really change his manner of acting. But no, he never altered his manner of acting, poor fellow. What a good fellow he was, but very commonplace!

And how difficult it was to undress and dress without a lady's maid! Perhaps that was the moment when she began to take a dislike to him. When he said: "Do you want me to help you?" she could have killed him. Certainly there were not many men as awkward as he was, or as uninteresting. Certainly, little Baron de Isombal would never have asked her in such a manner: “Do you want me to help you?” He would have helped her, he was so witty, so funny, so active. But there! He was a diplomatist, he had been about in the world, and had roamed everywhere, and, no doubt, dressed and undressed women who were arrayed in every possible fashion! ...

The church clock struck the three-quarters, and she looked at the dial, and said: “Oh, how agitated he will be!” and then she quickly left the square; but she had not taken a dozen steps outside, when she found herself face to face with a gentleman who bowed profoundly to her.

“Why! Is that you, Baron?” she said, in surprise. She had just been thinking of him.

“Yes, Madame.” And then, after asking how she was, and a few vague words, he continued: “Do you know that you are the only one — you will allow me to say of my lady friends, I hope? who has not yet seen my Japanese collection.”

“But my dear Baron, a lady cannot go to a bachelor’s room like this.”

“What do you mean? That is a great mistake, when it is a question of seeing a rare collection!”

“At any rate, she cannot go alone.”

“And why not? I have received a number of ladies alone, only for the sake of seeing my collection! They come every day. Shall I tell you their names? No — I will not do that; one must be discreet, even when one it not guilty; as a matter of fact, there is nothing improper in going to the house of a well-known serious man who holds a certain position, unless one goes for an unavoidable reason!”

“Well, what you have said is certainly correct, at bottom.”

“So you will come and see my collection?”

“When?”

“Well, now, immediately.”

“Impossible; I am in a hurry.”

“Nonsense, you have been sitting in the square for this last half hour.”

“You were watching me?”

“I was looking at you.”

“But I am sadly in a hurry.”

“*I* am sure you are not. Confess that you are in no particular hurry.”

Madame Haggan began to laugh, and said: “Well, ... no ... not ... very....”

A cab passed close to them, and the little Baron called out: “Cabman!” and the vehicle stopped, and opening the door, he said: “Get in, Madame.”

“But, Baron! no, it is impossible to-day; I really cannot.”

“Madame, you are acting very imprudently; get in! people are beginning to look at us, and you will collect a crowd; they will think I am trying to carry you off, and we shall both be arrested; please get in!”

She got in, frightened and bewildered, and he sat down by her side, saying to the cabman: “Rue de Provence.”

But suddenly she exclaimed: “Good heavens! I have forgotten a very important telegram; please drive to the nearest telegraph office first of all.”

The cab stopped a little farther on, in the Rue de Châteaudun, and she said to the Baron: “Would you kindly get me a fifty centimes telegraph form? I promised my husband to invite Martelet to dinner to-morrow, and had quite forgotten it.”

When the Baron returned and gave her the blue telegraph form, she wrote in pencil:

“My Dear Friend: I am not at all well. I am suffering terribly from neuralgia, which keeps me in bed. Impossible to go out. Come and dine to-morrow night, so that I may obtain my pardon.

“JEANNE.”

She wetted the gum, fastened it carefully, and addressed it to: “Viscount de Martelet, 240 Rue Miromesnil,” and then, giving it back to the Baron, she said: “Now, will you be kind enough to throw this into the telegram box.”

AN ADVENTURE

“Come! Come!” Pierre Dufaille said, shrugging his shoulders. “What are you talking about, when you say that there are no more adventures? Say that there are no more adventurous men, and you will be right! Yes, nobody ventures to trust to chance, in these days, for as soon as there is any slight mystery, or a spice of danger, they draw back. If, however, a man is willing to go into them blindly, and to run the risk of anything that may happen, he can still meet with adventures, and even I, who never look for them, met with one in my life, and a very startling one; let me tell you.

“I was staying in Florence, and was living very quietly, and all I indulged in, in the way of adventures, was to listen occasionally to the immoral proposals with which every stranger is beset at night on the *Piazzo de la Signoria*, by some worthy Pandarus or other, with a head like that of a venerable priest. These excellent fellows generally introduce you to their families, where debauchery is carried on in a very simple, and almost patriarchal fashion, and where one does not run the slightest risk.

“One day as I was admiring Benvenuto Cellini’s wonderful Perseus, in front of the *Loggia del Lanzi*, I suddenly felt my sleeve pulled somewhat roughly, and on turning round, I found myself face to face with a woman of about fifty, who said to me with a strong German accent: ‘You are French, Monsieur, are you not?’ ‘Certainly, I am,’ I replied. ‘And would you like to go home with a very pretty woman?’

“‘Most certainly I should,’ I replied, with a laugh.

“Nothing could have been funnier than the looks and the serious air of the procuress, or than the strangeness of the proposal, made to broad daylight, and in very bad French, but it was even worse when she added: ‘Do you know everything they do in Paris?’ ‘What do you mean, my good woman?’ I asked her, rather startled. ‘What is done in Paris, that is not done everywhere else?’

"However, when she explained her meaning, I replied that I certainly could not, and as I was not quite so immodest as the lady, I blushed a little. But not for long, for almost immediately afterwards I grew pale, when she said: 'I want to assure myself of it, personally.' And she said this in the same phlegmatic manner, which did not seem so funny to me now, but, on the contrary, rather frightened me. 'What!' I said. 'Personally! You! Explain yourself!'

"If I had been rather surprised before, I was altogether astonished at her explanation. It was indeed an adventure, and was almost like a romance. I could scarcely believe my ears, but this is what she told me.

"She was the confidential attendant on a lady moving in high society, who wished to be initiated into the most secret refinements of Parisian high life, and who had done me the honor of choosing me for her companion. But then, this preliminary test! 'By Jove!' I said to myself, 'this old German hag is not so stupid as she looks!' And I laughed in my sleeve, as I listened inattentively to what she was saying to persuade me.

"'My mistress is the prettiest woman you can dream of; a real beauty; springtime! A flower!' 'You must excuse me, but if your mistress is really like springtime and a flower, you (pray excuse me for being so blunt) are not exactly that, and perhaps I should not exactly be in a mood to humor you, my dear lady, in the same way that I might her.'

"She jumped back, astonished in turn: 'Why, I only want to satisfy myself with my own eyes; not by injuring you.' And she finished her explanation, which had been incomplete before. All she had to do was to go with me to *Mother Patata's* well-known establishment, and there to be present while I conversed with one of its fair and frail inhabitants.

"'Oh!' I said to myself, 'I was mistaken in her tastes. She is, of course, an old, shriveled up woman, as I guessed, but she is a specialist. This is interesting, upon my word! I never met with such a one before!'

"Here, gentlemen, I must beg you to allow me to hide my face for a moment. What I said was evidently not strictly correct, and I am rather ashamed of it; my excuse must be that I was young, that *Patata's* was a celebrated place, of which I had heard wonderful things said, but the entry to which was barred me, on account of my small means. Five napoleons was the price! Fancy! I could not treat myself to it, and so I accepted the good lady's offer. I do not say that it was not disagreeable, but what was I to do? And then, the old woman was a German, and so her five napoleons were a slight return for our five milliards, which we paid them as our war indemnity.

"Well, *Patata's* boarder was charming, the old woman was not too troublesome, and your humble servant did his best to sustain the ancient glory of Frenchmen.

"Let me drink my disgrace to the dregs! On the next day but one after, I was waiting at the statue of Perseus. It was shameful, I confess, but I enjoyed the partial restitution of the five milliards, and it is surprising how a Frenchman loses his dignity, when he is traveling.

"The good lady made her appearance at the appointed time. It was quite dark, and I followed her without a word, for, after all, I was not very proud of the part I was playing. But if you only knew how fair that little girl at *Patata's* was! As I went along, I thought only of her, and did not pay any attention to where we were going, and I was only roused from my reverie by hearing the old woman say: 'Here we are. Try and be as entertaining as you were the day before yesterday.'

"We were not outside *Patata's* house, but in a narrow street running by the side of a palace with high walls, and in front of us was a small door, which the old woman opened gently.

"For a moment I felt inclined to draw back. Apparently the old hag was also ardent on her own account! She had me in a trap! No doubt she wanted in her turn to make use of my small talents! But, no! That was impossible!

"'Go in! Go in!' she said. 'What are you afraid of? My mistress is so pretty, so pretty, much prettier than the little girl of the other day.' So it was really true, this story out of *The Arabian Nights*? Why not? And after all, what was I risking? The good woman would certainly not injure me, and so I went in, though somewhat nervously.

"Oh! My friend, what an hour I spent then! Paradise! and it would be useless, impossible to describe it to you! Apartments fit for a princess, and one of those princesses out of fairy tales, a fairy herself. An exquisite German woman, exquisite as German women can be, when they try. An Undine of Heinrich Heine's, with hair like the Virgin Mary's, innocent blue eyes, and a skin like strawberries and cream.

"Suddenly, however, my Undine got up, and her face convulsed with fury and pride. Then, she rushed behind some hangings, where she began to give vent to a flood of German words, which I did not understand, while I remained standing, dumbfounded. But just then, the old woman came in, and said, shaking with fear: ‘Quick, quick; dress yourself and go, if you do not wish to be killed.’

“I asked no questions, for what was the good of trying to understand? Besides, the old woman, who grew more and more terrified, could not find any French words, and chattered wildly. I jumped up and got into my shoes and overcoat and ran down the stairs, and in the street.

“Ten minutes later, I recovered my breath and my senses, without knowing what streets I had been through, nor where I had come from, and I stole furtively into my hotel, as if I had been a malefactor.

“In the *cafés* the next morning, nothing was talked of except a crime that had been committed during the night. A German baron had killed his wife with a revolver, but he had been liberated on bail, as he had appealed to his counsel, to whom he had given the following explanation, to the truth of which the lady companion of the baroness had certified.

“She had been married to her husband almost by force, and detested him, and she had some particular reasons (which were not specified) for her hatred of him. In order to have her revenge on him, she had had him seized, bound and gagged by four hired ruffians, who had been caught, and who had confessed everything. Thus, reduced to immobility, and unable to help himself, the baron had been obliged to witness a degrading scene, where his wife caressed a Frenchman, and thus outraged conjugal fidelity and German honor at the same time. As soon as he was set at liberty, the baron had punished his faithless wife, and was now seeking her accomplice.”

“And what did you do?” someone asked Pierre Dufaille.

“The only thing I could do, by George!” he replied. “I put myself at the poor devil’s disposal; it was his right, and so we fought a duel. Alas! It was with swords, and he ran me right through the body. That was also his right, but he exceeded his right when he called me her *ponce*. Then I gave him his chance, and as I fell, I called out with all the strength that remained to me: ‘A Frenchman! A Frenchman! Long live France!’”

THE DOUBLE PINS

"Ah; my-dear fellow, what jades women are!"

"What makes you say that?"

"Because they have played me an abominable trick."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Women, or a woman?"

"Two women."

"Two women at once?"

"Yes."

"What was the trick?"

The two young men were sitting outside a *café* on the Boulevards, and drinking liquors mixed with water, those aperients which look like infusions of all the shades in a box of water-colors. They were nearly the same age, twenty-five to thirty. One was dark and the other fair, and they had the same semi-elegant look of stock-jobbers, of men who go to the Stock Exchange, and into drawing-rooms, who are to be seen everywhere, who live everywhere, and love everywhere. The dark one continued.

"I have told you of my connection with that little woman, a tradesman's wife, whom I met on the beach at Dieppe?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, you know what it is. I had a mistress in Paris, whom I loved dearly; an old friend, a good friend, and it has grown into a habit, in fact, and I value it very much."

"Your habit."

"Yes, my habit, and hers also. She is married to an excellent man, whom I also value very much, a very cordial fellow. A capital companion! I may say, I think that my life is bound up with that house."

"Well?"

“Well! they could not manage to leave Paris, and I found myself a widower at Dieppe.”

“Why did you go to Dieppe?”

“For change of air. One cannot remain on the Boulevards the whole time.”

“And then?”

“Then I met the little woman I mentioned to you on the beach there.”

“The wife of that head of the public office?”

“Yes; she was dreadfully dull; her husband only came every Sunday, and he is horrible! I understand her perfectly, and we laughed and danced together.”

“And the rest?”

“Yes, but that came later. However, we met, we liked each other. I told her I liked her, and she made me repeat it, so that she might understand it better, and she put no obstacles in my way.”

“Did you love her?”

“Yes, a little; she is very nice.”

“And what about the other?”

“The other was in Paris! Well, for six weeks it was very pleasant, and wre returned here on the best of terms. Do you know how to break with a woman, when that woman has not wronged you in any way?”

“Yes, perfectly well.”

“How do you manage it?”

“I give her up.”

“How do you do it?”

“I do not see her any longer.”

“But supposing she comes to you?”

“I am ... not at home.”

“And if she comes again?”

“I say I am not well.”

“If she looks after you?”

“I play her some dirty trick.”

“And if she puts up with it?”

“I write to her husband anonymous letters, so that he may look after her on the days that I expect her.”

“That is serious! I cannot resist, and do not know how to bring about a rupture, and so I have a collection of mistresses. There are some whom I do not see more than once a year, others every ten months, others on those days when they want to dine at a restaurant, those whom I have put at regular intervals do not worry me, but I often have great difficulty with the fresh ones, so as to keep them at proper intervals."

"And then...."

"And then ... Then, this little woman was all fire and flame, without any fault of mine, as I told you! As her husband spends all the whole day at his office, she began to come to me unexpectedly, and twice she nearly met my regular one on, the stairs."

"The devil!"

"Yes; so I gave each of them her days, regular days, to avoid confusion; Saturday and Monday for the old one, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday for the new one."

"Why did you show her the preference?"

"Ah! My dear friend, she is younger."

"The devil!"

"Yes; so I gave each of them her days, regular days, to avoid confusion; Saturday and Monday for the old one, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday for the new one."

"Why did you show her the preference?"

"Ah! My dear friend, she is younger."

"So that only gave you two days to yourself in a week."

"That is enough for one."

"Allow me to compliment you on that."

"Well, just fancy that the most ridiculous and most annoying thing in the world happened to me. For four months everything had been going on perfectly; I felt perfectly safe, and I was really very happy, when suddenly, last Monday, the crash came.

"I was expecting my regular one at the usual time, a quarter past one, and was smoking a good cigar, and dreaming, very well satisfied with myself, when I suddenly saw that it was past the time, at which I was much surprised, for she is very punctual, but I thought that something might have accidentally delayed her. However, half-an-hour passed, then an hour, an hour and a half, and then I knew that something must have detained her; a sick headache, perhaps, or some annoying visitor. That sort of waiting is very vexatious, that ... useless waiting ... very annoying and enervating. At last, I made up my mind to go out, and not knowing what to do, I went to her and found her reading a novel."

"Well!" I said to her. And she replied quite calmly:

"My dear I could not come; I was hindered."

"How?"

"My ... something else."

"What was it?

"A very annoying visit."

"I saw that she would not tell me the true reason, and as she was very calm, I did not trouble myself any more about it, and hoped to make up for lost time with the other, the next day, and on the Tuesday, I was very ... very excited, and amorous in expectation of the public official's little wife, and I was surprised that she had not come before the appointed time, and I looked at the clock every moment, and watched the hands impatiently, but the quarter past, then the half-hour, then two o'clock. I could not sit still any longer, and walked up and down very soon in great strides, putting my face against the window, and my ears to the door, to listen whether she was not coming upstairs."

"Half-past two, three o'clock! I seized my hat, and rushed to her house. She was reading a novel my dear fellow! 'Well!' I said, anxiously, and she replied as calmly as usual: 'I was hindered, and could not come.'

"'By what?'

"'An annoying visit.'

"Of course, I immediately thought that they both knew everything, but she seemed so calm and quiet, that I set aside my suspicions, and thought it was only some strange coincidence, as I could not believe in such dissimulation on her part, and so, after half-an-hour's friendly talk, which was, however, interrupted a dozen times by her little girl coming in and out of the room. I went away, very much annoyed. Just imagine the next day...."

"The same thing happened?"

"Yes, and the next also. And that went on for three weeks without any explanation, without anything explaining that strange conduct to me, the secret of which I suspected, however."

"They knew everything?"

"I should think so, by George. But how? Ah! I had a great deal of anxiety before I found it out."

"How did you manage it at last?"

“From their letters, for on the same day they both gave me their dismissal in identical terms.”

“Well?”

“This is how it was.... You know that women always have an array of pins about them. I know hairpins, I doubt them, and look after them, but the others are much more treacherous; those confounded little black-headed pins which look all alike to us, great fools that we are, but which they can distinguish, just as we can distinguish a horse from a dog.

“Well, it appears that one day my minister’s little wife left one of those tell-tale instruments pinned to the paper, close to my looking-glass. My usual one had immediately seen this little black speck, no bigger than a flea, and had taken it out without saying a word, and then had left one of her pins, which was also black, but of a different pattern, in the same place.

“The next day, the minister’s wife wished to recover her property, and immediately recognized the substitution. Then her suspicions were aroused, and she put in two and crossed them, and my original one replied to this telegraphic signal by three black pellets, one on the top of the other, and as soon as this method had begun, they continued to communicate with one another, without saying a word, only to spy on each other. Then it appears that the regular one, being bolder, wrapped a tiny piece of paper round the little wire point, and wrote upon it: *C. D., Poste Restante, Boulevards, Malherbes*.

“Then they wrote to each other. You understand that was not everything that passed between them. They set to work with precaution, with a thousand stratagems, with all the prudence that is necessary in such cases, but the regular one did a bold stroke, and made an appointment with the other. I do not know what they said to each other; all that I know is, that I had to pay the costs of their interview. There you have it all!”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“And you do not see them any more?”

“I beg your pardon. I see them as friends, for we have not quarreled altogether.”

“And have they met again?”

“Yes, my dear fellow, they have become intimate friends.”

“And has not that given you an idea?”

“No, what idea?”

“You great booby! The idea of making them put back the pins where they found them.”

UNDER THE YOKE

As he was a man of quiet and regular habits, and of a simple and affectionate disposition, and had nothing to disturb the even tenor of his life, Monsieur de Loubancourt suffered more than most men do from his widowerhood. He regretted his lost happiness, was angry with fate, which separated united couples so brutally, and which made choice of a tranquil existence, whose sleepy quietude had not hitherto been troubled by any cares or chimeras, in order to rob it of its happiness.

Had he been younger, he might, perhaps, have been tempted to form a new line, to fill up the vacant place, and to marry again. But when a man is nearly sixty, such ideas make people laugh, for they have something ridiculous and insane about them; and so he dragged on his dull and weary existence, escaped from all those familiar objects which constantly recalled the past to him, and went from hotel to hotel without taking an interest in anything, without becoming intimate with anyone, even temporarily; inconsolable, silent, almost enigmatical, and looking funereal in his eternal black clothes.

He was generally alone, though on rare occasions he was accompanied by his only son, who used to yawn by stealth, and who seemed to be mentally counting the hours, as if he were performing some hateful, enforced duty in spite of himself.

Two years of this crystallization went past, and one was as monotonous, and as void of incident, as the other.

One evening, however, in a boarding-house at Cannes, where he was staying on his wanderings, there was a young woman dressed in mourning, among the new arrivals, who sat next to him at dinner. She had a sad, pale face, that told of suffering, a beautiful figure, and large, blue eyes with deep rings round them, but which, nevertheless, looked like the first star which shines in the twilight.

All remarked her, although he usually took no notice of women, no matter whatever they were, ugly or pretty; he looked at her and listened to her. He felt less lonely by her side, though he did not know why. He trembled with instinctive and confused happiness, just as if in some distant country he had found some female friend or relative, who at last would understand him, tell him some news, and talk to him in his dear native language about everything that a man leaves behind him when he exiles himself from home.

What strange affinity had thrown them together thus? What secret forces had brought their grief in contact? What made him so sanguine and so calm, and incited him to take her suddenly into his confidences, and urged him on to resistless curiosity?

She was an experienced traveler, who had no illusions, and was in search of adventures; one of those women who frequently change their name, and who, as they have made up their minds to swindle if luck is not on their side, act a continual part, an adventuress, who could put on every accent; who for the sake of her course, transformed herself into a Slav, or into an American, or simply into a provincial; who was ready to take part in any comedy in order to make money, and not to be obliged to waste her strength and her brains on fruitless struggles or on wretched expedients. Thus she immediately guessed the state of this melancholy sexagenarian’s mind, and the illusions which attracted him to her, and scented the spoils which offered themselves to her cupidity of their own accord, and divined under what guise she ought to show herself, to make herself accepted and loved.

She initiated him into depths of grief which were unknown to him, by phrases which were cut short by sighs, by fragments of her story, which she finished by a disgusted shrug of the shoulders, and a heartrending smile, and by insensibly exciting his feelings. In a word, she triumphed over the last remaining doubts, which might still have mingled with the affectionate pity with which that poor, solitary heart, which, so full of bitterness, overflowed.

And so, for the first time since he had become a widower, the old man confided in another person, poured out his old heart into that soul which seemed to be so like his own, which seemed to offer him a refuge where he could be cheered up, and where the wounds of his heart could be healed, and he longed to throw himself into those sisterly arms, to dry his tears and to exercise his grief there.

Monsieur de Loubancourt, who had married at twenty-five, as much from love as from judgment, had lived quietly and peacefully in the country, much more than in Paris. He was ignorant of the female wiles of temptations, offered to creatures like Wanda Pulska, who was made up of lies, and only cared for pleasure, a virgin soil on which any seed will grow.

She attached herself to him, became his shadow, and by degrees, part of his life. She showed herself to be a charitable woman who devoted herself to an unhappy man, who endeavored to console him, and who, in spite of her youth, was willing to be the inseparable companion of the old man in his slow, daily walks. She never appeared to tire of his anecdotes and reminiscences, and she played cards with him. She waited on him carefully when he was confined to his bed, appeared to have no sex, and transformed herself; and though she handled him skillfully, she seemed ingenuous and ignorant of evil. She acted like an innocent young girl, who had just been confirmed; but for all that, she chose dangerous hours and certain spots in which to be sentimental and to ask questions which agitated and disconcerted him, and abandoned her slender fingers to his feverish hands, which pressed and held them in a tender clasp.

And then, there were wild declarations of love, prayers and sobs which frightened her; wild *adieux*, which were not followed by his departure, but which brought about a touching reconciliation and the first kiss, and then, one night, while they were traveling together, he forced open the door of her bedroom at the hotel, which she had locked, and came in like a mad man. There was the phantom of violence, and the fallacious submission of a woman, who was overcome by so much tenderness, who rebelled no longer, but who accepted the yoke of her master and lover. And then, the conquest of the body after the conquest of the heart, which forged his chain link by link, pleasures which besot and corrupt old men, and dry up their brains, until at last he allowed himself to be induced, almost unconsciously, to make an odious and stupid will.

Informed, perhaps, by anonymous letters, or astonished because his father kept him altogether at a distance from him, and gave no signs of life, Monsieur de Loubancourt’s son joined them in Provence. But Wanda Pulska, who had been preparing for that attack for a long time, waited for it fearlessly.

She did not seem disconcerted at that sudden visit, but was very charming and affable towards the new comer, reassured him by her careless airs of a girl, who took life as it came, and who was suffering from the consequences of a fault, and did not trouble her head about the future.

He envied his father, and grudged him such a treasure. Although he had come to combat her dangerous influence, and to treat the woman, who had assumed the place of death, and who governed her lover as his sovereign mistress, as an enemy, he shrunk from his task, panted with desire, lost his head, and thought of nothing but treason and of an odious partnership.

She managed him even more easily than she had managed Monsieur de Loubancourt, molded him just as she chose; made him her tool, without even giving him the tips of her fingers, or granting him the slightest favor, induced him to be so imprudent, that the old man grew jealous, watched them, discovered the intrigue, and found mad letters in which his son was angry, begged, threatened and implored.

One evening, when she knew that her lover had come in, and was hiding in a dark cupboard in order to watch them, Wanda happened to be alone in the drawing-room, which was full of light, of beautiful flowers, with this young fellow, five-and-twenty. He threw himself at her feet and declared his love, and besought her to run away with him, and when she tried to bring him to reason and repulsed him, and told him in a loud and very distinct voice, how she loved Monsieur de Loubancourt, he seized her wrists with brutal violence, and maddened with passion and stammering words of love and lust, he pushed her towards one of the couches.

“Let me go,” she said, “let me go immediately,... You are a brute to take advantage of a woman like that.... Please let me go, or I shall call the servants to my assistance.”

The next moment, the old man, terrible in his rage, rushed out of his hiding place with clenched fists and a slobbering mouth, threw himself on the startled son, and pointing to the door with a superb gesture, he said:

“You are a dirty scoundrel, sir. Get out of my house immediately, and never let me see you again!”

The comedy was over. Grateful for such fidelity and real affection, Monsieur de Loubancourt married Wanda Pulska, whose name appeared on the civil register — which was a detail of no importance to a man who was in love — as Frida Krubstein; she came from Saxony, and had been a servant at an inn. Then he disinherited his son, as far as he could.

And now that she is a respectable and respected widow, Madame de Loubancourt is received everywhere by society in those places of winter resort where people’s by-gone history is so rarely gone into, and where women bear a name, who are pretty, and who can waltz — like the Germans can, are always well received.

THE READ ONE AND THE OTHER

“Well, really,” Chasseval said, standing with his back to the fire, “could any of those respectable shop-keepers and wine growers have possibly believed that that pretty little Parisian woman, with her soft innocent eyes, like those of a Madonna, with such smiling lips and golden hair, and who always dressed so simple, was their candidate’s mistress?”

She was a wonderful help to him, and accompanied him even to the most outlying farms; went to the meetings in the small village *cafés* and had a pleasant and suitable word for every one, and did not recoil at a glass of mulled wine or a grip of the hand, and was always ready to join in *farandole*. She seemed to be so in love with Eliénne Rulhiére, to trust him so entirely, to be so proud of forming half of his life, and of belonging to him, gave him such looks full of pleasure and of hope, and listened to all he said so intently, that voters who might have hesitated, allowed themselves by degrees to be talked over and persuaded; and promised their votes to the young doctor, whose name they never heard mentioned in the district before.

That electoral campaign had been like a truant’s escapade for Jane Dardenne; it was a delightful and unexpected holiday, and as she was an actress at heart, she played her part seriously, and threw herself into her character, and enjoyed herself more than she ever enjoyed herself in her most adventurous outings.

And then there came in the pleasure of being taken for a woman of the world, of being flattered, respected and envied, and of getting out of the usual groove for a time, and also the dream that this journey of a few weeks would have the sequence, that her lover would not separate from her on their return, but would sacrifice the woman whom he no longer loved, and whom he ironically used to call his *Cinderella*, to her.

At night, when they had laid aside all pretense, and when they were alone in their room in the hotel, she coaxed him and flattered him, spurred his ambition on, threw her quivering arms around him, and amidst her kisses, whispered those words to him, which make a man proud and warm his heart, and give him strength, like a stout dram of alcohol.

The two between them captured the district, and won the election easily, and in spite of his youth, Eliénne Rulhiére was chosen by a majority of five thousand. Then, of course, there were more fetes and banquets, at which Jane was present, and where she was received with enthusiastic shouts; there were fireworks, when she was obliged to set light to the first rocket, and balls at which she astonished those worthy people by her affability. And when they left, three little girls dressed in white, as if they were going to be confirmed, came onto the platform and recited some complimentary verses to her while the band played the *Marseillaise*, the women waved their pocket-handkerchiefs, and the men their hats, and leaning out of the carriage window, looking charming in her traveling costume, with a smile on her lips, and with moist eyes, as was fitting at such a pathetic leave-taking, actress as she was, with a sudden and childlike gesture, she blew kisses to them from the tips of her fingers, and said:

“Good-bye, my friends, good-bye, only for the present; I shall never forget you!”

The deputy, who was also very effusive, had invited his principal supporters to come and see him in Paris as there were plenty of excursion trains. They all took him at his word, and Rulhière was obliged to invite them all to dinner.

In order to avoid any possible mishaps, he gave his wife a foretaste of their guests. He told her that they were rather noisy, talkative, and unpolished, and that they would, no doubt, astonish her by their manners and their accent, but that, as they had great influence, and were excellent men, they deserved a good reception. It was a very useful precaution, for when they came into the drawing-room in their new clothes, expanding with pleasure, and with their hair pomatumed as if they had been going to a country wedding, they felt inclined to fall down before the new Madame Rulhière to whom the deputy introduced them, and who seemed to be perfectly at home there.

At first they were embarrassed, felt uncomfortable and out of place, did not know what to say, and had to seek their words; they buttoned and unbuttoned their gloves, answered her questions at random, and racked their brains to discover the solution of the enigma. Captain Mouredus looked at the fire, with the fixed gaze of a somnambulist, Marius Barbaste scratched his fingers mechanically, while the three others, the factory manager, Casemajel, Roquetton, the lawyer, and Dustugue, the hotel proprietor, looked at Rulhière anxiously.

The lawyer was the first to recover himself. He got up from his arm chair laughing heartily, dug the deputy in the ribs with his elbow, and said:

"I understand it all, I understand it; you thought that people do not come to Paris to be bored, eh? Madame is delightful, and I congratulate you, Monsieur."

He gave a wink, and made signs behind his back to his friends, and then the captain had his turn.

"We are not boobies, and that fellow Roquetton is the most knowing of the lot of us.... Ah! Monsieur Rulhière, without any exaggeration, you are the cream of good fellows."

And with a flushed face, and expanding his chest, he said sonorously:

"They certainly turn them out very pretty in your part of the country, my little lady!"

Madame Rulhière, who did not know what to say, had gone up to her husband for protection; but she felt much inclined to go to her own room under some pretext or other, in order to escape from her intolerable task. She kept her ground, however, during the whole of dinner, which was a noisy, jovial meal, during which the five electors, with their elbows on the table, and their waistcoats unbuttoned, and half drunk, told coarse stories, and swore like troopers. But as the coffee and the liquors were served in the smoking room, she took leave of her guests in an impatient voice, and went to her own room with the hasty step of an escaped prisoner, who is afraid of being retaken.

The electors sat staring after her with gaping mouths, and Mouredus lit a cigar, and said:

"Just listen to me, Monsieur Rulhiére; it was very kind of you to invite us here, to your little quiet establishment, but to speak to you frankly, I should not, in your place, wrong my lawful wife for such a stuck-up piece of goods as this one is."

"The captain is quite right," Roquetton the notary opined; "Madame Rulhiére, the lawful Madame Rulhiére, is much more amiable, and altogether nicer. You are a scoundrel to deceive her; but when may we hope to see her?"

And with a paternal grimace, he added:

“But do not be uneasy; we will all hold our tongue; it would be too sad if she were to find it out.”

THE UPSTART

You know good-natured, stout Dupontel, who looks like the type of a happy man, with his fat cheeks that are the color of ripe apples, his small, reddish moustache, turned up over his thick lips, with his prominent eyes, which never know any emotion or sorrow, which remind one of the calm eyes of cows and oxen, and his long back fixed onto two little wriggling, crooked legs, which obtained for him the nickname of corkscrew from some nymph of the ballet.

Dupontel, who had taken the trouble to be born, but not like the grand seigneurs whom Beaumarchais made fun of once upon a time, was ballasted with a respectable number of millions, as is becoming in the sole heir of a house that had sold household utensils and appliances for over a century.

Naturally, like every other upstart who respects himself, he wished to appear something, to play at being a clubman, and also to play to the gallery, because he had been educated at Vangirard and knew a little English; because he had gone through his voluntary service in the army for twelve months at Rouen; because he was a tolerable singer, could drive four-in-hands, and play lawn-tennis.

Always studiedly well-dressed, too correct in every way, copying his way of speaking, his hats and his trousers from the three or four snobs who set the fashion, reproducing other people’s witticisms, learning anecdotes and jokes by heart, like a lesson, to use them again at small parties, constantly laughing, without knowing why his friends burst into roars of merriment, and was in the habit of keeping pretty girls for the pleasure of his best friends. Of course he was a perfect fool, but after all, a capital fellow, to whom it was only right to extend a good deal of indulgence.

When he had taken his thirty-first mistress, and had made the discovery that in love, money does not create happiness two-thirds of the time, that they had all deceived him, and made him perfectly ridiculous at the end of the week, Charles Dupontel made up his mind to settle down as a respectable married man, and to marry, not from calculation or from reason, but for love.

One autumn afternoon at Auteuil, he noticed in front of the club stand, among the number of pretty women who were standing round the braziers, a girl with such lovely delicate complexion that it looked like an apple blossom; her hair was like threads of gold, and she was so slight and supple that she reminded him of those outlines of saints which one sees in old stained-glass church windows. There was also something enigmatical about her, for she had at the same time the delightfully ingenuous look of a school girl during the holidays, and also of some enlightened young lady, who already knew the how and the why of everything, who is exuberant with youth and life, and who is eagerly waiting for the moment when marriage will at length allow her to say and to do everything that comes into her head, and to amuse herself to satiety.

Then she had such small feet that they would have gone into a woman's hand, a waist that could have been clasped by a bracelet, turned up eyelashes, which fluttered like the wings of a butterfly, close on an impudent and sensual nose, and a vague, mocking smile that made folds in her lips, like the petals of a rose.

Her father was a member of the Jockey Club, who was generally *cleared out*, as they call it, in the great races, but who yet defended his position bravely, and continued that, and who kept himself afloat by prodigies of coolness and skill. He belonged to a race which could prove that his ancestors had been at the court of Charlemagne, and not as musicians or cooks, as some people declared.

Her youth and beauty and her father's pedigree dazzled Dupontel, upset his brain, and altogether turned him upside down, and combined they seemed to him to be a mirage of happiness and of pride of family.

He got introduced to her father, at the end of a game of baccarat, invited him to shoot with him, and a month later, as if it were an affair to be hurried over, he asked for and obtained the hand of Mademoiselle Therése de Montsaigne, and felt as happy as a miner who has discovered a vein of precious metal.

The young woman did not require more than twenty-four hours to discover that her husband was nothing but a ridiculous puppet, and immediately set about to consider how she might best escape from her cage, and befool the poor fellow, who loved her with all his heart.

And she deceived him without the least pity or the slightest scruple; she did it as if it were from instinctive hatred, as if it were a necessity for her not only to make him ridiculous, but also to forget that she ought to sacrifice her virgin dreams to him, to belong to him, and to submit to his hateful caresses without being able to defend himself and to repel him.

She was cruel, as all women are when they do not love, delighted in doing audacious and absurd things, and in visiting everything, and in braving danger. She seemed like a young colt, that is intoxicated with the sun, the air and its liberty, and which gallops wildly across the meadows, jumps hedges and ditches, kicks, and whinnies joyously, and rolls about in the long, sweet grass.

But Dupontel remained quite imperturbable; he had not the slightest suspicion, and was the first to laugh when anybody told him some good story of a husband who had been cuckolded, although his wife repelled him, quarreled with him, and constantly pretended to be out of sorts or tired out, in order to escape from him. She seemed to take a malicious pleasure in checkmating him by her personal remarks, her disenchanting answers, and her apparent listlessness.

They saw a great deal of company, and he called himself Du Pontel now, and he even had thoughts of buying a title from the Pope; he only read certain newspapers, kept up a regular correspondence with the Orleans Princes, was thinking of starting a racing stable, and finished up by believing that he really was a fashionable man, and strutted about, and was puffed out with conceit, as he had probably never read La Fontaine’s fable, in which he tells the story of the ass that is laden with relics which people salute, and so takes their bows to himself.

Suddenly, however, anonymous letters disturbed his quietude, and tore the bandage from his eyes.

At first he tore them up without reading them, and shrugged his shoulders disdainfully; but he received so many of them, and the writer seemed so determined to dot his *i’s* and cross his *t’s* and to clear his brain for him, that the unhappy man began to grow disturbed, and to watch and to ferret about. He instituted minute inquiries, and arrived at the conclusion that he no longer had the right to make fun of other husbands, and that he was the perfect counterpart of *Sganarelle*.

Furious at having been duped, he set a whole private inquiry agency to work, continually acted a part, and one evening appeared unexpectedly with a commissary of police in the snug little bachelor’s quarters which concealed his wife’s escapades.

Therése, who was terribly frightened, and at her wits’ end at being thus surprised in all the disorder of her lover’s apartments, and pale with shame and terror, hid herself behind the bed curtains, while he, who was an officer of dragoons, very much vexed at being mixed up in such a pinchbeck scandal, and at being caught in a silk shirt by these men who were so correctly dressed in frock coats, frowned angrily, and had to restrain himself so as not to fling his victim out of a window.

The police commissary, who was calmly looking at this little scene with the coolness of an amateur, prepared to verify the fact that they were caught *flagrante delicto*, and in an ironical voice said to her husband, who had claimed his services:

“I must ask for your name in full, Monsieur?”

“Charles Joseph Edward Dupontel,” was the answer. And as the commissary was writing it down from his dictation, he added suddenly: “Du Pontel in two words, if you please, Monsieur le Commissionaire!”

THE CARTER’S WENCH

The driver, who had jumped from his box, and was now walking slowly by the side of his thin horses, waking them up every moment by a cut of the whip, or a coarse oath, pointed to the top of the hill, where the windows of a solitary house, in which the inhabitants were still up, although it was very late and quite dark, were shining like yellow lamps, and said to me:

“One gets a good drop there, Monsieur, and well served, by George.”

And his eyes flashed in his thin, sunburnt face, which was of a deep brickdust color, while he smacked his lips like a drunkard, who remembers a bottle of good liquor that he has lately drunk, and drawing himself up in a blouse like a vulgar swell, he shivered like the back of an ox, when it is sharply pricked with the goad.

“Yes, and well served by a wench who will turn your head for you before you have tilted your elbow and drank a glass!”

The moon was rising behind the snow-covered mountain peaks, which looked almost like blood under its rays, and which were crowned by dark, broken clouds, which whirled about and floated, and reminded the passenger of some terrible Medusa’s head. The gloomy plains of Capsir, which were traversed by torrents, extensive meadows in which undefined forms were moving about, fields of rye, like huge golden table-covers, and here and there wretched villagers, and broad sheets of water, into which the stars seemed to look in a melancholy manner, opened out to the view. Damp gusts of winds swept along the road, bringing a strong smell of hay, of resin of unknown flowers, with them, and erratic pieces of rock, which were scattered on the surface like huge boundary stones, had spectral outlines.

The driver pulled his broad-brimmed felt hat over his eyes, twirled his large moustache, and said in an obsequious voice:

“Does Monsieur wish to stop here? This is the place!”

It was a wretched wayside public-house, with a reddish slate roof, that looked as if it were suffering from leprosy, and before the door there stood three wagons drawn by mules, and loaded with huge stems of trees, and which took up nearly the whole of the road; the animals, which were used to halting there, were dozing, and their heavy loads exhaled a smell of a pillaged forest.

Inside, three wagoners, one of whom was an old man, while the other two were young, were sitting in front of the fire, which cackled loudly, with bottles and glasses on a large round-table by their side, and were singing and laughing boisterously. A woman with large round hips, and with a lace cap pinned onto her hair, in the Catalan fashion, who looked strong and bold, and who had a certain amount of gracefulness about her, and with a pretty, but untidy head, was urging them to undo the strings of their great leather purses, and replied to their somewhat indelicate jokes in a shrill voice, as she sat on the knee of the youngest, and allowed him to kiss her and to fumble in her bodice, without any signs of shame.

The coachman pushed open the door, like a man who knows that he is at home.

“Good evening, Glaizette, and everybody; there is room for two more, I suppose?”

The wagoners did not speak, but looked at us cunningly and angrily, like dogs whose food had been taken from them, and who showed their teeth, ready to bite, while the girl shrugged her shoulders and looked into their eyes like some female wild beast tamer; and then she asked us with a strange smile:

“What am I to get you?”

“Two glasses of cognac, and the best you have in the cupboard,” Glaizette, the coachman replied, rolling a cigarette.

While she was uncorking the bottle I noticed how green her eyeballs were; it was a fascinating, tempting green, like that of the great green grasshopper; and also how small her hands were, which showed that she did not use them much; how white her teeth were, and how her voice, which was rather rough, though cooing, had a cruel, and at the same time, a coaxing sound. I fancied I saw her, as in a mirage, reclining triumphantly on a couch, indifferent to the fights which were going on about her, always waiting — longing for him who would prove himself the stronger, and who would prove victorious. She was, in short, the hospitable dispenser of love, by the side of that difficult, stony road, who opened her arms to poor men, and who made them forget everything in the profusion of her kisses. She knew dark matters, which nobody in the world besides herself should know, which her sealed lips would carry away inviolate to the other world. She had never yet loved, and would never really love, because she was vowed to passing kisses which were so soon forgotten.

I was anxious to escape from her as soon as possible; no longer to see her pale, green eyes, and her mouth that bestowed caresses from pure charity; no longer to feel the woman with her beautiful, white hands, so near one; so I threw her a piece of gold and made my escape without saying a word to her, without waiting for any change, and without even wishing her good-night, for I felt the caress of her smile, and the disdainful restlessness of her looks.

The carriage started off at a gallop to Formiguéres, amidst a furious jingling of bells. I could not sleep any more; I wanted to know where that woman came from, but I was ashamed to ask the driver and to show any interest in such a creature, and when he began to talk, as we were going up another hill, as if he had guessed my sweet thoughts, he told me all he knew about Glaizette. I listened to him with the attention of a child, to whom somebody is telling some wonderful fairy tale.

She came from Fontpédrouze, a muleteers' village, where the men spend their time in drinking and gambling at the inn when they are not traveling on the high roads with their mules, while the women do all the field work, carry the heaviest loads on their back, and lead a life of pain and misery.

Her father kept an inn; the girl grew up very happy; she was courted before she was fifteen, and was so coquettish that she was certain to be almost always found in front of her looking-glass, smiling at her own beauty, arranging her hair, trying to make herself like a young lady on the *prado*. And now, as none of the family knew how to keep a halfpenny, but spent more than they earned, and were like cracked jugs, from which the water escapes drop by drop, they found themselves ruined one fine day, just as if they had been at the bottom of a blind alley. So on the "Feast of Our Lady of Succor," when people go on a pilgrimage to Font Romea, and the villages are consequently deserted, the inn-keeper set fire to the house. The crime was discovered through *la Glaizette*, who could not make up her mind to leave the looking-glass, with which her room was adorned, behind her, and so had carried it off under her petticoat.

The parents were sentenced to many years' imprisonment, and being let loose to live as best she could, the girl became a servant, passed from hand to hand, inherited some property from an old farmer, whom she had caught, as if she had been a thrush on a twig covered with bird-lime, and with the money she had built this public-house on the new road which was being built across the Capsir.

"A regular bad one, Monsieur," the coachman said in conclusion, "a vixen such as one does not see now in the worst garrison towns, and who would open the door to the whole fraternity, and not at all avaricious, but thoroughly honest...."

I interrupted him in spite of myself, as if his words had pained me, and I thought of those pale green eyes, those magic eyes, eyes to be dreamt about, which were the color of grasshoppers, and I looked for them, and saw them in the darkness; they danced before me like phosphorescent lights, and I would have given then the whole contents of my purse to that man if he would only have been silent and urged his horses on to full speed, so that their mad gallop might carry me off quickly, quickly and far, and continually further from that girl.

THE MARQUIS

It was quite useless to expostulate when that obstinate little Sonia, with a Russian name and Russian caprices, had said: “I choose to do it.” She was so delicate and pretty also, with her slightly turned-up nose, and her rosy and childish cheeks, while every female perversity was reflected in the depths of her strange eyes, which were the color of the sea on a stormy evening. Yes, she was very charming, very fantastic, and above all, so Russian, so deliciously and imperiously Russian, and all the more Russian, as she came from Montmarte, and in spite of this, not one of her seven lovers who composed her usual menagerie had laughed when their enslaver said one day:

“You know my feudal castle at Pludun-Herlouët, near Saint Jacut-de-la-Mer, which I bought two years ago, and in which I have not yet set foot? Very well, then! The day after to-morrow, which is the first of May, we will have a house-warming there.”

The seven had not asked for any further explanation, but had accompanied little Sonia, and were now ready to sit down to dinner under her presidency in the dining-room of the old castle, which was situated ten hours from Paris. They had arrived there that morning; they were going to have dinner and supper together, and start off again at daybreak next morning; such were Sonia’s orders, and nobody had made the slightest objection.

Two of her admirers, however, who were not yet used to her sudden whims, had felt some surprise, which was quickly checked by expressions of enthusiastic pleasure on the part of the others.

“What a delightful, original idea! Nobody else would have thought of such things! Positively, nobody else. Oh! these Russians!” But those who had known her for some time, and who had been consequently educated not to be surprised at anything, found it all quite natural.

It was half-past six in the evening, and the gentlemen were going to dress. Sonia had made up her mind to keep on her morning-gown, or if she dressed, she would do so later. Just then she was not inclined to move out of her great rocking-chair, from which she could see the sun setting over the sea. The sight always delighted her very much. It might have been taken for a large red billiard ball, rebounding from the green cloth. How funny it was! And how lucky that she was all alone to look at it, for those seven would not have understood it at all! Those men never have any soul, have they?

Certainly, the sunset was strange at first, but at length it made her sad, and just now Sonia's heart felt almost heavy, though the very sadness was sweet. She was congratulating herself more than ever on being alone, so as to enjoy that languor, which was almost like a gentle dream, when, in perfect harmony with that melancholy and sweet sensation, a voice rose from the road, which was overhung by the terrace; a tremulous, but fresh and pure voice sang the following words to a slow melody:

"Walking in Paris, Having my drink, A friend of mine whispered: *What do you think? If love makes you thirsty, Then wine makes you lusty*."

The sound died away, as the singer continued on his way, and Sonia was afraid that she should not hear the rest; it was really terrible; so she jumped out of the rocking-chair, ran to the balustrade of terrace, and leaning over it, she called out: "Sing it again! I insist on it. The song, the whole song!"

On hearing this, the singer looked round and then came back, without hurrying, however, and as if he were prompted by curiosity, rather than by any desire to comply with her order, and holding his hand over his eyes, he looked at Sonia attentively, who, on her part, had plenty of time to look closely at him.

He was an old man of about sixty-five, and his rags and the wallet over his shoulder denoted a beggar, but Sonia immediately noticed that there was a certain amount of affectation in his wretchedness. His hair and beard were not shaggy and ragged, like such men usually wear them, and evidently he had his hair cut occasionally, and he had a fine, and even *distinguished* face, as Sonia said to herself. But she did not pay much attention to that, as for some time she had noticed that old men at the seaside nearly all looked like gentlemen.

When he got to the foot of the terrace, the beggar stopped, and wagged his head and said: "Pretty! The little woman is very pretty!" But he did not obey Sonia's order, who repeated it, almost angrily this time, beating a violent tattoo on the stone-work. "The song, the whole song!"

He did not seem to hear, but stood there gaping, with a vacant smile on his face, and as his head was rather inclined towards his left shoulder, a thin stream of saliva trickled from his lips onto his beard, and his looks became more and more ardent. "How stupid I am!" Sonia suddenly thought. "Of course he is waiting for something." She felt in her pocket, in which she always carried some gold by way of half-pence, took out a twenty-franc piece and threw it down to the old man. He, however, did not take any notice of it, but continued looking at her ecstatically, and was only roused from his state of bliss by receiving a handful of gravel which she threw at him, right in his face.

"Do sing!" she exclaimed. "You must; I will have it; I have paid you." And then, still smiling, he picked up the napoleon and threw it back onto the terrace, and then he said proudly, though in a very gentle voice: "I do not ask for charity, little lady; but if it gives you pleasure, I will sing you the whole song, the whole of it, as often as you please." And he began the song again, in his tremulous voice, which was more tremulous than it had been before, as if he were much touched.

Sonia was overcome, and without knowing was moved into tears; delighted because the man had spoken to her so familiarly, and rather ashamed at having treated him as a beggar; and now her whole being was carried away by the slow rhythm of the melody, which related an old love story, and when he had done he again looked at her with a smile, and as she was crying, he said to her: "I dare say you have a beautiful horse, or a little dog that you are very fond of, which is ill. Take me to it, and I will cure it: I understand it thoroughly. I will do it *gratis*, because you are so pretty."

She could not help laughing. "You must not laugh," he said. "What are you laughing at? Because I am poor? But I am not, for I had work yesterday, and again to-day. I have a bag full. See, look here!" And from his belt he drew a leather purse in which coppers rattled. He poured them out into the palm of his hand, and said merrily: "You see, little one, I have a purse. Forty-seven sous; forty-seven!" "So you will not take my napoleon?" Sonia said. "Certainly not," he replied. "I do not want it; and then, I tell you again, I will not accept alms. So you do not know me?" "No, I do not." "Very well, ask anyone in the neighborhood. Everybody will tell you that the Marquis does not live on charity."

The Marquis! At that name she suddenly remembered that two years ago she had heard his story. It was at the time that she bought the property, and the vendor had mentioned the *Marquis* as one of the curiosities of the soil. He was said to be half silly, at any rate an original, almost in his dotage, living by any lucky bits that he could make as horse-coper and veterinary. The peasants gave him a little work, as they feared that he might throw spells over anyone who refused to employ him. They also respected him on account of his former wealth and of his title, for he had been rich, very rich, and they said that he really was a marquis, and it was said that he had ruined himself in Paris by speculating. The reason, of course, *was women*!

At that moment the dinner bell began to ring, and a wild idea entered Sonia's head. She ran to the little door that opened onto the terrace, overtook the musician, and with a ceremonious bow she said to him: "Will you give me the pleasure and the honor of dining with me, Marquis?"

The old man left off smiling and grew serious; he put his hand to his forehead, as if to bring old recollections back, and then with a very formal, old-fashioned bow, he said: "With pleasure, my dear." And letting his wallet drop, he offered Sonia his arm.

When she introduced this new guest to them, all the seven, even to the best drilled, started. "I see what disturbs you," she said. "It is his dress. Well! It really leaves much to be desired. But wait a moment; that can soon be arranged."

She rang for her lady's maid and whispered something to her, and then she said: "Marquis, your bath is ready in your dressing-room. If you will follow Sabina, she will show you to it. These gentlemen and I will wait dinner for you." And as soon as he had gone out, she said to the youngest there: "And now, Ernest, go upstairs and undress; I will allow you to dine in your morning coat, and you will give your dress coat and the rest to Sabina, for the Marquis."

Ernest was delighted at having to play a part in the piece, and the six others clapped their hands. "Nobody else could think of such things; nobody, nobody!"

Half an hour later they were sitting at dinner, the Marquis in a dress coat on Sonia's left, and it was a great deception for the seven. They had reckoned on having some fun with him, and especially Ernest, who set up as a wit, had intended to *draw him*. But at the first attempt of this sort, Sonia had given him a look which they all understood, and dinner began very ceremoniously for the seven, but merrily and without restraint between Sonia and the old man.

They cut very long faces, those seven, but inwardly, if one can say so, for of course they could not dream of showing how put out they were, and those inward long faces grew longer still when Sonia said to the old fellow, quite suddenly: "I say, how stupid these gentlemen are! Suppose we leave them to themselves?"

The Marquis rose, offered her his arm again, and said: "Where shall we go to?" But Sonia's only reply was to sing the couplet of that song which she had remembered:

"For three years I passed The nights with my love, In a beautiful bed In a splendid alcove. Though wine makes me sleepy, Yet love keeps me frisky."

And the seven, who were altogether dumbfounded this time, and who could not conceal their vexation, saw the couple disappear out of the door which led to Sonia's apartments. "Hum!" Ernest ventured to say, "this is really rather strong!" "Yes," the eldest of the menagerie replied. "It certainly is rather strong, but it will do! You know, there is nobody like her for thinking of such things!"

The next morning, the *château* bell woke them up at six o'clock, when they had agreed to return to Paris, and the seven men asked each other whether they should go and wish Sonia good-morning, as usual, before she was out of her room. Ernest hesitated more than any of them about it, and it was not until Sabina, her maid, came and told them that her mistress insisted upon it, that they could make up their minds to do so, and they were surprised to find Sonia in bed by herself.

"Well!" Ernest asked boldly, "and what about the Marquis?" "He left very early," Sonia replied. "A queer sort of marquis, I must say!" Ernest observed contemptuously, and growing bolder. "Why, I should like to know?" Sonia replied, drawing herself up. "The man has his own habits, I suppose!" "Do you know, Madame," Sabina observed, "that he came back half an hour after he left?" "Ah!" Sonia said, getting up and walking about the room. "He came back? What did he want, I wonder?" "He did not say, Madame. He merely went upstairs to see you. He was dressed in his old clothes again."

And suddenly Sonia uttered a loud cry, and clapped her hands, and the seven came round to see what had caused her emotion. "Look here! Just look here!” she cried. “Do look on the mantel-piece! It is really charming! Do look!”

And with a smiling, and yet somewhat melancholy expression in her eyes, with a tender look which they could not understand, she showed them a small bunch of wild flowers, by the side of a heap of half-pennies. Mechanically she took them up and counted them, and then began to cry.

There were forty-seven of them.

THE BED

On a hot afternoon during last summer, the large auction rooms seemed asleep, and the auctioneers were knocking down the various lots in a listless manner. In a back room, on the first floor, two or three lots of old silk, ecclesiastical vestments, were lying in a corner.

They were copes for solemn occasions, and graceful chasubles on which embroidered flowers surrounded symbolic letters on a yellowish ground, which had become cream-colored, although it had originally been white. Some second-hand dealers were there, two or three men with dirty beards, and a fat woman with a big stomach, one of those women who deal in second-hand finery, and who also manage illicit love affairs, who are brokers in old and young human flesh, just as much as they are in new and old clothes.

Presently a beautiful Louis XV. chasuble was put up for sale, which was as pretty as the dress of a marchioness of that period; it had retained all its colors, and was embroidered with lilies of the valley round the cross, and long blue iris, which came up to the foot of the sacred emblem, and wreaths of roses in the corners. When I had bought it, I noticed that there was a faint scent about it, as if it were permeated with the remains of incense, or rather, as if it were still pervaded by those delicate, sweet scents of by-gone years, which seemed to be only the memory of perfumes, the soul of evaporated essences.

When I got it home, I wished to have a small chair of the same period covered with it; and as I was handling it in order to take the necessary measures, I felt some paper beneath my fingers, and when I cut the lining, some letters fell at my feet. They were yellow with age, and the faint ink was the color of rust, and outside the sheet, which was folded in the fashion of years long past, it was addressed in a delicate hand: *To Monsieur l'Abbé d'Argence*

The first three lines merely settled places of meeting, but here is the third:

“My Friend; I am very unwell, ill in fact, and I cannot leave my bed. The rain is beating against my windows, and I lie dreaming comfortably and warmly on my eider-down coverlet. I have a book of which I am very fond, and which seems as if it really applied to me. Shall I tell you what it is? No, for you would only scold me. Then, when I have read a little, I think, and will tell you what about.

“Having been in bed for three days, I think about my bed, and even in my sleep I meditate on it still, and I have come to the conclusion that the bed constitutes our whole life; for we were born in it, we live in it, and we shall die in it. If, therefore, I had Monsieur de Crébillon’s pen, I should write the history of a bed, and what exciting and terrible, as well as delightful moving occurrences would not such a book contain! What lessons and what subjects for moralizing could one not draw from it, for everyone?

“You know my bed, my friend, but you will never guess how many things I have discovered in it within the last three days, and how much more I love it, in consequence. It seems to me to be inhabited, haunted, if I may say so, by a number of people I never thought of, who, nevertheless, have left something of themselves in that couch.

“Ah! I cannot understand people who buy new beds, beds to which no memories or cares are attached. Mine, ours, which is so shabby, and so spacious, must have held many existences in it, from birth to the grave. Think of that, my friend; think of it all; review all those lives, a great part of which was spent between these four posts, surrounded by these hangings embroidered by human figures, which have seen so many things. What have they seen during the three centuries since they were first put up?

“Here is a young woman lying on this bed. From time to time she sighs, and then she groans and cries out; her mother is with her, and presently a little creature that makes a noise like a cat mewing, and which is all shriveled and wrinkled, comes from her. It is a male child to which she has given birth, and the young mother feels happy in spite of her pain; she is nearly suffocated with joy at that first cry, and stretches out her arms, and those around her shed tears of pleasure; for that little morsel of humanity which has come from her means the continuation of the family, the perpetuation of the blood, of the heart, and of the soul of the old people, who are looking on, trembling with excitement.

“And then, here are two lovers, who for the first time are flesh to flesh together in that tabernacle of life. They tremble; but transported with delight, they have the delicious sensation of being close together, and by degrees their lips meet. That divine kiss makes them one, that kiss, which is the gate of a terrestrial heaven, that kiss which speaks of human delights, which continually promises them, announces them, and precedes them. And their bed is agitated like the tempestuous sea, and it bends and murmurs, and itself seems to become animated and joyous, for the maddening mystery of love is being accomplished on it. What is there sweeter, what more perfect in this world than those embraces, which make one single being out of two, and which give to both of them at the same moment the same thought, the same expectation, and the same maddening pleasure, which descends upon them like a celestial and devouring fire?

“Do you remember those lines from some old poet, which you read to me last year? I do not remember who wrote them, but it may have been Rousard:

“When you and I in bed shall lie, Lascivious we shall be, Enlaced, playing a thousand tricks, Of lovers, gamesomely.

“I should like to have that verse embroidered on the top of my bed, where Pyramus and Thisbe are continually looking at me out of their tapestry eyes.

“And think of death, my friend; of all those who have breathed out their last sigh to God in this bed. For it is also the tomb of hopes ended, the door which closes everything, after having been the one which lets in the world. What cries, what anguish, what sufferings, what groans, how many arms stretched out towards the past; what appeals to happiness that has vanished for ever; what convulsions, what death-rattles, what gaping lips and distorted eyes have there not been in this bed, from which I am writing to you, during the three centuries that it has sheltered human beings!

“The bed, you must remember, is the symbol of life; I have discovered this within the last three days. There is nothing good except the bed, and are not some of our best moments spent in sleep?

“But then again, we suffer in bed! It is the refuge of those who are ill and suffering; a place of repose and comfort for worn-out bodies, and, in a word, the bed is part and parcel of humanity.

“Many other thoughts have struck me, but I have no time to note them down for you, and then, should I remember them all? Besides that, I am so tired that I mean to retire to my pillows, stretch myself out at full length, and sleep a little. But be sure and come to see me at three o’clock to-morrow; perhaps I may be better, and able to prove it to you.

“Good-bye, my friend; here are my hands for you to kiss, and I also offer you my lips.”

AN ADVENTURE IN PARIS

Is there any stronger feeling than curiosity in a woman? Oh! Fancy seeing, knowing, touching what one has dreamt about! What would a woman not do for that? When once a woman's eager curiosity is aroused, she will be guilty of any folly, commit any imprudence, venture upon anything, and recoil from nothing. I am speaking of women who are really women, who are endowed with that triple-bottomed disposition, which appears to be reasonable and cold on the surface, but whose three secret compartments are filled. The first, with female uneasiness, which is always in a state of flutter; the next, with sly tricks which are colored in imitation of good faith, with those sophistical and formidable tricks of apparently devout women; and the last, with all those charming, improper acts, with that delightful deceit, exquisite perfidy, and all those wayward qualities, which drive lovers who are stupidly credulous, to suicide; but which delight others.

The woman whose adventure I am about to relate, was a little person from the provinces, who had been insipidly chaste till then. Her life, which was apparently so calm, was spent at home, with a busy husband and two children, whom she brought up like an irreproachable woman. But her heart beat with unsatisfied curiosity, and some unknown longing. She was continually thinking of Paris, and read the fashionable papers eagerly. The accounts of parties, of the dresses and various entertainments, excited her longing; but, above all, she was strangely agitated by those paragraphs which were full of double meaning, by those veils which were half raised by clever phrases, and which gave her a glimpse of culpable and ravishing delights, and from her country home, she saw Paris in an apotheosis of magnificent and corrupt luxury.

And during the long nights, when she dreamt, lulled by the regular snores of her husband, who was sleeping on his back by her side, with a silk handkerchief tied round his head, she saw in her sleep those well-known men whose names appeared on the first page of the newspapers as great stars in the dark skies; and she pictured to herself their life of continual excitement, of constant debauches, of orgies such as they indulged in in ancient Rome, which were horridly voluptuous, with refinements of sensuality which were so complicated that she could not even picture them to herself.

The boulevards seemed to her to be a kind of abyss of human passions, and there could be no doubt that the houses there concealed mysteries of prodigious love. But she felt that she was growing old, and this, without having known life, except in those regular, horridly monotonous, everyday occupations, which constitute the happiness of the home. She was still pretty, for she was well preserved in her tranquil existence, like some winter fruit in a closed cupboard; but she was agitated and devoured by her secret ardor. She used to ask herself whether she should die without having experienced any of those damning, intoxicating joys, without having plunged once, just once into that flood of Parisian voluptuousness.

By dint of much perseverance, she paved the way for a journey to Paris, found a pretext, got some relations to invite her, and as her husband could not go with her, she went alone, and as soon as she arrived, she invented a reason for remaining for two days, or rather for two nights, if necessary, as she told him that she had met some friends who lived a little way out of town.

And then she set out on a voyage of discovery. She went up and down the boulevards, without seeing anything except roving and numbered vice. She looked into the large *cafés*, and read the *Agony Column* of the *Figaro*, which every morning seemed to her like a tocsin, a summons to love. But nothing put her on the track of those orgies of actors and actresses; nothing revealed to her those temples of debauchery which she imagined opened at some magic word, like the cave in the *Arabian Nights*, or those catacombs in Rome, where the mysteries of a persecuted religion were secretly celebrated.

Her relations, who were quite middle-class people, could not introduce her to any of those well-known men with whose names her head was full, and in despair she was thinking of returning, when chance came to her aid. One day, as she was going along the *Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin*, she stopped to look into a shop full of those colored Japanese knick-knacks, which strike the eye on account of their color. She was looking at the little ivory buffoons, the tall vases of flaming enamel, and the curious bronzes, when she heard the shop-keeper dilating, with many bows, on the value of an enormous, pot-bellied, comical figure, which was quite unique, he said, to a little, bald-headed, gray-bearded man.

Every moment, the shop-keeper repeated his customer’s name, which was a celebrated one, in a voice like a trumpet. The other customers, young women and well-dressed gentlemen, gave a swift and furtive, but respectful glance at the celebrated writer, who was looking admiringly at the china figure. They were both equally ugly, as ugly as two brothers who had sprung from the same mother.

“I will let you have it for a thousand francs, Monsieur Varin, and that is exactly what it cost me. I should ask anybody else fifteen hundred, but I think a great deal of literary and artistic customers, and have special prices for them. They all come to me, Monsieur Varin. Yesterday, Monsieur Busnach bought a large, antique goblet of me, and the other day I sold two candelabra like this (is it not handsome?) to Monsieur Alexander Dumas. If Monsieur Zola were to see that Japanese figure, he would buy it immediately, Monsieur Varin.”

The author hesitated in perplexity, as he wanted to have the figure, but the price was above him, and he thought no more about her looking at him than if he had been alone in the desert. She came in trembling, with her eyes fixed shamelessly upon him, and she did not even ask herself whether he were good-looking, elegant or young. It was Jean Varin himself, Jean Varin. After a long struggle, and painful hesitation, he put the figure down onto the table. “No, it is too dear,” he said. The shop-keeper’s eloquence redoubled. “Oh! Monsieur Varin, too dear? It is worth two thousand francs, if it is worth a son.” But the man of letters replied sadly, still looking at the figure with the enameled eyes: “I do not say it is not; but it is too dear for me.” And thereupon, she, seized by a kind of mad audacity, came forward and said: “What shall you charge me for the figure?” The shop-keeper, in surprise, replied: “Fifteen hundred francs, Madame.” “I will take it.”

The writer, who had not even noticed her till that moment, turned round suddenly; he looked at her from head to foot, with half-closed eyes, observantly, and then he took in the details, as a connoisseur. She was charming, suddenly animated by that flame which had hitherto been dormant in her. And then, a woman who gives fifteen hundred francs for a knick-knack is not to be met with every day.

But she was overcome by a feeling of delightful delicacy, and turning to him, she said in a trembling voice: “Excuse me, Monsieur; no doubt I have been rather hasty, as perhaps you had not finally made up your mind.” He, however, only bowed, and said: “Indeed, I had, Madame.” And she, filled with emotion, continued: “Well, Monsieur, if either to-day, or at any other time, you change your mind, you can have this Japanese figure. I only bought it because you seemed to like it.”

He was visibly flattered, and smiled. “I should much like to find out how you know who I am?” he said. Then she told him how she admired him, and became quite eloquent as she quoted his works, and while they were talking he rested his arms on a table, and fixed his bright eyes upon her, trying to make out who and what she really was. But the shop-keeper, who was pleased to have that living puff of his goods, called out, from the other end of the shop: “Just look at this, Monsieur Varin; is it not beautiful?”

And then everyone looked round, and she almost trembled with pleasure at being seen talking so intimately with such a well-known man.

At last, however, intoxicated, as it were, by her feelings, she grew bold, like a general does, who is going to give the order for an assault. “Monsieur,” she said, “will you do me a great, a very great pleasure? Allow me to offer you this funny Japanese figure, as a keepsake from a woman who admires you passionately, and whom you have seen for ten minutes.”

Of course he refused, and she persisted, but still he resisted her offer, at which he was much amused, and at which he laughed heartily; but that only made her more obstinate, and she said: “Very well, then, I shall take it to your house immediately. Where do you live?”

He refused to give her his address, but she got it from the shop-keeper, and when she had paid for her purchase, she ran out to take a cab. The writer went after her, as he did not wish to accept a present for which he could not possibly account. He reached her just as she was jumping into the vehicle, and getting in after her, he almost fell onto her, and then tumbled onto the bottom of the cab as it started. He picked himself up, however, and sat down by her side, feeling very much annoyed.

It was no good for him to insist and to beg her; she showed herself intractable, and when they got to the door, she stated her conditions. “I will undertake not to leave this with you,” she said, “if you will promise to do all I want to-day.” And the whole affair seemed so funny to him that he agreed. “What do you generally do at this time?” she asked him; and after hesitating for a few moments, he replied: “I generally go for a walk.” “Very well, then, we will go to the *Bois de Boulogne*!” she said, in a resolute voice, and they started.

He was obliged to tell her the names of all the well-known women, pure or impure, with every detail about them; their life, their habits, their private affairs, and their vices; and when it was getting dusk, she said to him: “What do you do every day at this time?” “I have some absinthe,” he replied, with a laugh. “Very well, then, Monsieur,” she went on, seriously, “let us go and have some absinthe.”

They went into a large *café* on the boulevard which he frequented, and where he met some of his colleagues, whom he introduced to her. She was half mad with pleasure, and she kept saying to herself: “At last! At last!” But time went on, and she observed that she supposed it must be about his dinner time, and she suggested that they should go and dine. When they left *Bignon’s*, after dinner, she wanted to know what he did in the evening, and looking at her fixedly, he replied: “That depends; sometimes I go to the theater.” “Very well, then, Monsieur; let us go to the theater.”

They went to the Vaudeville with an order, thanks to him, and, to her great pride, the whole house saw her sitting by his side, in the balcony stalls.

When the play was over, he gallantly kissed her hand, and said: “It only remains for me to thank you for this delightful day....” But she interrupted him: “What do you do at this time, every night?” “Why ... why ... I go home.” She began to laugh, a little tremulous laugh. “Very well, Monsieur ... let us go to your rooms.”

They did not say anything more. She shivered occasionally, from head to foot, feeling inclined to stay, and inclined to run away, but with a fixed determination, after all, to see it out to the end. She was so excited that she had to hold onto the baluster as she went upstairs, and he came up behind her, with a wax match in his hand.

As soon as they were in the room, she undressed herself quickly, and retired without saying a word, and then she waited for him, cowering against the wall. But she was as simple as it was possible for a provincial lawyer’s wife to be, and he was more exacting than a pascha with three tails, and so they did not at all understand each other. At last, however, he went to sleep, and the night passed, and the silence was only disturbed by the *tick-tack* of the clock, and she, lying motionless, thought of her conjugal nights; and by the light of the Chinese lantern, she looked, nearly heart-broken, at the little fat man lying on his back, whose round stomach raised up the bed-clothes like a balloon filled with gas. He snored with the noise of a wheezy organ pipe, with prolonged snorts and comic chokings. His few hairs profited by his sleep, to stand up in a very strange way, as if they were tired of having been fastened for so long to that pate, whose bareness they were trying to cover, and a small stream of saliva was running out of one corner of his half-open mouth.

At last the daylight appeared through the drawn blinds; so she got up and dressed herself without making any noise, and she had already half opened the door, when she made the lock creak, and he woke up and rubbed his eyes. He was some moments before he quite came to himself, and then, when he remembered all that had happened, he said: "What! Are you going already?" She remained standing, in some confusion, and then she said, in a hesitating voice: "Yes, of course; it is morning..."

Then he sat up, and said: "Look here, I have something to ask you, in my turn." And as she did not reply, he went on: "You have surprised me most confoundedly since yesterday. Be open, and tell me why you did it all, for upon my word I cannot understand it in the least." She went close up to him, blushing like as if she had been a virgin, and said: "I wanted to know ... what ... what vice ... really was, ... and ... well ... well, it is not at all funny."

And she ran out of the room, and downstairs into the street.

A number of sweepers were busy in the streets, brushing the pavements, the roadway, and sweeping everything on one side. With the same regular motion, the motion of mowers in a meadow, they pushed the mud in front of them in a semi-circle, and she met them in every street, like dancing puppets, walking automatically with their swaying motion. And it seemed to her as if something had been swept out of her; as if her over-excited dreams had been pushed into the gutter, or into the drain, and so she went home, out of breath, and very cold, and all that she could remember was the sensation of the motion of those brooms sweeping the streets of Paris in the early morning.

As soon as she got into her room, she threw herself onto her bed and cried.

HAPPINESS

The sky was blue, with light clouds that looked like swans slowly sailing on the waters of a lake, and the atmosphere was so warm, so saturated with the subtle odors of the mimosas, that Madame de Viellemont ordered coffee to be served on the terrace which overlooked the sea.

And while the steam rose from the delicate china cups, one felt an almost inexpressible pleasure in looking at the sails, which were gradually becoming lost in the mysterious distance, and at the almost motionless sea, which had the sheen of jewels, which attracted the eyes like the looks of a dreamy woman.

Monsieur de Pardeillac, who had arrived from Paris, fresh from the remembrance of the last election there, from that Carnival of variegated posters, which for weeks had imparted the strange aspect of some Oriental bazaar to the whole city, had just been relating the victory of *The General*, and went on to say that those who had thought that the game was lost, were beginning to hope again.

After listening to him, old Count de Lancolme, who had spent his whole life in rummaging libraries, and who had certainly compiled more manuscripts than any Benedectine friar, shook his bald head, and exclaimed in his shrill, rather mocking voice:

“Will you allow me to tell you a very old story, which has just come into my head, while you were speaking, my dear friend, which I read formerly in an old Italian city, though I forget at this moment where it was?

“It happened in the fifteenth century, which is far removed from our epoch, but you shall judge for yourselves whether it might not have happened yesterday.

“Since the day, when mad with rage and rebellion, the town had made a bonfire of the Ducal palace, and had ignominiously expelled that patrician who had been their *podestat*, as if he had been some vicious scoundrel, had thrust his lovely daughter into a convent, and had forced his sons, who might have claimed their parental heritage, and have again imposed the abhorred yoke upon them, into a monastery, the town had never known any prosperous times. One after another the shops closed, and money became as scarce as if there had been an invasion of barbarian hordes, who had emptied the State treasury, and stolen the last gold coin.

"The poor people were in abject misery, and in vain held out their hands to passers-by under the church porches, and in the squares, while only the watchmen disturbed the silence of the starlit nights, by their monotonous and melancholy call, which announced the flight of the hours as they passed.

"There were no more serenades; no longer did viols and flutes trouble the slumbers of the lovers' choice; no longer were amorous arms thrown round women's supple waists, nor were bottles of red wine put to cool in the fountains under the trees. There were no more love adventures, to the rhythm of laughter and of kisses; nothing but heavy, monotonous weariness, and the anxiety as to what the next day might bring forth, and ceaseless, unbridled ambitions and lusts.

"The palaces were deserted, one by one, as if the plague were raging, and the nobility had fled to Florence and to Rome. In the beginning, the common people, artisans and shop-keepers had installed themselves in power, as in a conquered city, and had seized posts of honor and well-paid offices, and had sacked the Treasury with their greedy and eager hands. After them, came the middle classes, and those solemn upstarts and hypocrites, like leathern bottles blown out with wind, acting the tyrant and lying without the least shame, disowned their former promises, and would soon have given the finishing stroke to the unfortunate city, which was already at its last shifts.

"Discontent was increasing, and the *sbirri* could scarcely find time to tear the seditious placards, which had been posted up by unknown hands, from the walls.

"But now that the old *podestat* had died in exile, worn out with grief, and that his children, who had been brought up under monastic rules, and were accustomed to nothing so much as to praying, thought only of their own salvation, there was nobody who could take his place.

"And so these kinglets profited by the occasion to strut about at their ease like great nobles, to cram themselves with luxurious meals, to increase their property by degrees, to put everything up for sale, and to get rid of those who, later on, could have called for accounts, and have nailed them to the pillory by their ears.

"Their arrogance knew no bounds, and when they were questioned about their acts, they only replied by menaces or raillery, and this state of affairs lasted for twenty years, when, as war was imminent with Lucca, the Council raised troops and enrolled mercenaries. Several battles were fought in which the enemy was beaten and was obliged to flee, abandoning their colors, their arms, prisoners, and all the booty in their camp.

"The man who had led the soldiers from battle, whom they had acclaimed as triumphant and laurel-crowned Caesar, around their campfires, was a poor *condottiere*, who possessed nothing in the world except his clothes, his buff jerkin and his heavy sword.

"They called him *Hercules*, on account of his strong muscles, his imposing build, and his large head, and also *Malavista*, because in those butcheries he had no pity, no weakness, but seemed, with his great murderous arms, as if he had the long reach of death itself. He had neither title, deeds, fortune, nor relations, for he had been born one night in the tent of a female camp follower; for a long time, an old, broken drum had been his cradle, and he had grown up anyhow, without knowing those maternal kisses and endearments that warm the heart, or the pleasure of not always sleeping on a hard bed, or of always eating tough beef, or of being obliged to tighten his sword belt when luck had turned like a weathercock when the wind shifts, and a man would gladly give all his share of the next booty for a moldy crust of bread and a glass of water.

"He was a simple and a brave man, whose heart was as virgin as some virgin shore, on which no human foot has ever yet left its imprint.

"The Chiefs of the Council were imprudent enough to summon Hercules Malavista within the walls of the town, and to celebrate his arrival with almost imperial splendor, more, however, to deceive the people and to regain their waning popularity by means of some one else, by a ceremony copied from those of Pagan Rome, than to honor and recompense the services of a soldier whom they despised at the bottom of their hearts.

"The bells rang a full peal, and the archbishop and clergy and choir boys went to meet the Captain, singing psalms and hymns of joy, as if it might have been Easter. The streets and squares were strewn with branches of box roses and marjoram, while the meanest homes were decorated with flags, and hung with drapery and rich stuffs.

“The conqueror came in through Trajan’s gate, bare-headed, and with the symbolical golden laurel wreath on his head; and sitting on his horse, that was as black as a starless night, he appeared even taller, more vigorous and more masculine than he really was. He had a joyous and tranquil smile on his lips, and a hidden fire was burning in his eyes, and his soldiers bore the flags and the trophies that he had gained, before him, and behind him there was a noise of clashing partisans and cross-bows, and of loud voices shouting *vivats* in his honor.

“In this fashion he traversed all the quarters of the town, and even the suburbs. The women thought him handsome and proud, blew kisses to him, and held up their children so that they might see him, and he might touch them, and the men cheered him, and looked at him with emotion, and many of them reflected and dreamt about that bright, unknown man, who appeared to be surrounded by a halo of glory.

“The members of the Council began to perceive the extent of the almost irreparable fault that they had committed, and did not know what to do in order to ward off the danger by which they were menaced, and to rid themselves of a guest who was quite ready to become their master. They saw clearly that their hours were numbered, that they were approaching that fatal period at which rioting becomes imminent, when the leaders are carried away with it, like pieces of straw in a swift current.

“Hercules could not show himself in public without being received with shouts of acclamation and noisy greetings, and deputations from the nobility, as well as from the people, came repeatedly and told him that he had only to make a sign and to say a word, for his name to be in every mouth, and for his authority to be accepted. They begged him on their knees to accept the supreme authority, as though he would be conferring a favor on them, but the free-lance did not seem to understand them, and repelled their offers with the superb indifference of a soldier who has nothing to do with the people or a crown.

“At length, however, his resistance grew weaker; he felt the intoxication of power, and grew accustomed to the idea of holding the lives of thousands in his hands, of having a palace, arsenals full of arms, chests full of gold, ships which he could send on adventurous cruises wherever he pleased, and of governing that city, with all its houses and all its churches, and of being a leading figure at all grand functions in the cathedral.

“The shop-keepers and merchants were overcome by terror at this, and bowed before the shadow of that great sword, which might sweep them all away and upset their false weights and scales. So they assembled secretly in a monastery of the Carmelite friars outside the gates of the city, and a short time afterwards the weaver Marconelli, and the money-changer Rippone brought Giaconda, who was one of the most beautiful courtesans in Venice, and who knew every secret in the *Art of Love*, and whose kisses were a foretaste of Paradise, back with them from that city. She soon managed to touch the soldier with her delicate, fair skin, to make him inhale its bewitching odor in close proximity, and to dazzle him with her large, dark eyes, in which the reflection of stars seemed to shine, and when he had once tasted that feast of love, and that heavy wine of kisses, when he had clasped that pink and white body in his arms, and had listened to that voice which sounded as soft as music, and which promised him eternities of joy, and vowed to him eternities of pleasures, Hercules lost his head, and forgot his dreams and his oaths.

“Why lose precious hours in conspiring, in deluding himself with chimeras; why risk his life when he loved and was loved, and when the minutes were all too short, when he would have wished never to detach his lips from those of the woman he loved?

“And so he did whatever Gioconda demanded.

“They fled from the city, without even telling the sentinels who were on guard before his palace. They went far, far away, as they could not find any retreat that was sufficiently unknown and hidden, and at last they stopped at a small, quiet fishing village, where there were gardens full of lemon trees, where the deserted beach looked as if it were covered with gold, and where the sea was a deep blue until it was lost in the distance. And while the captain and the courtesan loved each other and wore themselves out with pleasure — with the enchantment of the sea close to them — the irritated citizens, whom he had left were clamoring for their idol, were indignant at his desertion, and tore up the paving stones in the streets, to stone the man who had betrayed their confidence and worship.

“And they pulled his statue down from its pedestal, amidst spiteful songs and jokes, and the members of the Council breathed again ... as they were no longer afraid of the great sword.”

THE OLD MAID

Count Eustache d'Etchegorry's solitary country house had the appearance of a poor man's home, where people do not have enough to eat every day in the week, where the bottles are more frequently filled at the pump than in the cellar, and where they wait until it is dark before lighting the candles.

It was an old and sordid building; the walls were crumbling to pieces, the grated, iron gates were eaten away by rust, the holes in the broken windows had been mended with old newspapers, and the ancestral portraits which hung against the walls, showed that it was no tiller of the soil, nor miserable laborer whose strength had gradually worn out and bent his back, who lived there. Great, knotty elm trees sheltered it, as if they had been a tall, green screen, and a large garden, full of wild rose-trees and of straggling plants, as well as of sickly-looking vegetables, which sprang up half-withered from the sandy soil, went down as far as the bank of the river.

From the house, one could hear the monotonous sound of the water, which at one time rushed yellow and impetuous towards the sea, and then again flowed back, as if driven by some invisible force towards the town which could be seen in the distance, with its pointed spires, its ramparts, and its ships at anchor by the side of the quay, and its citadel built on the top of a hill.

A strong smell of the sea came from the offing, mingled with the resinous smell of pine logs, and of the large nets with great pieces of sea-weed clinging to them, which were drying in the sun.

Why had Monsieur d'Etchegorry, who did not like the country, who was of a sociable rather than of a solitary nature, for he never walked alone, but kept step with the retired officers who lived there, and frequently played game after game at *piquet* at the *café*, when he was in town, buried himself in such a solitary place, by the side of a dusty road at Boucau, a village close to the town, where on Sundays the soldiers took off their tunics, and sat in their shirt sleeves in the public-houses, drank the thin wine of the country, and teased the girls.

What secret reasons had he for selling the mansion which he had possessed at Bayonne, close to the bishop's palace, and condemning his daughter, a girl of nineteen, to such a dull, listless, solitary life; counting the minutes far from everybody, as if she had been a nun, no one knew, but most people said that he had lost immense sums in gambling, and had wasted his fortune and ruined his credit in doubtful speculations. They wondered whether he still regretted the tender, sweet woman whom he had lost, who died one evening, after years of suffering, like a church lamp whose oil has been consumed to the last drop. Was he seeking for perfect oblivion, for that soothing repose in nature, in which a man becomes enervated, and which envelopes him like a moist, warm cloth? How could he be satisfied with such an existence? With the bad cooking, and the careless, untidy ways of a char-woman, and with the shabby clothes, that were discolored by use!

His numerous relations had been anxious about it at first, and had tried to cure him of his apparent hypochondria, and to persuade him to employ himself with something, but as he was obstinate, avoided them, rejected their friendly offers with arrogance and self-sufficiency, even his brothers had abandoned him, and almost renounced him. All their affection had been transferred to the poor child who shared his solitude, and who endured all that wretchedness with the resignation of a saint. Thanks to them, she had a few gleams of pleasure in their exile, and was not dressed like a beggar girl, but received invitations, and appeared here and there at some ball, concert or tennis party, and the girl was extremely grateful to them for it all, although she would much have preferred that nobody should have held out a helping hand to her, but have left her to her dull life, without any day dreams or homesickness, so that she might grow used to her lot, and day by day lose all that remained to her of her pride of race and of her youth.

With her sensitive and proud mind, she felt that she was treated exactly like others were in society, that people showed her either too much pity or too much indifference, that they knew all about her side life of undeserved poverty, and that in the folds of her muslin dress they could smell the mustiness of her home. If she was animated, or buoyed up with secret hopes in her heart, if there was a smile on her lips, and her eyes were bright when she went out at the gate, and the horses carried her off to town at a rapid trot, she was all the more low-spirited and tearful when she returned home, and she used to shut herself up in her room and find fault with her destiny, declared to herself that she would imitate her father, show relations and friends politely out, with a passive and resigned gesture, and make herself so unpleasant and embarrassing that they would grow tired of it in the end, leave long intervals between their visits, and finally would not come to see her at all, but would turn away from her, as if from a hospital where incurable patients were dying.

Nevertheless, the older the count grew, the more the supplies in the small country house diminished, and the more painful and harder existence became. If a morsel of bread was left uneaten on the table, if an unexpected dish was served up at table, if she put a piece of ribbon into her hair, he used to heap violent, spiteful reproaches on her, torrents of rage which defile the mouth, and violent threats like those of a madman, who is tormented by some fixed idea. Monsieur d’Etchegorry had dismissed the servant and engaged a char-woman, whom he intended to pay, merely by small sums on account, and he used to go to market with a basket on his arm.

He locked up every morsel of food, used to count the lumps of sugar and charcoal, and bolted himself in all day long in a room that was larger than the rest, and which for a long time had served as a drawing-room. At times he would be rather more gentle, as if he were troubled by vague thoughts, and used to say to his daughter, in an agonized voice, and trembling all over: “You will never ask me for any accounts, I say?... You will never demand your mother’s fortune?”

She always gave him the required promise, did not worry him with any questions, nor give vent to any complaints, and thinking of her cousins, who would have good dowries, who were growing up happily and peacefully, amidst careful and affectionate surroundings and beautiful old furniture, who were certain to be loved, and to get married some day, and she asked herself why fate was so cruel to some, and so kind to others, and what she had done to deserve such disfavor.

Marie-des-Anges d’Etchegorry, without being absolutely pretty, possessed all the charm of her age, and everybody liked her. She was as tall and slim as a lily, with beautiful, fine, soft fair hair, eyes of a dark, undecided color, which reminded one of those springs in the depths of the forests, in which a ray of the sun is but rarely reflected — mirrors which changed now to violet, then to the color of leaves, but most frequently of a velvety blackness — and her whole being exhaled a freshness of childhood, and something that could not be described, but which was pleasant, wholesome and frank.

She lived on through a long course of years, growing old, faithful to the man who might have given her his name, honorable, having resisted temptations and snares, worthy of the motto which used to be engraved on the tombs of Roman matrons before the Cæsars: “*She spun wool, and kept at home*.”

When she was just twenty-one, Marie-des-Anges fell in love, and her beautiful, dark, restless eyes for the first time became illuminated with a look of dreamy happiness. For someone seemed to have noticed her; he waltzed with her more frequently than he did with the other girls, spoke to her in a low voice, dangled at her petticoats, and discomposed her so much, that she flushed deeply as soon as she heard the sound of his voice.

His name was André de Gèdrè; he had just returned from Sénégal, where after several months of daily fighting in the desert, he had won his sub-lieutenant’s epaulets.

With his thin, surnburnt, yellow face, looking awkward in his tight coat, in which his broad shoulders could not distend themselves comfortably, and in which his arms, which had formerly been used to cut right and left, were cramped in their tight sleeves, he looked like one of those pirates of old, who used to scour the seas, pillaging, killing, hanging their prisoners to the yard-arms, who were ready to engage a whole fleet, and who returned to the port laden with booty, and occasionally with waifs and strays picked up at sea.

He belonged to a race of buccaneers or of heroes, according to the breeze which swelled his sails and carried him North or South. Over head and ears in debt, reduced to discounting doubtful legacies, to gambling at Casinos, and to mortgaging the few acres of land that he had remaining at much below their value, he nevertheless managed to make a pretty good figure in his hand to mouth existence; he never gave in, never showed the blows that he had received, and waited for the last struggle in a state of blissful inactivity, while he sought for renewed strength and philosophy from the caressing lips of women.

Marie-des-Anges seemed to him to be a toy which he could do with as he liked. She had the flavor of unripe fruit; left to herself, and sentimental as she was, she would only offer a very brief resistance to his attacks, and would soon yield to his will, and when he was tired of her and threw her off, she would bow to the inevitable, and would not worry him with violent scenes, nor stand in his way, with threats on her lips. And so he was kind, and used to wheedle her, and by degrees enveloped her in the meshes of a net, which continually hemmed her in closer and closer. He gained entire possession of her heart and confidence, and without expressing any wish or making any promises, managed so to establish his influence over her, that she did nothing but what he wished.

Long before Monsieur de Gèdrè had addressed any passionate words to her, or any avowal which immediately introduces warmth and danger into a flirtation, Marie-des-Anges had betrayed herself with the candor of a little girl, who does not think she is doing any wrong, and cannot hide what she thinks, what she is dreaming about, and the tenderness which lies hidden at the bottom of her heart, and she no longer felt that horror of life which had formerly tortured her. She no longer felt herself alone, as she had done formerly — so alone, so lost, even among her own people, that everything had become indifferent to her.

It was very pleasant and soothing to love and to think that she was loved, to have a furtive and secret understanding with another heart, to imagine that he was thinking of her at the same time that she was thinking of him, to shelter herself timidly under his protection, to feel more unhappy each time she left him, and to experience greater happiness every time they met.

She wrote him long letters, which she did not venture to send him when they were written, for she was timid and feared that he would make fun of them, and she sang the whole day through, like a lark that is intoxicated with the sun, so that Monsieur d'Etchegorry scarcely recognized her any longer.

Soon they made appointments together in some secluded spot, meeting for a few minutes in the aisles of the cathedral and behind the ramparts, or on the promenade of the *Alleés-Marinès*, which was always dark, on account of the dense foliage.

And at last, one evening in June, when the sky was so studded with stars that it might have been taken for a triumphal route of some sovereign, strewn with precious stones and rare flowers, Monsieur de Gèdrè went into the large, neglected garden.

Marie-des-Anges was waiting for him in a somber walk with witch elms on either side and listening for the least noise, looking at the closed windows of the house, and nearly fainting, as much from fear as from happiness. They spoke in a low voice. She was close to him and he must have heard the beating of her heart, into which he had cast the first seeds of love, and he put his arms around her and clasped her gently, as if she had been some little bird that he was afraid of hurting, but which he did not wish to allow to escape.

She no longer knew what she was doing, but was in a state of entire intense, supreme happiness. She shivered, and yet something burning seemed to permeate her whole being under her skin, from the nape of her neck to her feet, like a stream of burning spirit, and she would not have had the strength to disengage herself or to take a step forward, so she leant her head instinctively and very tenderly against André's shoulder. He kissed her hair, touched her forehead with his lips, and at last put them against hers. The girl felt as if she were going to die, and remained inert and motionless, with her eyes full of tears.

He came nearly every evening for two months. She had not the courage to repel him and to speak to him seriously of the future, and could not understand why he had not yet asked her father for her hand and had not fulfilled his former promises, until, one Sunday, as she was coming from High Mass, walking on before her cousins, Marie-des-Anges heard the following words, from a group in which André was standing, and he was the speaker: “Oh! no,” he said, “you are altogether mistaken; I should never do anything so foolish.... One does not marry a girl without a halfpenny; one takes her for one's mistress.”

The unhappy girl mastered her feelings, went down the steps of the porch quite steadily, but feeling utterly crushed, as if by the news of some terrible disaster, and joined the servant, who was waiting for her, to accompany her back to Boucau. The effects of what she had heard were to give her a serious illness and for some time she hovered between life and death, consumed and wasted by a violent fever; and when after a fortnight's suffering, she grew convalescent, and looked at herself in the glass, she recoiled, as if she had been face to face with an apparition, for there was nothing left of her former self.

Her eyes were dull, her cheeks pale and hollow, and there were white streaks in her silky, light hair. Why had she not succumbed to her illness?

Why had destiny reserved her for such a trial, and increased her unhappy lot, that of disappointed hopes, thus? But when that rebellious feeling was over, she accepted her cross, fell into a state of ardent devotion and became crystallized in the torpor of an old woman, tried with all her might to rid her memory of any recollections that had become incrusted in it, and to put a thick black veil between herself and the past.

She never walked in the garden now, and never went to Bayonne, and she would have liked to have choked herself, and to have beaten herself, when, in spite of her efforts and of her will, she remembered her lost happiness, and when some sensual feeling and a longing for past pleasures agitated her body afresh.

That lasted for four years, which finished her and altogether destroyed her good looks and she had the figure and the appearance of an old maid, when her father suddenly died, just as he was going to sit down to dinner; and when the lawyer, who was summoned immediately, had ransacked the cupboards and drawers, discovered a mass of securities, of bank-notes, and of gold, which Count d’Etchegorry, who was eaten up with avarice, had amassed eagerly, and hidden away, it was found that Mademoiselle Marie-des-Anges, who was his sole heiress, possessed an income of fifty thousand francs.

She received the news without any emotion, for of what use was such a fortune to her now, and what should she do with it? Her eyes, alas! had been too much opened by all the tears that had fallen from them for her to delude herself with visionary hopes, and her heart had been too cruelly wounded to warm itself by lying illusions, and she was seized by melancholy when she thought that in future she would be coveted, she who had been kept at arm’s length, as if she had been a leper; that men would come after her money with odious impatience, that now that she was worn out and ugly, tired of everything and everybody, she would most certainly have plenty of suitors to refuse, and that perhaps he would come back to her, attracted by that amount of money, like a hawk hovering over its prey, that he would try to re-kindle the dead cinders, to revive some spark in them and to obtain pardon for his cowardice.

Oh! With what bitter pleasure she could have thrown those millions into the road to the ragged beggars, or scattered them about like manna to all who were suffering and dying of hunger, and who had neither roof nor hearth! She naturally soon became the target at which everyone aimed, the goal for which all those who had formerly disdained her most, now eagerly tried.

Monsieur de Gèdrè was not long before he was in the ranks of her suitors, as she had foreseen, and caused her that last heart-burning of seeing him humble, kneeling at her feet, acting a comedy, trying every means of overcoming her resistance, and to regain possession of that heart, which was closed against him, after having been entirely his, in all its adorable virginity.

And Marie-des-Anges had loved him so deeply that his letters in which he recalled the past, and stirred up all the recollections of their love, their kisses, and their dreams, softened her in spite of herself, and came across her profound, incurable sadness, like a factitious light, the reflection of a bonfire, which, from a distance, illuminates a prison cell for a moment.

He was poor himself and had not wished, so he said, to drag her into his life of privation and shifts, and she thought to herself that perhaps he had been right; and thus sensibly, like a mother or an elder sister, who has become indulgent and wishes to close her eyes and her ears against everything, to forgive again, to forgive always, she excused him, and tried to remember nothing but those months of tenderness and of ecstacy, those months of happiness, and that he had been the first, the only man who, in the course of her unhappy, wasted life, had given her a moment’s peace, had caused her to dream, and had made her happy, and youthful and loving.

He had been charitable towards her and she would be so a hundred fold towards him; and so she grew happy again, when she said to herself that she would be his benefactress, that even with his hard heart, he could not accept the sacrifice from a woman, who, like so many others, might have returned him evil for evil, but who preferred to be kind and maternal, after having been in love with him, without some feelings of gratitude and emotion.

And that resolution transfigured her, restored to her temporarily, something of her youth, which had so soon fled away, and a poor, heroic saint amongst all the saints, she took refuge in a Carmelite convent, so as to escape from this returning temptation, and to bequeath everything of which she could lawfully dispose, to Monsieur de Gèdrè.

THE AWAKENING

During the three years that she had been married, she had not left the *Val de Ciré*, where her husband possessed two cotton-mills. She led a quiet life, and although she had no children, she was quite happy in her house among the trees, which the work-people called the *château*.

Although Monsieur Vasseur was considerably older than she was, he was very kind. She loved him, and no guilty thought had ever entered her mind.

Her mother came and spent every summer at Ciré, and then returned to Paris for the winter, as soon as the leaves began to fall.

Jeanne coughed a little every autumn, for the narrow valley through which the river wound, grew foggy for five months. First of all, slight mists hung over the meadows, making all the low-lying ground look like a large pond, out of which the roof of the houses rose.

Then that white vapor, which rose like a tide, enveloped everything, and turned the valley into a land of phantoms, through which men moved about like ghosts, without recognizing each other ten yards off, and the trees, wreathed in mist, and dripping with moisture, rose up through it.

But the people who went along the neighboring hills, and who looked down upon the deep, white depression of the valley, saw the two huge chimneys of Monsieur Vasseur’s factories, rising above the mist below. Day and night they vomited forth two long trails of black smoke, and that alone indicated that people were living in that hollow, which looked as if it were filled with a cloud of cotton.

That year, when October came, the medical men advised the young woman to go and spend the winter in Paris with her mother, as the air of the valley was dangerous for her weak chest, and she went. For a month or so, she thought continually of the house which she had left, to which she seemed rooted, and whose well-known furniture and quiet ways she loved so much, but by degrees she grew accustomed to her new life, and got to liking entertainments, dinners and evening parties, and balls.

Till then, she had retained her girlish manners, she had been undecided and rather sluggish; she walked languidly, and had a tired smile, but now she became animated and merry, and was always ready for pleasure. Men paid her marked attentions, and she was amused at their talk, and made fun of their gallantries, as she felt sure that she could resist them, for she was rather disgusted with love, from what she had learned of it in marriage.

The idea of giving up her body to the coarse caresses of such bearded creatures, made her laugh with pity, and shudder a little with ignorance.

She asked herself how women could consent to those degrading contacts with strangers, as they were already obliged to endure them with their legitimate husbands. She would have loved her husband much more if they had lived together like two friends, and had restricted themselves to chaste kisses, which are the caresses of the soul.

But she was much amused by their compliments, by the desire which showed itself in their eyes, and which she did not share, by their declarations of love, which they whispered into her ear as they were returning to the drawing-room after some grand dinner, by their words, which were murmured so low that she almost had to guess them, and which left her blood quite cool, and her heart untouched, while they gratified her unconscious coquetry, while they kindled a flame of pleasure within her, and while they made her lips open, her eyes glow bright, and her woman’s heart, to which homage was due, quiver with delight.

She was fond of those *tête-à-têtes* when it was getting dusk, when a man grows pressing, stammers, trembles and falls on his knees. It was a delicious and new pleasure to her to know that they felt that passion which left her quite unmoved, to say *no*, by a shake of the head, and with her lips, to withdraw her hands, to get up and calmly ring for lights, and to see the man who had been trembling at her feet, get up, confused and furious when he heard the footman coming.

She often had a hard laugh, which froze the most burning words, and said harsh things, which fell like a jet of icy water on the most ardent protestations, while the intonations of her voice were enough to make any man who really loved her, kill himself, and there were two especially who made obstinate love to her, although they did not at all resemble one another.

One of them, Paul Péronel, was a tall man of the world, gallant and enterprising, a man who was accustomed to successful love affairs, and who knew how to wait, and when to seize his opportunity.

The other, Monsieur d'Avancelle, quivered when he came near her, scarcely ventured to express his love, but followed her like a shadow, and gave utterance to his hopeless desire by distracted looks, and the assiduity of his attentions to her, and she made him a kind of slave who followed her steps, and whom she treated as if he had been her servant.

She would have been much amused if anybody had told her that she would love him, and yet she did love him, after a singular fashion. As she saw him continually, she had grown accustomed to his voice, to his gestures, and to his manner, as one grows accustomed to those with whom one meets continually. Often his face haunted her in her dreams, and she saw him as he really was; gentle, delicate in all his actions, humble, but passionately in love, and she awoke full of those dreams, fancying that she still heard him, and felt him near her, until one night (most likely she was feverish), she saw herself alone with him in a small wood, where they were both of them sitting on the grass. He was saying charming things to her, while he pressed and kissed her hands.

She could feel the warmth of his skin and of his breath, and she was stroking his hair, in a very natural manner.

We are quite different in our dreams to what we are in real life. She felt full of love for him, full of calm and deep love, and was happy in stroking his forehead and in holding him against her. Gradually he put his arms round her, kissed her eyes and her cheeks without her attempting to get away from him; their lips met, and she yielded.

When she saw him again, unconscious of the agitation that he had caused her, she felt that she grew red, and while he was telling her of his love, she was continually recalling to mind their previous meeting, without being able to get rid of the recollection.

She loved him, loved him with refined tenderness, which arose chiefly from the remembrance of her dream, although she dreaded the accomplishment of the desires which had arisen in her mind.

At last, he perceived it, and then she told him everything, even to the dread of his kisses, and she made him swear that he would respect her, and he did so. They spent long hours of transcendental love together, during which their souls alone embraced, and when they separated, they were enervated, weak and feverish.

Sometimes their lips met, and with closed eyes they reveled in that long, yet chaste caress; she felt, however, that she could not resist much longer, and as she did not wish to yield, she wrote and told her husband that she wanted to come to him, and to return to her tranquil, solitary life. But in reply, he wrote her a very kind letter, and strongly advised her not to return in the middle of the winter, and so expose herself to a sudden change of climate, and to the icy mists of the valley, and she was thunderstruck, and angry with that confiding man, who did not guess, who did not understand, the struggles of her heart.

February was a warm, bright month, and although she now avoided being alone with Monsieur Avancelle, she sometimes accepted his invitation to drive round the lake in the *Bois de Boulogne* with him, when it was dusk.

On one of those evenings, it was so warm that it seemed as if the sap in every tree and plant were rising. Their cab was going at a walk; it was growing dusk, and they were sitting close together, holding each others' hands, and she said to herself:

"It is all over, I am lost!" for she felt her desires rising in her again, the imperious want for that supreme embrace, which she had undergone in her dream. Every moment their lips sought each other, clung together and separated, only to meet again immediately.

He did not venture to go into the house with her, but left her at her door, more in love with him than ever, and half fainting.

Monsieur Paul Péronel was waiting for her in the little drawing-room, without a light, and when he shook hands with her, he felt how feverish she was. He began to talk in a low, tender voice, lulling her worn-out mind with the charm of amorous words.

She listened to him without replying, for she was thinking of the other; she thought she was listening to the other, and thought she felt him leaning against her, in a kind of hallucination. She saw only him, and did not remember that any other man existed on earth, and when her ears trembled at those three syllables: "I love you," it was he, the other man, who uttered them, who kissed her hands, who strained her to his breast, like the other had done shortly before in the cab. It was he who pressed victorious kisses on her lips, it was his lips, it was he whom she held in her arms and embraced, whom she was calling to, with all the longings of her heart, with all the over-wrought ardor of her body.

When she awoke from her dream, she uttered a terrible cry. Captain Fracasse was kneeling by her, and thanking her, passionately, while he covered her disheveled hair with kisses, and she almost screamed out: “Go away! go away! go away!”

And as he did not understand what she meant, and tried to put his arm round her waist again, she writhed, as she stammered out:

“You are a wretch, and I hate you! Go away! go away!” And he got up in great surprise, took up his hat, and went.

The next day she returned to *Val de Ciré*, and her husband, who had not expected her for some time, blamed her for a freak.

“I could not live away from you any longer,” she said.

He found her altered in character, and sadder than formerly, but when he said to her:

“What is the matter with you? You seem unhappy. What do you want?” she replied:

“Nothing. Happiness exists only in our dreams, in this world.”

Avancelle came to see her the next summer, and she received him without any emotion, and without regret, for she suddenly perceived that she had never loved him, except in a dream, from which Paul Péronel had brutally roused her.

But the young man, who still adored her, thought as he returned to Paris:

“Women are really very strange, complicated and inexplicable beings.”

THE JENNET

Every time he held an inspection on the review ground, General Daumont de Croisailles was sure of a small success, and of receiving a whole packet of letters from women the next day.

Some were almost illegible, scribbled on paper with a love emblem at the top, by some sentimental milliner; the others ardent, as if saturated with curry, letters which excited him, and suggested the delights of kisses to him.

Among them, also, there were some which evidently came from a woman of the world, who was tired of her monotonous life, had lost her head, and let her pen run on, without exactly knowing what she was writing, with those mistakes in spelling here and there which seemed to be in unison with the disordered beating of her heart.

He certainly looked magnificent on horseback; there was something of the fighter, something bold and mettlesome about him, *a valiant look*, as our grandmothers used to say, when they threw themselves into the arms of the conquerors, between two campaigns, though the same conquerors had loud, rough voices, even when they were making love, as they had to dominate the noise of the firing, and violent gestures, as if they were using their swords and issuing orders, who did not waste time over useless refinements, and in squandering the precious hours which were counted so avariciously, in minor caresses, but sounded the charge immediately, and made the assault, without meeting with any more resistance than they did from a redoubt.

As soon as he appeared, preceded by dragoons, with his sword in his hand, amidst the clatter of hoofs and jingle of scabbards and bridles, while plumes waved and uniforms glistened in the sun, a little in front of his staff, sitting perfectly upright in the saddle, and with his cocked hat with its black plumes, slightly on one side, the surging crowd, which was kept in check by the police officers, cheered him as if he had been some popular minister, whose journey had been given notice of beforehand by posters and proclamations.

That tumult of strident voices that went from one end of the great square to the other, which was prolonged like the sound of the rising tide, which beats against the shore with ceaseless noise, that rattle of rifles, and the sound of the music that alternated with blasts of the trumpets all along the line, made the General's heart swell with unspeakable pride.

He attudinized in spite of himself, and thought of nothing but ostentation, and of being noticed. He continually touched his horse with his spurs, and worried it, so as to make it appear restive, and to prance and rear, to champ its bit, and to cover it with foam, and then he would continue his inspection, galloping from regiment to regiment with a satisfied smile, while the good old infantry captains, sitting on their thin Arab horses, with their toes well stuck out, said to one another:

"I should not like to have to ride a confounded, restive brute like that, I know!"

But the General's aide-de-camp, little Jacques de Montboron, could easily have reassured them, for he knew those famous thoroughbreds, as he had had to break them in, and had received a thousand trifling instructions about them.

They were generally more or less spavined brutes, which he had bought at Tattersall's auctions for a ridiculous price, and so quiet and well in hand that they might have been held with a silk thread, but with a good shape, bright eyes, and coats that glistened like silk. They seemed to know their part, and stepped out, pranced and reared, and made way for themselves, as if they had just come out of the riding-school at Saumur.

That was his daily task, his obligatory service.

He broke them in, one after another, and transformed them into veritable mechanical horses, accustomed them to bear the noise of trumpets and drums, and of firing, without starting, tired them out by long rides the evening before every review, and bit his lips to prevent himself from laughing when people declared that General Daumont de Croisailles was a first-rate rider, who was really fond of danger.

A rider! That was almost like writing history! But the aide-de-camp discreetly kept up the illusion, outdid the others in flattery, and related unheard-of feats of the General's horsemanship.

And, after all, breaking in horses was not more irksome than carrying on a monotonous and dull correspondence about the buttons on the gaiters, or than thinking over projects of mobilization, or than going through accounts in which he lost himself like in a labyrinth. He had not, from the very first day that he entered the military academy at Saint-Cyr, learned that sentence which begins the rules of the *Interior Service*, in vain:

"As discipline constitutes the principal strength of an army, it is very important for every superior to obtain absolute respect, and instant obedience from his inferiors."

He did not resist, but accustomed himself thus to become a sort of Monsieur Loyal, spoke to his chief in the most flattering manner, and reckoned on being promoted over the heads of his fellow officers.

General Daumont de Croisailles was not married and did not intend to disturb the tranquillity of his bachelor life as long as he lived, for he loved all women, whether they were dark, fair or red-haired, too passionately to love only one, who would grow old, and worry him with useless complaints.

Gallant, as they used to be called in the good old days, he kissed the hands of those women who refused him their lips, and as he did not wish to compromise his dignity, and be the talk of the town, he had rented a small house just outside it.

It was close to the canal, in a quiet street with courtyards and shady gardens, and as nothing is less amusing than the racket of jealous husbands, or the brawling of excited women who are disputing or raising their voices in lamentation, and as it is always necessary to foresee some unfortunate incident or other in the amorous life, some unlucky mishap, some absurdly imprudent action, some forgotten love appointment, the house had five different doors.

So discreet, that he reassured even the most timid, and certainly not given to melancholy, he understood extremely well how to vary his kisses and his ways of proceeding; how to work on women's feelings, and to overcome their scruples, to obtain a hold over them through their curiosity to learn something new, by the temptation of a comfortable, well-furnished, warm room, that was fragrant with flowers, and where a little supper was already served as a prologue to the entertainment. His female pupils would certainly have deserved the first prize in a love competition.

So men mistrusted that ancient Lovelace as if he had been the plague, when they had plucked some rare and delicious fruit, and had sketched out some charming adventure, for he always managed to discover the weak spot, and to penetrate into the place.

To some, he held out the lure of debauch without any danger attached to it, the desire of finishing their amorous education, of reveling in perverted enjoyment, and to others he held out the irresistible argument that seduced Danae, that of gold.

Others, again, were attracted by his cocked hat and feathers, and by the conceited hope of seeing him at their knees, of throwing their arms round him as if he had been an ordinary lover, although he was a general who rode so imposingly, who was covered with decorations, and to whom all the regiments presented arms simultaneously, the chief whose orders could not be commented on or disputed, and who had such a martial and haughty look.

His pay, allowances and his private income of fifteen thousand francs, all went in this way, like water that runs out drop by drop, from a cracked bottle.

He was continually on the alert, and looked out for intrigues with the acuteness of a policeman, followed women about, had all the impudence and all the cleverness of the fast man who has made love for forty years, without ever meaning anything serious, who knows all its lies, tricks and illusions, and who can still do a march without halting on the road, or requiring too much music to put him in proper trim. And in spite of his age and gray hairs, he could have given a sub-lieutenant points, and was very often loved for himself, which is the dream of men who have passed forty, and do not intend to give up the game just yet.

And there were not a dozen in the town who could, without lying, have declared to a jealous husband or a suspicious lover, that they had not, at any rate, once staid late in the little house in the Eglisottes quarter, who could have denied that they had not returned more thoughtful. Not a dozen, certainly, and, perhaps, not six!

Among that dozen or six, however, was Jacques de Montboron’s mistress. She was a little marvel, that Madame Courtade, whom the Captain had unearthed in an ecclesiastical warehouse in the Faubourg Saint-Exupère, and not yet twenty. They had begun by smiling at each other, and by exchanging those long looks when they met, which seemed to ask for charity.

Montboron used to pass in front of the shop at the same hours, stopped for a moment with the appearance of a lounger who was loitering about the streets, but immediately her supple figure appeared, pink and fair, shedding the brightness of youth and almost childhood round her, while her looks showed that she was delighted at little gallant incidents which dispelled the monotony and weariness of her life for a time, and gave rise to vague but delightful hopes.

Was love, that love which she had so constantly invoked, really knocking at her door at last, and taking pity on her unhappy isolation? Did that officer, whom she met whenever she went out, as if he had been faithfully watching her, when coming out of church, or when out for a walk in the evening, who said so many delightful things to her with his wheedling eyes, really love her as she wished to be loved, or was he merely amusing himself at that game, because he had nothing better to do in their quiet little town?

But in a short time he wrote to her, and she replied to him, and at last they managed to meet in secret, to make appointments, and talk together.

She knew all the cunning tricks of a simple girl, who has tasted the most delicious of sweets with the tip of her tongue, and acting in concert, and giving each other the word, so that there might be no awkward mistake, they managed to make the husband their unwitting accomplice, without his having the least idea of what was going on.

Courtade was an excellent fellow, who saw no further than the tip of his nose, incapable of rebelling, flabby, fat, steeped in devotion, and thinking too much about heaven to see what a plot was being hatched against him, in our unhappy vale of tears, as the psalters say.

In the good old days of confederacies, he would have made an excellent chief of a corporation; he loved his wife more like a father than a husband, considering that at his age a man ought no longer to think of such trifles, and that, after all, the only real happiness in life was to keep a good table and to have a good digestion, and so he ate like four canons, and drank in proportion.

Only once during his whole life had he shown anything like energy — but he used to relate that occurrence with all the pride of a conqueror, recalling his most heroic battle — and that was on the evening when he refused to allow the bishop to take his cook away, quite regardless of any of the consequences of such a daring deed.

In a few weeks, the Captain became his regular table companion, and his best friend. He had begun by telling him in a boastful manner that, in order to keep a vow that he had made to St. George, during the charge up the slope at Yron, during the battle of Gravelotte, he wished to send two censers and a sanctuary lamp to his village church.

Courtade did his utmost, and all the more readily as this unexpected customer did not appear to pay any regard to money. He sent for several goldsmiths, and showed Montboron models of all kinds; he hesitated, however, and did not seem able to make up his mind, and discussed the subject, designed ornaments himself, gained time, and thus managed to spend several hours every day in the shop.

In fact, he was quite at home in the place, shook hands with Courtade, called him "my dear fellow," and did not wince when he took his arm familiarly before other people, and introduced him to his customers as, "My excellent friend, the Marquis de Montboron." He could go in and out of the house as he pleased, whether the husband was at home or not.

The censers and the lamp were sent in due course to Montboron's château at Pacy-sur-Romanche (in Normandy), and when the package was undone, it caused the greatest surprise to Jacques' mother, who was more accustomed to receiving requests for money from her son, than ecclesiastical objects.

Suddenly, however, without rhyme or reason, little Madame Courtade became insupportable and enigmatical. Her husband could not understand it at all, and grew uneasy, and continually consulted his friend the Captain.

Etiennette's character seemed to have completely changed; she found fifty pretexts for deserting the shop, for coming late, for avoiding *tête-à-têtes*, in which people come to explanations, and mutually become irritated, though such matters usually end in a reconciliation, amidst a torrent of kisses.

She disappeared for days at a time, and soon, Montboron, who was not fitted to play the part of a Sganarelle, either by age or temperament, became convinced that his mistress was making him wear the horns, that she was hobnobbing with the General, and that she was in possession of one of the five keys of the house in the Eglisottes quarter; and as he was as jealous as an Andalusian, and felt a horror for that kind of pleasantry, he swore that he would make his rival pay a hundred fold for the trick which he had played him.

The Fourteenth of July was approaching, when there was to be a grand parade of the whole garrison on the large review ground, and all along the paling, which divided the spectators from the soldiers, itinerant dealers had put up their stalls, and there were mountebanks’ and somnambulists’ booths, menageries, and a large circus, which had gone through the town in caravans, with a great noise of trumpets and of drums.

He had given his aide-de-camp his instructions beforehand, for he was more anxious than ever to surprise people, and to have a horse like an equestrian statue, an animal which should outdo that famous black horse of General Boulanger’s, about which the Parisian loungers had talked so much, and told Montboron not to mind what the price was, as long as he found him a suitable charger.

When the Captain, a few days before the review, brought him a chestnut jennet, with a long tail and flowing mane, which would not keep quiet for five seconds, but kept on shaking its head, had extraordinary action, answered the slightest touch of the leg, and stepped out as if it knew no other motion, General Daumont de Croisailles showered compliments upon him, and assured him that he knew few officers who possessed his intelligence and his value, and that he should not forget him when the proper time came for recommending him for promotion.

Not a muscle of the Marquis de Montboron’s face moved, and when the day of the review arrived, he was at his post on the staff that followed the General, who sat as upright as a dart in the saddle, and looked at the crowd to see whether he could not recognize some old or new female friend there, while his horse pranced and plunged.

He rode onto the review ground, amidst the increasing noise of applause, with a smile upon his lips, when, suddenly, at the moment that he galloped up into the large square, formed by the troops drawn up in a line, the band of the fifty-third regiment struck up a quick march, and, as if obeying a preconcerted signal, the jennet began to turn round, and to accelerate its speed, in spite of the furious tugs at the bridle which the rider gave.

The horse performed beautifully, followed the rhythm of the music, and appeared to be acting under some invisible impulse, and the General had such a comical look on his face, he looked so disconcerted, rolled his eyes, and seemed to be the prey to such terrible exasperation, that he might have been taken for some character in a pantomime, while his staff followed him, without being able to comprehend this fresh fancy of his.

The soldiers presented arms, the music did not stop, though the instrumentalists were much astonished at this interminable ride.

The General at last became out of breath, and could scarcely keep in the saddle, and the women, in the crowded ranks of the spectators, gave prolonged, nervous laughs, which made the old *roué's* ears tingle with excitement.

The horse did not stop until the music ceased, and then it knelt down with bent head, and put its nostrils into the dust.

It nearly gave General de Croisailles an attack of the jaundice, especially when he found out that it was his aide-de-camp's *tit for tat*, and that the horse came from a circus which was giving performances in the town. And what irritated him all the more was, that he could not even set it down against Montboron and have him sent to some terrible out-of-the-way hole, for the Captain sent in his resignation, wisely considering that sooner or later he should have to pay the costs of that little trick, and that the chances were that he should not get any further promotion, but remain stationary, like a cab which some bilker has left standing for hours at one end of an arcade, while he has made his escape at the other.

RUST

During nearly his whole life, he had had an insatiable love for sport. He went out every day, from morning till night, with the greatest ardor, in summer and winter, spring and autumn, on the marshes, when it was close time on the plains and in the woods. He shot, he hunted, he coursed, he ferreted; he spoke of nothing but shooting and hunting, he dreamt of it, and continually repeated:

"How miserable any man must be who does not care for sport!"

And now that he was past fifty, he was well, robust, stout and vigorous, though rather bald, and he kept his moustache cut quite short, so that it might not cover his lips, and interfere with his blowing the horn.

He was never called by anything but his first Christian name, Monsieur Hector, but his full name was Baron Hector Gontran de Coutelier, and he lived in a small manor house which he had inherited, in the middle of the woods; and though he knew all the nobility of the department, and met its male representatives out shooting and hunting, he only regularly visited one family, the Courvilles, who were very pleasant neighbors, and had been allied to his race for centuries, and in their house he was liked, and taken the greatest care of, and he used to say: "If I were not a sportsman, I should like to be here always."

Monsieur de Courville had been his friend and comrade from childhood, and lived quietly as a gentleman farmer with his wife, daughter and son-in-law, Monsieur de Darnetot, who did nothing, under the pretext of being devoted to historical studies.

Baron de Coutelier often went and dined with his friends, as much with the object of telling them of the shots he had made, as of anything else. He had long stories about dogs and ferrets, of which he spoke as if they were persons of note, whom he knew very well. He analyzed them, and explained their thoughts and intentions:

“When Medor saw that the corn-crake was leading him such a dance, he said to himself: ‘Wait a bit, my friend, we will have a joke.’ And then, with a jerk of the head to me, to make me go into the corner of the clover field, he began to quarter the sloping ground, noisily brushing through the clover to drive the bird into a corner from which it could not escape.

“Everything happened as he had foreseen. Suddenly, the corn-crake found itself on the borders of the clover, and it could not go any further without showing itself; Medor stood and pointed, half-looking round at me, but at a sign from me, he drew up to it, flushed the corn-crake; *bang*! down it came, and Medor, as he brought it to me, wagged his tail, as much as to say: ‘How about that, Monsieur Hector?’”

Courville, Darnetot, and the two ladies laughed very heartily at those picturesque descriptions into which the Baron threw his whole heart. He grew animated, moved his arms about, and gesticulated with his whole body; and when he described the death of anything he had killed, he gave a formidable laugh, and said:

“Was not that a good shot?”

As soon as they began to speak about anything else, he left off listening, and hummed a hunting song, or a few notes to imitate a hunting horn, to himself.

He had only lived for field sports, and was growing old, without thinking about it, or guessing it, when he had a severe attack of rheumatism, and was confined to his bed for two months, and nearly died of grief and weariness.

As he kept no female servant, for an old footman did all the cooking, he could not get any hot poultices, nor could he have any of those little attentions, nor anything that an invalid requires. His gamekeeper was his sick nurse, and as the servant found the time hang just as heavily on his hands as it did on his master’s, he slept nearly all day and all night in any easy chair, while the Baron was swearing and flying into a rage between the sheets.

The ladies of the De Courville family came to see him occasionally, and those were hours of calm and comfort for him. They prepared his herb tea, attended to the fire, served him his breakfast up daintily, by the side of his bed, and when they were going again, he used to say:

“By Jove! You ought to come here altogether,” which made them laugh heartily.

When he was getting better, and was beginning to go out shooting again, he went to dine with his friends one evening; but he was not at all in his usual spirits. He was tormented by one continual fear — that he might have another attack before shooting began, and when he was taking his leave at night, when the women were wrapping him up in a shawl, and tying a silk handkerchief round his neck, which he allowed to be done for the first time in his life, he said in a disconsolated voice:

“If it goes on like this, I shall be done for.”

As soon as he had gone, Madame Darnetot said to her mother:

“We ought to try and get the Baron married.”

They all raised their hands at the proposal. How was it that they had never thought of it before? And during all the rest of the evening they discussed the widows whom they knew, and their choice fell on a woman of forty, who was still pretty, fairly rich, very good-tempered and in excellent health, whose name was Madame Berthe Vilers, and, accordingly, she was invited to spend a month at the château. She was very dull at home, and was very glad to come; she was lively and active, and Monsieur de Coutelier took her fancy immediately. She amused herself with him as if he had been a living toy, and spent hours in asking him slyly about the sentiments of rabbits and the machinations of foxes, and he gravely distinguished between the various ways of looking at things which different animals had, and ascribed plans and subtle arguments to them, just as he did to men of his acquaintance.

The attention she paid him, delighted him, and one evening, to show his esteem for her, he asked her to go out shooting with him, which he had never done to any woman before, and the invitation appeared so funny to her that she accepted it.

It was quite an amusement for them to fit her out; everybody offered her something, and she came out in a sort of short riding habit, with boots and men’s breeches, a short petticoat, a velvet jacket, which was too tight for her across the chest, and a huntsman’s black velvet cap.

The Baron seemed as excited as if he were going to fire his first shot. He minutely explained to her the direction of the wind, and how different dogs worked. Then he took her into a field, and followed her as anxiously as a nurse does when her charge is trying to walk for the first time.

Medor soon made a point, and stopped with his tail out stiff and one paw up, and the Baron, standing behind his pupil, was trembling like a leaf, and whispered:

“Look out, they are par ... par ... partridges.” And almost before he had finished, there was a loud *whirr — whirr*, and a covey of large birds flew up in the air, with a tremendous noise.

Madame Vilers was startled, shut her eyes, fired off both barrels and staggered at the recoil of the gun; but when she had recovered her self-possession, she saw that the Baron was dancing about like a madman, and that Medor was bringing back the first of the two partridges which she had killed.

From that day, Monsieur de Coutelier was in love with her, and used to say, raising his eyes: “What a woman!” And he used to go and see them every evening now, and talked about shooting.

One day, Monsieur de Courville, who was walking part of the way with him, asked him, suddenly:

“Why don’t you marry her?”

The Baron was altogether taken by surprise, and said:

“What? I? Marry her? ... Well ... really....”

And he said no more for a while, but then, suddenly shaking hands with his companion, he said:

“Good-bye, my friend,” and quickly disappeared in the darkness.

He did not go again for three days, but when he reappeared, he was pale from thinking the matter over, and graver than usual. Taking Monsieur de Courville aside, he said:

“That was a capital idea of yours; try and persuade her to accept me, for one might say that a woman like she is, was made for me, and you and I shall be able to have some sort of sport together, all the year round.”

As Monsieur de Courville felt certain that his friend would not meet with a refusal, he replied:

“Propose to her immediately, my dear fellow, or would you rather that I did it for you?”

But the Baron grew suddenly nervous, and said, with some hesitation:

“No, ... no.... I must go to Paris for ... for a few days. As soon as I come back, I will give you a definite answer.” No other explanation was forthcoming, and he started the next morning.

He made a long stay. One, two, three weeks passed, but Monsieur de Coutelier did not return, and the Courvilles, who were surprised and uneasy, did not know what to say to their friend, whom they had informed of the

Baron’s wishes. Every other day they sent to his house for news of him, but none of his servants had a line.

But one evening, while Madame Vilers was singing, and accompanying herself on the piano, a servant came with a mysterious air, and told Monsieur de Courville that a gentleman wanted to see him. It was the Baron, in a traveling suit, who looked much altered and older, and as soon as he saw his old friend, he seized both his hands, and said, in a somewhat tired voice: “I have just returned, my dear friend, and I have come to you immediately; I am thoroughly knocked up.”

Then he hesitated in visible embarrassment, and presently said:

“I wished to tell you ... immediately ... that ... that business ... you know what I mean ... must come to nothing.”

Monsieur de Courville looked at him in stupefaction. “Must come to nothing?... Why?”

“Oh! Do not ask me, please; it would be too painful for me to tell you; but you may rest assured that I am acting like an honorable man. I cannot ... I have no right ... no right, you understand, to marry this lady, and I will wait until she has gone, to come here again; it would be too painful for me to see her. Good-bye.” And he absolutely ran away.

The whole family deliberated and discussed the matter, surmising a thousand things. The conclusion they came to was, that the Baron’s past life concealed some great mystery, that, perhaps, he had natural children, or some connection of long standing. At any rate, the matter seemed serious, and so as to avoid any difficult complications, they adroitly informed Madame Vilers of the state of affairs, who returned home just as much of a widow as she had come.

Three months more passed, when one evening, when he had dined rather too well, and was rather unsteady on his legs, Monsieur de Coutelier, while he was smoking his pipe with Monsieur de Courville, said to him:

“You would really pity me, if you only knew how continually I am thinking about your friend.”

But the other, who had been rather vexed at the Baron’s behavior in the circumstances, told him exactly what he thought of him:

“By Jove, my good friend, when a man has any secrets in his existence, like you have, he does not make advances to a woman, immediately, as you did, for you must surely have foreseen the reason why you had to draw back.”

The Baron left off smoking in some confusion.

"Yes, and no; at any rate, I could not have believed what actually happened."

Whereupon, Monsieur de Courville lost his patience, and replied:

"One ought to foresee everything."

But Monsieur de Coutelier replied in a low voice, in case anybody should be listening: "I see that I have hurt your feelings, and will tell you everything, so that you may forgive me. You know that for twenty years I have lived only for sport; I care for nothing else, and think about nothing else. Consequently, when I was on the point of undertaking certain obligations with regard to this lady, I felt some scruples of conscience. Since I have given up the habit of ... of love, there! I have not known whether I was still capable of ... you know what I mean ... Just think! It is exactly sixteen years since ... I for the last time ... you understand what I mean. In this neighborhood, it is not easy to ... you know. And then, I had other things to do. I prefer to use my gun, and so before entering into an engagement before the Mayor and the Priest to ... well, I was frightened. I said to myself: 'Confound it; suppose I missed fire!' An honorable man always keeps his engagements, and in this case, I was undertaking sacred duties with regard to this lady, and so, to feel sure, I made up my mind to go and spend a week in Paris.

"At the end of that time, nothing, absolutely nothing occurred. I always lost the game.... I waited for a fortnight, three weeks, continually hoping. In the restaurants, I ate a number of highly seasoned dishes, which upset my stomach, and ... and it was still the same thing ... or rather, nothing. You will, therefore, understand, that, in such circumstances, and having assured myself of the fact, the only thing I could do was ... was ... to withdraw; and I did so."

Monsieur de Courville had to struggle very hard not to laugh, and he shook hands with the Baron, saying:

"I am very sorry for you," and accompanied him half-way home.

When he got back, and was alone with his wife, he told her everything, nearly choking with laughter; she, however, did not laugh, but listened very attentively, and when her husband had finished, she said, very seriously:

"The Baron is a fool, my dear; he was frightened, that is all. I will write and ask Berthe to come back here as soon as possible."

And when Monsieur de Courville observed that their friend had made such long and useless attempts, she merely said:

“Nonsense! When a man loves his wife, you know ... that sort of thing adjusts itself to the situation.”

And Monsieur de Courville made no reply, as he felt rather confused himself.

THE SUBSTITUTE

"Madame Bonderoi?"

"Yes, Madame Bonderoi."

"Impossible."

"I tell you it is."

Madame Bonderoi, the old lady in a lace cap, the devout, the holy, the honorable Madame Bonderoi, whose little false curls looked as if they were glued round her head.

"That is the very woman."

"Oh! Come, you must be mad."

"I swear to you that it is Madame Bonderoi."

"Then please give me the details."

"Here they are. During the life of Monsieur Bonderoi, the lawyer, people said that she utilized his clerks for her own particular service. She is one of those respectable middle-class women, with secret vices, and inflexible principles, of whom there are so many. She liked good-looking young fellows, and I should like to know what is more natural than that? Do not we all like pretty girls?"

"As soon as old Bonderoi was dead, his widow began to live the peaceful and irreproachable life of a woman with a fair, fixed income. She went to church assiduously, and spoke evil of her neighbors, but gave no handle to anyone for speaking ill of her, and when she grew old she became the little wizened, sour-faced, mischievous woman whom you know. Well, this adventure, which you would scarcely believe, happened last Friday.

"My friend, Jean d'Anglemare, is, as you know, a captain in a dragoon regiment, who is quartered in the barracks in the *Rue de la Rivette*, and when he got to his quarters the other morning, he found that two men of his squadron had had a terrible quarrel. The rules about military honor are very severe, and so a duel took place between them. After the duel they became reconciled, and when their officer questioned them, they told him what their quarrel had been about. They had fought on Madame Bonderoi's account."

"Oh!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, about Madame Bonderoi."

"But I will let Trooper Siballe speak."

"This is how it was, Captain. About a year and a half ago, I was lounging about the barrack-yard, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, when a woman came up and spoke to me, and said, just as if she had been asking her way: 'Soldier, would you like to earn ten francs a week, honestly?' Of course, I told her that I decidedly should, and so she said: 'Come and see me at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning. I am Madame Bonderoi, and my address is No. 6, *Rue de la Tranchée*.' 'You may rely upon my being there, Madame.' And then she went away, looking very pleased, and she added: 'I am very much obliged to you, soldier.' 'I am obliged to you, Madame,' I replied. But I plagued my head about the matter, until the time came, all the same.

"At twelve o'clock, exactly, I rang the bell, and she let me in herself. She had a lot of ribbons on her head.

"'We must make haste,' she said; 'as my servant might come in.'

"'I am quite willing to make haste,' I replied, 'but what am I to do?'

"But she only laughed, and replied: 'Don't you understand, you great knowing fellow?'

"I was no nearer her meaning, I give you my word of honor, Captain, but she came and sat down by me, and said:

"'If you mention this to anyone, I will have you put in prison, so swear that you will never open your lips about it.'

"I swore whatever she liked, though I did not at all understand what she meant, and my forehead was covered with perspiration, so I took my pocket-handkerchief out of my helmet, and she took it and wiped my brow with it; then she kissed me, and whispered: 'Then you will?' 'I will do anything you like, Madame,' I replied, 'as that is what I came for.'

"Then she made herself clearly understood by her actions, and when I saw what it was, I put my helmet onto a chair, and showed her that in the dragoons a man never retires, Captain.

"Not that I cared much about it, for she was certainly not in her prime, but it is no good being too particular in such a matter, as ten francs are scarce, and then I have relations whom I like to help, and I said to myself: ‘There will be five francs for my father, out of that.’

“When I had done my allotted task, Captain, I got ready to go, though she wanted me to stop longer, but I said to her:

“‘To everyone their due, Madame. A small glass of brandy costs two sous, and two glasses cost four.’

“She understood my meaning, and put a gold ten-franc piece into my hand. I do not like that coin, because it is so small that if your pockets are not very well made, and come at all unsewn, one is apt to find it in one’s boots, or not to find it at all, and so, while I was looking at it, she was looking at me. She got red in the face, as she had misunderstood my looks, and she said: ‘Is not that enough?’

“‘I did not mean that, Madame,’ I replied; ‘but if it is all the same to you, I would rather have two five-franc pieces.’ And she gave them to me, and I took my leave. This has been going on for a year and a half, Captain. I go every Tuesday evening, when you give me leave to go out of barracks; she prefers that, as her servant has gone to bed then, but last week I was not well, and I had to go into the infirmary. When Tuesday came, I could not get out, and I was very vexed, because of the ten francs which I had been receiving every week, and I said to myself:

“‘If anybody goes there, I shall be done; and she will be sure to take an artilleryman, and that made me very angry. So I sent for Paumelle, who comes from my part of the country, and I told him how matters stood:

“‘There will be five francs for you, and five for me,’ I said. He agreed, and went, as I had given him full instructions. She opened the door as soon as he knocked, and let him in, and as she did not look at his face, she did not perceive that it was not I, for, you know, Captain, one dragoon is very like another, with their helmets on.

“Suddenly, however, she noticed the change, and she asked, angrily: ‘Who are you? What do you want? I do not know you.’

“Then Paumelle explained matters; he told her that I was not well, and that I had sent him as my substitute; so she looked at him, made him also swear to keep the matter secret, and then she accepted him, as you may suppose, for Paumelle is not a bad-looking fellow, either. But when he came back, Captain, he would not give me my five francs. If they had been for myself, I should not have said a word, but they were for my father, and on that score, I would stand no nonsense, and I said to him:

"'You are not particular in what you do, for a dragoon; you are a discredit to your uniform.'

"He raised his fist, Captain, saying that fatigue duty like that was worth double. Of course, everybody has his own ideas, and he ought not to have accepted it. You know the rest."

"Captain d'Anglemare laughed until he cried as he told me the story, but he also made me promise to keep the matter a secret, just as he had promised the two soldiers. So, above all, do not betray me, but promise me to keep it to yourself."

"Oh! You may be quite easy about that. But how was it all arranged, in the end?"

"How? It is a joke in a thousand!... Mother Bonderoi keeps her two dragoons, and reserves his own particular day for each of them, and in that way everybody is satisfied."

"Oh! That is capital! Really capital!"

"And he can send his old father and mother the money as usual, and thus morality is satisfied."

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES

Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes did me the honor of sending a lady to wait on me.

At about eight o'clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the *Palais de Justice*, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND,
Member of the Academy of Medicine,
Port-au-Prince,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

At the bottom of the card, there was written in pencil:

From Lady Frogère

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well, who was a very agreeable Creole from Haiti, and whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone required that he should grant him an interview, however short it might be. Therefore, although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, he could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented that strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man, of a man from the North, pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, and his surprise increased when, after a few words of excuse for his untimely visit, he added, with an enigmatical smile:

"My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them."

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice, which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing words, consequently, sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of his reason. But his looks, the looks of those pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and, above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

"I have seen," Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, "the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime."

And this impression was so strong, that Monsieur de Vargnes thought that he was the sport of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents: "Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow, you will receive a letter which will explain it at all to you, but, first all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see."

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to this doubt, as he said to himself:

"Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression, and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes."

And absorbed in these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse, and then he thought to himself suddenly:

"No, I am not the sport of any hallucination, and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life.”

The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor, but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame Frogère, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Haiti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame Frogère began to laugh, and said:

“You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear Monsieur. The eyes which you have described, are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted.”

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him, but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated, but nothing of the negro, not even the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but which appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in letters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

“MONSIEUR, —

“Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great Poet, Edgar Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which *I* will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and, when this requirement is satisfied, my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have *my* secret; from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by-the-bye, has procured you the honor of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, *by us two alone*. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove the reality of this secret to anyone, unless I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, *and without danger to myself*."

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X —— at an evening party and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfect impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

"Probably I am the sport of a hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar, in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?"

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X —— had been a very poor, but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor's degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever, and thus Monsieur X —— had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X —— must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skillfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

"Do you believe it?" I asked Monsieur de Vargnes. "Absolutely," he replied. "And the most terrible thing about it is, that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment, I thought of magnetism, but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit."

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!"

And when he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

"Formerly, justice had torture at its command."

"Upon my word," I replied, with all an author's unconscious and simple egotism, "it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale would have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, as far as regards the story I intended to make of it."

ALLOUMA

I

One of my friends had said to me: —

“If you happen to be near Bordj-Ebbaba while you are in Algeria, be sure and go to see my old friend Auballe, who has settled there.”

I had forgotten the name of Auballe and of Ebbaba, and I was not thinking of this planter, when I arrived at his house by pure accident. For a month, I had been wandering on foot through that magnificent district which extends from Algiers to Cherchell, Orléansville, and Tiaret. It is at the same time wooded and bare, grand and charming. Between two hills, one comes across large pine forests in narrow valleys, through which torrents rush in the winter. Enormous trees, which have fallen across the ravine, serve as a bridge for the Arabs, and also for the tropical creepers, which twine round the dead stems, and adorn them with new life. There are hollows, in little known recesses of the mountains, of a terribly beautiful character, and the sides of the brooks, which are covered with oleanders, are indescribably lovely.

But what has left behind it the most pleasant recollections of that excursion, is the long after-dinner walks along the slightly wooded roads on those undulating hills, from which one can see an immense tract of country from the blue sea as far as the chain of the Quarsenis, on whose summit there is the cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad.

On that day I lost my way. I had just climbed to the top of a hill, whence, beyond a long extent of rising ground, I had seen the extensive plain of Metidja, and then, on the summit of another chain, almost invisible in the distances that strange monument which is called *The Tomb of the Christian Woman*, and which was said to be the burial-place of the kings of Mauritana. I went down again, going southward, with a yellow landscape before me, extending as far as the fringe of the desert, as yellow as if all those hills were covered with lions' skins sewn together, sometimes a pointed yellow peak would rise out of the midst of them, like the bristly back of a camel.

I walked quickly and lightly, like as one does when following tortuous paths on a mountain slope. Nothing seems to weigh on one in those short, quick walks through the invigorating air of those heights, neither the body, nor the heart, nor the thoughts, nor even cares. On that day I felt nothing of all that crushes and tortures our life; I only felt the pleasure of that descent. In the distance I saw an Arab encampment, brown pointed tents, which seemed fixed to the earth, like limpets are to a rock, or else *gourbis*, huts made of branches, from which a gray smoke rose. White figures, men and women, were walking slowly about, and the bells of the flocks sounded vaguely through the evening air.

The arbutus trees on my road hung down under the weight of their purple fruit, which was falling on the ground. They looked like martyred trees, from which blood-colored sweat was falling, for at the top of every tier there was a red spot, like a drop of blood.

The earth all round them was covered with it, and as my feet crushed the fruit, they left blood-colored traces behind them, and sometimes, as I went along, I would jump and pick one, and eat it.

All the valleys were by this time filled with a white vapor, which rose slowly, like the steam from the flanks of an ox, and on the chain of mountains that bordered the horizon, on the outskirts of the desert of Sahara, the sky was in flames. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood — blood again! Blood and gold, the whole of human history — and sometimes between the two there was a small opening in the greenish azure, far away like a dream.

How far away I was from all those persons and things with which one occupies oneself on the boulevards, far from myself also, for I had become a kind of wandering being, without thought or consciousness, far from any road, of which I was not even thinking, for as night came on, I found that I had lost my way.

The shades of night were falling onto the earth like a shower of darkness, and I saw nothing before me but the mountains, in the far distance. Presently, I saw some tents in the valley, into which I descended, and tried to make the first Arab I met understand in which direction I wanted to go. I do not know whether he understood me, but he gave me a long answer, which I did not in the least understand. In despair, I was about to make up my mind to pass the night wrapped up in a rug near the encampment, when among the strange words he uttered, I fancied that I heard the name, *Bordj-Ebbaba*, and so I repeated:

"*Bordj-Ebbaba.*"

"Yes, yes."

I showed him two francs that were a fortune to him, and he started off, while I followed him. Ah! I followed that pale phantom which strode on before me bare-footed along stony paths, on which I stumbled continually, for a long time, and then suddenly I saw a light, and we soon reached the door of a white house, a kind of fortress with straight walls, and without any outside windows. When I knocked, dogs began to bark inside, and a voice asked in French:

"Who is there?"

"Does Monsieur Auballe live here?" I asked.

"Yes."

The door was opened for me, and I found myself face to face with Monsieur Auballe himself, a tall man in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth and the looks of a jolly Hercules.

As soon as I mentioned my name, he put out both his hands and said:

"Consider yourself at home here, Monsieur."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining ravenously, opposite to my host, who went on smoking.

I knew his history. After having wasted a great amount of money on women, he had invested the remnants of his fortune in Algerian landed property and taken to money-making. It turned out prosperously; he was happy, and had the calm look of a happy and contented man. I could not understand how this fast Parisian could have grown accustomed to that monstrous life in such a lonely spot, and I asked him about it.

"How long have you been here?" I asked him.

"For nine years."

"And have you not been intolerably dull and miserable?"

"No, one gets used to this country, and ends by liking it. You cannot imagine how it lays hold on people by those small, animal instincts that we are ignorant of ourselves. We first become attached to it by our organs, to which it affords secret gratifications which we do not inquire into. The air and the climate overcome our flesh, in spite of ourselves, and the bright light with which it is inundated keeps the mind clear and fresh, at but little cost. It penetrates us continually by our eyes, and one might really say that it cleanses the somber nooks of the soul."

"But what about women?"

"Ah...! There is rather a dearth of them!"

"Only *rather*?"

"Well, yes ... rather. For one can always, even among the Arabs, find some complaisant, native women, who think of the nights of Roumi."

He turned to the Arab, who was waiting on me, who was a tall, dark fellow, with bright, black eyes, that flashed beneath his turban, and said to him:

"I will call you when I want you, Mohammed." And then, turning to me, he said:

"He understands French, and I am going to tell you a story in which he plays a leading part."

As soon as the man had left the room, he began:

"I had been here about four years, and scarcely felt quite settled yet in this country, whose language I was beginning to speak, and forced, in order not to break altogether with those passions that had been fatal to me in other places, to go to Algiers for a few days, from time to time.

"I had bought this farm, this *bordj*, which had been a fortified post, and was within a few hundred yards from the native encampment, whose man I employ to cultivate my land. Among the tribe that had settled here, and which formed a portion of the Oulad-Taadja, I chose, as soon as I arrived here, that tall fellow whom you have just seen, Mohammed ben Lam'har, who soon became greatly attached to me. As he would not sleep in a house, not being accustomed to it, he pitched his tent a few yards from my house, so that I might be able to call him from my window.

"You can guess what my life was, I dare say? Every day I was busy with cleanings and plantations; I hunted a little, I used to go and dine with the officers of the neighboring fortified posts, or else they came and dined with me. As for pleasures ... I have told you what they consisted in. Algiers offered me some which were rather more refined, and from time to time a complaisant and compassionate Arab would stop me when I was out for a walk, and offer to bring one of the women of his tribe to my house at night. Sometimes I accepted, but more frequently I refused, from fear of the disagreeable consequences and troubles it might entail upon me.

"One evening, at the beginning of summer, as I was going home, after going over the farm, as I wanted Mohammed, I went into his tent without calling him, as I frequently did, and there I saw a woman, a girl, sleeping almost naked, with her arms crossed under her head, on one of those thick, red carpets, made of the fine wool of Djebel-Amour, and which are as soft and as thick as a feather bed. Her body, which was beautifully white under the ray of light that came in through the raised covering of the tent, appeared to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race that I had ever seen, and most of the women about here are beautiful and tall, and are a rare combination of features and shape. I let the edge of the tent fall in some confusion, and returned home.

"I love women! The sudden flash of this vision had penetrated and scorched me, and had rekindled in my veins that old, formidable ardor to which I owe my being here. It was very hot for it was July, and I spent nearly the whole night at my window, with my eyes fixed on the black Mohammed's tent made on the ground.

"When he came into my room the next morning, I looked him closely in the face, and he hung his head, like a man who was guilty and in confusion. Did he guess that I knew? I, however, asked him, suddenly:

"'So you are married, Mohammed?' and I saw that he got red, and he stammered out: 'No, *mo'ssieuia*!'

"I used to make him speak French to me, and to give me Arabic lessons, which was often productive of a most incoherent mixture of languages; however, I went on:

"'Then why is there a woman in your tent?'

"'She comes from the South,' he said, in a low, apologetic voice.

"'Oh! So she comes from the South? But that does not explain to me how she comes to be in your tent.'

"Without answering my question, he continued:

"'She is very pretty.'

"'Oh! Indeed. Another time, please, when you happen to receive a pretty woman from the South, you will take care that she comes to my *gourbi*, and not to yours. You understand me, Mohammed?'

"'Yes, *mo'ssieuia*,' he repeated, seriously.

"I must acknowledge that during the whole day I was in a state of aggressive excitement at the recollection of that Arab girl lying on the red carpet, and when I went in at dinner time, I felt very strongly inclined to go to Mohammed’s tent again. During the evening, he waited on me just as usual, and hovered round me with his impassive face, and several times I was very nearly asking him whether he intended to keep that girl from the South, who was very pretty, in his camel skin tent for a long time.

“Towards nine o’clock, still troubled with that longing for female society which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out to get some fresh air, and to stroll about a little round that cone of brown skin through which I could see a brilliant speck of light. I did not remain long, however, for fear of being surprised by Mohammed in the neighborhood of his dwelling. When I went in an hour later, I clearly saw his outline in the tent, and then, taking the key out of my pocket, I went into the *bordj*, where besides myself, there slept my steward, two French laborers, and an old cook whom I had picked up in the Algiers. As I went up stairs, I was surprised to see a streak of light under my door, and when I opened it, I saw a girl with the face of a statue sitting on a straw chair by the side of the table, on which a wax candle was burning; she was bedizened with all those silver gew-gaws which women in the South wear on their legs, arms, breast, and even on their stomach. Her eyes, which were tinged with kohl, to make them look larger, regarded me earnestly, and four little blue spots, finely tatooed on her skin, marked her forehead, her cheeks, and her chin. Her arms, which were loaded with bracelets, were resting on her thighs, which were covered by the long, red silk skirt that she wore.

“When she saw me come in, she got up and remained standing in front of me, covered with her barbaric jewels, in an attitude of proud submission.

“‘What are you doing here?’ I said to her in Arabic.

“‘I am here because Mohammed told me to come.’

“‘Very well, sit down.’

“So she sat down and lowered her eyes, while I examined her attentively.

“She had a strange, regular, delicate, and rather bestial face, but mysterious as that of a Buddha. Her lips, which were rather thick and covered with a reddish efflorescence, which I discovered on the rest of her body as well, indicated a slight admixture of negro blood, although her hands and arms were of an irreproachable whiteness.

“I hesitated what to do with her, and felt excited, tempted and rather confused, so in order to gain time and to give myself an opportunity for reflection, I put other questions to her, about her birth, how she came into this part of the country, and what her connection with Mohammed was. But she only replied to those that interested me the least, and it was impossible for me to find out why she had come, with what intention, by whose orders, nor what had taken place between her and my servant. However, just as I was about to say to her: ‘Go back to Mohammed’s tent,’ she seemed to guess my intention, for getting up suddenly, and raising her two bare arms, on which the jingling bracelets slipped down to her shoulders, she crossed her hands behind my neck and drew me towards her with an irresistible air of suppliant longing.

“Her eyes, which were bright from emotion, from that necessity of conquering man, which makes the looks of an impure woman as seductive as those of the feline tribe, allured me, enchained me, deprived me of all the power of resistance, and filled me with impetuous ardor. It was a short, sharp struggle of the eyes only, that eternal struggle between those two human brutes, the male and the female, in which the male is always beaten.

“Her hands, which had clasped behind my head, drew me irresistibly, with a gentle, increasing pressure, as if by mechanical force towards her red lips, on which I suddenly laid mine while, at the same moment, I clasped her body, that was covered with jingling silver rings, in an ardent embrace.

“She was as strong, as healthy, and as supple as a wild animal, with all the motions, the ways, the grace, and even something of the odor of a gazelle, which made me find a rare, unknown zest in her kisses, which was as strange to my senses as the taste of tropical fruits.

“Soon — I say soon, although it may have been towards morning — I wished to send her away, as I thought that she would go in the same way that she had come; I did not, even, at the moment, ask myself what I should do with her, or what she would do with me, but as soon as she guessed my intention, she whispered:

“‘What do you expect me to do if you get rid of me now? I shall have to sleep on the ground in the open air at night. Let me sleep on the carpet, at the foot of your bed.’

“What answer could I give her, or what could I do? I thought that no doubt Mohammed also would be watching the window of my room, in which a light was burning, and questions of various natures, that I had not put to myself during the first minutes, formulated themselves clearly in my brain.

“‘Stop here,’ I replied, ‘and we will talk.’

“My resolution was taken in a moment. As this girl had been thrown into my arms, in this manner, I would keep her; I would make her a kind of slave-mistress, hidden in my house, like women in a harem are. When the time should come that I no longer cared for her, it would be easy for me to get rid of her in some way or another, for on African soil those sort of creatures almost belong to us, body and soul, and so I said to her:

“‘I wish to be kind to you, and I will treat you so that you shall not be unhappy, but I want to know who you are and where you come from?’

“She saw clearly that she must say something, and she told me her story, or rather a story, for no doubt she was lying from beginning to end, like all Arabs always do, with or without any motive.

“That is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible signs of the native character — the Arabs always lie. Those people in whom Islam has become so incarnate that it has become part of themselves, to such an extent as to model their instincts and modifies the entire race, and to differentiate it from others in morals just as much as the color of the skin differentiates a negro from a white man, are liars to the backbone, so that one can never trust a word that they say. I do not know whether they owe that to their religion, but one must have lived among them in order to know the extent to which lying forms part of their being, of their heart and soul, until it has become a kind of second nature, a very necessity of life, with them.

“Well, she told me that she was the daughter of a *Caidi* of the *Ouled Sidi Cheik*, and of a woman whom he had carried off in a raid against the Touaregs. The woman must have been a black slave, or, at any rate, have sprung from a first cross of Arab and negro blood. It is well known that negro women are in great request for harems, where they act as aphrodisiacs. Nothing of such an origin was to be noticed, however, except the purple color of her lips, and the dark nipples of her elongated breasts, which were as supple as if they were on springs. Nobody who knew anything about the matter, could be mistaken in that. But all the rest of her belonged to the beautiful race from the South, fair, supple and with a delicate face which was formed on straight and simple lines like those of a Hindoo figure. Her eyes, which were very far apart, still further heightened the somewhat god-like looks of this desert marauder.

“I knew nothing exactly about her real life. She related it to me in incoherent fragments, that seemed to rise up at random from a disordered memory, and she mixed up deliciously childish observations with them; a whole vision of a Nomad world, born of a squirrel's brain that had leapt from tent to tent, from encampment to encampment, from tribe to tribe. And all this was done with the severe looks that this reserved people always preserve, with the appearance of a brass idol, and rather comic gravity.

"When she had finished, I perceived that I had not remembered anything of that long story, full of insignificant events, that she had stored up in her flighty brain, and I asked myself whether she had not simply been making fun of me by her empty and would-be serious chatter, which told me nothing about her, nor about any real facts connected with her life.

"And I thought of that conquered race, among whom we have encamped, or, rather, who are encamping among us, whose language we are beginning to speak, whom we see every day, living under the transparent linen of their tents, on whom we have imposed our laws, our regulations, and our customs, and about whom we know nothing, nothing more whatever, I assure you, than if we were not here, and solely occupied in looking at them, for nearly sixty years. We know no more about what is going on in those huts made of branches, and under those small canvas cones that are fastened to the ground by stakes, which are within twenty yards of our doors, than we know what the so-called civilized Arabs of the Moorish houses in Algiers do, think, and are. Behind the white-washed walls of their town houses, behind the partition of their *gourbi*, which is made of branches, or behind that thin, brown, camel-haired curtain which the wind moves, they live close to us, unknown, mysterious, cunning, submissive, smiling, impenetrable. What if I were to tell you, that when I look at the neighboring encampment through my field glasses, I guess that there are superstitions, customs, ceremonies, a thousand practices of which we know nothing, and which we do not even suspect! Never previously, in all probability, did a conquered race know so well how to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence and the inveterate, but useless, investigations of the conquerors.

"Now I suddenly felt the insurmountable, secret barrier which incomprehensible nature had set up between the two races, more than I had ever felt it before, between this girl and myself, between this woman who had just given herself to me, who had yielded herself to my caresses and to me, who had possessed her, and, thinking of it for the first time, I said to her: 'What is your name?'

“She did not speak for some moments, and I saw her start, as if she had forgotten that I was there, and then, in her eyes that were raised to mine, I saw that that moment had sufficed for her to be overcome by sleep, by irresistible, sudden, almost overwhelming sleep, like everything that lays hold of the mobile senses of women, and she answered, carelessly, suppressing a yawn:

“‘Allouma.’

“‘Do you want to go sleep?’

“‘Yes,’ she replied.

“‘Very well then, go to sleep!’

“She stretched herself out tranquilly by my side, lying on her stomach, with her forehead resting on her folded arms, and I felt almost immediately that fleeting, untutored thoughts were lulled in repose, while I began to ponder, as I lay by her side, and tried to understand it all. Why had Mohammed given her to me? Had he acted the part of a magnanimous servant, who sacrifices himself for his master, even to the extent of giving up the woman whom he had brought into his own tent, to him? Or had he, on the other hand, obeyed a more complex and more practical, though less generous impulse, in handing over this girl who had taken my fancy, to my embrace? An Arab, when it is a question of women, is rigorously modest and unspeakably complaisant, and one can no more understand his rigorous and easy morality, than one can all the rest of his sentiments. Perhaps, when I accidentally went to his tent, I had merely forestalled the benevolent intentions of this thoughtful servant, who had intended this woman, who was his friend and accomplice, or perhaps even his mistress, for me.

“All these suppositions assailed me, and fatigued me so much, that, at last, in my turn, I fell into a profound sleep, from which I was roused by the creaking of my door, and Mohammed came in, to call me as usual. He opened the window, through which a flood of light streamed in, and fell onto Allouma who was still asleep; then he picked up my trousers, coat and waistcoat from the floor in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman who was lying by my side, did not seem to know or remark that she was there, and preserved his ordinary gravity, demeanor and looks. But the light, the movement, the slight noise which his bare feet made, the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs, roused Allouma from her lethargy. She stretched out her arms, turned over, opened her eyes, and looked at me and then Mohammed with the same indifference; then she sat up in bed and said: ‘I am hungry.’

“‘What would you like?’

“‘Kahoua.’

“‘Coffee and bread and butter.’

“‘Yes.’

“Mohammed remained standing close to our bed, with my clothes under his arm, waiting for my orders.

“‘Bring breakfast for Allouma and me,’ I said to him.

“He went out, without his face betraying the slightest astonishment or anger, and as soon as he had left the room, I said to the girl:

“‘Will you live in my house?’

“‘I should like to, very much.’

“‘I will give you a room to yourself, and a woman to wait on you.’

“‘You are very generous, and I am grateful to you.’

“‘But if you behave badly, I shall send you away immediately.’

“‘I will do everything that you wish me to.’

“She took my hand, and kissed it as a token of submission, and just then Mohammed came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it, and I said to him: —

“‘Allouma is going to live here. You must spread a carpet on the floor of the room at the end of the passage, and get Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara’s wife to come and wait on her.’

“‘Yes, *mo’ssieuia*.’

“That was all.

“An hour later, my beautiful Arab was installed in a large, airy, light room, and when I went in to see that everything was in order, she asked me in a supplicating voice, to give her a wardrobe with a looking-glass in the doors. I promised her one, and then I left her squatting on the carpet from Djebel-Amour, with a cigarette in her mouth, and gossiping with the old Arab woman I had sent for, as if they had known each other for years.”

II

“For a month I was very happy with her, and I got strangely attached to this creature belonging to another race, who seemed to me almost to belong to some other species, and to have been born on a neighboring planet.

“I did not love her; no, one does not love the women of that primitive continent. This small, pale blue flower of Northern countries never unfolds between them and us, or even between them and their natural males, the Arabs. They are too near to human animalism, their hearts are too rudimentary, their feelings are not refined enough to rouse that sentimental exaltation in us, which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of thought or feeling is mingled with that sensual intoxication which those charming nonentities excite in us. Nevertheless, they captivate us like the others do, but in a different fashion, which is less tenacious, and, at the same time, less cruel and painful.

“I cannot even now explain precisely what I felt for her. I said to you just now that this country, this bare Africa, without any arts, void of all intellectual pleasures, gradually captivates us by its climate, by the continual mildness of the dawn and sunset, by its delightful light, and by the feeling of well-being with which it fills all our organs. Well, then! Allouma captivated me in the same manner, by a thousand hidden, physical, alluring charms, and by the procreative seductiveness, not of her embraces, for she was of thoroughly oriental supineness in that respect, but of her sweet self-surrender.

“I left her absolutely free to come and go as she liked, and she certainly spent one afternoon out of two with the wives of my native agricultural laborers. Often also, she would remain for nearly a whole day admiring herself in front of a mahogany wardrobe with a large looking-glass in the doors that I had got from Miliana.

“She admired herself conscientiously, standing before the glass doors, in which she followed her own movements with profound and serious attention. She walked with her head somewhat thrown back, in order to be able to see whether her hips and loins swayed properly; went away, came back again, and then, tired with her own movements, she sat down on a cushion and remained opposite to her own reflection, with her eyes fixed on her face in the glass, and her whole soul absorbed in that picture.

“Soon, I began to notice that she went out nearly every morning after breakfast, and that she disappeared altogether until evening, and as I felt rather anxious about this, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she could be doing during all these long hours of absence, but he replied very calmly:

"'Do not be uneasy. It will be the Feast of Ramadan soon, and so she goes to say her prayers.'

"He also seemed delighted at having Allouma in the house, but I never once saw anything suspicious between them, and so I accepted the situation as it was, and let time, accident, and life act for themselves.

"Often, after I had inspected my farm, my vineyards, and my clearings, I used to take long walks. You know the magnificent forests in this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines, where fallen pine trees hem the mountain torrents, and those little valleys filled with oleanders, which look like oriental carpets stretching along the banks of the streams. You know that at every moment, in these woods and on these hills, where one would think that nobody had ever penetrated, one suddenly sees the white dome of a shrine that contains the bones of a humble, solitary marabout, which was scarcely visited from time to time, even by the most confirmed believers, who had come from the neighboring villages with a wax candle in their pocket, to set up before the tomb of the saint.

"Now one evening as I was going home, I was passing one of these Mohammedan chapels, and, looking in through the door, which was always open, I saw a woman praying before the altar. That Arab woman, sitting on the ground in that dilapidated building, into which the wind entered as it pleased, and heaped up the fine, dry pine needles in yellow heaps in the corners. I went near to see better, and recognized Allouma. She neither saw nor heard me, so absorbed was she with the saint, to whom she was speaking in a low voice, as she thought that she was alone with him, and telling this servant of God all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped for a short time to think, to try and recollect what more she had to say, so that she might not forget anything that she wished to confide to him; then, again, she would grow animated, as if he had replied to her, as if he had advised her to do something that she did not want to do, and the reasons for which she was impugning, and I went away as I had come, without making any noise, and returned home to dinner.

"That evening, when I sent for her, I saw that she had a thoughtful look, which was not usual with her.

"'Sit down there,' I said, pointing to her place on the couch by my side. As soon as she had sat down, I stooped to kiss her, but she drew her head away quickly, and, in great astonishment, I said to her:

"'Well, what is the matter?'

"'It is the Ramadan,' she said.

"I began to laugh, and said: 'And the Marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during the Ramadan?'

"Oh, yes; I am an Arab woman, and you are a Roumi!'

"'And it would be a great sin?'

"'Oh, yes!'

"'So you ate nothing all day, until sunset?'

"'No, nothing.'

"'But you had something to eat after sundown?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you ought not to be more strict about the rest than you are about your mouth.'

"She seemed irritated, wounded, and offended, and replied with an amount of pride that I had never noticed in her before: —

"'If an Arab girl were to allow herself to be touched by a Roumi during the Ramadan, she would be cursed for ever.'

"'And that is to continue for a whole month?'

"'Yes, for the whole of the month of Ramadan,' she replied, with great determination.

"I assumed an irritated manner and said:— 'Very well, then, you can go and spend the Ramadan with your family.'

"She seized my hands, and, laying them on my heart, she said: —

"'Oh! Please do not be unkind, and you shall see how nice I will be. We will keep Ramadan together, if you like. I will look after you, and spoil you, but don't be unkind.'

"I could not help smiling at her funny manner and her unhappiness, and I sent her to go to sleep at home, but, an hour later, just as I was thinking about going to bed, there came two little taps at my door, which were so slight, however, that I scarcely heard them; but when I said:— 'Come in,' Allouma appeared carrying a large tray covered with Arab dainties; fried balls of rice, covered with sugar, and a variety of other strange, Nomad pastry.

"She laughed, showing her white teeth, and repeated:— 'Come, we will keep Ramadan together.'

"You know that the fast, which begins at dawn and ends at twilight, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish a black from a white thread, is followed every evening by small, friendly entertainments, at which eating is kept up until the morning, and the result is that for such of the natives as are not very scrupulous, Ramadan consists of turning day into night, and night into day. But Allouma carried her delicacy of conscience further than this. She placed her tray between us on the divan, and taking a small, sugared ball between her long, slender fingers, she put it into my mouth, and whispered:— ‘Eat it, it is very good.’

“I munched the light cake, which was really excellent, and asked her:— ‘Did you make that?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘For me?’

“‘Yes, for you.’

“‘To enable me to support Ramadan?’

“‘Oh! Don’t be so unkind! I will bring you some every day.’

“Oh! the terrible month that I spent! A sugared, insipidly sweet month; a month that nearly drove me mad; a month of spoiling and of temptation, of anger and of vain efforts against an invincible resistance, but at last the three days of Beiram came, which I celebrated in my own fashion, and Ramadan was forgotten.

“The summer went on, and it was very hot, and in the first days of autumn, Allouma appeared to me to be pre-occupied and absent-minded, and, seemingly, taking no interest in anything, and, at last, when I sent for her one evening, she was not to be found in her room. I thought that she was roaming about the house, and I gave orders to look for her. She had not come in, however, and so I opened my window, and called out: —

“‘Mohammed,’ and the voice of the man, who was lying in his tent, replied: —

“‘Yes, *mo’ssieuia*.’

“‘Do you know where Allouma is?’

“‘No, *mo’ssieuia* ... it is not possible ... is Allouma lost?’

“A few moments later, my Arab came into my room, so agitated that he could not master his feelings, and I said:

“‘Is Allouma lost?’

“‘Yes, she is lost.’

“‘It is impossible.’

“‘Go and look for her,’ I said.

“He remained standing where he was, thinking, seeking for her motives, and unable to understand anything about it. Then he went into the empty room, where Allouma’s clothes were lying about, in oriental disorder. He examined everything, as if he had been a police officer, or, rather, he smelt like a dog, and then, incapable of a lengthened effort, he murmured, resignedly: —

“‘She has gone, she has gone!’

“I was afraid that some accident had happened to her; that she had fallen into some ravine and sprained herself, and I immediately sent all the men about the place off with orders to look for her until they should find her, and they hunted for her all that night, all the next day, and all the week long, but nothing was discovered that could put us upon her track. I suffered, for I missed her very much; my house seemed empty, and my existence a void. And then, disgusting thoughts entered my mind. I feared that she might have been carried off, or even murdered, but when I spoke about it to Mohammed, and tried to make him share my fears, he invariably replied:

“‘No; gone away.’

“Then he added the Arab word *r’ezale*, which means *gazelle*, as if he meant to say that she could run quickly, and that she was far away.

“Three weeks passed, and I had given up all hopes of seeing my Arab mistress again, when one morning Mohammed came into my room, with every sign of joy in his face, and said to me:

“‘*Mo’ssieuia*, Allouma has come back.’

“I jumped out of bed and said:

“‘Where is she?’

“‘She does not dare to come in! There she is, under the tree.’

“And stretching out his arm, he pointed out to me, through the window, a whitish spot at the foot of an olive tree.

“I got up immediately, and went out to where she was. As I approached what looked like a mere bundle of linen thrown against the gnarled trunk of the tree, I recognized the large, dark eyes, the tattooed stars, and the long, regular features of that semi-wild girl who had so captivated my senses. As I advanced towards her, I felt inclined to strike her, to make her suffer pain, and to have my revenge, and so I called out to her from a little distance:

“‘Where have you been?’

“She did not reply, but remained motionless and inert, as if she were scarcely alive, resigned to my violence, and ready to receive my blows. I was standing up, close to her, looking in stupefaction at the rags with which she was covered, at those bits of silk and muslin, covered with dust, torn and dirty, and I repeated, raising my hand, as if she had been a dog:

"'Where have you come from?'

"'From yonder,' she said, in a whisper.

"'Where is that?'

"'From the tribe.'

"'What tribe?'

"'Mine.'

"'Why did you go away?'

"When she saw that I was not going to beat her, she grew rather bolder, and said in a low voice: "'I was obliged to do it.... I was forced to go, I could not stop in the house any longer.'

"I saw tears in her eyes, and immediately felt softened. I leaned over her, and when I turned round to sit down, I noticed Mohammed, who was watching us at a distance, and I went on, very gently:

"'Come, tell me why you ran away?'

"Then she told me, that for a long time in her Nomad's heart she had felt the irresistible desire to return to the tents, to lie, to run, to roll on the sand; to wander about the plains with the flocks, to feel nothing over her head, between the yellow stars in the sky and the blue stars in her face, except the thin, threadbare, patched stuff, through which she could see spots of fire in the sky, when she awoke during the night.

"She made me understand all that in such simple and powerful words, that I felt quite sure that she was not lying, and pitied her, and I asked her:

"'Why did you not tell me that you wished to go away for a time?'

"'Because you would not have allowed me...'

"'If you had promised to come back, I should have consented.'

"'You would not have believed me.'

"Seeing that I was not angry, she began to laugh, and said:

"'You see that is all over; I have come home again, and here I am. I only wanted a few days there. I have had enough of it now, it is finished and passed; the feeling is cured. I have come back, and have not that longing any more. I am very glad, and you are very kind.'

"'Come into the house,' I said to her.

"She got up, and I took her hand, her delicate hand, with its slender fingers, and triumphant in her rags, with her bracelets and her necklace ringing, she went gravely towards my house, where Mohammed was waiting for us, but before going in, I said:

"'Allouma, whenever you want to return to your own people, tell me, and I will allow you to go.'

"'You promise?'

"'Yes, I promise.'

"'And I will make you a promise also. When I feel ill or unhappy' — and here she put her hand to her forehead, with a magnificent gesture— 'I shall say to you: "I must go yonder," and you will let me go.'

"I went with her to her room, followed by Mohammed, who was carrying some water, for there had been no time to tell the wife of Abd-el-Kader-el-Hadam that her mistress had returned. As soon as she got into the room, and saw the wardrobe with the looking-glass in the door, she ran up to it, like a child does when it sees its mother. She looked at herself for a few seconds, made a grimace, and then in a rather cross voice, she said to the looking-glass:

"'Just you wait a moment; I have some silk dresses in the wardrobe. I shall be beautiful in a few minutes.'

"And I left her alone, to act the coquette to herself.

"Our life began its usual course again, as formerly, and I felt more and more under the influence of the strange, merely physical attractions of that girl, for whom, at the same time, I felt a kind of paternal contempt. For two months all went well, and then I felt that she was again becoming nervous, agitated, and rather low-spirited, and one day I said to her: —

"'Do you want to return home again?'

"'Yes.'

"'And you did not dare to tell me?'

"'I did not venture to.'

"'Go, if you wish to; I give you leave.'

"She seized my hands and kissed them, as she did in all her outbursts of gratitude, and the same morning she disappeared.

"She came back, as she had done the first time, at the end of about three weeks, in rags, covered with dust, and satiated with her Nomad life of sand and liberty. In two years she returned to her own people four times in this fashion.

"I took her back, gladly, without any feelings of jealousy, for with me jealousy can only spring from love as we Europeans understand it. I might very likely have killed her if I had surprised her in the act of deceiving me, but I should have done it, just as one half kills a disobedient dog, from sheer violence. I should not have felt those torments, that consuming fire — Northern jealousy. I have just said that I should have killed her like a disobedient dog, and, as a matter of fact, I loved her somewhat in the same manner as one loves some very highly bred horse or dog, which it is impossible to replace. She was a splendid animal, a sensual animal, an animal made for pleasure, and which possessed the body of a woman.

"I cannot tell you what an immeasurable distance separated our two souls, although our hearts perhaps occasionally warmed towards each other. She was something belonging to my house, she was part of my life, she had become a very agreeable, daily, regular requirement with me, to which I clung, and which the sensual man in me loved, that in me which was only eyes and sensuality.

"Well, one morning, Mohammed came into my room with a strange look on his face, that uneasy look of the Arabs, which resembles the furtive look of a cat, face to face with a dog, and when I noticed his expression, I said:

"'What is the matter, now?'

"'Allouma has gone away.'

"I began to laugh, and said:— 'Where has she gone to?'

"'Gone away altogether, *mo'ssieuia*!'

"'What do you mean by *gone away altogether*; you are mad, my man.'

"'No, *mo'ssieuia*.'

"'Why has she gone away? Just explain yourself; come!'

"He remained motionless, and evidently did not wish to speak, and then he had one of those explosions of Arab rage, which make us stop in streets in front of two demoniacs, whose oriental silence and gravity suddenly give place to the most violent gesticulations, and the most ferocious vociferations, and I gathered, amidst his shouts, that Allouma had run away with my shepherd, and when I had partially succeeded in calming him, I managed to extract the facts from him one by one.

"It was a long story, but at last I gathered that he had been watching my mistress, who used to meet a sort of vagabond whom my steward had hired the month before, behind the neighboring cactus woods, or in the ravine where the oleanders flourished. The night before, Mohammed had seen her go out without seeing her return, and he repeated, in an exasperated manner:— 'Gone, *mo'ssieuia*; she has gone away!'

"I do not know why, but his conviction, the conviction that she had run away with this vagabond, laid hold of me irresistibly in a moment. It was absurd, unlikely, and yet certain in virtue of that very unreasonableness, which constitutes female logic.

"Boiling over with indignation, I tried to recall the man's features, and I suddenly remembered having seen him the previous week, standing on a mound amidst his flock, and watching me. He was a tall Bedouin, the color of whose bare limbs was blended with that of his rags; he was a type of a barbarous brute, with high cheek bones, and a hooked nose, a retreating chin, thin legs, and a tall carcass in rags, with the shifty eyes of a jackal.

"I did not doubt for a moment that she had run away with that beggar. Why? Because she was Allouma, a daughter of the desert. A girl from the pavement in Paris would have run away with my coachman, or some thief in the suburbs.

"'Very well,' I said to Mohammed. Then I got up, opened my window, and began to draw in the stifling South wind, for the sirocco was blowing, and I thought to myself: —

"Good heavens! she is ... a woman, like so many others. Does anybody know what makes them act, what makes them love, what makes them follow, or throw over a man? One certainly does know, occasionally; but often one does not, and sometimes one is in doubt. Why did she run away with that repulsive brute? Why? Perhaps, because the wind had been blowing regularly from the South, for a month; that was enough; a breath of wind! Does she know, do they know, even the cleverest of them, why they act? No more than a weather-cock that turns with the wind. An imperceptible breeze, makes the iron, brass, zinc, or wooden arrow revolve, just in the same manner as some imperceptible influence, some undiscernible impression moves the female heart, and urges it on to resolutions, and it does not matter whether they belong to town or country, the suburbs or the desert.

"They can then feel, provided that they reason and understand, why they have done one thing rather than another, but, for the moment, they do not know, for they are the playthings of their own sensibility, the thoughtless, giddy-headed slaves of events, of their surroundings, of chance meetings, and of all the sensations with which their soul and their body trembles!"

Monsieur Auballe had risen, and, after walking up and down the room once or twice, he looked at me, and said, with a smile: —

“That is love in the desert!”

“Suppose she were to come back?” I asked him.

“Horrid girl!” he replied.

“But I should be very glad if she did return to me.”

“And you would pardon the shepherd?”

“Good heavens, yes! With women, one must always pardon ... or else pretend not to see things.”

THE ODALISQUE OF SENICHOU

In Senichou, which is a suburb of Prague, there lived about twenty years ago, two poor but honest people, who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow; he worked in a large printing establishment, and his wife employed her spare time as a laundress. Their pride, and their only pleasure, was their daughter Viteska, who was a vigorous, voluptuous-looking, handsome girl of eighteen, whom they brought up very well and carefully. She worked for a dress-maker, and was thus able to help her parents a little, and she made use of her leisure moments to improve her education, and especially her music. She was a general favorite in the neighborhood on account of her quiet modest demeanor, and she was looked upon as a model by the whole suburb.

When she went to work in the town, the tall girl with her magnificent head, which resembled that of an ancient, Bohemian Amazon, with its wealth of black hair, and her dark, sparkling yet soft eyes, attracted the looks of passers-by, in spite of her shabby dress, much more than the graceful, well-dressed ladies of the aristocracy. Frequently some young, wealthy lounger would follow her home; and even try to get into conversation with her, but she always managed to get rid of them and their importunities, and she did not require any protector, for she was quite capable of protecting herself from any insults.

One evening, however, she met a man on the suspension bridge, whose strange appearance made her give him a look which evinced some interest, but perhaps even more surprise. He was a tall, handsome man with bright eyes and a black beard; he was very sunburnt, and in his long coat, which was like a caftan, with a red fez on his head, he gave those who saw him the impression of an Oriental; he had noticed her look all the more as he himself had been so struck by her poor, and at the same time regal, appearance, that he remained standing and looking at her in such a way, that he seemed to be devouring her with his eyes, so that Viteska, who was usually so fearless, looked down. She hurried on and he followed her, and the quicker she walked, the more rapidly he followed her, and, at last, when they were in a narrow, dark street in the suburb, he suddenly said in an insinuating voice: "May I offer you my arm, my pretty girl?" "You can see that I am old enough to look after myself," Viteska replied hastily; "I am much obliged to you, and must beg you not to follow me any more; I am known in this neighborhood, and it might damage my reputation." "Oh! You are very much mistaken if you think you will get rid of me so easily," he replied. "I have just come from the East and am returning there soon, come with me, and as I fancy that you are as sensible as you are beautiful, you will certainly make your fortune there, and I will bet that before the end of a year, you will be covered with diamonds, and be waited on by eunuchs and female slaves."

"I am a respectable girl, sir," she replied proudly, and tried to go on in front, but the stranger was immediately at her side again. "You were born to rule," he whispered to her. "Believe me, and I understand the matter, that you will live to be a Sultaness, if you have any luck." The girl did not give him any answer, but walked on. "But, at any rate, listen to me," the tempter continued. "I will not listen to anything; because I am poor, you think it will be easy for you to seduce me," Viteska exclaimed: "but I am as virtuous as I am poor, and I should despise any position which I had to buy with shame." They had reached the little house where her parents lived, and she ran in quickly, and slammed the door behind her.

When she went into the town the next morning, the stranger was waiting at the corner of the street where she lived, and bowed to her very respectfully. "Allow me to speak a few words with you," he began. "I feel that I ought to beg your pardon for my behavior yesterday." "Please let me go on my way quietly," the girl replied. "What will the neighbors think of me?" "I did not know you," he went on, without paying any attention to her angry looks, "but your extraordinary beauty attracted me. Now that I know that you are as virtuous as you are charming, I wish very much to become better acquainted with you. Believe me, I have the most honorable intentions."

Unfortunately, the bold stranger had taken the girl's fancy, and she could not find it in her heart to refuse him. "If you are really in earnest," she stammered in charming confusion, "do not follow me about in the public streets, but come to my parents' house like a man of honor, and state your intentions there.” “I will certainly do so, and immediately, if you like,” the stranger replied, eagerly. “No, no,” Viteska said; “but come this evening if you like.”

The stranger bowed and left her, and really called on her parents in the evening. He introduced himself as Ireneus Krisapolis, a merchant from Smyrna, spoke of his brilliant circumstances, and finally declared that he loved Viteska passionately. “That is all very nice and right,” the cautious father replied, “but what will it all lead to? Under no circumstances can I allow you to visit my daughter. Such a passion as yours often dies out as quickly as it arises, and a respectable girl is easily robbed of her virtue.” “And suppose I make up my mind to marry your daughter?” the stranger asked, after a moment’s hesitation. “Then I shall refer you to my child, for I shall never force Viteska to marry against her will,” her father said.

The stranger seized the pretty girl’s hand, and spoke in glowing terms of his love for her, of the luxury with which she would be surrounded in his house, of the wonders of the East, to which he hoped to take her, and at last Viteska consented to become his wife. Thereupon the stranger hurried on the arrangements for the wedding, in a manner that made the most favorable impression on them all, and during the time before their marriage he lay at her feet like her humble slave.

As soon as they were married, the newly-married couple set off on their journey to Smyrna and promised to write as soon as they got there, but a month, then two and three, passed without the parents, whose anxiety increased every day, receiving a line from them, until at last the father in terror applied to the police.

The first thing was to write to the Consul at Smyrna for information: his reply was to the effect that no merchant of the name of Ireneus Krisapolis was known in Smyrna, and that he had never been there. The police, at the entreaties of the frantic parents, continued their investigations, but for a long time without any result. At last, however, they obtained a little light on the subject, but it was not at all satisfactory. The police at Pestle said that a man, whose personal appearance exactly agreed with the description of Viteska’s husband, had a short time before carried off two girls from the Hungarian capital, to Turkey, evidently intending to trade in that coveted, valuable commodity there, but that when he found that the authorities were on his track he had escaped from justice by a sudden flight.

Four years after Viteska's mysterious disappearance, two persons, a man and a woman, met in a narrow street in Damascus, in a scarcely less strange manner, than when the Greek merchant met Viteska on the suspension bridge at Prague. The man with the black beard, the red fez, and the long, green caftan, was no one else than Ireneus Krisapolis; matters appeared to be going well with him; he had his hands comfortably thrust into the red shawl which he had round his waist, and a negro was walking behind him with a large parasol, while another carried his *Chiloque* after him. A noble Turkish lady met him in a litter borne by four slaves; she was wrapped like a ghost in a white veil, only that a pair of large, dark, threatening eyes flashed at the merchant.

He smiled, for he thought that he had found favor in the eyes of an Eastern houri, and that flattered him; but he soon lost sight of her in the crowd, and forgot her almost immediately. The next morning however, a eunuch of the pasha's came to him, to his no small astonishment, and told him to come with him. He took him to the Sultan's most powerful deputy, who ruled as an absolute despot in Damascus. They went through dark, narrow passages, and curtains were pushed aside, which rustled behind them again. At last they reached a large rotunda, the center of which was occupied by a beautiful fountain, while scarlet divans ran all around it. Here the eunuch told the merchant to wait, and left him. He was puzzling his brains what the meaning of it all could be, when suddenly a tall, commanding woman came into the apartment. Again a pair of large, threatening eyes looked at him through the veil, while he knew from her green, gold-embroidered caftan, that if it was not the pasha's wife, it was at least one of his favorites, who was before him, and so he hurriedly knelt down, and crossing his hands on his breast, he put his head on to the ground before her. But a clear, diabolical laugh made him look up, and when the beautiful Odalisque threw back her veil, he uttered a cry of terror, for his wife, his deceived wife, whom he had sold, was standing before him.

"Do you know me?" she asked with quiet dignity. "Viteska!" "Yes, that was my name when I was your wife," she replied quickly, in a contemptuous voice; "but now that I am the pasha's wife, my name is Sarema. I do not suppose you ever expected to find me again, you wretch, when you sold me in Varna to an old Jewish profligate, who was only half alive. You see I have got into better hands, and I have made my fortune, as you said I should do. Well? What do you expect of me; what thanks, what reward?”

The wretched man was lying overwhelmed, at the feet of the woman whom he had so shamefully deceived, and could not find a word to say; he had felt that he was lost, and had not even got the courage to beg for mercy. “You deserve death, you miscreant,” Sarema continued. “You are in my hands, and I can do whatever I please with you, for the pasha has left your punishment to me alone. I ought to have you impaled, and to feast my eyes on your death agonies. That would be the smallest compensation for all the years of degradation that I have been through, and which I owe to you.” “Mercy, Viteska! Mercy!” the wretched man cried, trembling all over, and raising his hands to her in supplication.

The Odalisque’s only reply was a laugh, in which rang all the cruelty of an insulted woman’s deceived heart. It seemed to give her pleasure to see the man whom she had loved, and who had so shamefully trafficked in her beauty, in his mortal agony, as he cringed before her, whining for his life, as he clung to her knees, but at last she seemed to relent somewhat.

“I will give your life, you miserable wretch,” she said, “but you shall not go unpunished.” So saying, she clapped her hands, and four black eunuchs came in, and seized the favorite’s unfortunate husband and in a moment bound his hands and feet.

“I have altered my mind, and he shall not be put to death,” Sarema said, with a smile that made the traitor’s blood run cold in his veins; “but give him a hundred blows with the bastinade, and I will stand by and count them.” “For God’s sake,” the merchant screamed, “I can never endure it.” “We will see about that,” the favorite said, coldly, “and if you die under it, it was allotted you by fate; I am not going to retract my orders.”

She threw herself down on the cushions, and began to smoke a long pipe, which a female slave handed to her on her knees. At a sign from her the eunuchs tied the wretched man’s feet to the pole, by which the soles of the culprit were raised, and began the terrible punishment. Already at the tenth blow the merchant began to roar like a wild animal, but his wife whom he had betrayed, remained unmoved, carelessly blowing the blue wreaths of smoke into the air, and resting on her lovely arm, she watched his features, which were distorted by pain, with merciless enjoyment.

During the last blows he only groaned gently, and then he fainted.

A year later the dealer was caught with his female merchandise by the police in an Austrian town, and handed over to justice, when he made a full confession, and by that means the parents of the *Odalisque of Senichou* heard of their daughter's position. As they knew that she was happy and surrounded by luxury, they made no attempt to get her out of the Pasha's hands, who, like a thorough Mussulman, had become the slave of his slave.

The unfortunate husband was sent over to the frontier when he was released from prison. His shameful traffic, however, flourishes still, in spite of all the precautions of the police and of the consuls, and every year he provides the harems of the East with those voluptuous *Boxclanas*, especially from Bohemia and Hungary, who, in the eyes of a Mussulman, vie for the prize of beauty, with the slender Circassian women.

A GOOD MATCH

Strauss’ band was playing in the saloons of the Horticultural Society, which was so full that the young cadet Hussar-sergeant Max B., who had nothing better to do on an afternoon when he was off duty than to drink a glass of good beer and to listen to a new waltz tune, had already been looking about for a seat for some time, when the head waiter, who knew him, quickly took him to an unoccupied place, and without waiting for his orders, brought him a glass of beer. A very gentlemanly-looking man, and three elegantly dressed ladies were sitting at the table.

The cadet saluted them with military politeness, and sat down, but almost before he could put the glass to his lips, he noticed that the two elder ladies, who appeared to be married, turned up their noses very much at his taking a seat at their table, and even said a few words which he could not catch, but which no doubt referred unpleasantly to him. “I am afraid I am in the way here,” the cadet said; and he got up to leave, when he felt a pull at his sabre-tasch beneath the table, and at the same time the gentleman felt bound to say with some embarrassment: “Oh! not at all; on the contrary, we are very pleased that you have chosen this table.”

Thereupon the cadet resumed his seat, not so much because he took the gentleman’s invitation as sincere, but because the silent request to remain, which he had received under the table, and which was much more sincerely meant, had raised in him one of those charming illusions, which are so frequent in our youth, and which promised so much happiness, with electrical rapidity. He could not doubt for a moment, that the daring invitation came from the third, the youngest and prettiest of the ladies, into whose company a fortunate accident had thrown him.

From the moment that he had sat down by her, however, she did not deign to bestow even another look on him, much less a word, and to the young hussar, who was still rather inexperienced in such matters, this seemed rather strange; but he possessed enough natural tact not to expose himself to a rebuff by any hasty advances, but quietly to wait further developments of the adventure on the part of the heroine of it. This gave him the opportunity of looking at her more closely, and for this he employed the moments when their attention was diverted from him, and was taken up by conversation among themselves.

The girl, whom the others called Angelica, was a thorough Viennese beauty, not exactly regularly beautiful, for her features were not Roman or Greek, and not even strictly German, and yet they possessed every female charm, and were seductive, in the fullest sense of the word. Her strikingly small nose, which in a lady's-maid might have been called impudent, and her little mouth with its voluptuously full lips, which would have been called lustful in a street-walker, imparted an indescribable piquant charm to her small head, which was surmounted by an imposing tower of that soft brown hair which is so characteristic of Viennese women. Her bright eyes were full of good sense, and a merry smile lurked continually in the most charming little dimples near her mouth and on her chin.

In less than a quarter of an hour, our cadet was fettered, with no more will of his own than a slave has, to the triumphal chariot of this delightful little creature, and as he hoped and believed — for ever. And he was a man worth capturing. He was tall and slim, but muscular, and looked like an athlete, and at the time he had one of those handsome, open faces which women like so much. His honest, dark eyes showed strength of will, courage and strong passions, and that, women also like.

During an interval in the music, an elderly gentleman, with the ribbon of an order in his button-hole, came up to the table, and from the manner in which he greeted them, it was evident that he was an old friend. From their conversation, which was carried on in a very loud tone of voice, and with much animation, in the bad, Viennese fashion, the cadet gathered that the gentleman who was with the ladies, was a Councilor of Legation, and that the eldest lady was his wife, while the second lady was his married, and the youngest his unmarried, sister-in-law. When they at last rose to go, the pretty girl, evidently intentionally, put her velvet jacket, trimmed with valuable sable, very loosely over her shoulders; then she remained standing at the exit, and slowly put it on, so that the cadet had an opportunity to get close to her. “Follow us,” she whispered to him, and then ran after the others.

The cadet was only too glad to obey her directions, and followed them at a distance, without being observed, to the house where they lived. A week passed without his seeing the pretty Angelica again, or without her giving him any sign of life. The waiter in the Horticultural Society's grounds, whom he asked about them, could tell him nothing more than that they were people of position, and a few days later the cadet saw them all again at a concert, but he was satisfied with looking at his ideal from a distance. She, however, when she could do so without danger, gave him one of those coquettish looks which inexperienced young men imagine express the innermost feelings of a pure, virgin heart. On that occasion she left the grounds with her sisters, much earlier, and as she passed the handsome cadet, she let a small piece of rolled-up paper fall, which only contained the words: “Come at ten o'clock to-night, and ring the bell.”

He was outside the house at the stroke of ten and rang, but his astonishment knew no bounds when, instead of Angelica or her confidential maid, the housekeeper opened the door. She saw his confusion, and quickly put an end to it by taking his hand, and pulling him into the house. “Come with me,” she whispered; “I know all about it. The young lady will be here directly, so come along.” Then she lead him through the kitchen into a room which was shut off from the rest of the house, and which she had apparently furnished for similar meetings, on her own account, and left him there by himself, and the cadet was rather surprised to see the elegant furniture, a wide, soft couch, and some rather obscene pictures in broad, gilt frames. In a few minutes, the beautiful girl came, in, and without any further ceremony, threw her arms round the young soldier's neck. In her *negligée*, she appeared to him much more beautiful than in her elegant outdoor dress, but the virginal fragrance which then pervaded her, had given way to that voluptuous atmosphere which surrounds a young newly-married woman.

Angelica, whose little feet were encased in blue velvet slippers lined with ermine, and who was wrapped in a richly embroidered, white dressing-gown, that was trimmed with lace, drew the handsome cadet down on to the couch with graceful energy, and almost before he exactly knew what he had come for, she was his, and the young soldier, who was half dazed at his unexpected victory and good fortune, did not leave her until after twelve o'clock. He returned every night at ten, rang the bell, and was admitted by the girl's slyly-smiling confidante, and a few moments later was clasping his little goddess, who used to wrap her delicate, white limbs sometimes in dark sable, and at others in princely ermine, in his arms. Every time they partook of a delicious supper, laughed and joked and loved each other like only young, good-looking people do love, and frequently they entertained one another until morning.

Once the cadet attempted diffidently to pay the housekeeper for her services, and also for the supper, but she refused his money with a laugh, and said that everything was already settled; and the young soldier had reveled in this manner in boundless bliss for four months, when, by an unfortunate accident, he met his mistress in the street one day. She was alone, but in spite of this she contracted her delicate, finely-arched eyebrows angrily, when he was about to speak to her, and turned her head away. This hurt the honest young fellow's feelings, and when that evening she drew him to her bosom, that was rising and falling tempestuously under the black velvet that covered it, he remonstrated with her quietly, but emphatically. — She made a little grimace, and looking at him coldly and angrily, she at last said, shortly: "I forbid you to take any notice of me out of doors. I do not choose to recognize you; do you understand?"

The cadet was surprised and did not reply, but the harmony of his pleasures was destroyed by a harsh discord. For some time he bore his misery in silence and with resignation, but at last the situation became unendurable; his mistress's fiery kisses seemed to mock him, and the pleasure which she gave him to degrade him, so at last he summoned up courage, and in his open way, he came straight to the point.

"What do you think of our future, Angelica?" She wrinkled her brows a little. "Do not let us talk about it; at any rate not to-day." "Why not? We must talk about it sooner or later," he replied, "and I think it is high time for me to explain my intentions to you, if I do not wish to appear as a dishonorable scoundrel in your eyes." She looked at him in surprise. "I look upon you as one of the best and most honorable of men, Max," she said, soothingly, after a pause. "And do you trust me also?" "Of course I do." "Are you convinced that I love you honestly?" "Quite." "Then do not hesitate any longer to bestow your hand upon me," her lover said, in conclusion. "What are you thinking about?" she cried, quickly, in a tone of refusal. "What is to be the end of our connection? What is at any rate not permissible with a woman, is wrong and dishonorable with a girl. You yourself must feel lowered if you do not become my wife as soon as possible." "What a narrow-minded view," Angelica replied, angrily, "but as you wish it, I will give you my opinion on the subject, but ... by letter.” “No, no; now, directly.”

The pretty girl did not speak for some time, and looked down, but suddenly she looked at her lover, and a malicious, mocking smile lurked in the corners of her mouth. “Well, I love you, Max, I love you really and ardently,” she said, carelessly; “but I can never be your wife. If you were an officer I might perhaps marry you; yes, I certainly would, but as it is, it is impossible.” “Is that your last word?” the cadet said, in great excitement. She only nodded, and then put her full, white arms round his neck, with all the security of a mistress who is granting some favor to her slave; but on that occasion she was mistaken. He sprang up, seized his sword and hurried out of the room, and she let him go, for she felt certain that he would come back again, but he did not do so, and when she wrote to him, he did not answer her letters, and still did not come; so at last she gave him up.

It was a bad, a very bad, experience for the honorable young fellow; the highborn, frivolous girl had trampled on all the ideals and illusions of his life with her small feet, for he then saw only too clearly, that she had not loved him, but that he had only served her pleasures and her lusts, while he, he had loved her so truly!

About a year after the catastrophe with charming Angelica, the handsome cadet happened to be in his captain’s quarters, and accidentally saw a large photograph of a lady on his writing table, and on going up and looking at it, he recognized — Angelica.

“What a beautiful girl,” he said, wishing to find out how the land lay. “That is the lady I am going to marry,” the captain, whose vanity was flattered, said, “and she is as pure and as good as an angel, just as she is as beautiful as one, and into the bargain she comes of a very good and very rich family; in short, in the fullest sense of the word, she is ‘a good match.’”

A FASHIONABLE WOMAN

It can easily be proved that Austria is far richer in talented men in every domain, than North Germany, but while men are systematically drilled there for the vocation which they choose, like the Prussian soldiers are, with us they lack the necessary training, especially technical training, and consequently very few of them get beyond mere diletantism. Leo Wolfram was one of those intellectual diletantes, and the more pleasure one took in his materials and characters, which were usually boldly taken from real life, and in a certain political, and what is still more, in a plastic plot, the more he was obliged to regret that he had never learnt to compose or to mold his characters, or to write; in one word, that he had never become a literary artist, but how greatly he had in himself the materials for a master of narration, his "Dissolving Views," and still more his *Goldkind*, prove.

This Goldkind is a striking type of our modern society, and the novel of that name contains all the elements of a classic novel, although of course in a crude, unfinished state. What an exact reflection of our social circumstances Leo Wolfram gave in that story our present reminiscences will show, in which a lady of that race plays the principal part.

It may be ten years ago, that every day four very stylishly dressed persons went to dine in a corner of the small dining-room of one of the best hotels in Vienna, who, both there and elsewhere, gave occasion for a great amount of talk. They were an Austrian landowner, his charming wife, and two young diplomatists, one of whom came from the North, while the other was a pure son of the South. There was no doubt that the lady came in for the greatest share of the general interest in every respect.

The practiced observer and discerner of human nature easily recognized in her one of those characters which Goethe has so aptly named "problematical," for she was one of those individuals who are always dissatisfied and at variance with themselves and with the world, who are a riddle to themselves, and who can never be relied on, and with the interesting and captivating, though unfortunate contradictions in her nature, she made a strong impression on everybody, even by her mere outward appearance. She was one of those women who are called beautiful, without their being really so. Her face, as well as her figure, was wanting in æsthetic lines, but there was no doubt that, in spite of that, or perhaps on that very account, she was the most dangerous, infatuating woman that one could imagine.

She was tall and thin, and there was a certain hardness about her figure, which became a charm through the vivacity and grace of her movements; her features harmonized with her figure, for she had a high, clever, cold forehead, a strong mouth with sensual lips, and an angular, sharp chin, the effect of which was, however, diminished by her slightly turned-up, small nose, her beautifully arched eyebrows, and her large, animated, swimming blue eyes.

In her face, which was almost too full of expression for a woman, there was as much feeling, kindness and candor as there was calculation, coolness and deceit, and when she was angry and drew her upper lip up, so as to show her dazzlingly white teeth, it had even a devilish look of wickedness and cruelty, and at that time, when women still wore their own hair, the beauty of her long, chestnut plaits, which she fastened on the top of her head like a crown, was very striking. Besides this, she was remarkable for her elegant, tasteful dresses, and a bearing which united to the dignity of a lady of rank that undefinable something which makes actresses and women who belong to the higher classes of the *demi-monde* so interesting to us.

In Paris she would have been taken for a kept woman, but in Vienna the best drawing-rooms were open to her, and she was not looked upon as more respectable or as less respectable than any other aristocratic beauties.

Her husband decidedly belonged to that class of men whom that witty writer, Balzac, so delightfully calls *les hommes prédestinés* in his *Physiologie du Mariage*. Without doubt, he was a very good-looking man, but he bore that stamp of insignificance which so often conceals coarseness and vulgarity, and was one of those men who, in the long run, become unendurable to a woman of refined tastes. He had a good private income, but his wife understood the art of enjoying life, and so a deficit in the yearly accounts of the young couple became the rule, without causing the lively lady to check her noble passion in the least on that account; she kept horses and carriages, rode with the greatest boldness, had her box at the opera, and gave beautiful little suppers, which at that time was the highest aim of a Viennese woman of her class.

One of the two young diplomats who accompanied her, a young Count, belonging to a well-known family in North Germany, and who was a perfect gentleman in the highest sense of the word, was looked upon as her adorer, while the other, who was his most intimate friend, yet, in spite of his ancient name and his position as attaché to a foreign legation, gave people that distinct impression that he was an adventurer, which makes the police keep such a careful eye on some persons, and he had the reputation of being an unscrupulous and dangerous duellist. Short, thin, with a yellow complexion, with strongly-marked but engaging features, an aquiline nose and bright, dark eyes, he was the typical picture of a man who seduces women and kills men.

The handsome woman appeared to be in love with the Count, and to take an interest in his friend; at least, that was the construction that the others in the dining-room put upon the situation, as far as it could be made out from the behavior and looks of the people concerned, and especially from their looks, for it was strange how devotedly and ardently the beautiful woman’s blue eyes rested on the Count, and with what wild, diabolical sympathy she gazed at the Italian from time to time, and it was hard to guess whether there was most love or hatred in that glance. None of the four, however, who were then dining and chatting so gaily together, had any presentiment at the time that they were amusing themselves over a mine, which might explode at any moment, and bury them all.

It was the husband of the beautiful woman who provided the tinder. One day he told her that she must make up her mind to the most rigid retrenchment, give up her box at the opera, and sell her carriage and horses, if she did not wish to risk her whole position in society. Her creditors had lost all patience, and were threatening to distrain on her property, and even to put her in prison. She made no reply to this revelation, but during dinner she said to the Count, in a whisper, that she must speak to him later, and would, therefore, come to see him at his house. When it was dark, she came thickly veiled, and after she had responded to his demonstrations of affection for some time, with more patience than amiableness, she began. Their conversation is extracted from his diary.

“You are so unconcerned and happy, while misery and disgrace are threatening me!” “Please explain what you mean!” “I have incurred some debts.” “Again?” he said reproachfully, “why do you not come to me at once, for you must do it in the end, and then at least you would avoid any exposure?” “Please do not take me to task,” she replied; “you know it only makes me angry. I want some money; can you give me some?” “How much do you want?” She hesitated, for she had not the courage to name the real amount, but at last she said, in a low voice: “Five thousand florins.” It was evidently only a small portion of what she really required, so he replied: “I am sure you want more than that!” “No.” “Really not?” “Do not make me angry.”

He shrugged his shoulders, went to his strong box and gave her the money, whereupon she nodded, and giving him her hand, she said: “You are always kind, and as long as I have you, I am not afraid; but if I were to lose you, I should be the most unhappy woman in the world.” “You always have the same fears; but I shall never leave you; it would be impossible for me to separate from you,” the Count exclaimed. “And if you die?” she interrupted him hastily. “If I die?” the Count said, with a peculiar smile. “I have provided for you in that eventuality also.” “Do you mean to say” ... she stammered, flushed, and her large, lovely eyes rested on her lover with an indescribable expression in them. He, however, opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took out a document, which he gave her. It was his will. She opened it with almost indecent haste, and when she saw the amount — thirty thousand florins — she grew pale to her very lips.

It was a moment in which the germs of a crime were sown in her breast, but one of those crimes which cannot be touched by the Criminal Code. A few days after she had paid her visit to the Count, she herself received one from the Italian. In the course of conversation he took a jewel case out of his breast pocket and asked her opinion of the ornaments, as she was well-known for her taste in such matters, telling her at the same time, that it was intended as a present for an actress, with whom he was on intimate terms.—“It is a magnificent set!” she said, as she looked at it. “You have made an excellent selection.” Then she suddenly became absorbed in thought, while her nostrils began to quiver, and that touch of cold cruelty played on her lips.

“Do you think that the lady for whom this ornament is intended will be pleased with it?” the Italian asked. “Certainly,” she replied; “I myself would give a great deal to have it.” “Then may I venture to offer it to you?” the Italian said.

She blushed, but did not refuse it, but the same evening she rushed into her lover’s room in a state of the greatest excitement. “I am beside myself,” she stammered; “I have been most deeply insulted.” “By whom?” the Count asked, excitedly. “By your friend, who has dared to send me some jewelry to-day. I suppose he looks upon me as a lost woman; perhaps I am already looked upon as belonging to the *demi-monde*, and this I owe to you, to you alone, and to my mad love for you, to which I have sacrificed my honor and everything. Everything!” She threw herself down and sobbed, and would not be pacified until the Count gave her his word of honor that he would set aside every consideration for his friend, and obtain satisfaction for her at any price. He met the Italian the same evening at a card party and questioned him.

“I did not, in the first place, send the lady the jewelry, but I gave it to her myself, not, however, until she had asked me to do so.” “That is a shameful lie!” the Count shouted, furiously. Unfortunately, there were others present, and his friend took the matter seriously, so the next morning he sent his seconds to the Count.

Some of their real friends tried to settle the matter in another way, but his bad angel, his mistress, who required thirty thousand florins, drove the Count to his death. He was found in the Prater, with his friend’s bullet in his chest. A letter in his pocket spoke of suicide, but the police did not doubt for a moment that a duel had taken place. Suspicion soon fell on the Italian, but when they went to arrest him, he had already made his escape.

The husband of the beautiful, problematical woman, called on the broken-hearted father of the man who had been killed in the duel, and who had hastened to Vienna on receipt of a telegraphic message, a few hours after his arrival, and demanded the money. “My wife was your son’s most intimate friend,” he stammered, in embarrassment, in order to justify his action as well as he could. “Oh! I know that,” the old Count replied, “and female friends of that kind want to be paid immediately, and in full. Here are the thirty thousand florins.”

And our *Goldkind*? She paid her debts, and then withdrew from the scene for a while. She had been compromised, certainly, but then, she had risen in value in the eyes of those numerous men who can only adore and sacrifice themselves for a woman when her foot is on the threshold of vice and crime.

I saw her last during the Franco-German war, in the beautiful *Mirabell-garden* at Salzburg. She did not seem to feel any qualms of conscience, for she had become considerably stouter, which made her more attractive, more beautiful, and consequently, more dangerous, than she was before.

THE CARNIVAL OF LOVE

The Princess Leonie was one of those beautiful, brilliant enigmas, who irresistibly allure everyone like a Sphinx, for she was young, charming, and singularly lovely, and understood how to heighten her charms not a little by carefully-chosen dresses. She was a great lady of the right stamp, and was very intellectual into the bargain, which is not the case with all aristocratic ladies; she also took great interest in art and literature, and it was even said that she patronized one of our poets in a manner which was worthy of the Medicis, and that she strewed the beautiful roses of continual female sympathy on to his thorny path. All this was evident to everybody, and had nothing strange about it, but the world would have liked to know the history of that woman, and to look into the depths of her soul, and because people could not do this in Princess Leonie's case, they thought it very strange.

No one could read that face, which was always beautiful, always cheerful, and always the same; no one could fathom those large, dark, unfathomable eyes, which hid their secrets under the unvarying brilliancy of majestic repose, like a mountain lake, whose waters look black on account of their depth. For everybody was agreed that the beautiful princess had her secrets, interesting and precious secrets, like all other ladies of our fashionable world.

Most people looked upon her as a flirt who had no heart, and even no blood, and they asserted that she was only virtuous because the power of loving was denied her, but that she took all the more pleasure in seeing that she was loved, and that she set her trammels and enticed her victims, until they surrendered at discretion at her feet, so that she might leave them to their fate, and hurry off in pursuit of some fresh game.

Others declared that the beautiful woman had met with her romances in life, and was still having them, but, as a thorough Messalina, she knew how to conceal her adventures as cleverly as that French queen who had every one of her lovers thrown into the cold waters of the Seine, as soon as he quitted her soft, warm arms, and she was described thus to Count Otto F., a handsome cavalry officer, who had made the acquaintance of the beautiful, dangerous woman at that fashionable watering place, Karlsbad, and had fallen deeply in love with her.

Even before he had been introduced to her, the Princess had already exchanged fiery, encouraging glances with him, and when a brother officer took him to call on her, she welcomed him with a smile which appeared to promise him happiness, but after he had paid his court to her for a month, he did not seem to have made any progress, and as she possessed in a high degree the skill of being able to avoid even the shortest private interviews, it appeared as if matters would go no further than that delightful promise.

Night after night, the enamored young officer walked along the garden railings of her villa as close to her windows as possible, without being noticed by any one, and at last fortune seemed to favor him. The moon, which was nearly at the full, was shining brightly, and in its silvery light he saw a tall, female figure, with large plaits round her head, coming along the grave path; he stood still, as he thought he recognized the Princess, but as she came nearer he saw a pretty girl, whom he did not know, and who came up to the railings and said to him with a smile: “What can I do for you, Count?” mentioning his name.

“You seem to know me, Fräulein.” “Oh! I am only the Princess’s lady’s-maid.” ... “But you could do me a great favor.” “How?” she asked quickly: “You might give the Princess a letter.” ... “I should not venture to do that,” the girl replied with a peculiar, half-mocking, half-pitying smile, and with a deep curtsey, she disappeared behind the raspberry bushes which formed a hedge along the railings.

The next morning, as the Count, with several other ladies and gentlemen, was accompanying the Princess home from the pump-room, the fair coquette let her pocket-handkerchief fall just outside her house. The young officer took this for a hint, so he picked it up, concealed the letter that he had written, which he always kept about him so as to be prepared for any event, in the folds of the soft cambric, and gave it back to the Princess, who quickly put it into her pocket. That also seemed to him to be a good augury, and, in fact, in the course of a few hours he received a note in disguised handwriting, by the post, in which his bold wooing was graciously entertained, and an appointment was made for the same night in the pavilion of the Princess’s villa.

The happiness of the enamored young officer knew no bounds; he kissed the letter a hundred times, thanked the Princess when he met her in the afternoon where the band was playing by his animated looks, which she either did not or could not understand, and at night was standing an hour before the appointed time behind the wall at the bottom of the garden.

When the church clock struck eleven he climbed over it and jumped on to the ground on the other side, and looked about him carefully; then he went up to the small, white-washed summer-house, where the Princess had promised to meet him, on tiptoe. He found the door ajar, went in, and at the same moment he felt two soft arms thrown round him. “Is it you, Princess?” he asked, in a whisper, for the pavilion was in total darkness, as the venetian blinds were drawn. “Yes, Count, it is I.” ... “How cruel.” ... “I love you, but I am obliged to conceal my passion under the mask of coldness because of my social position.”

As she said this, the enamored woman, who was trembling on his breast with excitement, drew him on to a couch that occupied one side of the pavilion, and began to kiss him ardently. The lovers spent two blissful hours in delightful conversation and intoxicating pleasures; then she bade him farewell, and told him to remain where he was until she had gone back to the house. He obeyed her, but could not resist looking at her through the venetian blinds, and he saw her tall, slim figure as she went along the gravel path with an undulating walk. She wore a white boumous, which he recognized as having seen in the pump-room; her soft, black hair fell down over her shoulders, and before she disappeared into the villa she stood for a moment and looked back, but he could not see her face, as she wore a thick veil.

When Count F. met the Princess the next morning in company with other ladies, when the band was playing, she showed an amount of unconstraint which confused him, and while she was joking in the most unembarrassed manner, he turned crimson and stammered out such a lot of nonsense that the ladies noticed it, and made him the target for their wit. None of them was bolder or more confident in their attacks on him than the Princess, so that at last he looked upon the woman who concealed so much passion in her breast, and who yet could command herself so thoroughly, as a kind of miracle, and at last said to himself: “The world is right; woman is a riddle!”

The Princess remained there for some weeks longer, and always maintained the same polite and friendly, but cool and sometimes ironical, demeanor towards him, but he easily endured being looked upon as her unfortunate adorer by the world, for at least every other day a small, scented note, stamped with her arms and signed *Leonie*, summoned him to the pavilion, and there he enjoyed the full, delightful possession of the beautiful woman. It, however, struck him as strange that she would never let him see her face. Her head was always covered with a thick black veil, through which he could see her eyes, which sparkled with love, glistening; he passed his fingers through her hair, he saw her well-known dresses, and once he succeeded in getting possession of one of her pocket-handkerchiefs, on which the name *Leonie* and the princely coronet were magnificently embroidered.

When she returned to Vienna for the winter, a note from her invited him to follow her there, and as he had indefinite leave of absence from his regiment, he could obey the commands of his divinity. As soon as he arrived there he received another note, which forbade him to go to her house, but promised him a speedy meeting in his rooms, and so the young officer had the furniture elegantly renovated, and looked forward to a visit from the beautiful woman with all a lover's impatience.

At last she came, wrapped in a magnificent cloak of green velvet, trimmed with ermine, but still thickly veiled, and before she came in she made it a condition that the room in which he received her should be quite dark, and after he had put out all the lights she threw off her fur, and her coldness gave way to the most impetuous tenderness.

"What is the reason that you will never allow me to see your dear, beautiful face?" the officer asked. "It is a whim of mine, and I suppose I have the right to indulge in whims," she said, hastily. "But I so long once more to see your splendid figure and your lovely face in full daylight," the Count continued. "Very well then, you shall see me at the Opera this evening."

She left him at six o'clock, after stopping barely an hour with him, and as soon as her carriage had driven off he dressed and went to the opera. During the overture, he saw the Princess enter her box and looking dazzlingly beautiful; she was wearing the same green velvet cloak, trimmed with ermine, that he had had in his hands a short time before, but almost immediately she let it fall from her shoulders, and showed a bust which was worthy of the Goddess of Love. She spoke with her husband with much animation, and smiled with her usual cold smile, though she did not give her adorer even a passing look, but, in spite of this, he felt the happiest of mortals.

In Vienna, however, the Count was not as fortunate as he had been at Karlsbad, where he had first met her, for his beautiful mistress only came to see him once a week; often she only stopped a short time with him, and once nearly six weeks passed without her favoring him at all, and she did not even make any excuse for remaining away. Just then, however, Leonie's husband accidentally made the young officer's acquaintance at the Jockey Club, took a fancy to him, and asked him to go and see him at his house.

When he called and found the Princess alone his heart felt as if it would burst with pleasure, and seizing her hand, he pressed it ardently to his lips. "What are you doing, Count?" she said, drawing back. "You are behaving very strangely." "We are alone," the young officer whispered, "so why this mask of innocence? Your cruelty is driving me mad, for it is six weeks since you came to see me last." "I certainly think you are out of your mind," the Princess replied, with every sign of the highest indignation, and hastily left the drawing-room. Nothing else remained for the Count but to do the same thing, but his mind was in a perfect whirl, and he was quite incapable of explaining to himself the Princess's enigmatical behavior. He dined at an hotel with some friends, and when he got home he found a note in which the Princess begged him to pardon her, and promised to justify her conduct, for which purpose she would see him at eight o'clock that evening.

Scarcely, however, had he read her note, when two of his brother-officers came to see him, and asked him, with well-simulated anxiety, whether he were ill. When he said that he was perfectly well, one of them continued, laughing: "Then please explain the occurrence that is in everybody's mouth to-day, in which you play such a comical part."— "I, a comical part?" the Count shouted.— "Well, is it not very comical when you call on a lady like Princess Leonie, whom you do not know, to upbraid her for her cruelty, and most unceremoniously call her *thou*?"

That was too much; Count F. might pardon the Princess for pretending not to know him in society, but that she should make him a common laughing-stock, nearly drove him mad. "If I call the Princess *thou*," he exclaimed, "it is because I have the right to do so, as I will prove." — His comrades shrugged their shoulders, but he asked them to come again punctually at seven o'clock, and then he made his preparations.

At eight o'clock his divinity made her appearance, still thickly veiled, but on this occasion wearing a valuable sable cloak. As usual, Count F. took her into the dark-room and locked the outer door; then he opened that which led into his bedroom, and his two friends came in, each with a candle in his hand. — The lady in the sable cloak cried out in terror when Count F. pulled off her veil, but then it was his turn to be surprised, for it was not the Princess Leonie who stood before him, but her pretty lady's-maid, who, now she was discovered, confessed that love had driven her to assume her mistress's part, in which she had succeeded perfectly, on account of the similarity of their figure, eyes and hair. She had found the Count's letter in the Princess's pocket-handkerchief when they were at Karlsbad and had answered it. She had made him happy, and had heightened the illusion which her figure gave rise to by borrowing the Princess's dresses.

Of course the Count was made great fun of, and turned his back on Vienna hastily that same evening, but the pretty lady's-maid also disappeared soon after the catastrophe, and only by those means escaped from her mistress's well-merited anger; for it turned out that that gallant little individual had already played the part of her mistress more than once, and had made all those hopeless adorers of the Princess, who had found favor in her own eyes, happy in her stead.

Thus the enigma was solved which Princess Leonie seemed to have proposed to the world.

A DEER PARK IN THE PROVINCES

It is not very long ago that an Hungarian Prince, who was in an Austrian cavalry regiment, was quartered in a wealthy Austrian garrison town. The ladies of the local aristocracy naturally did everything they could to allure the new comer, who was young, good-looking, animated and amusing, into their nets, and at last one of the ripe beauties, who was now resting there on her amorous laurels, after innumerable victories on the hot floors of Viennese society, succeeded in taking him in her toils, but only for a short time, for she had very nearly reached that limit in age where, on the man's side, love ceases and esteem begins. But she had more sense than most women, and she recognized the fact in good time, and as she did not wish to give up the principal character which she played in society there so easily, she reflected as to what means she could employ to bind him to her in another manner. It is well known that the notorious Marchioness de Pompadour, who was one of the mistresses of Louis XV. of France, when her own charms did not suffice to fetter that changeable monarch, conceived the idea of securing the chief power in the State and in society for herself, by having a pavilion in the deer park, which belonged to her, and where Louis XV. was in the habit of hunting, fitted up with every accommodation of a harem, where she brought beautiful women and girls of all ranks of life to the arms of her royal lover.

Inspired by that historical example, the baroness began to arrange evening parties, balls, and private theatricals in the winter, and in the summer excursions into the country, and thus she gave the Prince, who at that time was still, so to say, at her feet, the opportunity of plucking fresh flowers. But even this clever expedient did not avail in the long run, for beautiful women were scarce in that provincial town, and the few which the local aristocracy could produce were not able to offer the Prince any fresh attractions, when he had made their closer acquaintance. At last, therefore, he turned his back on the highly-born Messalinas, and began to bestow marked attention on the pretty women and girls of the middle classes, either in the streets or when he was in his box at the theater.

There was one girl in particular, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant, who was supposed to be the most beautiful girl in the capital, on to whom his opera glass was constantly leveled, and whom he even followed occasionally without being noticed. But Baroness Pompadour soon got wind of this unprincely taste, and determined to do everything in her power to keep her lover and the whole nobility, which was threatened, from such an unheard-of disgrace, as an intrigue of a Prince with a girl of the middle classes, would have been in her eyes. “It is really sad,” the outraged baroness once said to me, “that in these days princes and monarchs choose their mistresses only from the stage, or even from the scum of the people. But it is the fault of our ladies themselves. They mistake their vocation! Ah! Where are those delightful times when the daughters of the first families looked upon it as an honor to become their princes’ mistresses?”

Consequently, the horror of the blue-blooded, aristocratic lady was intense when the Prince, in his usual, amiable, careless manner, suggested to her to people her deer park with girls of the lower orders.

“It is a ridiculous prejudice,” the Prince said on that occasion, “which obliges us to shut ourselves off from the other ranks, and to confine ourselves altogether to our own circle, for monotony and boredom are the inevitable consequences of it. How many honorable men of sense and education, and especially how many charming women and girls there are, who do not belong to the aristocracy, who would infuse fresh life and a new charm into our dull, listless society! I very much wish that a lady like you would make a beginning, and would give up this exclusiveness, which cannot be maintained in these days, and would enrich our circle with the charming daughters of middle class families.”

A wish of the Prince’s was as good as a command; so the baroness made a wry face, but she accommodated herself to the circumstances, and promised to invite some of the prettiest girls of the *plebs* to a ball in a few days. She really issued a number of invitations, and even condescended to drive to the house of each of them in person. “But I must ask one thing of you,” she said to each of the pretty girls, “and that is to come dressed as simply as possible; washing muslins will be best. The Prince dislikes all finery and ostentation and he would be very vexed with me if I were the cause of any extravagance on your part.”

The great day arrived; it was quite an event for the little town, and all classes of society were in a state of the greatest excitement. The pretty, plebeian girls, with her whom the Prince had first noticed at their head, appeared in all their innocence, in plain, washing dresses, according to the Prince's orders, with their hair plainly dressed, and without any ornaments, except their own fresh, buxom charms. When they were all captives in the den of the proud, aristocratic lioness, the poor little mice were very much terrified when suddenly the aristocratic ladies came into the ball-room, rustling in whole oceans of silks and lace, with their haughty heads changed into so many hanging gardens of Semiramis, loaded with all the treasures of India, and radiant as the sun.

At first the poor girls looked down in shame and confusion, and Baroness Pompadour's eyes glistened with all the joy of triumph, but her ill-natured pleasure did not last long, for the intrigue, on which the Prince's ignoble passions were to make shipwreck, recoiled on the highly-born lady patroness of the deer park.

It was not the aristocratic ladies in their magnificent toilettes that threw the girls from the middle classes into the shade, but, on the contrary, those pretty girls in their washing dresses, and with the plain but splendid ornament of their abundant hair looked far more charming than they would have done in silk dresses with long trains, and with flowers in their hair, and the novelty and unwontedness of their appearance there allured not only the Prince, but all the other gentlemen and officers, so that the proud granddaughters of the lions, griffins, and eagles, were quite neglected by the gentlemen, who danced almost exclusively with the pretty girls of the middle classes.

The faded lips of the baronesses and countesses uttered many a "*For Shame*!" but all in vain, neither was it any good for the Baroness to make up her mind that she would never again put a social medley before the Prince in her drawing-room, for he had seen through her intrigue, and gave her up altogether. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

She, however, consoled herself as best she could.

THE WHITE LADY

Fortuna, the goddess of chance and good luck, has always been *Cupid's* best ally and Arnold T., who was a lieutenant in a hussar regiment, was evidently a special favorite of both those roguish deities.

This good-looking, well-bred young officer had been an enthusiastic admirer of the two Countesses W., mother and daughter, during a tolerably long leave of absence, which he spent with his relations in Vienna. He had admired them from the *Prater*, and worshiped them at the opera, but he had never had an opportunity of making their acquaintance, and when he was back at his dull quarters in Galicia, he liked to think about those two aristocratic beauties. Last summer his regiment was transferred to Bohemia, to a wildly romantic district, that had been made illustrious by a talented writer, which abounded in magnificent woods, lofty mountain-forests and castles, and which was a favorite summer resort of the neighboring aristocracy.

Who can describe his joyful surprise, when he and his men were quartered in an old, weather-beaten castle in the middle of a wood, and he learnt from the house-steward who received him that the owner of the castle was the husband, and, consequently, also the father of his Viennese ideals. An hour after he had taken possession of his old-fashioned, but beautifully furnished, room in a side-wing of the castle, he put on his full-dress uniform, and throwing his dolman over his shoulders, he went to pay his respects to the Count and the ladies.

He was received with the greatest cordiality. The Count was delighted to have a companion when he went out shooting, and the ladies were no less pleased at having some one to accompany them on their walks in the forests, or on their rides, so that he felt only half on the earth, and half in the seventh heaven of Mohammedan bliss. Before supper he had time to inspect the house more closely, and even to take a sketch of the large, gloomy building from a favorable point. The ancient seat of the Counts of W. was really very gloomy; in fact it created a sinister, uncomfortable feeling. The walls, which were crumbling away here and there, and which were covered with dark ivy; the round towers, which harbored jackdaws, owls, and hawks; the Æolian harp, which complained and sighed and wept in the wind; the stones in the castle yard, which were overgrown with grass; the cloisters, in which every footstep re-echoed; the great ancestral portraits which hung on the walls, coated as it were with dark, mysterious veils by the centuries which had passed over them — all this recalled to him the legends and fairy tales of his youth, and he involuntarily thought of the *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, and of *Blue Beard*, of the cruel mistress of the Kynast, and that aristocratic tigress of the Carpathians, who obtained the unfading charms of eternal youth by bathing in human blood.

He came in to supper where he found himself for the first time in company with all the members of the family, just in the frame of mind that was suitable for ghosts, and was not a little surprised when his host told him, half smiling and half seriously, that the "White Lady" was disturbing the castle again, and that she had latterly been seen very often. "Yes, indeed," Countess Ida exclaimed; "You must take care, Baron, for she haunts the very wing where your room is." The hussar was just in the frame of mind to take the matter seriously, but, on the other hand, when he saw the dark, ardent eyes of the Countess, and then the merry blue eyes of her daughter fixed on him, any real fear of ghosts was quite out of the question with him. For Baron T. feared nothing in this world, but he possessed a very lively imagination, which could conjure up threatening forms from another world so plainly that sometimes he felt very uncomfortable at his own fancies. But on the present occasion that malicious apparition had no power over him; the ladies took care of that, for both of them were beautiful and amiable.

The Countess was a mature Venus of thirty-six, of middle height, and with the voluptuous figure of a true Viennese, with bright eyes, thick dark hair, and beautiful white teeth, while her daughter Ida, who was seventeen, had light hair and the pert little nose of the china figures of shepherdesses in the dress of the period of Louis XIV., and was short, slim, and full of French grace. Besides them and the Count, a son of twelve and his tutor were present at supper. It struck the hussar as strange that the tutor, who was a strongly-built young man, with a winning face and those refined manners which the greatest plebeian quickly acquires when brought into close and constant contact with the aristocracy, was treated with great consideration by all the family except the Countess, who treated him very haughtily. She assumed a particularly imperious manner towards her son's tutor, and she either found fault with, or made fun of, everything that he did, while he put up with it all with smiling humility.

Before supper was over their conversation again turned on to the ghost, and Baron T. asked whether they did not possess a picture of the *White Lady*. "Of course we have one," they all replied at once; whereupon Baron T. begged to be allowed to see it. "I will show it you to-morrow," the Count said. "No, Papa, now, immediately," the younger lady said mockingly; "just before the ghostly hour, such a thing creates a much greater impression."

All who were present, not excepting the boy and his tutor, took a candle and then they walked as if they had formed a torchlight procession, to the wing of the house where the hussar's room was. There was a life-size picture of the *White Lady* hanging in a Gothic passage near his room, among other ancestral portraits, and it by no means made a terrible impression on anyone who looked at it, but rather the contrary. The ghost, dressed in stiff, gold brocade and purple velvet, and with a hawk on her wrist, looked like one of those seductive Amazons of the fifteenth century, who exercised the art of laying men and game at their feet with equal skill.

"Don't you think that the *White Lady* is very like mamma?" Countess Ida said, interrupting the Baron's silent contemplation of the picture. "There is no doubt of it," the hussar replied, while the Countess smiled and the tutor turned red, and they were still standing before the picture, when a strong gust of wind suddenly extinguished all the lights, and they all uttered a simultaneous cry. The *White Lady*, the little Count whispered, but she did not come, and as it was luckily a moonlight night, they soon recovered from their momentary shock. The family retired to their apartments, while the hussar and the tutor went to their own rooms, which were situated in the wing of the castle which was haunted by the *White Lady*; the officer's being scarcely thirty yards from the portrait, while the tutor's were rather further down the corridor.

The hussar went to bed, and was soon fast asleep, and though he had rather uneasy dreams nothing further happened. But while they were at breakfast the next morning, the Count's body-servant told them, with every appearance of real terror, that as he was crossing the court-yard at midnight, he had suddenly heard a noise like bats in the open cloisters, and when he looked he distinctly saw the *White Lady* gliding slowly through them; but they merely laughed at the poltroon, and though our hussar laughed also, he fully made up his mind, without saying a word about it, to keep a look-out for the ghost that night.

Again they had supper alone, without any company, had some music and pleasant talk and separated at half-past eleven. The hussar, however, only went to his room for form's sake; he loaded his pistols, and when all was quiet in the castle, he crept down into the court-yard and took up his position behind a pillar which was quite hidden in the shade, while the moon, which was nearly at the full, flooded the cloisters with its clear, pale light.

There were no lights to be seen in the castle except from two windows, which were those of the Countess's apartments, and soon they were also extinguished. The clock struck twelve, and the hussar could scarcely breathe from excitement; the next moment, however, he heard the noise which the Count's body-servant had compared to that of bats, and almost at the same instant a white figure glided slowly through the open cloisters and passed so close to him, that it almost made his blood curdle, and then it disappeared in the wing of the castle which he and the tutor occupied.

The officer who was usually so brave, stood as though he was paralyzed for a few moments, but then he took heart, and feeling determined to make the nearer acquaintance of the spectral beauty, he crept softly up the broad staircase and took up his position in a deep recess in the cloisters, where nobody could see him.

He waited for a long time; he heard every quarter strike, and at last, just before the close of the *witching hour*, he heard the same noise like the rustling of bats, and then she came, he felt the flutter of her white dress, and she stood before him — it was indeed the Countess.

He presented his pistol at her as he challenged her, but she raised her hand menacingly. "Who are you?" he exclaimed. "If you are really a ghost, prove it, for I am going to fire." "For heaven's sake!" the White Lady whispered, and at the same instant two white arms were thrown round him, and he felt a full, warm bosom heaving against his own.

After that night the ghost appeared more frequently still. Not only did the *White Lady* make her appearance every night in the cloisters, only to disappear in the proximity of the hussar's rooms as long as the family remained at the castle, but she even followed them to Vienna.

Baron T., who went to that capital on leave of absence during the following winter, and who was the Count’s guest at the express wish of his wife, was frequently told by the footman that although hitherto she had seemed to be confined to the old castle in Bohemia, she had shown herself now here, now there, in the mansion in Vienna, in a white dress and making a noise like the wings of a bat, and bearing a striking resemblance to the beautiful Countess.

CAUGHT

A young and charming lady, who was a member of the Viennese aristocracy, went last summer, like young and charming ladies usually do, to a fashionable Austrian watering place, Carlsbad, which is much frequented by foreigners, without her husband.

As is usually the case in their rank of life, she had married from family considerations and for money; and the short spell of *Love after Marriage* was not sufficient to take deep root, and after she had satisfied family traditions and her husband's wishes by giving birth to a son and heir, they both went their way; the young, handsome and fascinating man to his clubs, the race-course, and behind the scenes at the theaters, and his charming, coquettish wife to her box at the opera, to the ice in winter, and to some fashionable watering place in the summer.

On the present occasion she brought a young, very highly-connected Pole with her from one of the latter resorts, who enjoyed all the rights and the liberty of an avowed favorite, and who had to perform all the duties of a slave.

As is usual in such cases, the lady rented a small house in one of the suburbs of Vienna, had it beautifully furnished and received her lover there. She was always dressed very attractively, sometimes as *La Belle Hélène* in Offenbach's Opera, only rather more after the ancient Greek fashion; another time as an Odalisque in the Sultan's harem, and another time as a lighthearted Suabian girl, and so forth. In winter, however, she grew tired of such meetings, and she wanted to have matters more comfortable, so she took it into her head to receive her lover in her own house. But how was it to be done? That, however, gave her no particular difficulty, as is the case with every woman, when once she has made up her mind to a thing, and after thinking it over for a day or two she went to the next *rendez-vous*, with a fully prepared plan of war.

The Pole was one of those types of handsome men which are rare; he was almost womanly in his delicate features, of the middle height, slim and well-made, and he resembled a youthful Bacchus who might very easily be made to pass for a Venus by the help of false locks; the more so as there was not even the slightest down on his lips. The lady, therefore, who was very fertile in resources, suggested to the handsome Pole that he might just as well transform himself into a handsome Polish lady, so that he might, under the cover of the ever feminine, be able to visit her undisturbed, and as it was winter, the thick, heavy, capacious dress assisted the metamorphosis.

The lady, accordingly, bought a number of very beautiful costumes for her lover, and in the course of a few days she told her husband that a charming young Polish lady, whose acquaintance she had made in the summer at Carlsbad, was going to spend the winter in Vienna, and would very frequently come and see her. Her husband listened to her with the greatest indifference, for it was one of his fundamental rules never to make love to any of his wife's female friends, and he went to his club as usual at night, and the next day had forgotten all about the Polish lady.

And now, half an hour after the husband had left the house, a cab drove up and a tall, slim, heavily veiled lady got out and went up the thickly carpeted stairs, only to be metamorphosed into the most ardent lover in the young woman's *boudoir*. The young Pole grew accustomed to his female attire so quickly that he even ventured to appear in the streets in it, and when he began to make conquests, and aristocratic gentlemen and successful speculators on the Stock Exchange looked at him significantly, and even followed him, he took a real pleasure in the part he was playing, and began to understand the pleasure a coquette feels in tormenting men.

The young Pole became more and more daring, until at last one evening he went to a private box at the opera, wrapped in an ermine cloak, on to which his dark, false curls fell in heavy waves.

A handsome young man in a box opposite to him ogled him incessantly from the first moment, and the young Pole responded in a manner which made the other bolder every minute. At the end of the third act, the box opener brought the fictitious Venus a small bouquet with a card concealed in it, on which was written in pencil: “You are the most lovely woman in the world, and I implore you on my knees to grant me an interview.” The young Pole read the name of the man who had been captivated so quickly, and, with a peculiar smile, wrote on a card on which nothing but the name

“Valeska” was printed: “After the theater,” and sent Cupid’s messenger back with it.

When the spurious Venus was about to enter her carriage after the performance, thickly veiled and wrapped in her ermine cloak, the handsome young man was standing by it with his hat off, and he opened the door for her. She was kind enough to allow him to get in with her and during their drive she talked to him in the most charming manner, but she was cruel enough to dismiss him without pity before they reached her house, and this she did every time. For she went to the theater each night now, and every evening she received an ardent note, and every evening she allowed the amorous swain to accompany her as far as her house, and men were beginning to envy him on account of his brilliant conquest, when a catastrophe happened which was very surprising for all concerned.

The husband of the lady in whose eyes the Pole had found favor, surprised the loving couple one day under circumstances which made any justification impossible. But while he, trembling with rage and jealousy, was drawing a small Circassian dagger which hung against the wall from its sheath, and as his wife threw herself, half-fainting, on to a couch, the young Pole had hastily put the false curls on to his head, and had slipped into the silk dress and the sable cloak which he had been wearing when he came into his mistress’s boudoir. “What does this mean,” the husband stammered, “Valeska?”— “Yes, sir,” the young Pole replied; “Valeska, who has come here to show your wife a few love letters, which.” ... “No, no,” the deceived, but nevertheless guilty, husband said in imploring accents; “no, that is quite unnecessary.” And at the same time he put the dagger back into its sheath. “Very well then, there is a truce between us,” the Pole observed coolly, “but do not forget what weapons I possess, and which I mean to retain against all contingencies.”

Then the gentlemen bowed politely to each other, and the unexpected meeting came to an end.

From that time forward, the terms on which the young married couple lived together assumed the character of that everlasting peace, which President Grant once promised to the whole world in his message to all nations. The young woman did not find it necessary to make her lover put on petticoats, and the husband constantly accompanied the real Valeska a good deal further than he did the false one on that memorable occasion.

CHRISTMAS EVE

"The Christmas-eve supper! Oh! no, I shall never go in for that again!" Stout Henri Templier said that in a furious voice, as if some one had proposed some crime to him, while the others laughed and said:

"What are you flying into a rage about?"

"Because a Christmas-eve supper played me the dirtiest trick in the world, and ever since I have felt an insurmountable horror for that night of imbecile gayety."

"Tell us what it is?"

"You want to know what it was? Very well then, just listen.

"You remember how cold it was two years ago at Christmas; cold enough to kill poor people in the streets. The Seine was covered with ice; the pavements froze one's feet through the soles of one's boots, and the whole world seemed to be at the point of going to pot.

"I had a big piece of work on, and so I refused every invitation to supper, as I preferred to spend the night at my writing table. I dined alone and then began to work. But about ten o'clock I grew restless at the thought of the gay and busy life all over Paris, at the noise in the streets which reached me in spite of everything, at my neighbors' preparations for supper, which I heard through the walls. I hardly knew any longer what I was doing; I wrote nonsense, and at last I came to the conclusion that I had better give up all hope of producing any good work that night.

"I walked up and down my room; I sat down and got up again. I was certainly under the mysterious influence of the enjoyment outside, and I resigned myself to it. So I rang for my servant and said to her:

"'Angela, go and get a good supper for two; some oysters, a cold partridge, some crayfish, hams and some cakes. Put out two bottles of champagne, lay the cloth and go to bed.'

"She obeyed in some surprise, and when all was ready, I put on my great coat and went out. A great question was to be solved: 'Whom was I going to bring in to supper?’ My female friends had all been invited elsewhere, and if I had wished to have one, I ought to have seen about it beforehand, so I thought that I would do a good action at the same time, and I said to myself:

“‘Paris is full of poor and pretty girls who will have nothing on their table to-night, and who are on the look out for some generous fellow. I will act the part of Providence to one of them this evening; and I will find one if I have to go into every pleasure resort, and have to question them and hunt for one till I find one to my choice.’ And I started off on my search.

“I certainly found many poor girls, who were on the look-out for some adventure, but they were ugly enough to give any man a fit of indigestion, or thin enough to freeze as they stood if they had stopped, and you all know that I have a weakness for stout women. The more flesh they have, the better I like them, and a female colossus would drive me out of my senses with pleasure.

“Suddenly, opposite the Théâtre des Variétés, I saw a face to my liking. A good head, and then two protuberances, that on the chest very beautiful, and that on the stomach simply surprising; it was the stomach of a fat goose. I trembled with pleasure, and said:

“‘By Jove! What a fine girl!’

“It only remained for me to see her face. A woman’s face is the dessert, while the rest is ... the joint.

“I hastened on, and overtook her, and turned round suddenly under a gas lamp. She was charming, quite young, dark, with large, black eyes, and I immediately made my proposition, which she accepted without any hesitation, and a quarter of an hour later, we were sitting at supper in my lodgings. ‘Oh! how comfortable it is here,’ she said as she came in, and she looked about her with evident satisfaction at having found a supper and a bed, on that bitter night. She was superb; so beautiful that she astonished me, and so stout that she fairly captivated me.

“She took off her cloak and hat, sat down and began to eat; but she seemed in low spirits, and sometimes her pale face twitched as if she were suffering from some hidden sorrow.

“‘Have you anything troubling you?’ I asked her.

“‘Bah! Don’t let us think of troubles!’

“And she began to drink. She emptied her champagne glass at a draught, filled it again, and emptied it again, without stopping, and soon a little color came into her cheeks, and she began to laugh.

“I adored her already, kissed her continually, and discovered that she was neither stupid, nor common, nor coarse as ordinary street-walkers are. I asked her for some details about her life, but she replied:

“‘My little fellow, that is no business of yours!’ Alas! an hour later....

“At last it was time to go to bed, and while I was clearing the table, which had been laid in front of the fire, she undressed herself quickly, and got in. My neighbors were making a terrible din, singing and laughing like lunatics, and so I said to myself:

“‘I was quite right to go out and bring in this girl; I should never have been able to do any work.’

“At that moment, however, a deep groan made me look round, and I said:

“‘What is the matter with you, my dear?’

“She did not reply, but continued to utter painful sighs, as if she were suffering horribly, and I continued:

“‘Do you feel ill?’ And suddenly she uttered a cry, a heartrending cry, and I rushed up to the bed, with a candle in my hand.

“Her face was distorted with pain, and she was wringing her hands, panting and uttering long, deep groans, which sounded like a rattle in the throat, and which are so painful to hear, and I asked her in consternation:

“‘What is the matter with you? Do tell me what is the matter.’

“‘Oh! my stomach! my stomach!’ she said. I pulled up the bed-clothes, and I saw ... My friends, she was in labor.

“Then I lost my head, and I ran and knocked at the wall with my fists, shouting: ‘Help! help!’

“My door was opened almost immediately, and a crowd of people came in, men in evening dress, women in low necks, harlequins, Turks, Musketeers, and this inroad startled me so, that I could not explain myself, and they, who had thought that some accident had happened, or that a crime had been committed, could not understand what was the matter. At last, however, I managed to say:

“‘This ... this ... woman ... is being confined.’

“Then they looked at her, and gave their opinion, and a Friar, especially, declared that he knew all about it, and wished to assist nature, but as they were all as drunk as pigs, I was afraid that they would kill her, and I rushed downstairs without my hat, to fetch an old doctor, who lived in the next street. When I came back with him, the whole house was up; the gas on the stairs had been relighted, the lodgers from every floor were in my room, while four boatmen were finishing my champagne and lobsters.

"As soon as they saw me they raised a loud shout, and a milkmaid presented me with a horrible little wrinkled specimen of humanity, that was mewing like a cat, and said to me:

"'It is a girl.'

"The doctor examined the woman, declared that she was in a dangerous state, as the event had occurred immediately after supper, and he took his leave, saying he would immediately send a sick nurse and a wet nurse, and an hour later, the two women came, bringing all that was requisite with them.

"I spent the night in my armchair, too distracted to be able to think of the consequences, and almost as soon as it was light, the doctor came again, who found his patient very ill, and said to me:

"'Your wife, Monsieur....'

"'She is not my wife,' I interrupted him.

"'Very well then, your mistress; it does not matter to me.'

"He told me what must be done for her, what her diet must be, and then wrote a prescription.

"What was I to do? Could I send the poor creature to the hospital? I should have been looked upon as a brute in the house and in all the neighborhood, and so I kept her in my rooms, and she had my bed for six weeks.

"I sent the child to some peasants at Poissy to be taken care of, and she still costs me fifty francs a month, for as I had paid at first, I shall be obliged to go on paying as long as I live, and later on, she will believe that I am her father. But to crown my misfortunes, when the girl had recovered ... I found that she was in love with me, madly in love with me, the baggage!"

"Well?"

"Well, she had grown as thin as a homeless cat, and I turned the skeleton out of doors, but she watches for me in the streets, hides herself, so that she may see me pass, stops me in the evening when I go out, in order to kiss my hand, and, in fact, worries me enough to drive me mad; and that is why I never keep Christmas eve now."

WORDS OF LOVE

Sunday. —

You do not write to me, I never see you, you never come, so I must suppose that you have ceased to love me. But why? What have I done? Pray tell me, my own dear love. I love you so much, so dearly! I should like always to have you near me, to kiss you all day while I called you every tender name that I could think of. I adore you, I adore you, I adore you, my beautiful cock. — Your affectionate hen,

SOPHIE.

Monday. —

My dear friend,

You will absolutely understand nothing of what I am going to say to you, but that does not matter, and if my letter happens to be read by another woman, it may be profitable to her.

Had you been deaf and dumb, I should no doubt have loved you for a very long time, and the cause of what has happened is, that you can talk; that is all.

In love, you see, dreams are always made to sing, but in order that they might do so, they must not be interrupted, and when one talks between two kisses, one always interrupts that frenzied dream which our souls indulge in, unless they utter sublime words; and sublime words do not come out of the little mouths of pretty girls.

You do not understand me at all, do you? So much the better, and I will go on. You are certainly one of the most charming and adorable women whom I have ever seen.

Are there any eyes on earth that contain more dreams than yours, more unknown promises, greater depths of love? I do not think so. And when that mouth of yours, with its two round lips, smiles, and shows the glistening white teeth, one is tempted to say that there issues from this ravishing mouth ineffable music, something inexpressibly delicate, a sweetness which extorts sighs.

It is then that you quietly call out to me, my great and renowned “lady-killer,” and it then seems to me as though I had suddenly found an entrance into your thoughts, which I can see is ministering to your soul — that little soul of a pretty, little creature, yes, pretty, but — and that is what troubles me, don’t you see, troubles me more than tongue can tell. I would much prefer never to see you at all.

You go on pretending not to understand anything, do you not? I calculate on that.

Do you remember the first time you came to see me at my residence? How gaily you stepped inside, an odor of violets, which clung to your skirts, heralding your entrance; how we regarded each other, for ever so long, without uttering a word, after which we embraced like two fools.... Then ... then from that time to this, we have never exchanged a word.

But when we separated, did not our trembling hands and our eyes say many things, things ... which cannot be expressed in any language. At least, I thought so; and when you went away, you murmured:

“We shall meet again soon!”

That was all you said, and you will never guess what delightful dreams you left me, all that I, as it were, caught a glimpse of, all that I fancied I could guess in your thoughts.

You see, my poor child, for men who are not stupid, who are rather refined and somewhat superior, love is such a complicated instrument, that the merest trifle puts it out of order. You women never perceive the ridiculous side of certain things when you love, and you fail to see the grotesqueness of some expressions.

Why does a word which sounds quite right in the mouth of a small, dark woman, seem quite wrong and funny in the mouth of a fat, light-haired woman? Why are the wheedling ways of the one, altogether out of place in the other?

Why is it that certain caresses which are delightful from the one, should be wearisome from the other? Why? Because in everything, and especially in love, perfect harmony, absolute agreement in motion, voice, words, and in demonstrations of tenderness, are necessary, with the person who moves, speaks and manifests affection; it is necessary in age, in height, in the color of the hair, and in the style of beauty.

If a woman of thirty-five, who has arrived at the age of violent, tempestuous passion, were to preserve the slightest traces of the caressing archness of her love affairs at twenty, were not to understand that she ought to express herself differently, look at her lover differently, and kiss him differently were not to see that she ought to be Dido and not a Juliette, she would infallibly disgust nine lovers out of ten, even if they could not account to themselves for their estrangement. Do you understand me? No. I hoped so.

From the time that you turned on your tap of tenderness, it was all over for me, my dear friend. Sometimes we would embrace for five minutes, in one interminable kiss, one of those kisses which make lovers close their eyes, as if part of it would escape through their looks, as if to preserve it entire in that clouded soul which it is ravaging. And then, when our lips separated, you would say to me:

"That was nice, you fat old dog."

At such moments, I could have beaten you; for you gave me successively all the names of animals and vegetables which you doubtless found in some *cookery book*, or *Gardener's Manual*. But that is nothing.

The caresses of love are brutal, bestial, and if one comes to think of it, grotesque! ... Oh! My poor child, what joking elf, what perverse sprite could have prompted the concluding words of your letter to me? I have made a collection of them, but out of love for you, I will not show them to you.

And you really sometimes said things which were quite inopportune, and you managed now and then to let out an exalted: *I love you!* on such singular occasions, that I was obliged to restrain a strong desire to laugh. There are times when the words: *I love you!* are so out of place, that they become indecorous; let me tell you that.

But you do not understand me, and many other women will also not understand me, and think me stupid, though that matters very little to me. Hungry men eat like gluttons, but people of refinement are disgusted at it, and they often feel an invincible dislike for a dish, on account of a mere trifle. It is the same with love, as it is with cookery.

What I cannot comprehend, for example, is, that certain women who fully understand the irresistible attraction of fine, embroidered stockings, the exquisite charm of shades, the witchery of valuable lace concealed in the depths of their underclothing, the exciting jest of hidden luxury, and all the subtle delicacies of female elegance, never understand the invincible disgust with which words that are out of place, or foolishly tender, inspire us.

At times coarse and brutal expressions work wonders, as they excite the senses, and make the heart beat, and they are allowable at the hours of combat. Is not that sentence of Cambronne's sublime?

Nothing shocks us that comes at the right time; but then, we must also know when to hold our tongue, and to avoid phrases *à la Paul de Kock*, at certain moments.

And I embrace you passionately, on the condition that you say nothing,

RENE.

A DIVORCE CASE

M. Chassel advocate, rises to speak: Mr. President and gentlemen of the jury. The cause that I am charged to defend before you, requires medicine rather than justice; and is much more a case of pathology than a case of ordinary law. At first blush the facts seem very simple.

A young man, very rich, with a noble and cultivated mind, and a generous heart, becomes enamored of a young lady, who is the perfection of beauty, more than beautiful, in fact; she is adorable, besides being as gracious, as she is charming, as good and true as she is tender and pretty, and he marries her. For some time, he comports himself towards her not only as a devoted husband, but as a man full of solicitude and tenderness. Then he neglects her, misuses her, seems to entertain for her an insurmountable aversion, an irresistible disgust. One day he even strikes her, not only without any cause, but also without the faintest pretext. I am not going, gentlemen, to draw a picture of silly allurements, which no one would comprehend. I shall not paint to you the wretched life of those two beings, and the horrible grief of this young woman. It will be sufficient to convince you, if I read some fragments from a journal written up every day by that poor young man, by that poor fool! For it is in the presence of a fool, gentlemen, that we now find ourselves, and the case is all the more curious, all the more interesting, seeing that, in many points, it recalls the insanity of the unfortunate prince who recently died, of the witless king who reigned platonically over Bavaria. I shall hence designate this case — poetic folly.

You will readily call to mind all that has been told of that most singular prince. He caused to be erected amid the most magnificent scenery his kingdom afforded, veritable fairy castles. The reality even of the beauty of the things themselves, as well as of the places, did not satisfy him. He invented, he created, in these improbable manors, factitious horizons, obtained by means of theatrical artifices, changes of view, painted forests, fabled empires, in which the leaves of the trees became precious stones. He had the Alps, and glaciers, steppes, deserts of sand made hot by a blazing sun; and at nights, under the rays of the real moon, lakes which sparkled from below by means of fantastic electric lights. Swans floated on the lakes which glistened with skiffs, while an orchestra, composed of the finest executants in the world, inebriated with poetry the soul of the royal fool. That man was chaste, that man was a virgin. He lived only to dream, his dream, his dream divine. One evening he took out with him in his boat, a lady, young and beautiful, a great artiste, and he begged her to sing. Intoxicated herself by the magnificent scenery, by the languid softness of the air, by the perfume of flowers, and by the ecstacy of that prince, both young and handsome, she sang, she sang as women sing who have been touched by love; then, overcome, trembling, she falls on the bosom of the king in order to seek out his lips. But he throws her into the lake, and seizing his oars, rows back to the shore, without concerning himself, whether anybody has saved her or not.

Gentlemen of the jury, we find ourselves in presence of a case similar in every way to that. I shall say no more now, except to read some passages from the journal which we unexpectedly came upon in the drawer of an old secretary.

How sad and weary is everything; always the same, always hateful. How I dream of a land more beautiful, more noble, more varied. What a poor conception they have of their God, if their God existed, or if he had not created other things, elsewhere. Always woods, little woods, waves which resemble waves, plains which resemble plains, everything is sameness and monotony. And Man? Man? What a horrible animal! wicked, haughty and repugnant!

It is essential to love, to love perdition, without seeing that which one loves. For, to see is to comprehend, and to comprehend is to embrace. It is necessary to love, to become intoxicated by it, just as one gets drunk with wine, even to the extent that one knows no longer what one is drinking. And to drink, to drink, to drink, without drawing breath, day and night!

I have found her, I believe. She has about her something ideal which does not belong to this world, and which furnishes wings to my dream. Ah! my dream! How it reveals to me beings different from what they really are! She is a blonde, a delicate blonde, with hair whose delicate shade is inexpressible. Her eyes are blue! Only blue eyes can penetrate my soul. All women, the woman who lives in my heart, reveal themselves to me in the eye, only in the eyes. Oh! what a mystery, what a mystery is the eye! The whole universe lives in it, inasmuch as it sees, inasmuch as it reflects. It contains the universe, both things and beings, forests and oceans, men and beasts, the settings of the sun, the stars, the arts — all, all, it sees; it collects and absorbs all; and there is still more in it; the eye of itself has a soul; it has in it the man who thinks, the man who loves, the man who laughs, the man who suffers! Oh! regard the blue eyes of women, those eyes that are as deep as the sea, as changeful as the sky, so sweet, so soft, soft as the breezes, sweet as music, luscious as kisses; and transparent, so clear that one sees behind them, discerns the soul, the blue soul which colors them, which animates them, which electrifies them. Yes, the soul has the color of the looks. The blue soul alone contains in itself that which dreams; it bears its azure to the floods and into space. The eye! Think of it, the eye! It imbibes the visible life, in order to nourish thought. It drinks in the world, color, movement, books, pictures, all that is beautiful, all that is ugly, and weaves ideas out of them. And when it regards us, it gives us the sensation of a happiness that is not of this earth. It informs us of that of which we have always been ignorant; it makes us comprehend that the realities of our dreams are but noisome ordures.

I love her too for her walk. “Even when the bird walks one feels that it has wings,” as the poet has said. When she passes one feels that she is of another race from ordinary women, of a race more delicate, and more divine. I shall marry her to-morrow. But I am afraid, I am afraid of so many things!

Two beasts, two dogs, two wolves, two foxes, cut their way through the plantation and encounter one another. One of each two is male, the other female. They couple. They couple in consequence of an animal instinct, which forces them to continue the race, their race, the one from which they have sprung, the hairy coat, the form, movements and habitudes. The whole of the animal creation do the same without knowing why.

We human beings, also.

It is for this I have married; I have obeyed that insane passion which throws us in the direction of the female.

She is my wife. In accordance with my ideal desires, she comes very nearly to realize my unrealizable dream. But in separating from her, even for a second, after I have held her in my arms, she becomes no more than the being whom nature has made use of, to disappoint all my hopes.

Has she disappointed them? No. And why have I grown weary of her, become loath even to touch her; she cannot graze even the palm of my hand, or the tip of my lips, but my heart throbs with unutterable disgust, not perhaps disgust of her, but a disgust more potent, more widespread, more loathsome; the disgust, in a word, of carnal love so vile in itself that it has become for all refined beings, a shameful thing, which is necessary to conceal, which one never speaks of save in a whisper, nor without blushing.

I can no longer bear the idea of my wife coming near me, calling me by name, with a smile; I cannot look at her, nor touch even her arm, I cannot do it any more. At one time I thought to be kissed by her, would be to transport me to St. Paul’s seventh heaven. One day, she was suffering from one of those transient fevers, and I smelled in her breath, a subtle, slight almost imperceptible puff of human putridity; I was completely overthrown.

Oh! the flesh, with its seductive and eager smell, a putrefaction which walks, which thinks, which speaks, which looks, which laughs, in which nourishment ferments and rots, which, nevertheless, is rose-colored, pretty, tempting, deceitful as the soul itself.

Why flowers alone, which smell so sweet, those large flowers, glittering or pale, whose tones and shades make my heart tremble and trouble my eyes. They are so beautiful, their structure is so finished, so varied and sensual, semi-opened like human organs, more tempting than mouths, and streaked with turned up lips, teeth, flesh, seed of life powders, which, in each, gives forth a distinct perfume.

They reproduce themselves, they alone, in the world, without polluting their inviolable race, shedding around them the divine influence of their love, the odoriferous incense of their caresses, the essence of their incomparable body, of their body adorned with every grace, with every elegances of every shape and form; who have likewise the coquetry of every hue of color, and the inebriating seduction of every variety of perfume.

FRAGMENTS WHICH WERE SELECTED SIX MONTHS LATER.

I love flowers, not as flowers, but as material and delicious beings; I pass my days and my nights in beds of flowers, where they have been concealed from the public view like the women of a harem.

Who knows, except myself, the sweetness, the infatuation, the quivering, carnal, ideal, superhuman ecstacy of these tendernesses; and those kisses upon the bare flesh of a rose, upon the blushing flesh, upon the white skin, so miraculously different, delicate, rare, subtle, unctuous, of these adorable flowers!

I have flower-beds that no one has seen except myself, and which I tend myself.

I enter there as one would glide into a place of secret pleasure. In the lofty glass gallery, I pass first through a collection of enclosed carollas, half open or in full bloom, which incline towards the ground, or towards the roof. This is the first kiss they have given me.

The flowers just mentioned, these flowers which adorn the vestibule of my mysterious passions, are my servants and not my favorites.

They salute me by the change of their color and by their first inhalations. They are darlings, coquettes, arranged in eight rows to the right, eight rows, the left, and so laid out that they look like two gardens springing up from under my feet.

My heart palpitates, my eyes flash at the sight of them; my blood rushes through my veins, my soul is elated, and my hands tremble from desire as soon as I touch them. I pass on. There are three closed doors at the bottom of that gallery. I can make my choice of them. I have three harems.

But I enter most often the habitation of the orchids, my little wheedlers, by preference. Their chamber is low, suffocating. The humid and hot air make the skin moist, takes away the breath and causes the fingers to quiver. They come, these strange girls, from a country marshy, burning and unhealthy. They draw you towards them as do the sirens, are as deadly as poison, admirably fantastic, enervating, dreadful. The butterflies here would also seem to have enormous wings, tiny feet, and eyes! Yes! they have also eyes! They look at me, they see me, prodigious, incomparable beings, fairies, daughters of the sacred earth, of the impalpable air, and of hot sun rays, that mother bountiful of the universe. Yes, they have wings, they have eyes, and nuances that no painter could imitate, every charm, every grace, every form that one could dream of. These wombs are transverse, odoriferous and transparent, ever open for love and more tempting than all the flesh of women. The unimaginable designs of their little bodies inebriates the soul, and transports it to a paradise of images and of voluptuous ideals. They tremble upon their stems as though they would fly. When they do fly do they come to me? No, it is my heart that hovers o'er them, like a mystic male, tortured by love.

No wing of any animal can keep pace with them. We are alone, they and I, in the lighted prison which I have constructed for them. I regard them, I contemplate them, I admire them, I adore them, the one after the other.

How healthy, strong and rosy, a rosiness that moistens the lips of desire! How I love them! The border is frizzled, paler than their throat, where the carolla hides itself away; a mysterious mouth, seductive sugar under the tongue, exhibiting and unveiling the delicate, admirable and sacred organs of these divine little creatures which smell so exquisitely and do not speak.

I sometimes have a passion for some of them that lasts as long as their existence, which only embraces a few days and nights. I then have them taken away from the common gallery and enclosed in a pretty glass cabin, in which there murmurs a jet of water over against a tropical gazon, which has been brought from one of the Pacific Islands. And I remain close to it, ardent, feverish and tormented, knowing that its death is near, and watch it fading away, while that in thought, I possess it, aspire to its love, drink it in, and then pluck its short life with an inexpressible caress.

When he had finished the reading of these fragments, the advocate continued:

"Decency, gentlemen of the jury, hinders me from communicating to you the extraordinary avowals of this shameless, idealistic fool. The fragments that I have just submitted to you will be sufficient, in my opinion, to enable you to appreciate this instance of mental malady, less rare in our epoch of hysterical insanity and of corrupt decadence than most of us believe.

"I think, then, that my client is more entitled than any women whatever to claim a divorce, in the exceptional circumstances in which the disordered senses of her husband has placed her."

WHO KNOWS?

I

My God! My God! I am going to write down at last what has happened to me. But how can I? How dare I? The thing is so bizarre, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so silly!

If I were not perfectly sure of what I have seen, sure that there was not in my reasoning any defect, no error in my declarations, no lacune in the inflexible sequence of my observations, I should believe myself to be the dupe of a simple hallucination, the sport of a singular vision. After all, who knows?

Yesterday I was in a private asylum, but I went there voluntarily, out of prudence and fear. Only one single human being knows my history, and that is the doctor of the said asylum. I am going to write to him. I really do not know why? To disembarrass myself? For I feel as though I were being weighed down by an intolerable nightmare.

Let me explain.

I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a kind of isolated philosopher, easy-going, content with but little, harboring ill-feeling against no man, and without even having a grudge against heaven. I have constantly lived alone, consequently, a kind of torture takes hold of me when I find myself in the presence of others. How is this to be explained? I for one cannot. I am not averse from going out into the world, from conversation, from dining with friends, but when they are near me for any length of time, even the most intimate friends, they bore me, fatigue me, enervate me, and I experience an overwhelming torturing desire, to see them get up to depart, or to take themselves away, and to leave me by myself.

That desire is more than a craving; it is an irresistible necessity. And if the presence of people, with whom I find myself, were to be continued; if I were compelled, not only to listen, but also to follow, for any length of time, their conversation, a serious accident would assuredly take place. What kind of accident? Ah! who knows? Perhaps a slight paralytic stroke? Yes, probably!

I like so much to be alone that I cannot even endure the vicinage of other beings sleeping under the same roof. I cannot live in Paris, because when there I suffer the most acute agony. I lead a moral life, and am therefore tortured in my body and in my nerves by that immense crowd which swarms, which lives around even when it sleeps. Ah! the sleeping of others is more painful still than their conversation. And I can never find repose when I know, when I feel, that on the other side of a wall, several existences are interrupted by these regular eclipses of reason.

Why am I thus? Who knows? The cause of it is perhaps very simple. I get tired very soon with everything that does not emanate from me. And there are many people in similar case.

We are, on earth, two distinct races. Those who have need of others, whom others distract, engage, soothe, whom solitude harasses, pains, stupefies, like the forward movement of a terrible glacier, or the traversing of the desert; and those, on the contrary, whom others weary, tire, bore, silently torture, while isolation calms them, bathes them in the repose of independency, and plunges them into the humors of their own thoughts. In fine, there is here a normal, physical phenomenon. Some are constituted to live a life without themselves, others, to live a life within themselves. As for me, my exterior associations are abruptly and painfully short-lived, and, as they reach their limits, I experience in my whole body and in my whole intelligence, an intolerable uneasiness.

As a result of this, I became attached, or rather, I had become much attached to inanimate objects, which have for me the importance of beings, and my house has become, had become, a world in which I lived an active and solitary life, surrounded by all manner of things, furniture, familiar knick-knacks, as sympathetic in my eyes as the visages of human beings. I had filled my mansion with them, little by little, I had adorned it with them, and I felt an inward content and satisfaction, was more happy than if I had been in the arms of a desirable female, whose wonted caresses had become a soothing and delightful necessity.

I had had this house constructed in the center of a beautiful garden, which hid it from the public highways, and which was near the entrance to a city where I could find, on occasion, the resources of society, for which, at moments, I had a longing. All my domestics slept in a separate building which was situated at some considerable distance from my house, at the far end of the kitchen garden, which was surrounded by a high wall. The obscure envelopment of the nights, in the silence of my invisible and concealed habitation, buried under the leaves of the great trees, were so reposeful and so delicious, that I hesitated every evening, for several hours, before I could retire to my couch, in order to enjoy the solitude a little longer.

One day *Signad* had been played at one of the city theaters. It was the first time that I had listened to that beautiful, musical, and fairy-like drama, and I had derived from it the liveliest pleasures.

I returned home on foot, with a light step, my head full of sonorous phrases, and my mind haunted by delightful visions. It was night, the dead of night, and so dark that I could hardly distinguish the broad highway, and whence I stumbled into the ditch more than once. From the custom's-house, at the barriers to my house, was about a mile, perhaps a little more, or a leisurely walk of about twenty minutes. It was one o'clock in the morning, one o'clock or maybe half-past one; the sky had by this time cleared somewhat and the crescent appeared, the gloomy crescent of the last quarter of the moon. The crescent of the first quarter is, that which rises about five or six o'clock in the evening; is clear, gay and fretted with silver; but the one which rises after midnight is reddish, sad and desolating; it is the true Sabbath crescent. Every prowler by night has made the same observation. The first, though as slender as a thread, throws a faint joyous light which rejoices the heart and lines the ground with distinct shadows; the last, sheds hardly a dying glimmer, and is so wan that it occasions hardly any shadows.

In the distance, I perceived the somber mass of my garden, and I know not why I was seized with a feeling of uneasiness at the idea of going inside. I slowed my pace, and walked very softly, the thick cluster of trees having the appearance of a tomb in which my house was buried.

I opened my outer gate, and I entered the long avenue of sycamores, which ran in the direction of the house, arranged vault-wise like a high tunnel, traversing opaque masses, and winding round the turf lawns, on which baskets of flowers, in the pale darkness, could be indistinctly discerned.

In approaching the house, I was seized by a strange feeling, I could hear nothing, I stood still. In the trees there was not even a breath of air. "What is the matter with me then?” I said to myself. For ten years I had entered and re-entered in the same way, without ever experiencing the least inquietude. I never had any fear at nights. The sight of a man, a marauder, or a thief, would have thrown me into a fit of anger, and I would have rushed at him without any hesitation. Moreover, I was armed, I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I was anxious to resist that feeling of dread with which I was permeated.

What was it? Was it a presentiment? That mysterious presentiment which takes hold of the senses of men who have witnessed something which, to them, is inexplicable? Perhaps? Who knows?

In proportion as I advanced, I felt my skin quiver more and more, and when I was close to the wall, near the outhouses of my vast residence, I felt that it would be necessary for me to wait a few minutes before opening the door and going inside. I sat down, then, on a bench, under the windows of my drawing room. I rested there, a little fearful, with my head leaning against the wall, my eyes wide open under the shade of the foliage. For the first few minutes, I did not observe anything unusual around me; I had a humming noise in my ears, but that happened often to me. Sometimes it seemed to me that I heard trains passing, that I heard clocks striking, that I heard a multitude on the march.

Very soon, those humming noises became more distinct, more concentrated, more determinable, I was deceiving myself. It was not the ordinary tingling of my arteries which transmitted to my ears these rumbling sounds, but it was a very distinct, though very confused, noise which came, without any doubt whatever, from the interior of my house. I distinguished through the walls this continued noise, I should rather say agitation than noise, an indistinct moving about of a pile of things, as if people were tossing about, displacing, and carrying away surreptitiously all my furniture.

I doubted, however, for some considerable time yet, the evidence of my ears. But having placed my ear against one of the outhouses, the better to discover what this strange disturbance was that was inside my house, I became convinced, certain, that something was taking place in my residence, which was altogether abnormal and incomprehensible. I had no fear, but I was — how shall I express it — paralyzed by astonishment. I did not draw my revolver, knowing very well that there was no need of my doing so. I listened.

I listened a long time, but could come to no resolution, my mind being quite clear, though in myself I was naturally anxious. I got up and waited, listening always to the noise, which gradually increased, and at intervals grew very loud, and which seemed to become an impatient, angry disturbance, a mysterious commotion.

Then, suddenly, ashamed of my timidity, I seized my bunch of keys, I selected the one I wanted, I guided it into the lock, turned it twice, and, pushing the door with all my might, sent it banging against the partition.

The collision sounded like the report of a gun, and there responded to that explosive noise, from roof to basement of my residence, a formidable tumult. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled a few steps, and though I knew it to be wholly useless, I pulled my revolver out of its case.

I continued to listen for some time longer. I could distinguish now an extraordinary pattering upon the steps of my grand staircase, on the waxed floors, on the carpets, not of boots, nor of naked feet, but of iron, and wooden crutches, which resounded like cymbals. Then I suddenly discerned, on the threshold of my door, an arm chair, my large reading easy chair, which set off waddling. It went away through my garden. Others followed it, those of my drawing-room, then my sofas, dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short paws; then all my chairs, bounding like goats, and the little footstools, hopping like rabbits.

Oh! what a sensation! I slunk back into a clump of bushes where I remained crouched up, watching, meanwhile, my furniture defile past, for everything walked away, the one behind the other, briskly or slowly, according to its weight or size. My piano, my grand piano, bounded past with the gallop of a horse and a murmur of music in its sides; the smaller articles slid along the gravel like snails, my brushes, crystal, cups and saucers, which glistened in the moonlight. I saw my writing desk appear, a rare curiosity of the last century, which contained all the letters I had ever received, all the history of my heart, an old history from which I have suffered so much! Besides, there was inside of it a great many cherished photographs.

Suddenly — I no longer had any fear — I threw myself on it, seized it as one would seize a thief, as one would seize a wife about to run away; but it pursued its irresistible course, and despite my efforts and despite my anger, I could not even retard its pace. As I was resisting in desperation that insuperable force, I was thrown to the ground in my struggle with it. It then rolled me over, trailed me along the gravel, and the rest of my furniture which followed it, began to march over me, tramping on my legs and injuring them. When I loosed my hold, other articles passed over my body, just as a charge of cavalry does over the body of a dismounted soldier.

Seized at last with terror, I succeeded in dragging myself out of the main avenue, and in concealing myself again among the shrubbery, so as to watch the disappearance of the most cherished objects, the smallest, the least striking, the least unknown which had once belonged to me.

I then heard, in the distance, noises which came from my apartments, which sounded now as if the house were empty, a loud noise of shutting of doors. They were being slammed from top to bottom of my dwelling, even the door which I had just opened myself unconsciously, and which had closed of itself, when the last thing had taken its departure. I took flight also, running towards the city, and I only regained my self-composure on reaching the boulevards, where I met belated people. I rang the bell of a hotel where I was known. I had knocked the dust off my clothes with my hands, and I told the porter how that I had lost my bunch of keys, which included also that of the kitchen garden, where my servants slept in a house standing by itself, on the other side of the wall of the enclosure, which protected my fruits and vegetables from the raids of marauders.

I covered myself up to the eyes in the bed which was assigned to me; but I could not sleep, and I waited for the dawn in listening to the throbbing of my heart. I had given orders that my servants were to be summoned to the hotel at daybreak, and my *valet de chambre* knocked at my door at seven o’clock in the morning.

His countenance bore a woeful look.

“A great misfortune has happened during the night, monsieur,” said he.

“What is it?”

“Somebody has stolen the whole of monsieur’s furniture, all, everything, even to the smallest articles.”

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I was complete master of myself, bent on dissimulating, on telling no one of anything I had seen; determined on concealing and in burying in my heart of hearts, a terrible secret. I responded:

“They must then be the same people who have stolen my keys. The police must be informed immediately. I am going to get up, and I will rejoin you in a few moments.”

The investigation into the circumstances under which the robbery might have been committed lasted for five months. Nothing was found, not even the smallest of my knick-knacks, nor the least trace of the thieves. Good gracious! If I had only told them what I knew.... If I had said ... I had been locked up — I, not the thieves — and that I was the only person who had seen everything from the first.

Yes I but I knew how to keep silence. I shall never refurnish my house. That were indeed useless. The same thing would happen again. I had no desire even to re-enter the house, and I did not re-enter it; I never visited it again. I went to Paris, to the hotel, and I consulted doctors in regard to the condition of my nerves, which had disquieted me a good deal ever since that fatal night.

They advised me to travel, and I followed their council.

II

I began by making an excursion into Italy. The sunshine did me much good. During six months I wandered about from Genoa to Venice, from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, from Rome to Naples. Then I traveled over Sicily, a country celebrated for its scenery and its monuments, relics left by the Greeks and the Normans. I passed over into Africa, I traversed at my ease that immense desert, yellow and tranquil, in which the camels, the gazelles, and the Arab vagabonds, roam about, where, in the rare and transparent atmosphere, there hovers no vague hauntings, where there is never any night, but always day.

I returned to France by Marseilles, and in spite of all the Provençal gaiety, the diminished clearness of the sky made me sad. I experienced, in returning to the continent, the peculiar sensation, of an illness which I believed had been cured, and a dull pain which predicted that the seeds of the disease had not been eradicated.

I then returned to Paris. At the end of a month, I was very dejected. It was in the autumn, and I wished to make, before the approach of winter, an excursion through Normandy, a country with which I was unacquainted.

I began my journey, in the best of spirits, at Rouen, and for eight days I wandered about passive, ravished and enthusiastic, in that ancient city, in that astonishing museum of extraordinary Gothic monuments.

But, one afternoon, about four o'clock, as I was sauntering slowly through a seemingly unattractive street, by which there ran a stream as black as the ink called "Eau de Robec," my attention, fixed for the moment on the quaint, antique appearance of some of the houses, was suddenly turned away by the view of a series of second-hand furniture shops, which succeeded one another, door after door.

Ah! they had carefully chosen their locality, these sordid traffickers in antiquaries, in that quaint little street, overlooking that sinister stream of water, under those tile and slate-pointed roofs in which still grinned the vanes of byegone days.

At the end of these grim storehouses you saw piled up sculptured chests, Rouen, Sévre, and Moustier's pottery, painted statues, others of oak, Christs, Virgins, Saints, church ornaments, chasubles, capes, even sacred vases, and an old gilded wooden tabernacle, where a god had hidden himself away. Oh! What singular caverns are in those lofty houses, crowded with objects of every description, where the existence of things seems to be ended, things which have survived their original possessors, their century, their times, their fashions, in order to be bought as curiosities by new generations.

My affection for bibelots was awakened in that city of antiquaries. I went from shop to shop crossing, in two strides, the four plank rotten bridges thrown over the nauseous current of the Eau de Robec.

Heaven protect me! What a shock! One of my most beautiful wardrobes was suddenly descried by me, at the end of a vault, which was crowded with articles of every description and which seemed to be the entrance to some catacombs of a cemetery of ancient furniture. I approached my wardrobe, trembling in every limb, trembling to such an extent that I dare not touch it. I put forth my hand, I hesitated. It was indeed my wardrobe, nevertheless; a unique wardrobe of the time of Louis XIII., recognizable by anyone who had only seen it once. Casting my eyes suddenly a little farther, towards the more somber depths of the gallery, I perceived three of my tapestry covered chairs; and farther on still, my two Henry II. tables, such rare treasures that people came all the way from Paris to see them.

Think! only think in what a state of mind I now was! I advanced, haltingly, quivering with emotion, but I advanced, for I am brave, I advanced like a knight of the dark ages.

I found, at every step, something that belonged to me; my brushes, my books, my tables, my silks, my arms, everything, except the bureau full of my letters, and that I could not discover.

I walked on, descending to the dark galleries, in order to ascend next to the floors above. I was alone, I called out, nobody answered, I was alone; there was no one in that house — a house as vast and tortuous as a labyrinth.

Night came on, and I was compelled to sit down in the darkness on one of my own chairs, for I had no desire to go away. From time to time I shouted, "Hullo, hullo, somebody."

I had sat there, certainly, for more than an hour, when I heard steps, steps soft and slow, I knew not where, I was unable to locate them, but bracing myself up, I called out anew, whereupon I perceived a glimmer of light in the next chamber.

"Who is there?" said a voice.

"A buyer," I responded.

"It is too late to enter thus into a shop."

"I have been waiting for you for more than an hour," I answered.

"You can come back to-morrow."

"To-morrow I must quit Rouen."

I dared not advance, and he did not come to me. I saw always the glimmer of his light, which was shining on a tapestry on which were two angels flying over the dead on a field of battle. It belonged to me also. I said:

"Well, come here."

"I am at your service," he answered.

I got up and went towards him.

Standing in the center of a large room was a little man, very short and very fat, phenomenally fat, a hideous phenomenon.

He had a singular beard, straggling hair, white and yellow, and not a hair on his head. Not a hair!

As he held his candle aloft at arm's length in order to see me, his cranium appeared to me to resemble a little moon, in that vast chamber, encumbered with old furniture. His features were wrinkled and blown, and his eyes could not be seen.

I bought three chairs which belonged to myself, and paid at once a large sum for them, giving him merely the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered the next day before nine o’clock.

I then started off. He conducted me, with much politeness, as far as the door.

I immediately repaired to the commissaire’s office at the central police depot, and I told the commissaire of the robbery which had been perpetrated and of the discovery I had just made. He required time to communicate by telegraph with the authorities who had originally charge of the case, for information, and he begged me to wait in his office until an answer came back. An hour later, an answer came back, which was in accord with my statements.

“I am going to arrest and interrogate this man at once,” he said to me, “for he may have conceived some sort of suspicion, and smuggled away out of sight what belongs to you. Will you go and dine and return in two hours: I shall then have the man here, and I shall subject him to a fresh interrogation in your presence.”

“Most gladly, monsieur. I thank you with my whole heart.”

I went to dine at my hotel and I ate better than I could have believed. I was quite happy now; “that man was in the hands of the police,” I thought.

Two hours later I returned to the office of the police functionary, who was waiting for me.

“Well, monsieur,” said he, on perceiving me, “we have not been able to find your man. My agents cannot put their hands on him.”

Ah! I felt myself sinking.

“But ... you have at least found his house?” I asked.

“Yes, certainly; and what is more, it is now being watched and guarded until his return. As for him, he has disappeared.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yes, disappeared. He ordinarily passes his evenings at the house of a female neighbor, who is also a furniture broker, a queer sort of sorceress, the widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and cannot give any information in regard to him. We must wait until to-morrow.”

I went away. Ah! how sinister the streets of Rouen seemed to me, now troubled and haunted!

I slept so badly that I had a fit of nightmare every time I went off to sleep.

As I did not wish to appear too restless or eager, I waited till 10 o’clock the next day before reporting myself to the police.

The merchant had not reappeared. His shop remained closed.

The commissary said to me:

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The court has been made acquainted with the affair. We shall go together to that shop and have it opened, and you shall point out to me all that belongs to you."

We drove there in a cab. Police agents were stationed round the building; there was a locksmith, too, and the door of the shop was soon opened.

On entering, I could not discover my wardrobes, my chairs, my tables; I saw nothing, nothing of that which had furnished my house, no, nothing, although on the previous evening, I could not take a step without encountering something that belonged to me.

The chief commissary, much astonished, regarded me at first with suspicion.

"My God, monsieur," said I to him, "the disappearance of these articles of furniture coincides strangely with that of the merchant."

He laughed.

"That is true. You did wrong in buying and paying for the articles which were your own property, yesterday. It was that that gave him the cue."

"What seems to me incomprehensible," I replied, "is, that all the places that were occupied by my furniture are now filled by other furniture."

"Oh!" responded the commissary, "he has had all night, and has no doubt been assisted by accomplices. This house must communicate with its neighbors. But have no fear, monsieur; I will have the affair promptly and thoroughly investigated. The brigand shall not escape us for long, seeing that we are in charge of the den."

* * *

Ah! My heart, my heart, my poor heart, how it beat!

I remained a fortnight at Rouen. The man did not return. Heavens! good heavens! That man, what was it that could have frightened and surprised him!

But, on the sixteenth day, early in the morning, I received from my gardener, now the keeper of my empty and pillaged house, the following strange letter:

Monsieur:

I have the honor to inform monsieur, that there happened something, the evening before last, which nobody can understand, and the police no more than the rest of us. The whole of the furniture has been returned, not one piece is missing — everything is in its place, up to the very smallest article.

The house is now the same in every respect as it was before the robbery took place. It is enough to make one lose one's head. The thing took place during the night Friday — Saturday. The roads are dug up as though the whole barrier had been dragged from its place up to the door. The same thing was observed the day after the disappearance of the furniture.

We are anxiously expecting monsieur, whose very humble and obedient servant, I am,

Raudin, Phillipe.

Ah! no, no, ah! never, never, ah! no. I shall never return there!

I took the letter to the commissary of police.

"It is a very dexterous restitution," said he. "Let us bury the hatchet. We shall, however, nip the man one of these days."

But he has never been nipped. No. They have not nipped him, and I am afraid of him now, as though he were a ferocious animal that had been let loose behind me.

Inexplicable! It is inexplicable, this monster of a moon-struck skull! We shall never get to comprehend it. I shall not return to my former residence. What does it matter to me? I am afraid of encountering that man again, and I shall not run the risk.

I shall not risk it! I shall not risk it! I shall not risk it!

And if he returns, if he takes possession of his shop, who is to prove that my furniture was on his premises? There is only my testimony against him; and I feel that that is not above suspicion.

Ah! no! This kind of existence was no longer possible. I was not able to guard the secret of what I had seen. I could not continue to live like the rest of the world, with the fear upon me that those scenes might be re-enacted.

I have come to consult the doctor who directs this lunatic asylum, and I have told him everything.

After he had interrogated me for a long time, he said to me:

"Will you consent, monsieur, to remain here for some time?"

"Most willingly, monsieur."

"You have some means?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you have isolated apartments?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Would you care to receive any friends?"

“No, monsieur, no, nobody. The man from Rouen might take it into his head to pursue me here to be revenged on me.”

And I have been alone, alone, all, all alone, for three months. I am growing tranquil by degrees. I have no longer any fears. If the antiquary should become mad ... and if he should be brought into this asylum! Even prisons themselves are not places of security.

PAUL’S MISTRESS

The Restaurant Grillon, a small commonwealth of boatmen, was slowly emptying. In front of the door all was a tumult of cries and calls, while the jolly dogs in white flannels gesticulated with oars on their shoulders.

The ladies in bright spring toilets stepped aboard the skiffs with care, and seating themselves astern, arranged their dresses, while the landlord of the establishment, a mighty individual with a red beard, of renowned strength, offered his hand to the pretty dears, with great self-possession, keeping the frail craft steady.

The rowers, bare-armed, with bulging chests, took their places in their turn, posing for their gallery, as they did so, a gallery consisting of middle class people dressed in their Sunday clothes, of workmen and soldiers leaning upon their elbows on the parapet of the bridge, all taking a great interest in the sight.

The boats one by one cast off from the landing stage. The oarsmen bent themselves forward and then threw themselves backwards with an even swing, and under the impetus of the long curved oars, the swift skiffs glided along the river, got far away, grew smaller and finally disappeared under the other bridge, that of the railway, as they descended the stream towards La Grenouillère. One couple only remained behind. The young man, still almost beardless, slender, and of pale countenance, held his mistress, a thin little brunette, with the gait of a grasshopper, by the waist; and occasionally they gazed into each others eyes. The landlord shouted:

“Come, Mr. Paul, make haste,” and they drew near.

Of all the guests of the house, Mr. Paul was the most liked and most respected. He paid well and punctually, while the others hung back for a long time, if indeed they did not vanish insolvent. Besides which he acted as a sort of walking advertisement for the establishment, inasmuch as his father was a senator. And when a stranger would inquire: “Who on earth is that little chap who thinks so much of himself because of his girl?” some habituè would reply, half-aloud, with a mysterious and important air: “Don’t you know? That is Paul Baron, a senator’s son.”

And invariably the other could not restrain himself from exclaiming:

“Poor devil! He is not half mashed.”

Mother Grillon, a worthy and good business woman, described the young man and his companion as “her two turtle-doves,” and appeared quite moved by this passion, profitable for her house.

The couple advanced at a slow pace; the skiff, Madeleine, was ready, when at the moment of embarking therein they kissed each other, which caused the public collected on the bridge to laugh, and Mr. Paul taking the oars, they left also for La Grenonillère.

When they arrived it was just upon three o’clock and the large floating café overflowed with people.

The immense raft, sheltered by a tarpaulin roof, is attached to the charming island of Croissy by two narrow foot bridges, one of which leads into the center of this aquatic establishment, while the other unites its end with a tiny islet planted with a tree and surnamed “The Flower Pot,” and thence leads to land near the bath office.

Mr. Paul made fast his boat alongside the establishment, climbed over the railing of the café and then grasping his mistress’s hand assisted her out of the boat and they both seated themselves at the end of a table opposite each other.

On the opposite side of the river along the market road, a long string of vehicles was drawn up. Fiacres alternated with the fine carriages of the swells; the first, clumsy, with enormous bodies crushing the springs, drawn by a broken down hack with hanging head and broken knees; the second, slightly built on light wheels, with horses slender and straight, their heads well up, their bits snowy with foam, while the coachman, solemn in his livery, his head erect in his high collar, waited bolt upright, his whip resting on his knee.

The bank was covered with people who came off in families, or in gangs, or two by two, or alone. They plucked blades of grass, went down to the water, remounted the path, and all having attained the same spot, stood still awaiting the ferryman. The clumsy punt plied incessantly from bank to bank, discharging its passengers on to the island. The arm of the river (named the Dead Arm) upon which this refreshment wharf lay, appeared asleep, so feeble was the current. Fleets of yawls, of skiffs, of canoes, of podoscaphs (a light boat propelled by wheels set in motion by a treadle), of gigs, of craft of all forms and of all kinds, crept about upon the motionless stream, crossing each other, intermingling, running foul of one another, stopping abruptly under a jerk of the arms to shoot off afresh under a sudden strain of the muscles gliding swiftly along like great yellow or red fishes.

Others arrived incessantly; some from Chaton up the stream; others from Bougival down it; laughter crossed the water from one boat to another, calls, admonitions or imprecations. The boatmen exposed the bronzed and knotted flesh of their biceps to the heat of the day; and similar to strange flowers, which floated, the silk parasols, red, green, blue, or yellow, of the ladies seated near the helm, bloomed in the sterns of the boats.

A July sun flamed high in the heavens; the atmosphere seemed full of burning merriment: not a breath of air stirred the leaves of the willows or poplars.

Down there the inevitable Mont-Valerien erected its fortified ramparts, tier above tier, in the intense light; while on the right the divine slopes of Louveniennes following the bend of the river disposed themselves in a semi-circle, displaying in their order across the rich and shady lawns, of large gardens, the white walls of country seats.

Upon the outskirts of La Grenonillère a crowd of promenaders moved about beneath the giant trees which make this corner of the island the most delightful park in the world.

Women and girls with breasts developed beyond all measurement, with exaggerated bustles, their complexions plastered with rouge, their eyes daubed with charcoal, their lips blood-red, laced up, rigged out in outrageous dresses — trailed the crying bad taste of their toilets over the fresh green sward; while beside them young men postured in their fashion-plate accouterments with light gloves, varnished boots, canes, the size of a thread, and single eye-glasses punctuating the insipidity of their smiles.

The island is narrow opposite La Grenonillère, and on its other side, where also a ferry-boat plies, bringing people unceasingly across from Croissy, the rapid branch of the river, full of whirlpools and eddies and foam, rushes along with the strength of a torrent.

A detachment of pontoon-soldiers, in the uniform of artillerymen, is encamped upon this bank, and the soldiers seated in a row on a long beam watched the water flowing.

In the floating establishment there was a boisterous and uproarious crowd. The wooden tables upon which the spilt refreshments made little sticky streams, were covered with half empty glasses and surrounded by half tipsy individuals. All this crowd shouted, sang and brawled. The men, their hats at the backs of their heads, their faces red, with the brilliant eyes of drunkards, moved about vociferously in need of a row natural to brutes. The women, seeking their prey for the night, caused themselves to be treated, in the meantime; and in the free space between the tables, the ordinary local public predominated a whole regiment of boatmen, *Rowkickersup*, with their companions in short flannel petticoats.

One of them carried on at the piano and appeared to play with his feet as well as his hands; four couples bounded through a quadrille, and some young men watched them, polished and correct, who would have looked proper, if in spite of all, vice itself had appeared.

For there, one tastes in full all the pomp and vanity of the world, all its well bred debauchery, all the seamy side of Parisian society; a mixture of counter-jumpers, of strolling players, of the lowest journalists, of gentlemen in tutelage, of rotten stock-jobbers, of ill-famed debauchées, of used-up old, fast men; a doubtful crowd of suspicious characters, half-known, half gone under, half-recognized, half-cut, pickpockets, rogues, procurers of women, sharpers with dignified manners, and a bragging air, which seems to say: “I shall rend the first who treats me as a scoundrel.”

This place reeks of folly, stinks of the scum and the gallantry of the shops. Male and female there give themselves airs. There dwells an odor of love, and there one fights for a yes, or for a no, in order to sustain a worm-eaten reputation, which a stroke of the sword or a pistol bullet would destroy further.

Some of the neighboring inhabitants looked in out of curiosity every Sunday; some young men, very young, appeared there every year to learn how to live, some promenaders lounging about showed themselves there; some greenhorns wandered thither. It is with good reason named La Grenonillère. At the side of the covered wharf where they drank, and quite close to the Flower Pot, people bathed. Those among the women who possessed the requisite roundness of form came there to display their wares naked and to make clients. The rest, scornful, although well filled out with wadding, shored up with springs, corrected here and altered there, watched their sisters dabbling with disdain.

The swimmers crowded on to a little platform to dive thence head foremost. They are either straight like vine poles, or round like pumpkins, gnarled like olive branches, they are bowed over in front, or thrown backwards by the size of their stomachs and are invariably ugly, they leap into the water which splashes almost over the drinkers in the café.

Notwithstanding the great trees which overhang the floating-house, and notwithstanding the vicinity of the water a suffocating heat fills the place. The fumes of the spilt liquors mix with the effluvium of the bodies and with that of the strong perfumes with which the skin of the traders in love is saturated and which evaporate in this furnace. But beneath all these diverse scents a slight aroma of vice-powder lingered, which now disappeared and then reappeared, which one was perpetually encountering as though some concealed hand had shaken an invisible powder-puff in the air. The show was upon the river whither the perpetual coming and going of the boats attracts the eyes. The boatwomen sprawled upon their seats opposite their strong-wristed males, and contemplated with contempt the dinner hunters prowling about the island.

Sometimes when a train of boats, just started, passed at full speed, the friends who stayed ashore gave shouts, and all the people suddenly seized with madness set to work yelling.

At the bend of the river towards Chaton fresh boats showed themselves unceasingly. They came nearer and grew larger, and if only faces were recognized, the vociferations broke out anew.

A canoe covered with an awning and manned by four women came slowly down the current. She who rowed was little, thin, faded, in a cabin boy’s costume, her hair drawn up under an oil-skin cap. Opposite her, a lusty blonde, dressed as a man, with a white flannel jacket, lay upon her back at the bottom of the boat, her legs in the air, on the seat at each side of the rower, and she smoked a cigarette, while at each stroke of the oars, her chest and stomach quivered, shaken by the shock. Quite at the back, under the awning, two handsome girls, tall and slender, one dark and the other fair, held each other by the waist as they unceasingly watched their companions.

A cry arose from La Grenonillère, “There is Lesbos,” and there became all at once a furious clamor; a terrifying scramble took place; the glasses were knocked down; people clambered on to the tables; all in a frenzy of noise bawled: “Lesbos! Lesbos! Lesbos!” The shout rolled along, became indistinct, was no longer more than a kind of tremendous howl, and then suddenly it seemed to start anew, to rise into space, to cover the plain, to fill the foliage of the great trees, to extend itself to the distant slopes, to go even to the sun.

The rower, in the face of this ovation, had quietly stopped. The handsome blonde extended upon the bottom of the boat, turned her head with a careless air, as she raised herself upon her elbows; and the two girls at the back commenced laughing as they saluted the crowd.

Then the hullaballoo was doubled, making the floating establishment tremble. The men took off their hats, the women waved their handkerchiefs, and all voices, shrill or deep, together cried:

"Lesbos."

One would have said that these people, this collection of the corrupt, saluted a chief like the squadrons which fire guns when an admiral passes along the line.

The numerous fleet of boats also acclaimed the women's boat, which awoke from its sleepy motion to land rather farther off.

Mr. Paul, contrary to the others, had drawn a key from his pocket and whistled with all his might. His nervous mistress grew paler, caught him by the arm to cause him to be quiet, and upon this occasion she looked at him with fury in her eyes. But he appeared exasperated, as though borne away by jealousy of some man by deep anger, instinctive and ungovernable. He stammered, his lips quivering with indignation:

"It is shameful! They ought to be drowned like dogs with a stone about the neck."

But Madeleine instantly flew into a rage; her small and shrill voice became hissing, and she spoke volubly, as though pleading her own cause:

"And what has it to do with you — you indeed? Are they not at liberty to do what they wish since they owe nobody anything. A truce with your airs and mind your own business...."

But he cut her speech short:

"It is the police whom it concerns, and I will have them marched off to St. Lazare; so I will."

She gave a start:

"You?"

"Yes, I! And in the meantime I forbid you to speak to them, you understand, I forbid you to do so."

Then she shrugged her shoulders and grew calm in a moment:

"My friend, I shall do as I please; if you are not satisfied, be off, and instantly. I am not your wife, am I? Very well then, hold your tongue."

He made no reply and they stood face to face, their mouths tightly closed and their breathing rapid.

At the other end of the great café of wood the four women made their entry. The two in men's costumes marched in front: the one thin like an oldish tomboy, with yellow lines on her temples; the other filled out her white flannel garments with her fat, swelling out her big trousers with her buttocks; she swayed about like a fat goose with enormous legs and yielding knees. Their two friends followed them, and the crowd of boatmen thronged about to shake their hands.

They had all four hired a small cottage close to the water's edge, and they lived there as two households would have lived.

Their vice was public, recognized, patent. People talked of it as a natural thing, which almost excited their sympathy, and whispered in very low tones strange stories of dramas begotten of furious feminine jealousies, of the stealthy visit of well-known women and of actresses to the little house close to the water's edge.

A neighbor, horrified by these scandalous rumors, apprised the police, and the inspector, accompanied by a man, had come to make inquiry. The mission was a delicate one; it was impossible, in short, to reproach these women, who did not abandon themselves to prostitution with anything. The inspector, very much puzzled, indeed, ignorant of the nature of the offenses suspected, had asked questions at random, and made a lofty report conclusive of their innocence.

They laughed about it all the way to St. Germain. They walked about La Grenonillère establishment with stately steps like queens; and seemed to glory in their fame, rejoicing in the gaze that was fixed on them, so superior to this crowd, to this mob, to these plebeians.

Madeleine and her lover watched them approach and in the girl's eyes a fire lightened.

When the two first had reached the end of the table, Madeleine cried:

"Pauline!"

The large woman turned herself and stopped, continuing all the time to hold the arm of her feminine cabin boy:

"Good gracious, Madeleine.... Do come and talk to me, my dear."

Paul squeezed his fingers upon his mistress's wrist; but she said to him, with such an air:

"You know, my fine fellow, you can be off;" he said nothing and remained alone.

Then they chatted in low voices, standing all three of them. Many pleasant jests passed their lips, they spoke quickly; and Pauline looked now and then at Paul, by stealth, with a shrewd and malicious smile.

At last, putting up with it no longer, he suddenly raised himself and in a single bound was at their side, trembling in every limb. He seized Madeleine by the shoulders:

"Come. I wish it," said he. "I have forbidden you to speak to these scoundrels."

Whereupon Pauline raised her voice and set to work blackguarding him with her Billingsgate vocabulary. All the bystanders laughed; they drew near him; they raised themselves on tiptoe in order the better to see him. He remained dumbfounded under this downpour of filthy abuse. It appeared to him that these words, which came from that mouth and fell upon him, defiled him like dirt, and, in presence of the row which was beginning, he fell back, retraced his steps, and rested his elbows on the railing towards the river, turning his back upon the three victorious women.

There he stayed watching the water, and sometimes with rapid gesture as though he plucked it out, he removed with his sinewy fingers the tear which had formed in his eye.

The fact was that he was hopelessly in love, without knowing why, notwithstanding his refined instincts, in spite of his reason, in spite, indeed, of his will. He had fallen into this love as one falls into a sloughy hole. Of a tender and delicate disposition, he had dreamed of liaisons, exquisite, ideal and impassioned, and there that little bit of a woman, stupid like all girls, with an exasperating stupidity, not even pretty, thin and a spitfire, had taken him prisoner, possessing him from head to foot, body and soul. He underwent this feminine bewitchery, mysterious and all powerful, this unknown power, this prodigious domination, arising no one knows whence, from the demon of the flesh, which casts the most sensible man at the feet of some girl or other without there being anything in her to explain her fatal and sovereign power.

And there at his back he felt that some infamous thing was brewing. Shouts of laughter cut him to the heart. What should he do? He knew well, but he could not do it.

He steadily watched an angler upon the bank opposite him, and his motionless line.

Suddenly, the worthy man jerked a little silver fish, which wriggled at the end of his line, out of the river. Then he endeavored to extract his hook, hoisted and turned it, but in vain. At last, losing patience, he commenced to pull it out, and all the bleeding gullet of the beast, with a portion of its intestines, came out. Paul shuddered, rent himself to his heart-strings. It seemed to him that the hook was his love and that if he should pluck it out, all that he had in his breast would come out in the same way at the end of a curved iron fixed in the depths of his being, of which Madeleine held the line.

A hand was placed upon his shoulder; he started and turned; his mistress was at his side. They did not speak to each other; and she rested, like him, with her elbows upon the railing, her eyes fixed upon the river.

He sought for what he ought to say to her and could find nothing. He did not even arrive at disentangling his own emotions; all that he was sensible of was joy at feeling her there close to him, come back again, and a shameful cowardice, a craving to pardon everything, to permit everything, provided she never left him.

At last, at the end of some minutes, he asked her in a very gentle voice:

“Do you wish that we should leave? It will be nicer in the boat.”

She answered: “Yes, my puss.”

And he assisted her into the skiff, pressing her hands, all softened, with some tears still in his eyes. Then she looked at him with a smile and they kissed each other anew.

They re-ascended the river very slowly, skirting the bank planted with willows, covered with grass, bathed and still in the afternoon warmth. When they had returned to the Restaurant Grillon, it was barely six o’clock. Then leaving their boat they set off on foot on the island towards Bezons, across the fields and along the high poplars which bordered the river. The long grass ready to be mowed was full of flowers. The sun, which was sinking, showed himself from beneath a sheet of red light, and in the tempered heat of the closing day the floating exhalations from the grass, mingled with the damp scents from the river, filled the air with a soft languor, with a happy light, as though with a vapor of well-being.

A soft weakness overtakes the heart, and a species of communion with this splendid calm of evening, with this vague and mysterious chilliness of outspread life, with the keen and melancholy poetry which seems to arise from flowers and things, develops itself revealed at this sweet and pensive time to the senses.

He felt all that; but she did not understand anything of it, for her part. They walked side by side; and, suddenly tired of being silent, she sang. She sang with her shrill and false voice, something which pervaded the streets, an air catching the memory, which rudely destroyed the profound and serene harmony of the evening.

Then he looked at her and he felt an unsurpassable abyss between them. She beat the grass with her parasol, her head slightly inclined, contemplating her feet and singing, spinning out the notes, attempting trills, and venturing on shakes. Her smooth little brow, of which he was so fond, was at that time absolutely empty! empty! There was nothing therein but this music of a bird-organ; and the ideas which formed there by chance were like this music. She did not understand anything of him; they were now separated as if they did not live together. Did then his kisses never go any further than her lips?

Then she raised her eyes to him and laughed again. He was moved to the quick and, extending his arms in a paroxysm of love, he embraced her passionately.

As he was rumpling her dress she ended by disengaging herself, murmuring by way of compensation as she did so:

“Go; I love you well, my puss.”

But he seized her by the waist and seized by madness, carried her rapidly away. He kissed her on the cheek, on the temple, on the neck, all the while dancing with joy. They threw themselves down panting at the edge of a thicket, lit up by the rays of the setting sun, and before they had recovered breath they became friends again without her understanding his transport.

They returned, holding each other by the hand, when suddenly, across the trees, they perceived on the river, the canoe manned by the four women. The large Pauline also saw them, for she drew herself up and blew kisses to Madeleine. And then she cried:

“Until to-night!”

Madeleine replied:

“Until to-night!”

Paul believed he suddenly felt his heart enveloped in ice.

They re-entered the house for dinner.

They installed themselves in one of the arbors, close to the water, and set about eating in silence. When night arrived, they brought a candle inclosed in a glass globe, which lit them up with a feeble and glimmering light; and they heard every moment the bursting out of the shouts of the boatmen in the great saloon on the first floor.

Towards dessert, Paul, taking Madeleine's hand, tenderly said to her:

"I feel very tired, my darling; unless you have any objection, we will go to bed early."

She, however, understood the ruse, and shot an enigmatical glance at him, that glance of treachery which so readily appears at the bottom of a woman's eyes. Then having reflected she answered:

"You can go to bed if you wish, but I have promised to go to the ball at La Grenonillère."

He smiled in a piteous manner, one of those smiles with which one veils the most horrible suffering, but he replied in a coaxing but agonized tone:

"If you were very kind, we should remain here, both of us."

She indicated no with her head, without opening her mouth.

He insisted:

"I beg of you, my Bichette."

Then she roughly broke out:

"You know what I said to you. If you are not satisfied the door is open. No one wishes to keep you. As for myself, I have promised; I shall go."

He placed his two elbows upon the table, covered his face with his hands and remained there pondering sorrowfully.

The boat people came down again, bawling as usual. They set off in their vessels for the ball at La Grenonillère.

Madeleine said to Paul:

"If you are not coming, say so, and I will ask one of these gentlemen to take me."

Paul rose:

"Let us go!" murmured he.

And they left.

The night was black, full of stars, overpowered by a burning air, by oppressive breaths of wind, burdened with heat and emanations, with living germs, which, mixed with the breeze, destroyed its freshness. It imparted to the face a heated caress, made one breathe more quickly, gasp a little, so thick and heavy did it seem. The boats started on their way bearing venetian lanterns at the prow. It was not possible to distinguish the craft, but only these little colored lights, swift and dancing up and down like glow-worms in a fit; and voices sounded from all sides in the shade. The young people's skiff glided gently along. Now and then, when a fast boat passed near them, they could, for a moment, see the white back of the rower, lit up by his lantern.

When they turned the elbow of the river, La Grenonillère appeared to them in the distance. The establishment, en fête, was decorated with sconces, with colored garlands draped with clusters of lights. On the Seine some great barges moved about slowly, representing domes, pyramids and elaborate erections in fires of all colors. Illuminated festoons hung right down to the water, and sometimes a red or blue lantern, at the end of an immense invisible fishing-rod, seemed like a great swinging star.

All this illumination spread a light around the café, lit up the great trees on the bank, from top to bottom, the trunks of which stood out in pale gray and the leaves in a milky green upon the deep black of the fields and the heavens. The orchestra, composed of five suburban artists, flung far its public-house ball-music, poor and jerky, which caused Madeleine to sing anew.

She desired to enter at once. Paul desired first to take a turn on the island, but he was obliged to give way. The attendance was more select. The boatmen, always alone, remained with some thinly scattered citizens, and some young men flanked by girls. The director and organizer of this can-can majestic, in a jaded black suit, walked about in every direction, his head laid waste by his old trade of purveyor of public amusements, at a cheap rate.

The large Pauline and her companions were not there; and Paul breathed again.

They danced; couples opposite each other, capered in the most distracted manner, throwing their legs in the air, until they were upon a level with the noses of their partners.

The women, whose thighs were disjointed, skipped amid such a flying upwards of their petticoats that the lower portions of their frames were displayed. They kicked their feet up above their heads with astounding facility, balanced their bodies, wagged their backs and shook their sides, shedding around them a powerful scent of sweating womanhood.

The men were squatted like toads, some making obscene signs; some turned and twisted themselves, grimacing and hideous; some turned like a wheel on their hands, or, perhaps, trying to make themselves funny, sketched the manners of the day with exaggerated gracefulness.

A fat servant-maid and two waiters served refreshments.

This café-boat being only covered with a roof and having no wall whatever, to shut it in, the hare-brained dance was displayed in the face of the peaceful night and of the firmament powdered with stars.

Suddenly, Mount Valerien, yonder opposite, appears illumined, as if a conflagration had been set ablaze behind it. The radiance spreads itself and deepens upon the sky, describing a large luminous circle of wan and white light. Then something or other red appeared, grew greater, shining with a burning red, like that of hot metal upon the anvil. That gradually developed into a round body which seemed to arise from the earth; and the moon, freeing herself from the horizon, rose slowly into space. In proportion as she ascended, the purple tint faded and became yellow, a shining bright yellow, and the satellite appeared to grow smaller in proportion as her distance increased.

Paul watched her for sometime, lost in contemplation, forgetting his mistress, and when he returned to himself the latter had vanished.

He sought for her, but could not find her. He threw his anxious eye over table after table, going to and fro unceasingly, inquiring after her from this one and that one. No one had seen her. He was thus tormented with disquietude, when one of the waiters said to him:

"You are looking for Madame Madeleine, are you not? She has left but a few moments ago, in company with Madame Pauline." And at the same instant, Paul perceived the cabin-boy and the two pretty girls standing at the other end of the café, all three holding each others' waists and lying in wait for him, whispering to one another. He understood, and, like a madman, dashed off into the island.

He first ran towards Chatou, but having reached the plain, retraced his steps. Then he began to search the dense coppices, occasionally roamed about distractedly, halting to listen.

The toads all round about him poured out their metallic and short notes.

Towards Bougival, some unknown bird warbled some song which reached him from the distance.

Over the large lawns the moon shed a soft light, resembling powdered wool; it penetrated the foliage and shone upon the silvered bark of the poplars, and riddled with its brilliant rays the waving tops of the great trees. The entrancing poetry of this summer night had, in spite of himself, entered into Paul, athwart his infatuated anguish, and stirred his heart with a ferocious irony, increasing even to madness, his craving for an ideal tenderness, for passionate outpourings of the bosom of an adored and faithful woman. He was compelled to stop, choked by hurried and rending sobs.

The crisis over, he started anew.

Suddenly, he received what resembled the stab of a poignard. There, behind that bush, some people were kissing. He ran thither; and found an amorous couple whose faces were entwined, united in an endless kiss.

He dared not call, knowing well that she would not respond, and he had also a frightful dread of discovering them all at once.

The flourishes of the quadrilles, with the ear-splitting solos of the cornet, the false shriek of the flute, the shrill squeaking of the violin, irritated his feelings, and exasperated his sufferings. Wild and limping music was floating under the trees, now feeble, now stronger, wafted hither and thither by the breeze.

Suddenly, he said to himself, that possibly she had returned. Yes, she had returned! Why not? He had stupidly lost his head, without cause, carried away by his fears, by the inordinate suspicions which had for some time overwhelmed him.

Seized by one of these singular calms which will sometimes occur in cases of the greatest despair, he returned towards the ball-room.

With a single glance of the eye, he took in the whole room. He made the round of the tables, and abruptly again found himself face to face with the three women. He must have had a doleful and queer expression of countenance, for all three together burst into merriment.

He made off, returned into the island, threw himself across the coppice panting. He listened again, listened a long time, for his ears were singing. At last, however, he believed he heard a little farther off a little, sharp laugh, which he recognized at once; and he advanced very quietly, on his knees, removing the branches from his path, his heart beating so rapidly, that he could no longer breathe.

Two voices murmured some words, the meaning of which he did not understand, and then they were silent.

Next, he was possessed by a frightful longing to fly, to save himself, for ever, from this furious passion which threatened his existence. He was about to return to Chatou and take the train, resolved never to come back again, never again to see her. But her likeness suddenly rushed in upon him, and he mentally pictured that moment in the morning when she would wake in their warm bed, and would press herself coaxingly against him, throwing her arms around his neck, her hair disheveled, and a little entangled on the forehead, her eyes still shut and her lips apart ready to receive the first kiss. The sudden recollection of this morning caress filled him with frantic recollection and the maddest desire.

The couple began to speak again; and he approached, doubled in two. Then a faint cry rose from under the branches quite close to him. He advanced again, always as though in spite of himself, invisibly attracted, without being conscious of anything ... and he saw them.

And he stood there astounded and distracted, as though he had there suddenly discovered a corpse, dead and mutilated. Then, in an involuntary flash of thought, he remembered the little fish whose entrails he had felt being torn out.... But Madeleine murmured to her companion, in the same tone in which she had often called him by name, and he was seized by such a fit of anguish that he fled with all his might.

He struck against two trees, fell over a root, set off again and suddenly found himself near the river, opposite its rapid branch, which was lit up by the moon. The torrent-like current made great eddies where the light played upon it. The high bank dominated the river like a cliff, leaving a wide obscure zone at its foot where the eddies made themselves heard in the darkness.

On the other bank, the country seats of Croissy ranged themselves and could be plainly seen.

Paul saw all this as though in a dream, he thought of nothing, understood nothing, and all things, even his very existence, appeared vague, far-off, forgotten, done with.

The river was there. Did he know what he was doing? Did he wish to die? He was mad. He turned himself, however, towards the island, towards her, and in the still air of the night, in which the faint and persistent burden of the public house band was borne up and down, he uttered, in a voice frantic with despair, bitter beyond measure, and superhuman, a frightful cry:

"Madeleine."

His heartrending call shot across the great silence of the sky, and sped all around the horizon.

Then, with a tremendous leap, with the bound of a wild animal, he jumped into the river. The water rushed on, closed over him, and from the place where he had disappeared a series of great circles started, enlarging their brilliant undulations, until they finally reached the other bank. The two women had heard the noise of the plunge. Madeleine drew herself up and exclaimed:

"It is Paul," a suspicion having arisen in her soul, "he has drowned himself;" and she rushed towards the bank, where Pauline rejoined her.

A clumsy punt, propelled by two men, turned and returned on the spot. One of the men rowed, the other plunged into the water a great pole and appeared to be looking for something. Pauline cried:

"What are you doing? What is the matter?"

An unknown voice answered:

"It is a man who has just drowned himself."

The two ghastly women, squeezing each other tightly, followed the maneuvers of the boat. The music of La Grenonillère continued to sound in the distance, and appeared with its cadences to accompany the movements of the somber fisherman; and the river which now concealed a corpse, whirled round and round, illuminated. The search was prolonged. The horrible suspense made Madeleine shiver all over. At last, after at least half an hour, one of the men announced:

"I have got it."

And he pulled up his long pole very gently, very gently. Then something large appeared upon the surface. The other mariner left his oars, and they both uniting their strength and hauling upon the inert weight, caused it to tumble over into their boat.

Then they made for the land, seeking a place well lighted and low. At the moment when they landed, the women also arrived. The moment she saw him, Madeleine fell back with horror. In the moonlight he already appeared green, with his mouth, his eyes, his nose, his clothes full of slime. His fingers closed and stiff, were hideous. A kind of black and liquid plaster covered his whole body. The face appeared swollen, and from his hair, glued up by the ooze, there ran a stream of dirty water.

“Do you know him?” asked one.

The other, the Croissy ferryman, hesitated:

“Yes, it certainly seems to me that I have seen that head; but you know when like that one cannot recognize anyone easily.” And then, suddenly:

“Why, it’s Mr. Paul.”

“Who is Mr. Paul?” inquired his comrade.

The first answered:

“Why, Mr. Paul Baron, the son of the senator, the little chap who was so amorous.”

The other added, philosophically:

“Well, his fun is ended now; it is a pity, all the same, when one is so rich!”

Madeleine sobbed and fell to the ground. Pauline approached the body and asked:

“Is he indeed quite dead?”

“Quite?”

The men shrugged their shoulders.

“Oh! after that length of time for certain.”

Then one of them asked:

“Was it at the Grillon that he lodged?”

“Yes,” answered the other; “we had better take him back there, there will be something to be made of it.”

They embarked again in their boat and set out, moving off slowly on account of the rapid current; and yet, a long time after they were out of sight, from the place where the women remained, the regular splash of the oars in the water could be heard.

Then Pauline took the poor weeping Madeleine in her arms, petted her, embraced her for a long while, consoled her.

“What would you have; it is not your fault, is it? It is impossible to prevent men committing folly. He wished it, so much the worse for him, after all!”

And then lifting her up:

“Come, my dear, come and sleep at the house; it is impossible for you to go back to the Grillon to-night.”

And she embraced her again.

“Come, we will cure you,” said she.

Madeleine arose, and weeping all the while, but with fainter sobs, her head upon Pauline’s shoulder, as though it had found a refuge in a closer and more certain affection, more familiar and more confiding, set off with very slow steps.

THE TWENTY-FIVE FRANCS OF THE MOTHER-SUPERIOR

He certainly looked very droll, did Daddy Pavilly, with his great, spider legs and his little body, his long arms and his pointed head, surrounded by a flame of red hair on the top of the crown.

He was a clown, a peasant clown by nature, born to play tricks, to act parts, simple parts, as he was a peasant's son and was himself a peasant, who could scarcely read. Yes! God had certainly created him to amuse others, the poor country devils who have neither theaters nor fêtes, and he amused them conscientiously. In the café people treated him to drink in order to keep him there, and he drank intrepidly, laughing and joking, hoaxing everybody without vexing anyone, while the people were laughing heartily around him.

He was so droll that the very girls could not resist him, ugly as he was, because he made them laugh so. He would drag them about joking all the while, and he tickled and squeezed them, saying such funny things that they held their sides while they pushed him away.

Towards the end of June he engaged himself for the harvest to farmer Le Harivan, near Rouville. For three whole weeks he amused the harvesters, male and female, by his jokes, both by day and night. During the day, when he was in the fields, he wore an old straw hat which hid his red shock head, and one saw him gathering up the yellow grain and tying it into bundles with his long, thin arms; and then suddenly stopping to make a funny movement which made the laborers, who always kept their eyes on him, laugh all over the field. At night he crept, like some crawling animal, in among the straw in the barn where the women slept, causing screams and exciting a disturbance. They drove him off with their wooden clogs, and he escaped on all fours, like a fantastic monkey, amidst volleys of laughter from the whole place.

On the last day, as the wagon full of reapers, decked with ribbons and playing bag-pipes, shouting and singing with pleasure and drink, went along the white, high road, slowly drawn by six dapple-gray horses, driven by a lad in a blouse, with a rosette in his cap, Pavilly, in the midst of the sprawling women, danced like a drunken satyr, and kept the little dirty-faced boys and astonished peasants, standing staring at him open-mouthed on the way to the farm.

Suddenly, as they got to the gate of Le Harivan's farm yard, he gave a leap as he was lifting up his arms, but unfortunately, as he came down, he knocked against the side of the long wagon, fell over it onto the wheel, and rebounded into the road. His companions jumped out, but he did not move; one eye was closed, while the other was open, and he was pale with fear, while his long limbs were stretched out in the dust, and when they touched his right leg he began to scream, and when they tried to make him stand up, he immediately fell down.

"I think one of his legs is broken," one of the men said.

And so it really was. Harivan, therefore, had him laid on a table and sent off a man on horseback to Rouville to fetch the doctor, who came an hour later.

The farmer was very generous and said that he would pay for the man's treatment in the hospital, so that the doctor carried Pavilly off in his carriage to the hospital, and had him put into a white-washed ward, where his fracture was reduced.

As soon as he knew that it would not kill him, and that he would be taken care of, cuddled, cured, and fed without having anything to do except to lie on his back between the sheets, Pavilly's joy was unbounded, and he began to laugh silently and continuously, so as to show his decayed teeth.

Whenever one of the Sisters of Mercy came near his bed he made grimaces of satisfaction, winking, twisting his mouth awry and moving his nose, which was very long and mobile. His neighbors in the ward, ill as they were, could not help laughing, and the Mother-Superior often came to his bedside, to be amused for a quarter of an hour, and he invented all kinds of jokes and stories for her, and as he had all the makings of a strolling actor in him, he would be devout in order to please her, and spoke of religion with the serious air of a man who knows that there are times when jokes are out of place.

One day, he took it into his head to sing to her. She was delighted and came to see him more frequently, and then she brought him a hymn-book, so as to utilize his voice. Then he might be seen sitting up in bed, for he was beginning to be able to move, singing the praises of the Almighty and of Mary, in a falsetto voice, while the kind, stout sister stood by him and beat time with her finger. When he could walk, the Superior offered to keep him for some time longer to sing in chapel, to serve at Mass and to fulfill the duties of sacristan, and he accepted. For a whole month he might be seen in his surplice, limping and singing the psalms and the responses, with such movements of his head, that the number of the faithful increased, and that people deserted the parish Church to attend Vespers at the hospital.

But as everything must come to an end in this world, they were obliged to discharge him, when he was quite cured, and the Superior gave him twenty-five francs in return for his services.

As soon as Pavilly found himself in the street with all that money in his pocket, he asked himself what he was going to do. Should he return to the village? Certainly not before having a drink, for he had not had one for a long time, and so he went into a café. He did not go into the town more than two or three times a year, and so he had a confused and intoxicating recollection of an orgie, on one of those visits in particular, and so he asked for a glass of the best brandy, which he swallowed at a gulp to grease the passage, and then he had another to see how it tasted.

As soon as the strong and fiery brandy had touched his palate and tongue, awakening more vividly than ever the sensation of alcohol which he was so fond of, and so longed for, which caresses, and stings, and burns the mouth, he knew that he should drink a whole bottle of it, and so he asked immediately what it cost, so as to spare himself having it in detail. They charged him three francs, which he paid, and then he began quietly to get drunk.

However, he was methodical in it, as he wished to keep sober enough for other pleasures, and so, as soon as he felt that he was on the point of seeing the fireplace bow to him, he got up and went out with unsteady steps, with his bottle under his arm, in search of a house where girls of easy virtue lived.

He found one, with some difficulty, after having asked a carter, who did not know of one; a postman, who directed him wrong; a baker, who began to swear and called him an old pig; and lastly, a soldier, who was obliging enough to take him to it, advised him to choose *La Reine*.

Although it was barely twelve o'clock, Pavilly went into that palace of delights, where he was received by a servant, who wanted to turn him out again. But he made her laugh by making a grimace, showed her three francs, the usual price of the special provisions of the place, and followed her with difficulty up a dark staircase, which led to the first floor.

When he had been shown into a room, he asked for *la Reine*, and had another drink out of the bottle, while he waited. But very shortly, the door opened and a girl came in. She was tall, fat, red-faced, enormous. She looked at the drunken fellow, who had fallen into a seat, with the eye of a judge of such matters, and said:

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, at this time of day?"

"Ashamed of what, Princess?" he stammered.

"Why, of disturbing a lady, before she has even had time to eat her dinner."

He wanted to have a joke, so he said:

"There is no such thing as time, for the brave."

"And there ought to be no time for getting drunk, either, old guzzler."

At this he got angry:

"I am not a guzzler, and I am not drunk."

"Not drunk?"

"No, I am not."

"Not drunk? Why, you could not even stand straight;" and she looked at him angrily, thinking that all this time her companions were having their dinner.

"I ... I could dance a polka," he replied, getting up, and to prove his stability he got onto the chair, made a pirouette and jumped onto the bed, where his thick, muddy shoes made two great marks.

"Oh! you dirty brute!" the girl cried, and rushing at him, she struck him a blow with her fist in the stomach, such a blow that Pavilly lost his balance, fell and struck the foot of the bed, and making a complete somersault tumbled onto the night-table, dragging the jug and basin with him, and then rolled onto the ground, roaring.

The noise was so loud, and his cries so piercing, that everybody in the house rushed in, the master, mistress, servant, and the staff.

The master picked him up, but as soon as he had put him on his legs, the peasant lost his balance again, and then began to call out that his leg was broken, the other leg, the sound one.

It was true, so they sent for a doctor, and it happened to be the same one who had attended him at Le Harivan's.

"What! Is it you again?" he said.

"Yes, M'sieu."

"What is the matter with you?"

"Somebody has broken my other leg for me, M'sieu."

"Who did it, old fellow?"

"Why, a female."

Everybody was listening. The girls in their dressing gowns, with their mouths still greasy from their interrupted dinner, the mistress of the house furious, the master nervous.

"This will be a bad job," the doctor said. "You know that the municipal authorities look upon you with very unfavorable eyes, so we must try and hush the matter up."

"How can it be managed?" the master of the place asked.

"Why the best way would be to send him back to the hospital, from which he has just come out, and to pay for him there."

"I would rather do that," the master of the house replied, "than have any fuss made about the matter."

So half an hour later, Pavilly returned drunk and groaning to the ward which he had left an hour before. The Superior lifted up her hands in sorrow, for she liked him, and with a smile, for she was glad to have him back.

"Well, my good fellow, what is the matter with you now?"

"The other leg is broken, Madame."

"So you have been getting onto another load of straw, you old joker?"

And Pavilly, in great confusion, but still sly, said, with hesitation:

"No... no.... Not this time, no ... not this time. No ... no.... It was not my fault, not my fault ...A mattress caused this."

She could get no other explanation out of him, and never knew that his relapse was due to her twenty-five francs.

THE VENUS OF BRANIZA

Some years ago there lived in Braniza, a celebrated Talmadist, who was renowned no less on account of his beautiful wife, than of his wisdom, his learning, and his fear of God. The Venus of Braniza deserved that name thoroughly, for she deserved it for herself, on account of her singular beauty, and even more as the wife of a man who was deeply versed in the Talmud; for the wives of the Jewish philosophers are, as a rule, ugly, or even possess some bodily defect.

The Talmud explains this, in the following manner. It is well known that marriages are made in heaven, and at the birth of a boy a divine voice calls out the name of his future wife, and *vice versâ*. But just as a good father tries to get rid of his good wares out of doors, and only uses the damaged stuff at home for his children, so God bestows those women whom other men would not care to have, on the Talmudists.

Well, God made an exception in the case of our Talmudist, and had bestowed a Venus on him, perhaps only in order to confirm the rule by means of this exception, and to make it appear less hard. His wife was a woman who would have done honor to any king's throne, or to the pedestal in any sculpture gallery. Tall, and with a wonderful, voluptuous figure, she carried a strikingly beautiful head, surmounted by thick, black plaits, on her proud shoulders, while two large, dark eyes languished and glowed beneath her long lashes, and her beautiful hands looked as if they were carved out of ivory.

This beautiful woman, who seemed to have been designed by nature to rule, to see slaves at her feet, to provide occupation for the painter's brush, the sculptor's chisel and the poet's pen, lived the life of a rare and beautiful flower, which is shut up in a hot house, for she sat the whole day long wrapped up in her costly fur jacket and looked down dreamily into the street.

She had no children; her husband, the philosopher, studied, and prayed, and studied again from early morning until late at night; his mistress was *the Veiled Beauty*, as the Talmudists call the Kabbalah. She paid no attention to her house, for she was rich and everything went of its own accord, just like a clock, which has only to be wound up once a week; nobody came to see her, and she never went out of the house; she sat and dreamed and brooded and — yawned.

* * *

One day when a terrible storm of thunder and lightning had spent all its fury over the town, and all windows had been opened in order to let the Messiah in, the Jewish Venus was sitting as usual in her comfortable easy chair, shivering in spite of her fur jacket, and was thinking, when suddenly she fixed her glowing eyes on the man who was sitting before the Talmud, swaying his body backwards and forwards, and said suddenly:

"Just tell me, when will Messias, the Son of David, come?"

"He will come," the philosopher replied, "when all the Jews have become either altogether virtuous or altogether vicious, says the Talmud."

"Do you believe that all the Jews will ever become virtuous," the Venus continued.

"How am I to believe that!"

"So Messias will come, when all the Jews have become vicious?"

The philosopher shrugged his shoulders and lost himself again in the labyrinth of the Talmud, out of which, so it is said, only one man returned unscathed, and the beautiful woman at the window again looked dreamily out onto the heavy rain, while her white fingers played unconsciously with the dark fur of her splendid jacket.

* * *

One day the Jewish philosopher had gone to a neighboring town, where an important question of ritual was to be decided. Thanks to his learning, the question was settled sooner than he had expected, and instead of returning the next morning, as he had intended, he came back the same evening with a friend, who was no less learned than himself. He got out of the carriage at his friend's house, and went home on foot, and was not a little surprised when he saw his windows brilliantly illuminated, and found an officer's servant comfortably smoking his pipe in front of his house.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a friendly manner, but with some curiosity, nevertheless.

"I am looking out, in case the husband of the beautiful Jewess should come home unexpectedly."

"Indeed? Well, mind and keep a good look out."

Saying this, the philosopher pretended to go away, but went into the house through the garden entrance at the back. When he got into the first room, he found a table laid for two, which had evidently only been left a short time previously. His wife was sitting as usual at her bed room window wrapped in her fur jacket, but her cheeks were suspiciously red, and her dark eyes had not got their usual languishing look, but now rested on her husband with a gaze which expressed at the same time satisfaction and mockery. At that moment he kicked against an object on the floor, which emitted a strange sound, which he picked up and examined in the light. It was a pair of spurs.

"Who has been here with you?" the Talmudist said.

The Jewish Venus shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, but did not reply.

"Shall I tell you? The Captain of Hussars has been with you."

"And why should he not have been here with me?" she said, smoothing the fur on her jacket with her white hand.

"Woman! are you out of your mind?"

"I am in full possession of my senses," she replied, and a knowing smile hovered round her red voluptuous lips. "But must I not also do my part, in order that Messias may come and redeem us poor Jews?"

LA MORILLONNE

They called her *La Morillonne* because of her black hair and of her complexion, which resembled autumnal leaves, and because of her mouth with thick purple lips, which were like blackberries, when she curled them.

That she should be born as dark as this in a district where everybody was fair, and engendered by a father and mother with tow-colored hair and a complexion like butter was one of the mysteries of atavism. One of her female ancestors must have had an intimacy with one of those traveling tinkers who, have gone about the country from time immemorial, with faces the color of bistre and indigo, crowned by a wisp of light hair.

From that ancestor she derived, not only her dark complexion, but also her dark soul, her deceitful eyes, whose depths were at times illuminated by flashes of every vice, her eyes of an obstinate and malicious animal.

Handsome? Certainly not, nor even pretty. Ugly, with an absolute ugliness! Such a false look! Her nose was flat, and had been smashed by a blow, while her unwholesome looking mouth was always slobbering with greediness, or uttering something vile. Her hair was thick and untidy, and a regular nest for vermin, to which may be added a thin, feverish body, with a limping walk. In short, she was a perfect monster, and yet all the young men of the neighborhood had made love to her, and whoever had been so honored, longed for her society again.

From the time that she was twelve, she had been the mistress of every fellow in the village. She had corrupted boys of her own age in every conceivable manner and place.

Young men at the risk of imprisonment, and even steady, old, notable and venerable men, such as the farmer at Eclausiaux, Monsieur Martin, the ex-mayor and other highly respectable men, had been taken by the manners of that creature, and the reason why the rural policeman was not severe upon them, in spite of his love for summoning people before the magistrates, was, so people said, that he would have been obliged to take out a summons against himself.

The consequence was that she had grown up without being interfered with, and was the mistress of every fellow in the village, as the schoolmaster said; who had himself been one of *the fellows*. But the most curious part of the business was that no one was jealous. They handed her on from one to the other, and when someone expressed his astonishment at this to her one day, she said to this unintelligent stranger:

"Is everybody not satisfied?"

And then, how could any one of them, even if he had been jealous, have monopolized her? They had no hold on her. She was not selfish, and though she accepted all gifts, whether in kind or in money, she never asked for anything and she even appeared to prefer paying herself after her own fashion, by stealing. All she seemed to care about as her reward was pilfering, and a crown put into her hand, gave her less pleasure than a halfpenny which she had stolen. Neither was it any use to dream of ruling her as the sole male, or as the proud master of the hen roost, for which of them, no matter how broad shouldered he was, would have been capable of it? Some had tried to vanquish her, but in vain.

How then, could any of them claim to be her master? It would have been the same as wishing to have the sole right of baking their bread in the common oven, in which the whole village baked.

But there was one man who formed the exception, and that was Bru, the shepherd.

He lived in the fields in his movable hut, on cakes made of unleavened dough, which he kneaded on a stone and baked in the hot ashes, now here, now there, is a hole dug out in the ground, and heated with dead wood. Potatoes, milk, hard cheese, blackberries, and a small cask of old gin that he had distilled himself, were his daily pittance; but he knew nothing about love, although he was accused of all sorts of horrible things, and therefore nobody dared abuse him to his face; in the first place, because Bru was a spare and sinewy man, who handled his shepherd's crook like a drum-major does his staff; next, because of his three sheep dogs, who had teeth like wolves, and who knew nobody except their master; and lastly, for fear of the evil eye. For Bru, it appeared, knew spells which would blight the corn, give the sheep foot rot, the cattle the *rinder pest*, make cows die in calving, and set fire to the ricks and stacks.

But as Bru was the only one who did not loll out his tongue after La Morillonne, naturally one day she began to think of him, and she declared that she, at any rate, was not afraid of his evil eye, and so she went after him.

“What do you want?” he said, and she replied boldly:

“What do I want? I want you.”

“Very well,” he said, “but then you must belong to me alone.”

“All right,” was her answer, “if you think you can please me.”

He smiled and took her into his arms, and she was away from the village for a whole week. She had, in fact, become entirely Bru’s exclusive property.

The village grew excited. They were not jealous of each other, but they were of him. What! Could she not resist him. Of course he had charms and spells against every imaginable thing. And they grew furious. Next they grew bold, and watched from behind a tree. She was still as lively as ever, but he, poor fellow, seemed to have become suddenly ill, and required the most tender nursing at her hands. The villagers, however, felt no compassion for the poor shepherd, and so, one of them, more courageous than the rest, advanced towards the hut with his gun in his hand:

“Tie up your dogs,” he cried out from a distance; “fasten them up, Bru, or I shall shoot them.”

“You need not be frightened of the dogs,” *La Morillonne* replied; “I will be answerable for it that they will not hurt you;” and she smiled as the young man with the gun went towards her.

“What do you want?” the shepherd said.

“I can tell you,” she replied. “He wants me and I am very willing. There!”

Bru began to cry, and she continued:

“You are a good for nothing.”

And she went off with the lad, while Bru seized his crook, seeing which the young fellow raised his gun.

“Seize him! seize him!” the shepherd shouted, urging on his dogs, while the other had already got his finger on the trigger to fire at them. But *La Morillonne* pushed down the muzzle and called out:

“Here, dogs! here! Prr, prr, my beauties!”

And the three dogs rushed up to her, licked her hands and frisked about as they followed her, while she called to the shepherd from the distance:

“You see, Bru, they are not at all jealous!”
And then, with a short and evil laugh, she added:
“They are my property now.”

THE PORT

PART I

Having sailed from Havre on the 3rd of May, 1882, for a voyage in the China seas, the square-rigged three-master, *Notre Dame des Vents*, made her way back into the port of Marseilles, on the 8th of August, 1886, after an absence of four years. When she had discharged her first cargo in the Chinese port for which she was bound, she had immediately found a new freight for Buenos Ayres, and from that place had conveyed goods to Brazil.

Other passages, then damage repairs, calms ranging over several months, gales which knocked her out of her course — all the accidents, adventures, and misadventures of the sea, in short — had kept far from her country, this Norman three-master, which had come back to Marseilles with her hold full of tin boxes containing American preserves.

At her departure, she had on board, besides the captain and the mate, fourteen sailors, eight Normans and six Britons. On her return, there were left only five Britons and four Normans; the other Briton had died while on the way; the four Normans having disappeared under various circumstances, had been replaced by two Americans, a negro, and a Norwegian carried off, one evening, from a tavern in Singapore.

The big vessel, with reefed sails and yards crossed over her masts, drawn by a tug from Marseilles, rocking over a sweep of rolling waves which subsided gently on becoming calm, passed in front of the Château d'If, then under all the gray rocks of the roadstead, which the setting sun covered with a golden vapor; and she entered the ancient port, in which are packed together, side by side, ships from every part of the world, pell mell, large and small, of every shape and every variety of rigging, soaking like a "bouillabaise" of boats in this basin too limited in extent, full of putrid water, where shells touch each other, rub against each other, and seem to be pickled in the juice of the vessels.

Notre Dame des Vents took up her station between an Italian brig and an English schooner, which made way to let this comrade slip in between them; then, when all the formalities of the custom-house and of the port had been complied with, the captain authorized the two-thirds of his crew to spend the night on shore.

It was already dark. Marseilles was lighted up. In the heat of this summer’s evening a flavor of cooking with garlic floated over the noisy city, filled with the clamor of voices, of rolling vehicles, of the crackling of whips, and of southern mirth.

As soon as they felt themselves on shore, the ten men, whom the sea had been tossing about for some months past, proceeded along quite slowly with the hesitating steps of persons who are out of their element, unaccustomed to cities, two by two, procession.

They swayed from one side to another as they walked, looked about them, smelling out the lanes opening out on the harbor, rendered feverish by the amorous appetite which had been growing to maturity in their bodies during their last sixty-six days at sea. The Normans strode on in front, led by Célestin Duclos, a tall young fellow, sturdy and waggish, who served as a captain for the others every time they set forth on land. He divined the places worth visiting, found out by-ways after a fashion of his own, and did not take much part in the squabbles so frequent among sailors in seaport towns. But, once he was caught in one, he was afraid of nobody.

After some hesitation as to which of the obscure streets which lead down to the waterside, and from which arise heavy smells, a sort of exhalation from closets, they ought to enter, Célestin gave the preference to a kind of winding passage, where gleamed over the doors projecting lanterns bearing enormous numbers on their rough colored glass. Under the narrow arches at the entrance to the houses, women wearing aprons like servants, seated on straw chairs, rose up on seeing them coming near, taking three steps towards the gutter which separated the street into two halves, and which cut off the path from this file of men, who sauntered along at their leisure, humming and sneering, already getting excited by the vicinity of those dens of prostitutes.

Sometimes, at the end of a hall, appeared, behind a second open door, which presented itself unexpectedly, covered over with dark leather, a big wench, undressed, whose heavy thighs and fat calves abruptly outlined themselves under her coarse white cotton wrapper. Her short petticoat had the appearance of a puffed out girdle; and the soft flesh of her breast, her shoulders, and her arms, made a rosy stain on a black velvet corsage with edgings of gold lace. She kept calling out from her distant corner, “Will you come here, my pretty boys?” and sometimes she would go out herself to catch hold of one of them, and to drag him towards her door with all her strength, fastening on to him like a spider drawing forward an insect bigger than itself. The man, excited by the struggle, would offer a mild resistance, and the rest would stop to look on, undecided between the longing to go in at once and that of lengthening this appetizing promenade. Then when the woman, after desperate efforts, had brought the sailor to the threshold of her abode, in which the entire band would be swallowed up after him, Célestin Duclos, who was a judge of houses of this sort, suddenly exclaimed: “Don’t go in there, Marchand! That’s not the place.”

The man, thereupon, obeying this direction, freed himself with a brutal shake; and the comrades formed themselves into a band once more, pursued by the filthy insults of the exasperated wench, while other women, all along the alley, in front of them, came out past their doors, attracted by the noise, and in hoarse voices threw out to them invitations coupled with promises. They went on, then, more and more stimulated, from the combined effects of the coaxings and the seductions held out as baits to them by the choir of portresses of love all over the upper part of the street, and the ignoble maledictions hurled at them by the choir at the lower end — the despised choir of disappointed wenches. From time to time, they met another band — soldiers marching along with spurs jingling at their heels — sailors again — isolated citizens — clerks in business houses. On all sides might be seen fresh streets, narrow, and studded all over with those equivocal lanterns. They pursued their way still through this labyrinth of squalid habitation, over those greasy pavements through which putrid water was oozing, between those walls filled with women’s flesh.

At last, Duclos made up his mind, and, drawing up before a house of rather attractive exterior, made all his companions follow him in there.

PART II

Then followed a scene of thorough going revelry. For four hours the six sailors gorged themselves with love and wine. Six months’ pay was thus wasted.

In the principal room in the tavern they were installed as masters, gazing with malignant glances at the ordinary customers, who were seated at the little tables in the corners, where one of the girls, who was left free to come and go, dressed like a big baby or a singer at a café-concert, went about serving them, and then seated herself near them. Each man, on coming in, had selected his partner, whom he kept all the evening, for the vulgar taste is not changeable. They had drawn three tables close up to them; and, after the first bumper, the procession divided into two parts, increased by as many women as there were seamen, had formed itself anew on the staircase. On the wooden steps, the four feet of each couple kept tramping for some time, while this long file of lovers got swallowed up behind the narrow doors leading into the different rooms.

Then they came down again to have a drink, and, after they had returned to the rooms descended the stairs once more.

Now, almost intoxicated, they began to howl. Each of them, with bloodshot eyes, and his chosen female companion on his knee, sang or bawled, struck the table with his fist, shouted while swilling wine down his throat, set free the human brute. In the midst of them, Célestin Duclos, pressing close to him, a big damsel with red cheeks, who sat astride over his legs, gazed at her ardently. Less tipsy than the others, not that he had taken less drink, he was as yet occupied with other thoughts, and, more tender than his comrades, he tried to get up a chat. His thoughts wandered a little, escaped him, and then came back, and disappeared again, without allowing him to recollect exactly what he meant to say.

“What time — what time — how long are you here?”

“Six months,” the girl answered.

He seemed to be satisfied with her, as if this were a proof of good conduct, and he went on questioning her:

“Do you like this life?”

She hesitated, then in a tone of resignation.

“One gets used to it. It is not more worrying than any other kind of life. To be a servant-girl or else a scrub is always a nasty occupation.”

He looked as if he also approved of the truthful remark.

“You are not from this place?” said he.

She answered merely by shaking her head.

“Do you come from a distance?”

She nodded, still without opening her lips.

“Where is it you come from?”

She appeared to be thinking, to be searching her memory, then said falteringly:

“From Perpignan.”

He was once more perfectly satisfied, and said:

“Ah! yes.”

In her turn she asked:

“And you, are you a sailor?”

“Yes, my beauty.”

“Do you come from a distance?”

“Ah! yes. I have seen countries, ports, and everything.”

“You have been round the world, perhaps?”

“I believe you, twice rather than once.”

Again she seemed to hesitate, to search in her brain for something that she had forgotten, then, in a tone somewhat different, more serious:

“Have you met many ships in your voyages?”

“I believe you, my beauty.”

“You did not happen to see the *Notre Dame des Vents*?”

He chuckled:

“No later than last week.”

She turned pale, all the blood leaving her cheeks, and asked:

“Is that true, perfectly true?”

“’Tis true as I tell you.”

“Honor bright! you are not telling me a lie?”

He raised his hand.

“Before God, I’m not!” said he.

“Then do you know whether Célestin Duclos is still on her?”

He was astonished, uneasy, and wished, before answering, to learn something further.

“Do you know him?”

She became distrustful in turn.

“Oh! ’tis not myself— ’tis a woman who is acquainted with him.”

“A woman from this place?”

“No, from a place not far off.”

“In the street?”

“What sort of a woman?”

“Why, then, a woman — a woman like myself.”

"What has she to say to him, this woman?"

"I believe she is a country-woman of his."

They stared into one another's hand, watching one another, feeling, divining that something of a grave nature was going to arise between them.

He resumed:

"I could see her there, this woman."

"What would you say to her?"

"I would say to her — I would say to her — that I had seen Célestin Duclos."

"He is quite well — isn't he?"

"As well as you or me — he is a strapping young fellow."

She became silent again, trying to collect her ideas; then slowly:

"Where has the *Notre Dame des Vents* gone to?"

"Why, just to Marseilles."

She could not repress a start.

"Is that really true?"

"'Tis really true."

"Do you know Duclos?"

"Yes, I do know him."

She still hesitated; then in a very gentle tone:

"Good! That's good!"

"What do you want with him?"

"Listen! — you will tell him — nothing!"

He stared at her, more and more perplexed. At last, he put this question to her:

"Do you know him, too, yourself?"

"No," said she.

"Then what do you want with him?"

Suddenly, she made up her mind what to do, left her seat, rushed over to the bar where the landlady of the tavern presided, seized a lemon, which she tore open, and shed its juice into a glass, then she filled this glass with pure water, and carrying it across to him:

"Drink this!"

"Why?"

"To make it pass for wine. I will talk to you afterwards."

He drank it without further protest, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, then observed:

"That's all right. I am listening to you."

"You will promise not to tell him you have seen me, or from whom you learned what I am going to tell you. You must swear not to do so."

He raised his hand.

"All right. I swear I will not."

"Before God?"

"Before God."

"Well, you will tell him that his father died, that his mother died, that his brother died, the whole three in one month, of typhoid fever, in January, 1883 — three years and a half ago."

In his turn, he felt all his blood set in motion through his entire body, and for a few seconds he was so much overpowered that he could make no reply; then he began to doubt what she had told him, and asked:

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure."

"Who told it to you?"

She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looking at him out of the depths of her eyes:

"You swear not to blab?"

"I swear that I will not."

"I am his sister!"

He uttered that name in spite of himself:

"Francoise?"

She contemplated him once more with a fixed stare, then, excited by a wild feeling of terror, a sense of profound horror, she faltered in a very low tone, almost speaking into his mouth:

"Oh! oh! it is you, Célestin."

They no longer stirred, their eyes riveted in one another.

Around them, his comrades were still yelling. The sounds made by glasses, by fists, by heels keeping time to the choruses, and the shrill cries of the women, mingled with the roar of their songs.

He felt her leaning on him, clasping him, ashamed and frightened, his sister. Then, in a whisper, lest anyone might hear him, so hushed that she could scarcely catch his words:

"What a misfortune! I have made a nice piece of work of it!"

The next moment, her eyes filled with tears, and she faltered:

"Is that my fault?"

But, all of a sudden, he said:

“So then, they are dead?”

“They are dead.”

“The father, the mother, and the brother?”

“The three in one month, and I told you. I was left by myself with nothing but my clothes, for I was in debt to the apothecary and the doctor and for the funeral of the three, and had to pay what I owed with the furniture.”

“After that I went as a servant to the house of Mait’e Cacheux — you know him well — the cripple. I was just fifteen at the time, for you went away when I was not quite fourteen. I tripped with him. One is so senseless when one is young. Then I went as a nursery-maid to the notary who debauched me also, and brought me to Havre, where he took a room for me. After a little while, he gave up coming to see me. For three days I lived without eating a morsel of food; and then, not being able to get employment, I went to a house, like many others. I, too, have seen different places — ah! and dirty places! Rouen, Evreux, Lille, Bordeaux, Perpignan, Nice, and then Marseilles, where I am now!”

The tears started from her eyes, flowed over her nose, wet her cheeks, and trickled into her mouth.

She went on:

“I thought you were dead, too? — my poor Cèlestin.”

He said:

“I would not have recognized you myself — you were such a little thing then, and here you are so big! — but how is it that you did not recognize me?”

She answered with a despairing movement of her hands:

“I see so many men that they all seem to me alike.”

He kept his eyes still fixed on her intently, oppressed by an emotion that dazed him, and filled him with such pain as to make him long to cry like a little child that has been whipped. He still held her in his arms, while she sat astride on his knees, with his open hands against the girl’s back; and now by sheer dint of looking continually at her, he at length recognized her, the little sister left behind in the country with all those whom she had seen die, while he had been tossing on the seas. Then, suddenly taking between his big seaman’s paws this head found once more, he began to kiss her, as one kisses kindred flesh. And after that, sobs, a man’s deep sobs, heaving like great billows, rose up in his throat, resembling the hiccoughs of drunkenness.

He stammered:

“And this is you — this is you, Francoise — my little Francoise!” —

Then, all at once, he sprang up, began swearing in an awful voice, and struck the table such a blow with his fists that the glasses were knocked down and smashed. After that, he advanced three steps, staggered, stretched out his arms, and fell on his face. And he rolled on the ground, crying out, beating the floor with his hands and feet, and uttering such groans that they seemed like a death-rattle.

All those comrades of his stared at him, and laughed.

“He’s not a bit drunk,” said one.

“He ought to be put to bed,” said another. “If he goes out, we’ll all be run in together.”

Then, as he had money in his pockets, the landlady offered to let him have a bed, and his comrades, themselves so much intoxicated that they could not stand upright, hoisted him up the narrow stairs to the apartment of the woman who had just been in his company, and who remained sitting on a chair, at the foot of that bed of crime, weeping quite as freely as he had wept, until the morning dawned.

THE HERMIT

We had gone to see, with some friends, the old hermit installed on an antique mound covered with tall trees, in the midst of the vast plain which extends from Cannes to La Napoule.

On our return we spoke of those strange lay solitaries, numerous in former times, but now a vanished race. We sought to find out the moral causes, and endeavored to determine the nature of the griefs which in bygone days had driven men into solitudes.

All of a sudden one of our companions said:

“I have known two solitaries — a man and a woman. The woman must be living still. She dwelt, five years ago, on the ruins of a mountain top absolutely deserted on the coast of Corsica, fifteen or twenty kilometers away from every house. She lived there with a maid-servant. I went to see her. She had certainly been a distinguished woman of the world. She received me with politeness and even in a gracious manner, but I know nothing about her, and I could find out nothing about her.

“As for the man, I am going to relate to you his ill-omened adventure:

Look round! You see over there that peaked woody mountain which stands by itself behind La Napoule in front of the summits of the Esterel; it is called in the district Snake Mountain. There is where my solitary lived within the walls of a little antique temple about a dozen years ago.

Having heard about him, I resolved to make his acquaintance, and I set out for Cannes on horseback one March morning. Leaving my steed at the inn at La Napoule, I commenced climbing on foot that singular cave, about one hundred and fifty perhaps, or two hundred meters in height, and covered with aromatic plants, especially cysti, whose odor is so sharp and penetrating that it irritates you and causes you discomfort. The soil is stony, and you can see gliding over the pebbles long adders which disappear in the grass. Hence this well-deserved appellation of Snake Mountain. On certain days, the reptiles seem to spring into existence under your feet when you climb the declivity exposed to the rays of the sun. They are so numerous that you no longer venture to go on, and experience a strange sense of uneasiness, not fear, for those creatures are harmless, but a sort of mysterious terror. I had several times the peculiar sensation of climbing a sacred mountain of antiquity, a fantastic hill perfumed and mysterious, covered with cysti and inhabited by serpents and crowned with a temple.

This temple still exists. They told me, at any rate, that it was a temple; for I did not seek to know more about it so as not to destroy the illusion.

So then, one March morning, I climbed up there under the pretext of admiring the country. On reaching the top, I perceived, in fact, walls and a man sitting on a stone. He was scarcely more than forty years of age, though his hair was quite white; but his beard was still almost black. He was fondling a cat which had cuddled itself upon his knees, and did not seem to mind me. I took a walk around the ruins, one portion of which covered over and shut in by means of branches, straw, grass and stones, was inhabited by him, and I made my way towards the place which he occupied.

The view here is splendid. On the right is the Esterel with its peaked summit strangely carved, then the boundless sea stretching as far as the distant coast of Italy with its numerous capes, facing Cannes, the Lerins Islands green and flat, which look as if they were floating, and the last of which shows in the direction of the open sea an old castellated fortress with battlemented towers built in the very waves.

Then, commanding a view of green mountain-side where you could see, at an equal distance, like innumerable eggs laid on the edge of the shore the long chaplet of villas and white villages built among the trees rose the Alps, whose summits are still shrouded in a hood of snow.

I murmured:

“Good heavens, this is beautiful!”

The man raised his head, and said:

“Yes, but when you see it every day, it is monstrous.”

Then he spoke, he chatted, and tired himself with talking — my solitary, I detained him.

I did not tarry long that day, and only endeavored to ascertain the color of misanthropy. He created on me especially the impression of being bored with other people, weary of everything, hopelessly disillusioned and disgusted with himself as well as the rest.

I left him after a half-hour's conversation. But I came back, eight hours later, and once again in the following week, then every week, so that before two months we were friends.

Now, one evening at the close of May, I decided that the moment had arrived, and I brought provisions in order to dine with him on Snake Mountain.

It was one of those evenings of the South so odorous in that country where flowers are cultivated just as wheat is in the North, in that country where every essence that perfumes the flesh and the dress of women is manufactured, one of those evenings when the breath of the innumerable orange-trees with which the gardens and all the recesses of the dales are planted, excite and cause languor so that old men have dreams of love.

My solitary received me with manifest pleasure. He willingly consented to share in my dinner.

I made him drink a little wine, to which he had ceased to be accustomed. He brightened up and began to talk about his past life. He had always resided in Paris, and had, it seemed to me, lived a gay bachelor's life.

I asked him abruptly:

"What put into your head this funny notion of going to live on the top of a mountain?"

He answered immediately:

"Her! it was because I got the most painful shock that a man can experience. But why hide from you this misfortune of mine? It will make you pity me, perhaps! And then — I have never told anyone — never — and I would like to know, for once, what another thinks of it, and how he judges it."

"Born in Paris, brought up in Paris, I grew to manhood and spent my life in that city. My parents had left me an income of some thousands of francs a year, and I procured as a shelter, a modest and tranquil place which enabled me to pass as wealthy for a bachelor.

"I had, since my youth, led a bachelor's life. You know what that is. Free and without family, resolved not to take a legitimate wife, I passed at one time three months with one, at another time six months with another, then a year without a companion, taking as my prey the mass of women who are either to be had for the asking or bought.

"This every day, or, if you like the phrase better, commonplace, existence agreed with me, satisfied my natural tastes for changes and silliness. I lived on the boulevard, in theaters and cafés, always out of doors, always without a regular home, though I was comfortably housed. I was one of those thousands of beings who let themselves float like corks, through life, for whom the walls of Paris are the walls of the world, and who have no care about anything, having no passion for anything. I was what is called a good fellow, without accomplishments and without defects. That is all. And I judge myself correctly.

"Then, from twenty to forty years, my existence flowed along slowly or rapidly without any remarkable event. How quickly they pass, the monstrous years of Paris, when none of those memories worth fixing the date of find way into the soul, these long and yet hurried years, trivial and gay, when you eat, drink and laugh without knowing why, your lips stretched out towards all they can taste and all they can kiss, without having a longing for anything. You are young, and you grow old without doing any of the things that others do, without any attachment, any root, any bond, almost without friends, without family, without wife, without children.

"So, gently and quickly, I reached my fortieth year; and in order to celebrate this anniversary, I invited myself to take a good dinner all alone in one of the principal cafés.

"After dinner, I was in doubt as to what I would do. I felt disposed to go to a theater; and then the idea came into my head to make a pilgrimage to the Latin quarters, where I had in former days lived as a law-student. So I made my way across Paris, and without premeditation went in to one of those public-houses where you are served by girls.

"The one who attended at my table was quite young, pretty, and merry-looking. I asked her to take a drink, and she at once consented. She sat down opposite me, and gazed at me with a practiced eye, without knowing with what kind of a male she had to do. She was a fair-haired woman, or rather a fair-haired girl, a fresh, quite fresh young creature, whom you guessed to be rosy and plump under her swelling bodice. I talked to her in that flattering and idiotic style which we always adopt with girls of this sort; and as she was truly charming, the idea suddenly occurred to me to take her with me — always with a view to celebrating my fortieth year. It was neither a long nor difficult task. She was free, she told me, for the past fortnight, and she forthwith accepted my invitation to come and sup with me in the Halles when her work would be finished.

“As I was afraid lest she might give me the slip — you never can tell what may happen, or who may come into those drink-shops, or what wind may blow into a woman’s head — I remained there all the evening waiting for her.

“I, too, had been free for the past month or two, and watching this pretty debutante of love going from table to table, I asked myself the question whether it would not be worth my while to make a bargain with her to live with me for some time. I am here relating to you one of those ordinary adventures which occur every day in the lives of men in Paris.

“Excuse me for such gross details. Those who have not loved in a poetic fashion take and choose women, as you choose a chop in a butcher’s shop without caring about anything save the quality of their flesh.

“Accordingly, I took her to her own house — for I had a regard for my own sheets. It was a little working-girl’s lodgings in the fifth story, clean and poor, and I spent two delightful hours there. This little girl had a certain grace and a rare attractiveness.

“When I was about to leave the room, I advanced towards the mantelpiece in order to place there the stipulated present, after having agreed on a day for a second meeting with the girl, who remained in bed, I got a vague glimpse of a clock without a globe, two flower-vases and two photographs, one of them very old, one of those proofs on glass called daguerreo-types. I carelessly bent forward towards this portrait, and I remained speechless at the sight, too amazed to comprehend.... It was my own, the first portrait of myself, which I had got taken in the days when I was a student in the Latin Quarter.

“I abruptly snatched it up to examine it more closely. I did not deceive myself — and I felt a desire to burst out laughing, so unexpected and queer did the thing appear to me.

“I asked:

“‘Who is this gentleman?’

“She replied:

“’Tis my father, whom I did not know. Mamma left it to me, telling me to keep it, as it might be useful to me, perhaps, one day— ‘

“She hesitated, began to laugh, and went on:

“‘I don’t know in what way, upon my word. I don’t think he’ll care to acknowledge me.’

“My heart went beating wildly, like the mad gallop of a runaway horse. I replaced the portrait, laying it down flat on the mantelpiece. On top of it I placed, without even knowing what I was doing, two notes for a hundred francs, which I had in my pocket, and I rushed away, exclaiming:

“‘We’ll meet again soon — by-bye, darling — by-bye.’

“I heard her answering:

“‘Till Tuesday.’

“I was on the dark staircase, which I descended, groping my way down.

“When I got into the open air, I saw that it was raining, and I started at a great pace down some street or other.

“I walked straight on, stupefied, distracted, trying to jog my memory! Was this possible? Yes. I remembered all of a sudden a girl who had written to me, about a month after our rupture, that she was going to have a child by me. I had torn or burned the letter, and had forgotten all about the matter. I should have looked at the woman’s photograph over the girl’s mantelpiece. But would I have recognized it? It was the photograph of an old woman, it seemed to me.

“I reached the quay. I saw a bench, and sat down on it. It went on raining. People passed from time to time under umbrellas. Life appeared to me odious and revolting, full of miseries, of shames, of infamies deliberate or unconscious. My daughter!... I had just perhaps possessed my own daughter! And Paris, this vast Paris, somber, mournful, dirty, sad, black, with all those houses shut up, was full of such things, adulteries, incests, violated children, I recalled to mind what I had been told about bridges haunted by the infamous votaries of vice.

“I had acted, without wishing it, without being aware of it, in a worse fashion than these ignoble beings. I had entered my own daughter’s bed!

“I was on the point of throwing myself into the water. I was mad! I wandered about till dawn, then I came back to my own house to think.

“I thereupon did what appeared to me the wisest thing. I desired a notary to send for this little girl, and to ask her under what conditions her mother had given her the portrait of him whom she supposed to be her father, stating that he was intrusted with this duty by a friend.

“The notary executed my commands. It was on her death-bed that this woman had designated the father of her daughter, and in the presence of a priest, whose name was given to me.

“Then, still in the name of this unknown friend, I got half of my fortune sent to this child, about one hundred and forty thousand francs, of which she could only get the income. Then I resigned my employment — and here I am.

“While wandering along this shore, I found this mountain, and I stopped there — up to what time I am unable to say!

“What do you think of me, and of what I have done?”

I replied as I extended my hand towards him:

“You have done what you ought to do. Many others would have attached less importance to this odious fatality.”

He went on:

“I know that, but I was nearly going mad on account of it. It seems I had a sensitive soul without ever suspecting it. And now I am afraid of Paris, as believers are bound to be afraid of Hell. I have received a blow on the head — that is all — a blow resembling the fall of a tile when one is passing through the street. I am getting better for some time past.”

I quitted my solitary. I was much disturbed by his narrative.

I saw him again twice, then I went away, for I never remain in the South after the month of May.

When I came back in the following year the man was no longer on Snake Mountain; and I have never since heard anything about him.

This is the history of my hermit.

THE ORDERLY

The cemetery, filled with officers, looked like a field covered with flowers. The kepis and the red trousers, the stripes and the gold buttons, the shoulder-knots of the staff, the braid of the chasseurs and the hussars, passed through the midst of the tombs, whose crosses, white or black, opened their mournful arms — their arms of iron, marble, or wood — over the vanished race of the dead.

Colonel Limousin's wife had just been buried. She had been drowned, two days before, while taking a bath. It was over. The clergy had left; but the colonel, supported by two brother-officers, remained standing in front of the pit, at the bottom of which he saw still the oaken coffin, wherein lay, already decomposed, the body of his young wife.

He was almost an old man, tall and thin, with white moustache; and, three years ago, he had married the daughter of a comrade, left an orphan on the death of her father, Colonel Sortis.

The captain and the lieutenant, on whom their commanding officer was leaning, attempted to lead him away. He resisted, his eyes full of tears, which he heroically held back, and murmuring, "No, no, a little while longer!" he persisted in remaining there, his legs bending under him, at the side of that pit, which seemed to him bottomless, an abyss into which had fallen his heart and his life, all that he held dear on earth.

Suddenly, General Ormont came up, seized the colonel by the arm, and dragging him from the spot almost by force said: "Come, come, my old comrade! you must not remain here."

The colonel thereupon obeyed, and went back to his quarters. As he opened the door of his study, he saw a letter on the table. When he took it in his hands, he was near falling with surprise and emotion; he recognized his wife's handwriting. And the letter bore the post-mark and the date of the same day. He tore open the envelope and read:

"Father,

"Permit me to call you still father, as in days gone by. When you receive this letter, I shall be dead and under the clay. Therefore, perhaps, you may forgive me.

"I do not want to excite your pity or to extenuate my sin. I only want to tell the entire and complete truth, with all the sincerity of a woman who, in an hour's time, is going to kill herself.

"When you married me through generosity, I gave myself to you through gratitude, and I loved you with all my girlish heart. I loved you as I loved my own father — almost as much; and one day, while I sat on your knee, and you were kissing me, I called you 'Father' in spite of myself. It was a cry of the heart, instinctive, spontaneous. Indeed, you were to me a father, nothing but a father. You laughed, and you said to me, 'Address me always in that way, my child; it gives me pleasure.'

"We came to the city; and — forgive me, father — I fell in love. Ah! I resisted long, well, nearly two years — and then I yielded, I sinned, I became a fallen woman.

"And as to him? You will never guess who he is. I am easy enough about that matter, since there were a dozen officers always around me and with me, whom you called my twelve constellations.

"Father, do not seek to know him, and do not hate him. He only did what any man, no matter whom, would have done in his place, and then I am sure that he loved me, too, with all his heart.

"But listen! One day we had an appointment in the isle of Becasses — you know the little isle, close to the mill. I had to get there by swimming, and he had to wait for me in a thicket, and then to remain there till nightfall, so that nobody should see him going away. I had just met him when the branches opened, and we saw Philippe, your orderly, who had surprised us. I felt that we were lost, and I uttered a great cry. Thereupon he said to me — he, my lover— 'Go, swim back quietly, my darling, and leave me here with this man.'

"I went away so excited that I was near drowning myself, and I came back to you expecting that something dreadful was about to happen.

"An hour later, Philippe said to me in a low tone, in the lobby outside the drawing-room where I met him: 'I am at madame's orders, if she has any letters to give me.' Then I knew that he had sold himself, and that my lover had bought him.

"I gave him some letters, in fact — all my letters — he took them away, and brought me back the answers.

"This lasted about two months. We had confidence in him, as you had confidence in him yourself.

"Now, father, here is what happened. One day, in the same isle which I had to reach by swimming, but this time alone, I found your orderly. This man had been waiting for me; and he informed me that he was going to reveal everything about us to you, and deliver to you the letters which he had kept, stolen, if I did not yield to his desires.

"Oh! father, father, I was filled with fear — a cowardly fear, an unworthy fear, a fear above all of you who had been so good to me, and whom I had deceived — fear on his account too — you would have killed him — for myself also perhaps! I cannot tell; I was mad, desperate; I thought of once more buying this wretch who loved me, too — how shameful!

"We are so weak, we women, we lose our heads more easily than you do. And then, when a woman once falls, she always falls lower and lower. Did I know what I was doing? I understood only that one of you two and I were going to die — and I gave myself to this brute.

"You see, father, that I do not seek to excuse myself.

"Then, then — then what I should have foreseen happened — he had the better of me again and again, when he wished, by terrifying me. He, too, has been my lover, like the other, every day. Is not this abominable? And what punishment, father?

"So then it is all over with me. I must die. While I lived, I could not confess such a crime to you. Dead, I dare everything. I could not do otherwise than die — nothing could have washed me clean — I was too polluted. I could no longer love or be loved. It seemed to me that I stained everyone by merely allowing my hand to be touched.

"Presently I am going to take my bath, and I will never come back.

"This letter for you will go to my lover. It will reach him when I am dead, and without anyone knowing anything about it, he will forward it to you, accomplishing my last wishes. And you shall read it on your return from the cemetery.

"Adieu, father! I have no more to tell you. Do whatever you wish, and forgive me."

The colonel wiped his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. His coolness; the coolness of days when he had stood on the field of battle, suddenly came back to him. He rang.

A man-servant made his appearance. “Send in Philippe to me,” said he. Then, he opened the drawer of his table.

The man entered almost immediately — a big soldier with red moustache, a malignant look, and a cunning eye.

The colonel looked him straight in the face.

“You are going to tell me the name of my wife’s lover.”

“But, my colonel— “

The officer snatched his revolver out of the half-open drawer.

“Come! quick! You know I do not jest!”

“Well — my colonel — it is Captain Saint-Albert.”

Scarcely had he pronounced this name when a flame flashed between his eyes, and he fell on his face, his forehead pierced by a ball.

DUCHOUX

While descending the wide staircase of the club heated like a conservatory by the stove the Baron de Mordiane had left his fur-coat open; therefore, when the huge street-door closed behind him he felt a shiver of intense cold run through him, one of those sudden and painful shivers which make us feel sad, as if we were stricken with grief. Moreover, he had lost some money, and his stomach for some time past had troubled him, no longer permitting him to eat as he liked.

He went back to his own residence; and, all of a sudden, the thought of his great, empty apartment, of his footman asleep in the ante-chamber, of the dressing-room in which the water kept tepid for the evening toilet simmered pleasantly under the chafing-dish heated by gas, and the bed, spacious, antique, and solemn-looking, like a mortuary couch, caused another chill, more mournful still than that of the icy atmosphere, to penetrate to the bottom of his heart, the inmost core of his flesh.

For some years past he had felt weighing down on him that load of solitude which sometimes crushes old bachelors. Formerly, he had been strong, lively, and gay, giving all his days to sport and all his nights to festive gatherings. Now, he had grown dull, and no longer took pleasure in anything. Exercise fatigued him; suppers and even dinners made him ill; women annoyed him as much as they had formerly amused him.

The monotony of evenings all like each other, of the same friends met again in the same place, at the club, of the same game with a good hand and a run of luck, of the same talk on the same topics, of the same witty remarks by the same lips, of the same jokes on the same themes, of the same scandals about the same women, disgusted him so much as to make him feel at times a veritable inclination to commit suicide. He could no longer lead this life regular and inane, so commonplace, so frivolous and so dull at the same time, and he felt a longing for something tranquil, restful, comfortable, without knowing what.

He certainly did not think of getting married, for he did not feel in himself sufficient fortitude to submit to the melancholy, the conjugal servitude, to that hateful existence of two beings, who, always together, knew one another so well that one could not utter a word which the other would not anticipate, could not make a single movement which would not be foreseen, could not have any thought or desire or opinion which would not be divined. He considered that a woman could only be agreeable to see again when you know her but slightly, when there is something mysterious and unexplored attached to her, when she remains disquieting, hidden behind a veil. Therefore, what he would require was a family without family-life, wherein he might spend only a portion of his existence; and, again, he was haunted by the recollection of his son.

For the past year he had been constantly thinking of this, feeling an irritating desire springing up within him to see him, to renew acquaintance with him. He had become the father of this child, while still a young man, in the midst of dramatic and touching incidents. The boy dispatched to the South, had been brought up near Marseilles without ever hearing his father's name.

The latter had at first paid from month to month for the nurture, then for the education and the expense of holidays for the lad, and finally had provided an allowance for him on making a sensible match. A discreet notary had acted as an intermediary without ever disclosing anything.

The Baron de Mordiane accordingly knew merely that a child of his was living somewhere in the neighborhood of Marseilles, that he was looked upon as intelligent and well-educated, that he had married the daughter of an architect and contractor, to whose business he had succeeded. He was also believed to be worth a lot of money.

Why should he not go and see this unknown son without telling his name, in order to form a judgment about him at first and to assure himself that he would be able, in case of necessity, to find an agreeable refuge in this family?

He had acted handsomely towards the young man, had settled a good fortune on him, which had been thankfully accepted. He was, therefore, certain that he would not find himself clashing against any inordinate sense of self-importance; and this thought, this desire, which every day returned to him afresh, of setting out for the South, tantalized him like a kind of itching sensation. A strange self-regarding feeling of affection also attracted him, bringing before his mental vision this pleasant, warm abode by the seaside, where he would meet his young and pretty daughter-in-law, his grandchildren, with outstretched arms, and his son, who would recall to his memory the charming and short-lived adventure of bygone years. He regretted only having given so much money, and that this money had prospered in the young man's hands, thus preventing him from any longer presenting himself in the character of a benefactor.

He hurried along, with all these thoughts running through his brain, and the collar of his fur-coat wrapped round his head. Suddenly he made up his mind. A cab was passing; he hailed it, drove home, and, when his valet, just roused from a nap, had opened the door.

"Louis," said he, "we start to-morrow evening for Marseilles. We'll remain there perhaps a fortnight. You will make all the necessary preparations."

The train rushed on past the Rhone with its sandbanks, then through yellow plains, bright villages, and a wide expanse of country, shut in by bare mountains, which rose on the distant horizon.

The Baron de Mordiane, waking up after a night spent in a sleeping compartment of the train, looked at himself, in a melancholy fashion, in the little mirror of his dressing-case. The glaring sun of the South showed him some wrinkles which he had not observed before — a condition of decrepitude unnoticed in the imperfect light of Parisian rooms. He thought, as he examined the corners of his eyes, and saw the rumpled lids, the temples, the skinny forehead:

"Damn it, I've not merely got the gloss taken off — I've become quite an old fogy."

And his desire for rest suddenly increased, with a vague yearning, born in him for the first time, to take his grandchildren on his knees.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, he arrived in a landau which he had hired at Marseilles, in front of one of those houses of Southern France so white, at the end of their avenues of plane-trees that they dazzle us and make our eyes droop. He smiled as he pursued his way along the walk before the house, and reflected:

"Deuce take it! this is a nice place."

Suddenly, a young rogue of five or six made his appearance, starting out of a shrubbery, and remained standing at the side of the path, staring at the gentleman with eyes wide open.

Mordiane came over to him:

“Good morrow, my boy.”

The brat made no reply.

The baron, then, stooping down, took him up in his arms to kiss him, but, the next moment, suffocated by the smell of garlic with which the child seemed impregnated all over, he put him back again on the ground, muttering:

“Oh! it is the gardener’s son.”

And he proceeded towards the house.

The linen was hanging out to dry on a cord before the door — shirts and chemises, napkins, dish-cloths, aprons, and sheets, while a row of socks, hanging from strings one above the other, filled up an entire window, like sausages exposed for sale in front of a pork-butcher’s shop.

The baron announced his arrival. A servant-girl appeared, a true servant of the South, dirty and untidy, with her hair hanging in wisps and falling over her face, while her petticoat under the accumulation of stains which had soiled it had retained only a certain uncouth remnant of its old color, a hue suitable for a country fair or a mountebank’s tights.

He asked:

“Is M. Duchoux at home?”

He had many years ago, in the mocking spirit of a skeptical man of pleasure, given this name to the foundling, in order that it might not be forgotten that he had been picked up under a cabbage.

The servant-girl asked:

“Do you want M. Duchoux?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he is in the big room drawing up his plans.”

“Tell him that M. Merlin wishes to speak to him.”

She replied, in amazement:

“Hey! go inside then, if you want to see him.”

And she bawled out:

“Monsieur Duchoux — a call.”

The baron entered, and in a spacious apartment, rendered dark by the windows being half-closed, he indistinctly traced out persons and things, which appeared to him very slovenly looking.

Standing in front of a table laden with articles of every sort, a little bald man was tracing lines on a large sheet of paper.

He interrupted his work, and advanced two steps. His waistcoat left open, his unbuttoned breeches, and his turned-up shirt-sleeves, indicated that he felt hot, and his muddy shoes showed that it had rained hard some days before.

He asked with a very pronounced southern accent:

“Whom have I the honor of — ?”

“Monsieur Merlin — I came to consult you about a purchase of building-ground.”

“Ha! ha! very well!”

And Duchoux, turning towards his wife, who was knitting in the shade:

“Clear off a chair, Josephine.”

Mordiane then saw a young woman, who appeared already old, as women look old at twenty-five in the provinces, for want of attention to their persons, regular washing, and all the little cares bestowed on feminine toilet which make them fresh, and preserve, till the age of fifty, the charm and beauty of the sex. With a neckerchief over her shoulders, her hair clumsily braided — though it was lovely hair, thick and black, you could see that it was badly brushed — she stretched out towards a chair hands like those of a servant, and removed an infant’s robe, a knife, a fag-end of packe-bread, an empty flower-pot, and a greasy plate left on the seat, which she then moved over towards the visitor.

He sat down, and presently noticed that Duchoux’s work-table had on it, in addition to the books and papers, two salads recently gathered, a wash-hand basin, a hair-brush, a napkin, a revolver, and a number of cups which had not been cleaned.

The architect perceived this look, and said with a smile:

“Excuse us! there is a little disorder in the room — it is owing to the children.”

And he drew across his chair, in order to chat with his client.

“So then you are looking out for a piece of ground in the neighborhood of Marseilles?”

His breath, though not close to the baron, carried towards the latter that odor of garlic which the people of the South exhale as flowers do their perfume.

Mordiane asked:

“Is it your son that I met under the plane-trees?”

“Yes. Yes, the second.”

“You have two of them?”

“Three, monsieur; one a year.”

And Duchoux looked full of pride.

The baron was thinking:

“If they all have the same perfume, their nursery must be a real conservatory.”

He continued:

“Yes, I would like a nice piece of ground near the sea, on a little solitary strip of beach— “

Thereupon Duchoux proceeded to explain. He had ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred, or more, pieces of ground of the kind required, at different prices and suited to different tastes. He talked just as a fountain flows, smiling, self-satisfied, wagging his bald round head.

And Mordiane was reminded of a little woman, fair-haired, slight, with a somewhat melancholy look, and a tender fashion of murmuring, “My darling,” of which the mere remembrance made the blood stir in his veins. She had loved him passionately, madly, for three months; then, becoming pregnant in the absence of her husband, who was a governor of a colony, she had run away and concealed herself, distracted with despair and terror, till the birth of the child, which Mordiane carried off one summer’s evening, and which they had not laid eyes on afterwards.

She died of consumption three years later, over there, in the colony of which her husband was governor, and to which she had gone across to join him. And here, in front of him, was their son, who was saying, in the metallic tones with which he rang out his closing words:

“This piece of ground, monsieur, is a rare chance— “

And Mordiane recalled the other voice, light as the touch of a gentle breeze, as it used to murmur:

“My darling, we shall never part— “

And he remembered that soft, deep, devoted glance in those eyes of blue, as he watched the round eye, also blue, but vacant, of this ridiculous little man, who, for all that, bore a resemblance to his mother.

Yes, he looked more and more like her every moment — like her in accent, in movement, in his entire deportment — he was like her in the way an ape is like a man; but still he was hers; he displayed a thousand external characteristics peculiar to her, though in an unspeakably distorted, irritating, and revolting form.

The baron was galled, haunted as he was all of a sudden by this resemblance, horrible, each instant growing stronger, exasperating, maddening, torturing him like a nightmare, like a weight of remorse.

He stammered out:

“When can we look at this piece of ground together?”

“Why, to-morrow, if you like.”

“Yes, to-morrow. At what hour?”

“One o’clock.”

“All right.”

The child he had met in the avenue appeared before the open door, exclaiming:

“Dada!”

There was no answer.

Mordiane had risen up with a longing to escape, to run off, which made his legs tremble. This “dada” had hit him like a bullet. It was to *him* that it was addressed, it was intended for him, this “dada,” smelling of garlic — this “dada” of the South.

Oh! how sweet had been the perfume exhaled by her, his sweetheart of bygone days!

Duchoux saw him to the door.

“This house is your own?” said the baron.

“Yes, monsieur; I bought it recently. And I am proud of it. I am a child of accident, monsieur, and I don’t want to hide it; I am proud of it. I owe nothing to anyone; I am the son of my own efforts; I owe everything to myself.”

The little boy, who remained on the threshold, kept still exclaiming, though at some distance away from them:

“Dada!”

Mordiane, shaking with a shivering fit, seized with panic, fled as one flies away from a great danger.

“He is going to guess who I am, to recognize me,” he thought. “He is going to take me in his arms, and to call out to me, ‘Dada,’ while giving me a kiss perfumed with garlic.”

“To-morrow, monsieur.”

“To-morrow, at one o’clock.”

The landau rolled over the white road.

“Coachman! to the railway-station!”

And he heard two voices, one far away and sweet, the faint, sad voice of the dead, saying: “My darling,” and the other sonorous, sing-song, frightful, bawling out, “Dada,” just as people bawl out, “Stop him!” when a thief is flying through the street.

Next evening, as he entered the club, the Count d’Etreillis said to him:

“We have not seen you for the last three days. Have you been ill?”

“Yes, a little unwell. I get headaches from time to time.”

RELICS OF THE PAST

My dear Colette, — I do not know whether you remember a verse of M. Sainte-Beuve which we have read together, and which has remained fixed in my memory; for me this verse speaks eloquently; and it has very often reassured my poor heart, especially for some time past. Here it is:

"To be born, to live, and die in the same house."

I am now all alone in this house where I was born, where I have lived, and where I hope to die. It is not gay every day, but it is pleasant; for there I have souvenirs all around me.

My son Henri is a barrister; he comes to see me twice a year. Jeanne is living with her husband at the other end of France, and it is I who go to see her each autumn. So here I am, all, all alone, but surrounded by familiar objects which incessantly speak to me about my own people, the dead, and the living separated from me by distance.

I no longer read much; I am too old for that; but I am constantly thinking, or rather dreaming. I do not dream as I used to do long ago. You may recall to mind any wild fancies, the adventures our brains concocted when we were twenty, and all the horizons of happiness that dawned upon us!

Nothing out of all our dreaming has been realized, or rather it is quite a different thing that has happened, less charming, less poetic, but sufficient for those who know how to accept their lot in this world bravely.

Do you know why we women are so often unhappy? It is because we are taught in our youth to believe too much in happiness! We are never brought up with the idea of fighting, of striving, of suffering. And, at the first shock, our hearts are broken; we look forward, with blind faith, to cascades of fortunate events. What does happen is at best but a partial happiness, and thereupon we burst out sobbing. Happiness, the real happiness that we dream of, I have come to know what that is. It does not consist in the arrival of great bliss, for any great bliss that falls to our share is to be found in the infinite expectation of a succession of joys to which we never attain.

Happiness is happy expectation; it is the horizon of hope; it is, therefore, endless illusion; and, old as I am, I create illusions for myself still, in fact, every day I live; only their object is changed, my desires being no longer the same. I have told you that I spend my brightest hours in dreaming. What else should I do?

I have two ways of doing this. I am going to tell you what they are; they may perhaps prove useful to you.

Oh! the first is very simple; it consists in sitting down before my fire in a low armchair made soft for my old bones, and looking back at the things that have been put aside.

One life is so short, especially a life entirely spent in the same spot:

"To be born, to live, and die in the same house."

The things that bring back the past to our recollection are heaped, pressed together; and, we are old, it sometimes seems no more than ten days since we were young. Yes; everything slips away from us, as if life itself were but a single day: morning, evening, and then comes night — a night without a dawn!

When I gaze into the fire, for hours and hours, the past rises up before me as though it were but yesterday. I no longer think of my present existence; reverie carries me away; once more I pass through all the changes of my life.

And I often am possessed by the illusion that I am a young girl, so many breaths of bygone days are wafted back to me, so many youthful sensations and even impulses, so many throbbings of my young heart — all the passionate ardor of eighteen; and I have clear, as fresh realities, visions of forgotten things. Oh! how vividly, above all, do the memories of my walks as a young girl come back to me! There, in the armchair of mine, before the fire, I saw once more, a few nights since, a sunset on Mont Saint-Michel, and immediately afterwards I was riding on horseback through the forest of Uville with the odors of the damp sand and of the flowers steeped in dew, and the evening star sending its burning reflection through the water and bathing my face in its rays as I galloped through the copse. And all I thought of then, my poetic enthusiasm at the sight of the boundless sea, my keen delight at the rustling of the branches as I passed, my most trivial impressions, every fragment of thought, desire, or feeling, all, all came back to me as if I were there still, as if fifty years had not glided by since then, to chill my blood and moderate my hopes. But my other way of reviving the long ago is much better.

You know, or you do not know, my dear Colette, that we destroy nothing in the house. We have upstairs, under the roof, a large room for cast-off things which we call "the lumber-room." Everything which is no longer used is thrown there. I often go up there, and gaze around me. Then I find once more a heap of nothings that I had ceased to think about, and that recalled a heap of things to my mind. They are not those beloved articles of furniture which we have known since our childhood and to which are attached recollections of events of joys or sorrows, dates in our history, which, from the fact of being intermingled with our lives, have assumed a kind of personality, a physiognomy, which are the companions of our pleasant or gloomy house, the only companions, alas! that we are sure not to lose, the only ones that will not die, like the others — those whose features, whose loving eyes, whose lips, whose voices, have vanished for ever. But I find instead among the medley of worn-out gewgaws those little old insignificant objects which have hung on by our side for forty years without ever having been noticed by us, and which, when we suddenly lay eyes on them again, have somehow the importance, the significance of relics of the past. They produce on my mind the effect of those people — whom we have known for a very long time without ever having seen them as they really are, and who, all of a sudden, some evening, quite unexpectedly, break out into a stream of interminable talk, and tell us all about themselves down to their most hidden secrets, of which we had never even suspected the existence.

And I move about from one object to the other with a little thrill in my heart every time something fixes my attention. I say to myself: "See there! I broke that the night Paul started for Lyons;" or else, "Ah! there is mamma's little lantern, which she used to carry with her going to her evening devotions on dark winter nights." There are even things in this room which have no story to tell me, which have come down from my grandparents, things therefore, whose history and adventures are utterly unknown to those who are living to-day, and whose very owners nobody knows now. Nobody has seen the hands that used to touch them or the eyes that used to gaze at them. These are the things that make me have long, long dreams. They represent to my mind desolate people whose last remaining friend is dead. You, my dear Colette, can scarcely comprehend all this, and you will smile at my simplicity, my childish, sentimental whims. You are a Parisian, and you Parisians do not understand this interior life, those eternal echoes of one's own heart. You live in the outer world, with all your thoughts in the open. Living alone as I do, I can only speak about myself. When you are answering this letter, tell me a little about yourself, that I may also be able to put myself in your place, as you will be able to put yourself in mine to-morrow.

But you will never completely understand M. de Sainte Beuve's verse:

"To be born, to live, and to die in one house."

A thousand kisses, my old friend,

Adelaide.

THE PEDDLER

How many trifling occurrences, things which have left only a passing impression on our minds, humble dramas of which we have got a mere glimpse so that we have to guess at or suspect their real nature, are, while we are still young and inexperienced, threads, so to speak, guiding us, step by step, towards a knowledge of the painful truth!

Every moment, when I am retracing my steps during the long wandering reveries which distract my thoughts along the path through which I saunter at random, my soul takes wing, and suddenly I recall little incidents of a gay or sinister character which, emerging from the shades of the past, flit before my memory as the birds flit through the bushes before my eyes.

This summer, I wandered along a road in Savoy which commands a view of the right bank of the Lake of Bourget, and, while my glance floated over that mass of water, mirror-like and blue, with a unique blue, pale, tinted with glittering beams by the setting sun, I felt my heart stirred by that attachment which I have had since my childhood for the surface of lakes, for rivers, and for the sea. On the opposite bank of the vast liquid plate, so wide that you did not see the ends of it, one vanishing in the Rhone, and the other in the Bourget, rose the high mountain, jagged like a crest up to the topmast peak of the "Cats's Tooth." On either side of the road, vines, trailing from tree to tree, choked under their leaves their slender supporting branches, and they extended in garlands through the fields, green, yellow, and red garlands, festooning from one trunk to the other, and spotted with clusters of dark grapes.

The road was deserted, white, and dusty. All of a sudden, a man emerged out of the thicket of large trees which shuts in the village of Saint-Innocent, and, bending under a load, he came towards me, leaning on a stick.

When he had come closer to me, I discovered that he was a peddler, one of those itinerant dealers who go about the country from door to door, selling paltry objects cheaply, and thereupon a reminiscence of long ago arose up in my mind, a mere nothing almost, the recollection simply of an accidental meeting I had one night between Argenteuil and Paris when I was twenty-one.

All the happiness of my life, at this period, was derived from boating. I had taken a room in an obscure inn at Argenteuil, and, every evening, I took the Government clerks' train, that long slow train which, in its course, sets down at different stations a crowd of men with little parcels, fat and heavy, for they scarcely walk at all, so that their trousers are always baggy owing to their constant occupation of the office-stool. This train, in which it seemed to me I could even sniff the odor of the writing-desk, of official documents and boxes, deposited me at Argenteuil. My boat was waiting for me, ready to glide over the water. And I rapidly plied my oar so that I might get out and dine at Bezons or Chatou or Epinay or Saint-Ouen. Then I came back, put up my boat, and made my way back on foot to Paris with the moon shining down on me.

Well, one night on the white road I perceived just in front of me a man walking. Oh! I was constantly meeting those night travelers of the Parisian suburbs so much dreaded by belated citizens. This man went on slowly before me with a heavy load on his shoulders.

I came right up to him by quickening my pace so much that my footsteps rang on the road. He stopped and turned round; then, as I kept approaching nearer and nearer, he crossed to the opposite side of the road.

As I rapidly passed him, he called out to me:

"Hallo! good evening, monsieur."

I responded:

"Good evening, mate."

He went on:

"Are you going far?"

"I am going to Paris."

"You won't be long getting there; you're going at a good pace. As for me, I have too big a load on my shoulders to walk so quickly."

I slackened my pace. Why had this man spoken to me? What was he carrying in this big pack? Vague suspicions of crime sprang up in my mind, and rendered me curious. The columns of the newspapers every morning contain so many accounts of crimes committed in this place, the peninsula of Gennevilliers, that some of them must be true. Such things are not invented merely to amuse readers — all this catalogue of arrests and varied misdeeds with which the reports of the law courts are filled.

However, this man's voice seemed rather timid than bold, and up to the present his manner had been more discreet than aggressive.

In my turn I began to question him:

"And you — are you going far?"

"Not farther than Asnieres."

"Is Asnieres your place of abode?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am a peddler by occupation, and I live at Asnieres."

He had quitted the sidewalk, where pedestrians move along in the daytime under the shadows of the trees, and he was soon in the middle of the road. I followed his example. We kept staring at each other suspiciously, each of us holding his stick in his hand. When I was sufficiently close to him, I felt less distrustful. He evidently was disposed to assume the same attitude towards me, for he asked:

"Would you mind going a little more slowly?"

"Why do you say this?"

"Because I don't care for this road by night. I have goods on my back, and two are always better than one. When two men are together, people don't attack them."

I felt that he was speaking truly, and that he was afraid. So I yielded to his wishes, and the pair of us walked on, side by side, this stranger and I, at one o'clock in the morning, along the road leading from Argenteuil to Asnieres.

"Why are you going home so late when it is so dangerous?" I asked my companion.

He told me his history. He had not intended to return home this evening, as he had brought with him that very morning a stock of goods to last him three or four days. But he had been so fortunate in disposing of them that he found it necessary to get back to his abode without delay in order to deliver next day a number of things which had been bought on credit.

He explained to me with genuine satisfaction that he had managed the business very well, having a tendency to talk confidentially, and that the knick-knacks he displayed were useful to him in getting rid, while gossiping, of other things which he could not easily sell.

He added:

"I have a shop in Asnieres. 'Tis my wife keeps it."

"Ah! So you're married?"

"Yes, m'sieur, for the last fifteen months. I have got a very nice wife. She'll get a surprise when she sees me coming home to-night."

He then gave me an account of his marriage. He had been after this young girl for two years, but she had taken time to make up her mind.

She had, since her childhood, kept a little shop at the corner of a street, where she sold all sorts of things — ribbons, flowers in summer, and principally pretty little shoe-buckles, and many other gewgaws, in which, owing to the favor of a manufacturer, she enjoyed a speciality. She was well-known in Asnieres as "La Bluette." This name was given to her because she often dressed in blue. And she made money, as she was very skillful in everything she did. His impression was that she was not very well at the present moment; he believed she was in the family way, but he was not quite sure. Their business was prospering; and he traveled about exhibiting samples to all the small traders in the adjoining districts. He had become a sort of traveling commission-agent for some of the manufacturers, working at the same time for them and for himself.

"And you — what are you," he said.

I answered him with an air of embarrassment. I explained that I had a sailing-boat and two yawls in Argenteuil, that I came for a row every evening, and that, as I was fond of exercise, I sometimes walked back to Paris, where I had a profession, which — I led him to infer — was a lucrative one.

He remarked:

"Faith, if I had spondulics like you, I wouldn't amuse myself by trudging that way along the roads at night— 'Tisn't safe along here."

He gave me a sidelong glance, and I asked myself whether he might not all the same, be a criminal of the sneaking type who did not want to run any fruitless risk.

Then he restored my confidence when he murmured:

"A little less quickly, if you please. This pack of mine is heavy."

The sight of a group of houses showed that we had reached Asnieres.

"I am nearly at home," he said. "We don't sleep in the shop; it is watched at night by a dog, but a dog who is worth four men. And then it costs too much to live in the center of the town. But listen to me, monsieur! You have rendered me a precious service, for I don't feel my mind at ease when I'm traveling with my pack along the roads. Well, now you must come in with me, and drink a glass of mulled wine with my wife if she hasn't gone to bed, for she is a sound sleeper, and doesn't like to be waked up. Besides, I'm not a bit afraid without my pack, and so I'll see you to the gates of the city with a cudgel in my hand."

I declined the invitation; he insisted on my coming in; I still held back; he pressed me with so much eagerness, with such an air of real disappointment, such expressions of deep regret — for he had the art of expressing himself very forcibly — asking me in the tone of one who felt wounded "whether I objected to have a drink with a man like him," that I finally gave way and followed him up a lonely road towards one of those big dilapidated houses which are to be found on the outskirts of suburbs.

In front of this dwelling I hesitated. This high barrack of plaster looked like a den for vagabonds, a hiding-place for suburban brigands. But he pushed forward a door which had not been locked, and made me go in before him. He led me forward by the shoulders, through profound darkness, towards a staircase where I had to feel my way with my hands and feet, with a well-grounded apprehension of tumbling into some gaping cellar.

When I had reached the first landing, he said to me: "Go on up! 'Tis the sixth story."

I searched my pockets, and, finding there a box of vestas, I lighted the way up the ascent. He followed me, puffing under his pack, repeating:

"Tis high! 'tis high!"

When we were at the top of the house, he drew forth from one of his inside pockets a key attached to a thread, and unlocking his door he made me enter.

It was a little whitewashed room, with a table in the center, six chairs, and a kitchen-cupboard close to the wall.

"I am going to wake up my wife," he said; "then I am going down to the cellar to fetch some wine; it doesn't keep here."

He approached one of the two doors which opened out of this apartment, and exclaimed:

"Bluette! Bluette!" Bluette did not reply. He called out in a louder tone: "Bluette! Bluette!"

Then knocking at the partition with his fist, he growled: "Will you wake up in God's name?"

He waited, glued his ear to the key-hole, and muttered, in a calmer tone: “Pooh! if she is asleep, she must be let sleep! I’ll go and get the wine: wait a couple of minutes for me.”

He disappeared. I sat down and made the best of it.

What had I come to this place for? All of a sudden, I gave a start, for I heard people talking in low tones, and moving about quietly, almost noiselessly, in the room where the wife slept.

Deuce take it! Had I fallen into some cursed trap? Why had this woman — this Bluette — not been awakened by the loud knocking of her husband at the doorway leading into her room; could it have been merely a signal conveying to accomplices: “There’s a mouse in the trap! I’m going to look out to prevent him escaping. ’Tis for you to do the rest!”

Certainly, there was more stir than before now in the inner room; I heard the door opening from within. My heart throbbed. I retreated towards the further end of the apartment, saying to myself: “I must make a fight of it!” and, catching hold of the back of a chair with both hands, I prepared for a desperate struggle.

The door was half opened, a hand appeared which kept it ajar; then a head, a man’s head covered with a billycock hat, slipped through the folding-doors, and I saw two eyes staring hard at me. Then so quickly that I had not time to make a single movement by way of defense, the individual, the supposed criminal, a tall young fellow in his bare feet with his shoes in his hands, a good looking chap, I must admit — half a gentleman, in fact, made a dash for the outer door, and rushed down the stairs.

I resumed my seat. The adventure was assuming a humorous aspect. And I waited for the husband, who took a long time fetching the wine. At last I heard him coming up the stairs, and the sound of his footsteps made me laugh, with one of those solitary laughs which it is hard to restrain.

He entered with two bottles in his hands. Then he asked me:

“Is my wife still asleep? You didn’t hear her stirring — did you?”

I knew instinctively that there was an ear pasted against the other side of the partition-door, and I said: “No, not at all.”

And now he again called out:

“Pauline!”

She made no reply, and did not even move.

He came back to me, and explained:

"You see, she doesn't like me to come home at night, and take a drop with a friend."

"So then you believe she was not asleep?"

He wore an air of dissatisfaction.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "let us have a drink together."

And immediately he showed a disposition to empty the two bottles one after the other without more ado.

This time I did display some energy. When I had swallowed one glass I rose up to leave. He no longer spoke of accompanying me, and with a sullen scowl, the scowl of a common man in an angry mood, the scowl of a brute whose violence is only slumbering, in the direction of his wife's sleeping apartment, he muttered:

"She'll have to open that door when you've gone."

I stared at this poltroon, who had worked himself into a fit of rage without knowing why, perhaps, owing to an obscure presentiment, the instinct of the deceived male who does not like closed doors. He had talked about her to me in a tender strain; now assuredly he was going to beat her.

He exclaimed, as he shook the lock once more:

"Pauline!"

A voice like that of a woman waking out of her sleep, replied from behind the partition:

"Eh! what?"

"Didn't you hear me coming in?"

"No, I was asleep! Let me rest."

"Open the door!"

"Yes, when you're alone. I don't like you to be bringing home fellows at night to drink with you."

Then I took myself off, stumbling down the stairs, as the other man, of whom I had been the accomplice had done. And, as I resumed my journey toward Paris, I realized that I had just witnessed in that wretched abode a scene of the eternal drama which is being acted every day, under every form, and among every class.

THE OLIVE GROVE

WHEN the ‘longshoremen of Garandou, a little port of Provence, situated in the bay of Pisca, between Marseilles and Toulon, perceived the boat of the Abbé Vilbois entering the harbor, they went down to the beach to help him pull her ashore.

The priest was alone in the boat. In spite of his fifty-eight years, he rowed with all the energy of a real sailor. He had placed his hat on the bench beside him, his sleeves were rolled up, disclosing his powerful arms, his cassock was open at the neck and turned over his knees, and he wore a round hat of heavy, white canvas. His whole appearance bespoke an odd and strenuous priest of southern climes, better fitted for adventures than for clerical duties.

He rowed with strong and measured strokes, as if to show the southern sailors how the men of the north handle the oars, and from time to time he turned around to look at the landing point.

The skiff struck the beach and slid far up, the bow plowing through the sand; then it stopped abruptly. The five men watching for the abbé drew near, jovial and smiling.

“Well!” said one, with the strong accent of Provence, “have you been successful, Monsieur le Curé?’ The abbé drew in the oars, removed his canvas head-covering, put on his hat, pulled down his sleeves, and buttoned his coat. Then having assumed the usual appearance of a village priest, he replied proudly: “Yes, I have caught three red-snappers, two eels, and five sunfish.”

The fishermen gathered around the boat to examine, with the air of experts, the dead fish, the fat red-snappers, the flat-headed eels, those hideous sea-serpents, and the violet sunfish, streaked with bright orange-colored stripes.

Said one: “I’ll carry them up to your house, Monsieur le Curé.”

“Thank you, my friend.”

Having shaken hands all around, the priest started homeward, followed by the man with the fish; the others took charge of the boat.

The Abbé Vilbois walked along slowly with an air of dignity. The exertion of rowing had brought beads of perspiration to his brow and he uncovered his head each time that he passed through the shade of an olive grove. The warm evening air, freshened by a slight breeze from the sea, cooled his high forehead covered with short, white hair, a forehead far more suggestive of an officer than of a priest.

The village appeared, built on a hill rising from a large valley which descended toward the sea.

It was a summer evening. The dazzling sun, traveling toward the ragged crests of the distant hills, outlined on the white, dusty road the figure of the priest, the shadow of whose three-cornered hat bobbed merrily over the fields, sometimes apparently climbing the trunks of the olive-trees, only to fall immediately to the ground and creep among them.

With every step he took, he raised a cloud of fine, white dust, the invisible powder which, in summer, covers the roads of Provence; it clung to the edge of his cassock turning it grayish white. Completely refreshed, his hands deep in his pockets, he strode along slowly and ponderously, like a mountaineer. His eyes were fixed on the distant village where he had lived twenty years, and where he hoped to die. Its church — his church — rose above the houses clustered around it; the square turrets of gray stone, of unequal proportions and quaint design, stood outlined against the beautiful southern valley; and their architecture suggested the fortifications of some old château rather than the steeples of a place of worship.

The abbé was happy; for he had caught three red-snappers, two eels, and five sunfish. It would enable him to triumph again over his flock, which respected him, no doubt, because he was one of the most powerful men of the place, despite his years. These little innocent vanities were his greatest pleasures. He was a fine marksman; sometimes he practiced with his neighbor, a retired army provost who kept a tobacco shop; he could also swim better than anyone along the coast.

In his day he had been a well-known society man, the Baron de Vilbois, but had entered the priesthood after an unfortunate love-affair. Being the scion of an old family of Picardy, devout and royal istic, whose sons for centuries had entered the army, the magistracy, or the Church, his first thought was to follow his mother’s advice and become a priest. But he yielded to his father’s suggestion that he should study law in Paris and seek some high office.

While he was completing his studies his father was carried off by pneumonia; his mother, who was greatly affected by the loss, died soon afterward. He came into a fortune, and consequently gave up the idea of following a profession to live a life of idleness. He was handsome and intelligent, but somewhat prejudiced by the traditions and principles which he had inherited, along with his muscular frame, from a long line of ancestors.

Society gladly welcomed him and he enjoyed himself after the fashion of a well-to-do and seriously inclined young man. But it happened that a friend introduced him to a young actress, a pupil of the Conservatoire, who was appearing with great success at the Odéon. It was a case of love at first sight.

His sentiment had all the violence, the passion of a man born to believe in absolute ideas. He saw her act the romantic rôle in which she had achieved a triumph the first night of her appearance. She was pretty, and, though naturally perverse, possessed the face of an angel.

She conquered him completely; she transformed him into a delirious fool, into one of those ecstatic idiots whom a woman’s look will forever chain to the pyre of fatal passions. She became his mistress and left the stage. They lived together four years, his love for her increasing during the time. He would have married her in spite of his proud name and family traditions, had he not discovered that for a long time she had been unfaithful to him with the friend who had introduced them.

The awakening was terrible, for she was about to become a mother, and he was awaiting the birth of the child to make her his wife.

When he held the proof of her transgressions, — some letters found in a drawer, — he confronted her with his knowledge and reproached her with all the savageness of his uncouth nature for her unfaithfulness and deceit. But she, a child of the people, being as sure of this man as of the other, braved and insulted him with the inherited daring of those women, who, in times of war, mounted with the men on the barricades.

He would have struck her to the ground — but she showed him her form. As white as death, he checked himself, remembering that a child of his would soon be born to this vile, polluted creature. He rushed at her to crush them both, to obliterate this double shame. Reeling under his blows, and seeing that he was about to stamp out the life of her unborn babe, she realized that she was lost. Throwing out her hands to parry the blows, she cried:

“Do not kill me! It is his, not yours!”

He fell back, so stunned with surprise that for a moment his rage subsided. He stammered:

“What? What did you say?”

Crazed with fright, having read her doom in his eyes and gestures, she repeated: “It’s not yours, it’s his.”

Through his clenched teeth he stammered:

“The child?”

“Yes.”

“You lie!”

And again he lifted his foot as if to crush her, while she struggled to her knees in a vain attempt to rise. “I tell you it’s his. If it was yours, wouldn’t it have come much sooner?”

He was struck by the truth of this argument. In a moment of strange lucidity, his mind evolved precise, conclusive, irresistible reasons to disclaim the child of this miserable woman, and he felt so appeased, so happy at the thought, that he decided to let her live.

He then spoke in a calmer voice: “Get up and leave, and never let me see you again.”

Quite cowed, she obeyed him and went. He never saw her again.

Then he left Paris and came south. He stopped in a village situated in a valley, near the coast of the Mediterranean. Selecting for his abode an inn facing the sea, he lived there eighteen months in complete seclusion, nursing his sorrow and despair. The memory of the unfaithful one tortured him; her grace, her charm, her perversity haunted him, and withal came the regret of her caresses.

He wandered aimlessly in those beautiful vales of Provence, baring his head, filled with the thoughts of that woman, to the sun that filtered through the grayish-green leaves of the olive-trees.

His former ideas of religion, the abated ardor of his faith, returned to him during his sorrowful retreat. Religion had formerlv seemed a refuge from the unknown temptations of life, now it appeared as a refuge from its snares and tortures. He had never given up the habit of prayer. In his sorrow, he turned anew to its consolations, and often at dusk he would wander into the little village church, where in the darkness gleamed the light of the lamp hung above the altar, to guard the sanctuary and symbolize the Divine Presence.

He confided his sorrow to his God, told Him of his misery, asking advice, pity, help, and consolation. Each day, his fervid prayers disclosed stronger faith.

The bleeding heart of this man, crushed by love for a woman, still longed for affection; and soon his prayers, his seclusion, his constant communion with the Savior who consoles and cheers the weary, wrought a change in him, and the mystic love of God entered his soul, casting out the love of the flesh.

He then decided to take up his former plans and to devote his life to the Church.

He became a priest. Through family connections he succeeded in obtaining a call to the parish of this village which he had come across by chance. Devoting a large part of his fortune to the maintenance of charitable institutions, and keeping only enough to enable him to help the poor as long as he lived, he sought refuge in a quiet life filled with prayer and acts of kindness toward his fellow-men.

Narrow-minded but kind-hearted, a priest with a soldier’s temperament, he guided his blind, erring flock forcibly through the mazes of this life in which every taste, instinct, and desire is a pitfall. But the old man in him never disappeared entirely. He continued to love out-of-door exercise and noble sports, but he hated every woman, having an almost childish fear of their dangerous fascination.

II.

The sailor who followed the priest, being a southerner, found it difficult to refrain from talking. But he did not dare start a conversation, for the abbé exerted a great prestige over his flock. At last he ventured a remark: “So you like your lodge, do you, Monsieur le Curé?”

This lodge was one of the tiny constructions that are inhabited during the summer by the villagers and the town people alike. It was situated in a field not far from the parish-house, and the abbé had hired it because the latter was very small and built in the heart of the village next to the church.

During the summer time, he did not live altogether at the lodge, but would remain a few days at a time to practice pistol-shooting and be close to nature.

"Yes, my friend," said the priest, "I like it very well."

The low structure could now be seen; it was painted pink, and the walls were almost hidden under the leaves and branches of the olive-trees that grew in the open field. A tall woman was passing in and out of the door, setting a small table at which she placed, at each trip, a knife and fork, a glass, a plate, a napkin, and a piece of bread. She wore the small cap of the women of Arles, a pointed cone of silk or black velvet, decorated with a white rosette.

When the abbé was near enough to make himself heard, he shouted:

"Eh! Marguerite!"

She stopped to ascertain whence the voice came, and recognizing her master: "Oh! it's you, Monsieur le Curé!"

"Yes. I have caught some fine fish, and want you to broil this sunfish immediately, do you hear?"

The servant examined, with a critical and approving glance, the fish that the sailor carried.

"Yes, but we are going to have a chicken for dinner," she said.

"Well, it cannot be helped. To-morrow the fish will not be as fresh as it is now. I mean to enjoy a little feast — it does not happen often — and the sin is not great."

The woman picked out a sunfish and prepared to go into the house. "Ah!" she said, "a man came to see you three times while you were out, Monsieur le Curé."

Indifferently he inquired: "A man! What kind of man?"

"Why, a man whose appearance was not in his favor."

"What! a beggar?"

"Perhaps — I don't know. But I think he is more of a 'maoufatan.'"

The abbé smiled at this word, which, in the language of Provence means a highwayman, a tramp, for he was well aware of Marguerite's timidity, and knew that every day and especially every night she fancied they would be murdered.

He handed a few sous to the sailor, who departed. And just as he was saying: "I am going to wash my hands," — for his past dainty habits still clung to him, — Marguerite called to him from the kitchen where she was scraping the fish with a knife, thereby detaching its blood-stained, silvery scales:

"There he comes!"

The abbé looked down the road and saw a man coming slowly toward the house; he seemed poorly dressed, indeed, so far as he could distinguish. He could not help smiling at his servant's anxiety, and thought, while he waited for the stranger: "I think, after all, she is right; he does look like a 'maoufatan.'"

The man walked slowly, with his eyes on the priest and his hands buried deep in his pockets. He was young and wore a full, blond beard; strands of curly hair escaped from his soft felt hat, which was so dirty and battered that it was impossible to imagine its former color and appearance. He was clothed in a long, dark overcoat, from which emerged the frayed edge of his trousers; on his feet were bathing shoes that deadened his steps, giving him the stealthy walk of a sneak thief.

When he had come within a few steps of the priest, he doffed, with a sweeping motion, the ragged hat that shaded his brow. He was not bad looking, though his face showed signs of dissipation and the top of his head was bald, an indication of premature fatigue and debauch, for he certainly was not over twenty-five years old.

The priest responded at once to his bow, feeling that this fellow was not an ordinary tramp, a mechanic out of work, or a jail-bird, hardly able to speak any other tongue but the mysterious language of prisons.

"How do you do, Monsieur le Curé?" said the man. The priest answered simply, "I salute you," unwilling to address this ragged stranger as "Monsieur." They considered each other attentively; the abbé felt uncomfortable under the gaze of the tramp, invaded by a feeling of unrest unknown to him.

At last the vagabond continued: "Well, do you recognize me?"

Greatly surprised, the priest answered: "Why, no, you are a stranger to me."

"Ah! you do not know me? Look at me well."

"I have never seen you before."

"Well, that may be true," replied the man sarcastically, "but let me show you some one whom you will know better."

He put on his hat and unbuttoned his coat, revealing his bare chest. A red sash wound around his spare frame held his trousers in place. He drew an envelope from his coat pocket, one of those soiled wrappers destined to protect the sundry papers of the tramp, whether they be stolen or legitimate property, those papers which he guards jealously and uses to protect himself against the too zealous gendarmes. He pulled out a photograph about the size of a folded letter, one of those pictures which were popular long ago; it was yellow and dim with age, for he had carried it around with him everywhere and the heat of his body had faded it.

Pushing it under the abbé's eyes, he demanded: "Do you know him?"

The priest took a step forward to look and grew pale, for it was his own likeness that he had given Her years ago.

Failing to grasp the meaning of the situation ha remained silent.

The tramp repeated:

"Do you recognize him?"

And the priest stammered: "Yes."

"Who is it?"

"It is I."

"It is you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, look at us both, — at me and at your picture!"

Already the unhappy man had seen that these two beings, the one in the picture and the one by his side, resembled each other like brothers; yet he did not understand, and muttered: "Well, what is it you wish?"

Then in an ugly voice, the tramp replied: "What do I wish? Why, first I wish you to recognize me."

"Who are you?"

"Who am I? Ask anybody by the roadside, ask your servant, let's go and ask the mayor and show him this; and he will laugh, I tell you that! Ah! you will not recognize me as your son, papa curé?" The old man raised his arms above his head, with a patriarchal gesture, and muttered despairingly: "It cannot be true!"

The young fellow drew quite close to him.

"Ah! It cannot be true, you say! You must stop lying, do you hear?" His clenched fists and threatening face, and the violence with which he spoke, made the priest retreat a few steps, while he asked himself anxiously which one of them was laboring under a mistake.

Again he asserted: "I never had a child."

The other man replied: "And no mistress, either?" The aged priest resolutely uttered one word, a proud admission:

"Yes."

"And was not this mistress about to give birth to a child when you left her?"

Suddenly the anger which had been quelled twenty-five years ago, not quelled, but buried in the heart of the lover, burst through the wall of faith, resignation, and renunciation he had built around it. Almost beside himself, he shouted:

"I left her because she was unfaithful to me and was carrying the child of another man; had it not been for this, I should have killed both you and her, sir!"

The young man hesitated, taken aback at the sincerity of this outburst. Then he replied in a gentler voice:

"Who told you that it was another man's child?"

"She told me herself and braved me."

Without contesting this assertion the vagabond assumed the indifferent tone of a loafer judging a case: "Well, then, mother made a mistake, that's all!" After his outburst of rage, the priest had succeeded in mastering himself sufficiently to be able to inquire: "And who told you that you were my son?"

"My mother, on her deathbed, M'sieur le Curé. And then — this!" And he held the picture under the eyes of the priest.

The old man took it from him; and slowly, with a heart bursting with anguish, he compared this stranger with his faded likeness and doubted no longer — it was his son.

An awful distress wrung his very soul, a terrible, inexpressible emotion invaded him; it was like the remorse of some ancient crime. He began to understand a little, he guessed the rest. He lived over the brutal scene of the parting. It was to save her life, then, that the wretched and deceitful woman had lied to him, her outraged lover. And he had believed her. And a son of his had been brought into the world and had grown up to be this sordid tramp, who exhaled the very odor of vice as a goat exhales its animal smell.

He whispered: "Will you take a little walk with me, so that we can discuss these matters?"

The young man sneered: "Why, certainly! Isn't that what I came for?"

They walked side by side through the olive grove. The sun had gone down and the coolness of southern twilights spread an invisible cloak over the country. The priest shivered, and raising his eyes with a familiar motion, perceived the trembling gray foliage of the holy tree which had spread its frail shadow over the Son of Man in His great trouble and despondency.

A short, despairing prayer rose within him, uttered by his soul's voice, a prayer by which Christians implore the Savior's aid: "O Lord! have mercy on me."

Turning to his son he said: "So your mother is dead?"

These words, "Your mother is dead," awakened a new sorrow; it was the torment of the flesh which cannot forget, the cruel echo of past sufferings; but mostly the thrill of the fleeting, delirious bliss of his youthful passion.

The young man replied: "Yes, Monsieur le Curé, my mother is dead."

"Has she been dead a long while?"

"Yes, three years."

A new doubt entered the priest's mind. "And why did you not find me out before?"

The other man hesitated.

"I was unable to, I was prevented. But excuse me for interrupting these recollections — I will enter into more details later — for I have not had anything to eat since yesterday morning."

A tremor of pity shook the old man and holding forth both hands: "Oh! my poor child!" he said.

The young fellow took those big, powerful hands in'his own slender and feverish palms.

Then he replied, with that air of sarcasm which hardly ever left his lips: "Ah! I'm beginning to think that we shall get along very well together, after alll."

The curé started toward the lodge.

"Let us go to dinner," he said.

He suddenly remembered, with a vague and instinctive pleasure, the fine fish he had caught, which, with the chicken, would make a good meal for the poor fellow.

The servant was in front of the door, watching their approach with an anxious and forbidding face.

"Marguerite," shouted the abbé, "take the table and put it into the dining-room, right away; and set two places, as quick as you can."

The woman seemed stunned at the idea that her master was going to dine with this tramp.

But the abbé, without waiting for her, removed the plate and napkin and carried the little table into the dining-room.

A few minutes later he was sitting opposite the beggar, in front of a soup-tureen filled with savory cabbage soup, which sent up a cloud of fragrant steam.

III.

When the plates were filled, the tramp fell to with ravenous avidity. The abbé had lost his appetite and ate slowly, leaving the bread in the bottom of his plate. Suddenly he inquired:

"What is your name?"

The man smiled; he was delighted to satisfy his hunger.

"Father unknown," he said, "and no other name but my mother's, which you probably remember. But I possess two Christian names, which, by the way, are quite unsuited to me — Philippe-Auguste."

The priest whitened.

"Why were you named thus?" he asked.

The tramp shrugged his shoulders. "I fancy you ought to know. After mother left you, she wished to make your rival believe that I was his child. He did believe it until I was about fifteen. Then I began to look too much like you. And he disclaimed me, the scoundrel. I had been christened Philippe-Auguste; now, if I had not resembled a soul, or if I had been the son of a third person, who had stayed in the background, to-day I should be the Vicomte Philippe-Auguste de Pravallon, son of the count and senator bearing this name. I have christened myself 'No-luck.'"

"How did you learn all this?"

"They discussed it before me, you know; pretty lively discussions they were, too. I tell you, that's what shows you the seamy side of life!"

Something more distressing than all he had suffered during the last half hour now oppressed the priest. It was a sort of suffocation which seemed as if it would grow and grow till it killed him; it was not due so much to the things he heard as to the manner in which they were uttered by this wayside tramp. Between himself and this beggar, between his son and himself, he was discovering the existence of those moral divergencies which are as fatal poisons to certain souls. Was this his son? He could not yet believe it. He wanted all the proofs, every one of them. He wanted to hear all, to listen to all. Again he thought of the olive-trees that shaded his little lodge, and for the second time he prayed: “O Lord! have mercy upon me.”

Philippe-Auguste had finished his soup. He inquired: “Is there nothing else, abbé?”

The kitchen was built in an annex. Marguerite could not hear her master’s voice. He always called her by striking a Chinese gong hung on the wall behind his chair. He took the brass hammer and struck the round metal plate. It gave a feeble sound, which grew and vibrated, becoming sharper and louder till it finally died away on the evening breeze.

The servant appeared with a frowning face and cast angry glances at the tramp, as if her faithful instinct had warned her of the misfortune th:it had befallen her master. She held a platter on which was the sunfish, spreading a savory odor of melted butter through the room. The abbé divided the fish lengthwise, helping his son to the better half: “I caught it a little while ago,” he said, with a touch of pride in spite of his keen distress.

Marguerite had not left the room.

The priest added: “Bring us some wine, the white wine of Cape Corse.”

She almost rebelled, and the priest, assuming a severe expression was obliged to repeat: “Now, go, and bring two bottles, remember,” for, when he drank with anybody, a very rare pleasure, indeed, he always opened one bottle for himself.

Beaming, Philippe-Auguste remarked: “Fine! A splendid ideal M: has been a long time since I’ve had such a dinner,” The servant came back after a few minutes. The abbé thought it an eternity, for now a thirst for information burned his blood like infernal fire.

After the bottles had been opened, the woman still remained, her eyes glued on the tramp.

“Leave us,” said the curé.

She intentionally ignored his command.

He repeated almost roughly: “I have ordered you to leave us.”

Then she left the room.

Philippe-Auguste devoured the fish voraciously, while his father sat watching him, more and more surprised and saddened at all the baseness stamped on the face that was so like his own. The morsels the abbé raised to his lips remained in his mouth, for his throat could not swallow; so he ate slowly, trying to choose, from the host of questions which besieged his mind, the one he wished his son to answer first. At last he spoke:

“What was the cause of her death?”

“Consumption.”

“Was she ill a long time?”

“About eighteen months.”

“How did she contract it?”

“We could not tell.”

Both men were silent. The priest was reflecting. He was oppressed by the multitude of things he wished to know and to hear, for since the rupture, since the day he had tried to kill her, he had heard nothing. Certainly, he had not cared to know, because he had buried her, along with his happiest days, in forgetfulness; but now, knowing that she was dead and gone, he felt within himself the almost jealous desire of a lover to hear all.

He continued: “She was not alone, was she?”

“No, she lived with him.”

The old man started: “With him? With Pravallon?”

“Why, yes.”

And the betrayed man rapidly calculated that the woman who had deceived him, had lived over thirty years with his rival.

Almost unconsciously he asked: “Were they happy?”

The young man sneered. “Why, yes, with ups and downs! It would have been better had I not been there. I always spoiled everything.”

“How, and why?” inquired the priest.

“I have already told you. Because he thought I was his son up to my fifteenth year. But the old fellow wasn’t a fool, and soon discovered the likeness. That created scenes. I used to listen behind the door. He accused mother of having deceived him. Mother would answer: ‘Is it my fault? you knew quite well when you took me that I was the mistress of that other man.’ You were that other man.”

“Ah! They spoke of me sometimes?”

“Yes, but never mentioned your name before me, excepting toward the end, when mother knew she was lost. I think they distrusted me.”

“And you — and you learned quite early the irregularity of your mother’s position?”

“Why, certainly. I am not innocent and I never was. Those things are easy to guess as soon as one begins to know life.”

Philippe-Auguste had been filling his glass repeatedly. His eyes now were beginning to sparkle, for his long fast was favorable to the intoxicating effects of the wine. The priest noticed it and wished to caution him. But suddenly the thought that a drunkard is imprudent and loquacious flashed through him, and lifting the bottle he again filled the young man's glass.

Meanwhile Marguerite had brought the chicken.

Having set it on the table, she again fastened her eyes on the tramp, saying in an indignant voice: "Can't you see that he's drunk, Monsieur le Curé?"

"Leave us," replied the priest, "and return to the kitchen."

She went out, slamming the door.

He then inquired: "What did your mother say about me?"

"Why, what a woman usually says of a man she has jilted: that you were hard to get along with, very strange, and that you would have made her life miserable with your peculiar ideas."

"Did she say that often?"

"Yes, but sometimes only in allusions, for fear I would understand; but nevertheless I guessed all."

"And how did they treat you in that house?"

"Me? They treated me very well at first and very badly afterward. When mother saw that I was interfering with her, she shook me."

"How?"

"How? very easily. When I was about sixteen years old, I got into various scrapes, and those blackguards put me into a reformatory to get rid of me." He put his elbows on the table and rested his cheeks in his palms. He was hopelessly intoxicated, and felt the unconquerable desire of all drunkards to talk and boast about themselves.

He smiled sweetly, with a feminine grace, an arch grace the priest knew and recognized as the hated charm that had won him long ago, and had also wrought his undoing. Now it was his mother whom the boy resembled, not so much because of his features, but because of his fascinating and deceptive glance, and the seductiveness of the false smile that played around his lips, the outlet of his inner ignominy.

Philippe-Auguste began to relate: "Ah! Ah! Ah!

—— I've had a fine life since I left the reformatory! A great writer would pay a large sum for it! Why, old Père Dumas's Monte Cristo has had no strangei adventures than mine."

He paused to reflect with the philosophical gravity of the drunkard, then he continued slowly:

"When you wish a boy to turn out well, no matter what he has done, never send him to a reformatory. The associations are too bad. Now, I got into a bad scrape. One night about nine o'clock, I, with three companions — we were all a little drunk —— was walking along the road near the ford of Folac. All at once a wagon hove in sight, with the driver and his family asleep in it. They were people from Martinon on their way home from town. I caught hold of the bridle, led the horse to the ferryboat, made him walk into it, and pushed the boat into the middle of the stream. This created some noise and the driver awoke. He could not see in the dark, but whipped up the horse, which started on a run and landed in the water with the whole load. All were drowned! My companions denounced me to the authorities, though they thought it was a good joke when they saw me do it. Really, we didn't think that it would turn out that way. We only wanted to give the people a ducking, just for fun. After that I committed worse offenses to revenge myself for the first one, which did not, on my honor, warrant the reformatory. But what's the use of telling them? I will speak only of the latest one, because I am sure it will please you. Papa, I avenged you!"

The abbé was watching his son with terrified eyes; he had stopped eating.

Philippe-Auguste was preparing to begin. "No, not yet," said the priest, "in a little while."

And he turned to strike the Chinese gong. Marguerite appeared almost instantly. Her master addressed her in such a rough tone that she hung her head, thoroughly frightened and obedient: "Bring in the lamp and the dessert, and then do not appear until I summon you."

She went out and returned with a porcelain lamp covered with a green shade, and bringing also a large piece of cheese and some fruit.

After she had gone, the abbé turned resolutely to his son.

"Now I am ready to hear you."

Philippe-Auguste calmly filled his plate with dessert and poured wine into his glass. The second bottle was nearly empty, though the priest had not touched it.

His mouth and tongue, thick with food and wine, the man stuttered: "Well, now for the last job. And it's a good one. I was home again, — stayed there in spite of them, because they feared me, — yes, feared me. Ah! you can't fool with me, you know, — I'll do anything, when I'm roused. They lived together on and off. The old man had two residences. One official, for the senator, the other clandestine, for the lover. Still, he lived more in the latter than in the former, as he could not get along without mother. Mother was a sharp one — she knew how to hold a man! She had taken him body and soul, and kept him to the last! Well, I had come back and I kept them down by fright. I am resourceful at times — nobody can match me for sharpness and for strength, too — I'm afraid of no one. Well, mother got sick and the old man took her to a fine place in the country, near Meulan, situated in a park as big as a wood. She lasted about eighteen months, as I told you. Then we felt the end to be near. He came from Paris every day — he was very miserable — really.

"One morning they chatted a long time, over an hour, I think, and I could not imagine what they were talking about. Suddenly mother called me in and said:

"'I am going to die, and there is something I want to tell you beforehand, in spite of the Count's advice.' In speaking of him she always said 'the Count.'

'It is the name of your father, who is alive.' I had asked her this more than fifty times — more than fifty times — my father's name — more than fifty times — and she always refused to tell. I think I even beat her one day to make her talk, but it was of no use. Then, to get rid of me, she told me that you had died penniless, that you were worthless and that she had made a mistake in her youth, an innocent girl's mistake. She lied so well, I really believed you had died.

"Finally she said: 'It is your father's name.'

"The old man, who was sitting in an armchair, repeated three times, like this: 'You do wrong, you do wrong, you do wrong, Rosette.'

"Mother sat up in bed. I can see her now, with her flushed cheeks and shining eyes; she loved me, in spite of everything; and she said: 'Then you do something for him, Philippe!' In speaking to him she called him 'Philippe' and me 'Auguste.'

"He began to shout like a madman: 'Do something for that loafer — that blackguard, that convict? never!'

"And he continued to call me names, as if he had done nothing else all his life but collect them.

"I was angry, but mother told me to hold my tongue, and she resumed: 'Then you must want him to starve, for you know that I leave no money.'

"Without being deterred, he continued: 'Rosette, I have given you thirty-five thousand francs a year for thirty years, — that makes more than a million. I have enabled you to live like a wealthy, a beloved, and I may say, a happy woman. I owe nothing to that fellow, who has spoiled our late years, and he will not get a cent from me. It is useless to insist. Tell him the name of his father, if you wish. I am sorry, but I wash my hands of him.'

"Then mother turned toward me. I thought: 'Good! now I'm going to find my real father — if he has money, I'm saved.'

"She went on: 'Your father, the Baron de Vilbois, is to-day the Abbé Vilbois, curé of Garandou, near Toulon. He was my lover before I left him for the Count!'

"And she told me all, excepting that she had deceived you about her pregnancy. But women, you know, never tell the whole truth."

Sneeringly, unconsciously, he was revealing the depths of his foul nature. With beaming face he raised the glass to his lips and continued:

"Mother died two days — two days later. We followed her remains to the grave, he and I — say — wasn't it funny? — he and I — and three servants — that was all. He cried like a calf — we were side by side — we looked like father and son.

"Then he went back to the house alone. I was thinking to myself: 'I'll have to clear out now and without a penny, too.' I owned only fifty francs. What could I do to revenge myself?

"He touched me on the arm and said: 'I wish to speak to you.' I followed him into his office. He sat down in front of the desk and, wiping away his tears, he told me that he would not be as hard on me as he had said he would to mother. He begged me to leave you alone. That — that concerns only you and me. He offered me a thousand-franc note —— a thousand — a thousand francs. What could a fellow like me do with a thousand francs? — I saw that there were very many bills in the drawer. The sight of the money made me wild. I put out my hand as if to take the note he offered me, but instead of doing so, I sprang at him, threw him to the ground and choked him till he grew purple. When I saw that he was going to give up the ghost, I gagged and bound him. Then I undressed him, laid him on his stomach and — ah! ah! ah! — I avenged you in a funny way!"

He stopped to cough, for he was choking with merriment. His ferocious, mirthful smile reminded the priest once more of the woman who had wrought his undoing.

"And then?" he inquired.

"Then, — ah! ah! ah! — There was a bright fire in the fireplace — it was in the winter — in December — mother died — a bright coal fire — I took the poker — I let it get red-hot — and I made crosses on his back, eight or more, I cannot remember how many — then I turned him over and repeated them on his stomach. Say, wasn't it funny, papa? Formerly they marked convicts in this way. He wriggled like an eel — but I had gagged him so that he couldn't scream. I gathered up the bills — twelve in all — with mine it made thirteen — an unlucky number. I left the house, after telling the servants not to bother their master until dinner-time, because he was asleep.

I thought that he would hush the matter up because he was a senator and would fear the scandal. I was mistaken. Four days later I was arrested in a Paris restaurant. I got three years for the job. That is the reason why I did not come to you sooner." He drank again, and stuttering so as to render his words almost unintelligible, continued:

"Now — papa — isn't it funny to have one's papa a curé? You must be nice to me, very nice, because, you know, I am not commonplace, — and I did a good job — didn't I — on the old man?"

The anger which years ago had driven the Abbé Vilbois to desperation rose within him at the sight of this miserable man.

He, who in the name of the Lord, had so often pardoned the infamous secrets whispered to him under the seal of confession, was now merciless in his own behalf. No longer did he implore the help of a merciful God, for he realized that no power on earth or in the sky could save those who had been visited by such a terrible disaster.

All the ardor of his passionate heart and of his violent blood, which long years of resignation had tempered, awoke against the miserable creature who was his son. He protested against the likeness he bore to him and to his mother, the wretched mother who had formed him so like herself; and he rebelled against the destiny that had chained this criminal to him, like an iron ball to a galley-slave.

The shock roused him from the peaceful and pious slumber which had lasted twenty-five years; with a wonderful lucidity he saw all that would inevitably ensue.

Convinced that he must talk loud so as to intimidate this man from the first, he spoke with his teeth clenched with fury:

"Now that you have told all, listen to me. You will leave here to-morrow morning. You will go to a country that I shall designate, and never leave it without my permission. I will give you a small income, for I am poor. If you disobey me once, it will be withdrawn and you will learn to know me." Though Philippe-Auguste was half dazed with wine, he understood the threat. Instantly the criminal within him rebelled. Between hiccoughs he sputtered: "Ah! papa, be careful what you say — you're a curé, remember — I hold you — and you have to walk straight, like the rest!"

The abbé started. Through his whole muscular frame crept the unconquerable desire to seize this monster, to bend him like a twig, so as to show him that he would have to yield.

Shaking the table, he shouted: "Take care, take care — I am afraid of nobody."

The drunkard lost his balance and seeing that he was going to fall and would forthwith be in the priest's power, he reached with a murderous look for one of the knives lying on the table. The abbé perceived his motion, and he gave the table a terrible shove; his son toppled over and landed on his back. The lamp fell with a crash and went out.

During a moment the clinking of broken glass was heard in the darkness, then the muffled sound of a soft body creeping on the floor, and then all was silent.

With the crashing of the lamp a complete darkness spread over them; it was so prompt and unexpected that they were stunned by it as by some terrible event. The drunkard, pressed against the wall, did not move; the priest remained on his chair in the midst of the night which had quelled his rage. The somber veil that had descended so rapidly, arresting his anger, also quieted the furious impulses of his soul; new ideas, as dark and dreary as the obscurity, beset him.

The room was perfectly silent, like a tomb where nothing draws the breath of life. Not a sound came from outside, neither the rumbling of a distant wagon, nor the bark of a dog, nor even the sigh of the wind passing through the trees.

This lasted a long time, perhaps an hour. Then suddenly the gong vibrated! It rang once, as if it had been struck a short, sharp blow, and was instantly followed by the noise of a falling body and an overturned chair.

Marguerite came running out of the kitchen, but as soon as she opened the door she fell back, frightened by the intense darkness. Trembling, her heart beating as if it would burst, she called in a low, hoarse voice: "M'sieur le Curé! M'sieur le Curé!" Nobody answered, nothing stirred.

“Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,” she thought, “what has happened, what have they done?”

She did not dare enter the room, yet feared to go back to fetch a light. She felt as if she would like to run away, to screech at the top of her voice, though she knew her legs would refuse to carry her. She repeated: “M’sieur le Curé! M’sieur le Curé! it is me, Marguerite.”

But, notwithstanding her terror, the instinctive desire of helping her master and a woman’s courage, which is sometimes heroic, filled her soul with a terrified audacity, and running back to the kitchen she fetched a lamp.

She stopped at the doorsill. First, she caught sight of the tramp lying against the wall, asleep, or simulating slumber; then she saw the broken lamp, and then, under the table, the feet and black-stockinged legs of the priest, who must have fallen backward, striking his head on the gong.

Her teeth chattering and her hands trembling with fright, she kept on repeating: “My God! My God! what is this?”

She advanced slowly, taking small steps, till she slid on something slimy and almost fell.

Stooping, she saw that the floor was red and that a red liquid was spreading around her feet toward the door. She guessed that it was blood. She threw down her light so as to hide the sight of it, and fled from the room out into the fields, running half crazed toward the village. She ran screaming at the top of her voice, and bumping against the trees she did not heed, her eyes fastened on the gleaming lights of the distant town.

Her shrill voice rang out like the gloomy cry of the night-owl, repeating continuously, “The maoufa tan — the maoufatan — the maoufatan” —

When she reached the first house, some excited men came out and surrounded her; but she could not answer them and struggled to escape, for the fright had turned her head.

After a while they guessed that something must have happened to the curé, and a little rescuing party started for the lodge.

The little pink house standing in the middle of the olive grove had grown black and invisible in the dark, silent night. Since the gleam of the solitary window had faded, the cabin was plunged in darkness, lost in the grove, and unrecognizable for anyone but a native of the place.

Soon lights began to gleam near the ground, between the trees, streaking the dried grass with long, yellow reflections. The twisted trunks of the olive-trees assumed fantastic shapes under the moving lights, looking like monsters or infernal serpents. The projected reflections suddenly revealed a vague, white mass, and soon the low, square wall of the lodge grew pink from the light of the lanterns. Several peasants were carrying the latter, escorting two gendarmes with revolvers, the mayor, the *garde-champêtre,* and Marguerite, supported by the men, for she was almost unable to walk.

The rescuing party hesitated a moment in front of the open, grewsome door. But the brigadier, snatching a lantern from one of the men, entered, followed by the rest.

The servant had not lied, blood covered the floor like a carpet. It had spread to the place where the tramp was lying, bathing one of his hands and legs.

The father and son were asleep, the one with a severed throat, the other in a drunken stupor. The two gendarmes seized the latter and before he awoke they had him handcuffed. He rubbed his eyes, stunned, stupefied with liquor, and when he saw the body of the priest, he appeared terrified, unable to understand what had happened.

“Why did he not escape?” said the mayor.

“He was too drunk,” replied the officer.

And every man agreed with him, for nobody ever thought that perhaps the Abbé Vilbois had taken his own life.

A WARNING NOTE

I have received the following letter. Thinking that it may be profitable to many readers, I make it my business to communicate it to them:

"Paris, November 15th, 1886.

"Monsieur, — You often treat either in the shape of short stories or chronicles, of subjects which have relation to what I may describe as 'current morals.' I am going to submit to you some reflections which ought, it seems to me, to furnish you with the materials for one of your tales.

"I am not married; I am a bachelor, and, as it seems to me, a rather simple man. But I fancy that many men, the greater part of men, are simple in the way that I am. As I am always, or nearly always, a plain dealer, I am not well able to see through the natural cunning of my neighbors, and I go straight ahead, with my eyes open, without sufficiently looking out for what is behind things and behind people's external behavior.

"We are nearly all accustomed, as a rule, to take appearances for realities, and to look on people as what they pretend to be; and very few possess that scent which enables certain men to divine the real and hidden nature of others. From this peculiar and conventional method of regarding life come the result that we pass, like moles, through the midst of events; and that we never believe in what is, but in what seems to be, that we declare a thing to be improbable as soon as we are shown the fact behind the veil, and that everything which displeases our idealistic morality is classed by us an exception, without taking into account that these exceptions all brought together constitute nearly the total number of cases. There further results from it that credulous good people like me are deceived by everybody and especially by women, who have a talent in this direction.

"I have started far afield in order to come to the particular fact which interests me. I have a mistress, a married woman. Like many others, I imagined (do you understand?) that I had chanced on an exception, on an unhappy little woman who was deceiving her husband for the first time. I had paid attentions to her, or rather I had looked on myself as having paid attention to her for a long time, as having overcome her virtue by dint of kindness and love, and as having triumphed by the sheer force of perseverance. In fact, I had made use of a thousand precautions, a thousand devices, and a thousand subtle dallyings in order to succeed in getting the better of her.

"Now here is what happened last week: Her husband being absent for some days, she suggested that we should both dine together, and that I should attend on myself so as to avoid the presence of a man-servant. She had a fixed idea which had haunted her for the last four or five months: She wanted to get tipsy, but to get tipsy altogether without being afraid of consequences, without having to go back home, speak to her chambermaid, and walk before witnesses. She had often obtained what she called 'a gay agitation' without going farther, and she had found it delightful. So then she promised herself that she would get tipsy once, only once, but thoroughly so. She pretended at her own house that she was going to spend twenty-four hours with some friends near Paris, and she reached my abode just about dinner-hour.

"A woman naturally ought not to get fuddled except when she has had too much champagne. She drinks a big glass of it fasting, and before the oysters arrive, she begins to ramble in her talk.

"We had a cold dinner prepared on a table behind me. It was enough for me to stretch out my arms to take the dishes or the plates, and I attended on myself as best I could while I listened to her chattering.

"She kept swallowing glass after glass, haunted by her fixed idea. She began by making me the recipient of meaningless and interminable confidences with regard to her sensations as a young girl. She went on and on, her eyes rather wandering, brilliant, her tongue untied, and her light ideas rolling themselves out endlessly like the blue telegraph-paper which is moved on without stopping by the bobbin and which keeps extending its length to the click of the electric apparatus which covers it with unknown words.

"From time to time she asked me:

"'Am I tipsy?'

"'No, not yet.'

"And she went on drinking.

"She was so in a little while, not so tipsy as to lose her senses, but tipsy enough to tell the truth, as it seemed to me.

"To her confidences as to her emotions while a young girl succeeded more intimate confidences as to her relations with her husband. She made them to me without restraint till she wearied me with them, under this pretext, which she repeated a hundred times: 'I can surely tell everything to you. To whom could I tell everything if it were not to you?' So I was made acquainted with all the habits, all the defects, all the fads and the most secret fancies of her husband.

"And by way of claiming my approval she asked: 'Isn't he a flat? Do you think he has taken a feather out of me? eh? So, the first time I saw you, I said to myself: "Let me see! I like him, and I'll take him for my lover." It was then you began mashing me.'

"I must have presented an odd face to her eyes at that moment, for she could see it, tipsy though she was; and with great outbursts of laughter, she exclaimed: 'Ah! you big simpleton, you did go about it cautiously; but, when men pay attention to us, you dear blockhead, you see we like it, and then they must make quick work of it, and not keep us waiting. A man must be a ninny not to understand, by a mere glance at us, that we mean "Yes." Ah! I believe I was waiting for you, you stupid! I did not know what to do in order to make you see that I was in a hurry. Oh! yes, flowers, verses, compliments, more verses, and nothing else at all! I was very near letting you go, my fine fellow, you were so long in making up your mind. And only to think that half the men in the world are like you, while the other half, ha! ha! ha!'

"This laugh of hers sent a cold shiver down my back. I stammered: 'The other half — what about the other half?'

"She still went on drinking, her eyes steeped in the fumes of sparkling wine, her mind impelled by the imperious necessity for telling the truth which sometimes takes possession of drunkards.

"She replied: 'Ah! the other half makes quick work of it — too quick; but, all the same, they are right. There are days when we don't hit it off with them; but there are days, too, when it all goes right, in spite of everything.... My dear, if you only knew how funny it is — the way the two kinds of men act! You see, the timid ones, such as you, you never could imagine what sort the others are and what they do, immediately, as soon as they find themselves alone with us. They are regular dare-devils! They get many a slap in the face from us, no doubt of that, but what does that matter? They know we're the sort that kiss and don't tell! They know us well, they do!'

"I stared at her with the eyes of an Inquisitor, and with a mad desire to make her speak, to learn everything from her. How often had I put this question to myself: 'How do the other men behave towards the women who belong to us?' I was fully conscious of the fact that, from the way I saw two men talking to the same woman publicly in a drawing-room, these two men, if they found themselves, one after the other, all alone with her, would conduct themselves quite differently, although they were both equally well acquainted with her. We can guess at the first glance of the eye that certain beings, naturally endowed with the power of seduction, or only more lively, more daring than we are, reach after an hour's chat with a woman who pleases them, to a degree of intimacy to which we would not attain in a year. Well, do these men, these seducers, these bold adventurers, take, when the occasion presents itself to them, liberties with their hands and lips which to us, the timid ones, would appear odious outrages, but which women perhaps look on merely as pardonable effrontery, as indecent homages to their irresistible grace!

"So I asked her: 'There are women, though, who think these men very improper?'

"She threw herself back on her chair in order to laugh more at her ease, but with a nerveless, unhealthy laugh, one of those laughs which ends in nervous fits, then, a little more calmly, she replied: 'Ha! ha! my dear, improper? that is to say, that they dare everything, at once, all, you understand, and many other things, too.'

"I felt myself horrified as if she had just revealed to me a monstrous thing.

"'And you permit this, you women?'

"'No, we don't permit it; we slap them in the face, but, for all that, they amuse us! And then with them one is always afraid, one is never easy. You must keep watching them the whole time; it is like fighting a duel. You have to keep staring into their eyes to see what they are thinking of or where they are putting their hands. They are blackguards, if you like, but they love us better than you do.'

"A singular and unexpected sensation stole over me. Although a bachelor, and determined to remain a bachelor, I suddenly felt in my breast the spirit of a husband in the face of this impudent confidence. I felt myself the friend, the ally, the brother of all these confiding men who are, if not robbed, at least defrauded by all the rufflers of woman's waists.

"It is this strange emotion, monsieur, that I am obeying at this moment, in writing to you, and in begging of you to address a warning note to the great army of easy-going husbands.

"However, I had still some lingering doubts. This woman was drunk and must be lying.

"I went on to inquire: 'How is it that you never relate these adventures to anyone, you women?'

"She gazed at me with profound pity, and with such an air of sincerity that, for the moment, I thought she had been soberized by astonishment.

"'We — But, my dear fellow, you are very foolish. Why do we never talk to you about these things? Ha! ha! ha! Does your valet tell you about his tips, his odd sous? Well, this is our little tip. The husband ought not to complain when we don't go farther. But how dull you are! To talk of these things would be to give the alarm to all ninnies! Ah! how dull you are!... And then what harm does it do as long as we don't yield?'

"I felt myself in a great state of great confusion as I put this question to her:

"'So then you have often been embraced by men?'

"She answered, with an air of sovereign contempt for the man who could have any doubt on the subject:

"'Faith! — Why, every woman has been often embraced.... Try it on with any of them, no matter whom, in order to see for yourself, you great goose! Look here! embrace Mme. de X! She is quite young, and quite virtuous. Embrace, my friend — embrace, and touch, you shall see. Ha! ha! ha!'

"All of a sudden she flung her glass straight at the chandelier. The champagne fell down in a shower, extinguished three wax-candles, stained the hangings, and deluged the table, while the broken glass was scattered about the dining-room. Then, she made an effort to seize the bottle to do the same with it, but I prevented her. After that, she burst out crying in a very loud tone — the nervous fit had come on, as I had anticipated....

"Some days later, I had almost forgotten this avowal of a tipsy woman when I chanced to find myself at an evening party with this Mme. de X —— whom my mistress had advised me to embrace. As I lived in the same direction as she did, I offered to drive her to her own door, for she was alone this evening. She accepted my offer.

"As soon as we were in the carriage, I said to myself: 'Come! I must try it on!' But I had not the courage. I did not know how to make a start, how to begin the attack.

"Then suddenly, the desperate courage of cowards came to my aid. I said to her: 'How pretty you were, this evening.'

"She replied with a laugh: 'So then, this evening was an exception, since you only remarked it for the first time.'

"I did not know what rejoinder to make. Certainly my gallantry was not making progress. After a little reflection, however, I managed to say:

"'No, but I never dared to tell you.'

"She was astonished:

"'Why?'

"'Because it is — it is a little difficult.'

"'Difficult to tell a woman that she's pretty? Why, where did you come from? You should always tell us so, even when you only half think it ... because it always gives us pleasure to hear."...

"I felt myself suddenly animated by a fantastic audacity, and, catching her round the waist, I raised my lips towards her mouth.

"Nevertheless I seemed to be rather nervous about it, and not to appear so terrible to her. I must also have arranged and executed my movement very badly, for she managed to turn her head aside so as to avoid contact with my face, saying:

"'Oh no — this is rather too much — too much.... You are too quick! Take care of my hair. You cannot embrace a woman who has her hair dressed like mine!'...

"I resumed my former position in the carriage, disconcerted, unnerved by this repulse. But the carriage drew up before her gate; and she, as she stepped out of it, held out her hand to me, saying in her most gracious tones:

"'Thanks, dear monsieur, for having seen me home ... and don't forget my advice!'

"I saw her three days later. She had forgotten everything.

"And I, monsieur, I am incessantly thinking of the other sort of men — the sort of men to whom a lady's hair is no obstacle, and who know how to seize every opportunity."...

AFTER

"My darlings," said the comtesse, "you might go to bed."

The three children, two girls and a boy, rose and kissed their grandmother. Then they said good-night to M. le Cure, who had dined at the chateau, as was his custom every Thursday.

The Abbe Mauduit lifted two of the children on his knees, passing his long arms clad in black round their necks, and kissing them tenderly on the forehead as he drew their heads toward him as a father might.

Then he set them down on the ground, and the little beings went off, the boy ahead, and the girls following.

"You are fond of children, M. le Cure," said the comtesse.

"Very fond, madame."

The old woman raised her bright eyes toward the priest.

"And — has your solitude never weighed too heavily on you?"

"Yes, sometimes."

He became silent, hesitated, and then added: "But I was never made for ordinary life."

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh! I know very well. I was made to be a priest; I followed my vocation."

The comtesse kept staring at him:

"Come now, M. le Cure, tell me this — tell me how it was you resolved to renounce forever all that makes the rest of us love life — all that consoles and sustains us? What is it that drove you, impelled you, to separate yourself from the great natural path of marriage and the family? You are neither an enthusiast nor a fanatic, neither a gloomy person nor a sad person. Was it some incident, some sorrow, that led you to take life vows?"

The Abbe Mauduit rose and approached the fire, then, holding toward the flame his big shoes, such as country priests generally wear, he seemed still hesitating as to what reply he should make.

He was a tall old man with white hair, and for the last twenty years had been pastor of the parish of Saint-Antoine-du-Rocher. The peasants said of him: “There’s a good man for you!” And indeed he was a good man, benevolent, friendly to all, gentle, and, to crown all, generous. Like Saint Martin, he would have cut his cloak in two. He laughed readily, and wept also, on slight provocation, just like a woman — which prejudiced him more or less in the hard minds of the country folk.

The old Comtesse de Saville, living in retirement in her chateau of Rocher, in order to bring up her grandchildren, after the successive deaths of her son and her daughter-in-law, was very much attached to her cure, and used to say of him: “What a heart he has!”

He came every Thursday to spend the evening with the comtesse, and they were close friends, with the frank and honest friendship of old people.

She persisted:

“Look here, M. le Cure! it is your turn now to make a confession!”

He repeated: “I was not made for ordinary life. I saw it fortunately in time, and I have had many proofs since that I made no mistake on the point:

“My parents, who were mercers in Verdiers, and were quite well to do, had great ambitions for me. They sent me to a boarding school while I was very young. No one knows what a boy may suffer at school through the mere fact of separation, of isolation. This monotonous life without affection is good for some, and detestable for others. Young people are often more sensitive than one supposes, and by shutting them up thus too soon, far from those they love, we may develop to an exaggerated extent a sensitiveness which is overwrought and may become sickly and dangerous.

“I scarcely ever played; I had no companions; I passed my hours in homesickness; I spent the whole night weeping in my bed. I sought to bring before my mind recollections of home, trifling memories of little things, little events. I thought incessantly of all I had left behind there. I became almost imperceptibly an over-sensitive youth to whom the slightest annoyances were terrible griefs.

“In this way I remained taciturn, self-absorbed, without expansion, without confidants. This mental excitement was going on secretly and surely. The nerves of children are quickly affected, and one should see to it that they live a tranquil life until they are almost fully developed. But who ever reflects that, for certain boys, an unjust imposition may be as great a pang as the death of a friend in later years? Who can explain why certain young temperaments are liable to terrible emotions for the slightest cause, and may eventually become morbid and incurable?

"This was my case. This faculty of regret developed in me to such an extent that my existence became a martyrdom.

"I did not speak about it; I said nothing about it; but gradually I became so sensitive that my soul resembled an open wound. Everything that affected me gave me painful twitchings, frightful shocks, and consequently impaired my health. Happy are the men whom nature has buttressed with indifference and armed with stoicism.

"I reached my sixteenth year. An excessive timidity had arisen from this abnormal sensitiveness. Feeling myself unprotected from all the attacks of chance or fate, I feared every contact, every approach, every current. I lived as though I were threatened by an unknown and always expected misfortune. I did not venture either to speak or do anything in public. I had, indeed, the feeling that life, is a battle, a dreadful conflict in which one receives terrible blows, grievous, mortal wounds. In place of cherishing, like all men, a cheerful anticipation of the morrow, I had only a confused fear of it, and felt in my own mind a desire to conceal myself to avoid that combat in which I would be vanquished and slain.

"As soon as my studies were finished, they gave me six months' time to choose a career. A very simple occurrence showed me clearly, all of a sudden, the diseased condition of my mind, made me understand the danger, and determined me to flee from it.

"Verdiers is a little town surrounded with plains and woods. In the central street stands my parents' house. I now passed my days far from this dwelling which I had so much regretted, so much desired. Dreams had reawakened in me, and I walked alone in the fields in order to let them escape and fly away. My father and mother, quite occupied with business, and anxious about my future, talked to me only about their profits or about my possible plans. They were fond of me after the manner of hardheaded, practical people; they had more reason than heart in their affection for me. I lived imprisoned in my thoughts, and vibrating with my eternal sensitiveness.

"Now, one evening, after a long walk, as I was making my way home with great strides so as not to be late, I saw a dog trotting toward me. He was a species of red spaniel, very lean, with long curly ears.

"When he was ten paces away from me he stopped. I did the same. Then he began wagging his tail, and came over to me with short steps and nervous movements of his whole body, bending down on his paws as if appealing to me, and softly shaking his head. I spoke to him. He then began to crawl along in such a sad, humble, suppliant manner that I felt the tears coming into my eyes. I approached him; he ran away, then he came back again; and I bent down on one knee trying to coax him to approach me, with soft words. At last, he was within reach of my hands, and I gently and very carefully stroked him.

"He gained courage, gradually rose and, placing his paws on my shoulders, began to lick my face. He followed me to the house.

"This was really the first being I had passionately loved, because he returned my affection. My attachment to this animal was certainly exaggerated and ridiculous. It seemed to me in a confused sort of way that we were two brothers, lost on this earth, and therefore isolated and without defense, one as well as the other. He never again quitted my side. He slept at the foot of my bed, ate at the table in spite of the objections of my parents, and followed me in my solitary walks.

"I often stopped at the side of a ditch, and sat down in the grass. Sam immediately rushed up, lay down at my feet, and lifted up my hand with his muzzle that I might caress him.

"One day toward the end of June, as we were on the road from Saint-Pierre de Chavrol, I saw the diligence from Pavereau coming along. Its four horses were going at a gallop, with its yellow body, and its imperial with the black leather hood. The coachman cracked his whip; a cloud of dust rose up under the wheels of the heavy vehicle, then floated behind, just as a cloud would do.

"Suddenly, as the vehicle came close to me, Sam, perhaps frightened by the noise and wishing to join me, jumped in front of it. A horse's hoof knocked him down. I saw him roll over, turn round, fall back again beneath the horses' feet, then the coach gave two jolts, and behind it I saw something quivering in the dust on the road. He was nearly cut in two; all his intestines were hanging out and blood was spurting from the wound. He tried to get up, to walk, but he could only move his two front paws, and scratch the ground with them, as if to make a hole. The two others were already dead. And he howled dreadfully, mad with pain.

"He died in a few minutes. I cannot describe how much I felt and suffered. I was confined to my room for a month.

"One night, my father, enraged at seeing me so affected by such a trifling occurrence, exclaimed:

"'How will it be when you have real griefs — if you lose your wife or children?'

"His words haunted me and I began to see my condition clearly. I understood why all the small miseries of each day assumed in my eyes the importance of a catastrophe; I saw that I was organized in such a way that I suffered dreadfully from everything, that every painful impression was multiplied by my diseased sensibility, and an atrocious fear of life took possession of me. I was without passions, without ambitions; I resolved to sacrifice possible joys in order to avoid sure sorrows. Existence is short, but I made up my mind to spend it in the service of others, in relieving their troubles and enjoying their happiness. Having no direct experience of either one or the other, I should only experience a milder form of emotion.

"And if you only knew how, in spite of this, misery tortures me, ravages me! But what would formerly have been an intolerable affliction has become commiseration, pity.

"These sorrows which cross my path at every moment, I could not endure if they affected me directly. I could not have seen one of my children die without dying myself. And I have, in spite of everything, preserved such a mysterious, overwhelming fear of events that the sight of the postman entering my house makes a shiver pass every day through my veins, and yet I have nothing to be afraid of now."

The Abbe Mauduit ceased speaking. He stared into the fire in the huge grate, as if he saw there mysterious things, all the unknown of the existence he might have passed had he been more fearless in the face of suffering.

He added, then, in a subdued tone:

"I was right. I was not made for this world."

The comtesse said nothing at first; but at length, after a long silence, she remarked:

"For my part, if I had not my grandchildren, I believe I would not have the courage to live."

And the cure rose up without saying another word.

As the servants were asleep in the kitchen, she accompanied him herself to the door, which looked out on the garden, and she saw his tall shadow, lit up by the reflection of the lamp, disappearing through the gloom of night.

Then she came back and sat down before the fire, and pondered over many things we never think of when we are young.

TIMBUCTOO

The boulevard, that river of humanity, was alive with people in the golden light of the setting sun. The whole sky was red, blinding, and behind the Madeleine an immense bank of flaming clouds cast a shower of light the whole length of the boulevard, vibrant as the heat from a brazier.

The gay, animated crowd went by in this golden mist and seemed to be glorified. Their faces were gilded, their black hats and clothes took on purple tints, the patent leather of their shoes cast bright reflections on the asphalt of the sidewalk.

Before the cafes a mass of men were drinking opalescent liquids that looked like precious stones dissolved in the glasses.

In the midst of the drinkers two officers in full uniform dazzled all eyes with their glittering gold lace. They chatted, happy without asking why, in this glory of life, in this radiant light of sunset, and they looked at the crowd, the leisurely men and the hurrying women who left a bewildering odor of perfume as they passed by.

All at once an enormous negro, dressed in black, with a paunch beneath his jean waistcoat, which was covered with charms, his face shining as if it had been polished, passed before them with a triumphant air. He laughed at the passers-by, at the news venders, at the dazzling sky, at the whole of Paris. He was so tall that he overtopped everyone else, and when he passed all the loungers turned round to look at his back.

But he suddenly perceived the officers and darted towards them, jostling the drinkers in his path. As soon as he reached their table he fixed his gleaming and delighted eyes upon them and the corners of his mouth expanded to his ears, showing his dazzling white teeth like a crescent moon in a black sky. The two men looked in astonishment at this ebony giant, unable to understand his delight.

With a voice that made all the guests laugh, he said:

“Good-day, my lieutenant.”

One of the officers was commander of a battalion, the other was a colonel. The former said:

"I do not know you, sir. I am at a loss to know what you want of me."

"Me like you much, Lieutenant Vedie, siege of Bezi, much grapes, find me."

The officer, utterly bewildered, looked at the man intently, trying to refresh his memory. Then he cried abruptly:

"Timbuctoo?"

The negro, radiant, slapped his thigh as he uttered a tremendous laugh and roared:

"Yes, yes, my lieutenant; you remember Timbuctoo, ya. How do you do?"

The commandant held out his hand, laughing heartily as he did so. Then Timbuctoo became serious. He seized the officer's hand and, before the other could prevent it, he kissed it, according to negro and Arab custom. The officer embarrassed, said in a severe tone:

"Come now, Timbuctoo, we are not in Africa. Sit down there and tell me how it is I find you here."

Timbuctoo swelled himself out and, his words falling over one another, replied hurriedly:

"Make much money, much, big restaurant, good food; Prussians, me, much steal, much, French cooking; Timbuctoo cook to the emperor; two thousand francs mine. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

And he laughed, doubling himself up, roaring, with wild delight in his glances.

When the officer, who understood his strange manner of expressing himself, had questioned him he said:

"Well, au revoir, Timbuctoo. I will see you again."

The negro rose, this time shaking the hand that was extended to him and, smiling still, cried:

"Good-day, good-day, my lieutenant!"

He went off so happy that he gesticulated as he walked, and people thought he was crazy.

"Who is that brute?" asked the colonel.

"A fine fellow and a brave soldier. I will tell you what I know about him. It is funny enough.

"You know that at the commencement of the war of 1870 I was shut up in Bezieres, that this negro calls Bezi. We were not besieged, but blockaded. The Prussian lines surrounded us on all sides, outside the reach of cannon, not firing on us, but slowly starving us out.

"I was then lieutenant. Our garrison consisted of soldier of all descriptions, fragments of slaughtered regiments, some that had run away, freebooters separated from the main army, etc. We had all kinds, in fact even eleven Turcos [Algerian soldiers in the service of France], who arrived one evening no one knew whence or how. They appeared at the gates of the city, exhausted, in rags, starving and dirty. They were handed over to me.

"I saw very soon that they were absolutely undisciplined, always in the street and always drunk. I tried putting them in the police station, even in prison, but nothing was of any use. They would disappear, sometimes for days at a time, as if they had been swallowed up by the earth, and then come back staggering drunk. They had no money. Where did they buy drink and how and with what?

"This began to worry me greatly, all the more as these savages interested me with their everlasting laugh and their characteristics of overgrown frolicsome children.

"I then noticed that they blindly obeyed the largest among them, the one you have just seen. He made them do as he pleased, planned their mysterious expeditions with the all-powerful and undisputed authority of a leader. I sent for him and questioned him. Our conversation lasted fully three hours, for it was hard for me to understand his remarkable gibberish. As for him, poor devil, he made unheard-of efforts to make himself intelligible, invented words, gesticulated, perspired in his anxiety, mopping his forehead, puffing, stopping and abruptly beginning again when he thought he had found a new method of explaining what he wanted to say.

"I gathered finally that he was the son of a big chief, a sort of negro king of the region around Timbuctoo. I asked him his name. He repeated something like 'Chavaharibouhalikranafotapolara.' It seemed simpler to me to give him the name of his native place, 'Timbuctoo.' And a week later he was known by no other name in the garrison.

"But we were all wildly anxious to find out where this African ex-prince procured his drinks. I discovered it in a singular manner.

"I was on the ramparts one morning, watching the horizon, when I perceived something moving about in a vineyard. It was near the time of vintage, the grapes were ripe, but I was not thinking of that. I thought that a spy was approaching the town, and I organized a complete expedition to catch the prowler. I took command myself, after obtaining permission from the general.

“I sent out by three different gates three little companies, which were to meet at the suspected vineyard and form a cordon round it. In order to cut off the spy’s retreat, one of these detachments had to make at least an hour’s march. A watch on the walls signalled to me that the person I had seen had not left the place. We went along in profound silence, creeping, almost crawling, along the ditches. At last we reached the spot assigned.

“I abruptly disbanded my soldiers, who darted into the vineyard and found Timbuctoo on hands and knees travelling around among the vines and eating grapes, or rather devouring them as a dog eats his sop, snatching them in mouthfuls from the vine with his teeth.

“I wanted him to get up, but he could not think of it. I then understood why he was crawling on his hands and knees. As soon as we stood him on his feet he began to wabble, then stretched out his arms and fell down on his nose. He was more drunk than I have ever seen anyone.

“They brought him home on two poles. He never stopped laughing all the way back, gesticulating with his arms and legs.

“This explained the mystery. My men also drank the juice of the grapes, and when they were so intoxicated they could not stir they went to sleep in the vineyard. As for Timbuctoo, his love of the vineyard was beyond all belief and all bounds. He lived in it as did the thrushes, whom he hated with the jealous hate of a rival. He repeated incessantly: ‘The thrushes eat all the grapes, captain!’

“One evening I was sent for. Something had been seen on the plain coming in our direction. I had not brought my field-glass and I could not distinguish things clearly. It looked like a great serpent uncoiling itself — a convoy. How could I tell?

“I sent some men to meet this strange caravan, which presently made its triumphal entry. Timbuctoo and nine of his comrades were carrying on a sort of altar made of camp stools eight severed, grinning and bleeding heads. The African was dragging along a horse to whose tail another head was fastened, and six other animals followed, adorned in the same manner.

“This is what I learned: Having started out to the vineyard, my Africans had suddenly perceived a detachment of Prussians approaching a village.

Instead of taking to their heels, they hid themselves, and as soon as the Prussian officers dismounted at an inn to refresh themselves, the eleven rascals rushed on them, put to flight the lancers, who thought they were being attacked by the main army, killed the two sentries, then the colonel and the five officers of his escort.

"That day I kissed Timbuctoo. I saw, however, that he walked with difficulty and thought he was wounded. He laughed and said:

"'Me provisions for my country.'

"Timbuctoo was not fighting for glory, but for gain. Everything he found that seemed to him to be of the slightest value, especially anything that glistened, he put in his pocket. What a pocket! An abyss that began at his hips and reached to his ankles. He had retained an old term used by the troopers and called it his 'profonde,' and it was his 'profonde' in fact.

"He had taken the gold lace off the Prussian uniforms, the brass off their helmets, detached their buttons, etc., and had thrown them all into his 'profonde,' which was full to overflowing.

"Each day he pocketed every glistening object that came beneath his observation, pieces of tin or pieces of silver, and sometimes his contour was very comical.

"He intended to carry all that back to the land of ostriches, whose brother he might have been, this son of a king, tormented with the longing to gobble up all objects that glistened. If he had not had his 'profonde' what would he have done? He doubtless would have swallowed them.

"Each morning his pocket was empty. He had, then, some general store where his riches were piled up. But where? I could not discover it.

"The general, on being informed of Timbuctoo's mighty act of valor, had the headless bodies that had been left in the neighboring village interred at once, that it might not be discovered that they were decapitated. The Prussians returned thither the following day. The mayor and seven prominent inhabitants were shot on the spot, by way of reprisal, as having denounced the Prussians.

"Winter was here. We were exhausted and desperate. There were skirmishes now every day. The famished men could no longer march. The eight 'Turcos' alone (three had been killed) remained fat and shiny, vigorous and always ready to fight. Timbuctoo was even getting fatter. He said to me one day:

"'You much hungry; me good meat.'

“And he brought me an excellent filet. But of what? We had no more cattle, nor sheep, nor goats, nor donkeys, nor pigs. It was impossible to get a horse. I thought of all this after I had devoured my meat. Then a horrible idea came to me. These negroes were born close to a country where they eat human beings! And each day such a number of soldiers were killed around the town! I questioned Timbuctoo. He would not answer. I did not insist, but from that time on I declined his presents.

“He worshipped me. One night snow took us by surprise at the outposts. We were seated, on the ground. I looked with pity at those poor negroes shivering beneath this white frozen shower. I was very cold and began to cough. At once I felt something fall on me like a large warm quilt. It was Timbuctoo’s cape that he had thrown on my shoulders.

“I rose and returned his garment, saying:

“‘Keep it, my boy; you need it more than I do.’

“‘Non, my lieutenant, for you; me no need. Me hot, hot!’

“And he looked at me entreatingly.

“‘Come, obey orders. Keep your cape; I insist,’ I replied.

“He then stood up, drew his sword, which he had sharpened to an edge like a scythe, and holding in his other hand the large cape which I had refused, said:

“‘If you not keep cape, me cut. No one cape.’

“And he would have done it. So I yielded.

“Eight days later we capitulated. Some of us had been able to escape, the rest were to march out of the town and give themselves up to the conquerors.

“I went towards the exercising ground, where we were all to meet, when I was dumfounded at the sight of a gigantic negro dressed in white duck and wearing a straw hat. It was Timbuctoo. He was beaming and was walking with his hands in his pockets in front of a little shop where two plates and two glasses were displayed.

“‘What are you doing?’ I said.

“‘Me not go. Me good cook; me make food for Colonel Algeria. Me eat Prussians; much steal, much.’

“There were ten degrees of frost. I shivered at sight of this negro in white duck. He took me by the arm and made me go inside. I noticed an immense flag that he was going to place outside his door as soon as we had left, for he had some shame.”

I read this sign, traced by the hand of some accomplice

"'ARMY KITCHEN OF M. TIMBUCTOO,

"'Formerly Cook to H. M. the Emperor.

"'A Parisian Artist. Moderate Prices.'

"In spite of the despair that was gnawing at my heart, I could not help laughing, and I left my negro to his new enterprise.

"Was not that better than taking him prisoner?

"You have just seen that he made a success of it, the rascal.

"Bezieres to-day belongs to the Germans. The 'Restaurant Timbuctoo' is the beginning of a retaliation."

TOMBSTONES

The five friends had finished dinner, five men of the world, mature, rich, three married, the two others bachelors. They met like this every month in memory of their youth, and after dinner they chatted until two o’clock in the morning. Having remained intimate friends, and enjoying each other’s society, they probably considered these the pleasantest evenings of their lives. They talked on every subject, especially of what interested and amused Parisians. Their conversation was, as in the majority of salons elsewhere, a verbal rehash of what they had read in the morning papers.

One of the most lively of them was Joseph de Bardon, a celibate living the Parisian life in its fullest and most whimsical manner. He was not a debauche nor depraved, but a singular, happy fellow, still young, for he was scarcely forty. A man of the world in its widest and best sense, gifted with a brilliant, but not profound, mind, with much varied knowledge, but no true erudition, ready comprehension without true understanding, he drew from his observations, his adventures, from everything he saw, met with and found, anecdotes at once comical and philosophical, and made humorous remarks that gave him a great reputation for cleverness in society.

He was the after dinner speaker and had his own story each time, upon which they counted, and he talked without having to be coaxed.

As he sat smoking, his elbows on the table, a petit verre half full beside his plate, half torpid in an atmosphere of tobacco blended with steaming coffee, he seemed to be perfectly at home. He said between two whiffs:

“A curious thing happened to me some time ago.”

“Tell it to us,” they all exclaimed at once.

“With pleasure. You know that I wander about Paris a great deal, like book collectors who ransack book stalls. I just look at the sights, at the people, at all that is passing by and all that is going on.

“Toward the middle of September — it was beautiful weather — I went out one afternoon, not knowing where I was going. One always has a vague wish to call on some pretty woman or other. One chooses among them in one's mental picture gallery, compares them in one's mind, weighs the interest with which they inspire you, their comparative charms and finally decides according to the influence of the day. But when the sun is very bright and the air warm, it takes away from you all desire to make calls.

"The sun was bright, the air warm. I lighted a cigar and sauntered aimlessly along the outer boulevard. Then, as I strolled on, it occurred to me to walk as far as Montmartre and go into the cemetery.

"I am very fond of cemeteries. They rest me and give me a feeling of sadness; I need it. And, besides, I have good friends in there, those that one no longer goes to call on, and I go there from time to time.

"It is in this cemetery of Montmartre that is buried a romance of my life, a sweetheart who made a great impression on me, a very emotional, charming little woman whose memory, although it causes me great sorrow, also fills me with regrets — regrets of all kinds. And I go to dream beside her grave. She has finished with life.

"And then I like cemeteries because they are immense cities filled to overflowing with inhabitants. Think how many dead people there are in this small space, think of all the generations of Parisians who are housed there forever, veritable troglodytes enclosed in their little vaults, in their little graves covered with a stone or marked by a cross, while living beings take up so much room and make so much noise — imbeciles that they are!

"Then, again, in cemeteries there are monuments almost as interesting as in museums. The tomb of Cavaignac reminded me, I must confess without making any comparison, of the chef d'oeuvre of Jean Goujon: the recumbent statue of Louis de Breze in the subterranean chapel of the Cathedral of Rouen. All modern and realistic art has originated there, messieurs. This dead man, Louis de Breze, is more real, more terrible, more like inanimate flesh still convulsed with the death agony than all the tortured corpses that are distorted to-day in funeral monuments.

"But in Montmartre one can yet admire Baudin's monument, which has a degree of grandeur; that of Gautier, of Murger, on which I saw the other day a simple, paltry wreath of immortelles, yellow immortelles, brought thither by whom? Possibly by the last grisette, very old and now janitress in the neighborhood. It is a pretty little statue by Millet, but ruined by dirt and neglect. Sing of youth, O Murger!

"Well, there I was in Montmartre Cemetery, and was all at once filled with sadness, a sadness that is not all pain, a kind of sadness that makes you think when you are in good health, 'This place is not amusing, but my time has not come yet.'

"The feeling of autumn, of the warm moisture which is redolent of the death of the leaves, and the weakened, weary, anaemic sun increased, while rendering it poetical, the sensation of solitude and of finality that hovered over this spot which savors of human mortality.

"I walked along slowly amid these streets of tombs, where the neighbors do not visit each other, do not sleep together and do not read the newspapers. And I began to read the epitaphs. That is the most amusing thing in the world. Never did Labiche or Meilhac make me laugh as I have laughed at the comical inscriptions on tombstones. Oh, how much superior to the books of Paul de Kock for getting rid of the spleen are these marble slabs and these crosses where the relatives of the deceased have unburdened their sorrow, their desires for the happiness of the vanished ones and their hope of rejoining them — humbugs!

"But I love above all in this cemetery the deserted portion, solitary, full of great yews and cypresses, the older portion, belonging to those dead long since, and which will soon be taken into use again; the growing trees nourished by the human corpses cut down in order to bury in rows beneath little slabs of marble those who have died more recently.

"When I had sauntered about long enough to refresh my mind I felt that I would soon have had enough of it and that I must place the faithful homage of my remembrance on my little friend's last resting place. I felt a tightening of the heart as I reached her grave. Poor dear, she was so dainty, so loving and so white and fresh — and now — if one should open the grave —

"Leaning over the iron grating, I told her of my sorrow in a low tone, which she doubtless did not hear, and was moving away when I saw a woman in black, in deep mourning, kneeling on the next grave. Her crape veil was turned back, uncovering a pretty fair head, the hair in Madonna bands looking like rays of dawn beneath her sombre headdress. I stayed.

"Surely she must be in profound grief. She had covered her face with her hands and, standing there in meditation, rigid as a statue, given up to her grief, telling the sad rosary of her remembrances within the shadow of her concealed and closed eyes, she herself seemed like a dead person mourning another who was dead. All at once a little motion of her back, like a flutter of wind through a willow, led me to suppose that she was going to cry. She wept softly at first, then louder, with quick motions of her neck and shoulders. Suddenly she uncovered her eyes. They were full of tears and charming, the eyes of a bewildered woman, with which she glanced about her as if awaking from a nightmare. She looked at me, seemed abashed and hid her face completely in her hands. Then she sobbed convulsively, and her head slowly bent down toward the marble. She leaned her forehead on it, and her veil spreading around her, covered the white corners of the beloved tomb, like a fresh token of mourning. I heard her sigh, then she sank down with her cheek on the marble slab and remained motionless, unconscious.

"I darted toward her, slapped her hands, blew on her eyelids, while I read this simple epitaph: 'Here lies Louis-Theodore Carrel, Captain of Marine Infantry, killed by the enemy at Tonquin. Pray for him.'

"He had died some months before. I was affected to tears and redoubled my attentions. They were successful. She regained consciousness. I appeared very much moved. I am not bad looking, I am not forty. I saw by her first glance that she would be polite and grateful. She was, and amid more tears she told me her history in detached fragments as well as her gasping breath would allow, how the officer was killed at Tonquin when they had been married a year, how she had married him for love, and being an orphan, she had only the usual dowry.

"I consoled her, I comforted her, raised her and lifted her on her feet. Then I said:

"'Do not stay here. Come.'

"'I am unable to walk,' she murmured.

"'I will support you.'

"'Thank you, sir; you are good. Did you also come to mourn for some one?'

"'Yes, madame.'

"'A dead friend?'

"'Yes, madame.'

"'Your wife?'

"'A friend.'

"'One may love a friend as much as they love their wife. Love has no law.'

"'Yes, madame.'

"And we set off together, she leaning on my arm, while I almost carried her along the paths of the cemetery. When we got outside she faltered:

"'I feel as if I were going to be ill.'

"'Would you like to go in anywhere, to take something?'

"'Yes, monsieur.'

"I perceived a restaurant, one of those places where the mourners of the dead go to celebrate the funeral. We went in. I made her drink a cup of hot tea, which seemed to revive her. A faint smile came to her lips. She began to talk about herself. It was sad, so sad to be always alone in life, alone in one's home, night and day, to have no one on whom one can bestow affection, confidence, intimacy.

"That sounded sincere. It sounded pretty from her mouth. I was touched. She was very young, perhaps twenty. I paid her compliments, which she took in good part. Then, as time was passing, I suggested taking her home in a carriage. She accepted, and in the cab we sat so close that our shoulders touched.

"When the cab stopped at her house she murmured: 'I do not feel equal to going upstairs alone, for I live on the fourth floor. You have been so good. Will you let me take your arm as far as my own door?'

"I agreed with eagerness. She ascended the stairs slowly, breathing hard. Then, as we stood at her door, she said:

"'Come in a few moments so that I may thank you.'

"And, by Jove, I went in. Everything was modest, even rather poor, but simple and in good taste.

"We sat down side by side on a little sofa and she began to talk again about her loneliness. She rang for her maid, in order to offer me some wine. The maid did not come. I was delighted, thinking that this maid probably came in the morning only, what one calls a charwoman.

"She had taken off her hat. She was really pretty, and she gazed at me with her clear eyes, gazed so hard and her eyes were so clear that I was terribly tempted. I caught her in my arms and rained kisses on her eyelids, which she closed suddenly.

"She freed herself and pushed me away, saying:

"'Have done, have done.'

"But I next kissed her on the mouth and she did not resist, and as our glances met after thus outraging the memory of the captain killed in

Tonquin, I saw that she had a languid, resigned expression that set my mind at rest.

"I became very attentive and, after chatting for some time, I said:

"'Where do you dine?'

"'In a little restaurant in the neighborhood:

"'All alone?'

"'Why, yes.'

"'Will you dine with me?'

"'Where?'

"'In a good restaurant on the Boulevard.'

"She demurred a little. I insisted. She yielded, saying by way of apology to herself: 'I am so lonely — so lonely.' Then she added:

"'I must put on something less sombre, and went into her bedroom. When she reappeared she was dressed in half-mourning, charming, dainty and slender in a very simple gray dress. She evidently had a costume for the cemetery and one for the town.

"The dinner was very enjoyable. She drank some champagne, brightened up, grew lively and I went home with her.

"This friendship, begun amid the tombs, lasted about three weeks. But one gets tired of everything, especially of women. I left her under pretext of an imperative journey. She made me promise that I would come and see her on my return. She seemed to be really rather attached to me.

"Other things occupied my attention, and it was about a month before I thought much about this little cemetery friend. However, I did not forget her. The recollection of her haunted me like a mystery, like a psychological problem, one of those inexplicable questions whose solution baffles us.

"I do not know why, but one day I thought I might possibly meet her in the Montmartre Cemetery, and I went there.

"I walked about a long time without meeting any but the ordinary visitors to this spot, those who have not yet broken off all relations with their dead. The grave of the captain killed at Tonquin had no mourner on its marble slab, no flowers, no wreath.

"But as I wandered in another direction of this great city of the dead I perceived suddenly, at the end of a narrow avenue of crosses, a couple in deep mourning walking toward me, a man and a woman. Oh, horrors! As they approached I recognized her. It was she!

“She saw me, blushed, and as I brushed past her she gave me a little signal, a tiny little signal with her eye, which meant: ‘Do not recognize me!’ and also seemed to say, ‘Come back to see me again, my dear!’

“The man was a gentleman, distingue, chic, an officer of the Legion of Honor, about fifty years old. He was supporting her as I had supported her myself when we were leaving the cemetery.

“I went my way, filled with amazement, asking myself what this all meant, to what race of beings belonged this huntress of the tombs? Was she just a common girl, one who went to seek among the tombs for men who were in sorrow, haunted by the recollection of some woman, a wife or a sweetheart, and still troubled by the memory of vanished caresses? Was she unique? Are there many such? Is it a profession? Do they parade the cemetery as they parade the street? Or else was she only impressed with the admirable, profoundly philosophical idea of exploiting love recollections, which are revived in these funereal places?

“And I would have liked to know whose widow she was on that special day.”

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YVETTE SAMORIS

The Plays

Maupassant was harshly opposed to the building of the Eiffel Tower. He often ate lunch in the restaurant at its base simply to avoid seeing its otherwise inescapable profile. He and forty-six other Parisian literary and artistic notables attached their names to an elaborately irate letter of protest against the tower's construction, which was sent to the Minister of Public Works.

A TALE OF OLD TIMES

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

Produced for the first time at the Théâtre-Français, Paris, February 19, 1879.

TO MADAME CAROLINE COMMANVILLE

MADAME:

At a time when you alone knew of it, I offered you this little play, which should be styled more properly a dialogue. Now that it has been acted in public and applauded by some friends of mine, permit me to dedicate it to you.

It is my earliest dramatic work. In every way it belongs to you; for you, after being the companion of my childhood, have become to me a charming and an earnest friend; and, as if to draw closer the ties already existing between us, the affection which we both have for my dearest uncle has made us so to speak members of the same family. Accept then, Madame, the tribute of these lines as a testimony of the devoted, respectful, and fraternal affection of your sincere friend and old companion.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

Paris, Feb. 23, 1879.

A TALE OF OLD TIMES

A Louis XV. room. A blaming fire on the hearth. The time, winter. The old Marchioness in an armchair, a book on her knees; in low spirits.

A SERVANT *[announcing a visitor*]
My lord the Count.

THE MARCHIONESS
And so, dear Count, at last
You've come to me; I see that your old friends
Are unforgotten; thanks for this kind visit;
I waited for you with anxiety.
The sight of you each day has grown to me
Habitual, and now, I know not why,
This evening I feel a little gloomy.
Draw near the fire and let us sit awhile
And talk.

THE COUNT [sits *down, after kissing her hand]*
And I, dear Marchioness, myself
Am melancholy; for our sense of age
Crushes the spirit; 'tis the young alone
Carry a store of gladness in the heart,
And in their sky the clouds are quickly passed.
They have so many objects in their life,
Their love, so many objects in pursuit!
But we, our life is lacking in this gladness,
Our melancholy kills us, for it clings
Like moss upon a sapless tree, and thus,
You see, 'tis ours to struggle and beat off
This terrible affliction; and but lately
D'Armont arrived, to take me by surprise;
We stirred the ashes of the ancient days;

Spoke of old friends and of our ancient loves!
And since that hour, like an uncertain shadow
I see my distant youth revive again;
Thus I am come wounded and gloomy here
To sit by you and talk about the past.

THE MARCHIONESS
Since morning, I have suffered the blockade
Of the cold weather; to the roaring wind
I listen, and I watch the snowflakes fall.
For winter is affliction at our age,
And brings us suffering; when it freezes hard
We feel as if we were about to die.
Yes, let us talk, for to remember days
Of vanished youth revives again one instant
Our cold and frozen age. I see at last
The sun is bright.

THE COUNT
Yes, for a winter day.
My sun is dim, my sky is cloudy still.

THE MARCHIONESS
Come, tell me some adventure of your own.
You were, they say, skilled in the rapier once;
You were, dear Count, a bully and a rake,
Rich, a fine gentleman, and proud withal.
You've figured in a scandal and crossed blades
With many a husband; for I have been told
By a fine lady, when we talked together
One evening, tho' beneath her breath she spoke,
That once your step made many hearts beat faster.
Unless they lied to me, you were a page,
A haunter of the street, a rollicker;
Four months, they say, you slept in durance vile,
All for a villager who hanged himself;

He had, they say, a young and pretty wife.
The dull wife of a villager! Oh, Count!
What folly to endure for such as her
Four months' imprisonment. If it had been
Some lady of high rank, and beauty rare,
It had been reasonable; not for her.
Come, find for me some tale of gallantry,
And make the heroine a noble dame, —
Romantic love, — the classic closet, where
The husband suddenly returning home
Catches the lover lying in concealment
Hidden by his old clothes!

THE COUNT
Why do you harp
Upon this high-born lady? Others too
Can please as well as she, for womankind
Is made to charm us, be she noble born
Or humble; for true beauty has no title,
And graciousness requires no pedigree.

THE MARCHIONESS
Thanks! — But I do not wish to learn about
Your common loves, for there is something else
In the recesses of your history — .
Dear Count, I'm listening, please begin the tale.

THE COUNT
I must obey you, since it is your will.
Ah, certainly, that proverb tells the truth —
"The will of woman is the will of God."
When first I came to court I was romantic;
But soon my eyes were opened; I was shocked
At my awakening, for I was in love.
I loved the peerless Countess de Paulé;
I thought that she was faithful to my love.

One day, I caught her in another’s arms.
My heart was broken, Marchioness, that night;
And two long months I spent in senseless tears;
But all the court and city laughed at me;
For all that breed is envious and base;
They hiss at the unfortunate and praise
Those who succeed. I was deceived and failed.
And yet, soon after that, I found myself
A second mistress, yet another shared
The girl’s affection; ’twas a poet, one
Who turned off verses, called her “flower” and “star,”
“Light of the universe,” I know not what.
And when I sent a challenge to the fool,
“He was a man of intellect” he said,
“And stuck to his own trade.” Too great a coward
To draw the sword, he undertook to write
A senseless sonnet, and again the laugh
Was raised against me; I was dubbed an ass.
This lesson put an end to all my doubts:I ceased to look to one, and I became
A universal lover and I took
For my device an ancient apothegm —
“All faith is folly” — and I found it true.

THE MARCHIONESS
And yet at other times when you declared
Your love, and at the feet of some fair dame
Uttered your sighs, and wrapped her round with love,
Did you speak thus?

THE COUNT
I did not, but confess,
Between ourselves, that every woman acts
Like a spoiled child; they flatter her too much,
And sing her praises in too high a key.
Her titled flatterers and these sonnet mongers,

That pour out every day like water taps
Fine compliments and sugared poetry,
Have rendered her a child, spoiled and puffed up
With vanity. But she at least can love?
Not she: what she desires to have is not
The love of opening manhood, whose sole fault
Is purity, which to that age belongs,
But the wild passion of some debauchee.
He, as he goes, is gazed upon by all
With wonder, sometimes almost with respect.
The women at his look are roused to feeling,
And tremble, simply since they know this man
Has the one merit, exquisite and rare,
Of being first in the seducer's art
Among the men of France and of Navarre.
Tis not that he is young or beautiful,
Or has great qualities — these things are naught.
This man delights them merely from the fact
That he is reprobate. How strange it is!
And it is thus this angel is seduced!
But if perchance another comes to ask,
That she will only cast a glance on him;
She laughs him in the face and scoffs at him,
Cries for the moon! And you are well aware
I speak not of one instance but of many.

THE MARCHIONESS
You are quite polite this evening. Thanks again!
Now listen to a tale that I shall tell;
Old Master Fox, now paralytic grown,
But still a mighty hunter of fresh meat,
With empty belly, once was prowling round;
And as he went, he thought of bygone feasts —
Such as the chicken that he caught one night
Just at the corner of a neighboring wood;
The doubling hare he captured at full speed.
Old age had put these dainties out of reach.

He was less nimble, and must fast more often.
And once upon the wind the scent of game
Struck on his nostrils, and a sudden light
Flashed in the pupil of his aged eye.
And he perceived upon an ancient wall,
Perched with their heads beneath their wings, a row
Of pullets; but our Fox was heavy limbed;
The road to reach them was too difficult,
In spite of longing, hunger, and hard fast.
"They are," he said, "too green for such as I,
And better suited to a younger man."

THE COUNT
Dear Marchioness, you are venomous to-night!
But I will cite some other instances.
There's Samson and Delilah, Antony
And Cleopatra; then there's Hercules,
And Omphale before whose feet he lay.

THE MARCHIONESS
Your theory of love lacks cheerfulness.

THE COUNT
Not so, I think man's like a fruit, which God
Has cut in two. Through the wide world he walks,
And he is never happy till he find,
Amid the uncertain fortune that he meets,
His other half and chance is his sole guide.
Now chance is blind yet is his sole reliance;
And scarcely ever is his search successful.
Yet, when he meets his object, straight he loves her.
You, I believe, were that half of myself,
Which God had destined for me, that I had sought
But which I never found, and never loved.
But here to-day, our journey at an end,
Chance has too late our aged lots united.

THE MARCHIONESS
Well, that is better; but you have gone wrong,
And I shan’t let you off so easily;
Now can you tell me, Count, to what I would
Compare you? As a miser keeps his house,
You keep your house locked up; you are the host.
When visitors arrive, you think them robbers,
You show the people naught but worn-out things.
No more evasions! For a little while
Be serious, for a miser in some hole
Keeps hidden a coffer filled with purest gold.
The poorest heart some secret treasure hides.
What have you at the bottom of your heart?
A portrait of a girl about sixteen,
Some light romance you think of with a blush,
And keep as secret. Have I guessed the truth?
Sometimes you take a fancy, later on,
To come and look upon these images,
Abandoned long ago and left behind,
Those past experiences, which give us pain
Altho’ we love to feel the pain they give.
Some evening, you will lock your door, and spend
Hours in perusing this old book, that tells
The tales of one old heart. You gaze again
Upon the flower she gave you one fine night,
The flower that keeps the scent of vanished springs.
You listen, how you listen, till you hear
Her voice brought back by those old memories.
You kiss the flower, whose outline has been stamped,
As on the page in which it has been pressed,
So on your heart. Alas! when suffering comes
With age, you try to consecrate in days
Declining, the sweet scent of ancient flowers
And early years.

THE COUNT
’Tis true, but even while
I feel in my heart’s core revive again
My oldest memory, I feel quite prepared,
Dear Marchioness, to tell you all about it.
But I demand of you an equal frankness.
’Tis turn about with me and whim for whim;
Story for story. Now you must begin.

THE MARCHIONESS
I’ll gladly do so, tho’ my tale must be
Mere trifling; but I know not how it is
The things of our young life, like wine, take force
And sweeten in their aging and from year
To year they grow in their importance.
You know a hundred of these little tales;
The first romance of all young girls is there;
And every woman in her memory
Counts two or three of them; I had but one.
And this is why I think it keeps a place
So fresh, so firmly rooted in my heart,
And makes so large a portion of my life.
I then was very young. — I was eighteen;
And I had learned to read the old romances,
And I had often dreamed in the old paths
Of the old park, watching the rising moon,
And ‘neath the willows listening to hear,
Whether the breezes spoke not to the branch
Of love; and dreaming ever of that lot,
Of which the girl in secret ever thinks,
Which she expects, and for which she believes
God made her. That was the constant theme
Of all my reverie. I was young and proud
And charming, and one day he came to me —
I felt my girlish heart bounding with joy.
I fell in love with him, he found me kind —
My beautiful young man. Alas! next day

He left me, that was all — a kiss, a pressure
Of two young hands, a glance exchanged which he
Too soon forgot. Perhaps he said, “That girl,
She is a darling”; then the thing forever
Faded from out his heart; but God forbid
That a child’s love should e’er be treated thus.
Ah, but you tell me you find womankind
Unfeeling and capricious. Fie! for shame!
It is your fault, for she could love you well;
But it is you that hinder her from loving:
The first love that she feels you disappoint;
Poor girl, I was a fool and credulous,
But you will call his claim ridiculous.
You mock at love — long did I wait for it,
When it did not return I took a husband.
But I confess that I preferred the other.
I bare my heart to you, now show me yours.

THE COUNT *[smiling]*
Are you then my confessor?

THE MARCHIONESS
That I am!
And I refuse to you my absolution
If you continue in this mocking mood,
You wretched and unfeeling man.

THE COUNT
Attend.
It was in Brittany during the time
Which men have named the Terror. Everywhere
Was fighting, and I fought for the Vendeans.
I served with Soufflet, and it is just here
That I begin my tale. It happened that
The Loire had to be crossed. We were delayed —
Posted in different parties, certain friends

And some old peasants. I was in command.
We were perhaps a hundred men in all
Hidden in the bushes that hemmed round the plain,
Protecting the retreat, and step by step
Receding, till at last our men ceased firing.
And all were then dispersing, as each day
Had been our custom, when a certain soldier
A Blue, whose native home was in the south,
Who, I presume, by skulking in the bushes,
Had come upon us, pulled his trigger twice
And shot me with his pistol. With one blow
I cleft his head. But in my shoulder bore
Two bullets. All my people had gone off.
Then, like a prudent general, I set spurs
To my good charger, and across the fields,
With dizzy brain and slackened rein, I fled,
Wild as a madman, and at last, confused,
Wounded and quite o’erspent and bleeding fast,
I tumbled from my horse and found myself
Upon the further side of a deep bank.
Soon after, close at hand, I saw a light,
And heard some voices. ’Twas a little cot
Which I had stumbled on, and I cried out,
“In the king’s name, I bid you open!” Then
Quite spent and stiffened with the cold, I fainted,
And groaning fell across the open doorway.
How long I lay there, I can never tell,
But when my senses came again to me,
I found that I was lying in a bed
Both warm and comfortable, and kind friends.
Waiting for my awakening anxiously,
Were hurrying round, and stood about my bed
Full of solicitude, and in the midst
Of these dull Bretons like a woodland bird
Amid a brood of turkeys, I beheld
A maiden of sixteen. Ah! Marchioness,
What a sweet face was hers, how exquisite

Her bearing, oh, how beautiful she was!
With those blond locks beneath her little cap,
So silky and so long, that any queen had given
Her wealth to claim them for her own. And then
Her feet and hands were fit for any duchess.
So much so, I had doubts about the virtue
Of her stout mother. Had I been her husband,
I would have bartered any claim I had
To be that beauty's sire, for an old song.
Good heavens! How beautiful she was! with looks
Austere and modest; and she never left
My bedside for four nights and three short days;
And all the time I saw her by my side,
Now seated and now standing; while she read
The book of her devotions, and no doubt
Read many a prayer therein, but ah! for whom?
Was it for me, poor wounded man, or maybe
For some one else? Then gliding to and fro,
About my chamber, with her quiet step,
She went and came; and then she gazed at me,
With glance as clear and brilliant as amber;
For she had eyes as yellow and as proud
As are an eagle's; and, dear Marchioness,
I greatly was surprised, when first I saw you,
To find your eyes and glance were just the same,
And seemed as if a sunbeam flashed from them.
Upon my faith! she was so fresh and fair,
That, almost without knowing it, my heart,
So great my madness, beat with love for her.
But suddenly, one morning, in my ear
The roar of cannon sounded from afar!
My host came rushing, pale and breathlessly,
Into my room. "The Blues, the Blues," he cried,
"Have overrun the plain and you must fly."
But I was still enfeebled by my wound;
And yet I rose in haste, for time was pressing.
As a horse trembles at the trumpet sound,

My brain was filled with fever for the fight.
But she, dressed all in black, as those in mourning,
Tears in her eyes, followed me to the threshold.
She held the stirrup while I mounted horse.
And, like a gallant knight, I stooped and gaily
Printed a kiss upon her forehead. She
Drew herself up, as if she felt affronted;
From her proud eye a hazel light was flashed,
And blushing, as with shame, she said to me,
"Ah, sir, I never looked for this!" She wore
An air of stateliness; I had offended
The noble maiden, awkwardly and deeply,
Doubtless the child of some old family
Of loyalists, concealed for safety's sake,
By those who had been servants of the house,
While like myself her father fought the Blues.
Ah! But I felt crest-fallen for the moment!
Yet, in those days of my Quixotic youth,
My mind was steeped in stories of romance.
So that, at once dismounting from my horse
I fell before her on my bended knee,
And said to her, "I crave your pardon, lady;
This kiss, believe me, for I never lie,
Comes from no libertine or coxcomb vain,
If you are willing, 'tis the seal to us
Of our betrothal. If the chance of war
Permit, I will return to seek again
The pledge of love which I have left with you."
"So be it," she said, smiling, "then, farewell
My promised lover." And she took my hand
And raised me, and she blew a kiss to me.
"Farewell," she said, "your pardon is secured.
Quickly return to me, my handsome stranger."
And off I rode

THE MARCHIONESS [*Sadly*]
And you did ne'er return?

THE COUNT
Oh heavens! I never did; but why I did not,
I cannot tell. But was it possible
That she, the child I saw but for an instant
Could love me? And did I love her? I doubted.
I should return, I thought, perhaps too late,
To find the lovely girl wedded to some one,
Beloved and mother of a family.
Perhaps this vain proposal of a fool,
Uttered in passing, from her mind had glided,
Leaving behind a trifling memory,
A pleasant thought; and, should I find her there
Where I had left her? Was it anything
But a mistake? Had I not better keep
This far-off memory, fresh and joyous still,
And see her always as my mind had imaged;
And ne'er return, to see her once again
And meet with naught, alas, but disenchantment?
And yet that spell still lingered in my mind;
And a vague melancholy oft has filled
My heart, as if there came a fear that I
Had touched on happiness, yet had let drop
The gift, as I went traveling on my way.

THE MARCHIONESS *[with sobs in her voice*]
And might she not perhaps have loved you well,
This unknown girl? Alas! God knows she did.
But you returned no more.

THE COUNT
Dear Marchioness,
Was it so great a crime that I committed?

THE MARCHIONESS
What! did you not remark to me just now,

“I think that man is like a fruit which God
Has cut in two. Through the wide world he walks
And he is never happy till he find,
Amid the uncertain chances that he meets,
His other half and chance is his sole guide.
Now chance is blind yet is his sole reliance;
And scarcely ever is his search successful.
Yet, when he meets his object, straight he loves her.
You, I believe, were that half of myself,
Which God had destined for me, that I had sought
But which I never found, and never loved.
But here to-day, our journey at an end,
Chance has too late our aged lots united?”
Too late, alas, for you did ne’er return.

THE COUNT
You weep, dear Marchioness.

THE MARCHIONESS
Oh that is nothing.
I knew the poor girl you are talking of;
Her story made me sad, and hence my tears
But it is nothing.

THE COUNT
She to whom my troth
I plighted, Marchioness, was you yourself.

THE MARCHIONESS
Ah well, ’twas I!
[The Count kneels before her and kisses her hand; she is much moved]

THE MARCHIONESS
But let us think no more
About it. For it was the time of roses.

Our withered faces suit not such a theme;
And he who saw us at this moment well
Might smile at us. Come, rise, and let us end
This old romance, this memory of the past
Which fits no longer to these later years.
Yet, Count, I will return to you your pledge;
No longer young, I run no risk by it.
[Kisses his forehead; then with a sad smile]
But this poor kiss, I fear, has sadly aged.

FINIS

MUSOTTE

OR, A CRITICAL SITUATION

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

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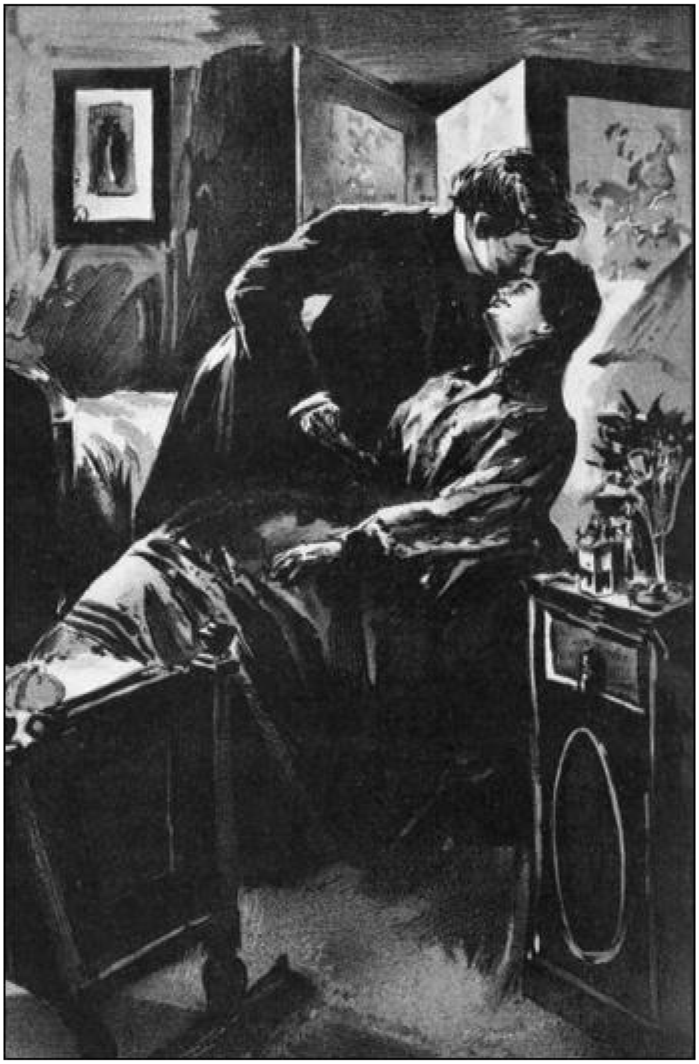

An original illustration for this play

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

JEAN MARTINEL
Nephew of M. Martinel, a painter; not yet thirty years of age, but already well known and the recipient of various honors.

LEON DE PETITPRÉ
Brother to Gilberts Martinel, a young lawyer about thirty years of age.

M. MARTINEL
An old gunmaker of Havre, aged fifty-five.
M. DE PETITPRÉ
An old magistrate, officer of the Legion of Honor. Aged sixty.

DR. PELLERIN
A fashionable physician of about thirty-five.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Sister to M. de Petitpré, about fifty-five years of age.

HENRIETTE LÉVÊQUE
Nicknamed Musotte; a little model, formerly Jean Martinel’s mistress. Twenty-two years of age.

MME. FLACHE
A midwife. Formerly a ballet-dancer at the Opera. About thirty-five years of age.

GILBERTE MARTINEL
Daughter of M. and Mme. de Petitpré, married in the morning to Jean Martinel. About twenty years old.

LISE BABIN
A nurse, about twenty-six.

SERVANTS
Time: Paris of to-day. The first and third acts take place in M. de Petitpré's *drawing-room.*

The second act takes place in Musotte's *bedchamber*.

ACT I

SCENE I.

(*A richly yet classically furnished drawing-room in* M. de Petitpré's house. *A table*, C.; *sofas*, R.; *chairs and armchairs*, L. *Wide doors*, C., *opening upon a terrace or gallery. Doors* R. *and* L. *of* C. *Lighted lamps*.)
Enter from R. M. de Petitpré, Monsieur Martinel, Madame de Ronchard, Léon de Petitpré, Jean *and* Gilberte. Gilberte *is in her bridal attire, but without wreath and veil*.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*after bowing to* M. Martinel, *whose arm she relinquishes, seats herself* R.]
Gilberte, Gilberte!

GILBERTE [*leaves Jean's arm*]
What is it, Auntie?

MME. DE RONCHARD
The coffee, my dear child.

GILBERTE [*goes to the table*]
I will give you some, Auntie.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Don't soil your gown.

LÉON [*comes up*]
No, no, not to-day shall my sister serve coffee. The day of her marriage! No, indeed, I will take care of that. [*To* Mme. de Ronchard.] You know that I am a lawyer, my dear Aunt, and therefore can do everything.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, I know your abilities, Léon, and I appreciate them —

LÉON [*smiles, and gives his Aunt a cup of coffee*]
You are too good.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*taking cup, dryly*]
For what they are worth.

LÉON [*aside, turns to the table*]
There she goes again — another little slap at me! That is never wanting. [*offers a cup to* Martinel.] You will take a small cup, won't you, M. Martinel, and a nip of old brandy with it? I know your tastes. We will take good care of you.

MARTINEL
Thank you, Léon.

LÉON [*to* Petitpré]
Will you have a cup, father?

PETITPRÉ
I will, my son.

LÉON [*to the newly married couple, seated L. and talking aside*]
And you, you bridal pair there? [*The couple, absorbed in each other, do not answer.*] Oh, I suppose we must not bother you. [*He sets cup down on the table*].

PETITPRÉ [*to* Martinel]
You don't smoke, I believe?

MARTINEL
Never, thank you.

MME. DE RONCHARD
You astonish me! My brother and Léon would not miss smoking each day for anything in the world. But what an abomination a cigar is!

PETITPRÉ
A delicious abomination, Clarisse.

LÉON [*turns to* Mme. de Ronchard]
Almost all abominations are delicious, Auntie; in fact many of them, to my personal knowledge, are exquisite.

MME. DE RONCHARD
You naughty fellow!

PETITPRÉ [*takes* Léon's *arm*]
Come and smoke in the billiard-room, since your aunt objects to it here.

LÉON [*to* Petitpré]
The day when she will love anything except her spaniels —

PETITPRÉ
Hold your tongue and come along. [*Exit* C.]

MARTINEL [*to* Mme. de Ronchard]
This is the sort of marriage that I like — a marriage that, in this Paris of yours, you don't have very often. After the wedding breakfast, which takes place directly after you come from the church, all the guests go home, even the maids of honor and the ushers. The married couple remain at home and dine with their parents or relatives. In the evening they play billiards or cards, just as on an ordinary night; the newly married couple entertain each other. [Gilberte *and* Jean *rise, and hand in hand slowly retire* C.] Then, before midnight, good night!

MME. DE RONCHARD [*aside*]
Which is altogether very *bourgeois*!

MARTINEL [*sits* R. *upon the sofa beside* Mme. de Ronchard]
As to newly married couples — instead of going on that absurd and traditional thing you call a honeymoon, it is far better for them to go at once to the apartment or house prepared for them. I dare say you will think my plan lacking in fashion and display, but I cannot help that. For myself, I must say that I like absence of all ostentation.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Your plan is not according to the customs of polite society, Monsieur.

MARTINEL
Polite society, indeed! Why, there are thirty-six different kinds of polite society. For instance, take Havre.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*interrupts*]
I know only ours. [*Corrects herself.*] That is, I mean to say, mine, which is the correct one.

MARTINEL
Oh, naturally, naturally! Nevertheless, simple as it may be, this marriage is an acknowledged fact, and I hope that you have taken into your good books my dear nephew, who, until now —

MME. DE RONCHARD
I can hardly help doing so since he is my brother’s son-in-law, and my niece’s husband.

MARTINEL
Well, that is not the only thing, is it? I am very happy that the affair is over — although my life has been spent in the midst of difficulties.

MME. DE RONCHARD
What! Your life?

MARTINEL
I mean commercial difficulties, not matrimonial.

MME. DE RONCHARD
What commercial difficulties can you have — you, a Croesus who has just given five hundred thousand francs in dowry to his nephew. [*With a sigh.*] Five hundred thousand francs! Just what my late husband squandered.

MARTINEL
Oh! Yes, I know that, Madame de Ronchard.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*sighs again*]
I was ruined and deserted after just one year of married life, Monsieur — one year. I just had time to realize how happy I could be, for the scoundrel, the wretch, knew how to make me love him.

MARTINEL
Then he was a scoundrel?

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh! Monsieur, he was a man of fashion.

MARTINEL
Well, that did not prevent him from —

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, don't let us talk any more about my misfortunes. It would be too long and too sad, and everybody else is so happy here just now.

MARTINEL
And I am happier than anybody else, I assure you. My nephew is such a

good fellow. I love him as I would a son. Now, as for myself, I made my fortune in trade —

MME. DE RONCHARD [*aside*]
That is very evident.

MARTINEL [*resumes*]
In the sea-going trade. But my nephew will gain fame for our name by his renown as an artist; the only difference between us is that he makes his fortune with his brushes, and I have made mine with ships. Art, to-day, Madame, may be as important as trade, but it is less profitable. Take my nephew. Although he has made a very early success, it is I who have enabled him to. When my poor brother died, his wife following him almost immediately, I found myself, while quite a young man, left alone with this baby. Well, I made him learn everything that I could. He studied chemistry, music, and literature, but he had a leaning toward art more than to the other things. I assure you that I encouraged him in it, and you see how he has succeeded. He is only just thirty, is well known, and has just been decorated.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*dryly*]
Thirty years old, and only just decorated; that is slow for an artist.

MARTINEL
Pshaw! He will make up for lost time. [*Rises*] But I am afraid I am getting boastful. You must pardon me, I am a plain man, and just now a little exhilarated by dining. It is all Petitpré's fault. His Burgundy is excellent. It is a wine that you may say is a friend to wisdom. And we are accustomed to drink a good deal at Havre. [*Takes up his glass of brandy and finishes it.*]

MME. DE RONCHARD [*aside*]
Surely that is enough about Havre.

MARTINEL [*turns to* Mme. de Ronchard]
Well, there is a treaty between us — a treaty which will last — which no

foolishness can break, such as that which has failed to break this marriage.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises and crosses* L.]
Foolishness! You speak very lightly about it. But now that the marriage is a thing accomplished, it is all right. I had destined my niece for another sphere than a painter's world. However, when you can't get a thrush, eat a blackbird, as the proverb says.

MARTINEL
But a white blackbird, Madame, for your niece is a pearl. Let me tell you, the happiness of these children will be the happiness of my declining years.

MME. DE RONCHARD
I wish that it may be, Monsieur, without daring to hope for it.

MARTINEL
Never mind. There are two things on which I am an expert — the merits of women and of wine.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*aside*]
Especially upon the latter.

MARTINEL
They are the only two things worth knowing in life.

SCENE II.

(*The same characters and* Petitpré *who enters* C, *with* Léon.)

PETITPRÉ
Now that this red-letter day has gone by as any other day goes, will you play a game of billiards with me, Monsieur Martinel?

MARTINEL
Most certainly, I am very fond of billiards.

LÉON [*comes down stage*]
You are like my father. It seems to me that when anyone begins to like billiards at all, they become infatuated with the game; and you two people are two of a kind.

MARTINEL
My son, when a man grows old, and has no family, he has to take refuge in such pleasures as these. If you take bait-fishing as your diversion in the morning and billiards for the afternoon and evening, you have two kinds of amusement that are both worthy and attractive.

LÉON
Oh, ho! Bait-fishing, indeed! That means to say, getting up early and sitting with your feet in the water through wind and rain in the hope of catching, perhaps each quarter of an hour, a fish about the size of a match. And you call that an attractive pastime?

MARTINEL
I do, without a doubt. But do you believe that there is a single lover in the world capable of doing as much for his mistress throughout ten, twelve, or

fifteen years of life? If you asked my opinion, I think he would give it up at the end of a fortnight.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Of a truth; he would.

LÉON [*interrupts*]
Pardon me, I should give it up at the end of a week.

MARTINEL
You speak sensibly.

PETITPRÉ
Come along, my dear fellow.

MARTINEL
Shall we play fifty up?

PETITPRÉ
Fifty up will do.

MARTINEL [*turns to* Mme. de Ronchard]
We shall see you again shortly, Madame.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, I have had enough of Havre for the present.
[*Exit* Martinel *and* Petitpré C.]

SCENE III.

(Leon *and* Mme. de Ronchard.)

LÉON
Martinel is a good fellow. Not a man of culture, but bright as sunshine and straight as a rule.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*seated* L.]
He is lacking in distinction of manner.

LÉON [*inadvertently*]
How about yourself, Aunt?

MME. DE RONCHARD
What do you mean?

LÉON [*corrects himself and approaches* Mme. de Ronchard]
I said, how about yourself? You know what I mean — you have such an intimate knowledge of the world that you are a better judge of human nature than anyone I know.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Indeed, I am. You were too small a boy to recollect it, but nevertheless, I went a great deal into society before my husband spent all my money, and let me tell you that I was a great success. For instance, at a grand ball given by the Turkish ambassador, at which I was dressed as Salammbô —

LÉON [*interrupts*]
What, you, the Carthaginian princess?

MME. DE RONCHARD
Certainly. Why not? Let me tell you that I was greatly admired, for my appearance was exquisite. My dear, that was in eighteen hundred and sixty —

LÉON [*sits near* Mme. de Ronchard]
Oh, no dates! for goodness sake, no dates!

MME. DE RONCHARD
It is not necessary to be sarcastic.

LÉON
What! I, sarcastic? God forbid! It is simply this: in view of the fact that you did not wish this marriage to take place, and that I did, and that the marriage has taken place, I feel very happy. Do you understand me? It is a triumph for me, and I must confess that I feel very triumphant this evening. Tomorrow, however, vanish the triumpher, and there will remain only your affectionate little nephew. Come, smile, Auntie. At heart you are not as ill-natured as you pretend to be, and that is proved by the generosity of soul you have evinced in founding at Neuilly, despite your modest means, a hospital for — lost dogs!

MME. DE RONCHARD
What else could I do. When a woman is alone and has no children — and I was married such a short time — do you know what I am, after all? Simply an old maid, and like all old maids —

LÉON [*finishes the sentence for her*]
You love toy dogs.

MME. DE RONCHARD
As much as I hate men.

LÉON
You mean to say one man. Well, I could hardly blame you for hating him.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And you know for what kind of girl he abandoned and ruined me. You never saw her, did you?

LÉON
Pardon me, I did see her once in the Champs-Elysées. I was walking with you and my father. A gentleman and lady came toward us; you became excited, quickened your steps, and clutched nervously at my father’s arm, and I heard you say in a low voice, “Don’t look at them; it is she!”

MME. DE RONCHARD
And what were you doing?

LÉON
I? — I was looking at him.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises*]
And you thought her horrible, didn’t you?

LÉON
I really don’t know. You know I was only eleven years old.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*crosses* R.]
You are insufferable! Go away, or I shall strike you.

LÉON [*soothingly, and rising*]
There, there, Aunt, I won’t do it again. I will be good, I promise you, if you will forgive me.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises, as if to go out* C.]
I will not!

LÉON
Please do!

MME. DE RONCHARD [*returns*]
I will not! If it were simply a case of teasing me, I could let it pass, for I can take care of myself; but you have done your sister a wrong, and that is unforgivable.

LÉON
How?

MME. DE RONCHARD [*stands* R. *of table and drums on it with her fingers*]
Why, this marriage! You brought it about.

LÉON [*imitates her action at* L. *of table*]
That is true, and I did right. Moreover, I shall never be tired asserting that what I did was right.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*still tapping on the table*]
And for my part I shall never be tired of saying that Gilberte has not married the right man.

LÉON [*still tapping*]
Well, what kind of man do you think Gilberte ought to have married?

MME. DE RONCHARD
A man of position, a public official, or an eminent physician, or — an engineer.

LÉON
Do you mean a theatrical engineer?

MME. DE RONCHARD
There are other kinds of engineers. Then, above all, she should not have married a handsome man.

LÉON
Do you reproach Jean for his good looks? If you do, my dear Aunt, there are a good many men in the world who must plead guilty. Suppose, even, that a man has no need of good looks, it does not follow that he ought to be ugly.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*sits on a little stool by the table, clasps her hands, and looks upward*]
My husband was handsome, nay, superb, a veritable guardsman — and I know how much it cost me.

LÉON
It might have cost you a great deal more if he had been ugly! [Mme. de Ronchard *rises to go away*.] Besides Jean is not only good-looking but he is good. He is not vain, but modest; and he has genius, which is manifesting itself more and more every day. He will certainly attain membership in the Institute. That would please you, would it not? That would be worth more than a simple engineer; and, moreover, every woman finds him charming, except you.

MME. DE RONCHARD
That's the very thing for which I blame him. He is too good and too honest. He has already painted the portraits of a crowd of women, and he will continue to do that. They will be alone with him in his studio for hours at a time, and everybody knows what goes on in those studios.

LÉON
You have been accustomed to go there, my dear Aunt?

MME. DE RONCHARD [*dreamily*]
Oh, yes. [*Corrects herself.*] I mean to say, once I went to Horace Vernet's studio.

LÉON
The painter of battle scenes!

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, what I say of Jean, I say of all artists — that they ought not to be allowed to marry into a family of lawyers and magistrates, such as ours. Such doings always bring trouble. I ask you as a man, is it possible to be a good husband under such conditions — among a crowd of women continually around you who do nothing but unrobe and re-dress themselves, whether they be clients or models (*pointedly*), especially models? [Mme. de Ronchard *rises and* Léon *is silent*.] I said *models*, Léon.

LÉON
I understand you, Aunt. You make a very pointed and delicate allusion to Jean's past. Well, what of it? If he did have one of his models for a mistress, he loved her, and loved her sincerely for three years —

MME. DE RONCHARD
You mean to tell me a man can love such women?

LÉON
Every woman can be loved, my dear Aunt; and this woman certainly deserved to be loved more than most women.

MME. DE RONCHARD
A great thing, truly, for a model to be pretty! That is the essential thing, I should think.

LÉON
Whether it be essential or not, it is nevertheless very nice to be pretty. But this girl was better than pretty, for she had a nature which was exceptionally tender, good, and sincere.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, then, why did he leave her?

LÉON
What! Can you ask me such a question? — you, who know so much about the world and the world's opinions? [*Folds his arms.*] Would you advocate free love?

MME. DE RONCHARD [*indignantly*]
You know I would not.

LÉON [*seriously*]
Listen. The truth is, that it happened to Jean as it has happened to many others besides him — that is to say, there was a pretty little nineteen-year-old girl whom he met, whom he loved, and with whom he established an intimacy little by little — an intimacy which lasted one, two, three years — the usual duration of that sort of thing. Then, as usually happens, there came a rupture — a rupture which is sometimes violent, sometimes gentle, but which is never altogether good-natured. Then also, as usual in such cases, each went a separate way — the eternal ending, which is always prosaic, because it is true to life. But the one thing that distinguishes Jean's *liaison* from the usual affair is the truly admirable character of the girl in the case.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, admirable character! Mademoiselle — tell me, what is the name of this young lady? If you mentioned it I have forgotten it. Mademoiselle Mus — Mus —

LÉON
Musotte, Auntie; little Musotte.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Musette! Pshaw, that's a very common name. It reminds me of the Latin quarter and of Bohemian life. [*With disgust.*] Musette!

LÉON
No, no; not Musette. Musotte, with an O instead of an E. She is named Musotte because of her pretty little nose; can't you understand? Musotte, the name explains itself.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*with contempt*]
Oh, yes; a *fin-de-siècle* Musotte, which is still worse. Musotte is not a name.

LÉON
My dear Aunt, it is only a nickname. The nick-name of a model. Her true name is Henriette Lévêque.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*puzzled*]
Lévêque?

LÉON
Yes, Lévêque. What does this questioning mean? It is just as I told you, or else I know nothing about it. Now, Henriette Lévêque, or Musotte, if you prefer that term, has not only been faithful to Jean during the course of her love affair with him; has not only been devoted and adoring, and full of a tenderness which was ever watchful, but at the very hour of her rupture with him, she gave proof of her greatness of soul. She accepted everything without reproach, without recrimination; the poor little girl understood everything — understood that all was finished and finished forever. With the intuition of a woman, she felt that Jean's love for my sister was real and deep, she bowed her head to circumstances and she departed, accepting, without a murmur, the loneliness that Jean's action brought upon her. She carried her fidelity to the end, for she would have slain herself sooner than become [*hesitating out of respect for* Mme. de Ronchard] a courtesan. And this I *know*.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And has Jean never seen her since?

LÉON
Not once; and that is more than eight months ago. He wished for news of her, and he gave me the task of getting it. I never found her and I have never been able to gain any knowledge of her, so cunningly did she arrange this flight of hers — this flight which was so noble and so self-sacrificing. [*Changing his tone.*] But I don't know why I repeat all this. You know it just as well as I do, for I have told it to you a dozen times.

MME. DE RONCHARD
It is just as incredible at the twentieth time as at the first.

LÉON
It is nevertheless the truth.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*sarcastically*]
Well, if it is really the truth, you were terribly wrong in helping Jean to break his connection with such an admirable woman.

LÉON
Oh, no, Aunt, I only did my duty. You have even called me hairbrained, and perhaps you were right; but you know that I can be very serious when I wish. If this three-year-old *liaison* had lasted until now, Jean would have been ruined.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, how could we help that?

LÉON
Well, these things are frightful — these entanglements — I can't help using the word. It was my duty as a friend — and I wish to impress it upon you — to rescue Jean; and as a brother, it was my duty to marry my sister to such a man as he. The future will tell you whether I was right or not. [*Coaxingly.*] And then, my dear Aunt, when later you have a little nephew or a little niece to take care of, to dandle in your arms, you will banish all these little spaniels that you are taking care of at Neuilly.

MME. DE RONCHARD
The poor little darlings! I, abandon them! Don't you know that I love them as a mother loves her children?

LÉON
Oh, yes; you can become an aunt to them, then, because you will have to become a mother to your little nephew.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, hold your tongue; you irritate me. (Jean *appears with* Gilberte *for a moment at C.*)

JEAN [*to servant entering* R.]
Joseph, have you forgotten nothing, especially the flowers?

SERVANT
Monsieur and Madame may rest assured that everything has been done.
[*Exit servant* L.]

LÉON [*to* Mme. de Ronchard]
Look at them; aren't they a bonny couple?

SCENE IV.

(*The same with* Jean *and* Gilberte.)

JEAN [*approaches* Mme. de Ronchard *and speaks to her*]
Do you know of whom we were talking just now? We were talking of you.

LÉON [*aside*]
Ahem! ahem!

JEAN
Yes; I was just saying that I had not made you a present on the occasion of my nuptials, because the choosing of it demanded a great deal of reflection.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*dryly*]
But Gilberte made me a very pretty one for you both, Monsieur.

JEAN
But that is not enough. I have been looking for something which I thought would be particularly acceptable to you; and do you know what I found? It is a very small thing, but I ask you, Madame, to be so good as to accept this little pocketbook, which holds some bank-notes, for the benefit of your dear little deserted pets. You can add to your home for these little pets some additional kennels on the sole condition that you will allow me from time to time to come and pet your little pensioners, and on the additional condition that you will not pick out the most vicious among them to greet me.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*greatly impressed*]
With all my heart, I thank you. How good of you to think of my poor little orphans!

LÉON [*whispers to* Jean]
You diplomat, you!

JEAN
There is nothing extraordinary about it, Madame. I am very fond of dumb animals. They are really the foster-brothers of man, sacrificed for them, slaves to them, and in many cases their food. They are the true martyrs of the world.

MME. DE RONCHARD
What you say is very true, Monsieur, and I have often thought of it in that way. For instance, take those poor horses, scourged and beaten by coachmen in the streets.

LÉON [*with sarcastic emphasis*]
And the pheasants, Auntie, and the partridges and the blackcock falling on all sides under a hail of lead, flying panic-stricken before the horrible massacre of the guns.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, don’t talk like that, it makes me shudder; it is horrible!

JEAN [*turns to* Gilberte]
Horrible, indeed!

LÉON [*after a pause, in light tone*]
Perhaps so, but they are good eating.

MME. DE RONCHARD
You are pitiless.

LÉON [*aside to his aunt*]
Pitiless, perhaps, toward animals, but not pitiless, like you, toward people.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*in the same tone*]
What do you mean by that?

LÉON [*in the same tone pointing to* Jean *and* Gilberte, *who are seated on a sofa* R.]
Do you think that your presence here can be acceptable to those two lovers? [*Takes her arm*.] My father has certainly finished smoking; come into the billiard-room for a little while.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And what are you going to do?

LÉON
I am going down into my study on the ground floor, and I shall come up here after a little while.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*sarcastically*]
Your study, indeed — your studio — you mean, you rascal, where your clients are — models —

LÉON [*with mock modesty*]
Oh, Auntie. My clients, at least, don't unrobe — alas! [*Exit* Léon R., *giving a mock benediction to the lovers*.] Children, receive my benediction!
[*Exit* Madame de Ronchard C.]

SCENE V.

(Jean *and* Gilberte *seated on the sofa at right*.)

JEAN
At last, you are my wife, Mademoiselle.

GILBERTE
Mademoiselle?

JEAN
Forgive me. I hardly know how to address you.

GILBERTE
Call me Gilberte. There is nothing shocking about that, is there?

JEAN
Gilberte, at last, at last, at last, you are my wife!

GILBERTE
And truly, not without a good deal of trouble.

JEAN
And what a dainty, energetic little creature you are! How you fought with your father, and with your aunt, for it is only through you, and thanks to you, that we are married, for which I thank you with all my heart — the heart which belongs to you.

GILBERTE
But it is only because I trusted you, and that is all.

JEAN
And have you only trust for me?

GILBERTE
Stupid boy! You know that you pleased me. If you had only pleased me, my confidence in you would have been useless. One must love first. Without that, Monsieur, nothing can come.

JEAN
Call me Jean, just as I have called you Gilberte.

GILBERTE [*hesitates*]
But that is not altogether the same thing. It seems to me — that — that — I cannot do it. [*Rises and crosses* L.]

JEAN [*rises*]
But I love you. I am no trifler, believe me; I love you. I am the man who loves you because he has found in you qualities that are inestimable. You are one of those perfect creatures who have as much brains as sentiment; and the sentimentality that permeates you is not the sickly sentimentality of ordinary women. It is that gloriously beautiful faculty of tenderness which characterizes great souls, and which one never meets elsewhere in the world. And then, you are so beautiful, so graceful, with a grace that is all your own, and I, who am a painter, you know how I adore the beautiful. Then, above everything, you drew me to you, but not only that, you wiped out the traces of the world from my mind and eyes.

GILBERTE
I like to hear you say that. But, don’t talk any more just now in that way, because it embarrasses me. However, I know, for I try to foresee everything, that to enjoy these things I must listen to them to-day, for your words breathe the passion of a lover. Perhaps in the future your words will be as sweet, for they could not help being so when a man speaks as you spoke and loves as you appear to love, but at the same time, they will be different.

JEAN
Oh!

GILBERTE [*sits on stool near the table*]
Tell me it over again.

JEAN
What drew me to you was the mysterious harmony between your natural form and the soul within it. Do you recollect my first visit to this house?

GILBERTE
Oh, yes, very well. My brother brought you to dinner, and I believe that you did not wish to come.

JEAN [*laughs*]
If that were true, it was very indiscreet of your brother to tell you. And he told you that? I am annoyed that he did so, and I confess I did hesitate somewhat, for you know I was an artist accustomed to the society of artists, which is lively, witty, and sometimes rather free, and I felt somewhat disturbed at the idea of entering a house so serious as yours — a house peopled by dignified lawyers and young ladies. But I was so fond of your brother, I found him so full of novelty, so gay, so wittily sarcastic and discerning, under his assumed levity, that not only did I go everywhere with him, but I followed him to the extent of meeting you. And I never cease to thank him for it. Do you remember when I entered the drawing-room where you and your family were sitting, you were arranging in a china vase some flowers that had just been sent to you?

GILBERTE
I do.

JEAN
Your father spoke to me of my Uncle Martinel, whom he had formerly known. This at once formed a link between us, for all the time that I was talking to him I was watching you arrange your flowers.

GILBERTE [*smiles*]
You looked far too long and too steadfastly for a first introduction.

JEAN
I was looking at you as an artist looks, and was admiring you, for I found your figure, your movements, and your entire self attractive. And then for the last six months I have often come to this house, to which your brother invited me and whither your presence attracted me, and finally I felt your sway as a lover feels the sway of the one he adores. There was an inexplicable, unseen attraction calling me to you. [*Sits beside her* R. *of table*.] Then a dim idea entered my brain, — an idea that one day you might become my wife. It gained possession of my soul, and I immediately took steps to renew the friendship between your father and my uncle. The two men again became friends. Did you never divine my maneuvers?

GILBERTE
Divine your maneuvers? No, I suspected a little at times, but I was so astounded that a man like you — in the full flush of success, so well known, so sought after — should concern himself with such a little, unimportant girl as I, that, really, I could place no faith in the sincerity of your attention.

JEAN
Nevertheless, we quickly knew how to understand each other, did we not?

GILBERTE
Your character pleased me. I felt that you were loyal, and then you entertained me greatly, for you brought into our house that artistic air which gave my fancies life. I ought to tell you that my brother had already warned me that I should like you. You know that Léon loves you.

JEAN
I know it, and I think it was in *his* brain that the first idea of our marriage had birth. [*After a short silence*] You remember our return from Saint-Germain after we had dined in the Henri IV. Pavilion?

GILBERTE
I remember it well.

JEAN
My uncle and your aunt were in the front of the landau, and you and I on the rear seat, and in another carriage were your father and Léon. What a glorious spring night! But how coldly you treated me!

GILBERTE
I was so embarrassed!

JEAN
You ought to recall that I put to you that day a question which I had already asked you, because you cannot deny that I had paid you very tender attention and that you had captured my heart.

GILBERTE
True. Nevertheless it surprised and upset me. Oh, how often have I remembered it since! But I have never been able to recall the very words you used. Do you remember them?

JEAN
No; they came from my lips, issuing from the bottom of my heart like a prayer for mercy. I only know that I told you that I should never re-enter your house if you did not give me some little hope that there should be a day when you would know me better. You pondered a long time before you answered me, but you spoke in such a low tone that I was anxious to make you repeat it.

GILBERTE [*takes up his sentence and speaks as if in a dream*]
I said that it would pain me greatly if I should see you no more.

JEAN
Yes, that is what you said.

GILBERTE
You have forgotten nothing!

JEAN
Could anyone forget that? [*With deep emotion.*] Do you know what I think? As we look at each other and examine our hearts, our souls, our mutual understanding, our love, I verily believe that we have set out on the true road to happiness. [*Kisses her. For a moment they are silent.*]

GILBERTE [*rises*]
But I must leave you. [*Goes toward door* L.] I must prepare for our journey. Meanwhile, go and find my father.

JEAN [*follows her*]
Yes, but tell me before you go that you love me.

GILBERTE
Yes — I love you.

JEAN [*kisses her forehead*]
My only one.
[*Exit* Gilberte L., *a second after. Enter* M. Martinel C. *with a very agitated air, and a letter in his hand*.]

MARTINEL [*perceives* Jean, *quickly slips the letter into his pocket; then, recollecting himself*]
Have you seen Léon?

JEAN
No, are you looking for him?

MARTINEL
No, no, I have just a word to say to him concerning an engagement of small importance.

JEAN [*perceives* Léon]
Wait a moment. Here he comes.
[*Enter* Léon R. *Exit* Jean. C.]

SCENE VI.

(Martinel *and* Léon.)

MARTINEL [*goes quickly up to* Léon]
I must have five minutes with you. Something terrible has happened. Never in the course of my life have I been placed in so awkward and so embarrassing a situation.

LÉON
Quick! What is it?

MARTINEL
I had just finished my game at billiards when a servant brought me a letter addressed to M. Martinel, without any Christian name by which to identify it, but with these words on the letter “Exceedingly urgent.” I thought it was addressed to me, so I tore open the envelope, and I read words intended for Jean — words which have well-nigh taken away my reason. I came to find you in order to ask advice, for this is a thing which must be decided upon the moment.

LÉON
Tell me, what is it?

MARTINEL
I am responsible for my own actions, M. Léon, and I would ask advice of no one if the matter concerned myself only, but unfortunately it concerns Jean; therefore, I hesitate — the matter is so grave, and then the secret is not mine — I came upon it accidentally.

LÉON
Tell me quickly, and do not doubt my faith.

MARTINEL
I do not doubt your faith. Here is the letter. It is from Dr. Pellerin, who is Jean's physician, who is his friend, our friend, a good fellow, a free liver, and a physician to many women of the world, and one who would not write such things unless necessity compelled him. [*Hands the letter to* Léon, *who holds it close to his eyes.*]

LÉON [*reads*]

"MY DEAR FRIEND:
"I am more than annoyed at having to communicate with you upon this evening, above every other evening, upon such a subject as this. But I am sure that if I did otherwise you would never forgive me. Your former mistress, Henriette Lévêque, is dying and would bid you farewell. [*Throws a glance at* Martinel *who signs to him to continue.*] She will not live through the night. She dies after bringing into the world, some fifteen days ago, a child who on her deathbed she swears is yours. So long as she was in no danger, she determined to leave you in ignorance of this child's existence. But, to-day, doomed to death, she calls to you. I know how you have loved her in the past. But you must do as you think fit. She lives in the Rue Chaptal at Number 31. Let me know how I can serve you, my dear fellow, and believe me,
"Always yours,

"PELLERIN."

MARTINEL
There you are. That letter came this evening. That is to say, at the one moment above all others when such a misfortune could threaten the whole future — the whole life of your sister and of Jean. What would you do if you were I? Would you keep this confounded letter, or would you give it to him? If I keep it, we may save appearances, but such an act would be unworthy of me.

LÉON [*energetically*]
I should say so. You must give the letter to Jean.

MARTINEL
Well, what will he do?

LÉON
He alone is the judge of his own actions. We have no right to hide anything from him.

MARTINEL
Supposing he consults me?

LÉON
He will not do it. In such situations a man consults only his conscience.

MARTINEL
But he treats me like a father. If he hesitates a moment between his attention to his wife and the effacement of his happiness, what shall I tell him to do?

LÉON
Just what you would do yourself in like case.

MARTINEL
My impulse would be to go to the woman. What would be yours?

LÉON [*resolutely*]
I should go.

MARTINEL
But how about your sister?

LÉON [*sadly, seating himself by the table*]
Yes, my poor little sister! What an awakening for her!

MARTINEL [*after a few seconds' hesitation, crosses abruptly from* L. *to* R.]
No; it is too hard a thing to do. I shall not give him this letter. I shall be blamed perhaps, but so much the worse. In any case, I save him.

LÉON
You cannot do such a thing, sir. We both know my sister, poor little girl, and I am sure that if this marriage is annulled, she will die. [*Rises*.] When a man has for three years enjoyed the love of such a woman as the one who sends for him, he cannot refuse to see her on her deathbed whatever may happen.

MARTINEL
What will Gilberte do?

LÉON
She worships Jean — but you know how proud she is.

MARTINEL
Will she accept the situation? Will she forgive it?

LÉON
Of that I am very doubtful, especially after all that has been said about this poor girl in the family circle. But what does that matter? Jean must be warned at once. I am going to find him and bring him to you. [*Rises as if to go out* C.]

MARTINEL
Well, how would you like me to tell him?

LÉON Simply give him the letter. [*Exit* Léon C.]

SCENE VII.

MARTINEL [*alone*]
Poor children! in the midst of their happiness and at the zenith of joy! And that other poor girl, who is now suffering and slowly dying! Heavens! How unjust and how cruel life is at times.

SCENE VIII.

(*Re-enter* Léon *with* Jean)

JEAN [*walks briskly to* C. *of stage*]
What is it all about?

MARTINEL
One minute, my poor boy; read this, and forgive me for having opened your letter. I opened it because I thought it was intended for me. [*Gives letter to* Jean, *and watches him read it.* Léon *also watches him, standing* L.]

JEAN [*after reading the letter, speaks to himself in a low tone, touched with deep but contained emotion*]
I must do it! I owe it to her! [*To Martinel.*] Uncle, I leave my wife in your charge. Say nothing until I return, and remain here till I come back. Wait for me. [*Turns to* Léon.] I know you well enough to realize that you do not disapprove of what I am doing. To you I confide my future. I am going. [*Turns to the door* R., *but after casting a glance at the door* L., *which leads to his wife's chamber, says to* Léon.] To you I owe the love your sister has bestowed upon me. Help me now to preserve it.
[*Exit quickly* R.]

SCENE IX.

(Martinel *and* Léon.)

MARTINEL [*seated* R.]
What shall we do now? What are we going to say? What explanations can we give?

LÉON
Let me manage it. It is only right that I should do it since I brought about this marriage.

MARTINEL [*rises*]
Well, I'd dearly love to be forty-eight hours older. [*Rising*.] I confess I do not like these love tragedies, and moreover the fact of the child entering into the case is awful. What is going to become of that poor little mortal? We cannot send him to the foundling asylum. [*Enter* Gilberte L.] Gilberte!

SCENE X.

Gilberte *has removed her marriage robes, and now wears a handsome house gown. She carries an opera cloak, which she throws over a chair neat the door*.

GILBERTE
Where is Jean?

LÉON
Do not be disturbed, he will be back directly.

GILBERTE [*in astonishment*]
Has he gone out?

LÉON
Yes.

GILBERTE
Gone out? And on this evening, above all others!

LÉON
A sudden and grave circumstance compelled him to go out for an hour.

GILBERTE [*excitedly*]
What is going on? What is it that you are hiding from me? Your story is impossible. Some awful misfortune must have happened.

LÉON AND MARTINEL [*together*]
Oh, no, no!

GILBERTE
Then, what is it? Tell me! Speak!

LÉON
I cannot tell you anything. Be patient for an hour. It is Jean's duty to tell you of the sudden and unexpected call which has summoned him hence at such a time.

GILBERTE
What curious words you use! A sudden and unexpected call? He is an orphan — his uncle is his only relative, — then what? Who? Why? Oh, God, how you frighten me!

LÉON
There are duties of many kinds, my dear; friendship, pity, sympathy can impose many of them. But I must not say any more. Be patient for an hour, I implore you.

GILBERTE [*to* Martinel]
And you, Uncle? Speak! I implore you! What is he doing? Where has he gone? I feel — oh, I feel the shadow of a terrible misfortune hovering over us; speak, I entreat.

MARTINEL [*with tears in his eyes*]
But I cannot tell you any more, my dear child. I cannot. Like your brother, I promised to say nothing, and I would have done just as Jean has done. Wait for an hour, I beseech you — just an hour.

GILBERTE
And you, too, are upset. It must be a catastrophe.

MARTINEL
No, no! The fact that you are so distressed agitates me, because you know I love you with my whole heart. [*Embraces her*.]

GILBERTE [*to* Léon]
You have spoken of friendship, of pity, and of sympathy, but if it were any of these reasons you could tell me so; meanwhile, as I look at you two, I feel that here is some unspoken reason, some mystery which appalls me.

LÉON [*resolutely*]
My dear little sister, won't you trust in me?

GILBERTE
Yes, you ought to know all.

LÉON
Will you trust me absolutely?

GILBERTE
Absolutely.

LÉON
I swear to you, on my faith as a gentleman, that I would have done just as Jean has done; that his absolute fidelity to you, his fidelity, which perhaps is even exaggerated by love for you, is the only reason which had led him to forget at this very moment the very thing that he has gone to learn anew.

GILBERTE [*looks* Léon *straight in the eyes*]
I believe you, Léon, and I thank you. Nevertheless, I tremble yet and I shall tremble until he returns. If you swear to me that my husband was entirely ignorant of the cause which has made him leave me at this supreme moment, I will content myself as well as I can, trusting in you two. [*She stretches both hands to the two men.*]

SCENE XI.

(*The same, with* M. de Petitpré *and* Mme. de Ronchard, *who enters quickly* C.)

PETITPRÉ
What is this I hear? Jean Martinel gone out?

MARTINEL
He is coming back very soon, sir.

PETITPRÉ
But why on earth did he go out on such an evening as this without a word of explanation to his wife? [*Turns to* Gilberte] You know nothing about it, do you?

GILBERTE [*seated* L. *of table*]
Father, I know nothing at all about it.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And without a word of explanation to the family! That is indeed a lack of courtesy.

PETITPRÉ [*to* Martinel]
And why has he acted in this way, sir?

MARTINEL
Your son knows as much as I do, sir; but neither of us can reveal it to you. Moreover, your daughter has consented to wait until she can learn all about it from her husband on his return.

PETITPRÉ
My daughter has consented — but I do not consent! Besides, it seems that you alone were forewarned of this sudden departure.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*in agitation to* Martinel]
It was to you they brought the letter, and you were the one who read it first.

MARTINEL
You are correctly informed, Madame; a letter was delivered here, but I would not shoulder the responsibility of this matter, and I showed the letter to your son, sir [*turns to* Petitpré], and asked his advice with the intention of following it.

LÉON
The advice that I gave is exactly what my brother-in-law has done of his own volition, and I esteem him all the more for it.

PETITPRÉ [*turns to* Léon]
It is I who should have been consulted, not you. If Jean's action is indeed excusable, his want of courtesy is absolutely unpardonable.

MME. DE RONCHARD
It is scandalous!

LÉON [*to* M. Petitpré]
Yes, it would have been better to consult you, but the urgency of the matter did not allow it. You would have discussed the matter; my aunt would have discussed the matter; we should all have discussed the matter the whole night long, and you know there are times when one cannot afford to lose even seconds. Silence was necessary until Jean's return. When he does return he will hide nothing from you, and I feel sure that you will judge him as I myself have judged him.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*turns to* Martinel]
But this letter, from whom did it come?

MARTINEL
Oh, I can tell you that. It came from a physician.

MME. DE RONCHARD
From a physician — a physician — then he must have a sick patient — and it is on account of this patient that he made Jean come to him. But who is the patient? Oh, ho! I surmise that it is a woman — that woman — his former mistress, who has played this card today. Sick! I suppose she has made a pretense of poisoning herself in order to show him that she loves him still and will always love him. Oh, the little wretch! [*To* Léon.] This is the kind of people you stand up for! Yes, you!

LÉON
It would be only reasonable, my dear Aunt, not to air all these revolting theories of yours in Gilberte's presence, especially when you really know nothing at all.

GILBERTE [*rises*]
Do not speak any more about it, I pray you. Everything that I have heard just now distresses me beyond measure. I will wait for my husband; I do not wish to know anything except from his lips, as I have absolute confidence in him. If misfortune has threatened us, I will not hear such things talked of. [*Exit* L, *accompanied by* Petitpré. *Short silence*.]

MME. DE RONCHARD [*turns to* Léon]
Well, Léon, do you always win? You see what charming fellows these husbands are — every one of them!

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Musotte's *bedroom, neatly furnished, but without luxury. Disordered bed stands* L. *A screen stands* L. I. E., *almost hiding* Musotte, *who lies stretched at length upon a steamer-chair. Beside the bed is a cradle, the head of which is turned up stage. On the mantelpiece and on small tables at* R. *and* L. *are vials of medicine, cups, chafing-dish, etc. A table stands*, R. I. E. Musotte *is sleeping*. La Babin *and* Mme. Flache *stand* C. *looking at her*.

LA BABIN [*in low tones*]
How she sleeps!

MME. FLACHE [*in the same voice*]
But she will not sleep long now, unless she is going into her last sleep.

LA BABIN
Oh, there is no chance of that. That is enough to give one the horrors. Fancy losing one's life for a child!

MME. FLACHE
But how can you prevent it? Death is as necessary as birth, or the world would become too small for us all.

LA BABIN [*sits* R. *of table*]
All people ought to die in the same way and at the same age — every one of us; then one would know what to expect.

MME. FLACHE [*pours out some tea*]
What simple ideas you have, Madame Babin! Personally, I would rather not know the hour of my death. I would sooner finish my life while sleeping in the middle of the night — during slumber — without suffering — by a sudden failure of the heart.

LA BABIN
Look at the sick woman. How silly of her to wish to rest upon that steamer-chair as she has done. The doctor told her plainly that such an effort would probably finish her.

MME. FLACHE [*sits* L. *of table*]
Oh, I understand her motive. When a girl like her has a lover she commits every kind of folly, and more especially, nurse, when they are at all coquettish; but you country people do not know anything about such things. They are coquettish through and through. That is the reason she wished to look her prettiest. She was afraid of being thought ugly, don't you understand? So I had to put on her *peignoir*, and tidy her up, and arrange her hair just as I have done.

LA BABIN
Oh, these Parisians! It is necessary that they should have a hairdresser even to the last gasp! [*A short silence*.] But will this gentleman of hers come?

MME. FLACHE
I do not think so. Men are not overfond of obeying the calls of their former mistresses at such times, and then, this lover of hers was married to-day, poor fellow!

LA BABIN
Well, that is a joke.

MME. FLACHE
I should say so.

LA BABIN
Certainly, then, he won't come. In such a case would *you* go to see a man?

MME. FLACHE
Oh, if I loved him very much I should go.

LA BABIN
Even if you were marrying another the same day?

MME. FLACHE
Just the same. For such a combination of circumstances would pierce my heart; would penetrate me with a strong emotion, — and, oh, I am so fond of such emotions!

LA BABIN
Well, so far as I am concerned, I certainly would not go. I should be too much afraid of the shock.

MME. FLACHE
But Doctor Pellerin asserts that the man will come.

LA BABIN
Do you know this physician well?

MME. FLACHE
Who, Doctor Pellerin?

LA BABIN
Yes; he has the air of a charming man of the world.

MME. FLACHE
Oh, yes; he is all that, but he is also a good physician. Then he is such good company, and has such a smooth tongue. And you know he is not physician to the Opera for nothing.

LA BABIN
That little puppy of a —

MME. FLACHE
A puppy! You don’t very often find puppies among men of his caliber, and then,-oh, how he used to love the girls! Oh, oh! Although, for the matter of that, there are many physicians who are like him. It was at the Opera that I first met him.

LA BABIN
At the Opera!

MME. FLACHE
Yes, at the Opera. You know, I was a dancer there for eight years. Yes, indeed, even I — just as you see me, a dancer at the Opera.

LA BABIN
You, Madame Flache!

MME. FLACHE
Yes, my mother was a midwife, and taught me the business at the same time that she taught me dancing, because she always said it was well to have two strings to your bow. Dancing, you see, is all very well, provided you are not too ambitious of appearing on first nights, but, unhappily, that was the case with me. I was as slender as a thread when I was twenty, and very agile, but I grew fat and scant of breath, and became rather heavy in my steps; so when my mother died, as I had my diploma as a midwife, I took her apartment and her business, and I added the title of “Midwife to the Opera,” for all their business comes to me. They like me very much there. When I was dancing, they used to call me Mademoiselle Flacchi the première.

LA BABIN
Then you have been married since then?

MME. FLACHE
No, but a woman in my profession should always assume the title of

Madame for the sake of its dignity. You know, it gives confidence. But, how about you, nurse, from what place do you come? You know, you have only just come here, and nobody consulted me about engaging you.

LA BABIN
I am from Yvetot.

MME. FLACHE
Is this your first engagement as a nurse?

LA BABIN
No, my third. I have had two daughters and a little boy.

MME. FLACHE
And your husband, is he a farmer or a gardener?

LA BABIN [*Simply*]
I am not married.

MME. FLACHE [*laughing*]
Not married, and with three children! Upon my word, let me compliment you; you are indeed precocious.

LA BABIN
Don’t talk about it; it was not my will. It is the good God who does these things. One cannot prevent it.

MME. FLACHE
How simple you are! Now you will probably have a fourth child.

LA BABIN
That’s very possible.

MME. FLACHE
Well, what does your lover do? What is his business? Or perhaps you have more than one?

LA BABIN [*with indignation*]
There has never been more than one. I give you my word, upon my hope of salvation. He is a lemonade-seller at Yvetot.

MME. FLACHE
Is he a handsome fellow?

LA BABIN
I believe you, indeed! He is handsome! [*Confidentially.*] If I tell you all this, it is only because you are a midwife, and a midwife in such affairs as this is like a priest in the confessional. But you, Madame Flache, you, who have been a dancer at the Opera, you must also have had, surely — little love affairs — little intrigues?

MME. FLACHE [*evidently flattered, and in a dreamy tone*]
Oh, yes, one or two!

LA BABIN [*laughs*]
And have you never had — this sort of accident? [*Points to the cradle.*]

MME. FLACHE
No.

LA BABIN
How did that come?

MME. FLACHE [*rises and approaches the mantelpiece*]
Probably because I was a midwife.

LA BABIN
Well, I know one in your profession who has had five.

MME. FLACHE [*with contempt*]
She evidently did not come from Paris.

LA BABIN
That’s true; she came from Courbevoie.

MUSOTTE [*in a feeble voice*] Is no one there?

MME. FLACHE
She is awakening. There, there! [*Folds up the screen which hides the long steamer-chair*.]

MUSOTTE
Hasn’t he come yet?

MME. FLACHE
No.

MUSOTTE
He will arrive too late — my God! My God!

MME. FLACHE
What an idea! He will come.

MUSOTTE
And my little darling — my child?

MME. FLACHE
He is sleeping like an angel.

MUSOTTE [*after looking at herself in a hand-mirror*]
I must not look like this when he comes. Oh, God! Bring my child — I want to see him.

MME. FLACHE
But if I show him to you he will wake up, and who knows if he will go to sleep again.

MUSOTTE
Bring the cradle here. [*A gesture of refusal from* Mme Flache.] Yes, yes! I insist, [Mme. Flache *and the nurse gently bring the cradle to her*.] Nearer, nearer, so that I can see him well — the darling! My child, my child! And I am going to leave him! Soon I shall disappear into the unknown. Oh. God, what agony!

MME. FLACHE
Now don't go worrying yourself like that; you are not as ill as you think. I have seen lots worse than you. Come, come! you are going to recover. Take away the cradle, nurse. [*They put the cradle again in its place; then to the nurse*.] That will do, that will do. Watch me. You know very well that it is only I who can quiet it. [*Sits near the cradle, and sings a lullaby while rocking it*.]
"A little gray fowl
Came into the barn,
To lay a big egg
For the good boy that sleeps.
Go to sleep, go to sleep,
My little chicken!
Go to sleep, sleep, my chick!"

LA BABIN [*stands near the end of the mantelpiece, drinks the sugared water, and slips loaf sugar into her pocket; aside*]
I must not forget the main thing. I have just seen in the kitchen the remains of a leg of mutton, to which I should like to go and say a few words. I am breaking in two with hunger just now.

MME. FLACHE [*sings softly*]
"A little black fowl
Came into the room,
To lay a big egg
For the good boy that sleeps.
Sleep, sleep, my little chicken,
Sleep, oh, sleep, my chick!"

MUSOTTE [*from the long chair, after moaning several times*]
Has he gone to sleep again?

MME. FLACHE [*goes toward* Musotte]
Yes, Mademoiselle, just as if he were a little Jesus. Do you wish to know what I think about him, this young man lying here? You will lead him to the altar for his marriage. He is a jewel, like yourself, my dear.

MUSOTTE
Do you really think him pretty?

MME. FLACHE
On the honor of a midwife, I have seldom brought into the world one so pretty. It is a pleasure to know that one has brought to the light such a little Cupid as he is.

MUSOTTE
And to think that in a few hours, perhaps, I shall see him no more; look at him no more; love him no more!

MME. FLACHE
Oh, no, no! You are talking unreasonably.

MUSOTTE
Ah, I know it too well! I heard you talking with the nurse. I know that the end is very near; this night, perhaps. Would the doctor have written to Jean

to come and see me on this evening — the evening of his marriage — if I were not at the point of death? [*The bell rings*. Musotte *utters a cry*.] Ah, there he is! it is he! Quick! quick! Oh, God, how I suffer! [*Exit* Mme. Flache C. Musotte *gazes after her. Enter* Dr. Pellerin, *in evening clothes*.]

SCENE II.

MUSOTTE [*despairingly*]
Ah! it is not he!

PELLERIN [*approaches* Musotte]
Has he not come yet?

MUSOTTE
He will not come.

DR. PELLERIN
He will! I am certain of it; I know it.

MUSOTTE
No!

DR. PELLERIN
I swear it! [*Turns toward* Mme. Flache.] Hasn't he answered the note yet?

MME. FLACHE
No, Doctor.

DR. PELLERIN
Well, he will come. How is my patient?

MME. FLACHE
She has rested a little.

MUSOTTE [*in an agitated voice*]
All is over! I feel that I shall not rest any more until he comes, or until I

depart without having seen him.

DR. PELLERIN
He will come if you will go to sleep immediately and sleep until to-morrow morning.

MUSOTTE
You would not have written to him to come this evening if I had been able to wait until to-morrow morning. [*The bell rings*.] If that is not he, I am lost — lost! [Mme. Flache *runs to open the door*. Musotte *listens intently, and hears from below a man's voice; then murmurs despairingly*.] It is not he!

MME. FLACHE [*re-enters with a vial in her hand*]
It is the medicine from the chemist.

MUSOTTE [*agitated*]
Oh, God! how horrible! He is not coming; what have I done? Doctor, show me my child. I will see him once more.

DR. PELLERIN
But he sleeps, my little Musotte.

MUSOTTE
Well, he has plenty of time in the future for sleep.

DR. PELLERIN
Come, come, calm yourself.

MUSOTTE
If Jean does not come, who will take care of my child? — for it is Jean's child, I swear to you. Do you believe me? Oh, how I loved him!

DR. PELLERIN
Yes, my dear little child, we believe you. But please be calm.

MUSOTTE [*with increasing agitation*]
Tell me, when you went away just now where did you go?

DR. PELLERIN
To see a patient.

MUSOTTE
That is not true. You went to see Jean, and he would not come with you, or he would be here now.

DR. PELLERIN
On my word of honor, no.

MUSOTTE
Yes, I feel it. You have seen him, and you do not dare to tell me for fear it would kill me.

DR. PELLERIN
Ah, the fever is coming back again. This must not go on. I don't wish you to be delirious when he comes. [*Turns to* Mme. Flache.] We must give her a hypodermic injection. Give me the morphia. [Mme. Flache *brings the needle and morphia, from the mantelpiece and gives it to* Dr. Pellerin.]

MUSOTTE [*uncovers her own arm*]
But for this relief, I do not know how I should have borne up during the last few days. [Dr. Pellerin *administers the hypodermic*.]

DR. PELLERIN
Now, you must go to sleep; I forbid you to speak. I won't answer you, and I tell you of a certainty that in a quarter of an hour Jean will be here. [Musotte *stretches herself out obediently upon the couch and goes to sleep*.]

LA BABIN [*silently replaces the screen which hides* Musotte]
How she sleeps! What a benediction that drug is! But I don’t want any of it. It scares me; it is a devil’s potion. [*Sits near the cradle and reads a newspaper*.]

MME. FLACHE [*in a low voice to* Dr. Pellerin]
Oh, the poor girl, what misery!

DR. PELLERIN [*in the same tone*]
Yes, she is a brave girl. It is some time since I first met her with Jean Martinel, who gave her three years of complete happiness. She has a pure and simple soul.

MME. FLACHE
Well, will this Monsieur Martinel come?

DR. PELLERIN
I think so. He is a man of feeling, but it is a difficult thing for him to leave his wife and his people on such a day as this.

MME. FLACHE
It certainly is a most extraordinary case. A veritable *fiasco*.

DR. PELLERIN
It is, indeed.

MME. FLACHE [*changes her tone*]
Where have you been just now? You did not put on evening dress and a white cravat to go and see a patient?

DR. PELLERIN
I went to see the first part of the Montargy ballet danced.

MME. FLACHE [*interested, and leaning upon the edge of the table*]
And was it good? Tell me.

DR. PELLERIN [*sits* L. *of table*]
It was very well danced.

MME. FLACHE
The new directors do things in style, don’t they?

DR. PELLERIN
Jeanne Merali and Gabrielle Poivrier are first class.

MME. FLACHE
Poivrier — the little Poivrier — is it possible! As to Merali I am not so much astonished; although she is distinctly ugly, she has her good points. And how about Mauri?

DR. PELLERIN
Oh, a marvel — an absolute marvel, who dances as no one else can. A human bird with limbs for wings. It was absolute perfection.

MME. FLACHE
Are you in love with her?

DR. PELLERIN
Oh, no; merely an admirer. You know how I worship the dance.

MME. FLACHE
And the *danseuses* also, at times. [*Lowering her eyes.*] Come, have you forgotten?

DR. PELLERIN
One can never forget artists of your worth, my dear.

MME. FLACHE
You are simply teasing me.

DR. PELLERIN
I only do you justice. You know that formerly, when I was a young doctor, I had for you a very ardent passion which lasted six weeks. Tell me, don't you regret the time of the grand *fête*?

MME. FLACHE
A little. But reason comes when one is young no longer, and I have nothing to complain of. My business is very prosperous.

DR. PELLERIN
You are making money, then? They tell me that you are giving dainty little dinners.

MME. FLACHE
I believe you, and I have a particularly good *chef*. Won't you give me the pleasure of entertaining you at dinner one of these days, my dear Doctor?

DR. PELLERIN
Very willingly, my dear.

MME. FLACHE
Shall I have any other physicians, or do you prefer to come alone?

DR. PELLERIN
Alone, if you please. I am not fond of a third party. [*The bell rings.*]

MUSOTTE [*awakens*]
Ah, some one rang, run and see. [*Exit* Mme. Flache. *A short silence.*]
A VOICE [*without*]
Madame Henriette Lévêque?

MUSOTTE [*emitting an anguished cry*]
Ah, it is he! There he is! [*Makes an effort to rise. Enter* Jean Martinel.] Jean! Jean! At last! [*Springs up and stretches her arms to him.*]

SCENE III.

(*The same, — with* Jean Martinel.)

JEAN [*comes rapidly forward, kneels near the long steamer-chair, and kisses* Musotte's *hands*]
My poor little Musotte! [*They begin to weep and dry their eyes; then they remain silent and motionless. At last* Jean *rises and holds up his hand to* Dr. Pellerin.]

PELLERIN
Did I do well?

JEAN
You did indeed, and I thank you.

PELLERIN [*introduces them*]
Madame Flache, the midwife — the nurse — [*indicates the cradle with a grave gesture*] and there!

JEAN [*approaches the cradle and lifts the little curtain, takes up the child and kisses it on the mouth; then lays it down again*]
He is a splendid boy!

DR. PELLERIN
A very pretty child.

MME. FLACHE
A superb morsel — one of my prettiest.

JEAN [*in a low voice*]
And Musotte, how is she?

MUSOTTE [*who has heard him*]
I, — I am almost lost. I know surely that all is over. [*To* Jean.] Take that little chair, dear, and seat yourself near me, and let us talk as long as I am able to speak. I have so many things to say to you, for we shall never be together any more. I am so glad to see you again that nothing else now seems of any importance.

JEAN [*approaching her*] Don't agitate yourself. Don't get excited.

MUSOTTE
How can I help being agitated at seeing you again?

JEAN [*sits on the low chair, takes* Musotte's *hand*]
My poor Musotte, I cannot tell you what a shock it was to me when I learned just now that you were so ill.

MUSOTTE
And on this day of all days! It must have shocked you greatly.

JEAN
What! Do you know of it then?

MUSOTTE
Yes, since I felt so ill, I kept myself informed about you every day, in order that I might not pass away without having seen you and spoken to you again, for I have so much to say to you. [*At a sign from* Jean, Mme. Flache, Pellerin, *and* La Babin *exit* R.]

SCENE IV.

(Musotte *and* Jean.)

MUSOTTE
Then you received the letter?

JEAN
Yes.

MUSOTTE
And you came immediately?

JEAN
Certainly.

MUSOTTE
Thanks — ah! thanks. I hesitated a long time before warning you — hesitated even this morning, but I heard the midwife talking with the nurse and learned that to-morrow perhaps it might be too late, so I sent Doctor Pellerin to call you immediately.

JEAN
Why didn’t you call me sooner?

MUSOTTE
I never thought that my illness would become so serious. I did not wish to trouble your life.

JEAN [*points to the cradle*]
But that child! How is it that I was not told of this sooner?

MUSOTTE
You would never have known it, if his birth had not killed me. I would have spared you this pain — this cloud upon your life. When you left me, you gave me enough to live upon. Everything was over between us; and besides, at any other moment than this, would you believe me if I said to you: "This is your child?"

JEAN
Yes, I have never doubted you.

MUSOTTE
You are as good as ever, my Jean. No, no, I am not lying to you; he is yours, that little one there. I swear it to you on my deathbed; I swear it to you before God!

JEAN
I have already told you that I believed you. I have always believed you.

MUSOTTE
Listen, this is all that has happened. As soon as you left me, I became very ill. I suffered so much that I thought I was going to die. The doctor ordered a change of air. You remember, it was in the spring. I went to Saint-Malo — to that old relative, of whom I have often talked to you.

JEAN
Yes, yes.

MUSOTTE
It was in Saint-Malo, after some days, that I realized that you had left me a pledge of your affection. My first desire was to tell you everything, for I knew that you were an honest man — that you would have recognized this child, perhaps even have given up your marriage; but I would not have had you do that. All was over; was it not? — and it was better that it should be

so. I knew that I could never be your wife [*smiles*], Musotte, me, Madame Martinel — oh, no!

JEAN
My poor, dear girl. How brutal and hard we men are, without thinking of it and without wishing to be so!

MUSOTTE
Don't say that. I was not made for you. I was only a little model; and you, you were a rising artist, and I never thought that you would belong to me forever. [Jean *sheds tears*.] No, no, don't cry; you have nothing to reproach yourself with. You have always been so good to me. It is only God who has been cruel to me.

JEAN
Musotte!

MUSOTTE
Let me go on. I remained at Saint-Malo without revealing my condition. Then I came back to Paris, and here some months afterward the little one was born — the child! When I fully understood what had happened to me, I experienced at first such fear; yes, such fear! Then I remembered that he was bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh; that you had given him life, and that he was a pledge from you. But one is so stupid when one knows nothing. One's ideas change just as one's moods change, and I became contented all at once; contented with the thought that I would bring him up, that he would grow to be a man, that he would call me mother. [*Weeps.*] Now, he will never call me mother. He will never put his little arms around my neck, because I am going to leave him; because I am going away — I don't know where; but there, where everybody goes. Oh, God! My God!

JEAN
Calm yourself, my little Musotte. Would you be able to speak as you do speak if you were as ill as you think you are?

MUSOTTE
You do not see that the fever is burning within me; that I am losing my head, and don’t know longer what I say.

JEAN
No, no; please calm yourself.

MUSOTTE
Pet me; pet me, Jean, and you will calm me.

JEAN [*kisses her hair; then resumes*]
There, there; don’t speak any more for a minute or two. Let us remain quietly here near each other.

MUSOTTE
But I must speak to you; I have so many things to say to you yet, and do not know how to say them. My head is beyond my control. Oh, my God! how shall I do it? [*Raises herself, looks around her and sees the cradle.*] Ah, yes, I know; I recollect, it is he, my child. Tell me, Jean, what will you do with him? You know that I am an orphan, and when I am gone he will be here all alone — alone in the world! Poor little thing! Listen, Jean, my head is quite clear now. I shall understand very well what you answer me now, and the peace of my closing moments depends upon it. I have no one to leave the little one to but you.

JEAN
I promise you that I will take him, look after him, and bring him up.

MUSOTTE
As a father?

JEAN
As a father.

MUSOTTE
You have already seen him?

JEAN
Yes.

MUSOTTE
Go and look at him again. [Jean *goes over to the cradle.*]

JEAN
He is pretty, isn't he?

MUSOTTE
Everybody says so. Look at him, the poor little darling, who has enjoyed only a few days of life as yet. He belongs to us. You are his father; I am his mother, but soon he will have a mother no more. [*In anguish.*] Promise me that he shall always have a father.

JEAN [*goes over to her*]
I promise it, my darling!

MUSOTTE
A true father, who will always love him well?

JEAN I promise it.

MUSOTTE
You will be good — very good — to him?

JEAN
I swear it to you!

MUSOTTE
And then, there is something else — but I dare not —

JEAN
Tell it to me.

MUSOTTE
Since I came back to Paris, I have sought to see you without being seen by you, and I have seen you three times. Each time you were with her — with your sweetheart, your wife, and with a gentleman — her father, I think. Oh, how I looked at her! I asked myself: "Will she love him as I have loved him? Will she make him happy? Is she good?" Tell me, do you really believe she is very good?

JEAN
Yes, darling, I believe it.

MUSOTTE
You are very certain of it?

JEAN
Yes, indeed.

MUSOTTE
And I thought so, too, simply from seeing her pass by. She is so pretty! I have been a little jealous, and I wept on coming back. But what are you going to do now as between her and your son?

JEAN
I shall do my duty.

MUSOTTE
Your duty? Does that mean by her or by him?

JEAN
By him.

MUSOTTE
Listen, Jean: when I am no more, ask your wife from me, from the mouth of a dead woman, to adopt him, this dear little morsel of humanity-to love him as I would have loved him; to be a mother to him in my stead. If she is tender and kind, she will consent. Tell her how you saw me suffer — that my last prayer, my last supplication on earth was offered up for her. Will you do this?

JEAN
I promise you that I will.

MUSOTTE
Ah! How good you are! Now I fear nothing; my poor little darling is safe, and I am happy and calm. Ah, how calm I am! You didn't know, did you, that I called him Jean, after you? That does not displease you, does it?

JEAN [*weeps*]
No, no!

MUSOTTE
You weep — so you still love me a little, Jean? Ah, how I thank you for this! But if I only could live; it must be possible. I feel so much better since you came here, and since you have promised me all that I have asked you. Give me your hand. At this moment I can recall all our life together, and I am content — almost gay; in fact, I can laugh — see, I can laugh, though I don't know why. [*Laughs.*]

JEAN
Oh, calm yourself for my sake, dear little Musotte.

MUSOTTE
If you could only understand how recollections throng upon me. Do you remember that I posed for your “Mendiante,” for your “Violet Seller,” for your “Guilty Woman,” which won for you your first medal? And do you remember the breakfast at Ledoyen’s on Varnishing Day? There were more than twenty-five at a table intended for ten. What follies we committed, especially that little, little — what did he call himself — I mean that little comic fellow, who was always making portraits which resembled no one? Oh, yes, Tavernier! And you took me home with you to your studio, where you had two great manikins which frightened me so, and I called to you, and you came in to reassure me. Oh, how heavenly all that was! Do you remember? [*Laughs again*.] Oh, if that life could only begin over again! [*Cries suddenly*.] Ah, what pain! [*To* Jean, *who is going for the doctor*.] No, stay, stay! [*Silence. A sudden change comes over her face*.] See, Jean, what glorious weather! If you like, we will take the baby for a sail on a river steamboat; that will be so jolly! I love those little steamboats; they are so pretty. They glide over the water quickly and without noise. Now that I am your wife, I can assert myself — I am armed. Darling, I never thought that you would marry me. And look at our little one — how pretty he is, and how he grows! He is called Jean after you. And I — I have my two little Jeans — mine — altogether mine! You don’t know how happy I am. And the little one walks to-day for the first time! [*Laughs aloud, with her arms stretched out, pointing to the child which she thinks is before her*.]

JEAN [*weeps*]
Musotte! Musotte! Don’t you know me?

MUSOTTE
Indeed I know you! Am I not your wife? Kiss me, darling. Kiss me, my little one.

JEAN [*takes her in his arms, weeping and repeating*]
Musotte! Musotte! [Musotte *rises upon her couch, and with a gesture to* Jean *points to the cradle, toward which he goes, nodding “Yes, yes,” with his head. When* Jean *reaches the cradle,* Musotte, *who has raised herself*

upon her hands, falls lifeless upon the long steamer-chair. Jean, *frightened, calls out*] Pellerin! Pellerin!

SCENE V.

(*The same:* Pellerin, Mme. Flache, *and* La Babin, *enter quickly* R.)

PELLERIN [*who has gone swiftly to* Musotte, *feels her pulse and listens at the heart*]
Her heart is not beating! Give me a mirror, Madame Flache.

JEAN
My God! [Mme. Flache *gives a hand-mirror to* Pellerin, *who holds it before the lips of* Musotte, *Pause*.]

PELLERIN [*in a low voice*]
She is dead!

JEAN [*takes the dead woman's hand and kisses it fondly, his voice choked with emotion*]
Farewell, my dear little Musotte! To think that a moment ago you were speaking to me — a moment ago you were looking at me, you saw me, and now — all is over!

PELLERIN [*goes to* Jean *and takes him by the shoulder*]
Now, you must go at once. Go! You have nothing more to do here. Your duty is over.

JEAN [*rises*]
I go. Farewell, poor little Musotte!

PELLERIN
I will take care of everything this evening. But the child, do you wish me to find an asylum for him?

JEAN
Oh, no, I will take him. I have sworn it to that poor, dead darling. Come and join me immediately at my house, and bring him with you. Then I shall have another service to request of you. But how about Musotte, who is going to remain with her?

MME. FLACHE
I, Monsieur. Have no anxiety; I am acquainted with all that must be done.

JEAN
Thank you, Madame. [*Approaches the bed; closes* Musotte's *eyes and kisses her fondly and for a long time upon her forehead*.] Farewell, Musotte, forever! [*Goes softly to the cradle, removes the veil, kisses the child and speaks to it in a firm voice which at the same time is full of tears*.] I shall see you again directly, my little Jean!
[*Exit quickly*].

ACT III.

SCENE I.

(*Same setting as in* Act I.)
(Monsieur de Petitpré, Mme. de Ronchard, M. Martinel, *and* Léon.)

MME. DE RONCHARD [*walks about in an agitated manner*]
Seven minutes to midnight! It is nearly two hours since Jean left us!

LEON [*seated* L.]
But, my dear Aunt, just allow a half hour in the carriage for going and a half hour for returning, and there remains just one hour for the business he had to attend to.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Was it so very long, then — the business that called him hence?

LEON
Yes, my dear Aunt; and now, why worry yourself by counting the minutes? Your agitation will change nothing in the end, and will not hasten Jean's return by a single second, or make the hands of the clock move more quickly.

MME. DE RONCHARD
How can you ask me not to worry when my mind is full of anxiety, when my heart is beating, and I feel the tears rising into my eyes?

LÉON
But, my dear Aunt, you know very well you do not feel as badly as that.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Oh, you irritate me!

MARTINEL [*seated near the table*]
Don't torment yourself, Madame. True, the situation is a rather delicate one, but it need not disquiet you or frighten us, if we know how to bring to its consideration at this moment coolness and reason.

LÉON
Just so, my dear Aunt, Monsieur Martinel speaks truly.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*crosses* R.]
You ought to be beaten, you two! You know everything, and won't tell anything. How annoying men are! There is never any means of making them tell a secret.

MARTINEL
Jean will come presently and will tell you everything. Have a little patience.

PETITPRÉ
Yes; let us be calm. Let us talk of other things, or be silent, if we can.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Be silent! That is about, the most difficult thing —
A SERVANT [*enters* R.]
A gentleman wishes to see M. Martinel.

MARTINEL [*rises*.]
Pardon me for a moment. [*To the servant.*] Very well, I am coming. [*Exit* R.]

SCENE II.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*approaches servant quickly*]
Baptiste, Baptiste! Who is asking for M. Martinel?

SERVANT
I do not know, Madame. It was the hall porter who came upstairs.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, run now and look without showing yourself, and come back and tell us at once.

PETITPRÉ [*who has risen at the entrance of the servant*]
No, I will permit no spying; let us wait. We shall not have to wait long now. [*To the servant.*] You may go. [*Exit servant.*]

MME. DE RONCHARD [*to* Petitpré]
I do not understand you at all. You are absolutely calm. One would think that your daughter's happiness was nothing to you. For myself, I am profoundly agitated.

PETITPRÉ
That will do no good. [*Sits near the table* R.] Let us talk — talk reasonably, now that we are a family party and Monsieur Martinel is absent.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*Sits* R.]
If that man would only go back to Havre!

LÉON [*Sits* L. *of table*]
That would not change anything even if he could go back to Havre.

PETITPRÉ
For my part, I think —

MME. DE RONCHARD [*interrupts*]
Do you wish to hear my opinion? Well, I think that they are preparing us for some unpleasant surprise; that they wish to entrap us, as one might say.

PETITPRÉ
But why? In whose interest? Jean Martinel is an honest man, and he loves my child. Léon, whose judgment I admire, although he is my son —

LEON
Thank you, father!

PETITPRÉ
Léon bears Jean as much affection as esteem. As to the uncle —

MME. DE RONCHARD
Don't talk about them, I pray. It is this woman who is seeking to entrap us. She has played some little comedy, and she chooses to-day above all others for its *dénouement*. It is her stage climax; her masterpiece of treachery.

LÉON
As in "The Ambigu."

MME. DE RONCHARD
Do not laugh. I know these women. I have suffered enough at their hands.

PETITPRÉ
Oh, my poor Clarisse; if you really understood them, you would have held your husband better than you did.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises*]
What do you mean by "understanding" them? Pardon me — to live with

that roisterer coming in upon me when and whence he pleased — I prefer my broken life and my loneliness — with you!

PETITPRÉ
No doubt you are right from your point of view of a married woman; but there are other points of view, perhaps less selfish and certainly superior, such as that of family interest.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Of family interest, indeed? Do you mean to say that I was wrong from the point of view of the family interest — you, a magistrate!

PETITPRÉ
My duties as a magistrate have made me very prudent, for I have seen pass under my eyes many equivocal and terrible situations, which not only agonized my conscience but gave me many cruel hours of indecision. Man is often so little responsible and circumstances are often so powerful. Our impenetrable nature is so capricious, our instincts are so mysterious that we must be tolerant and even indulgent in the presence of faults which are not really crimes, and which exhibit nothing vicious or abandoned in the man himself.

MME. DE RONCHARD
So, then, to deceive one's wife is not deceitful, and you say such a thing before your son? Truly, a pretty state of affairs! [*Crosses* L.]

LÉON
Oh, I have my opinion also about that, my dear Aunt.

PETITPRÉ [*rises*]
It is not almost a crime, — it is one. But it is looked upon to-day as so common a thing that one scarcely punishes it at all. It is punished by divorce, which is a house of refuge for most men. The law prefers to separate them with decency — timidly, rather than drag them apart as in former times.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Your learned theories are revolting, and I wish —

LÉON [*rises*]
Ah, here is Monsieur Martinel.

SCENE III.

(*The same, and* Monsieur Martinel.)

MARTINEL [*with great emotion*]
I come to fulfill an exceedingly difficult task. Jean, who has gone to his own house, before daring to present himself here, has sent Doctor Pellerin to me. I am commissioned by him to make you acquainted with the sad position in which Jean finds himself, — in which we all find ourselves.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Ah, ha! Now, I am going to learn something!

MARTINEL
By a letter which you will read presently, we have learned this evening, in this house, of a new misfortune. A woman of whose existence you are all aware was at the point of death.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Did I not predict that she would do just this thing?

LÉON
Let M. Martinel speak, my dear Aunt.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And now that this woman has seen him, how does she feel — his dying patient? Better, without a doubt?

MARTINEL [*quietly*]
She died, Madame, died before his eyes.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Died this evening! Impossible!

MARTINEL
Nevertheless, it is so, Madame.

LÉON [*aside*]
Poor little Musotte!

MARTINEL
There is a serious thing to be considered here. This woman left a child, and that child's father is Jean.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*stupefied*]
A child!

MARTINEL [*to* Petitpré]
Read the physician's letter, Monsieur. [*Hands* Petitpré *the letter, and* Petitpré *reads it*.]

MME. DE RONCHARD
He had a child and he has never confessed it; has never said anything about it; has hidden it from us! What infamy!

MARTINEL
He would have told you in due time.

MME. DE RONCHARD
He would have told! That is altogether too strong — you are mocking us!

LÉON
But, my dear Aunt, let my father answer. I shall go and find Gilberte. She will be dying of anxiety. We have no right to hide the truth from her any longer. I am going to acquaint her with it.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*accompanying him to the door*]
You have a pleasant task, but you will not succeed in arranging matters.

LÉON [*at door* L.]
In any case I shall not embroil them with each other as you would.
[*Exit* L.]

SCENE IV.

(Petitpré, Martinel, *and* Madame de Ronchard.)

PETITPRÉ [*who has finished reading the letter*]
Then, Martinel, you say that your nephew was ignorant of the situation of this woman.

MARTINEL
Upon my honor.

MME. DE RONCHARD
It is incredible.

MARTINEL
I will answer you in a word. If my nephew had known of this situation, would he have done what he has this evening?

PETITPRÉ
Explain yourself more clearly.

MARTINEL
It is very simple. If he had known sooner of the danger this woman was in, do you think that he would have waited until the last moment, and have chosen this very evening — this supreme moment — to say good-bye to this poor, dying woman, and to reveal to you the existence of his illegitimate son? No, men hide these unfortunate children when and how they please. You know that as well as I, Monsieur. To run the risk of throwing us all into such a state of emotion and threatening his own future, as he has done, it would seem that Jean must be a madman, and he is by no means that. Had he known sooner of this situation, do you think that he

would not have confided in me, and that I would have been so stupid — yes, I — as not to avert this disaster? Why, I tell you it is as clear as day.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*agitated, walks to and fro rapidly* L.]
Clear as the day — clear as the day!

MARTINEL
Yes, indeed. If we had not received this piece of news as a bomb which destroys the power of reflection, if we could have taken time to reason the thing out, to make plans, we could have hidden everything from you, and the devil would have been in it before you would have known anything! Our fault has been that of being too sincere and too loyal. Yet, I do not regret it; it is always better to act openly in life.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Permit me, Monsieur —

PETITPRÉ
Silence, Clarisse. [*To* Martinel.] Be it so, Monsieur. There is no question of your honor or of your loyalty, which have been absolutely patent in this unfortunate affair. I willingly admit that your nephew knew nothing of the situation, but how about the child? What is there to prove that it is Jean's?

MARTINEL
Jean alone can prove or disprove that. He believes it, and you know that it is not to his interest to believe it. There is nothing very joyful about such a complication — a poor, little foundling thrusting himself upon one like a thunderbolt, without warning, and upon the very evening of one's marriage. But Jean believes that the child is his, and I — and all of us — must we not accept it as he has accepted it, as the child's father has accepted it? Come, now. [*A short silence.*] You ask me to prove to you that this child belongs to Jean?

MME. DE RONCHARD AND PETITPRÉ [*together*]
Yes!

MARTINEL
Then first prove to me that it is not Jean’s child.

MME. DE RONCHARD
You ask an impossibility.

MARTINEL
And so do you. The principal judge in the matter, look you, is my nephew himself. We others can do nothing but accept his decision.

MME. DE RONCHARD
But meanwhile —

PETITPRÉ
Silence, Clarisse. Monsieur Martinel is right.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*ironically*]
Say that again.

MARTINEL
There can be no better reason, Madame. [*To* Petitpré.] I was quite sure that you would understand me, Monsieur, for you are a man of sense.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And what am I, then?

MARTINEL
You are a woman of the world, Madame.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And it is exactly as a woman of the world that I protest, Monsieur. You have a very pretty way of putting things, but none the less this is a fact: Jean

Martinel brings to his bride, as a nuptial present, on the day of his marriage, an illegitimate child. Well, I ask you, woman of the world or not, can she accept such a thing?

PETITPRÉ
My sister is in the right this time, Monsieur Martinel.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And by no means too soon.

PETITPRÉ
It is evident that a situation exists patent and undeniable, which places us in an awkward dilemma. We have wedded our daughter to a man supposedly free from all ties and all complications in life, and then comes — what you know has come. The consequences should be endured by him, not by us. We have been wounded and deceived in our confidence, and the consent that we have given to this marriage we should certainly have refused, had we known the actual circumstances.

MME. DE RONCHARD
We should have refused? I should say so — not only once, but twice. Besides, this child, if Jean brings it into the house, will certainly be a cause of trouble among us all. Consider, Gilberte will probably become a mother in her turn, and then what jealousies, what rivalries, what hatred, perhaps, will arise between this intruder and her own children. This child will be a veritable apple of discord.

MARTINEL
Oh, no, no! he will not be a burden to anyone. Thanks to Jean’s liberality, this child’s mother will have left him enough to live comfortably, and, later, when he has become a man, he will travel, no doubt. He will do as I have done; as nine-tenths of the human race do.

PETITPRÉ
Well, until then, who will take care of it?

MARTINEL
I, if it is agreeable. I am a free man, retired from business; and it will give me something to do, something to distract me. I am ready to take him with me at once, the poor little thing — [*looks at* Mme. de Ronchard] unless Madame, who is so fond of saving lost dogs —

MME. DE RONCHARD
That child! I! Oh, that would be a piece of foolishness.

MARTINEL
Yet, Madame, if you care to have him, I will yield my right most willingly.

MME. DE RONCHARD
But Monsieur, I never said —

MARTINEL
Not as yet, true, but perhaps you will say it before very long, for I am beginning to understand you. You are an assumed man-hater and nothing else. You have been unhappy in your married life and that has embittered you — just as milk may turn upon its surface, but at the bottom of the churn there is butter of fine quality.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*frowns*]
What a comparison! — milk — butter — pshaw! how vulgar!

PETITPRÉ
But Clarisse —

MARTINEL
Here is your daughter.

SCENE V.

(*The same, and* Gilberte *and* Leon *who enter* L.)

PETITPRÉ [*approaches Gilberte*]
Before seeing your husband again, if you decide to see him, it is necessary that we should decide exactly what you are going to say to him.

GILBERTE [*greatly moved, sits* L. *of table*]
I knew it was some great misfortune.

MARTINEL [*sits beside her*]
Yes, my child; but there are two kinds of misfortune — those that come from the faults of men, and those that spring purely from the hazards of fate; that is to say, destiny. In the first case, the man is guilty; in the second case, he is a victim. Do you understand me?

GILBERTE
Yes, Monsieur.

MARTINEL
A misfortune of which some one person is the victim can also wound another person very cruelly. But will not the heart of this second wounded and altogether innocent, person bestow a pardon upon the involuntary author of her disaster?

GILBERTE [*in a sad voice*]
That depends upon the suffering which she undergoes.

MARTINEL Meanwhile, you knew that before Jean loved you, before he conceived the idea of marrying you, he had — an intrigue. You accepted the fact as one which had nothing exceptional about it.

GILBERTE
I did accept it.

MARTINEL
And now your brother may tell you the rest.

GILBERTE
Yes, Monsieur.

MARTINEL
What shall I say to Jean?

GILBERTE
I am too much agitated to tell you yet. This woman, of whom I did not think at all, whose very existence was a matter of indifference to me — her death has frightened me. It seems that she has come between Jean and me, and will always remain there. Everything that I have heard of her prophesies this estrangement. But you knew her — this woman did you not, Monsieur?

MARTINEL
Yes, Madame, and I can say nothing but good of her. Your brother and I have always looked upon her as irreproachable in her fidelity to Jean. She loved him with a pure, devoted, absolute, and lasting affection. I speak as a man who has deplored deeply this intrigue, for I look upon myself as a father to Jean, but we must try to be just to everyone.

GILBERTE
And did Jean love her very much, too?

MARTINEL
Oh, yes, certainly he did, but his love began to wane. Between them there was too much of a moral and social distance. He lived with her, however,

drawn to her by the knowledge of the deep and tender affection which she bestowed upon him.

GILBERTE [*gravely*]
And Jean went to see her die?

MARTINEL
He had just time to say farewell to her.

GILBERTE [*to herself*]
If I could only tell what passed between them at that moment! Ah, this wretched death is worse for me than if she were alive!

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises* R. *and goes up stage*]
I really do not understand you, my dear. The woman has died — so much the better for you. May God deliver you from all such!

GILBERTE
No, my dear Aunt; the feeling I have just now is so painful that I would sooner know her to be far away than to know her dead.

PETITPRÉ [*comes down*]
Yes, I admit that is the sentiment of a woman moved by a horrible catastrophe; but there is one grave complication in the matter — that of the child. Whatever may be done with it, he will none the less be the son of my son-in-law and a menace to us all.

MME. DE RONCHARD
And a subject for ridicule. See what the world will say of us in a little while.

LÉON
Leave the world to itself, my dear Aunt, and let us occupy ourselves with

our own business. [*Goes to Gilberte.*] Now, Gilberte, is it the idea of the child that moves you so deeply?

GILBERTE
Oh, no, — the poor little darling!

PETITPRÉ
Such is the foolishness of women who know nothing of life.

LÉON
Well, father, why, if we have so many different views, — according as we are spectators or actors in the course of events, — why is there so much difference between the life of the imagination and the actual life; between that which one ought to do; that which you would that others should do, and that which you do yourself. Yes, what has happened is very painful; but the surprise of the event, its coincidence with the nuptial day makes it still more painful. We magnify — everything in our emotion, when it is ourselves that misfortune touches. Suppose, for a moment, that you had read this in your daily newspaper —

MME. DE RONCHARD [*seated* L. *of table, indignantly*]
In my daily newspaper!

LÉON
Or in a romance. What emotion we should feel; what tears we should shed! How your sympathy would quickly go out to the poor little child whose birth was attained at the cost of his mother's life! How Jean would go up in your esteem; how frank, how loyal, how stanch in his fealty you would consider him; while, on the other hand, if he had deserted the dying woman, and had spirited away the little one into some distant village, you would not have had enough scorn for him, or enough insults for him. You would look upon him as a being without heart and without fear; and, you, my dear Aunt, thinking of the innumerable little bad dogs who owe you their lives, you would cry out with forcible gestures: "What a miserable scoundrel!"

MARTINEL [*seated* L.]
That’s perfectly true.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Dogs are worth more than men.

LÉON
Little children are not men, my dear Aunt. They have not had time to become bad.

PETITPRÉ
All that is very ingenious, Leon, and your special pleading is magnificent.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Yes, if you would only plead like that at the Palais.

PETITPRÉ
But this has nothing to do with a romance or with imaginary personages. We have married Gilberte to a young man in the ordinary conditions of life.

MME. DE RONCHARD
Without enthusiasm.

PETITPRÉ
Without enthusiasm, it is true, but nevertheless they are married, just the same. Now, on the evening of his nuptials, he brings us a present — I must say I do not care for a present which bawls.

LÉON
What does that prove, unless it is that your son-in-law is a brave man? What he has just done — risked his happiness in order to accomplish his duty — does it not say better than anything else could, how capable of devotion he is?

MARTINEL
Clear as the day.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*aside*]
And this man from Havre admires him!

PETITPRÉ
Then you maintain that Gilberte, on the day, of her entry upon married life, should become the adopted mother of the son of her husband’s mistress?

LÉON
Exactly; just as I maintain all that is honorable and disinterested. And you would think as I do if the thing did not concern your daughter.

PETITPRÉ
No; it is an inexcusable situation.

LÉON
Well, then, what do you propose to do?

PETITPRÉ
Well, nothing less than a divorce. The scandal of this night is sufficient.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*rises*]
Gilberte divorced! You don’t dream of that, do you? Have all our friends closing their doors on her, the greater part of her relatives lost to her! Divorced! Come, come! in spite of your new law, that has not yet come into our custom and shall not come in so soon. Religion forbids it; the world accepts it only under protest; and when you have against you both religion and the world —

PETITPRÉ
But statistics prove —

MME. DE RONCHARD
Pshaw! Statistics! You can make them say what you wish. No, no divorce for Gilberte. [*In a soft, low voice*.] Simply a legal separation — that is admissible, at least, and it is good form. Let them separate. I am separated — all fashionable people separate, and everything goes all right, but as to divorce —

LÉON [*seriously*]
It seems to me that only one person has a right to speak in this matter, and we are forgetting her too long. [*Turns to Gilberte*.] You have heard everything, Gilberte; you are mistress of your own judgment and of your decision. Upon a word from you depend either pardon or rupture. My father has made his argument. What does your heart say? [*Gilberte tries to speak, but stops and breaks down*.] Think always that in refusing to pardon Jean you wound me, and if I see you unhappy from your determination to say no, I shall suffer exceedingly. Monsieur Martinel asks from you at once an answer for Jean. Let us do better. I will go and find him. It is from your lips; it is, above all, in your eyes, that he will learn his fate. [*Brings her gently to the front of the stage*.] My little sister, my. dear little sister, don't be too proud; don't be too haughty! Listen to that which your chagrin murmurs in your soul. Listen well, but do not mistake it for pride.

GILBERTE
But I have no pride. I do not know how I feel. I am ill. My joy has been blighted, and it poisons me.

LÉON
Take care! It takes so little in such moments as these to make wounds which are incurable.

GILBERTE
No, no! I am too much distressed. Perhaps I shall be hard, for I am afraid of him and of myself. I am afraid of breaking off everything, or of yielding everything.

LÉON
I am going to find Jean.

GILBERTE [*resolutely*]
No, I do not wish to see him. I forbid it!

LÉON
Let me tell you something, my little Gilberte: You are less intelligent than I thought.

GILBERTE
Why?

LÉON
Because in such moments as these it is necessary to say yes or no at once. [*Jean appears at door* R.]

SCENE VI.

(*The same, and* Jean Martinel *standing at door* R.)

GILBERTE [*with a stifled cry*]
It is he!

LÉON [*goes up to* Jean *and taking him by the hand*]
Welcome!

JEAN
I am like a prisoner awaiting the decision of his judges — whether it be acquittal or death. The moments through which I have just passed I shall never forget.

LÉON
Your uncle and I have said all that we had to say. Now speak for yourself.

JEAN
I do not know how. It must be to my wife alone. I dare not speak before you all. I ask but a moment. After that I go, and I shall leave the house if my wife's attitude indicates that I ought. I shall do exactly what she would have me. I shall become that which she may order. But I must hear from her *own* lips her decision as to my life. [*To* Gilberte.] You cannot refuse me that, Madame. It is the only prayer that I shall ever make to you, I swear, if this request to you remains ungranted. [*They stand face to face and look at each other*.]

GILBERTE
No, I cannot refuse you. Father, Aunt, please leave me alone for a few minutes with Monsieur Martinel. You can see that I am perfectly calm.

PETITPRÉ
But — but —

JEAN [*determinedly to* M. Petitpré]
Monsieur, I shall not gainsay your will in anything. I shall do nothing without your approval. I have not returned here to contest your authority or to speak of rights; but I respectfully ask permission to remain alone a few minutes with — my wife! Consider that this is perhaps our last interview and that our future depends upon it.

MME. DE RONCHARD
It is solely the future of Gilberte which concerns me.

JEAN [*to* Mme. de Ronchard]
I appeal simply to your heart, Madame; your heart, which has suffered. Do not forget that your irritation and your bitterness against me come from the misfortune that another man has inflicted upon you. Your life has been broken by him. Do not wish the same for me. You have been unhappy; married scarcely a year. [*Points to* Gilberte.] Will you say that she shall be married scarcely a day, and that later she shall talk of her broken life — ceaselessly guarding in her mind the memory of this evening's disaster? [*At a movement of* Mme. de Ronchard.] I know you to be kind, although you deny it, and I promise you, Madame, that if I remain Gilberte's husband, I shall love you as a son, as a son worthy of you.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*very much moved*]
A son! He has stirred me deeply! [*Whispers to* Petitpré.] Come away, let us leave them alone. [*Embraces* Gilberte.]

PETITPRÉ [*to* Jean]
Well, so be it, Monsieur. [*Rises and exit* C., *offering his arm to* Mme. de Ronchard.]

MARTINEL [*to* Léon]
They are going to talk with that [*touches his heart*]; it is the only true

eloquence.
[*Exit with* Léon C.]

SCENE VII.

(Gilberte and Jean.)

JEAN
You know all, do you not?

GILBERTE
Yes. And I have been deeply wounded.

JEAN
I hope you do not accuse me of lying or of any other dissimulation.

GILBERTE
Oh, no!

JEAN
Do you blame me for having left you this evening?

GILBERTE
I blame no one who does his duty.

JEAN
You did not know this woman — and she is dead.

GILBERTE
It is just because she is dead that she troubles me thus.

JEAN
Impossible; you must have another reason. [*With hesitation.*] The child?

GILBERTE [*quickly*]
No, no! don’t deceive yourself. The poor little darling! it is not his fault. No, I suffer from something which is peculiar to myself, which can come only from me, and which I cannot confess to you. It is a sorrow deep in my heart, so keen, when I felt it spring to birth under the words of my brother and your uncle, that, should I ever experience it again when living with you as your wife, I should never be able to dispel it.

JEAN
What is it?

GILBERTE
I cannot tell it. [*Sits* L.]

JEAN [*stands*]
Listen to me. It is necessary that at this moment there should not be between us the shadow of a misunderstanding. All our life depends upon it. You are my wife, but I admit that you are absolutely free after what has happened. I will do as you wish. I am ready to agree to everything you desire, even to a divorce if you demand it. But what will happen to me after that I do not know, for I love you so that the thought of losing you after winning you will throw me mercilessly into some desperate resolve. [*Sees* Gilberte *moved.*] I do not seek to soften you, to move you — I simply tell you the naked truth. I feel, and I have felt during the whole night, through all the shocks and horrible emotions of the drama that has just been enacted, that you hold for me the keenest wound. If you banish me now, I am a lost man.

GILBERTE [*much moved*]
Do you really love me as much as that?

JEAN
With a love that I feel is ineffaceable.

GILBERTE
Did you love her?

JEAN
I did indeed love her. I experienced a tender attachment for a gentle and devoted girl. [*In a low voice, with passion.*] Listen: that which I am going to tell you is unworthy, perhaps infamous, but I am only a human being, feeble as anyone else. Well, just now, in the presence of this poor, dying girl, my eyes were filled with tears and my sobs choked me — all my being vibrated with sorrow; but at the bottom of my soul, in the depths of my being, I thought only of you.

GILBERTE [*rises quickly*]
Do you mean that?

JEAN [*simply*]
I cannot lie to you.

GILBERTE
Well, do you know what made me suffer just now when my brother told me of this intrigue and death? I can tell it to you now. I was jealous! It was unworthy of me, wasn't it? Jealous of this poor, dead woman! But he spoke so well of her as to move me, and I felt that she loved you so much that you might find me perhaps indifferent and cold after her, and that hurt me so! I had so much fear of experiencing that that I thought of renouncing you.

JEAN
And now? — Gilberte! Gilberte!

GILBERTE [*extends her hands*]
I am here, Jean! take me!

JEAN
Ah, how grateful I am. [*Kisses her hands; then immediately after, with*

emotion.] But here another anguish seizes me. I have promised this poor woman to take and cherish this child in my own home. [Gilberte *makes a movement*.] That is not all. Do you know what her last thought, her last prayer was? She entreated me to commend the child to you.

GILBERTE
To me!

JEAN
To you, Gilberte.

GILBERTE [*profoundly moved*]
She did this, the poor woman? Did she believe that I would take —

JEAN
She hoped it, and in that hope her death was made easier.

GILBERTE [*in exalted mood, crosses* R.]
Yes, I will take it! where is it?

JEAN
At my house.

GILBERTE
At your house? You must go to it immediately.

JEAN
What! leave you now, at this moment?

GILBERTE
We will go together, since I was to have accompanied you to your house this evening.

JEAN [*joyously*]
Oh, Gilberte! But your father will not let us go.

GILBERTE
Well, do you know what we must do, since my packing is finished, and my maid awaits me at your house? You must carry me off.

JEAN
Carry you off?

GILBERTE
Give me my cloak and let us go. All can be explained tomorrow. [*Shows the cloak that she had left upon the chair in the first act.*] My cloak, please.

JEAN [*picks up the cloak quickly and throws it over her shoulders*]
You are the most adorable creature! [Gilberte *takes his arm and they go toward door* R.]

SCENE VIII.

(*Enter* Mme. de Ronchard, M. Petitpré, M. Martinel, *and* Léon C.)

MME. DE RONCHARD
Well, what are they doing? Are they going away now?

PETITPRÉ
Why, what does it mean?

GILBERTE
Yes; father, I am going away. I am going with my husband; but I shall be here to-morrow to ask pardon for this hurried flight, and to explain to you the reason for it.

PETITPRÉ
Were you going without saying good-bye to us — without embracing us?

GILBERTE
Yes, in order to avoid more discussions.

LÉON
She is right. Let them go.

GILBERTE [*throws herself upon* Petitpré’s *neck*]
Till to-morrow, father; till to-morrow, my dear Aunt. Good night, all; I have had enough of emotion and fatigue.

MME. DE RONCHARD [*goes to* Gilberte *and embraces her*]
Yes, run along, darling — there is a little one over there who waits for a

mother!
Curtain.

A COMEDY OF MARRIAGE

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MONSIEUR DE SALLUS
JACQUES DE RANDOL
MADAME DE SALLUS

Time: Paris, 1890

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Mme. de Sallus *in her drawing-room, seated in a corner by the fireplace. Enter* Jacques de RANDOL *noiselessly; glances to see that no one is looking, and kisses* Mme. de Sallus *quickly upon her hair. She starts; utters a faint cry, and turns upon him.*

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! How imprudent you are!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Don't be afraid; no one saw me.

MME. DE SALLUS
But the servants!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, they are in the outer hall.

MME. DE SALLUS
How is that? No one announced you

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, they simply opened the door for me.

MME. DE SALLUS
But what will *they* think?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, they will doubtless think that *I* don't count.

MME. DE SALLUS
But I will not permit it. I must have you announced in future. It does not look well.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[laughs]*
Perhaps they will even go so far as to announce your husband —

MME. DE SALLUS
Jacques, this jesting is out of place.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Forgive me. *[Sits.]* Are you waiting for anybody?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes — probably. You know that I always receive when I am at home.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I know that I always have the pleasure of seeing you for about five minutes — just enough time to ask you how you feel, and then some one else comes in — some one in love with you, of course, — who impatiently awaits my departure.

MME. DE SALLUS *[smiles]*
Well, what can I do? I am not your wife, so how can it be otherwise?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Ah! If you only were my wife!

MME. DE SALLUS
If I were your wife?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I would snatch you away for five or six months, far from this horrible town, and keep you all to myself.

MME. DE SALLUS
You would soon have enough of me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, no!

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, yes!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Do you know that it is absolute torture to love a woman like you?

MME. DE SALLUS *[bridles]*
And why?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Because I covet you as the starving covet the food they see behind the glassy barriers of a restaurant.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, Jacques!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I tell you it is true! A woman of the world belongs to the world; that is to say, to everyone except the man to whom she gives herself. He can see her with open doors for a quarter of an hour every three days — not oftener, because of servants. In exceptional cases, with a thousand precautions, with a thousand fears, with a thousand subterfuges, she visits him once or twice a month, perhaps, in a furnished room. Then she has just a quarter of an hour to give him, because she has just left Madame X in order to visit Madame Z, where she has told her coachman to take her. If he complains, she will not come again, because it is impossible for her to get rid of her coachman. So, you see, the coachman, and the footman, and Madame Z, and Madame

X, and all the others, who visit her house as they would a museum, — a museum that never closes, — all the he's and all the she's who eat up her leisure minute by minute and second by second, to whom she owes her time as an employee owes his time to the State, simply because she belongs to the world — all these persons are like the transparent and impassable glass: they keep you from my love.

MME. DE SALLUS
[dryly]
You seem upset to-day.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, no, but I hunger to be alone with you. You are mine, are you not? Or, I should say, I am yours. Isn't it true? I spend my life in looking for opportunities to meet you. Our love is made up of chance meetings, of casual bows, of stolen looks, of slight touches — nothing more. We meet on the avenue in the morning — a bow; we meet at your house, or at that of some other acquaintance — twenty words; we dine somewhere at the same table, too far from each other to talk, and I dare not even look at you because of hostile eyes. Is that love? We are simply acquaintances.

MME. DE SALLUS
Then you would like to carry me off?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Unhappily, I cannot.

MME. DE SALLUS
Then what?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I do not know. I only know this life is wearing me out.

MME. DE SALLUS
It is just because there are so many obstacles in the way of your love that it does not fade.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh! Madeline, can you say that?

MME. DE SALLUS *[softening]*
Believe me, dear, if your love has to endure these hardships, it is because it is not lawful love.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, I never met a woman as positive as you. Then you think that if chance made me your husband, I should cease to love you?

MME. DE SALLUS
Not all at once, perhaps, but — eventually.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What you say is revolting to me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Nevertheless, it is quite true. You know that when a confectioner hires a greedy saleswoman he says to her, “Eat all the sweets you wish, my dear.” She stuffs herself for eight days, and then she is satisfied for the rest of her life.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Ah! Indeed! But why do you include me in that class?

MME. DE SALLUS
Really, I do not know — perhaps as a joke!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Please do not mock me.

MME. DE SALLUS
I say to myself, here is a man who is very much in love with me. So far as I am concerned, I am perfectly free, morally, since for two years past I have altogether ceased to please my husband. Now, since this man loves me, why should I not love him?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You are philosophic — and cruel.

MME. DE SALLUS
On the contrary, I have *not* been cruel. Of what do you complain?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Stop! you anger me with this continual raillery. Ever since I began to love you, you have tortured me in this manner, and now I do not even know whether you have the slightest affection for me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, you must admit that I have always been — good-natured.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, you have played a queer little game! From the day I first met you I felt that you were coquetting with me, coquetting mysteriously, obscurely, coquetting as only you can without showing it to others. Little by little you conquered me with looks, with smiles, with pressures of the hand, without compromising yourself, without pledging yourself, without revealing yourself. You have been horribly upright — and seductive. I have loved you with all my soul, yes, sincerely and loyally, and to-day I do not know what feeling you have in the depths of your heart, what thoughts you have hidden in your brain; in fact, I know-I know nothing. I look at you, and I see a woman who seems to have chosen me, and seems also to have forgotten that she *has* chosen me. Does she love me, or is she tired of me? Has she

simply made an experiment — taken a lover in order to see, to know, to taste, — without desire, hunger, or thirst? There are days when I ask myself if among those who love you and who tell you so unceasingly there is not one whom you really love.

MME. DE SALLUS
Good heavens! Really, there are *some* things into which it is not necessary to inquire.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, how hard you are! Your tone tells me that you do not love me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Now, what *are* you complaining about? Of things I do not say? — because — I do not think you have anything else to reproach me with.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Forgive me, I am jealous.

MME. DE SALLUS
Of whom?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I do not know. I am jealous of everything that I do not know about you.

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, and without my knowing anything about these things, too.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Forgive me, I love you too much — so much that everything disturbs me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Everything?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes, everything.

MME. DE SALLUS
Are you jealous of my husband?

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[amazed]*
What an idea!

MME. DE SALLUS *[dryly]*
Well, you are wrong.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Always this raillery!

MME. DE SALLUS No, I want to speak to you seriously about him, and to ask your advice.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
About your husband?

MME. DE SALLUS *[seriously]*
Yes, I am not laughing, or rather I do not laugh any more. *[In lighter tone.]* Then you are not jealous of my husband? And yet you know he is the only man who has authority over me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
It is just because he has authority that I am not jealous. A woman's heart gives nothing to the man who has authority.

MME. DE SALLUS
My dear, a husband's right is a positive thing; it is a title-deed that he can lock up — just as my husband has for more than two years — but it is also

one that he can use at any given moment, as lately he has seemed inclined to do.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[astonished]*
You tell me that your husband —

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Impossible!

MME. DE SALLUS *[bridles]*
And why impossible?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Because your husband has — has — other occupations.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, it pleases him to vary them, it seems.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Jesting apart, Madeline, what has happened?

MME. DE SALLUS
Ah! Ah! Then you *are* becoming jealous of him.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline, I implore you; tell me, are you mocking me, or are you speaking seriously?

MME. DE SALLUS
I am speaking seriously, indeed, very seriously.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then what has happened?

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, you know my position, although I have never told you all my past life. It is all very simple and very brief. At the age of nineteen I married the Count de Sallus, who fell in love with me after he had seen me at the Opéra-Comique. He already knew my father's lawyer. He was very nice to me in those early days; yes, very nice, and I really believed he loved me. As for myself, I was very circumspect in my behavior toward him, very circumspect indeed, so that he could never cast a shadow of reproach on my name.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, did you love him?

MME. DE SALLUS
Good gracious! Why ask such questions?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then you did love him?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes and no. If I loved him, it was the love of a little fool; but I certainly never told him, for positively I do not know how to show love.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I can vouch for that!

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, it is possible that I cared for him sometimes, idiotically, like a timid, restless, trembling, awkward, little girl, always in fear of that disturbing thing — the love of a man — that disturbing thing that is sometimes so

sweet! As for him, — you know him. He was a sweetheart, a society sweetheart, who are always the worst of all. Such men really have a lasting affection only for those girls who are fitting companions for clubmen — girls who have a habit of telling doubtful stories and bestowing depraved kisses. It seems to me that to attract and to hold such people, the nude and obscene are necessary both in word and in body — unless — unless — it is true that men are incapable of loving any woman for a length of time.
However, I soon became aware that he was indifferent to me, for he used to kiss me as a matter of course and look at me without realizing my presence; and in his manners, in his actions, in his conversation, he showed that I attracted him no longer. As soon as he came into the room he would throw himself upon the sofa, take up the newspaper, read it, shrug his shoulders, and when he read anything he did not agree with, he would express his annoyance audibly. Finally, one day, he yawned and stretched his arms in my face. On that day I understood that I was no longer loved. Keenly mortified I certainly was. But it hurt me so much that I did not realize it was necessary to coquet with him in order to retain his affection. I soon learned that he had a mistress, a woman of the world. Since then we have lived separate lives — after a very stormy explanation.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What do you mean? What sort of explanation?

MME. DE SALLUS
Well —

JACQUES DE RANDOL
About — his mistress?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes and no. I find it difficult to express myself. To avoid my suspicions he found himself obliged, doubtless, to dissimulate from time to time, although rarely, and to feign a certain affection for his legitimate wife, the woman who had the right to his affection. I told him that he might abstain in future from such a mockery of love.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
How did you tell him that?

MME. DE SALLUS
I don’t remember.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
It must have been amusing.

MME. DE SALLUS
No, he appeared very much surprised at first. Then I formulated a nice little speech and learned it by heart, in which I asked him to carry such intermittent fancies elsewhere. He understood me, saluted me very courteously, and — did as I asked him.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Did he never come back?

MME. DE SALLUS
Never, until —

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[interrupts]*
Has he never again tried to tell you of his love?

MME. DE SALLUS
No, never, until —

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[interrupts]*
Have you regretted it?

MME. DE SALLUS
That is of small importance. What is of importance, though, is that he has had innumerable mistresses whom he entertains, whom he supports, whom he takes out. It is this that has irritated and humiliated me — in fact, cut me

to the quick. But then I took heart of grace, and too late, two years too late, I took a lover — you!

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[kisses her hand]*
And I, Madeline, I love you with my whole soul.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, all this is not at all proper.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What do you mean by “all this”?

MME. DE SALLUS
Life in general — my husband — his mistresses — myself — and you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Your words — prove beyond a doubt that you do not love me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Why?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You dare to say of love that it is not proper? If you loved me, it might be divine, but a loving woman would abhor a phrase which should contain such an idea. What! True love not proper?

MME. DE SALLUS
Possibly. It all depends upon the point of view. For myself, I see too much.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What do you see?

MME. DE SALLUS
I see too well, too far, too clearly.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You do not love me?

MME. DE SALLUS
If I did not love you — a little — I should have had no excuse for giving myself to you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
A little — just sufficient to warrant that excuse!

MME. DE SALLUS
But I do not excuse myself: I accuse myself.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then you did love me a little — and then — now — you love me no more!

MME. DE SALLUS
Do not let us argue.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You do nothing else.

MME. DE SALLUS
No, I only judge the present by the past; the only just ideas and sane notions of life one can form are those concerning that which is past.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And do you regret —

MME. DE SALLUS
Perhaps!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And what about to-morrow?

MME. DE SALLUS
I do not know.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Is it nothing to you to have one who is yours, body and soul? MME. DE SALLUS *[shrugs her shoulders]*
Yes, mine to-day.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[vehemently]*
And to-morrow!

MME. DE SALLUS *[shrugs her shoulders again]*
Yes, the to-morrow that follows to-night, but not the to-morrow of a year hence.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[emphatically]*
You shall see. But how about your husband?

MME. DE SALLUS
Does he annoy you?

JACQUES DE RANDOL By heaven —

MME. DE SALLUS
Hush! *[Archly.]* My husband has fallen in love with me again.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Is it possible?

MME. DE SALLUS *[indignantly]*
What do you mean by such an insolent question, and why should it not be possible?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
A man falls in love with his wife before he marries her, but after marriage he never commits the same mistake.

MME. DE SALLUS
But perhaps he has never really been in love with me until now.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
It is absolutely impossible that he could have lived with you — even in his curt, cavalier fashion — without loving you.

MME. DE SALLUS *[indifferently]*
It is of little importance. He has either loved me in the past, or is now beginning to love me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Truly, I do not understand you. Tell me all about it.

MME. DE SALLUS
But I have nothing to tell. He declares his love for me, takes me in his arms, and threatens me with his conjugal rights. This upsets me, torments me, and annoys me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline you torture me.

MME. DE SALLUS *[quickly]*
And what about me? Do you think that I do not suffer? I know that I am not exactly a faithful woman since I received your addresses, but I have, and shall retain, a single heart. It is either you *or* he. It will never be you *and* he. For me that would be infamy — the greatest infamy of a guilty woman, the sharing of her heart — a thing that debases her. One may fall, perhaps, because there are ditches along the wayside and it is not always easy to follow the right path. But if one falls, that is no reason to throw oneself in the abyss.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[takes her in his arms and kisses her]*
I simply adore you!

MME. DE SALLUS *[melts]*
And I, too, love you dearly, Jacques, and that is the reason why I fear.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But, tell me, Madeline how long has it been since your husband reformed?

MME. DE SALLUS
Possibly fifteen days or three weeks.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Without relapse?

MME. DE SALLUS
Without relapse.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I will explain the mystery. The fact of the matter is this, your husband has simply become a widower.

MME. DE SALLUS
What do you say?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I mean that your husband is unattached just now, and seeks to spend his leisure time with his wife.

MME. DE SALLUS
But I tell you that he is in love with me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes — yes — and no. He is in love with you — and also with another. Tell me, his temper is usually bad, isn't it?

MME. DE SALLUS
Execrable!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, then, here is a man in love with you who shows his wonderful return of tenderness by moods that are simply unsupportable — for they are unsupportable, aren't they?

MME. DE SALLUS
Absolutely.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
If he wooed you with tenderness you would not feel fear. You would say to yourself, "My turn has come at last," and then he would inspire you with a little pity for him, for a woman has always a sneaking sort of compassion for the man who loves her, even though that man be her husband.

MME. DE SALLUS
Perhaps that is true.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Is he nervous, preoccupied?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And he is abrupt with you, not to say brutal? He demands his right without even praying for it?

MME. DE SALLUS
True.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
My darling, for the moment you are simply a substitute.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! no, no!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
My dearest girl, your husband's latest mistress was Madame de Bardane, whom he left very abruptly about two months ago to run after the Santelli.

MME. DE SALLUS
What, the singer?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes, a capricious, saucy, cunning, venal little woman. A woman not at all uncommon upon the stage, or in the world either, for that matter.

MME. DE SALLUS
Then that is why he haunts the Opéra.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[laughs]*
Without a doubt.

MME. DE SALLUS *[dreamily]*
No, no, you are deceiving yourself.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[emphatically]*
The Santelli resists him and repulses him; then, burdened with a heart full of longing that has no outlet, he deigns to offer you a portion.

MME. DE SALLUS
My dear, you are dreaming. If he were in love with the Santelli, he would not tell me that he loves me. If he were so entirely preoccupied with this creature, he would not woo me. If he coveted her, he would not desire me at the same time.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
How little you understand certain kinds of men! Men like your husband, once inoculated with the poison of love, — which in them is nothing but brutal desire, — men like him, I say, when a woman they desire escapes or resists them, become raging beasts. They behave like madmen, like men possessed, with arms outstretched and lips wide open. They must love some one, no matter whom just as a mad dog with open jaws bites anything and everybody. The Santelli has unchained this raging brute, and you find yourself face to face with his dripping jaws. Take care! You call that love! It is nothing but animal passion.

MME. DE SALLUS *[sarcastically]*
Really, you are very unfair to him. I am afraid jealousy is blinding you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, no, I am not deceiving myself, you may be sure.

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, I think you are. Formerly my husband neglected and abandoned me, doubtless finding me very insipid; but now he finds me much improved,

and has returned to me. It is very easy to understand, and moreover, it is the worse for him, for he *must* believe that I have been a *faithful* wife to him all my life.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline!

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, what?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Does a girl cease to be a faithful wife, if, when deserted by the man who has assumed charge of her existence, and her happiness, and her love, and her ideals, she refuses to resign herself — young, beautiful, and full of hope — to eternal isolation and everlasting solitude?

MME. DE SALLUS
I think I have already told you that there are certain things which it is *not* necessary to discuss, and this is one of them. *[The front door bell sounds twice.]* Here is my husband. Please be silent. He is in a gloomy mood just now.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[rises]*
I think I shall go. I am not in love with your husband any more, for many reasons, and it is difficult for me to be polite to him when I despise him, and when I know that he ought to despise me, and would despise me when I shake hands with him, did he know all.

MME. DE SALLUS *[annoyed]*
How many times must I tell you that all this is entirely out of place?

SCENE II.

(*The same, including* M. de Sallus.)
Enter M. de Sallus, *evidently in a bad temper. He looks for a moment at* Mme. de Sallus *and at* Jacques de Randol, *who is taking his leave; then comes forward*.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Ah! Sallus.

M. DE SALLUS
How are you, Randol? Surely you are not going because I came.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, but my time is up. I have an appointment at the club at midnight, and now it is half after eleven. *[They shake hands.]* Have you come from the first performance of “Mahomet”?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh! Of course.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
People say that it should be a great success.

M. DE SALLUS
It doubtless will be.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[shakes hands again with De SALLUS and Madame de Sallus]*
Well, till I see you again.

M. DE SALLUS
Till then, my dear fellow.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madame, adieu.

MME. DE SALLUS
Adieu, Monsieur de Randol. *[Exit Randol.]*

SCENE III.

(M. de Sallus *and* Mme. de Sallus.)

M. DE SALLUS *[sinks into an armchair]*
Was Randol here any length of time?

MME. DE SALLUS
No, possibly half an hour.

M. DE SALLUS *[meditatively]*
Half an hour plus a whole hour makes an hour and a half, does it not? Time seems to fly when you are with him.

MME. DE SALLUS
What do you mean by an hour and a half?

M. DE SALLUS
Just what I say. When I saw the carriage waiting at the door, I asked the footman, who was within. He told me that it was M. Jacques de Randol. "Has he been here long?" I asked. "He has been here since ten," said the footman. Admitting that the man might have been mistaken, we will say, in the matter of a quarter of an hour, that would make an hour and a quarter, at the least.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, ho! What is this new attitude of yours? Have I not a right to receive whom I like now?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, my dear, I deny you nothing, nothing, nothing. The only thing that

astonishes me is that you do not know the difference between half an hour and an hour and a half.

MME. DE SALLUS
Are you looking for a scene? If you wish a quarrel, say so. I shall know how to answer you. You are simply in a bad temper. Go to bed and sleep, if you can.

M. DE SALLUS
I am not looking for a quarrel, neither am I in bad humor. I only state that time flies with you when you pass it in the company of Jacques de Randol.

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, it does go quickly; far more quickly than when I am with you.

M. DE SALLUS
He is a very charming fellow, and I know you like him; and, moreover, he must like you very much, since he comes here every day.

MME. DE SALLUS
These insinuations are distasteful to me. Please speak plainly and say what you mean. Are you assuming the rôle of a jealous husband?

M. DE SALLUS
God forbid! I have too much confidence in you, and far too much esteem for you, to reproach you with anything, for I know that you have too much tact ever to give rise to calumny or scandal.

MME. DE SALLUS
Do not play with words. You think that M. Jacques de Randol comes too often to this house — to your house?

M. DE SALLUS
I do not find any fault with you for that.

MME. DE SALLUS

Thank you. You simply have not the right. However, since you adopt this attitude, let us settle this question once for all, for I loathe misunderstandings. It seems to me that you have an exceedingly short memory. Let me come to your aid. Be frank with me. Through some occurrence, the nature of which I do not know, your attitude is different today from that of the past two years. Cast your memory over the past, to the time when you began to neglect me in a manner that was plain to all. I became very uneasy. Then I knew — I was told, and I saw — that you were in love with Madame de Servières. I told you how hurt I was, how grieved I was. What did you reply? Just what every man replies when he no longer loves the woman who reproaches him. You shrugged your shoulders, smiled impatiently, told me I was mad, and then expounded to me — I must admit, in a most skillful manner — those grand principles of freedom in love that are adopted by every husband who deceives his wife and thinks she will not deceive him. You gave me to understand that marriage is not a bond, but simply an association of mutual interests, a social rather than a moral alliance; that it does not demand friendship or affection between married couples, provided there be no scandal. You did not absolutely confess the existence of your mistresses, but you pleaded extenuating circumstances. You were very sarcastic upon the subject of those poor, silly women who object to their husbands being gallant toward other women, since, according to you, such gallantry is one of the laws of the polished society to which you belong. You laughed at the foolish man who does not dare to pay compliments to a woman in the presence of his own wife, and ridiculed the gloomy look of a wife whose eyes follow her husband into every corner, imagining that because the poor man disappears into an adjoining room he is at the feet of a rival. All this was very airy, funny, and disagreeable, wrapped up in compliments and spiced with cynicism — sweet and bitter at the same time, and calculated to banish from the heart all love for a smooth, false, and well-bred man who could talk in such a manner. I understood, I wept, I suffered, and then I shut my door upon you. You made no objection; you judged me better than you thought; and since then we have lived completely separate lives. Such has been the case for the past two years, two long years and more, which certainly have not seemed more than six months to you. We go into society as usual, we return from society as usual, and we each enter our own temple of life. The situation was established by you in consequence of your first infidelity, an infidelity which has been followed by many others. I have said nothing; I have resigned myself to the situation; and I have banished you from my heart. Now that I have finished, what do you wish?

M. DE SALLUS
My dear, I am not asking for anything. I do not even wish to answer the very aggressive speech you have done me the honor to make. I only wish to give you advice — the advice of a friend — upon a situation that may possibly endanger your reputation. You are beautiful, always in the public eye, and much envied. Scandal could have easy birth.

MME. DE SALLUS
Pardon me. If we are to speak of scandal, I must have leave to balance my account with you.

M. DE SALLUS
Come, do not let us joke over this thing. I speak to you as a friend — seriously, as a friend. As to what you have said about me, it is all extremely exaggerated.

MME. DE SALLUS
Not at all. You have never tried to conceal, in fact, you have actually proclaimed to all the world your infidelities — a fact which gives me the right to go and do likewise, and, my friend, believe what I say —

M. DE SALLUS
One moment —

MME. DE SALLUS
Let me finish. According to you, I am beautiful, I am young, and yet condemned by my husband to live, and watch him live, as if I were a widow. Look at me *[rises]*, is it just to consign me to play the rôle of an abandoned Ariadne, while my husband runs from this woman to that

woman, and this girl to that girl? *[Grows excited.]* A faithful wife! I cry you mercy! Is a faithful wife compelled to sacrifice all her life, all her happiness, all her affections, everything, in fact, every privilege, every expectation, every claim, which is hers by birth and for which she has been born? Look at me! Am I made for a nunnery? The fact that I married you should answer that question. And yet, you, *you*, who took me from my father's house, neglect me to run after others. And what others? I am not in their circle, neither am I one of those who would share your life with others. So much the worse for you — for I am free, and you have no right to give me advice since I *am* free.

M. DE SALLUS
My dear girl, be calm. You misunderstand me completely. I have never suspected you. Indeed, I have the most profound esteem and friendship for you — a loving friendship which grows greater every day. I have no wish to comment upon that past with which you reproach me so cruelly. Perhaps I am a little too — too — what shall I say?

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! Say that you belong to the period of the Regency. I know that method of excusing all male weaknesses and follies. Oh! yes; that eighteenth century, that *dainty* century, so full of *elegance*, so full of delicious *fantasies* and adorable *whims*! Alas! my dear, that is ancient history.

M. DE SALLUS
No, no, you misunderstand me again. Believe me, I am and have been above everything too — too — much of a Parisian, too much accustomed to turning night into day, for the sedate life of marriage. I have been too much accustomed to go behind the scenes of theaters, to various clubs, to a thousand other forms of dissipation; and you know a man cannot change all at once, — it takes time. Marriage seeks to change us all too suddenly. It ought to give us time to get accustomed to it, little by little. You would practically take away from me the joy of life were I to behave as you seem to desire.

MME. DE SALLUS
I am so grateful; and now, perhaps, you wish to offer me a new proof — a new proof —

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, as you please. Really, when a man who has lived as I have marries, he can hardly help looking upon his wife as a new mistress — I mean to say a faithful mistress — and it is only when it is too late that he understands more clearly, — comes to his senses and repents.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, my friend, it *is* too late. As I have already told you, I mean to have my innings. I have taken nearly three years to think it over. You may think that is long, but I need some amusement as well as you. The fact that I have taken nearly three years to think it over is a compliment to you, but you fail to see it.

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline, this jesting is altogether out of place.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! no, because I am compelled to think that every one of your mistresses was far more attractive than I, since you have preferred them to me.

M. DE SALLUS
What sort of mood are you in?

MME. DE SALLUS
In the same mood that I always am. It is you who have changed.

M. DE SALLUS
True, I *have* changed.

MME. DE SALLUS
And that is to say —

M. DE SALLUS
That I have been an idiot.

MME. DE SALLUS
And that —

M. DE SALLUS
I am sane once more.

MME. DE SALLUS
And that —

M. DE SALLUS
That I am again in love with my wife.

MME. DE SALLUS
You must have returned to your youth.

M. DE SALLUS
What do you say?

MME. DE SALLUS
I say that you must have returned to your youth.

M. DE SALLUS
What do you mean?

MME. DE SALLUS
Let me illustrate. When you are young you are always hungry, and when a youth is hungry he often eats things that he would not eat at another time.

Well, I am the dish, — the dish that you have neglected in your days of plenty, the dish to which you return in the days of scarcity — *[slowly]* for which I thank you!

M. DE SALLUS
I have never looked upon you as you think. You pain me as well as astonish me.

MME. DE SALLUS
So much the worse for both of us. If I astonish you, you repel me. Learn now, once for all, that I am not made for the rôle of a substitute.

M. DE SALLUS *[approaches her, takes her hand and presses a long kiss upon it]*
Madeline, I swear to you that I love you, in truth, devotedly, now and forever.

MME. DE SALLUS *[ironically]*
You must really believe it! *[Suddenly.]* But who is the woman that attracts — and repels you — just now?

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline, I swear —

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, a truce to your swearing! I know that you have just broken with one of your mistresses; you need another and you cannot find one, so you come to me. For nearly three years you have forgotten all about me, so that now you find I am somewhat of a novelty. It is not your wife you are seeking now, but a woman with whom you have formerly had a rupture, and with whom you now desire to make up. To speak the truth you are simply playing the game of a libertine.

M. DE SALLUS
I do not ask you whether you be my wife or not my wife. You are the woman I love, the woman who possesses my heart. You are the woman of whom I dream, whose image follows me everywhere, whom I continually desire. It happens that you are my wife. So much the worse, or so much the better. What matters it?

MME. DE SALLUS
Truly, it is a distinguished part that you offer me. After Mademoiselle Zozo, after Mademoiselle Lilie, Mademoiselle Tata, you have the audacity to offer to your wife — to Madame de Sallus — the place left vacant, asking her to become her husband's mistress for a short space of time.

M. DE SALLUS
No; now, and — forever.

MME. DE SALLUS
Pardon me. You ask that I should re-become your wife forever? That is out of the question; I have already ceased to entertain the idea. The reason may be obscure, but nevertheless it is real; and after all, the idea of making me your *legitimate* mistress seems to be far more entertaining to you than assuming the rôle of a *faithful* husband.

M. DE SALLUS *[laughs]*
Well, why should not the wife become the husband's mistress? You are right in what you say; you are absolutely free and I own my faults. Yet, I am in love with you-for the second time, if you will-and I say to you, here and now, Madeline, since you confess that your heart is empty, have pity upon me, for I tell you that I love you.

MME. DE SALLUS
And you ask me to give you a husband's right?

M. DE SALLUS
I do.

MME. DE SALLUS
And you acknowledge that I am free, absolutely free?

M. DE SALLUS
I do.

MME. DE SALLUS
And you really wish me to become your mistress?

M. DE SALLUS
I do.

MME. DE SALLUS
You understand what I mean — your mistress?

M. DE SALLUS
Yes.

MME. DE SALLUS *[sarcastically]*
Well, well! I think I would rather accept another offer that I have, but since you are good enough to ask me to give you the preference, I may give it to you — for a fair sum.

M. DE SALLUS
What do you mean?

MME. DE SALLUS
Just what I say. Listen! Do you consider me as attractive as any of your mistresses? Now, be frank with me.

M. DE SALLUS
A thousand times more!

MME. DE SALLUS
Really!

M. DE SALLUS
I swear it!

MME. DE SALLUS
What, better than the best?

M. DE SALLUS
A thousand times!

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, tell me, now, truly, how much has the one you liked best among all your numerous mistresses cost you, let us say — in three months?

M. DE SALLUS
I cannot tell.

MME. DE SALLUS
Listen to me. I repeat the question. How much has the most charming of your numerous mistresses cost you in the space of three months — not only in money, but in gifts of jewelry, in dainty little suppers, in ceremonious dinners, in theater boxes, — in everything?

M. DE SALLUS
How can I tell?

MME. DE SALLUS
You should be able to. Come, let us make an estimate. Did you give her a round sum, or did you pay for everything separately? However, I know you are not a man to bother over details, so I conclude that you gave her a round sum.

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline, you are absolutely unbearable.

MME. DE SALLUS
Follow me closely. When you began to neglect me, you took away three horses from our stables — one of them was mine and the other two were yours. Then you took away a coachman and a footman; you then found it necessary to make me economize at home in order that you might be extravagant abroad.

M. DE SALLUS
That is not true.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! yes, it is. I have every date; do not deny it, for I shall confound you if you do. You also stopped giving me jewels, for, of course, you had other ears, other fingers, other wrists, and other necks to adorn. You also deprived me of one of my nights at the Opéra, and I do not know how many other things less important. And all this, according to my idea, should mean about five thousand francs a month. Am I not right?

M. DE SALLUS
You may be, but you are mad.

MME. DE SALLUS
No, no, confess; did the most expensive one of your mistresses cost you about five thousand francs a month?

M. DE SALLUS
You are crazy.

MME. DE SALLUS
If you are going to answer me thus, I bid you good evening. *[She rises as if*

to retire, but M. de Sallus interposes.]

M. DE SALLUS
Come now, Madeline, a truce to this jesting.

MME. DE SALLUS *[in a determined manner]*
Five thousand francs? Tell me, did she cost you five thousand francs?

M. DE SALLUS *[shrugs his shoulders]*
Oh, yes, thereabouts.

MME. DE SALLUS *[looks him straight in the face]*
Ah, ah! Well, listen. If you will give me immediately five thousand francs, you may be my husband for a month — but only a month.

M. DE SALLUS
You have lost your head!

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, farewell, good night!

M. DE SALLUS
What a farce! Stop, Madeline, let us talk seriously.

MME. DE SALLUS
About what?

M. DE SALLUS
Of — of — hang it — of my love for you.

MME. DE SALLUS *[archly]*
But that's not a serious question at all.

M. DE SALLUS
I swear it is!

MME. DE SALLUS
Hypocrite! You make me thirsty with so much talk. [*Goes to a chiffonier, where there is a decanter and various liqueurs, and pours herself out a glass of water. At the instant she begins to drink*, M. de Sallus *steals up and kisses her on the back of the neck. She turns with a start and throws the glass of water in his face*.]

M. DE SALLUS
I suppose you think that funny.

MME. DE SALLUS
It may or may not be. Certainly what you have done, or tried to do, was ridiculous.

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline, I ask —

MME. DE SALLUS
Five — thousand — francs.

M. DE SALLUS
But that would be idiotic.

MME. DE SALLUS
And why?

M. DE SALLUS
Ask me why a husband should pay his wife — his lawful wife — when he has the right?

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, no, no. You may have the strength, but I can have my revenge.

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline —

MME. DE SALLUS
Five — thousand — francs.

M. DE SALLUS
I should be an object of ridicule forever if I were to pay my wife — yes — not only an object of ridicule, but an idiot, an imbecile.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, don't you think it is still more imbecile, when you have such a wife as I, to — to go outside and — pay mistresses?

M. DE SALLUS
Madeline, I confess it; but now — we are husband and wife, and it is not necessary to ruin me, is it?

MME. DE SALLUS
Allow me. When you took your wealth — the wealth which was also partly mine by marriage — to pay for your folly, you committed an action that was more than doubtful. In fact, it was criminal, for you ruined me at the same time you ruined yourself. I use your own language. I have refrained from asking you more about the folly that is in question; moreover, the five thousand francs that you must give me will be spent upon your own house. You must admit that is practical economy. But I know you; I know that you are never in love with anything that is lawful and right; so in paying dearly — very dearly, because I shall probably seek an increase — for what you have the right to take, you will find our — *liaison* — far more to your taste. *[Smiles.]* Good night, I am going to bed.

M. DE SALLUS *[angrily]*
Will you take it in cash, or have a cheque?

MME. DE SALLUS *[haughtily]*
I prefer cash.

M. DE SALLUS *[opening a pocketbook]*
I have only three bank-notes. I will give you the rest in a cheque. *[Writes a cheque and hands it to Mme. de Sallus.]*

MME. DE SALLUS *[takes the cheque, looks at M. de Sallus with disgust, and Speaks in harsh tones]*
You are just the kind of man I took you to be. After paying your numerous mistresses, you actually consent to pay me as if I were like them — without any feeling of disgust or realizing the difference in our situation. You have said that I asked too much, you have pleaded the fear of ridicule, but you could not understand that you were consenting to *buy* me — *me* — your *wife*! You wished to possess me for a little, as a sort of variation to your usual list, although your heart must have told you that it was degrading to me to be placed on such a plane. You did not recoil from such an idea, but pursued it, just as you pursue them, and the more eagerly, because I was more expensive. But you have deceived yourself, not me. Not thus will you ever regain possession of your wife. Adieu, Monsieur! *[Throws the money in his face, and makes a haughty exit.]*

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Madame de Sallus *alone in her drawing-room, as in* Act I. *She is writing; she stops and looks at the clock. A servant announces* Monsieur Jacques de Randol.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[after kissing Mme. de Sallus's hand]*
I trust you are well, Madame.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, yes, thank you.
[Exit servant.]

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What is it all about? Your letter has completely upset me. I thought some accident had occurred, and I came immediately.

MME. DE SALLUS *[looks at him steadfastly]*
My dear Jacques, we must decide upon some course of action immediately. The important hour has come.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[surprised]*
What do you mean?

MME. DE SALLUS
For two days I have undergone all the anguish that a woman's heart can endure.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[still more surprised]*
What has happened?

MME. DE SALLUS
I am about to tell you, but I wish to do so with calmness and moderation lest you think me mad. That is the reason why I sent for you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You know that I am yours entirely. Tell me what I must do.

MME. DE SALLUS
I cannot live near him any longer. It is absolutely impossible. It is an hourly crucifixion.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Near your husband?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, my husband.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What has he done?

MME. DE SALLUS
It is necessary to revert to the other evening, after you took your leave. When we were alone he tried to make a jealous scene, with you as the subject.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
With me as the subject?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, a scene which proved to me that he had been watching us.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
How?

MME. DE SALLUS
He had been questioning a servant.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Nothing more than that?

MME. DE SALLUS
No. That in itself, however, is not of much importance, for I believe he really likes you. But, after that, he told me of his love for me. Perhaps I was a little too insolent, too disdainful. I do not know exactly how far I went; but I found myself in such a perplexing, such a painful, such an extraordinary situation, that I dared everything to escape it.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What did you do?

MME. DE SALLUS
I sought to wound him so deeply that he would leave me forever.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Apparently you have not succeeded.

MME. DE SALLUS
No.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Of course not; that method never does succeed. On the contrary, it often brings about a reconciliation.

MME. DE SALLUS
The next day, during luncheon, he was sulky, irritable, and gloomy. Then, as he was rising from the table, he said, “I have not forgotten your behavior of yesterday, and shall not let you forget it. You wish for war, let it be war; but I warn you that I shall conquer you, because I am your master.” I answered

him, “Be it so; but if you drive me to extremity, take care, — it is not always safe to make a woman desperate.”

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Especially when that woman is his wife. And what did he reply?

MME. DE SALLUS
He did not reply in words; but he treated me brutally.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Did he strike you?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes and no. He jostled me, he squeezed me, he suffocated me. I have bruises all along my arms, but he did not strike me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then what did he do?

MME. DE SALLUS
He hugged and embraced me, trying to overcome my resistance.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Is that all?

MME. DE SALLUS
What do you mean by saying, “Is that all?” Don’t you think that is enough?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You do not understand me. I only wish to know whether he struck you.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, no. I am not afraid of that from him; but luckily I was able to ring the

bell.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You rang the bell?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What a thing to do! *[Smiles.]* And when the servant came, did you ask him to show your husband out?

MME. DE SALLUS *[pouts]*
You seem to find this very funny.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, no, my dear Madame; it is all exceedingly painful to me, but I cannot help realizing the grotesqueness of the situation. Pardon me, — and what then?

MME. DE SALLUS
I ordered my carriage. And then, as soon as Joseph had gone out, my husband said, with that arrogant air which you know so well in him, "Today, or to-morrow — it matters not which."

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And —

MME. DE SALLUS
And that is almost all.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Almost?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes, because since then I have locked myself in my room as soon as I heard him coming in.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Haven't you seen him since?

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, yes, several times, but only for a few minutes each time.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
What has he said to you?

MME. DE SALLUS
Little or nothing. He either sneers or insolently asks whether I am less savage to-day. Last night at the table he brought out a little book, which he read during dinner. As I did not wish to appear embarrassed or anxious, and desired to maintain my dignity, I said: "Your manners toward me are certainly exceedingly courteous." He smiled and replied: "What did you say?" "It is strange that, for reading, you should choose the time that we are together," I said. He answered: "Great heavens! It is all your fault, since you do not care to be amiable. Besides, this little book is very interesting. It is the Civil Code. Perhaps you would like to become acquainted with some clauses in it. They would certainly interest you." Then he read me the law concerning marriage; the duties of a wife and the rights of a husband. Then he looked me full in the face, and asked me whether I understood. I answered in the same tone that I understood too much, — especially did I understand the kind of man I had married. Then I went out and I have not seen him since.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Haven't you seen him to-day?

MME. DE SALLUS
No. He lunched alone. As for myself, I have thought over the situation, and

have decided not to meet him *tête-à-tête* any more.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But are you quite sure that at bottom his attitude is not induced by anger, by wounded vanity, by disappointment, and perhaps by a little bravado? Possibly he will behave himself better in future. To-night he is at the Opéra. The Santelli has scored a great success in “Mahomet,” and I think she has invited him to supper after the performance. Now, if the supper is very much to his taste, he will probably be in good humor when he comes home.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh! How provoking you are. Can’t you understand that I am in the power of this man, that I belong to him even more than his valet or his dog, because he has those abominable legal rights over me? The Code, your barbarous Code, puts me entirely in his power without any possible defense on my part; save actually killing me, he can do everything. Can’t you understand that? Can’t you realize the horror of my situation? Imagine, save actual murder, he can do anything to me, and he has the strength — not only physical but legal — to obtain anything from me. And I, I have not a single avenue of escape from a man whom I despise and hate. And that is the law made by you men! He took me, married me, deserted me. On my part, I have an absolutely moral right to leave him. And yet, despite this righteous hatred, this overpowering disgust, this loathing which creeps through me in the presence of the man who has scorned me, deceived me, and who has fluttered, right under my eyes, from girl to girl — this man, I say, has the right to demand from me a shameful and infamous concession. I have no right to hide myself; I have no right even to a key to my own door. Everything belongs to him — the key, the door, and even the woman who hates him. It is monstrous! Can you imagine such a horrible situation? That a woman should not be mistress of herself, should not even have the sacred right of preserving her person from a loathsome stain? And all this is the consequence of the infamous law which you men have made!

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[appealingly]*
My darling! I fully understand what you must be suffering; but how can I help it? No magistrate can protect you; no statute can preserve you.

MME. DE SALLUS
I know it. But when you have neither mother nor father to protect you, when the law is against you, and when you shrink from complicity in those degrading transactions to which many women yield themselves, there is always one means of escape.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And that?

MME. DE SALLUS
Flight.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You mean to say —

MME. DE SALLUS
Flight.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Alone?

MME. DE SALLUS
No — with you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
With me! Are you dreaming?

MME. DE SALLUS
No; so much the better. The scandal of it will prevent him from taking me back. I have gained courage now. Since he forces me to dishonor, I shall see that that dishonor is complete and overwhelming — even though it be the worse for him and for me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh! Beware, beware, my darling! You are in one of those moments of exaltation and nervous excitement in which a woman sometimes commits a folly that is irreparable.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, I would rather commit such a folly and ruin myself — if that be ruin — than expose myself to the infamous struggle with which each day I am threatened.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline, hear me. You are in a terrible situation, but for God's sake do not throw yourself into one that is irretrievable. Be calm, I implore you.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, what do you advise?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I do not know; we shall see. But I do not, I cannot, advise you to venture on a scandal which will put you outside the pale of society.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, yes, there is another law, an unwritten law which permits one to have lovers, even though it be shameful, because *[sarcastically]* it does not outrage society.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
That is not the question. The thing is to avoid taking up a wrong position in your quarrel with your husband. Have you decided to leave him?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Finally and forever?

MME. DE SALLUS
Yes.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Do you mean for *all* time?

MME. DE SALLUS
For *all* time.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, now, be cautious; be careful and cunning; guard your reputation and your name. Make neither commotion nor scandal, and await your opportunity.

MME. DE SALLUS *[ironically]*
And must I continue to be very charming when he returns to me, and be ready for all his fancies?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, Madeline, I speak to you in the truest friendship.

MME. DE SALLUS *[bitterly]*
In the truest friendship!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yea, as a friend who loves you far too dearly to advise you to commit any folly.

MME. DE SALLUS
And loves me just enough to advise me to be complaisant to a man I despise.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I! Never, never. My most ardent desire is to be with you forever. Get a divorce, and then if you still love me, let us wed.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, yes, yes — two years from now. Certainly, you *are* a patient lover!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But supposing I were to carry you off, he would take you back to-morrow; would shut you up in his house, and would never get a divorce lest you should become my wife.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, do you mean to say I could fly nowhere but to your house, that I could not hide myself in such fashion that he would never find me?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes, you could hide yourself, but it would be necessary for you to live abroad under another name, or buried in the country, till death. That is the curse of our love. In three months you would hate me. I never will let you commit such a folly.

MME. DE SALLUS
I thought you loved me enough to fly with me, but it seems that I am mistaken. Adieu!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline, listen to me for God's —

MME. DE SALLUS Jacques, take me, or leave me — answer!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Madeline, I implore you!

MME. DE SALLUS
Never! Adieu! *[Rises and goes to the door.]*

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Once more I implore you, Madeline, listen to me.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, no, no; adieu! *[De Randol takes her by the arms; she frees herself angrily.]* Unhand me! Let me go, or I shall call for help!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Call if you will, but listen to me. I would not that you should ever be able to reproach me for the madness that you meditate. God forbid that you should hate me, but, bound to me by this flight that you propose, you would carry with you forever a keen and unavailing regret that I allowed you to do it.

MME. DE SALLUS
Let me go! I despise you! Let me go!

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, if you wish to fly, why, let us fly.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, no, not now. I know you now. It is too late. Let me go.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I have done exactly what I ought to have done; I have said exactly what I ought to have said; consequently, I am no longer responsible for you, and you have no right to reproach me with the consequences. So let us fly.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, no, it is too late, and I do not care to accept sacrifices.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
There is no more any question of sacrifice. To fly with you is my most ardent desire.

MME. DE SALLUS *[astonished]*
You are mad.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Well, suppose I am mad. That is only natural, since I love you.

MME. DE SALLUS
What do you mean?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I mean what I say. I love you; I have nothing else to say. Let us fly.

MME. DE SALLUS
Ah, you were altogether too cautious just now to become so brave all at once.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Will you ever understand me? Listen to me. When I first realized that I adored you, I made a solemn vow concerning what might happen between you and me. The man who falls in love with a woman such as you, a woman married yet deserted; a slave in fact yet morally free, institutes between her and himself a bond which only she can break. The woman risks everything. Ay, it is just because she does this, because she gives everything — her heart, her body, her soul, her honor, her life, because she has foreseen all the miseries, all the dangers, all the misfortunes that can happen, because she dares to take so bold, and fearless a step, and because she is ready and determined to hazard everything — a husband who could kill her, and a world that would scorn her — it is for all this and for the heroism of her conjugal infidelity, that her lover, in taking her, ought to foresee all, to guard her against every ill that can possibly happen. I have nothing more to say. I spoke at first as a calm and foreseeing man who

wished to protect you against everything — now I am simply and only the man who loves you. Order me as you please.

MME. DE SALLUS
That is all very prettily said; but is it true?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I swear it!

MME. DE SALLUS
You wish to fly with me?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes.

MME. DE SALLUS
From the bottom of your heart?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
From the bottom of my heart.

MME. DE SALLUS
To-day?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes, and whenever you please.

MME. DE SALLUS
It is now a quarter to eight. My husband will be coming in directly, for we dine at eight. I shall be free at half past nine or ten o’clock.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Where shall I wait for you?

MME. DE SALLUS
At the end of the street in a *coupé*. *[The bell rings.]* There he is, and for the last time, thank God!

SCENE II.

(*The same characters, and* M. de Sallus.)

M. DE SALLUS *[enters. To Jacques de Randol, who has risen to take his leave]*
Well, you are not going again, are you? Why, it seems that I need only come in to make you take your leave.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, no, my dear fellow; you don't make me go, but I must.

M. DE SALLUS
That is just what I say. You always go the very moment I come in. Of course, I understand that a husband is less attractive than a wife. But, at least, let me believe that *I* am not objectionable to you. *[Laughs.]*

JACQUES DE RANDOL
On the contrary, my dear fellow, you know I like you. And if you would acquire the habit of coming into your own house without ringing the bell, you would never find me taking my leave when you come.

M. DE SALLUS
How is that? Is it not natural to ring the door bell?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, yes; but a ring of the bell always makes me feel that I must go, and surely, coming into your own house, you can dispense with that habit.

M. DE SALLUS
I don't understand you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Why, it is very simple. When I visit people whom I like, such as Madame de Sallus and yourself, I do not expect to meet the Paris that flutters from house to house in the evening, gossiping and scandalizing. I have had my experience of gossip and tittle-tattle. It needs only one of these talkative dames or men to take away all the pleasure there is for me in visiting the lady on whom I happen to have called. Sometimes when I am anchored perforce upon my seat, I feel lost; I do not know how to get away. I have to take part in the whirlpool of foolish chatter. I know all the set questions and answers better than I do the catechism itself, and it bores me to have to remain until the very end and hear the very last opinion of some fool upon the comedy, or the book, or the divorce, or the marriage, or the death that is being discussed. Now, do you understand why I always get up and go at the sound of a bell?

M. DE SALLUS *[laughs]*
What you say is very true. Drawing-rooms now are not habitable from four o'clock to seven, and our wives have no right to complain if we leave them to go to the club.

MME. DE SALLUS *[sarcastically]*
Nevertheless, I do not see my way to receiving ballet girls, or chorus girls, or actresses, or so-called painters, poets, musicians, and others — in order to keep you near me.

M. DE SALLUS
I do not ask so much as that. All I desire is a few witty fellows, some charming women, and by no means a crowd.

MME. DE SALLUS
You talk nonsense; you cannot pick and choose.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, truly, you cannot sift and strain the flow of idiocy that you meet in the drawing-rooms of to-day.

M. DE SALLUS
Why?

MME. DE SALLUS
Simply because it is as it is — to-day.

M. DE SALLUS
What a pity! How I should love the intimacy of a small and carefully selected circle of men and women.

MME. DE SALLUS
You?

M. DE SALLUS
Yes, why not?

MME. DE SALLUS *[laughs]*
Ha, ha, ha! What a charming little intimate circle you would bring to me! Ha, ha, ha! The fascinating men, and the fashionable women that you would invite! My dear sir, it is I who would leave the house then.

M. DE SALLUS
My dear girl, I only asked for three or four women like yourself.

MME. DE SALLUS
Pray repeat that.

M. DE SALLUS
Three or four such women as you.

MME. DE SALLUS
If you need four, I can understand how you found your house lonesome.

M. DE SALLUS
You understand very well what I wish to say, and it is not necessary for me to explain myself. And you know that you need only be alone to please me better than I could possibly be pleased elsewhere.

MME. DE SALLUS
Really, I do not recognize you. I am afraid you must be ill — very ill. You are not going to die, are you?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, chaff me as much as you like, you won't worry me.

MME. DE SALLUS
And is this mood of yours going to last?

M. DE SALLUS
Forever.

MME. DE SALLUS
Men often change.

M. DE SALLUS *[turns to Jacques de Randol]*
My dear Randol, will you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner to-night? You may help me to turn aside the epigrams that my wife seems to have barbed and ready for me.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
A thousand thanks, my dear Sallus! You are very, very good, but unfortunately, I am not free.

M. DE SALLUS
But, my dear fellow, send your excuses.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I cannot.

M. DE SALLUS
Are you dining in town?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes, well — not altogether. I have an appointment at nine o'clock.

M. DE SALLUS
Is it very important?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Very important

M. DE SALLUS
With a lady?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
My dear fellow, what a question!

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, I am discreet! But that need not prevent you from dining with us.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Thank you, my dear fellow, I cannot.

M. DE SALLUS
You know you can go away when you wish.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But I am not in evening dress.

M. DE SALLUS
I can easily send for your things.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, truly, thank you; I cannot.

M. DE SALLUS *[to Mme. de Sallus]*
My dear girl, won't you keep Randol?

MME. DE SALLUS
Why ask me? You know that I have no influence over him.

M. DE SALLUS
You are charming enough to influence the world this evening, so why can't you make him stay?

MME. DE SALLUS
Good gracious! I cannot make my friends stay in order to please you, and keep them in your house against their wish. Bring *your* friends.

M. DE SALLUS
Well, I shall remain at home this evening in any case, and we shall then be *tête-à-tête*.

MME. DE SALLUS
Really?

M. DE SALLUS
Yes.

MME. DE SALLUS
You will be at home all the evening?

M. DE SALLUS
All the evening.

MME. DE SALLUS *[sarcastically]*
Good gracious! How you surprise me — and how you honor me!

M. DE SALLUS
No, it is a pleasure to be with you.

MME. DE SALLUS
What a charming mood you are in to-night!

M. DE SALLUS
Now ask Randol to remain.

MME. DE SALLUS
My dear sir, Monsieur de Randol will do as he pleases. He knows that I am always glad to see him. *[Rises, and after reflecting for a second.]* Will you dine with us, Monsieur de Randol? You know you can go directly after dinner.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
With the greatest pleasure, Madame.

MME. DE SALLUS
Excuse my absence for a minute. It is eight o'clock, and I must give some new directions for dinner.
[Exit Mme. de Sallus.]

SCENE III.

(M. de Sallus *and* M. Jacques de Randol.)

M. DE SALLUS
My dear fellow, you will do me the greatest service if you will pass the whole evening here.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But I have told you that I cannot.

M. DE SALLUS
Is it altogether — absolutely — impossible?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Absolutely.

M. DE SALLUS
I most earnestly ask you to remain.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And why?

M. DE SALLUS
For the best of reasons — because — because I want to make peace with my wife.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Peace? Is there a rupture between you?

M. DE SALLUS
Not a very great one, but you know what you have seen this evening.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Is it your fault or hers?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, mine, I suppose.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
The devil!

M. DE SALLUS
I have had annoyances outside, serious annoyances, and they have made me bad-tempered, so much so that I have been unpleasant and aggressive in my behavior toward her.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
But I don’t see how a third party can contribute toward peace between you.

M. DE SALLUS
My dear fellow, you will enable me to make her understand in an indirect manner, while avoiding all indelicate and wounding explanations, that my ideas concerning life have altogether changed.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then you wish to be — to be — reconciled to her altogether?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, no, no, no — on the contrary —

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Pardon me, I do not understand you.

M. DE SALLUS
Listen: I wish to establish and maintain a *status quo* of a pacific neutrality — a sort of Platonic peace. *[Laughs.]* But I am going into details that cannot interest you.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Pardon me again. From the moment that you ask me to play a part in this very interesting affair, I must know exactly what part I am to play.

M. DE SALLUS
Why, just a conciliatory rôle.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Then you wish to conclude a peace without restrictions for yourself?

M. DE SALLUS
Now you have it.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
That is to say, that, after the disappointments and annoyances of which you have just told me, and which I presume are ended, you wish to have peace at home and yet be free to enjoy any happiness that you may acquire outside.

M. DE SALLUS
Let me go farther. My dear fellow, the present situation between my wife and myself is very much strained, and I never care to find myself alone with her altogether, because my position is a false one.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, in that case, my dear fellow, I will remain.

M. DE SALLUS
All the evening?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
All the evening.

M. DE SALLUS
My dear De Randol, you are indeed a friend! I shall never forget it.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, never mind that. *[A short silence.]* Were you at the Opéra last night?

M. DE SALLUS
As usual.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
So it is a good performance?

M. DE SALLUS
Admirable.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
The Santelli scored a great success, didn't she?

M. DE SALLUS
Not only a success, but a veritable triumph. She was recalled six times.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
She *is* good, isn't she?

M. DE SALLUS
More than admirable. She never sang better. In the first act she has a long recitative: "O God of all believers, hear my prayer," which made the body of the house rise to their feet. And in the third act, after that phrase, "Bright heaven of beauty," I never saw such enthusiasm.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
She was pleased?

M. DE SALLUS
Pleased? She was enchanted.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You know her well, don't you?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, yes, for some time back. I had supper with her and some of her friends after the performance.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Were there many of you?

M. DE SALLUS
No, about a dozen. You know she is rather particular.

JACQUES DE RANDOL.
It is pleasant to be intimate with her, is it not?

M. DE SALLUS
Exquisite! And then, you know, she is a woman in a million. I do not know whether you agree with me, but I find there are so few women that are really women.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[laughs]*
I have found that out.

M. DE SALLUS
Yes, and you have found out that there are women who have a feminine air,

but who are not women.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Explain yourself.

M. DE SALLUS
Good gracious! Our society women, with very rare exceptions, are simply pictures; they are pretty; they are distinguished; but they charm you only in their drawing-rooms. The part they play consists entirely in making men admire their dress, their dainty ways, all of which are assumed.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Men love them, nevertheless.

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, very rarely, my dear fellow.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Pardon me!

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, yes, dreamers do. But men — real men — men who are passionate, men who are positive, men who are tender, do not love the society woman of to-day, since she is incapable of love. My dear fellow, look around you. You see intrigues — everyone sees them; but can you lay your finger upon a single real love affair — a love that is disinterested, such a love as there used to be — inspired by a single woman of our acquaintance? Don't I speak the truth? It flatters a man to have a mistress — it flatters him, it amuses him, and then it tires him. But turn to the other picture and look at the woman of the stage. There is not one who has not at least five or six love affairs on the carpet; idiotic follies, causing bankruptcy, scandal, and suicides. Men love them; yes, they love these women because these women know how to inspire love, and because they are loving women. Yes, indeed, *they* know how to conquer men; they understand the seduction of a smile; they know how to attract, seize, and wrap us up in their hearts, how to

enslave us with a look, and they need not be beautiful at that. They have a conquering power that we never find in our wives.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And the Santelli is a seductress of this kind?

M. DE SALLUS
She is first among the first! Ah, the cunning little coquette! *She* knows how to make men run after her.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Does she do only that?

M. DE SALLUS
A woman of that sort does not give herself the trouble of making men run after her unless she has some further object in view.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
The devil! You make me believe you attend two first nights in the same evening.

M. DE SALLUS
My dear boy, don't imagine such a thing.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Great heavens! you have such a satisfied and triumphant air — an air so desirous of calm at home. If I am deceived I am sorry — for your sake.

M. DE SALLUS
Well, we will assume that you are deceived and —

SCENE IV.

(*The same, and* Mme. de Sallus.)

M. DE SALLUS *[gaily]*
Well, my dear, Jacques remains. He has consented for my sake.

MME. DE SALLUS
I congratulate you. And how did you achieve that miracle?

M. DE SALLUS
Oh, easily enough, in the course of conversation.

MME. DE SALLUS
And of what have you been talking?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Of the happiness that comes to a man who remains quietly at home.

MME. DE SALLUS
That sort of happiness has but little attraction for me. I like the excitement of travel.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
There is a time for everything; and travel is very often inopportune and very inconvenient.

MME. DE SALLUS
But how about that important appointment of yours at nine o'clock? Have you given it up altogether, Monsieur de Randol?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I have, Madame.

MME. DE SALLUS
You are very changeable.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, no, I am simply adapting myself to circumstances.

M. DE SALLUS
Will you pardon me if I write a note? *[Sits at desk at the other end of the drawing-room.]*

MME. DE SALLUS *[to Jacques de Randol]*
What has happened?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, nothing; everything is all right.

MME, DE SALLUS
When do we go?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Not at all.

MME. DE SALLUS
Are you mad? Why?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Please don’t ask me now about it.

MME. DE SALLUS
I am sure that he is laying a trap for us.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Not at all. He is very quiet, very contented, and has absolutely no suspicion.

MME. DE SALLUS
Then what does it all mean?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Now, be calm. He is happy, I tell you.

MME. DE SALLUS
That is not true.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
I tell you it is. He has made me the confidant of all his happiness.

MME. DE SALLUS
It is just a trick; he wishes to watch us.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, no; he is confiding and conciliatory. The only fear he has is of you.

MME. DE SALLUS
Of me?

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Yes; in the same way that you are, all the time, afraid of him.

MME. DE SALLUS
Great heavens! You have lost your head. You are talking at random.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Listen — I am sure that he intends to go out this evening.

MME. DE SALLUS
Well, in that case, let us go out too.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
No, no, — I tell you there is nothing more for us to fear.

MME. DE SALLUS
What nonsense! You will end by maddening me with your blindness.

M. DE SALLUS *[from the other end of the drawing-room]*
My dear, I have some good news for you. I have been able to get another night at the Opera for you every week.

MME. DE SALLUS
Really, it is very good of you to afford me the opportunity of applauding Madame Santelli so often.

M. DE SALLUS *[from the same place]*
Well, she is very clever.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
And everybody says she is charming.

MME. DE SALLUS *[irritably]*
Yes; it is only such women who please men.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
You are unjust.

MME. DE SALLUS
Oh, my dear Randol; it is only for such women that men commit follies,

and *[sarcastically]*, understand me, the measure of a man's folly is often the measure of his love.

M. DE SALLUS *[from the same place]*
Oh, no, my dear girl, — men do not marry them, and marriage is the only real folly that a man can commit with a woman.

MME. DE SALLUS
A beautiful idea, truly, when a woman has to endure all man's caprices.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Oh, no, not having anything to lose, they have nothing to risk.

MME. DE SALLUS
Ah, men are sad creatures! They marry a young girl because she is demure and self-contained, and they leave her on the morrow to dangle after a girl who is not young and who certainly is not demure, her chief attraction being that all the rich and well-known men about town have at one time been in her favor. The more danglers she has after her, the more she is esteemed, the more she is sought after, and the more she is respected; that is to say, with that kind of Parisian respect which accrues to a woman in the degree of her notoriety — a notoriety due either to the scandal she creates, or the scandal men create about her. Ah, yes, you men are so nice in these things!

M. DE SALLUS *[laughs gently]*
Take care! One would think you were jealous.

MME. DE SALLUS
I? Jealous? For whom do you take me? *[The butler announces.]* Madame is served. *[Hands a letter to M. de Sallus.]*

MME. DE SALLUS *[to Jacques de Randol]*
Your arm, M. Jacques de Randol.

JACQUES DE RANDOL *[in a low tone]*
How I love you!

MME. DE SALLUS *[indifferently]*
Just a little, I suppose.

JACQUES DE RANDOL
Ah, no; with all my soul!

M. DE SALLUS *[after reading his letter]*
Come along, then, let us go to dinner. I have to go out this evening.

Curtain.

The Poetry

Maupassant's house in Étretat. In 1883, following his first literary success, Maupassant returned to the town to fulfil his dream of building a house there. His mother gave him her orchard in Le Grand Val and the author bought a piece of land next to it, where he built his house, calling it "La Guillette".

The house seen from Maupassant's garden

DES VERS

OR, ROMANCES IN RHYME

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

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DEDICATION TO GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS AND PATERNAL FRIEND, WHOM I LOVE WITH ALL MY HEART: TO THE PRE-EMINENT MASTER, WHOM I ADMIRE ABOVE ALL OTHERS.

THE AUTHOR

FLAUBERT’S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

CROISSET, Feb. 19, 1880.

MY DEAR FELLOW:

Can it be true? I thought first of all that it was a joke. But now I acquiesce in the decree of fate.

Well, well, those are droll folks you have at Etampes! Are we to be subject to the whim of every court in French territory, including the colonies? And how is it that a piece of poetry inserted long ago in a Parisian journal, since extinct, becomes at once an illegal utterance, so soon as it is copied in a provincial paper? To whom are we responsible, pray? How ought we to write? In what Bœotia are we living?

“Arrested for an outrage on manners and on public morality,” two synonymous expressions, making up two counts of indictment. When I was in your position, there was a third count in my indictment, a third outrage was mentioned, namely, “an outrage against religion.” I allude to my appearance before the court with regard to my Madame Bovary, in a suit which was a tremendous advertisement for me, and to which I attribute two thirds of my success. To tell you plainly I am perfectly puzzled about this matter. Are you the victim and object of some secret vengeance? There is something crooked under all this. Do they wish to make a laughing stock of the Republic? Perhaps they do.

I can understand why a man should be prosecuted for writing a political article; although I defy all the courts to show what good such a prosecution has ever done. But to prosecute a man for a piece of literature, for a poem — seems to me absurd.

They will tell you in reply, that your poetry has certain “tendencies” and that these are licentious. The theory of “tendencies” is capable of a wide application, and in this connection must be considered the problem, “the place of morality in art.” Now, in my opinion, whatever is beautiful is moral. Poetry is like the sun and irradiates even the dunghill with its gold. They only are unfortunate to whom the gold is invisible.

Your handling of a familiar theme was perfect; for this, so far from meriting blame or imprisonment, you deserve the eulogy of mankind. “The talent of an author,” says La Bruyère, “consists in possessing distinction and verisimilitude." You have exhibited both of these qualities. What more do they want?

But the "subject," some Prudhomme will object, the "subject," my dear fellow, — two lovers, — a pretty girl, — the water side. You ought to treat such a subject more delicately, with greater reserve, to point the moral with an elegant aphorism; and bring in at the end a venerable ecclesiastic, or a learned theologian to talk upon the dangers of love. In a word, your narrative hints at the union of the sexes.

In the first place, it does no such thing; and even if this should be the case, what crime is there in preaching the worship of woman? But I preach nothing; my poor lovers do not even commit an act of adultery. They are free, bound by no tie to anyone. Ah! you will find much trouble in making your defense, for the "respectables" are never at a loss for an argument. Resign yourself, therefore.

Utter, then, to your accuser your denunciations against all the Greek and Roman classics, so that he may be persuaded to suppress these also, from Aristophanes to gentle Horace and tender Virgil; those also of foreign lands, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Cervantes; and in our own country, Rabelais, the fount of French literature. You may add Chateaubriand, the action of whose masterpiece turns on incest, and Molière, against whom you will remember Bossuet raged, and the great Corneille, whose "Theodore" has prostitution for its motif; and Father La Fontaine and Voltaire and Rousseau. Add to these, the fairy tales of Perrault. What is the theme of "Peau-d'Ane"? In what place is the fourth act of "Roi s'amuse" carried on? To judge from these we must also suppress those books of history which soil the imagination.

I am disgusted with their absurdities and our excellent "Voltaire" (not the great man, but the newspaper of that name) which the other day joked me upon my belief that literature was the object of hatred, is very much deceived, and I am more than ever confirmed in my opinion that pure style is the butt of reckless execration. A good writer immediately confronts two enemies: first the public, because his style compels thought and demands exertion on the part of the reader; and secondly the government, which detects in you good writers a certain influence, and power hates to see the rise of another power.

A change of government amounts to nothing; Monarchy, Empire, Republic, all are alike. Official æsthetics never change. By virtue of their position, administrators and magistrates are the only men of taste; take, for example, the arguments that led to my acquittal. They know how a man ought to write, their rhetoric is infallible, and they possess the means of proving it to you.

A man mounts toward the height of Olympus, his face is lit with a celestial ray, his heart is full of hope, of aspiration toward the beautiful, the divine; he is already half transported to the sky; but a wretched jailer's hand drags him back into the gutter. If you hold converse with the muse, they take you for a debaucher of girls. If you bathe in the fragrant waves of the Permessus, they confound you with the ill-savored gentry who haunt the sewers.

And they will make you stand, my friend, at the bar with thieves; and you will hear a fellow read your verses, stumbling over the feet, and re-read them, laying stress on some words to which he will give a double meaning; and some of them he will repeat over several times, like citizen Pinard with his "Note his mention of her ankle. Gentlemen, think of it, her ankle!"

And while your lawyer signs to you to keep quiet and maddens you all the more, you will have a vague feeling that following in pursuit of you are the police, the army, the whole force of public opinion, and that you are crushed and outnumbered. Then, perhaps, your heart will feel rising within it a hatred, the existence of which you had never suspected, coupled with plans of vengeance, which are immediately checked by a feeling of pride. But let me repeat, all this is impossible. You will not be prosecuted; you will not be condemned. There has been some blunder, some misunderstanding. The Chancellor will interfere. The glorious days of the Restoration have not yet returned.

Yet who knows? Earth has its boundaries, but human stupidity is limitless.

With sincere regards, I am

Your old friend,

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT.

THE WALL

WIDE were the sashes thrown, the lighted room
Poured forth its gleams of splendor on the gloom;
Bright flashes played upon the grassy ground;
The park below seemed answering to the sound
Of pipe and viol, with a glad rebound.
Charged with the scent of leaves and garnered croft,
The tepid air of night, like breathing soft,
Lingered around the shoulders of the fair,
And blent the woodland and the desert air
With beauty's magic fragrance; and the gleam
Of tapers quivered in the scented stream.
The breath of flowers from dappled meadows came
Of flowers that decked the hair of many a dame.
A chill gust murmured from the spangled sky,
As if an odor of the stars came by.

The ladies marked, seated on cushions soft,
Silent and still, with liquid eye, how oft
The curtain swelled, as loosened sails unfold,
And dreamed of voyage on that sky of gold,
There the great starry ocean lay unrolled!
And wistful longings o'er their spirits move
Bidding them bow beneath the spell of love;
Bidding them tell, with voices sweet and low,
The secret that their hearts alone can know.
On rolled the music, like a perfume rare;
In rhythmic waves flowed midnight's scented air
As came the call of stags upon the blast
A shudder through the white robed circle passed.
Each left her seat, the music's strain was still;
For o'er the summit of the crested hill,
Appeared, as fire 'mid withered branches shines,

The huge red moon, behind a copse of pines.
Then fairly risen, her full round orb displaying,
Up to the distant heaven she soared apace,
Like some pale human form, forever straying
Around the, world, to find its resting place.

Then each her pathway through the shadows took
Where, like the sleeping waters of a brook
The pale sand glistened, in a silvery day,
Beneath the placid moon’s delicious ray.
On the soft night woke love in every heart,
Till from each eye, the flames of passion start.
Demure the ladies went, as pondering
To find soft moonlight in their bosom spring;
And every breeze brought languor on its wing.

And I went wandering, too, amid them all.
I know not why, yet well do I recall,
My heart was light as at a festival.
A rippling peal of laughter, low and sweet,
Smote on my ear and stayed my hurrying feet.
I turned my head, and, suddenly, in sight
Appeared the lady of my heart’s delight.
Alas! she had been coy, nor e’er would bow
Her rebel spirit to my whispered vow.
“Lend me your arm,” she cried, “the path is dark,
And we will skirt the boscage of the park.”
Her speech in merry mood of mockery ran.
“The moon,” she cried, “is like a widow wan;
Too long for us, to-night, the way we wend;
’Tis quite impossible we reach the end.
Too new and delicate this robe of mine,
And all unfit for roads these slippers fine.
Let us retrace our steps,” at last she said.
But still, still onward, I my lady led.
Then forward sprang she, like a wandering sprite,

A creature only seen in fancy's light.
Her robe, as on she moved, at random flew,
And fanned the air, till gentle breezes blew
And stirred the slumbering woodland with the small.
Faint whisper that foretells the coming squall.
Then, breathless, suddenly her step she stayed,
And softly, without sound, our way we made
Along the pathway of a green arcade.
Upon our ears a sound of voices stole —
Low, tender accents from the inmost soul,
And all the shadows round with passion thrilled.
Amid the noises that the woodland filled
Sometimes we could discern that sound of bliss,
When two fond hearts are wedded in a kiss.
Ah! it was then, at that soft sound of love,
Her peal of laughter echoed through the grove,
Then suddenly to silence sank again;
And rapid steps were heard across the plain.
And in confusion, each deserted swain
Cursed the fond fool who made their hiding known.
A nightingale beside us made his moan,
Warbling upon a tree his melody,
A quail from distant marshlands made reply.

But lo! we came, before we were aware,
On a blank wall, whose blank and brutal glare,
Rising before us, took us by surprise,
And almost robbed of sense our dazzled eyes.
Right in our path the tall, white barrier flamed
Like to the palace all of metal framed,
The magic house in fairy legend famed.
We saw it from afar, upon our way,
As if in ambush for our steps it lay.
"The moonlight on that whitened area spread
Favors our good behavior," she said:
"When falls the night, the groves in darkness cower
And are no place for us, at such an hour.

Here let us sit,” she said, “before the wall
Whose bright reflections on our faces fall.”
Then down she sat, and smiled, as if she guessed,
The storm of rage that rose within my breast.
High in the heavens, the moon had risen in view,
And then I thought that it was smiling too.
And both together, yet I know not why,
The lady by my side, the moon on high,
Seemed to conspire and treat me mockingly.
Thus on the grassy turf we took our seat,
While the great wall rose pallid at our feet.
And I was silent, for I dared not say
“I love you,” ‘neath that penetrating ray.
But, as my speechless tongue was turned to stone,
I seized her hands and held them in my own;
And as I held them fast, and hardly breathed,
Her lips with a coquettish smile were wreathed.
She waited, as the hunter for his game,
As near and nearer to her arms I came.
Where o’er the path the shadows thickest grow,
Kindling the forest gloom with feeble glow,
Soft trailing figures glided to and fro.

The pallid moonlight over us was spread;
And, in its milk-white radiance, it shed
A spell that made our hearts, as if they felt
Its witchery, in tender anguish melt.
At her full height she glided on apace,
There was a placid splendor in her face,
A majesty in her unfettered pace,
That pierced our flesh as with a burnished blade,
And on our hearts a feverish languor laid.

I looked on my companion; through my heart,
Senses, and quivering spirit, I felt dart
Those strange and poignant pangs, which rage fire

Whene'er the charms of womankind inspire
The overwhelming fever of desire.
Whene'er, as, on our couch of rest we lie,
Many a troubled dream goes sweeping by, —
The kiss, in token of surrender meant,
And the closed lid, that silent gives consent!

Yet never lady fair has yielded more,
To him who waits and worships at her door,
Than the fond hope that, in some weaker hour,
Her soul may yield itself to passion's power.

My throat was parched, and with a sudden flame
Flushes of fever wrung my shuddering frame.
A slave's wild fancy swept across my brain;
I was a slave and I had broke my chain.
I felt the joy, because I had the strength
To seize my prey and capture it at length.
My prey, this proud, calm woman, who in vain
Should mourn at last her insolent disdain.

And she was smiling, and her mocking air
And fearless bearing made her seem more fair.
Her breathing was a vapor fine and rare
For which I thirsted. O'er my bounding heart
I felt a wave of sudden madness start;
I seized her in my arms and closely pressed
The fearful, trembling creature to my breast.
Then from her grassy seat she rose in haste,
And I with sudden anger clasped her waist.
I kissed her, bending like a sudden storm
The long, lithe contours of her supple form
And dominating eye, and forehead fair,
And dewy mouth and long disheveled hair.
The moon triumphant rode the heavens serene,
And with unclouded gladness lit the scene.

And while I now held fast upon my prey,
And strength and fury seemed to have their way,
One last, one crowning effort she essayed
And flung me backward humbled and dismayed.
Then once again we wrestled as before,
Close to the wail, that in its surface bore
The semblance of a canvas, white as snow.
On which, as we went struggling to and fro,
Appeared a startling, laughter-moving show.
There dancing in the moonlight’s silvery sheen,
Our wild disordered shapes were clearly seen,
In shadowed imitation on the wall;
Now drawing closer do those shadows fall,
Now disentangled from the tight embrace,
Now closing breast to breast, and face to face.
Like two buffoons their shadows seemed, forsooth,
Gesticulating in a rustic booth;
Or, like the senseless puppets of the stage,
Twisting and turning in their mimic rage,
And representing, as an idle jest,
Love’s sudden onset in a human breast.
The writhing shadows now grotesque appear:
Now each contorted image shakes with fear;
Now, like two rams upon the valley’s side,
The shadowy heads upon the wall collide.
Then each thin lengthened image on the wall,
Stands fixed and rigid as some column tall.
Sometimes, four arms gigantic stretch amain,
And their black lengths the snowy surface stain,
Then in grotesque endearments they unite,
And seemed to swoon in kisses in delight.

So laughable those figures in the light;
So unexpected was the curious sight;
She laughed. But how can woman shun defeat
And how forbid a lover’s lips to meet
With hers, if once her laughter yields the day?

When once her serious rage has passed away,
A greater victory can the lover claim,
Than if her heart were filled with passion’s flame.

The nightingale was singing in his tree;
In vain the moon looked down from heaven to see
Those double shadows ‘neath her radiance fall;
She saw one shadow, merely, on the wall.

A SUNSTROKE

It was the month of June, a glorious day,
When all the world was festal in array;
The noisy crowd flowed onward carelessly;
And I myself was gay, I know not why;
Their murmur roused me like the wine-cup’s power,
And my brain reeled, in that meridian hour.
The sun was beating down like tongues of flame,
And stirred the potent juices of my frame.
Into the inmost chambers of my breast
With all his force and majesty he pressed.
And I felt, burning, run through every vein
The transport and the rapture and the pain,
Which Adam our primeval father knew,
When the first sunrise woke upon his view.
’Twas then a woman passed along the street,
And turned her eyes on me, my glance to meet.
I know not what the fire, nor what the dart
That eye of hers had shot into my heart.
Alas! I do not know, I cannot tell,
What wildering madness on my spirit fell;
But instantly, I bent to the control,
Of the wild impulse that had seized my soul.
To fall upon that woman’s form divine:
A furious passion bade me closely twine
My arms about her, lay her lips to mine.
A cloud of blood hung o’er me, dark and red,
And on mine eyes, a sudden blindness shed;
I seized and held her fast against my breast,
And savage kisses on her mouth I pressed.
And as she lay, locked in my close embrace,
I laid her swaying figure down to rest;
Then with a sudden effort, into space

I mounted, spurning this domain of dust,
And soaring from the planet’s crumbling crust,
And she lay on my bosom, as I sailed
Into the realms where sunlight never failed;
She, breast to breast with me, and eye to eye,
Passed toward the empyrean canopy;
Onward and onward, journeying afar,
I mounted nearer to that fiery star,
Nor guessed, while on that face my vision fed,
That my convulsive arms embraced the dead.

HORROR

That evening, in my study, I had read
The writings of an author long since dead.
’Twas midnight, when my soul was seized with fear —
A fear of what? I know not; none was near,
Friend to console, or foe to do me harm;
And yet I shuddered, breathless with alarm,
As if a portent bade me understand
Some nameless act of horror was at hand.
I thought that some one stood behind my chair,
Smiling a cruel smile, a grisly leer,
Whose moveless lines would never disappear;
Yet not an uttered accent moved the air.
I was in torture lest he touch my hair,
And, bending over me, that cursed face,
A long lean hand upon my shoulder place;
For were that hand to stroke me I should die.
Ah, he was drawing nearer to my seat,
Closer and closer on those soundless feet;
And were it for my soul’s salvation, I
Would not have ventured in that moment dread
To make one movement, or to turn my head.
And just as birds, when furious tempests blow,
Are buffeted and beaten to and fro,
Hither and thither turned my startled thought,
As if some refuge from despair I sought.
Sweat drenched my members, as if death were near.
Yet all was silence in that chamber drear,
Save my own chattering teeth that shook for fear.

But suddenly, I heard a creaking sound,
As if some viewless forms went hurrying by;
With terror dazed, I uttered a wild cry.

Ah, never yet had such a fearful note
Found utterance in any human throat;
Then fell I stiff and senseless to the ground.

A CONQUEST

ALONG the boulevard a young man passed,
Swiftly he hurried on with listless eye,
Nor on the girls a single look he cast,
The girls, whose smile allures the passer-by.

But now so sweet a perfume swept the air,
That looking up, he saw a dame divine,
Or rather of a neck he was aware,
Rounded, yet supple, upon shoulders fine.
He followed her — and why? for, nothing, save,
That the arched foot, that ambles in and out
Beneath A snowy garment's passing wave
With love's soft instinct leads all men about.

He saw that luxury her limbs enlaced,
And longed to know if the decree of fate
Had, by chill poverty, her life disgraced,
Or given her goodness joined to high estate.

And as she heard the echoing step behind,
She turned her head, and, marvelous to declare,
With that one glance she seemed his soul to bind,
And he grew eager to address the fair.

He knew the soul's true entrance is the ear;
The subtle power of eloquence he knew;
But as the corner of the street was near,
Amid a crowd, she vanished from his view.

He cursed the idle loiterers of the street,
Whose hustling shoulders forced him to delay,
And sought in vain that peerless form to meet
Until the darkness closed upon the day.

At first he felt a bitter pang of grief,
And walked along, like a lost soul astray;
Then in a cooling draught he sought relief,
And early slept to dream his pain away.

You'll say the youth was of a simple mind;
But without dreams how few the joys we own?
How sweet, while in the chimney roars the wind,
In dreams to linger with some fair unknown.

On that brief vision for eight days he fed;
And, 'mid the dazzling crowd of night dreams, sought
By his own amorous inspiration led,
The sweetest, most delusive realms of thought.

Foolish are dreams like those, in waking hours!
What castles of adventure did he build;
For when the young soul feels its opening powers,
Our budding hopes the vainest prospect gild.

In dreams he followed her to foreign lands;
Together trod the classic plains of Greece;
Now like some ballad knight in arms he stands,
Before the castle seeking her release.

And now they wander on the mountain slope;
And now above the precipices they stray,
Talking of love's large avenue of hope,
Planning the advent of a happier day.

And sometimes, when propitious is the hour,
And tender twilight makes the young heart bold,
He plants a kiss upon that rosy flower,
Her mouth, and she returns a hundredfold.

Then hand in hand, they post away from town,
The horses gallop in their mad career;
And then they dream until the night is flown,
While the moon shines reflected in the mere.

Sometimes he sees her, thoughtful chatelaine,
On the carved cusp of Gothic balcony;
Sometimes she lightly rides across the plain,
Or speeds the hawk or hound upon their prey.

He is her page, and hopes her love to gain;
Ah, yielding is the ancient baron's bride!
In the deep wood with that fair chatelaine,
Her sole companion, still he wanders wide.

Eight days his dreams were of such stuff as this;
He closed his door against each nearest friend,
None he received to mar that heaven of bliss,
Or bring that radiant reverie to an end.

And sometimes, when the evening hour was nigh,
Forth would he steal to some forsaken seat,
And with no sign of living but a sigh,
Indulge his soul in retrospection sweet.

And when he waked one morning, as of yore
Yawning, and rubbing slumber from his eyes,
A troop of friends came rushing to his door,
Spoke all at once, and laughed at his surprise.

For they had planned a country jaunt that day, —
Sailing canoes, wandering the woody plain,
Shocking the country people by their play,
Dining *al fresco,* drinking iced champagne.

And first he answered them with much disgust;
Their picnic did not suit his taste, he said;
When they drove off amid a cloud of dust,
He changed his mind, and bounded from his bed.

His second thoughts induced him to conclude,
That it was sweet to dream on flowery leas;
That running water soothes a thoughtful mood;
And then how pleasant is the shade of trees!

Sad memories are like withered boughs, that float
Carried away upon the murmuring stream,
And reverie suits the rocking of a boat,
And blooming orchards prompt a vernal dream.

There is intoxication, strong and deep,
In running swift to breathe the open air;
The gusts that from the mountain summits creep,
The scent of hay by running brooks is rare.

How charming is the murmur of the stream,
The wood-bird’s song is like an anodyne;
How sweet to float upon a wandering dream,
As travelers sailing down some flood divine.

He called his groom, and dressed himself complete;
And after breakfast to the station wends,
Lights a cigar, and quickly takes his seat,
And at Marly is greeted by his friends.

The plain was moistened with the tears of night,
And a light mist in far-off fields was seen,
The birds were singing, and the sun was bright,
On the fresh pool his radiance shone serene.

When rising sap with verdure tints the grove,
And life in nature bursts again to sight,
And dawn is ushered in with songs of love,
Man’s soul and body swell with deep delight.

’Tis very true his luncheon had been good,
That fumes of wine had mounted to his head,
That, finally, the air of field and flood
With a new festal joy his spirit fed.

Then he embarked upon the light canoe;
In a faint wind the reeds were whispering round,
The rushes murmured sweetly, and he drew
A sense of calm contentment from the sound.

Then come the oarsmen; and their measured rhyme
Echo repeats around with softened strain;
Through foam and gathering waves the oars keep time,
To the deep-chested notes of that refrain.

In haste to capture first the inn’s *cuisine,*
Other canoes before him take their start;
He hears a shrill laughter come from lips unseen,
And yet the sound strikes to his very heart.

She I in a boat? Yes, sitting in the stern,
She holds the tiller, and with songs goes by, —
And thunderstruck this wondrous fact to learn,
He sees his beauty down the river fly.

He fretted over this till dinner time;
And then he stopped before a tavern small,
Where vines about a garden trellis climb,
And shade falls from a ring of lime-trees tall.

Already others from canoes had landed,
Swearing and quarreling with dreadful din,
And spreading their own table, had demanded
The whole accommodations of the inn.

And she was with them, drinking an absinthe,
At his blank face she smiled in merry mood,
But when she called, his looks replied: “I can’t.”
“Donkey!” she cried, “you take me for a prude!”

Then trembling he approached her, and they dined
Together, but he wondered, secretly,
How anyone would ever be inclined
To credit her with lofty pedigree!

A merry girl, light hearted in her talk,
Who called him her Dear Boy, her very own,
Offered her glass and fed him with her fork,
And would not let him leave the inn alone.

Ah, his poetic heart had thought to find
A flawless diamond, but ’twas paste, instead!
He took it thankfully, and bore in mind,
That “Half a loaf is better than no bread.”

A SNOWY NIGHT

There is no motion on the voiceless plain,
That stretches white to the horizon's brim;
No peal of laughter and no cry of pain
Rises in that dead desert, cold and grim,
Save that afar, at yonder coppice gate,
Some dog, unsheltered, howls disconsolate.

There is no music in the chilling air;
No stubble spreads the pathway at our feet.
The blight of winter withers everywhere
The summer bloom of life that was so sweet.
Like skeleton or fleshless phantoms stand,
The trees along the horizon of the land.

The full moon hastes across the steely sky,
Pale is she, as if shivering in the cold
Of that vast vault, that frozen canopy,
From which she seems us mortals to behold,
Views our poor desert earth, with scornful mien,
And rushes past us to a fairer scene.

And if she showers on us her darting rays,
They are but dropping icicles of frost,
That cheat us with a semblance, as she lays
A gleam so grim and cold, in mist half lost,
Upon the wilderness of distant snow,
That with infernal light it seems to glow.

And through the forest alleys sobs the wind, —
A breath of shuddering frost with killing power.

Where shall the birds this night a shelter find?
The forest’s birds in winter’s direst hour
When leaves are stripped from every safe retreat,
And every perch is frozen ‘neath their feet?

In the tall leafless trees the silver frost
Is hanging, like a glassy coat of mail;
There the birds crowd, and trembling, as if lost,
Forever, gaze upon the snowdrifts pale,
With restless eye, and vainly wait for night
To come and quench the chilled and cruel light.

A MESSAGE OF LOVE

In the Garden of the Tuileries

Come to me, little child, whose mother sweet
Makes my poor heart with throbs of passion beat.
Upon this bench she often loves to stay,
Watching her darling child before her play.
Pale is she, and her hair is such as gleams
Through fancy's softest, most delicious dreams.
I see it now, above her forehead lie,
Bright as the radiance of the starlight sky.
Come to me, dearest child, and let me press
Thy rosy lips with deepest tenderness.
Let me once more thy large blue eyes behold,
And plant one kiss upon thy curls of gold.
Thus, little darling, would I make thee bear
A load of kisses to her, unaware.
And thus, when thou returnest to her side,
And the soft darkness comes with eventide,
And when thy little arms at last are thrown
Around that tapering neck, I may not own, —
Upon thy rosy lip she still may find
And on those locks of gold she loves to bind,
The burning kiss, my lips have left behind.
Ah! sweet shall that be as the dawn of love.
Then shall she say, while trembling flushes move
Across the cheeks she guards from looks of mine,
And takes my kiss from those curled locks of thine,
"What is it on my daughter's brow to-night
That stirs my bosom with this strange delight?"

AT THE WATER'S SIDE

I.

A SULTRY sun was shining o'er the flood
Where floating laundries on the river stood.
The drowsy ducks, above the silent mill,
At the pool's edge, were ranged in slumber still.
The air with sunny radiance was alight;
The trees seemed kindling into beacons bright;
And I was resting on the grass, reclined
Near to the ancient boat, where women find
A summer laundry of a pleasant kind.
And down the current floated in a line
The soapy water. There the bubbles shine,
And burst their iridescent orbs divine.
And I was dozing, as I idly lay
Upon the grass that balmy summer's day;
Till I saw some one come along the way.
In the full radiance of the sun she trod,
With firm and rapid step, the fiery sod,
That girl, who seemed the daughter of a god!
Her rounded arms were carried high in air
Above her head, to keep in balance, there,
The load of laundry linen white and fair.
Broad-hipped and slender-waisted was the maid,
A marble Venus scantily arrayed.
Straight as a column to the stream she strode,
And balanced on her head the heavy load.
I followed her adown the pathway straight,
Until she halted at the laundry gate.

At last she chose her place, a vacant nook,
And, with a strong and supple grace, she took
And plunged her burden in the bubbling brook.
Less bare was she than those who at her side
Pursued their labors in the flowing tide.
And as she plied her task, each movement made
By tapering arms and haunches strong, displayed
Under the clinging skirt, that from her waist
Descended folding, with a sculptor's taste,
The rounded contours and the grace expressed
By tapering lines and by her swelling breast.
Hard was her toil, and, when she sought for rest,
She raised her glorious arms above her face,
And, with superb and unaffected grace,
Stretched her lithe body backward, and in haste
Bent in soft play the tendons of her waist.
The sun was powerful, and, with many a creak,
I heard the overheated timber speak.
The ancient vessel seemed to break its sheath
And open up, some cooling air to breathe.
With weary toil each panting bosom heaves,
And sweating arms relax the clinging sleeves.
New flushes now those mantling cheeks bedeck
And add a heightened tint to many a neck.
With fearless eye she looked into my face,
Then sought her swelling bodice to unlace.
And now at last her rounded breasts, I see,
Above the loosened frilling are set free.
And then she beat her linen, and each stroke
The surging contours of her bosom woke
To life, in rosy tints, that rise like flowers
Blowing in summer's parti-colored bowers.
A hot air from the laundry hits the sense,
As from some murky foundry dark and dense,
Bearing the sighs, that on the summer float
From many a rosy toiler's swelling throat;
And every stroke her supple motion deals

My heart within its deep recesses feels.
She looks at me with raillery in her eye;
And nearer still I draw, to watch her ply,
With humid bosom, fair exceedingly,
The busy toil, that makes her bosom white
The homage of a tender kiss invite.
I see compassion melting in her gaze;
For she can recognize my timid ways,
And, with a woman's wit, she deigns to ask
Some questions, and to tattle of her task.
And when, with many an effort vague, I reach,
Through incoherent sounds, the power of speech,
I do not understand one word she says
As on the beauty of her form I gaze.
The beauties that her bodice has unsealed
Tell of the charms beneath it unrevealed.
I burn with maddening ardor at the sight;
Then closing up her labors for the night
She bids me, in a whisper, stand and wait
Her coming in yon dell at evening late.

And all that filled my bosom with delight
Has vanished as she passes out of sight.
All my past years that moment disappear,
As water spilt upon some desert drear.
And yet I did rejoice; for in my heart,
I felt, that hour, the song of passion start.
Ceaseless I gazed upon the paling sky;
It seemed to me the night's obscurity
Shone luminous, as if the dawn were nigh.

II.

First at the tender trysting place was she;
I met her and I sank on bended knee —
Then raised my hands and sought, with loving haste,

To clasp the rounded beauty of her waist.
I tried in vain to draw her to my side;
I felt her quick from my embraces glide
And, like a shadow, out of sight she sped;
The moonlight bathed the grasses as she fled.
I followed, and I found the prey I sought;
For in a thorny brake her foot was caught.
I closed my arms about her as she sighed,
And bore her trembling to the forest’s side,
Where at the water’s edge a tree had spread
Its tangled roots that reached the river’s bed.
And I, who erst had seen her, with no sign
Of modesty reveal her charms divine,
Beheld her pale and troubled, filled with fears.
Her rosy cheek was wet with gentle tears;
Her startled frailty did my senses move
With the intoxicating sting of love.

Whence comes this fever of the lover’s brain?
What is it shakes our being, with such pain,
In the soft hour when love’s delight we gain?

The moon had risen, and her silver ray
Filled the whole landscape with a pallid day.
Amid the reeds, the frogs were croaking loud;
A mingled din they made, that noisy crowd,
Whose haunts the sedges and the rushes shroud.
Far from the distance could I hear the hail,
In double note, of solitary quail.
The birds awoke, and, with their chansons shrill,
Began their serenades beneath the hill.
And as fresh kisses on her cheeks I press,
Down sank she, murmuring, at my soft caress
While sobs and sighs her heaving heart oppress,
Beneath those drooping lids her eyes were bright
Our sighs and senses mingled in delight;

Then in the evening calm there seemed to creep
O’er nature’s wearied heart the balm of sleep.
The cry of love alone was sounding loud;
And startled birds within the coppice crowd;
And, for one moment, ceased the murmur harsh
That rose but lately from the peopled marsh.
All voices, all terrestrial sounds were still;
The quail no longer piped upon the hill;
All sounds of living nature seemed to die,
And boundless silence filled the sky,
Saving that thrice a mournful howl was heard,
Amid the noiseless life of beast and bird,
As from some mountain hamlet, perched on high,
The house-dog breathed his challenge to the sky.
And dazzling day was breaking o’er the sea,
As on swift feet she fled away from me.
I strode at random through the fields that morn;
And every scent that on the breeze was borne
Brought me a memory of her haunting face:
Her glances kept me anchored in that place.
And like two convicts by one chain confined
There was one tie that did our spirits bind.

III.

Five months had passed away, and still I sank
Each eventide, upon that river bank,
With no abatement of my passion’s power.
There fondling, in that sweet and tranquil hour,
Upon the fragrant turf, that maiden rare,
Superbly passionate as she was fair.
And every morning, thinking o’er the past
It seemed our dearest meeting was the last.
Our last night’s kisses no satiety
Could bring us. From the wild bird’s morning cry
Through the long day we lived disconsolate,

And thought the rest of evening came too late.
Sometimes, forgetting that the day was near,
The dawn surprised us, and the chanticleer
Woke us from bliss to thread the toiling strand
Eye fixed on melting eye, and hand in hand.
And oft I saw the thickets glow with light,
And the gray forest trunks grow crimson bright,
As if the blood of wounds was on their bark,
And yet methought the wide heaven still was dark,
For to my fancy, when the flames of morn
In dazzling splendor to my face were borne,
’Twas merely the refulgence of her gaze,
That tipped with purple dye the morning haze.
Each day she joined the toilers on the strand;
Each day I patient waited till the land
Was darkened, and the sunlight quenched its fire.
I fed my heart on passionate desire;
No greater pleasure would my spirit ask
Than watching her attentive to her task;
Patient I stood with her before my eyes;
The sole horizon that I saw arise
Was the rare outline of her heaving breast;
For by that vision did I live in thrall,
Like to a prisoner in his narrow wall —
My hopes no wider expectation taste,
Than lay within the belt that bound her waist.
Close to her side I stood a sentinel,
Lest others should approach, and feel the spell
Of her gay beauty that I loved so well.
At every sign of danger, I was near;
And she would turn her head, with glances clear,
That called me, and our lips were joined once more,
Then parted and the troublous hour was o’er.
Sometimes, she left her task; and at her sign
I followed to the shelter of the vine,
Where in a field ‘its gadding tendrils spread.
Or to some neighboring thicket oft she fled;

And there we watched the loves of beast and bird,
Or viewed the transports of the lowing herd.
Ofttimes, we saw the woodland birds draw near
To bill and coo before us, without fear.
Through nature’s realm we marked the happy pairs;
They did not dread us, for our lot was theirs.

Then, when my heart with thought of her was filled,
At that late hour, when nature’s voice was stilled,
I waited for her by the winding shore.
And where the poplars spread their leafage hoar
Saw her approach, with her familiar smile,
And in her pupils brown there flamed desire,
That might the heart of adamant beguile,
And woo to ecstasy with tender fire.
And, as I stretched my length beneath a tree,
Amid the thickets of the lonely lea,
I mused how in the Bible, we are told,
Of love, that won the daughters of mankind
To wed with angels in the days of old.
And how to the sons of God, with passion blind,
Came the fair daughters wantoning and wild,
And how these angels, with their faces mild,
Joined beauteous women in the sheltering grove,
And shared with them the deep delights of love.

IV.

But when the master slept, before the gate
At noon, he found the laundry desolate.
The hot sun smoked, like to a panting steer,
That labors with no sheltering shadow near.
But yet this drought was not so fierce, I thought,
As that which in my fevered senses wrought.
There was no sound, except a snatch of song
And laughter-peals of sots, stumbling along

From out the stews; except the frequent drip
Of water falling from the battered ship.
Now her lips show like jets of burning coal.
Whence those ecstatic kisses of the soul,
Like sparks from out a ruddy brazier start,
Till our two bodies faint and fall apart.
Nothing is heard except the cricket's cry —
Those people of the sun, whose clamor passes
Across the meadows, when the sun is high,
Like sound of crackling flame in withered grasses.
And we exchanged warm glances, in amaze
So pale, that each of us the other frays;
We read, in wrinkled features, and the track
Of lines 'neath feverish eyes, that is so black,
That ours was such a love as kills at last,
And life through every sense was ebbing fast.

We whispered, parting, that this eventide
We'd have no meeting at the water side.

But at that hour, a longing seized on me
To go alone to the accustomed tree.
To dream upon the beauties of her face,
And all our days of rapture to retrace,
And sleep on memories in that grassy place.
When drunk with recollections I came by,
She stood there, watching me as I drew nigh.
Then seized with feverish passion, we gave play
To acts of love that wore our love away.
Tho' death was gaining on us, longing bade
Our beings mingle in that evening shade.
Our passions were unchecked by thoughts of harm;
Our kindled looks were quenched by no alarm;
Each for the other, at the point of death
Was lying; hollow chest, and dwindled arm
Were forfeiting to us the fragrant breath

Of future kisses. Not a word we spoke;
And, by her side, the cry that from me broke
Was not the cry of love, but the wild call
That hot stags utter in the golden fall.
I ever felt the quiver of her frame
That filled me with fresh passion naught could tame.
And if I thirsted, as I raised that cry,
Her lips alone my thirst could satisfy.
And heat was whetted, strength was conquered quite,
In that embrace which was a mortal fight.
And even the shadowy turf on which we lay
Was withered, and the grasses burned away.
That place was easy to point out, we found,
Because our forms were stamped into the ground.

Some morning, while beneath that tree we bide
They’ll take us up hard by the water’s side,
They’ll place us at the bottom of a boat.
And we’ll embrace, as down the stream we float.
They’ll dig some secret pit, and fling us in
As wretched people who have died in sin.

But, if ’tis true that spirits of the dead
Return, our shades that soft and grassy bed,
‘Neath the tall poplars, still shall occupy;
And country people, as we hurry by,
Shall cross themselves, and mutter, “There they go,
The Death of Love, and her we used to know
Beating her linen, where the waters flow.”

THE WILD GEESE

The world is silent, from the thicket bare
No bird is warbling; but the plain is spread
Blank-white ‘neath skies gray as the locks of care.
The great black crows come flocking with the day,
They dot the snow, raising a silvery dust,
And dig for carrion in the frozen crust.
A murmur from the horizon rises clear,
A clamor and brush of many a wing, —
Louder it grows, and the wild geese are here;
Their necks are stretched like arrows from the string.
In furious flight and sounding pinions strong,
They lash the gale that hurries them along.

The guide who leads these pilgrims of the air,
O’er forest lands, o’er ocean’s foaming marge,
O’er yellow continents of desert bare,
Like to a trumpeter who leads a charge,
Utters from time to time a piercing cry,
That thrills the lagging cohorts of the sky.

Now, like a double pennon fluttering,
Wavers and breaks the toiling caravan,
And that strange cry again is heard to ring;
Now they deploy, like an unfolded fan;
And the great triangle appears to grow
Broader and ever broader as they go.

Their tame and captive brothers of the plain
Stalk stiff and shivering o’er the pathway hard,
Full-paunched, like loaded vessels on the main;
A whistling boy in ragged coat their guard.

And as the wild tribe of their kin draw near
With doubling cry — they raise their heads to hear.

Upon those freeborn travelers they gaze
Tracking the cloudless ocean of the sky,
And captives, they, with sudden effort, raise
Their wings, as if to join that company;
But those poor pinions are too weak to soar
And land the prisoners on freedom's shore.

And yet, they raise themselves tiptoe, and feel
Vaguely the primal passion that had place,
Yet slept, in their heart's core roused by the appeal
Of the wild wanderers, whom they grudge the space
Of heaven to range in, and the tropic shore,
Where smiles a tepid wave for evermore.

Ah, lost in those cold plains they wander still,
Those plains of snow where they must ever tread
The dull low clod, nor mount with clarion shrill
To liberty; and as they hear o'erhead
The call, they answer, with despairing cry,
Their wild free brethren of the boundless sky.

THE GRANDFATHER

THE grandfather was dying, he was cold
And rigid in his glazed and ghastly eye.
Six suns agone, he was fourscore years old.
His livid face was paling visibly;
White cheek, white scattered locks on withered head, —
White as the linen covering of his bed.

His large and pallid eye he opened wide;
And then he uttered words, in such a tone
They seemed as if across yon valley side,
They came, and now were softened to a moan;
Or like the woodland murmur, that we hear
When foliage quakes, altho' no storm is near.

Is this a memory stirs within me now?
Is it a dream my dying thoughts pursue?
The morn is laughing on the mountain brow;
With rising sap the trees their life renew;
My heart is beating with full crimson stream —
Is it a memory only or a dream?

Yes! life is sweet, but oh, how swift its flight!
How swift its flight, yet, I remember well
The days, that once I lived in long delight.
Those ancient days, the hours I loved so well,
When I was young, — and now my youth I deem.
Naught but a haunting memory or a dream.

Is it a memory stirs within me now,
Is it a dream my dying thoughts pursue?

Quivers the wave at faintest gusts that blow.
My breast would throb at every passion new.
Then like a torrent ran that ardent stream,
Is this a memory only or a dream?

A memory or a dream, oh, tell me — tell,
What is this breath that warms my heart of ice?
Now I remember, I remember well —
Youth, vigor, health, the gifts beyond all price,
Love, love, I do remember — well I deem
Tis memory stirs my heart, and not a dream.

A memory or a dream — I dream no more.
Within my bosom I can hear the sound
Of billows beating on a lonely shore;
And my thought stumbles, as it flutters round
The glories of a half-forgotten day;
Then like a startled bird it speeds away.

Dreams of the new and memories of the old.
Is this the bright exordium of a new
Existence, that I see at last unfold?
Or memory of a life no longer true.
Death, Death — I do remember — Lay me, then.
Amid the dust of unremembered men.

DISCOVERY

I was a child, I loved to read of fight
And warfare, and the heavy coat of mail
Worn patiently by many a doughty knight.
I loved those paladins, who once set sail,
To wrest the Holy Sepulcher from hands
Of Paynims, and who died in foreign lands.

I loved that English Richard, at whose name
My young heart beat with ardor, when they told
How, on returning from the fields of fame,
He, for a necklace fashioned out of gold,
As links of his triumphant trophy, chose
The heads that he had smitten off from foes.

The Queen of Beauty gave, to deck my crest,
Her favor, and I dangled at my side
A cane for scimitar, and forth, in quest
Of some adventure, stepped with knightly pride;
And at the flowers, with valiant arm, I hewed;
And all the lawn with bud and blossom strewed.

And in the open air, a seat of stone
I covered with a mossy cushion green;
And this I counted as a royal throne.
I hated even kings who overween,
And, for a royal crown to deck my brow,
I chose a garland from a budding bough.

Ah! lapped in happiness the days went by;
And once a fair companion joined my side;

Nor was the maid reluctant to comply,
When my bright crown, my court, my kingdom wide
I offered her, and pointed o’er the main,
To all the castles I had built in Spain.

Beneath the chestnut-trees she took her seat;
And she was beautiful, and in her eye,
Liquid and blue and bright, I seemed to meet
Another universe, another sky;
And at her feet I sat the whole day long,
As if I listened to some dreamland song.

Ah, wherefore did I leave that cheerful place,
Why did I fling away the happiness
Of gazing on that maiden’s tender face?
Why was Columbus filled with such distress,
When, thro’ the fading vapors of the night,
He saw a new world rising into sight?

THE BIRDCATCHER

BIRDCATCHER love abroad is seen,
Soon as the winter's reign is o'er,
And all the coppices are green,
The lowland thickets to explore;
And when the evening shades the hill,
His cage the feathered captives fill.
As soon as night has left the sky,
And morning floods the quiet dale,
The birdcatcher comes hurrying by,
The snare to set, the treacherous trail
Of bird lime on the twig to smear,
And scatter oats and millet near.
Hid by the hedgerow does he lie,
He lurks behind the river's mound,
He glides beneath the thicket high,
Crawling all fours along the ground,
For fear his steps the foe betray
And scare the swift-winged birds away.
The cunning child his springs has set,
Where lilies of the valley blow;
When white-thorn still with dew is wet,
He lays his slender snare below,
And in the trap, at his sly call,
The finches and the linnets fall.

Sometimes a supple wand he takes
Of osier green or rosemary,
With which a cunning snare he makes,
And watches — until downward fly
The birds that see his scattered grain:
Alas, they fly not back again.

A little bird, on rapid wing,
Comes cheerfully toward the net,
He eyes it frank and wondering,
His daring leads him nearer yet:
The treacherous grain without a thought
Of fraud he tastes, and he is caught.

Birdcatcher love no pity shows
But takes him from the woodland wide,
From all the native haunts he knows,
Thick bush, and bank, and waterside;
And when the evening shades the hill,
A cage the feathered songsters fill.

LONGINGS

Some wish for wings to mount into the sky,
And with glad shouts to soar through boundless space;
With the cloud-sweeping swallow would they fly,
Until the evening gloom their forms efface.

And some desire to batter on the breast
Of others, raising up their fists to hit,
And by the nose the flying steed arrest,
Without the aid of bridle or of bit.

The beauty of the body I desire;
I would be fair as some divinity
Of Greece, that, at my view, a flame of fire
Should kindle in fond hearts, and never die.
And I in every tender breast would reign,
And change each day my object of delight;
And every morn a different fruit obtain;
A different fancy to my heart unite.

For when we taste them, fruits have different flavors
The blonde and the brunette a different grace,
On all alike I would bestow my favors,
And each should reign in her peculiar place.

Kind glances in the squares, without offense
I sometimes, in a tender moment, meet;
I rather like it that no permanence
Clings to these fleeting conquests of the street.

Altho’ I love to sit with a brunette,
When earnest feeling in her face appears,
Still the mild blonde, we never must forget,
Has soft blue eyes, bright hair, and ready tears.

So without serious thoughts of womankind,
I go wherever fancy bids me start,
I pluck the fruit, but scarcely pierce the rind,
Lest I find something bitter at the heart.

THE LAST ESCAPADE

I.

THERE stood an ancient castle, begirt with lofty walls
And tottering was the flight of steps that led into its halls.
And grass o'ergrew the pavement, and moss o'erspread the stone, —
As if with scales of leprosy the place was overgrown.
And two strong towers the castle flanked, the one with pointed crown;
But, from the other, roof and tile for years had fallen down.
The tempest raged against that wall, the gale with fury blew,
And with a crash the tottering peak its fury overthrew.
And now the climbing ivy, that to that ruin clung
Like some fair lady's crown of locks in verdant beauty hung.
And when the rain came down from heaven, into that turret's flank,
Its gaps and seams, with secret flow, the falling water sank.
And there, as from a gaping wound, there sprang a mighty tree,
And through that fissure in the wall, the traveler might see
The ancient chambers veiled in gloom, the walls with hangings rent,
The armored knights that stood a-row, as in a dungeon pent.
The windows of the castle were blank and gray, and dim;
They seemed like eyeballs in the face of warriors gray and grim.
And all the gloomy building was tumbling to decay,
It was a blackened ruin, that soon must pass away.
Across its front the molding ran like wrinkles on a face;
No footing could be trusted in that neglected place;
The very tiles upon the roof in shattered ruin lie;
And many an ancient chamber stands open to the sky.
There's ruin writ on every stone; there, desolation now
Has stamped its brand, like marks of shame upon some caitiff brow.

Around the walls a gloomy park extends its shade profound;
The sunlight of the summer noon can never reach that ground;

Yet those who travel through the grove at times, when tempests rave,
May hear the foliage rustling like the murmur of the wave,
The wave that calmly beats along some desolated shore,
Where boatmen and where shipmen are busy nevermore,
But where the distant ocean stands glittering to the view,
With placid sunlight beating down from out a heaven of blue..
That forest, with its thickset trees, whose branches intertwine,
Can ne'er receive the showers of light that on the ocean shine.
The morning has no entrance to those avenues of shade;
And 'neath the giants of the grove the bushes droop and fade.
But like a vast cathedral, the verdant vault expands;
The odor of the tomb is there, for there no human hands
Have cleared the stagnant hollows that gather festering there,
And yet the solemn silence hears not the voice *of* prayer.

And yet upon the gallery-steps, from which the traveler sees
The spreading lawns that far away are hemmed by towering trees;
Two aged serving men are seen, supporting by their side
A bent and feeble couple, whom down the steps they guide.
Yes, softly down the mossy steps, each day they lead the twain,
Whose tottering limbs and feeble feet can scarce the toil sustain.
But with their sticks before them they seek the path to find.
And vacantly they stagger with gesture of the blind;
Right ancient seem the stately pair, their foreheads lined with age;
Their withered skins and pointed chins are like some old-time page,
Some antique page of history, that tells what mighty power
Can keep the sacred flame of life bright to its latest hour.
And now they sink all wearied each on the soft settee;
Their heads and hands are trembling, their eyes but dimly see.
With drooping lids they do not turn to the wild scene around,
But in dull languor fix their sight upon the mossy ground.
Their thoughts no longer onward range, they do not blame the fate
That sets them, like two trembling leaves, in winter desolate,
And if they still survive the grave, 'tis like two columns tall,
That each against the other leans, lest both together fall,
And silently they sit, nor speak; for word of bliss or bane
Has never passed, year after year, between the hapless twain.

II.

But now across the distant plain a breath of fire is spread;
The trees in every trembling trunk are rising from the dead.
And o’er their ruffled coronets the sunlight seems to glide,
And the flood of heat arises like the flowing of the tide.
And over every meadow a gilded robe appears,
The butterflies are dancing along those grassy spears.
The distant country rises clad in a garb of gray;
And many hovering murmurs upon the horizon play;
And in the bosom of the turf the crickets sing their lay.
The fever of the fiery day is sinking, and, once more,
The ancient walls grow young again and in that light are gay.
They take again the gleaming front they showed in days of yore,
The very stones are smiling above that battered door.

That aged man and woman with fresher life respire;
Their twinkling eyes new luster gain from that fierce bath of fire.
Their withered limbs new vigor take, and in their veins there run
The torrents of a life renewed beneath the blazing sun.
Confused as if a sudden call had wakened them from sleep
Amazed they listen, and they hear the noises shrill and deep.
They raise their heads and on their canes with withered hands they lean,
The old man to his consort turns, and speaks with eye serene,
He turns and looks upon her face, “The day is fine,” he cries.
And at his voice she raises her dim and drowsy eyes
And answers him, “The glorious days once more have come again.”
And their voice is like the shrilly cry of flocks upon the plain;
And spring’s eternal gladness with smiles their faces wreathes,
And they feel the forest odors the wind of summer breathes.
It stirs them as a draught of wine acts on a feeble brain;
They tremble at that vivid shock, as if it brought them pain.
They gently nod with mutual glance, their looks fly to and fro,
Until they feel in that sweet air the spring of long ago.
And suddenly she speaks to him, while sobs her utterance choke,

"'Twas on a day like this that first we met by yonder oak."
Then silence sinks upon the twain, but bitter thoughts of ruth
Return to them with memories of half-forgotten youth.
Return, as two stout vessels, that homeward voyage take,
With swelling sails and foaming prows follow their earliest wake.
He answered her, "'Tis long ago, those days can ne'er return, —
And then, — our bench of stone that yonder stood, knee-deep in fern."
The woman quails, as if a stab she felt above her heart,
"Come let us visit it once more," with choking voice she said.
And with a sudden effort they rise, as from the dead,
And down the winding avenue with tottering steps they start.
They were two strange companions, that couple pale and old,
He with his ancient hunting coat, with buttons of pure gold;
She, moving by her husband's side, a figure grim and tall,
Wrapped in the flowery patterns that marked her antique shawl.

III.

They watched their opportunity, that none might see their flight;
And then with bent and crooked forms they started with delight.
They felt ashamed, that they were old, when all around was new,
And hand in hand like children their tottering way pursue;
And, staggering on uncertain feet, they barred the avenue.
For each, as though with wine overcome, against the other pressed,
And in a zigzag line they went; while on their sticks they rest
Their withered hands, and hurrying on they walked toward the seat.
The sticks kept pace beside them as if two wooden feet.

And after many a stop, they reached, all breathless with their haste,
The park, the ample promenade, now a deserted waste.
Their past woke up and led them adown those alleys green;
And on that humid soil they saw, beneath the sky serene,
The footprints fresh which they had left in those old loving days,
As if the paths preserved them still to their eternal praise.
As if the paths expected still to see the amorous pair
Steal from the blooming thicket and breathe the scented air.

All weak and shrunken now beneath those towering trees they stole;
Lost in the tangled labyrinth of mighty bough and bole,
Where an eternal evening brought sadness to the soul;
Then as if searching ancient books from text to margin wide,
While one asserted “It is here,”
“Tis there,” the other cried.
“And was it here I kissed your hand?”
“Yes, ’tis the very spot,
Here lips were joined.”
“Ah, that,” he said, “I never have forgot.”
And so their pilgrimage went on, each kiss a shrine had made;
Like crosses on the journey of pilgrims on crusade.
And thus as through the forest the laboring pathway led,
They touched on happy moments, that from their gaze had fled;
Excursions of the heart were these, toward bliss that had its end;
They thought again that arm in arm they through the forest wend,
With eyes that spoke of mutual love, with fingers intertwined,
In silence, but with beating heart and fever of the mind:
Alas! within the wood they heard the moaning of the wind.

IV.

Yet there the bench awaited them, crumbling and mossy brown.
“Tis here,” he said, “Here” echoed she, and then they sat them down.
And ‘neath the warm reflections cast by memories of delight,
The darkness of the mantling grove grew for a moment bright.
But lo, they saw approaching as flattened by some load,
And wrinkled by his hundred years, the old familiar toad.
With parted feet across their path the reptile seemed to stalk,
Like to a staggering infant that has not learned to walk.
A sudden sob their bosom shook, and ended in a moan;
For ah! their earliest vows of love were heard by him alone.
Each evening would he issue forth to listen to their word,
And he alone remembered the tender vows he heard.
And now he hastens to them with dull and patient gait,
His belly rounds before them, his eyes in wonder wait.

And now against the trembling feet of the long faded pair,
He gently leans his bloated bulk and fondly nestles there.
And then they wept; but suddenly the warbling music clear
Of some shy songster of the grove struck on their listening ear.
Ah me, they quiver with delight, for well the strain they know,
’Twas the same chant they listened to just eighty years ago.
Then in the wild confusion of a supreme delight;
The days of long ago came back and shone upon their sight.
Like to a boiling torrent that swells with rising tide;
They see their life, their happiness, their passion multiplied.
The long caresses of the night that lasted until day;
And the sweet wakenings of the morn forever passed away;
And then the evenings that they spent beneath some flickering shade;
The odors of the forest; the turf of the arcade;
Where kisses came until they reached, where myriad alleys meet,
And wearied sank once more upon that old familiar seat.

But as these tender thoughts prevailed they saw the opening lane
And down it swept the frolic breeze from the far distant plain.
With scented wings it fanned their cheek, as in those ancient moods,
And it brought back to them again the springtime of the woods!

And then they felt the flush of youth their withered cheeks o’erspread.
And trembling seized their frames, their hands joined like the newly wed,
And then they looked with passion each to the other’s face,
Each as if ready at one smile, the other to embrace.
But never smile those faces showed, for foreheads clear and white,
Appeased the gloom of sorrow and age’s sallow blight.
And all they saw to call to life the passions that were dead,
Were two old countenances, each with wrinkles over-spread.
And each beheld presented an antiquated face
Crumpled in smiles of passion, with hideous grimace.
They closed their eyes, they fainting sank, as if they fell beneath
The overwhelming terror that comes with instant death.
“Come,” said the husband, “let us now toward our home retreat.”
But they were powerless to rise and stand upon their feet.

Fixed as their stony bench were they, and doubly terrified,
To think that they had wandered from their attendant’s side;
To feel themselves so feeble, so aged, and so lone,
And rigid, that they held their seat like people turned to stone.
Then from that quiet resting place, they rose with sudden might,
And down the verdant alley they rushed in fevered flight.

They whined and moaned in their distress, and like a shower of rain
A frigid horror struck their bones and chilled them with the pain.
And then they seemed to strangle, struck by a frozen breath,
Like to the currents that stream forth from musty caves of death,
Where they have festered centuries old, beneath the crumbling mound,
And on their hearts a heavy weight seemed bearing to the ground.
All their poetic dreams might be no more than leaden weights,
Hindering their struggling efforts to reach the castle gates.
And ‘neath the burden of their dreams, on limbs with journeying spent,
Adown the leafy avenue they staggered as they went.

V.

The wife was first to yield before the labor of the way,
And like a broken spring she snapped, and on the ground she lay.
And he stood upright at her side, waiting to see her rise;
And knew not that the mists of death were settling o’er her eyes.
Yet he was restless, for he thought she was o’ertired and weak;
For her dress trembled as she lay, although she did not speak.
But all at once he seemed to know the meaning of her fall.
And on him rushed the stroke of fear, swift as a sudden squall;
Then he stooped down, and with fond hand, he seized her skinny arm;
And raised her with prodigious pain, although his face was calm;
But the poor body limply hung, a miserable sight;
He saw that she was dying, and ne’er would see the night.
He ran to seek assistance and struggled on his feet,
With frightful and contorted limbs; but ah, his course was fleet.
He bounded in a gallop, his stick made out the way;
And limping, sidling, twisting, he left the leafy way;

And, as amid the labyrinth of tangled paths he wound,
His breath came thick and short and hard and had a coughing sound;
And then his trembling limbs gave way and toward the ground they bent,
He seemed to dance upon his knees and like a frog he went,
And as he hopped, he struck against the black trunks of the dell.
The very trees made sport of him and pushed him till he fell.
And one would thrust him back again against the other tree;
And at his agony they seemed to laugh with coward glee.
He knew at last the struggle was coming to an end;
And, like a shipwrecked mariner upon the billows, bend,
Who, e’er he drowns, shrieks one appeal to the unpitying sky,
Falling upon his face he made one faint complaining cry.
So feeble was that utterance, the very wind disdained
To bear it from the grassy path where sullen silence reigned.
And yet he listened, as he lay upon that pallet low,
In mournful intonation to the cawing of a crow.
And mingled with that dismal note, which echoed like a knell,
There came the dead and rattling sound flung by a broken bell.
Then every noise to silence sank; the forest’s icy gloom
Pressed down upon them heavy as the covering of a tomb.

VI.

And there they lay, while from the day died the last streak of light;
And all the sky was heaving with the tempest swell of night.
And there they lay, all crumpled like heaps of leaves that lie
Rustling beneath the eddying gust, when snow is in the sky,
So dimly seen amid the gloom, one scarce would think them there;
And the home-returning cattle pass by them with a stare.
While others, on their evening path, unheeding tread them down,
As if they were mere blocks that formed the pavement in a town.
The little snails crawl over them, and leave their slime behind,
And in the folded garments, that wrap their bodies round,
The swarms of insects nestle and cozy shelter find,
And others, thinking they are dead, light on the mortal mound.

But a sudden shudder passes through the forest avenue;
And a shower comes down, and lashes the leaves of oak and yew.
And clattering, rippling, falls upon the soil, like a cascade;
And on that aged pair, whose dress still flutters in the shade,
The rain descends with heavy drops in night-long fusillade.
And when the first faint light of dawn the ghastly drama sees,
Beneath the ceaseless dripping from the branches of the trees,
They raise from that green resting-place two bodies small and cold,
With faces grim and rigid, which dripping locks enfold,
Like two drowned sailors by the waves up to the land-wash rolled.

SONG OF THE MOONLIGHT

WRITTEN FOR A NOVEL

Knowest thou my name. ’Tis Moonlight. Whence I spring?
Look up, and see my mother glittering,
While night itself is dusky as a cave.
I climb the tree, and glide along the wave.
I lie upon the grass and tread the sands;
I scale a gloomy wall, and lightly perch
Upon the bole of many a slender birch;
All I surmount, like a marauder bold
And I am never hot and never cold.
I am so small that I can glide
Where no one else could go beside;
Close to the pane I press my nose,
And many a secret I disclose;
The beasts that thro’ the forest stray,
And lovers who with mournful face
Choose the cool shadows for their way,
Follow my bright and flickering face,
And find their love returned. And when
I vanish in the realms of space,
The grateful throbbing hearts of men
Do not my boundless gifts forget,
But feel a pang of keen regret.

The nightingale and thrush
For me, in every bush,
Sing, in their song divine,
The elm-trees and the pine.
I love to show my power
Where burrowing rabbits scour;

For each, at my behest,
At once forsakes his nest,
And all begin to play
Upon the bright highway.
From many a dingle deep
I wake the deer from sleep;
And, at my warning glow,
The restless, anxious doe
Scents in the silent air
The hunter with his snare.
Or hears the distant call
Of stag with antlers tall,
To whom my silvery glance
Prompts thoughts of dalliance.

My mother guides
The foaming tides;
And then I rise;
On every strand
I take my stand,
   With glittering eyes.
      In forest glade,
I slumber bring
To sap and spring.
My sudden gleam,
   In hollow ways,
      To those dismayed
A sword may seem.

And dreams I give
To those who live
In joyous mood;
To those who brood
In sore distress,
Some happiness.

Knowest thou my name. ’Tis Moonlight! Knowest thou why
I come so gladly from the lofty sky?
Beneath the trees the night was dark and gray,
And thou could’st fleeting glide the watery way,
Stray thro’ the woods, and wander on the shore;
Strike on the birch trunk when the day was o’er.
I wish to point to thee the passageway,
And that is why I visit thee to-day.

A WALK AT SIXTEEN

THE earth was smiling; and the sky was blue;
Still to the verdant grass the dew was clinging.
The world was filled with music, and I, too,
Felt a soft music in my heart was ringing;
A throstle in the thicket out of view
Sang loud, but did he twit me in his singing?
I cared not what he saucy fellow meant;
For I was filled with infinite content.

Our people were at odds, from morning tide
Till night they quarreled; Î could not say why;
She gathered posies, walking at my side.
I climbed a mossy bank, that I might lie
Close at her feet. Before us, we descried
A ruddy mountain height, that seemed to die
Away in sunlight to the horizon’s brim,
And there it lost itself in shadows dim.

She said: “Look at that mount, this hillock bare,
And the ravine that stops the traveler’s way.”
I only saw that she was very fair.
Then she began a merry roundelay;
I liked her voice much better than the air.
And then we found we must not longer stay
In idle dallying, or we would be late
Crossing the wood that ended at our gate.

A sapling elm had fallen across our track;
I ran and raised, and arched it high in air;
The leaves hung o’er that dome, as I held back
The springing trunk, and she passed smiling there;

The pretty child! And then there was no lack
Of looks, and timid starts, as though aware
Of some sweet intimacy, and we gazed around,
At our own feet, and on the humid ground!

And all the summer fields around were stilled;
Sometimes, without a word, she raised her eyes;
And then, it seemed to me, that we were filled
With thoughts that tender glances bid arise;
Thoughts those young hearts of ours were better skilled
To speak than human tongue, however wise;
And our hearts said, that day, in the green wood,
Things that we dared not utter if we could.

A PROTEST

WHAT sort of man your spouse is, I can’t tell!
That he is fat and coarse, is undisputed;
The spouse of her I die for may be — well!
One-eyed, or bandy-legged, or e’en clubfooted.
The stupid, harmless man will not repel
A friend of yours — if short, he is well suited
To stand between us; we have naught to dread —
Our love-making goes on above his head!

It seems to me, however, that to-day
You are somewhat capricious, and you make
Mention of oaths and vows that you must pay.
You tell me that remorse your heart would break —
You, young and lovely and aspiring, pray,
What path in life were you ordained to take?
’Twas surely not to languish day and night
With naught but this baboon for your delight!

And would you one remorseful moment find
Spring from deceiving this misshapen lout?
This eunuch, as I think, in flesh and mind,
For verily, I have a nervous doubt,
Whether he’ll leave a progeny behind!
Look how his bead-like eyes pop in and out!
His legs are short and stunted, and his chest
Sinks in the gulf of that surprising vest!

He is a man whom nothing seems to please;
At dinner ties his napkin round his neck,
To keep his shirt front safe from drops of grease!
And yet he lets the snuff his linen speck.

In drawing-rooms he is never at his ease;
If nothing comes his early flight to check,
He seeks the kitchen fire, and snugly, there,
Snores over his digestion in a chair.

He smugly still repeats his little jokes,
He calls you “Pussy” and “his little pet.”
And when there’s a dispute, he likes the folks
To make him arbiter, that he may win
Some credit from it; doubtless by such strokes,
He gained the Cross, and many an epithet,
“Good,” “Kindly,” “Solid,” yet he’ll chuck the chin
Of cook or housemaid when his wife’s not in!

He checks the grocery bill, and darns his hose;
He puts the candle out when you’re in bed.
Tho’ he may love you also, I suppose,
His love of gain is more to him than bread.
A donkey knows more Homer than he knows
Of your true nature, so that, if I said

To him I loved you, he’d not think it mattered —
But probably consider himself flattered!
Blow and inflate this dummy gendarme made,
Of leather! — scarecrow, set to drive away
The lover, as a puppet is displayed
To scare the birds from fruit-trees. For one day,
Not longer, are the little birds afraid! —
When in my arms your head at last you lay,
Let him stand up between us, and our first
Embrace will cause this wind-blown man to burst.

LOVE’S ENDING

THE gay sun lit the fields, and day was new;
And soft caresses, under the calm shade
Of leaves, were multiplied; each flower, where dew
Still sparkled, of its cup an offering made
To dazzling insects, who their suit renew
To sip the sweetness in that store-house laid.
Large butterflies, on velvet petals sinking,
Drank nectar there, and shook their wings while drinking.

’Twas hard to say, which was the living thing;
The insect seemed an animated flower;
And calls of tenderness came on the wing
Of breezes, in that tepid morning hour;
And each to other creatures seemed to cling
In love, and in the midst of the fresh bower, —
The crimson mist that comes with rising morn, —
The love song of the pairing larks was borne.

The haughty stallions their passions neighed;
While little rabbits, with a pirouette,
Leaped as the offering of their heart they made.
An amorous joy, like a strong, dazzling jet
Of fragrance, was expanding thro’ the glade;
It grew to the horizon, till it met
A myriad hearts, and then at last, these broke
Into the music that the welkin woke.

And in the gloom of hospitable boughs,
Where tiny peoples have their habitation,
Where creatures, like to grains of dust, carouse;
Whose forms escape our eyes’ investigation;

To whom the very bud in which they browse,
Is the vast kingdom of a countless nation;
These two had their caresses, and were prancing
Like motes along a bar of sunlight dancing.

And two young lovers on a path were wending,
Which tranquil led thro' wheat-fields of the plain;
Not arm in arm, not hand in hand, but bending
Vexed eyes upon the ground. He did not deign
To look upon the land, and she was tending
Toward a bank, where she to sit was fain.
"The truth," she said, "can be no longer hid;
You do not love me now, as once you did."

"Is that my fault?" he asked; and by her side
He sat him; and the minds of both were tossed
On waves of reverie, wandering far and wide.
"A year!" she cried, "To think that all is lost

In one short year! Eternal Love has died
Earlier, I think, than in the case of most.
Yet still your words re-echo in my ear,
And, ah! your past caresses still are dear!

"What is it can have changed you in one day?
You kissed me yester-morn, my love; your hand,
If now it chance to touch me, shrinks away.
Why can I from your lips no more command
A kiss? Reply, if you have aught to say."
He answered, "Think you I can understand?"
And then she met his eye, as if perusing
Some sign, that might declare what he was musing.

"Oh, do you not remember — why forget? —
How once you kissed me, and how each caress

Brought a wild throb that lingers with me yet?"
He answered in a tone of weariness,
Rolling with listless hand a cigarette,
And rising from his seat, "All this distress
Is useless; what you mention now is o'er.
Why speak of days that can return no more?"

Then slowly they proceed, with forehead bent,
And idly dangling arms; and in her throat
The sobs were swelling, while her heart-beats sent
Hot tears to gem the lashes where they float.
Two doves rose from the barley, as they went,
Frayed into flight, and coo'd with joyous note.
Beneath their feet, o'er azure sky, o'er all,
Love was enthroned and kept high festival

Long the winged lovers in the heavens kept wheeling.
A lad, upon his way to work, was chanting
A merry song, that touched the tender feeling
Of a young farm lass, who rushed, red and panting,
From the green shade, in which she had been kneeling,
To meet him. But our couple both were wanting
In speech. He seemed in irritable mood
And eyed her sidelong, till they reached a wood.

Upon the herbage of a path, athwart
The grass still bright and fresh, the sunlight fell
In patches at their feet. They had no heart
To note the natural charms they knew so well.
Then she broke down, panting beneath the smart
Of sorrows that her heart indignant swell,
And, toward the foot of a tall tree-trunk creeping,
Burst into storms of mingled sobs and weeping.

He waited for a time in hushed surprise,
Hoping that soon she would her tears control,

While from his lips long clouds of smoke arise;
He watched them vanishing, as they unroll,
Stamped with his foot, and said with stony eyes;
“Leave off! Enough of all this rigmarole!
I will not quarrel with you, and these tears
Are foolish in a person of your years.”

“Leave me to weep alone, and go!” she said,
Uplifting to him eyes in tear-drops drowned.
“Oh how my heart is raptured, tho’ dismayed,
And tortured! Why should souls by love be bound
One day, and not for life? Why should love fade
And hearts cease loving? I am faithful found
To you, and still I love you more and more —
But you’ll ne’er love me as you loved before!”

He answered her, “Yet I can naught avail.
’Tis thus our mortal life has been ordained;
And every joy below must some day fail;
And bliss is fleeting. I have ne’er maintained
That love of mine should last until the tale
Of years was told for us. Love rose and reigned
And abdicated, but when true love ends,
Lovers may sometimes ripen into friends.

“And after this hard passage, may not we
The sweet serene affection cultivate
To which ’tis best old lovers should agree?”
And then he tried to raise her, as she sate
Sobbing and sad— “Alas, you do not see
How women scorned live ever desolate.”
And then she wrung her hands in bitter pain,
“My God! My God!” she cried, and wept again.

And he, with not a single word, looked on,
Then after a long pause he said, “I’ll go,

You will not cease your folly.” He was gone.
And she sat lonely there, and weeping low.
Legions of birds raised, in a joyful tone,
A storm of music; and, her tale of woe
Forsaking, Philomel was gay; her throat
Seemed dropping pearls with every liquid note.

And from the glittering foliage, many a strain
Was warbled forth and, like a hautboy soft,
The linnet trilled, and throstles piped amain;
And, in the intervals, the finches oft
Added their little chirp to the refrain.
Some doves from out the lofty boughs descend,
And standing on the pathway in a ring
Were wooing, open-billed, with quivering wing.

She felt through all the landscape, wood and wold,
A breath was moving, tender, yet with fire
And fragrance loaded, and its presence told
Of purest love and natural desire,
Purged in a furnace like refinèd gold;
She, looking up, as if she would aspire
To love’s ideal in a brighter land,
Murmured, “Men are too base to understand.”

A STREET CHAT

When on the boulevard I take a stroll,
How often have I heard, to vex my soul,
Two *decores,* who smiling as they meet,
Talk nothing else but nonsense in the street.

FIRST DECORÉ
What, is it you?

SECOND DECORÉ
What chance has brought you out?

FIRST DECORÉ
How is your health?

SECOND DECORÉ
You see I get about;
But how are you?

FIRST DECORÉ
Ah! well I can’t complain.

SECOND DÉCORÉ
What glorious weather after so much rain!

FIRST DECORÉ
I think, if it continues to be bright,
We’ll have a splendid summer.

SECOND DECORÉ
You are right.

FIRST DECORÉ
To-morrow, I shall start for my estate,
To rest a little, and recuperate.

SECOND DECORÉ
Your change will do you good.

FIRST DECORÉ
My lilac-tree
Is blooming later far than formerly;
The air is feverish and the nights are chill.

SECOND DECORÉ
You see how red the moon is? Do you still
Enjoy your fishing?

FIRST DECORÉ
Yes, ’tis pretty fair.

SECOND DECORÉ
What further news has come of that affair?

FIRST DECORÉ
There’s nothing new.

SECOND DECORÊ
And how’s her ladyship?

FIRST DECORÉ
She’s well, but for a little touch of grippe.

SECOND DECORÊ
It seems this grippe is spreading, tell me pray
What's your opinion of Machin's new play?

FIRST DECORÉ
I have not seen it. What is said of it?

SECOND DECORÉ
A *fiasco,* though it might have proved a hit,
But it was far too labored. Now, Sardou
Is not like that, his work is swift and true,
And strong.

FIRST DECORÊ
O yes, Sardou is very strong.

SECOND DECORÉ
Machin works hard, but then his method's wrong.
That's well enough, if one a volume write;
In reading books, the toil and labor quite
Escape our notice, but a play, a play —
Should sound like conversation of the day.

FIRST DECORÉ
You make me think, dear sir, of Feuillet,
That's prose for you! — but book-hacks of our day —
Disgusting! — but, I've little time to read.
The daily paper, now, is all I need.

SECOND DÉCORÉ
The paper, and — the fair sex! —
[Then they grin
Pleased to confess a fashionable sin.]

SECOND DÉCORÉ
And not the table?

FIRST DECORÉ
No! — at least, I'm free
From the disgusting vice of gluttony.

SECOND DECORÉ
And politics — the business of the nation —

FIRST DECORÉ
Such subjects are my only consolation
In life.

SECOND DECORÉ
To seek alone the nation's weal,
And dedicate your life its ills to heal,
Is certainly a great and noble aim.
We in the Chamber have some men of fame
As orators.

FIRST DECORÉ
Yes, they are very strong.

SECOND DECORÉ
Since Thiers and Changarnier are gone,
Few such great thunderers to our side belong;
They've left us legal quibblers alone.
But apropos of reading, do you read
This Zola?

FIRST DECORÉ
A mere mud heap!

SECOND DECORÉ
Yes, indeed.
And then we hear complaints that things are dear!
That fraud and trickery and theft appear!
Such writings sap the morals of the land.
What are we coming to?

FIRST DECORÉ
Alas! good-bye,
Dear sir, I'm in a hurry, and must fly.

SECOND DECORÉ
Good-bye, my compliments to Madame, pray.

FIRST DECORÉ
I thank you, my respects I wish you'd pay
To your fair daughter.
[Then they go their way,
And the priests tell us such have souls divine;
That if there is in human life a sign,
That God man's place did o'er the beasts ordain,
It is, that thought and reason rule his brain;
That light and progress o'er his history reign,
Yet long as this old world of ours existed
Has idle, human silliness persisted.
If ever choice for me should hesitate,
Between a bull-calfs and a man's estate,'
I think my reason quickly would dictate,
That far superior, on every plea,
Is silence to long-tongued stupidity.]

A RUSTIC VENUS

THE gods are all eternal, among us
They spring to birth, as in old Italy,
Though men no longer give them serious
Observance, as of yore; and when they die,
The people bury them with face serene,
And quite forget that they have ever been.

New gods shall yet be born, and those who last
Arise shall reign above the noisy crowd,
No matter who gainsays. It is not past —
That grand Herculean age; the clamor loud
That greets the conqueror in his red career
Sees but another demigod appear.

And this old earth, with all its varied face, —
Spring with its garlands, and its tresses green,
Summer, the time of love for every race,
And placid autumn with its golden sheen,
And winter resting time for all, — has might
To bring a score of Venuses to light.

I.

Full sunlight beat upon a boundless shore, —
A fisherman, who bore upon his back,
Along the foaming line where billows roar,
The osier-woven burden of his pack,
Heard at his feet, from the low sandy plain,
The sobs of some one in distress or pain.

There he discerned an infant, on the ground,
Abandoned evidently, cast away
Naked and unprotected — therefore bound
To be the bitter floodtide’s easy prey;
It might have been the luckless progeny
Of the eternal kiss of sand and sea.

He dried the salt dew from its satin skin,
And in his pack he placed the dainty prize,
And round it wrapped his nets of meshes thin,
And bore it off triumphant in surprise.
Like to a rocking bark upon the deep,
His light pack swayed and lulled the babe to sleep.

Along the shore he went, until he grew
A dim and indistinguishable dot,
And then the horizon opened and withdrew
His form; and from the blank and lonely spot,
Whence he had started, his bare foot-prints made
Over the sand, a dwindling, endless braid.

The child thus found became a general pet
The country round; and often there was strife
Who first should have the privilege to set
A kiss on that small form, a rose of life,
Upon that dimpled waist so soft and fair,
Upon those tiny arms, forever bare.

For she would offer to each visitor
Those little rounded arms for their delight
As if a kiss was happiness to her;
And, when she saw them ravished at the sight
Of her own beauty, then her joy would trace
Smile after smile upon her chubby face.

When she at last was old enough to go
Into the crowded alley of the street,
Struggling to step and swaying to and fro, —
The women issued forth, and rushed to meet
Her coming with acclaim, and all were wild
To gaze upon the beauty of the child.

In later years, in rags was she bedight —
A scanty garb, exposing molded knee,
And tapering ankle, for she bounded light
As mountain chamois, and as fair and free,
Through grasses reaching to her lips, for hours
Chasing the butterflies among the flowers.

Her cheeks attracted a fond kiss from all,
She was a flower, that lures the flying troop
To light upon its dazzling coronal,
And in the fields, the boys she met would stoop
And clasp her little head with fond embrace;
And gaze enraptured on her lovely face.

And they would kiss her with the same wild, rare,
Ecstatic tremor, as a man may feel,
When first his mistress yields her shoulder bare
To his caresses, and the old would steal
Their arms about her, dance her on their knee,
Until she laughed aloud, in childish glee.

The old! — with withered arms about her waist —
Would flush with memory of forgotten days;
And once again that vivid rapture taste
Which through those ancient hours of sweetness plays.
And casting down their eyes, for tears were there,
Touch with their wrinkled lips that fragrant hair.

Soon thro’ the public roads her way she took;
Not lonely, for about her ever went
A troop of lads, who had their home forsook;
And every truant, every malcontent,
Was found her growing company among,
For with a word she conquered old and young.

From morn till eve, with tireless steps, she sped
Drawing this wandering cohort in her train,
As by the spell of love their hearts she led;
And while they strove her kisses to obtain,
And their yet budding passions to assuage,
They did not shrink from acts of brigandage.

And some, as soon as night her veil had spread,
Went forth and climbed the walls of many a yard,
And stole the garden apples ripe and red,
Fearless of those who had been placed on guard,
Of furious dogs who raise the loud alarm,
Or bludgeon wielded by an angry arm.

And others toiled for some less dangerous prize,
And set their snares to catch the lark or linnet,
And brought a cageful, pleased at her surprise
To see a throstle or a bullfinch in it;
And boldly, in their quests for gifts like these,
They’d climb from branch to branch the loftiest trees.

Shrimp-fishing was her favorite diversion;
She’d stand barelegged in shallows of the deep,
And cast her net, and with supreme exertion,
Pull out some wriggling creature at a sweep;
While in the limpid flood, her comrades see,
The trembling contours of her leg and knee.

When night upon their homeward path was stealing,
Stopping midway upon the shelving shore,
They'd crowd and kiss her in a burst of feeling;
And ever she, with resignation, bore
Their hot caresses, and stood calm and mute,
Offering her tender cheek for the salute.

II.

Her charms did well her loving-kindness suit.
And as she grew in years, her beauty's grace
Grew finer, till she ripened, like a fruit
Whose fragrance fills with life the dwelling-place.
Her hair, a tint of gold, that seemed laid on a
Red background, as in Titian's Madonna.

The hardy sun upon her neck and face,
The open pastures and the breezes warm,
With little specks of fire had left their trace;
And, with soft light, had dappled every charm.
Her swelling breasts a robe did scarce confine;
They curved in rising mounds her bodice line.

All dresses seemed becoming, when she wore them;
They found her supple lines could dominate
Whatever drapery a whim threw o'er them;
Proud as a queen in glittering robes of state,
She envied not the rich their raiment rare,
Tho' she was envied that her face was fair.

A cloven upper lip, a cloven chin,
Lips that were often parted to disclose
The pearly line of teeth that lay within
That waving barrier of trembling rose.

Blue, thoughtful eyes which so with love could dance
That some men would have died for one fond glance.

For when men saw her coming, they would flock
Before her, if but once to catch her eye;
And she would smile, feeling the fiery shock
Of passion from those sparkling pupils fly.
The fanning of her garments, as she passed,
Was to their vain desire a furnace blast.

Her very rags showed somewhat the disdain
Her beauty felt for ornament; her mien
So artless was, so kind, it made more plain
That noble mind of princess or of queen,
Which under such a humble garb was hid;
There something noble was in all she did.

And people said of her, not only where
She lived, but wide the neighboring country round,
That all who looked upon that figure rare
Were afterward her faithful followers found;
To touch her hand, and linger at her side,
Would make men constant to her till they died.

In the hard winter days, when keenest frost
Can penetrate the thickest cottage wall
To people in their beds, and snows are tossed
By tempest, in the hollow roads to fall,
Shadows are seen around her window sill
At nightfall, and the horizon pale and still,

Is checkered by these phantoms of the night
Who prowl like wolves about her dwelling-place.
And in the summer time, when skies are bright,
And merry harvesting goes on apace,

And dark-armed reapers in the wheat are lined,
And the blue flax flower shakes at every wind,

In fields that wave and rustle all day long,
The new-bound sheaves she gathered as they fell.
The sun above their head was high and strong,
It shone from out a sky of asphodel,
And floods of molten ore it poured amain,
Scorching and blasting all the laboring plain.

The bending reapers never cease their toil,
Panting for breath, and uttering not a word;
But still the long scythe gathers in its spoil
With rhythmic stroke, whose swishing sound is heard,
All through the drowsy upland, like the roll
Of breakers ‘gainst some jutting rocky knoll.

But she, in scarlet skirt and open throat,
Her full chemise scarce closed upon her breast,
By a loose kerchief, hardly seemed to note
Those-sun beats, which the very grass oppressed,
And forced the summer flowers to droop and fold
Their petals, as they sank upon the mold.

She bore, as if against that sun-beat steeled,
Advancing with light step, a sheaf of wheat,
Or truss of hay new-gathered from the field;
And when they saw her walk with tripping feet,
The men looked up, and felt within them move
That tremor of the heart that heralds love.

They seemed to scent afar, that sultry hour,
The fragrance of her balmy breath, that sweet,
Thrilling perfume of love as of a flower;
Then as the evening saw their task complete,

And the red star declined in heaven and stood
Ready to plunge at last into the flood,

There, suddenly, against the evening's rose,
On the plain's edge are seen the forms, that stand
Gigantic, of two reapers ranged as foes,
They meet in deadly combat, hand to hand;
Distinct they showed from off that crimson field,
And sunset flashes on the scythes they wield.

The shadows now enshroud, as in a tomb,
The peaceful countryside, and like a sweat
Break out the drops of dew, in the cold gloom,
On stubble and shorn meadow; and the last jet
Of sunlight fades, and with one glittering speck
The glories of a star the orient deck.

The last sounds, faint and distant, die away;
The yapping of a dog at some locked door;
The sheep bells tinkle, in the distance gray
Of the long road that seams the heathery moor;
The earth low rustles as it sinks to rest;
The stars come out upon heaven's dusky breast.

The way she took buried itself in shades
Of woodland, and with tripping step she sped,
Enjoying in those tortuous arcades
The balmy odors that the foliage shed.
And oft she stopped to gaze in wonder through
The tangled boughs that roofed the avenue,

As twinkling star and constellation spread
Like pearls upon the gleaming firmament,
It seemed that something floated o'er her head,
Gracious, and breathing to her heart content

A sapphire silence, that had power to bless;
As if the night came down with a caress,

And on her spirit poured a languorous spell
Subtle and soft; and yet that tepid gloom,
In which her sense seemed swooning, did compel,
Her spirit in its reverie, to give room
To vague misgivings, founded on distress,
A feeling of her utter loneliness.

The furtive pattering of unseen feet,
The timid bounds of creatures of the night,
That o'er the woodland's mossy carpet fleet,
With eye unquiet and with footsteps light;
Within the wood faint sounds and rustlings rouse,
And viewless birds dash down on creaking boughs.

She sat her down, feeling a numbness creep
From her heel upward till it reached her thigh;
And then an impulse seized her, strong and deep,
All her encumbering garments to lay by;
And lie on scented herbs, awaiting there,
The magic kiss that floated in the air.

And oft a shuddering tremor shook her frame;
And oft a feverish flush upon her skin
Sent to her marrow a consuming flame;
The glowworms round like points of fire, within
That leafy covert hovering, seemed to bring
The stars of heaven to give her welcoming.

But suddenly, upon her she felt slip
A ponderous living body, and there fell
From one whose mouth was fever, on her lip
A shower of kisses; in that quiet dell

Soft as a bed of slumber, she was pressed
By two strong arms, close to a lover’s breast.

But he in turn upon the grassy glade,
Quick as an ox beneath the ax’s blow,
Full length and senseless suddenly was laid,
Stretched at the mercy of a furious foe;
His rival clutched his throat, and groaning he
Lay flat and helpless ‘neath the conqueror’s knee.

But he, the victor, is himself o’erthrown.
A furious fist, planted between his eyes,
Lays him upon the greensward, pale and prone;
And, through the dense and tangled coppice, rise
Echoes of many footsteps on the way,
In haste and fury to the field of fray.

Then, in the gloomy shadows of the grove,
The dimlit battle recommenced its rage, —
A fight of men delirious with love;
Fiercer than stags, that with crossed antlers wage
Wild warfare for the timid dappled doc
That waits to follow with the conquering foe.

And there were screams of rage, and groans of pain,
And crack of ribs beneath the fierce embrace
Of iron sinews; and swift blows that rain,
Hard as a hammer, on the foeman’s face;
While on the battle she gazed placidly,
Throned on the trunk of an uprooted tree.

She watched the tide of battle ebb and flow,
And pride and joy were gleaming in her eye;
Pride, that it was at last her bliss to know
How loved she was; and joy that she was by

To see the fierce encounter, and attend
The thrilling arbitration of its end.

And when at last a solitary man
Stood on that field, victorious over all,
Blood-stained and dizzy tho' he was, she ran
To meet him, and before his feet to fall;
And, as beneath a tufted tree they sate,
Received the wild beast's tribute to his mate.

III.

In every sudden village conflagration,
The sparks shoot forth, as from a threshing-floor
The chaff is scattered, and the desolation
Is very quickly spread from door to door,
From roof to roof, till, running far and wide,
The flames extend o'er all the countryside.

Each house, in fact, a sort of torch becomes,
A huge and smoking torch, that sets alight
The thatch and wooden wall of neighboring homes;
And, like a raging monster of the night,
It seizes every homestead it sets eyes on,
'Till finally it reaches the horizon.

And thus it is with love's consuming flame,
Which ravages the heart of all it kindles;
Love can the body's vigor scorch and tame,
For like a fire its fury never dwindles:
From man to man spreads on the mad desire,
'Till the whole neighborhood is wrapped in fire.

Through woodland paths, embowered in shadowy green,
Through dingles deep, her reckless instinct drove her

At nightfall through those paths where might be seen,
Most probably, the coming of a lover.
When more than one man felt the passion cruel,
The matter was decided by a duel.

Then to the conqueror she made surrender,
As if this life of sense was her vocation,
Without one feeling, tedious or tender,
By night and day receiving the ovation
Of kissing lovers, without love or hate,
Accepting everything as merely fate.

And all who scanned her well from top to toe,
And saw her marvelous body’s hidden graces,
And plucked the fruit whose seeds the Sisters sow
On some immortal favorite’s flanks and faces,
Were secretly with feverish tremor fired —
A sense of something dreaded or desired.

They shivered, as beneath a frosty blast;
And yet it was the tremor of a fever;
They looked regretfully upon the past,
Yet eagerly they sought, and could not leave her;
And with wild words, whene’er she was away,
Followed her flying footsteps night and day.

IV.

The very beasts the sight of her affected
With many signs of interest and emotion;
And she caressed them all, and ne’er neglected
To pat and call them; for she had a notion,
That round her path the creatures seemed to hover,
With all the gestures of a human lover.

On furred and woolly coats her hand she laid,
These dumb admirers tenderly to greet;
For her far off the very stallions neighed;
The dogs came after her and licked her feet;
The bulls stood prancing as if they had seen
A heifer come to meet them on the green.

And then the barnyard cocks, as if the call
Of amorous combat sounded in the air,
Flapped loud their pinions; and with antlers tall
The stags prepared for fight when she was near,
And, on their faun-like, tapering limbs, drew back.
And front to front, made ready for attack.

The wasps buzzed round her, yet they never stung;
The yellow bees walked o’er her skin, nor set
A single prick there; birds high circling sung,
As she went by, their sweetest chansonnette,
Brushed her with fondling wing, upon their way,
Or fed their young that in her bosom lay.

She filled with love the flocks upon the road, —
The solemn rams, with crooked horn, who slighted
The shepherd’s shrilly call, that trembling flowed;
And the sheep bleated low, when she was sighted;
And in a mincing amble at her side,
Kept up with her alert and vigorous stride.

V.

On certain evenings, when the sky was fair
She’d steal away and seek in secrecy,
To bathe her limbs, beneath the balmy air,
In the cool briny waters of the sea;

When on the rising tide and sandy dune,
Was poured the pallid radiance of the moon.

And she would hurry quickly to the shore
And o’er the yellow sands, that stretched in view
To boundless distance, she would flee, before
The shadow that seemed bounding to pursue
Her footsteps; though that shadow was her own;
No living thing was there, but she alone.

Her garments on the sandy shore she set,
And naked, like a goddess, she descended,
And in the wave her snowy ankle wet,
The wave whose back was pearl and emerald blended;
Then, stretching out her arms with sudden leap,
She plunged into the bosom of the deep.

When from that ocean bath she came to land,
Her heart was happy, and her body dripping;
She stretched herself full length upon the sand,
Into the depths of that soft mantle slipping,
‘Till the strong, splendid body found a rest,
In something that inclosed it like a nest.

And when her steps turned homeward, soft and slow,
Incrusted by the fleck of ocean brine,
Her glorious form with new life seemed to glow,
One might have said a statue, tall and fine,
Of lustrous bronze had issued from the roar
Of breakers, flung by tempest to the shore.

And on the mold of beauty which her form
Had left imprinted on that sandy pillow,
The heavens looked down, with million eyes of warm
And loving wonder; and the stealing billow

Reached it at last, and, with effacing hand,
Leveled once more the sad and sullen strand.

VI.

She was the Spirit of Life, one time created
Under primeval law, who shows her face
On earth, from time to time reincarnated,
Eternal type of our poor human race;
Whose beauty reigns, the queen of mundane things,
Who by her dazzling power in fetters flings

The human will: Art is her sacred child.
And She is the beloved of all, as all
Loved Cleopatra with a passion wild
And Phryne, they love her, and she lets fall
Her tenderness on all, like balmy dew
Descending softly from heaven’s arch of blue.

No living thing she hated; with a smile
The very humblest she would try to please.
There was a shepherd, in whose acts of guile
The fiercest wolves became accomplices;
A wrinkled man, — begotten of a witch
Who threw her naked offspring in a ditch.

A shepherd of the place picked up the brat,
And raised him, leaving him as legacy
The furious hatred of a cornered rat
‘Gainst all in wealth and in prosperity.
Moreover he inherited, ’tis said,
A pack of magic secrets, dark and dread.

The sireless child to lonely boyhood grew;
He led to random pasture goats and geese;

Stood on the coppice side the whole day through;
And, with no hope of shelter or release,
Endured the pelting rain and bitter blast,
Or, worse, the insults on his lineage cast.

Then, when the labor of the day was done,
Wrapped in his cloak upon the cottage floor,
He sought for slumber; yet he never won
Repose, till he had thought of those who snore
On curtained beds of down, and then, out-worn,
He slept until the sky was lit by dawn.

The horizon kindled with a streak of day,
And his black bread he took upon the plain,
While watching o’er the distant cottage play
The rising thread of smoke with famine’s pain;
It told him of what most he did desire,
The fragrant soup, that bubbled on the fire.

And he grew old; and round his dwelling dim
And wretched, rose an atmosphere of dread,
In the long distant vales men spoke of him;
Tattling of what he did and what he said
In talks of him full many a cheek turned pale,
And women watched till morn to hear the tale.

They said he could control men’s destiny,
Giving them, as he chose, good luck or bad;
Call down disaster on an enemy,
And turn to dust and ashes all he had.
Could read the stars, and in the heavens could spell
The words of fire that all the future tell.

A vagabond, he kept from day to day
His hovel habitation: from the crowd

Around him ever skulking far away.
Yet often cries were heard that strange and loud
He uttered on the wind, and to his cry
Wild voices, not of this world, made reply.

It was believed his eyes could fascinate;
That sinister and evil power they cast;
That they the wildest bull could subjugate;
Then darker rumors thro' the country passed.
A girl that met him once, in falling night,
Was strangely shocked and influenced by the sight.

He did not speak a word to her, and still
Next midnight she awoke, her mind oppressed
With panic; for she felt another's will
Call her afar to lie upon his breast;
She struggled with this influence, but at length
His silent passion overcame her strength.

Although it was pitch dark, and the lone night
Impressed her spirit with alarm and awe,
From her own home she secretly took flight
To share his wretched hovel and his straw.
'Tis said, that other girls shared this one's fate,
To glut the monster's lust insatiate.

That all of them, and they were young and fair,
Without one tremor of disgust or shame,
Exposed to him their virgin bosoms bare;
And suffered from him what we may not name.
They really seemed in love, and smiled as smugly,
As if he had not been both old and ugly.

His face was hairy from his shaggy brow
Down to the matted covering of his chin;

His eyebrows like the bristles of a sow
Stuck out; his cheeks were rougher than the skin
That girt his loins; and such his brawny throat.
In fact in face he was a very goat.

And when upon the lofty mountain crest
Where shone the sun, though on the plains below
The darkling shadows of the evening rest,
They saw this evil-faced old shepherd go,
And the loud clank of his clubfoot was heard,
You might have thought the devil had appeared.

This aged Satan of the country, filled
With shameless passions, once upon a time
Met her whom all the people round had willed
Should be their adoration; ’twas the time
Of April, and the gorse had spread around
Her golden flowers upon the barren ground

Of a gray, grassless foothill of the plain.
The sight of her to this lascivious loon
Was like a sunstroke; and he strove in vain
To check the trembling fire, that made him swoon.
Then gathering all his life into one stare,
He fed upon that face surpassing fair.

Their glances, crossed like rapiers in a fight.
It was the meeting of Divinities,
Hostile, one god of darkness, one of light,
A sudden meeting under earthly skies.
He starts like one with leveled piece, whose eyes
Expect a deer and see a panther rise.

She passes on, — the bloom of her blond hair,
As o’er the slope she glides that April day,

Is blended with that gold of blossoms rare,
That flutter in the gorse upon her way.
And yet the clustering ringlets that bedight her
Are paler than the flower, tho’ somewhat brighter.

And now she trembled, for she oft had learned
His hideous and impious renown;
And tho’ her fear was half to loathing turned,
In wonderment she wandered up and down;
Until the labors of the day had past;
And night with its companions came at last.

She was alone, and saw for the first time
With dread, the deepening shadows that descended
In fields and woodlands; but the measured chime
Of bells that with the song of reapers blended,
As her path entered a dark avenue,
Filled her loud-beating heart with courage new.

The oaks were thickly ranged on either side
Of that broad grassy avenue, and there
She seemed to see, with stature magnified,
The hideous shepherd with his shaggy hair,
Standing erect beneath a spreading oak,
And yet he neither made a sign nor spoke.

Yet as she hurried by, in frantic flight,
She knew not whether that from which she shrunk
So madly, in the dimness of the night
Had not been merely some dismantled trunk,
That raised its withered arms, as if in wrath,
Standing midway across the forest path.

And days and months went by; and now her mind
And reason, like the bird that loses breath

As with lead-burdened wing he fights the wind,
Are overwrought and troubled to the death,
And sink beneath the weight of ceaseless fear;
The deadly presage of some ill so near.

She dare not even step beyond the door;
For soon as she appears upon the plain,
She’s sure to see that wretch start up before
Her footsteps, at the turning of the lane;
His crafty eye that seems to say, “To-morrow,”
Like hot iron upon her ceaseless sorrow

This heavy burden bends her will at last;
And in her heart, which panic fears benumb,
She feels fatality her lot has cast;
Her destiny compels her to succumb,
She goes to tell the Master her surrender
Thinking it is the Powers above that send her.

It was a night of winter, and the snow,
By which the earth was mantled wide and deep,
Revealed her stilly whiteness high and low
In hill and dale; the breezes gently creep
In weariness, as if from the world’s end
They came, and frozen could no further wend.

The forest creaked beneath that glacial gust,
Where the tall, naked trees stand rigidly
Their gray trunks powdered by the icy dust;
The moon is shining in the gloomy sky;
Her profile but a single line of light.
The very stones are pinched by winter’s might.

Thus she advanced, altho’ her feet with frost
Are bitten, and she moved without a care;

Sure that the journey’s labor is not lost.
Once ended, she will find her shepherd there;
Like a black patch along the lonely route
She hurries. She stands terror-struck and mute.

Her feet are rooted to the spot, for lo!
Across the waste she sees two powerful hounds
Running and gamboling along the snow.
The shadows of their limbs in mighty bounds
Outstretched, seemed swollen to gigantic size,
And a wild glare of joy is in their eyes.

She recognized them as the shepherd’s pair
Of watchdogs. Breathless, shrunken in their flanks
By hunger, with soft eyes, beneath long hair
Half hidden, they came on, as giving thanks
For the kind welcome visit she was paying.
Then she had no more terror of their baying.

Before her they both bounded, with sharp cries
Of joy, as at a royal festival,
Bristling with fangs that glistened laughterwise.
Like two great princes in some noble hall
Seeking the Princess Beautiful to bring
Into the presence of their lord the king,

And there conducting her, as round her steed,
They prance and caracole, with stately glee.
So did these guides of love this Woman lead.
The Man was waiting for her step, and he
Who upright stood before a water butt,
Came, seized her arm, and pointed to his hut.

The door of the vile hovel open stood
And in he pushed her, while his rude emprise

Divested her of everything that could
Hide her pure beauty from his ardent eyes.
He did not try his rapture to dissemble,
From head to foot the wretch was all a-tremble.

He acted as a man who feels the shock
Of long anticipation safely ended;
As one who turns the key and opes the lock,
Which has so far the aimed-at prize defended;
Panting he stands, like beagles, who pursue
But have not caught the quarry full in view.

And when she felt him pressing on her skin
The slimy kiss that chilled her like a snail,
Perceiving the flocks' odor lingered in
His garments, like the rank and pungent trail
Of vermin, then she shuddered, and was mute,
Under the frosty thrill of the salute.

But while he held her fast, the thought came o'er him,
Viewing her tender flanks, her features line,
That many haughty striplings had, before him,
Embraced and kissed that effigy divine;
That he had claimed and summoned to his call
One who was made to be beloved of all —

The heart of the old cripple felt arise
Within it pangs of jealousy, so keen
As would admit no pause or compromise;
A mixture of satiety and spleen
Prompted in him a longing, vague as cruel,
To take dire vengeance on this precious jewel!

First she submitted to her shaggy wooer;
Then, soon as she resisted, he was wild;

And with raised fist he threatened to undo her.
The silent snow, in massive drifts up-piled,
Deadened the cries, the groans, the shrieks of pain,
Which told that somebody was being slain,

But suddenly the dogs, that watched outside,
The lady's guardians, of their office proud, —
Uttered a dismal howl, which echoed wide
Along the level desert, long and loud,
And as it died away into a whine,
Cold shocks of horror shivered down their spine.

Then, in that hut a bitter war was waged —
Thuds of a body 'gainst the wainscot flung, —
A combat within narrow walls engaged —
Sobs from a weak and weeping woman wrung, —
A pause, and then a storm of rage and rattle —
Goes on persistently the furious battle,

And only ceases, after one faint cry
For help has died unechoed on the waste.
And then the day falls feebly from a sky
Of ashen pallor, and the breezes haste,
Whining and moaning in the bitter cold;
And glassy frosts the coppice-trees enfold

Till they look dead; and death in everything
Shows everything is verging to the end.
But like as if a curtain rose, the spring
Of day is opened, on the snow to send
Fresh rosy radiance in a rushing flood;
And all the purple welkin turns to blood.

And blood-red blazes all the mountain side,
That rises at the limit of the plains;

Blood-red the shepherd’s hovel, and the tide
Of sunlight now the icy branches stains
Blood-red; as if one blot of murder lies on
The landscape from horizon to horizon.

And when the shepherd on his threshold stands,
Blood-red in his apparel he appears;
And redder than the dawn his shaggy hands;
But when the crimson of the orient clears
And all is white once more, beneath the ray
Of cloudless sunset in a cloudless day,

He standing at this open cabin door,
Haggard and pale with last night’s festival,
Is redder and more blood stained than before.
He seems as if, ere he had issued, all,
Face, hands, and bosom, he, with fury blind,
Had in one bloody bath incarnadined.

Stooping to grasp some snow, he leaves a trace
Of blood upon the surface; then he kneels
And tries to wash the crimson from his face;
Trembling he sees the ruddy flood that steals
From the hot contact; and with pangs of fright
He turns and takes his course in headlong flight.

Descending from the mountain side, he flies
Along the hollows, and in thickets dense
Like manes that on the ridgy uplands rise;
As a lone wolf the hunter’s cries insense,
He doubles, then he halts with fearful mind,
To see the hamlet has been left behind.

Then in the hollow of his hand he sheds
Some water, with a wish to wash away

The scarlet patches which he so much dreads;
Then he sets out upon his homeward way;
He thinks with terror of his wandering
Even to death, not seeing anything

Or anyone he knows, thro’ snowy wastes
Beneath a sky as blank as it is cold.
He listens, hears a bell, and then he hastes
To his own native village and his fold.
He finds the villagers from gate to gate
Are talking mournful and disconsolate,

And as they run, they cry— “Come, all of you,
For she, the one we loved so well, is dead.”
He passes by, and vanishes from view,
And at some scattered houses shows his head,
And cries, “Come on, and join the funeral train;
My knife the lady of our love has slain.”

And then the rumor spreads, and forth it flies
From village on to village, and they all
Right quickly from their various labors rise,
And follow at the halting shepherd’s call.
None tries his headlong purpose to restrain,
And like a dusky ribbon o’er the plain

A flock of peasants follow in his wake.
And every burgh they traverse swells the mass.
Tumultuous toward the height their way they take
To which the breathless shepherd they see pass
To guide them, but they all of them know well
What woman has been murdered in his cell.

They ask not why, or how he did the deed;
They vaguely see, hovering above the dead

Winged Destiny, and “She had Beauty’s meed,”
They cry aloud, “while he had Craft instead— “
One of these deities must need give way,
Two equal Powers cannot one sceptre sway,

Two rivals cannot share a single sphere,
The god of ugliness never forgives
The god of beauty. Now the crowd draws near
To the vile cabin, where the shepherd lives,
And pause upon the summit of the hill,
And watch their halting guide advancing still,

Till all alone he passes to the scene
Of bloody crime. There, raising from the floor
The body that had once so cherished been,
He flings it naked through the open door;
As if he said, in scorn, as he forswore it —
“There keep this effigy, for I restore it.”

Then to his noisome cabin he retreats
And bolts the door and all are quite content
To leave him tortured still by amorous heats,
And trembling still with rage inconsequent.
Meanwhile the dazzling body by the door
Is lying, utterly unstained by gore.

For finding her reclining motionless
The dogs had tenderly licked off the stain;
She still seemed living and asleep, distress
And all the lingering agony of pain
In dying, could not mar the immortal grace
Whose radiance still lit up her placid face.

The knife stood upright at the very place
Where part the milk-white billows of her breast.

Her figure did a golden outline trace
Upon the snow-white ground, and all expressed
Pity for one so fatally mismated,
And deemed her now an image consecrated.

Her flaming hair was ranged as in a ring,
And glistened like the tail of some great comet,
Or like a sun, a radiant stellar king
Of heaven, who by chance had fallen from it.
One well might call those locks of golden red
The nimbus circling a celestial head.

Some peasants, men of age and modesty,
Strip from their back the goatskin rough and gray,
And cover quick her radiant nudity.
The young with haste cut branches down, and lay
Her body on them, and with little cheer
A score of trembling arms take up the bier.

The crowd, with silent tongue and measured pace,
Accompanied the solemn funeral train
Even to the distant limits of the place;
And like a snake across the snowy plain,
The vast procession wood and mountain skirted,
Then once again the scene became deserted.

But, closely bolted in his hovel dim,
The shepherd felt his solitude unpleasant.
The universe had all deserted him;
He heard no voice of either priest or peasant:
And when he went into the open air,
Naught but a frozen landscape met him there.

But fearing thus in loneliness to bide
He whistled to his dogs, his faithful friends.

And as they do not come, he opens wide
His eyes in wonder, and his glance he bends
In all directions, but it does not meet
That brace of watchdogs bounding at his feet.

He shouts to them, his voice is strong; and yet,
The snow is a great deadener of sound;
His maniac ululations still are met
By no kind bark; at last the dogs are found
Following the course the long procession led;
They leave their master to attend the dead.

TO A CHILD

WHY dost thou weep, my child? for hast thou found
So soon the thorns that hem life’s pathway round?
Run, weave thee garlands of the summer flowers!
Tears ill become thy fresh and tender hours.
All has its season, thine is meant for song;
’Tis thine to sing, my sweet, the summer long.
Run, with light step across the thickets leap,
For all the world seems sad, when children weep,
And all creation happy when they smile again.
Like bursts of sunlight after summer rain,
Smiles on the lips of childhood e’er should play,
And birds beside their cradles pour their lay,
For God bends listening, ‘mid the choiring throng,
To children’s laughter and the wild bird’s song.

ON THE DEATH OF LOUIS BOUILHET

DEAD is my master, dead; oh, why should fate
Have smitten one so kind, so good, so great?
Thus, Lord, thou choosest by thy side to place,
Bereaving us, the loftiest of our race.
Feeble our generation, so we die,
In vain to heaven the sad survivors cry.
Does heaven rejoice when we our best resign?
Why didst thou make them mortal, Power divine?
Can their death add to glory such as Thine?
Dead is he? What is death? There naught we see
Remaining, but a lifeless effigy.
Naught of the man; not e'en the kindly smile,
Which won the hearts it never could beguile;
That seemed to whisper with a look benign,
"Thou art my friend; I love thee, friend of mine."
That intellectual eye, kind, open, clear, —
O what a doom, within the grave to bear
Obstruction's fixity, buried beneath
The boundless, unplumbed mystery of death.
Yet since from dust of earth the buried corn
Starts forth again and in new life is born,
Since naught can perish in creation's range,
Since all is but development and change,
We know that he who left us yesterday,
Has but laid down his earthly cloak of clay;
But whither has his spirit sped away?
Has it left us to join the company
Of the great brother-dead who looked for it on high?
What unknown world before its vision lies,
This soul, that was a poet, one whose eyes
Were wide with wonder and with love's surprise.
Oft from those eyes a glance of splendor came

As potent and as dazzling as a flame.
Now those fixed orbs our inmost soul affright,
They seem amazed as if they knew to sight
Returned, alert, the soul that once had lent them light!
Ah, had you seen his orchard blooming gay,
And heard him chat with me the hours away;
How the old poet bared his heart to me
In talk — then buried in deep reverie
Would leave me, for the man was nature’s child.
Ah, poor Bouilhet! he dead? the good? the mild
In spirit? — for indeed he seemed to me,
A new Messiah who had brought the key
To that high heaven where slumbers poesy.
And now behold him dead, gone is his soul
To that eternal world which is the goal
Of genius, yet his spirit from on high
Doubtless still sees us, and can hear the cry
Of one whose heart love for the dead can never die!

SOUVENANCE

WHEN Phœbus on his car is mounting high,
And the quenched moonlight fades aneath the sky;
To nature would I fitting homage pay,
I pierce the thickets in their green array;
Wander in woodland maze or track the rill,
Pluck violets and list, while linnets trill.
At such an hour the God his dwelling left,
And fled from Thetis, of a love bereft.
Then dawns the day, scatter the clouds of sleep,
In joy the worshipers from couches leap,
Toilers start forth to work in courage high,
With one consent their daily task to ply.
By the slow thread-like stream my way I took,
The heavens' blue calm was mirrored in the brook.
Sometimes thro' flowery dells the waters wound,
And cut with many a turn the teeming ground,
Sometimes a rocky barrier crossed the dell,
Till in white cascade the pent-up waters fell.

The Travel Books

Maupassant, at the helm, travelling with friends on his beloved boat the Bel-Ami, named after his successful novel

AU SOLEIL

OR, AFRICAN WANDERINGS

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

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CHAPTER I. IN THE SUN

LIFE, which is so brief and yet so long, becomes unbearable sometimes. It unfolds itself, always the same, with death at the end. We can neither stop it, nor change it, nor can we even understand it. Often, indeed, a rebellious feeling comes over us, as we realize the uselessness of such an effort. Whatever we do, we must die! whatever we believe, whatever we think, whatever we attempt, in the end we die! And it seems as if we must die to-morrow, without yet knowing anything, though we are heartsick with what we do know. When we realize this, we feel crushed with the everlasting misery of things, with human weakness, and the monotony of one's actions.

We rise, we walk, we lean out of the window. Opposite us, neighbors are breakfasting, as they breakfasted yesterday, as they will breakfast to-morrow.

There is a father, a mother, and four children. About three years ago the grandmother was with them — she is not there now. The father has changed very much since we became neighbors. He does not notice it, but seems content, even happy — the idiot!

They speak of a wedding, then of a death, then of the tender chicken they are eating, of the maid, who is dishonest. They trouble themselves about a hundred things, utterly useless and silly, — fools!

The sight of their apartment, which they have occupied for eighteen years, fills me with disgust. And this is what we call life! Four walls, two doors, one window, a bed, a table, and a few chairs, that is all! A prison! All abodes occupied for any length of time become prisons! Oh! to run away from it all, to avoid the well-known places, the same actions at the same hour, and, above all things, the same thoughts. —

When you are weary enough to cry from morning till night, too listless to lift a glass of water to 'your lips, tired even of friendly faces, which, seen so often, cause irritation, sick of odiously placid neighbors, of familiar and monotonous things, of your house, your street, of the maid who comes to ask what you will have for dinner and turns abruptly on her heels, — those down-trodden heels that at every step raise the ragged edge of her dirty skirt, — when you are weary of the persistent fidelity of your dog, of the unchangeable colors of the wall-hangings, of the regularity of meals, of sleep in the same bed, of each action repeated daily, weary of yourself, of your own voice, of things repeated continually, of the narrow circle of your ideas, weary even of your own face in the mirror, — then leave everything, and enter a life of new and changed surroundings.

Traveling is a vision in which we leave a known reality to enter an unexplored reality, which seems like a dream.

A station, a seaport, a whistling train with its escape of steam, a large steamer passing out to sea! Who can witness these things without a feeling of envy, a longing to be one of the travelers?

We all dream of some special country; with one it is Sweden, with another the Indies; one person prefers Greece, another Japan. As for me, I was attracted to Africa. It was an imperious longing that possessed me, a sense of craving for the neglected and abandoned desert, a presentiment of incipient passion.

I left Paris on the sixth of July, 1881. I wished to see Africa, land of the sun and the sand, in midsummer, under the heavy tropical heat, in the dazzling, blinding glare of a great white light. Everyone knows the beautiful lines of the poet Leconte de Lisle, upon the *midi,* the sun of the desert, the *midi,* whose rays spread over plains of motionless and limitless sand, that made me leave the blossoming shores of the Seine, as sung by Madame Deshoulières, the fresh morning bath, and the deep shadows of the wood, for these burning solitudes.

Another reason made Algiers particularly attractive to me at that time. Bou-Amama — that will-o'-the-wisp — was conducting that fantastical campaign of which so many foolish things were said and written. It was rumored that the Mussulman population was preparing a general insurrection; that they were to make a final effort; and that immediately after the Ramadan war would break out all over Algiers. It would be curious to see the Arab in these circumstances, and to attempt to read his soul, a thing that colonists never think of doing.

Flaubert has said: "One can imagine the desert, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, without having seen them; but what one cannot imagine is the head of a Turkish barber, as he squats on his doorstep."

Would it not be still more interesting to know what goes on in that head?

CHAPTER II. THE SEA

MARSEILLES throbs under the joyful sun of a summer day. It laughs, with its flag-masted *cafés,* its head crowned with straw, as if for a masquerade, its inhabitants busy and noisy. It rings with its peculiar accent, that accent heard through all the streets, that accent with which it challenges the world. A native of Marseilles is considered amusing wherever he goes, and he seems a kind of foreigner murdering the French language; in Marseilles itself the natives combine to exaggerate this odd accent, which makes it appear like the language of a farce. Marseilles in the sun, perspiring freely, smells of garlic, of beggars, and a hundred other things. It smells of unnamable foods nibbled by negroes, Turks, Greeks, Italians, Maltese, Spaniards, English, Corsicans, as well as the natives of Marseilles, all lying down, sitting, or loitering on the wharves.

In the basin of the Joliette, the heavily-laden steamers, with bows turned seaward, are getting up steam, and are crowded with men loading them with merchandise.

One of these, the “Abd-el-Kader,” suddenly roars, for the old whistle has been abolished and replaced by a sort of siren, which has the cry of an animal, a frightful voice coming from the mouth of a smoking monster.

The great steamer, leaving its moorings, passes slowly in the midst of its fellows, and suddenly, the captain having given the order of “Full speed ahead!” it plunges forward, all eagerness, clearing a passage through the sea, leaving behind it a long white trail, while the coast retreats and Marseilles disappears on the horizon.

It is dinner hour on board and there are not many passengers, for few persons care to go to Algiers in July. At the end of the table sits a colonel, next him an engineer, then a physician and two merchants of Algiers, with their wives. The talk is of the country we are going to, and its form of government.

The colonel is emphatically in favor of a military government, speaks of tactics in the desert, and declares that telegraphy is useless and even dangerous to the army. He must have experienced some disappointment in war, through the fault of the telegraph. The engineer thinks it would be wise to place the colonies in the hands of a bridge-inspector who would build canals, dams, roads, and a hundred other things. The captain of the steamer, in a witty way, says that a seaman would be still better, as Algiers is inaccessible, save by water. The merchants point out the glaring faults of the present governor, and everyone laughs, and all wonder how anyone could make such mistakes.

Then we go up on the bridge, where nothing is to be seen but the sea — the sea so calm without a ripple, and silvered by the rays of the moon. The enormous vessel seems to glide over it, leaving in its wake a long trail of liquid fire. Overhead the sky is of a bluish black, strewn with glittering stars, obscured at times by the immense volume of smoke issuing from the ship's funnels, while the lantern at the top of the mast might be mistaken for a large star, moving in and out among myriad points of light. Nothing is heard but the dull roar of machinery in the hold of the ship. How charming are the quiet hours of the night, on the bridge of a vessel speeding onward!

All next day one lies thinking, under the spread-out awnings, with the ocean on all sides. The night comes again, and again the day follows. One has slept in the narrow cabin, on a bunk shaped like a coffin. Up and about: it is four o'clock!

What an awakening! We see a long hill, and, facing us, a white spot, which gradually grows larger — it is Algiers!

CHAPTER III. ALGIERS

UNEXPECTED vision, which enraptures the soul! Algiers is beyond my fondest hopes! How pretty the snow-white city with its dazzling light! An immense terrace, borne upon graceful arches, borders the harbor. Above it rise immense European hotels, and there also is the French quarter. Still higher is the little Arabian town, with innumerable tiny, white, odd-looking houses, which stand so close together as to appear to be entangled, and are divided by streets that look like lighted tunnels. The top row of these is supported by white-painted posts, the roofs of the houses being contiguous. There are abrupt declivities into inhabited holes, mysterious staircases toward dwellings, which look like burrows filled with crawling Arabs. A woman passes; she is grave and veiled, her ankles are bare and anything but attractive, black with the accumulation of dirt and perspiration.

From the end of the pier the view is marvelous. You gaze entranced at this brilliant cascade of houses, appearing to tumble down over one another, from the top of the hills to the sea. The effect is like the froth of a torrent, a froth of unusual whiteness; and here and there, like an immense bubble, a glaring mosque shines in the sunlight.

Everywhere you see a stupefied population crawling about. Beggars innumerable, clad in a simple shirt, or in two rugs sewed together in the shape of a chasuble, or in a bag with holes made in it for the head and arms, always barelegged and barefooted, covered with vermin as well as rags, come and go, abuse each other, and fight. Tartarin would say that they smelled of the Turk; for everything smells of the Turk here. And then you see a whole world of black-skinned babies, half-caste Arabs, negroes and whites, an ant-hill of shoeblacks, tormenting one like flies, bold and vicious at three years of age, and as sly as monkeys, insulting travelers in their native tongue, and following them about with their cry: "*Cit Cié, Mossieu!*" (Shine, Sir).

The following incident occurred on the day of my arrival and it sums up the history of Algiers and its colonization. As I was sitting in front of a *café,* a young black took hold of my feet, almost by force, and began polishing my shoes with great energy. After he had worked on them for about fifteen minutes and made them shine like glass, I gave him two sous. He said:

“Me’ci, Monsieur” (Thank you, Sir) but did not attempt to rise. As he remained squatting at my feet, rolling his eyes as if about to have a fit, I said: “Be off, Arab!” For a moment he neither answered nor moved, then suddenly catching up his shoe-box with both hands, he darted down the street, when I saw a tall negro boy apparently about sixteen, who had been hiding in a doorway, pounce on the little fellow. He struck him, stole his two sous from him, and walked away laughing quietly, while the poor little beggar howled with all his might.

I was indignant. My neighbor at table, an African officer, who was also a friend, said to me: “Leave them alone, it is the custom. So long as the younger boys are not strong enough to take the sous from their companions, they black shoes, but as soon as they feel able to knock down the little ones, they do not work any more. They watch for the small bootblacks, and rifle their pockets.” My companion added smilingly: “Nearly everyone does the same here.”

The European quarter, pretty from afar, has, on nearer view, the look of a new city sprung up in a climate that does not agree with it. On landing, a large sign attracts the eye— “Algerian Skating Rink.” At the first step you take you are uncomfortable, held by the sensation of a progress not applicable to that country, of a brutish, awkward civilization, little adapted to the customs, the sky, and the people. It is we who look barbarous among these barbarians, who are brutes, it is true, but brutes who are at home, and to whom the centuries have taught many customs the sense of which we do not appear to understand.

Napoleon III. once said a wise thing (probably whispered to him by one of his ministers): “Algiers does not need conquerors so much as initiators.” But we have remained brutal, awkward conquerors, infatuated with our stereotyped ideas. Our morals, which we have flaunted before these people, our Parisian houses, our customs even, all these offend the taste, as would glaring faults in art, common sense, and understanding. Everything we do seems wrong, a challenge to this country, not so much to its inhabitants as to the land itself.

A few days after my arrival, I was a spectator at a ball given in the open air, at Mustapha. You might have thought it was at Neuilly. Gingerbread shops, shooting galleries, ring-and-toss, somnambulists, clerks dancing with shopgirls the real French quadrille, while behind this inclosure, where one paid on entering, in the large and sandy drill ground, hundreds of Arabs lay motionless in their white tattered garments, with the moon shining down brightly, while all listened with grave and serious faces to the general uproar of the French pleasure-seekers.

CHAPTER IV. THE PROVINCE OF ORAN

To GO to Oran from Algiers takes a day in the train. One first crosses the plain of Mitidja, which is fertile, shady, and well populated. This is always pointed out to travelers to prove the fertility of this colony of ours. Without doubt the Mitidja and the Kabylie are two beautiful countries. The Kabylie has certainly more inhabitants than Calais; the Mitidja will have as many before long. What is to be colonized then? is asked; but I will take up this subject later.

The train rolls on; the cultivated plains disappear; the land becomes barren and sandy, the real land of Africa. The horizon stretches out as far as the eye can see, in a long, sterile, burning line. We follow the immense valley of the Chelif, shut in between mountains desolate in their grayness, without a tree, without a blade of grass. As we go along, the mountains grow lower and lower, opening up here and there, as if to show the wretched misery of the ground, parched by the burning sun. An unlimited space stretches out, perfectly flat, bound in the far distance by the invisible line which joins the sky to the earth. And here and there, in these barren solitudes, we see numerous white spots which might be taken for the eggs of some giant bird. They are marabouts, altars raised to the glory of Allah.

In this yellow, endless plain, sometimes we see sunburned Europeans standing about, watching the speeding train as it flies past, and close to them, in mushroom-like tents, we perceive bearded soldiers. These are hamlets of small agriculturists, protected by a detachment of regulars.

On this stretch of barren and dusty land, we make out, now and then, what looks like a small cloud running along, close to the ground, and ascending slowly toward the sky. It is a rider, whose horse's hoofs raise this cloud-like, fine, burning dust. Each of these clouds turns out to be a man, whose hooded cape we finally can make out.

Now and then we see native encampments. They are barely perceptible, these Arab tents, as they are usually hidden near some dried-up torrent, where children lead goats or sheep or sometimes a cow to pasture, although the word "pasture" in a country like this seems a mockery. The color of the brown linen huts, surrounded by dried briers, blends with the monotonous hue of the earth. On the embankment, made by the railroad, a dark-skinned man, with calfless legs, enveloped in whitish rags, contemplates the iron monster passing by.

Further on we meet a troop of nomads on the march. The caravan advances, leaving a cloud of dust behind it. The women and children are riding donkeys and small horses; the men are walking ahead with much majesty of demeanor.

It is like this all along. When the train stops, every hour or so, a European village appears, with a few houses, such as might be seen in Nanterre or Rueil, some dried-up trees, one of which bears the French flag, in honor of the fourteenth of July; and at one of the gates a gendarme stands, an exact counterpart of the gendarme one sees at Rueil or Nanterre.

The heat is intense. No metal of any kind, even that inside the car, can be touched with impunity. The water in the gourds burns the mouth, and the air that blows through the car appears to come from an overheated oven. At Orléanville the thermometer registers 100° in the shade!

We arrive at Oran in time for dinner. Oran is a real European town, and a commercial one, more Spanish than French, and with very little of interest. One meets in the streets fine-looking girls with dark eyes, complexions of ivory, and beautiful teeth. When the weather is clear, it is said that the coast of Spain, their native country, can be seen from here.

As soon as one sets foot on this African soil, one is seized with the desire to go further south. So I took a ticket for Saïda, which is reached by a narrow-gauge railroad ascending to the heights. Around Saïda, with his horsemen about him, that will-o’-the-wisp, Bou-Amama, is to be seen sometimes.

After a few hours of travel we reach the first slope of the Atlas mountains. The train pants and puffs as it climbs; it advances slowly, winds around the side of the barren hills, passes near a large lake formed by rivers, which is protected by the famous dam, the Habra. An immense wall, fifteen hundred feet long, one hundred and twenty feet high, one hundred and twenty feet wide, damming forty-two million cubic feet of water, rises over the boundless plain.

This dam broke down a year ago, drowning hundreds of men and causing destruction to the whole country. At that time a national subscription was being taken up for the families of the men lost in a flood in Hungary or Spain; but no one took any interest in this French disaster.

We then pass narrow defiles between mountains that look as if they had been scorched by a recent fire; we outline peaks, veer along slopes, swerving to right and left to avoid obstacles, finally attaining great speed in the open country, while still zigzagging a little, as if through sheer force of habit.

The cars are rather small, the engine being no larger than an ordinary street-car. It appears exhausted at times, groaning and puffing, and proceeding so slowly that one could almost follow it on foot; then suddenly it starts off again at great speed.

The whole country is barren and desolate. The Sun, king of Africa, ferocious ravager that he is, has devoured the flesh of these valleys, leaving only stones and dust, where nothing can grow.

Saida is a little town after the French style, and it appears to be inhabited only by generals. There are at least ten or twelve of them, and they seem to be forever holding conventions. One feels like crying out to them: “Well, general, where is Bou-Amama to-day?” The civilian here has no respect for the man in uniform.

The principal inn leaves much to be desired. I sleep on a mattress in a whitewashed room. The heat is unbearable. I close my eyes, hoping to sleep, but alas!

My window is open and looks out on a small courtyard. I hear dogs barking; they seem far, very far away, barking jerkily, as if answering one another. In a short time they come nearer, they are now close to the house, among the vines in the street. There are five hundred, perhaps a thousand, starving and ferocious dogs, who guarded the Spanish encampments on the heights. Their masters dead or gone away, these animals have banded and wander about in search of food; then, discovering the town, they descended on it, encircling it like an army. During the day they sleep in ravines, in holes in the mountains, but as soon as night falls, they come into Saïda for food.

The men who are late in returning home carry revolvers with them, for they are usually followed by twenty or thirty of these brownish dogs, which might be taken for wolves.

They bark at times in a continuous way, fearful to hear, enough to drive one crazy. Then other cries are heard, the shrill yelps of jackals, and above it all one hears the strong and singular voice of the hyena imitating the dog’s cry in order to attract and devour him. Until daybreak this uproar continues without ceasing.

Saïda, before it was occupied by the French, was protected by a small fortress built by Abd-el-Kader.

The new town is on low ground, surrounded by bald, rocky heights. A narrow river, across which one could almost leap, waters the surrounding fields, where grow beautiful vines. Toward the south the neighboring hills look like a wall; these are the last steps leading up to the heights. On the left rises a rock of brilliant red, about fifty feet high, and on its summit is the *débris* of ruined masonry. This is all that remains of the Saïda built by Abd-el-Kader. This rock, seen from afar, seems to cling to the mountain, but on climbing it one is filled with surprise and admiration. A deep ravine, hollowed out between two walls, divides this ancient redoubt from the neighboring hill. This hill is of purplish stone, slashed here and there with fissures, where fall the winter rains. Through this ravine runs the river, in the midst of bushes of rose-colored laurels. From above, it looks like an Oriental rug spread in a corridor. This carpet of flowers is dotted here and there with ferns. The descent of the valley is by a path used only by goatherds.

Further on, a stream (L’Oued Saïda), which is here called a river, but in reality is only a brook, ripples among the rocks under large blossoming shrubs, floating and undulating gracefully. The water is warm, almost hot. Enormous crabs, on seeing me, creep along with a singular rapidity, and with raised pincers. Large green lizards disappear in the foliage. Sometimes a snake glides by.

The ravine narrows, as if about to close. A loud noise above my head startles me. An eagle, surprised in its nest, soars away toward the blue sky, with slow but strongly-beating wings, so large that they seem to touch both walls.

In about an hour I struck the road leading toward Aïn-el-Hadjar, climbing up over the dusty hill.

In front of me walked a bent old woman, in a black skirt and cap, carrying a basket in one hand and in the other a kind of parasol, a huge red sunshade. A white woman here — where one sees none but the tall negro woman, with her yellow, red, and blue garments, leaving, as she passes, that odor of human flesh that will turn the stoutest stomach!

The old woman, exhausted, sat in the dust, panting in the torrid heat. Her face was wrinkled by innumerable lines, like those one sees in a crumpled garment, and her look was weary, depressed, and hopeless.

I spoke to her. She was an Alsatian, who had been sent to this country, with her four sons, after the war. She said to me: "You come from over there?" That "over there" grieved me.

"Yes."

And she began to weep. Then she told me her simple story.

Some land in this country had been promised to them, and they had come, this mother with her children. Three of her sons had died in this murderous climate, and now there remained but one, who was sick. Their fields, though large, yielded nothing, for want of water. The poor old woman kept repeating: "Ashes, sir, nothing but burned ashes! One cannot grow a cabbage; not even a single cabbage!" She clung to that idea of a single cabbage, the possession of which probably represented to her the sum of earthly happiness.

I never saw anything so pathetic as this good woman from Alsace thrown on this soil of fire where not even one cabbage could grow. How often she must have thought of the old country, the green country of her youth, this poor old soul!

On leaving me she asked: "Do you know whether they would give us any land in Tunisia? They say it is a good country. It is sure to be better than this, anyway, and it might save my son's life."

I had a constant desire to go further south. But the whole country was at war, and I could not venture alone. A chance arose, however, as a train was about to take provisions to the troops encamped along the salt lakes.

It was a day when the sirocco was raging. From early morning the south wind blew with its slow, heavy, devouring breath.

At seven o'clock the small convoy started out, consisting of two detachments of infantry, with their officers, three trains with water cisterns, and the engineers of the company, for no train during the last three weeks had been able to reach the end of the line, part of which had been destroyed by the Arabs.

The engine, called "The Hyena," starts out straight for the mountain, making as if it would go through it. Then suddenly it curves to one side, dips into a narrow valley, describes a half circle, and reappears about fifty feet above the spot where it was a little while ago. It turns again, ascends, zigzagging all the time, unfolding like a long ribbon creeping toward the summit.

There are large buildings along the way, chimneys of factories, an abandoned town. These are the magnificent mills of the Franco-Algerian Company.

It was here that the grain was milled, before the Spaniards were massacred. This place is called A'in-el-Hadjar.

We climb still higher. The engine pants, groans, slows up, and finally stops. Three times it tries to start again, but fails each time.

It goes back a little to get a start, but at this point it remains still, without the strength to ascend the rough slope.

Then the officers order the soldiers out to help in pushing up the train. It starts ahead slowly, moving step by step. We all joke and laugh, the men making fun of the engine. At last it is all over. Here we are on the heights.

The engineer, leaning far out, watches the tracks ceaselessly, for fear they may be cut away; and we are all intent on the horizon, alert to discover the smallest cloud of dust which might indicate a rider, still invisible. We all carry guns and pistols.

Sometimes a jackal runs past us; an enormous hawk flies away, leaving a camel's carcass almost entirely devoured; wild hens, very much like partridges, disappear among the dwarf-like palms.

Two small companies of foot-soldiers are camping at the village of Tafraoua, where we stop. A great many Spaniards were killed at this spot.

At Kralfallah, there is a company of Zouaves, hurriedly building a stronghold, with rails, beams, telegraph poles, anything they can lay their hands on. We take breakfast here, and the three officers, all young and gay, offer us some coffee.

The train starts once more. It runs along on the limitless plain, where tufts of *alfa* make it look like a smooth stretch of sea. The sirocco becomes unbearable, throwing up in our faces the burning air of the desert, and now and then, on the horizon, a dim form appears. Now it is an island, again a lake, or rocks sunk in water; it is a mirage.

On a sloping hill we see blackened stones and men's bones, the remains of Spaniards. And still we see more dead camels, always half-eaten by hawks.

We go through a forest, but what a strange forest! An ocean of sand, where tufts of evergreen, here and there, look like giant heads of lettuce in a gigantic kitchen garden.

Sometimes we fancy we see a rider in the distance, but no, he disappears; we must have made a mistake.

We reach L'Oued-Fallette, still in the midst of a deserted and gloomy land. Then I wander away with two companions, always toward the south. We climb a low hill in the intense heat. The sirocco sheds fire; it dries the perspiration from one's face as soon as it appears, burns the lips and eyes, and dries up the throat. Under every stone we find scorpions.

Around the train, which looks from here like a big black beast lying down on the dry sand, the soldiers load the weapons sent from the nearest encampment. Then they move away in the dust, slowly, with weary steps, under the scorching sun. We see them for a long while, then they disappear in a cloud of dust.

There are now six of us on the train. We cannot touch anything, for everything burns. The brasses of the car seem reddened as if with fire. We scream if our hands touch the steel of our pistols.

A few days ago the tribe of Rezaïna, turning rebels, crossed this salt lake, that we found we could not reach to-day, as the hour was too late. The heat was so great when these people crossed that dried marsh that they lost all their water-bottles, while sixteen of their children died in their mothers' arms.

The train whistles, and we leave L'Oued-Fallette. A remarkable deed had made this place famous.

A military post was established here and guarded by a detachment from the 15th Regulars. One night two Arab soldiers arrived at the outposts, after riding horseback for ten hours, bringing an important order from the general commanding the forces at Saïda. According to custom, they waved a lighted torch to make themselves known. The sentinel, a raw recruit, not knowing the regulations and customs of the south, and not having been instructed therein, discharged his gun at the couriers. The poor devils advanced notwithstanding, when the whole post took to arms, and, putting themselves in position, fired a fusillade.

After a hundred and fifty shots, the two Arabs gave up and went away, one of them having a ball in his shoulder. Next day they arrived at headquarters, bringing back their dispatch.

CHAPTER V. BOU-AMAMA

Very clever is the man who can solve, even to-day, the riddle of Bou-Amama. That man whom no one ever saw, who made game of our army, disappeared so completely as to make one think that he never existed.

Officers deserving of credence, who believed they knew him, have described him to me, others, no less truthful, positive also of having seen him, have given me an entirely different description of him.

At all events, this prowler was the chief of only a very small band of men, probably driven to rebellion through starvation. These men never fought but to rob villages or pillage trains. They do not appear to have acted thus from hatred or because of religious fanaticism, but simply from hunger. With our system of colonization, consisting as it does in ruining the Arab, in depriving him of his rest, in pursuing him without mercy, we must expect to see insurrections.

Another reason for this campaign was the presence of Spaniards on the heights.

In that ocean of *alfa,* in that gloomy, greenish stretch, motionless under the burning sun, dwelt a real nation, hordes of swarthy-faced men, adventurers whom distress or other reasons had driven from their native land. Wilder and much more feared than the Arabs even, isolated from cities, from all law, all power, they did what their ancestors had always done before them in a new country, they were violent, bloodthirsty, terrifying even to the primitive inhabitants. The vengeance the Arabs wreaked on them was fearful.

Here, in a few words, is the apparent origin of the insurrection. Two Mussulman priests preached rebellion openly to one of the tribes of the south. Lieutenant Weinbrennar was sent with an order to arrest the chief of the tribe. This officer had only four men with him. He was assassinated.

Colonel Innocenti was sent to avenge his death, and the aid of the military chief of Saïda was given to him.

On the road the armed contingent of natives met the Trafis who were also to join Colonel Innocenti. Quarrels arose between them, when the Trafis turned rebels and left to join Bou-Amama.

Here occurred the affair of Chellala, which has been so often related. After the sacking of his convoy, the colonel, who seems to have been spoken of very disparagingly by everyone, returned by forced marches toward the Kreïder, in order to re-enforce his column, thereby leaving the road entirely unprotected. His adversary was quick in taking advantage of this.

I must mention here a strange fact. On the same day the official dispatches reported Bou-Amama as being in two places one hundred and fifty miles apart.

The chief, profiting by this chance, passed within twelve miles of Géryville, and on the way killed Brigadier Bringeard, who had been sent into this openly rebellious country with only a handful of men to establish telegraphic communications. After this assassination Bou-Amama proceeded on his way northward.

He then crossed the territory of the Hassassenas and the Harrars, and virtually gave those two tribes the order for a general massacre, which was carried out soon after.

At last he arrived at Aïn-Kétifa, and two days later was camping at Haci-Tirsine, only twenty-two miles from Saïda.

The military authorities, becoming alarmed at last, sent word to the Franco-Algerian Company to recall all their agents, the country not being considered safe. Trains were running all night to the extreme limit of the line; but it was impossible to recall all the men in a few hours as they were scattered over a territory of a hundred and fifty miles. And on the eleventh, at daybreak, the massacre began.

The murdering was done chiefly by the tribes of the Hassassenas and those of the Harrars, who were exasperated with the Spaniards living on their territories.

And yet, on pretext of not inciting them to rebellion, these tribes who had slaughtered nearly three hundred men, women, and children, went unpunished.

Arab riders found loaded with spoils, and with garments belonging to Spanish women on their saddles, were released, it is said, on the plea that proof of their complicity was wanting.

So, on the night of the thirteenth, Bou-Amama was camping at Haci-Tirsine, twenty-two miles from Saïda. At the same time, General Cérez was telegraphing to the governor that the rebel chief was attempting to return south.

In the next few days this daring fellow pillaged the villages of Tafraoua and Kralfallah, loading his camels with booty and carrying away with him provisions and merchandise to the value of millions of francs.

He rode up once more to Haci-Tirsine to reorganize his troops; he broke his convoy in two, one section of which went toward Aïn-Kétifa. There it was stopped and pillaged by the mounted Arabs (section Brunetière).

The other section, commanded by Bou-Amama himself, was caught between General Détrie's column, which was camping at El-Maya, and that of General Mallaret, whose headquarters were at Ksar-el Krelifa, near the Kreïder.

To pass between the two camps was no easy task. Bou-Amama sent a party of riders before the camp of General Détrie, who pursued them with his whole army as far as Aïn-Sfisifa, far beyond the salt lake, convinced that he was on the chief's track.

The ruse was successful. The road was free. The day following the general's departure the insurgent chief occupied Détrie's camp; this was on the fourteenth of June.

On the other hand, Colonel Mallaret, instead of guarding the passage of the Kreider, encamped at Ksar-el-Krelifa, four miles further on. Bou-Amama immediately sent a great number of riders to file past the military post, and the colonel contented himself by firing six cannon-shots, which have become legendary. During this time the convoy of camels was passing the Kreider, at the only point where crossing was possible. From there the chief must have put his provisions under shelter with the Mogrars, his tribe, stationed four hundred miles south of Géryville.

Whence come these many precise details? will be asked. From everyone. They are sure to be contested, I know; if not on one point, then on another.

I cannot affirm these facts; I have gathered only those which seemed probable. It would be impossible, in Algiers, to be positive about anything happening three miles beyond any one spot. As for military news, during all this campaign it appeared to be supplied by some practical joker. Bou-Amama was signaled at six different places on the same day by six different commanding officers, who were sure, one and all, of holding him. A complete collection of these official dispatches, with a little supplement containing those of authorized agents, would make amusing reading.

Certain dispatches, whose improbability was too evident, were actually suppressed in the telegraph offices in Algiers.

An amusing caricature, made by a colonist, gives to my mind a very good explanation of the situation. It represents an old general, fat, gold-laced, with enormous mustaches, standing facing the desert. He contemplates with a puzzled look this immense, bare stretch of country, whose limit his eye cannot reach, and murmurs to himself: “They are there!... Somewhere!” Then he turns to his aide-de-camp, motionless behind him, saying pompously: “Telegraph the government that the enemy is before me, and that I start in pursuit!”

The only reliable information I got came from Spanish prisoners, who had escaped from Bou-Amama. I had occasion to converse through an interpreter with one of these, and this is what he told me:

His name was Blas Rojo Belisaire. While leading a convoy of seven carts, on the night of the tenth of June, he, with his men, found a number of broken carts on the road, and scattered here and there were the bodies of the murdered drivers. One of them was still alive, and they tried to revive him, but a troop of Arabs fell upon them. The Spaniards, having but one gun, surrendered; but they were all killed on the spot, except this Blas Rojo, spared, no doubt, on account of his youth and handsome face. We know that the Arabs are not indifferent to beauty in men.

He was brought into camp, where he found other prisoners. At midnight, for no apparent reason, one of these was killed, he was told. The next day, on the eleventh, Blas learned that more prisoners had been killed.

The day had been set apart for a general massacre. At night, the raiders brought in two women and a child.

On the twelfth, they broke camp and were on the march all day.

On the thirteenth, at night, they camped at Dayat-Kereb.

On the fourteenth, they marched toward Ksar-Krélifa. This was the day on which the Mallaret affair took place, and the prisoner did not hear the cannon, which leaves it to be supposed that Bou-Amama sent only a small detachment of men to file past the French post, while the convoy with the spoils, with which was Blas, passed the salt lake, some miles further, well under shelter from fire.

For eight days they walked to and fro, without any apparent aim. On arriving at Tis-Moulins the Arabs, who quarreled continually, finally separated, each chief taking his prisoners with him.

Bou-Amama was very considerate to his captives, especially the women, whom he assigned to a special tent, where they were guarded.

One of these, a beautiful girl of eighteen, had been compelled to live with one of the chiefs, who threatened her with death if she resisted; but when Bou-Amama heard of it, he refused to sanction such a union.

Blas Rojo was in the service of Bou-Amama, but he never saw him. He saw only his son, who directed the military operations. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, a tall, thin man, pale, with deep-set eyes, and he wore a short beard. He owned two sorrel horses, one of which had formerly belonged to the French commanding officer, Jacquet.

Blas Rojo had not heard about the shots fired at the Kreïder. He eventually ran away when near Bas-Yala, but, not knowing the country very well, he was compelled to follow the channel of dried-up rivers, and after walking for three days and three nights, he arrived at Marhoun.

He told me that Bou-Amama had with him five hundred horsemen and three hundred foot-soldiers, besides a convoy of camels to carry the spoils.

For two weeks after the massacres, the trains went to and fro on the short railroad. At times, those in charge of it gathered in some wounded Spaniards and fine-looking women, naked and bleeding.

The inhabitants of the country all join in saying that the military authorities, with a little foresight, could have avoided this butchery. They could not it seems, manage a handful of rebels. What was the reason of their inability to do so, when one compares the perfection of our firearms with the ancient muskets of the Arabs? I leave it to others to indicate the cause and explain it all.

The Arabs have this advantage over us, however, against which we struggle in vain. They are the sons of this country. Living on figs and a few grains of wheat, indefatigable on this soil, which exhausts men from the north, riding horses as strong and sturdy as themselves, and like them insensible to the heat, these men can ride a hundred miles a day. Having no baggage, nor convoys of provisions to drag after them, they go from place to place with surprising rapidity. They pass between two camps at a furious gallop, and a few miles further attack a village which everyone thought quite safe, and they return at the same pace, when they are supposed to be miles away.

In European wars, no matter how prompt is the march of an army, it cannot be moved about without its whereabouts being known. The mass of baggage is fatal to quick movements and always discloses the route followed. A party of Arabs leaves no more trace of its passage than a flight of birds. These roving horsemen come and go around us with the rapidity of flying swallows.

When they attack, we can conquer them and nearly always beat them, notwithstanding their courage. But it is impossible to pursue them; one can never reach them when they take to flight. And so they avoid encounters, and are content with harassing our troops.

They charge with impetuosity, galloping furiously on their lean horses and rushing toward us in a whirlwind of white linen. They discharge their long guns while galloping, and, suddenly describing, a curve, tear away with great speed, leaving here and there on the ground behind them a white bundle, fluttering like a wounded bird with blood on its wings.

CHAPTER VI. THE PROVINCE OF ALGERIA

Algerians, the real Algerians, know very little of their country beyond the plain of the Mitidja. They live quietly in one of the most charming cities of the world, declaring that the Arabs are an ungovernable people, good only to kill or to throw back in the desert. They have never seen any but the lowest and vilest of Arabs, idling in their streets. In *cafés*, they speak of Laghouat, of Bou-Saada, and of Saïda, as if these were foreign countries. It is rare to *is* find even an officer who knows all three provinces. They nearly always remain at one station until they return to France.

It is only fair to add that traveling is extremely difficult as soon as one leaves the known roads of the south. One cannot do so without the help and goodwill of the military authorities. The commanding officers consider themselves omnipotent, and an unknown individual, if he dared to penetrate these lands, would risk a great deal of danger of attack from the Arabs, so they say. A solitary man would be immediately arrested by a public officer, escorted to the nearest police station, and brought back to civilization between two native soldiers.

But if a man can show any credentials, he will meet with the kindest treatment from the men in office. Living alone, so far from any neighbors, they receive travelers in the most charming manner. Being so much alone, they are well read, well educated, and converse with ease; isolated in this large and desolate country, with its boundless horizon, they all become deep thinkers, as solitary workers usually do. Having left France with the usual prejudice against these men, I came back with changed ideas.

Thanks to many of these officers, I was enabled to make long excursions inland, out of the known highways, and to go from tribe to tribe.

The Ramadan had just begun, and there was great anxiety in the colony, for there was fear of a general uprising at the end of this Turkish Lent.

The Ramadan lasts thirty days, during which time no disciple of Mahomet can drink, eat, or smoke from the early morning hour when the sun appears, until the corresponding hour at night, when one cannot distinguish a white thread from a red one. This hard rule is not followed to the letter, and one sees many a lighted cigarette, as soon as the sun goes down, long before the eye has ceased to distinguish between a white or a red thread. Except for this hurry to smoke, no Arab transgresses this severe Lenten rule, this complete abstinence.

Men and women, boys from the age of fifteen and girls of eleven or twelve, remain all day without food or drink. It is not so bad to go without eating, but to abstain from drinking is terrible in this fearful heat. There are no dispensations in this Turkish fast; no one, indeed, would dare to ask any. Even the public women, the Oulad-Nails, who throng all these Arab centers and large oases, fast just as the priests do, perhaps even more than they. And those among the Arabs whom we think civilized, who appear in ordinary times to accept our customs and share our ideas, these, even, become savagely fanatical and stupidly fervent, as soon as the Ramadan begins.

It is easy to understand the effect of this furious exaltation on these narrow and obstinate minds. All day long these wretched beings meditate on an empty stomach, while watching their conquerors, who eat, drink, and smoke as much as they please. And they say to themselves that if they kill one of us during the Ramadan, they will go straight to heaven; and they think that the time of our rule over them is drawing to a close, for their priests teach them that they will soon put us out of this country, pushing us into the sea with the butts of their guns.

It is especially during the Ramadan that the Aissaounas, scorpion-eaters, snake-swallowers, and religious mountebanks flourish, the only persons perhaps, excepting a few miscreants and nobles, who have not this violent faith.

Among the nobles, there are a few such cases. I can only cite one:

When about to start on a twenty days’ march toward the south, an officer asked the three soldiers who were to accompany him not to observe the Ramadan, knowing full well that he could never get any work from these men if they were exhausted by fasting.

Two of them refused, and the third answered: “Lieutenant, I do not fast; I am not a priest, I am of noble birth.”

He was, in truth, of good birth, the son of one of the most ancient and illustrious families of the desert.

There is a singular custom, dating from the occupation by the French, which it is ridiculous to keep up when one thinks of the terrible consequences it might have for us. As we wished at first to conciliate these people, and as to flatter their religion appeared the best way of doing so, it was decided that the French cannon should give the signal for fasting during this holy time. So, in the morning, at the first peep of dawn, a boom of cannon proclaims the fast; and every night about twenty minutes after the setting of the sun, from all the cities, all the forts, and all the military places, another cannon-roar is heard, which is the signal for millions of cigarettes to be lighted and drinks to be given out in hundreds of *cafés,* while all over Algiers are prepared innumerable dishes of kouskous.

I assisted, in the great mosque in Algiers, at the religious ceremony with which the Ramadan begins. The building is quite plain, with whitewashed walls and floor thickly carpeted. The Arabs enter briskly, barefooted, carrying their shoes in their hands. They place themselves in long regular rows, wide apart from one another, in straighter ranks than those of a regiment at drill. They place their shoes on the floor near them, with other trifles they may have in their hands, and they remain as motionless as statues, their faces turned toward a small chapel, which indicates the direction of Mecca.

From this chapel the mufti officiates. With a soft, broken-down, monotonous voice, he intones a sorrowful chant, that once heard is never forgotten. The intonation sometimes changes, when the assistants, with a silent, rhythmical movement, go down on their knees, touch the floor with their heads, and rise rapidly, without even a tremor to mar the trembling voice of the old mufti. And ceaselessly these people go down and rise again, with a celerity, a silence, and a regularity almost fantastical. One never hears the bustle of moving chairs, the coughing, and whispering usually to be heard in most Christian churches. One feels that a rude faith hovers over these believers, bends and raises them like automatons; it is a dumb and tyrannical faith, which, taking hold of their bodies, makes their faces immovable, though it should wring their hearts. An unaccountable feeling of respect, mingled with pity, comes over the spectator as he sees these lean fanatics, having no flesh to interfere with the celerity and suppleness of their prostrations, perform their religious rites with the mechanism and regularity of Prussian soldiers at drill.

The walls are white, the rugs on the floor are red; the men wear white, red, or blue garments, with other colors besides, according to the gorgeousness of their gala apparel; but all the devotees are gracefully draped, and of noble mien, as they stand in the soft light that falls from the shining lusters.

Several priests occupy a raised platform, singing the responses with the same intonation given by the mufti. And this goes on indefinitely.

At night, in the Ramadan, is the most favorable time to visit the Casbah. The appellation of Casbah, which signifies citadel, is now used to designate the whole Arabian town. As these people fast and sleep all day long, so must they eat and live during the night.

The little streets, abrupt and rugged, like mountain paths, narrowing and turning continually, crossing and recrossing each other, so profoundly mysterious that one lowers the voice unconsciously when speaking, at night become inhabited by a population that appears to have sprung out of the "Arabian Nights." We feel we are traveling through the country described in the tales of the Sultana Schéhérazade. Here are the enormous low doors, as thick as prison walls, with their wonderful ironwork; here, also, are the veiled women; there, in the deep recesses of the half-open doors, are faces barely seen, and we hear vague sounds coming from these houses, tightly closed, like secret coffers.

On the doorsill men and women lie, eating and drinking. Sometimes the groups obstruct the entrance altogether. One must step over bare limbs, feel with the hand to find a footing in the midst of all these bundles of white clothes, out of which appear the heads and arms of the loungers.

The Jews open the hovels in which they transact their business; and pleasure-houses are so numerous that one meets them at every turn.

In the *cafés,* standing closely together, or seated on benches against the wall, or even lying on the floor, men are drinking coffee out of tiny little cups. You see them, motionless and dumb, holding in their hands the cups which now and then they carry slowly to their lips. Twenty of them will huddle together in a space that would hold comfortably only ten ordinary men.

Calm-faced fanatics come and go, among these quiet drinkers, trying to incite them to rebellion, assuring them that the end of their slavery is near.

It is said that the first symptoms of an insurrection always appear in the village of Boukhrari, which is on the road to Laghouat; and we decided to go there.

On looking up at the Atlas mountains, from the immense plain of the Mitidja, one sees a gigantic slit in the mountains toward the south; it is as if an ax had cut it open. This gap is called the gorge of the Chiffa, and it is through this that the routes pass that lead to Médéah, Boukhrari, and Laghouat.

We enter the gap in the mountains; we follow the shallow river of the Chiffa and find ourselves in a narrow road, a wild and wooded copse. There are streams everywhere. The trees grow on this straight cliff, fastening here and there, as if scaling the high rock.

The passage grows narrower. The solid rock on both sides seems to threaten us; the sky looks like a blue ribbon, winding in and out at the summit, and, suddenly, at an abrupt turn, a little river appears at the entrance of a ravine covered with trees. Here is the inn of the "Ruisseau-des-Singes," the Monkey-River Inn.

Before the door flows a murmuring brook, filling this corner of the earth with fragrance and freshness and reminding one of the calm valleys of Switzerland.

We rest and doze in the shade; suddenly, above us, a branch bends and breaks; we rise quickly and then, through the thick foliage, we see a hurried flight of monkeys, tumbling over each other with leaps and bounds and uttering shrill cries.

There are hundreds of them, some enormous creatures, and others that are quite small. A few, tamed by the owners of the inn, are caressing and quiet. One, quite young yet, and caught only a week ago, is still very wild.

When the visitor remains quiet, they advance, watching him intently all the time. One would think the traveler was the sole amusement of these inhabitants of the valley. On certain days, however, there may not be one in sight.

Beyond the inn of the "Ruisseau-des-Singes," the valley narrows still more, and suddenly we come upon two large cascades, which seem to fall from the top of the cliff, two masses of limpid water, like ribbons of silver. How sweet and refreshing to see water in this land of Africa!

We ascend for a very long time; the gap grows less deep and there are fewer trees. We climb still higher, and the mountain appears more barren at every turn. We are in the fields now, and when we reach the top of the cliff, we see, to our surprise, oaks, willows, and elms, the trees of our own country.

We sleep at Médéah, another little town similar to so many we have in France.

After leaving Médéah we experienced fierce ravages of the sun. We crossed a forest, sparsely planted, showing everywhere a burned stretch of earth and not a living thing to be seen.

On the left there is a small valley, red and barren, without a blade of grass. A shadow suddenly crosses slowly over this stretch of sand, a dark stain on the naked earth. This shadow is the only real inhabitant of this mournful and death-like place; it seems to reign here like a mysterious evil spirit.

I look up and I see, with its spread-out wings, the scavenger of the desert, the lean vulture, soaring above his domain; over which reigns supreme the other master of this vast country, — the Sun, the cruel Sun.

When we descend toward Boukhrari, we can descry, as far as the eye can reach, the endless valley of the Chélif; we see it, in all its hideousness, in the yellow misery of the soil. It looks tattered and worn, like an old Arab, a valley where the bed of the stream is drained to the mud by the fire from the sky. The sun here has conquered everything, destroyed and pulverized every living thing, and its fire, which replaces the air, fills the atmosphere.

You feel something on your forehead; in any other country it would be air, but here it is fire. Something floats in the distance, one would say it was mist, but here this haze is fire, or rather a living and visible heat. If the soil were not charred to its very center, this steam would remind one of the smoke which rises from the burning of living flesh. And all this has a peculiar color, blinding in its glare, the color of hot sand mingling with the purple of the melting sky.

There are no insects in this dust, only a few large ants; none of the hundred little pests of our country could exist in this oven-like heat. On certain torrid days even the flies die, as they do in the north after a cold spell.

It is barely possible to raise hens. We see the poor fowls, with wide-open beaks and flapping wings, hop about in a mournful though comical way.

For the last three years the streams have been dry, and the all-powerful Sun seems to glory in this great victory.

At last we see a few trees, but they are far from flourishing. Boghar is at our right, at the top of a dusty hill.

At the left, in the hollow of the rock, crowning a hillock barely distinct from the earth, so colorless is it, appears an Arabian village against the sky, the village of Boukhrari.

At the foot of this cone of dust, hidden in the fold of the hill, are a few houses, where lives a mixed community.

Boukhrari is one of the largest villages of Algeria, on the edge of the northern frontier, a little beyond the Tell, and in the zone of transition between the civilized countries and the desert. Its situation gives it political importance, making it a connecting link between the Arabs of the coast and those of the Sahara. As such, it has always been the pulse of all insurrections. To this place comes the given order, from it the command is sent out. The tribes who are furthest away send their men to Boukhrari to find out what is going on. This point is watched and looked up to from all parts of Algeria.

The French government alone takes no interest in what goes on in Boukhrari; it has made it into a town, patterned after those in France, governed by a mayor, some sleepy-eyed peasant, assisted by a forester. Anyone can come and go as he pleases. The Arabs, no matter what part of the country they come from, can go about and intrigue to their hearts' content, without any interference whatever.

At the foot of this village, two or three hundred feet away, the mixed community is governed by a civilian, who has unlimited power over this empty territory, which hardly seems worth while guarding at all; but he cannot interfere with the neighboring mayor in the discharge of his duties.

Facing this, in the mountain, is Boghar, where dwells the commanding officer of the military district. This man has full power here, but can exert no authority over Boukhrari, that village of natives being ruled by its own mayor. It is this dangerous spot which is overlooked, while the neighborhood is watched carefully. We look for evil effects, but take no trouble to correct their cause.

And what is the result? The officer and the civilian in charge of the mixed community, when they are friendly, organize a sort of secret police, and try to obtain various information without the knowledge of the mayor.

Is it not surprising to see this Arab center, which is known as being dangerous, really more free than any city in France; while, at the same time, a Frenchman finds it impossible to penetrate here on military territory without the protection of influential friends?

I found an inn in the village of the mixed community, and spent the night there. It was stifling; the air seemed to have been absorbed by the heat of the previous day.

I arose at the first peep of dawn. The sun appeared as if eager to begin its incendiary work. In front of my window, opening on the horizon, already torrid, stood a small stagecoach, on the yellow panel of which I read: “Mail for the South.” For the south! Then one could go further south, in this August heat. The south! what a fascinating word!

I looked at that magic word, as if I had never seen it before, and seemed suddenly to understand its hidden meaning. For well-known words, like well-known faces, assume a new significance, sometimes, that one cannot account for.

The south! The desert, the nomads, the unexplored lands, and the negroes. It is a new world, almost a new hemisphere. The south! how exhilarating is the phrase when one is on the edge of the Sahara!

In the afternoon I visited the village of the natives. Boukhrari is the first village where one sees Oulad-Naïls. One is astonished at sight of these courtesans of the desert.

The crowded streets are filled with Arabs, many of them lying in doorways, talking in low voices or sleeping. Everywhere their floating white garments seem to increase the universal whiteness of the houses. Suddenly from a doorway a woman appears, whose headdress seems of Assyrian origin, surmounted by an enormous diadem of gold. She wears a long dress of a brilliant red; her arms and ankles are encircled with shining bracelets, and her face, with its straight lines, is tattooed with blue stars.

Other women join her, a great many of them, all wearing this monumental headdress; a mountain of hair, on each side of which a thick braid hangs as far as the lower tip of the ear, where it is drawn back to be lost in the masses of back hair. They always wear tiaras, some of which are very costly. The breast is hidden under necklaces, medals, and other heavy jewelry; while two strong silver chains, hanging low down from the neck, support a padlock of the same metal, curiously engraved, from which hangs the key.

Some of these girls wear only tiny bracelets as yet; they are simply beginners in their profession. The others, the older ones, sometimes carry about on their persons jewelry to the value of ten or fifteen thousand francs. I saw one whose necklace was composed of eight rows of twenty-franc pieces. They hoard their savings in this way. The rings on their ankles are also of massive silver, and are surprisingly heavy, for, as soon as they accumulate silver pieces to the value of two or three hundred francs, they give them to the native jewelers to melt and make into chased ankle-rings, symbolical padlocks, chains, or bracelets. The diadems they wear are obtained in the same manner.

The monumental headdress, a clever tangle of twisted braids, takes almost a day to put up, and needs an incredible quantity of oil. For that reason, they do not dress it more than once a month, and take great care not to disarrange this high and elaborate edifice of hair, which gives out a disagreeable odor in a short time. It is worth while to go to see them when they dance in the Moorish *cafés* at night.

The village is silent. White-robed figures lie in doorways. The night is fearfully hot, and brilliant with stars; these stars of Africa shine with a clearness the like of which is never seen elsewhere — the brilliancy of a fiery diamond, palpitating, living, intense.

Suddenly, on turning a corner, a noise attracts us, a wild and rapid music, a rumble of drums which is drowned by the fierce, sharp sound of the flute, on which the proprietor of the *café* plays indefatigably.

On the doorsteps, looking on without entering, Arabs lie in their white robes, which look like moving light, in the clearer shining that comes from the interior. Inside, rows of men, motionless and white also, are seated on boards along the walls, under a very low roof. And in the center of the room, lolling on the floor in their flaming tinsels, their flashing jewelry, with their tattooed faces, and their headdresses so like the Egyptian bas-reliefs, the Oulad-Nalls are waiting.

We enter and no one moves. And so, according to custom, we take hold of some of the Arabs and hustle them out of their seats; they move away with impassive faces, and some of the others make room for them.

On an elevation at the rear, four men, standing in ecstatic poses, are beating with frenzy on the tambourines; and the master — a tall negro — walks about in a majestic way, blowing furiously on his flute, never stopping for a moment.

Then two Oulad-Nails rise, and taking up a position at the end of the room which has been left unoccupied, they begin to dance. The movements consist of a slow glide, whose rhythm is accentuated by a tap of the heel, which makes the ankle-bracelets ring out like a bell when the whole body bends in a methodical limp-like step; the hands are raised as high as the eyes, and are turned about gracefully, the fingers snapping briskly. The face, astonishingly rigid, is turned a little, and the eyes alone move about, following the action of the hands, as if fascinated by the graceful attitudes they assume.

The dancers approach one another in this way, their hands touching as they meet. A tremor seems to come over them, their figures sway to and fro, a long lace veil trailing behind them. They touch hands again, bending backward gracefully, as would two amorous doves, their long veils beating and spreading out like the wings of a bird. Suddenly they straighten up again, impassive once more, and continue as far as the line of spectators with their slow and limping glide.

Not all of them are pretty, but all possess a strange charm. Nothing can give an adequate idea of the impassiveness of these Arabs, among whom these women, covered with gold and flaming garments, pass and repass with rhythmical grace.

These prostitutes came originally from one tribe only, the Oulad-Nail. They gathered their dowries in this way, and returned home to marry, after accumulating the necessary money. This was one of the customs of the tribe, and no one thought any the less of them for doing it. To-day, although it is still understood that the girls of this particular tribe go away to earn money in this fashion, nearly all the tribes supply the Arabian towns with courtesans.

The proprietor of the *café* where they appear is always a negro. As soon as this person sees any strangers drawing near, he glues on his forehead, by some unknown process, a five-franc piece of silver. With this decoration he stalks through the building, blowing furiously on his flute all the while, and pointing to the money on his forehead, to induce the visitor to give him as much again.

Those of the Oulad-Nails who are of noble birth show great generosity and delicacy of feeling in their dealings with visitors. If the lover of a few minutes admires the rug that serves as a couch, the noble prostitute’s servant carries it to him, shortly after he has returned to his lodgings.

There are, as is usually the case, men who live on the earnings of these women, and sometimes a girl is found with her throat cut and all her jewels stolen. A man she has loved and lived with disappears at the same time, and is never seen again.

The room where they receive men is a narrow apartment, whose walls are of clay. In the oases, the roof is sometimes made of reeds, packed tightly, where hordes of scorpions hide. The couch is made of rugs, placed one over another.

Rich Arabian or French inhabitants who wish to pass a night in luxurious orgy remain until daybreak in their Moorish baths, attended by their servants. They eat and drink during the course of the bath, and vary the practices of their usual sleeping accommodations.

This question of morals brings up a very difficult subject.

Our ideas, our habits, and our instincts differ so absolutely from those with which one meets in these countries that one hardly dares speak at home of a vice which is so common there that Europeans are neither astonished nor scandalized by it any more. You are inclined to laugh instead of being indignant. It is a very delicate subject, but when you try to make anybody understand the familiar life of the Arabs, and to explain the peculiar characteristics of that people, it is a matter that you can hardly pass over without mention.

The traveler meets there at every step those unnatural phases of love between beings of the same sex that were sanctioned by Socrates, the "friend" of Alcibiades.

True, in history one often finds examples of that strange and unwholesome passion to which Cæsar abandoned himself — a passion to which the Romans and Greeks gave way, a practice that Henry III. made the fashion in France, and of which many great men have been accused. But these examples are exceptions as remarkable as they are rare. In Africa this abnormal phase of human passion has permeated so thoroughly the morals — if one may use that word — of the Arabs, that they seem to look upon it as being just as natural as its opposite.

Whence springs this aberration of instinct? From many causes, doubtless. Perhaps from the heat of the climate, which excites the passions of the body, and therefore destroys in men of ardent temperament that delicacy, that comprehension of natural right which preserves us generally from customs and contacts which repel.

There are yet other customs, commonly known, but so base that I cannot here comment upon them.

Coming down one night from Boukhrari, I saw three Oulad-Naïls, two dressed in red and one in blue, standing motionless in the midst of a group of Arabs, all lying down. They looked like fierce goddesses, dominating a prostrate people. All eyes were fixed on the fort of Boghar, up above, on the long dusty hill facing them. All were motionless, attentive, as if something wonderful were about to happen; each holding between his fingers a freshly-made cigarette.

Suddenly a puff of white smoke appeared at the summit of the fortress, and immediately all cigarettes were lighted, while the ground shook slightly with the roar of the cannon that gave the signal for the end of the daily fast.

CHAPTER VII. A SALT LAKE

As I was breakfasting one morning with the captain of the Arabian post at Boghar, who is one of the most obliging and competent officers here, the conversation turned to an order which two young lieutenants were about to carry out. This was a trip inland into the territories of Boghar, Djelfa, and Bou Saadar, to decide and locate the water-courses. The general fear of an uprising at the end of the Ramadan was still uppermost, and it was thought safer to prepare the way for an expedition to the different tribes of this part of the country.

No map has yet been made of this region. There are only topographical notes, made by the few officers who have passed this way, indicating, approximately, the springs and wells. These notes have sometimes been hastily scribbled on the pommel of a saddle, and they include also rough sketches of the localities, made without any instrument whatever.

I begged to be allowed to join the little troop, and was permitted to do so. We left two days later, at three o'clock in the morning. A Turkish soldier woke me by pounding on the door of the little inn. On opening the door, I beheld a man dressed in a red vest, embroidered with black; his wide trousers were gathered at the knee and tucked in the long, red leather gaiters worn by riders in the desert. He was an Arab of medium size. His nose had been slit open by a sword-cut, and the scar left one of the nostrils entirely exposed. He was called Bou-Abdal-ah, and he said to me:

"Sir, your horse is waiting."

"Has the lieutenant arrived yet?" I asked.

"He is coming," he answered.

Soon after, a noise could be heard in the barren valley, which was still dim; then shadows appeared and passed on. I could just make out the silhouettes of three camels loaded down with our canteens and camp-beds, and the few other necessary things for a twenty days' trip in a solitary region barely known to these officers.

In a short time, coming from the direction of Boghar, I heard the galloping of a troop of riders, and the two lieutenants arrived with their escort, composed of a soldier and an Arab rider, named Dellis, a man of noble birth, belonging to one of the most illustrious families of natives. —

I leaped on my horse and we were off. The night was still intensely calm, one might say motionless. After going north a short distance, following the valley of the Chélif, we turned to the right into a valley just at daybreak.

There is no twilight in this country, and it is seldom that one sees those crimson clouds, long drawn out and brilliantly variegated, the blazing or blood-red clouds of our horizons in the north, as the sun rises and sets.

Here the sunrise is at first a vague glimmer, which increases rapidly, spreads, and covers everything in a few seconds. And suddenly, at the top of a hill, or on the edge of the endless plain, the sun is seen just as it will look all day, and not with that reddish, sleepy look which it assumes in our country on a foggy morning.

But the strangest thing of all, in these dawns in the desert, is the complete silence. Who does not know, at home, the first, chirruping of birds, heard long before dawn, and that other answering cry in the neighboring tree, and following the incessant chatter, a series of quick, sharp notes, mingling with the continuous crowing of cocks in the distance; the clamor that follows the awakening of animals, the happy, joyful voices in the trees and bushes.

In the desert nothing is heard. The enormous sun rises above the earth, which it has devastated, and seems to look down upon it in a masterful way, as if to make sure that no living thing is left to devour.

No cry of an animal is ever heard, except perhaps the neighing of a horse; not a sign of life appears, apart from our beasts of burden, as they drink at the stream, near which we have been encamped.

The heat becomes intense immediately. We put on, over the flannel hood and the white cap, the large *medol,* a straw hat with a very wide brim.

We followed this valley slowly. As far as we could see, all was bare; the earth was of a yellowish gray, burning and superb. Sometimes in a hollow, where stagnated a little water, or in the dried bed of a river, a few reeds could be seen making a small stain here and there; sometimes, in a fold of the mountain, two or three trees disclosed a spring. We had not come yet to that region, which we were soon to cross, where there is absolutely nothing with which to quench one’s thirst.

We still climbed on. Small valleys adjoined the one we were in, and as midday drew near, the horizons almost disappeared in a misty heat, whose tones were of faint pinks and blues, appearing to be white in the distance, but slightly colored, and assuming an exquisite softness and an infinite charm, when compared with the blinding glare of our immediate surroundings.

At last we arrived on the top of the mountain, and the chief, El-Akhedar-ben-Yahia, with whom we were to camp, came to meet us, followed by a few riders. He was an Arab of illustrious birth, the son of the pasha, Yahia-ben-Aïssa, nicknamed “the military pasha with the wooden leg.”

He escorted us to his camp, which was near a spring, where stood four enormous trees whose roots were deep in water, the only green spot to be seen from this height, everything else being dry and stony as far as the eye could reach.

Breakfast was served immediately, the chief not joining us, on account of the fast of Ramadan. But he sat with us to see that we had all we wanted, and so did his brother, El-Haoués-ben-Yahia, chief of the Oulad-Alane-Berchieh. With them was a boy about twelve years old, somewhat thin, but of a graceful and noble mien. I had noticed him a few days ago, in the Moorish *café,* among the Oulad-Nails.

I was struck at that time with the fineness and dazzling whiteness of the garments of this frail little Arab, with the nobility of his manner, and the evident respect with which everyone treated him. When I expressed surprise at his being allowed, at his age, to be with courtesans, they said: “He is the youngest son of the military pasha. He comes here to see life!” How different from our French customs!

The child recognized me and came forward to shake hands. As he was too young to fast, he sat down with us, and with his thin little fingers began to tear apart the pieces of roast mutton. Meanwhile, I thought I understood that his two older brothers, the chiefs, were chaffing him about his trip to Boukhrari, asking him where he obtained that silk scarf about his neck, and whether it was the gift of a woman.

That day we dozed away under the shade of the trees. I woke up as night was falling, and climbed a small hill to scan the horizon. The sun, about to disappear, was of a reddish tint, in the midst of an orange-colored sky. And everywhere, from north to south, from east to west, as far as one could see, the rows of mountains spread out before me were all pink, like the wings of a flamingo. One would call it a fairy-like apotheosis of color, something unusual, fictitious, unnatural even, withal admirably beautiful.

Next day, we came down from the mountain, on the other side of it, into a valley of such length that it took us three days to cross it. Notwithstanding this, we could see the chain of the Djebel-Gada facing us. This was a mournful stretch of sand, or rather a dust-like earth, with tufts of *alfa* growing here and there, compelling our horses to pick their way on either side to avoid them.

These plains of the desert are full of surprises. From afar they look quite flat, when, in reality, they are full of undulations, like the sea, which from a distance after a storm looks quite smooth, but, on nearer view, discloses the long swell of its waves. The slope of these earth-waves is too slight to be felt, and you never lose sight of the mountains in the distance; but at the same time, a whole army could easily be hidden behind any of these hillocks and not be discovered.

It is just this peculiarity that made the pursuit of Bou-Amama so difficult on the heights of south Oran.

Every morning at dawn we resume our march through these endless plains; every night we meet a few riders, draped in their white cloaks, who lead us to a much-mended tent, under which rugs are spread out. We eat the same food every day, we converse for a few minutes, then drop off to sleep and dream.

And far away we ail feel! Far from the world, from life, from everything, as we lie under that small, low tent, through the holes of which we can see the stars, and also the immense country of arid sand.

This part of the earth is very monotonous to look at, always the same, charred and dried; yet one wishes for naught here, one regrets nothing, and one aspires to nothing. The calm landscape, with its torrent of light, suffices to the eye, the thought, the senses even, because it is complete, absolute, and one cannot conceive it otherwise. The sight of the thin verdure even offends, as does anything artificial or false.

Every day the same thing is repeated; this intense fire devours a world, and as soon as the sun sets, the moon rises, in its turn, over this infinite solitude. But every day, little by little, this silent desert encroaches on one’s thoughts, invading and penetrating them as the strong light penetrates the skin; and one wishes to become a nomad, after the way of these men, who go from place to place without ever forgetting the customs of their country.

Every day the officer on duty sends a native soldier ahead to announce to the chief that they will all eat and sleep in his tent, enabling him thus to procure the necessary food for the men and beasts. This custom, which is equivalent to taxation in our country, often becomes a burden, from the way it is carried out.

Who says Arab, says thief, without any exception whatever. And this is what takes place: The chief applies to one of the leaders and claims this sum from his men. The leader pays; then the chief pockets the money and applies to another, who also pays. If he has an enemy, this man is made to pay also, when he in turn makes his men pay, too.

And this is how a tax that should cost each tribe twenty or thirty francs, invariably reaches four or five hundred. Nor is it possible to change this state of affairs, for reasons too long to enumerate here.

As soon as we near a camp, we see in the distance a group of riders coming toward us. One of them leads the party, and the horses walk or trot. Then, suddenly, they break into a furious gallop, such as our northern horses never could endure. It is the gallop of race-horses, sounding like an express train at full speed. The Arab almost stands on his stirrups, with his white garments floating behind and, with one jerk stops his steed, which all but falls on its knees. Then he jumps from the horse, advances respectfully, and kisses the hand of the officer. No matter what the title, origin, power, or riches of an Arab may be, he nearly always kisses the hand of any officer that he meets.

The chief remounts and directs the travelers toward a tent prepared for them. The general idea is that these tents are white and brilliant in the sunlight. They are, on the contrary, of a dirty brown, striped with yellow. They are woven of coarse hair from camels and goats, are always low (one can just stand up in them) and roomy. Posts, irregularly placed, uphold them, and the canvas is raised on all sides, so that the air may circulate freely. Notwithstanding this care, the days spent under these linen tents are intolerable; but the nights are delightful, and one sleeps wonderfully well on the thick and gorgeous rugs, even though these are full of insects.

Rugs constitute the only luxury of wealthy Arabs. They are piled one on another, in great heaps, and they are so highly prized that everyone takes off his shoes before stepping on them, as if at the door of a mosque.

As soon as his guests are seated, or rather lying on the ground, the chief orders coffee to be served. This coffee is exquisite, and still the recipe for making it is simple. It is crushed, instead of being ground, and with it is mixed a certain quantity of ambergris, which is allowed to boil in the water.

Nothing is more amusing about the repasts than the china possessed by these people. When a rich chief entertains, his tent is full of priceless hangings, beautiful cushions, and gorgeous rugs; but when the coffee is brought in, it is served in three or four cups badly notched, on a tin tray that looks as if it might have been bought at a cheap bazaar in Paris. These cups are of all sizes and manufactures, — English porcelain, imitation Japanese, common china, the ugliest and commonest specimens of crockery ever seen anywhere. The coffee itself is likely to be in a soldier's wooden bowl or a dented and worn tin coffee-pot that has seen better days.

They are a strange people; they have remained as childish and primitive as at the beginning of time. They pass on this earth without becoming attached to it, never settling down. As their dwellings are merely pieces of linen stretched on sticks, they possess none of those things that mean so much to us. They have no beds, no sheets, tables, or seats, not one of the little things that we consider necessary to our comfort. They have no household furniture, no trades, no arts, no knowledge of any kind. They hardly know how to sew goat-skins together, in order to carry water, and their ways of doing the simplest things are so primitive as to make one wonder.

Some of them do not know how to mend even their tents; and the holes in the brown linen are so numerous that the rain comes through at all times. They are not attached to the soil, nor do they care for life, these vagabond riders; they leave a large stone where lie their dead, any kind of stone picked up on the neighboring hill. Their cemeteries look like a field, where a house might have tumbled down, stone by stone.

Negroes live in cabins, Laplanders in holes, Esquimaux in huts; the wildest of wild men have a dwelling of some kind, below the earth or above it, as they cling to mother earth. The Arabs alone come and go, wanderers always, without any love for that earth to which we all cling, which we love with all the intensity of our natures; they always gallop by on horses unfitted for our labors; they are indifferent to our troubles, and ride madly away, as if they were always hastening to some place that they are destined never to reach.

Their customs have remained rudimentary, while our civilization has marched past them without affecting them in any way.

They themselves drink out of the goats' skins, but water is given to strangers in the most incredible kinds of receptacles. Everything is to be found here, from the iron stewpan to the tin can with a hole in it. I believe that if they were to get hold of one of our high hats, in some bazaar, they would save it to offer a drink of water out of it to the first general passing their way.

The cooking consists entirely of four or five dishes, not varied in any way. First comes mutton, which has been roasted at an open fire. A man brings it in whole, carrying it on his shoulders, strung on a pole on which it was cooked; and the silhouette of this scorched animal up in the air reminds one of an execution in the Middle Ages. Its outline stands out at night against the crimson sky in a manner both sinister and grotesque, as it is held on high by this severe-looking personage draped in white.

The mutton is laid upon a flat dish made of braided *alfa,* in the center of the group of guests, who sit in a circle, Turkish fashion. Forks are unknown; each man uses his fingers, or carves with a small bone-handled knife. The wrinkled skin, which is crisp, is considered the daintiest morsel. It is torn off in long strips, which one crunches with pleasure, drinking muddy water with it, or else half-camel's milk and half-water, or some bitter milk which has fermented in a goat's skin and has acquired a strong taste of musk; the Arabs call this drink "leban."

After the *entrée* something that looks like a dish of vermicelli is brought in, sometimes in a small wooden basin or in some antique iron pot. This *potage* is composed of pimento (allspice), red pepper, and a mixture of apricots and dates mashed together. I would not advise a connoisseur to taste this dish.

When the chief's reception is particularly gorgeous, the *hamis is* served next; this dish is really wonderful. I will give the recipe for those who may care to try it. —

It is made of chicken or mutton. After cutting the meat into cubes, it is fried in a little butter. Then take hot water (I should think broth would improve it) and add a large quantity of red pepper, a dash of pimento (allspice), pepper and salt, onions, dates, and dried apricots, and boil this until the fruit is quite soft, when it is poured over the meat. It is simply delicious.

The meal ends invariably with the kouskous, the national dish. The Arabs prepare this by rolling flour between the fingers until it looks like gunshot. These granules are cooked in a particular way, and they are covered with a special kind of broth, of which I will say nothing here, for fear I may be accused of writing a cookbook. Sometimes, also, they bring little honey cakes, like puff paste, which are very good.

Every time you take a drink, the chief who is your host says: *"Saa!"* (your health), and you must answer " *Allah y selmeck!"* which is equal to our "God bless you!" This formula is gone through ten times during one meal.

At four o'clock every day we settle down under a different tent; sometimes at the foot of a mountain, or again in the midst of some limitless plain.

As the news of our arrival spreads, one sees on all sides in the distance, from hill and dale, white specks advancing rapidly. These are Arabs, come to gaze on the military officer and to make known their claims. Nearly all ride horseback, very few being on foot; some ride astride small asses, with their feet almost touching the ground.

As soon as they set foot on the ground, they lie all around the tent, motionless and with fixed gaze, waiting patiently. Finally, the chief makes a sign and the complainants advance.

Every officer administers justice in a final and decisive manner.

The Arabs bring forward extraordinary claims, as they are the most quarrelsome, wrangling, and vindictive people in the world. As to finding out the truth and giving a fair judgment, that is out of the question. Each side brings an incredible number of false witnesses, who swear by the ashes of their fathers and mothers to the truth they asseverate. Here are a few examples:

A cadi (these Turkish judges are known for being mercenary to a degree) sends for an Arab and makes this proposition to him: "You will give me twenty-five *douros* [a *douro* is about five francs] and you will bring me seven witnesses who will swear in writing, before me, that X — owes you seventy-five *douros,* and I will make him pay it to you."

The man brings his witnesses who give their evidence and sign it. Then the cadi sends for X — and says to him: "You will give me fifty *douros* and will bring me nine witnesses that B — [the first Arab] owes you a hundred and twenty-five *douros.* I will make him pay up." The second Arab brings his witnesses.

Then the cadi calls the first Arab B —— to appear before him, and on the sworn statement of his seven witnesses, makes X — pay B — seventy-five *douros.* X — , in his turn, brings his nine witnesses to prove that B — owes him a hundred and twenty-five *douros,* which the judge compels him to pay. The judge's share in this transaction is then seventy-five *douros,* levied on both victims.

This fact is authentic. Notwithstanding this, the Arab seldom appeals to a French judge, knowing that he cannot be bribed, while an Arab will do anything for money.

They have an unconquerable dislike for our way of administering justice. Any written legal document frightens them, as they are extremely superstitious of paper, on which one may write the name of God, it is true, but might also trace some malevolent characters.

At the beginning of the French rule, when the Mussulmen found a piece of paper of any kind, they would raise it piously to their lips, bury it, or hide it in a hole in the wall, or even in a tree. This custom brought about such disagreeable results that there was an end of it very soon.

Here is another example of Arabian deceit. In a tribe near Boghar a murder was committed, and an Arab was suspected of being the guilty one, but proofs were wanting. In the same tribe at that time, was a poor man, who had come from a neighboring tribe to watch over some pecuniary interests of his own. One man came forward and accused him of this crime, another followed, and still another. Ninety of them came forward with positive proofs of his guilt, and the stranger was condemned to death and executed. Later, the man's innocence was fully proved. These men had simply wished to get rid of this stranger, who was in their way, and also to prevent one of their own tribe from being compromised!

Lawsuits last for years, without a single word of truth being spoken on either side. The only thing to do then is to imprison both parties, witnesses included; they are kept in jail for a few months, and when released they will keep the peace for a year or so, when they begin again.

In the tribe of Oulad-Alane, through which we had just come, a lawsuit was going on that had lasted three years, in which time not a ray of light could be seen. Every now and then the litigants spent a short time in jail, and, on being released, they would begin their quarrel over again. They pass the greater part of their life in cheating and robbing and shooting one another, and only in cases where powder has been used do they keep clear of the courts. —

From the tribe of the Oulad-Mokhtar a tall man applied to be taken to the French hospital. The officer questioned him as to his illness, when the man, opening his dress, revealed a horrible wound, an old one too, evidently. Asking the man to show his back also, the officer saw another dreadful hole, opposite the first one. On touching him slightly around the wound fragments of bones protruded. There was no doubt that the man had received a gunshot, and that it had penetrated and shattered the bones. But he denied it with the greatest energy, and persisted in saying that "it was the work of God."

In this dry country, however, wounds are not considered dangerous; festerings and gangrene resulting from the hatching of microbes do not exist here, as these bacilli flourish only in damp climates. Unless one is killed on the spot, or unless one of the vital organs is attacked, wounds usually heal.

We arrived next day at the tent of a chief called Abd-el-Kader-bel-Hout. This man was an upstart. His tribe, which he governed with wisdom, was less wild and quarrelsome than the others, but there may have been another reason for this.

The country here has water-sources only on the south side of the mountain, which is uninhabited, so that the water can be had only from wells which are common property. Hence there is no "diverting water from its course." which is a frequent cause of quarrel.

Here, also, a man applied to be sent to the French hospital. When asked what was the matter with him, he showed his legs, which were blue, weak, and flabby, with the flesh so soft as to retain the impression of a finger-mark, like mellow fruit. The poor devil showed every symptom of syphilis in its worst form. He was asked how he came to have such a disease; he raised his hand and swore on all his dead ancestors that it was "the work of God." Truly, this God of the Arabs performs singular deeds!

When all claims have been satisfied, we try to sleep a little in the intense heat of the tent.

Night comes and we dine. A deep calm settles on the charred earth. The dogs belonging to the soldiers bark in the distance, and the jackals answer their cries.

We lie on the rugs, staring at the sky sown thick with stars, which scintillate so brightly that they seem moist; and then we talk for a long, long time. Sweet memories come back, and are easy to relate, in these lukewarm, starry nights.

Around the officers' tent the Arabs lie on the ground; while, in a row in front, the fettered horses remain standing with a guard over each one. These horses are not allowed to rest; a chiefs horse must never be tired; as soon as one of them attempts tu lie down, an Arab jumps up and compels him to rise again.

Night creeps on. We stretch at ease on the thick, soft rugs, and on waking suddenly we see white forms, as if wrapped in their shrouds, lying all about us.

One day after a ten hours' ride in the burning dust, as we neared camp, where there was a well of muddy, brackish water (which, however, we thought delicious), the lieutenant took me by the shoulders, as I was just about to rest under the tent, and pointing to the horizon toward the south, asked if I perceived anything.

After looking attentively, I answered: "Yes, a very small gray cloud."

The lieutenant smiled: "Well, sit down here and watch that small cloud."

When I wished to know the reason why, my companion added: "If I am not mistaken, that is a hurricane of sand coming this way."

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the temperature was still 48° under the tent. The air seemed asleep under the oblique rays of the sun. There was no breath of wind, no sound, except that of the horses munching their oats and the whispering of the men preparing our meal, a hundred feet away from us.

It seemed, however, as if an additional heat was about us, a suffocating, concentrated heat, like that which oppresses one when near an immense fire. It was not the burning breath, abrupt and repeated, the caresses of fire that precede the sirocco, but a mysterious overheating of all that existed about us.

I watched the cloud increasing rapidly, but only as clouds always do. It was now of a dirty brown, occasionally rising high in the air, and again spreading on all sides, as our storms sometimes do. To tell the truth, I did not see anything extraordinary about it.

Finally, it filled the whole of the south. Its base was opaque and black, while its summit was copper colored and transparent.

I turned, on hearing a great commotion behind me. The Arabs had closed the tent, and were fastening it down with heavy stones. Everyone was running, calling, or tearing about, with that frightened, excited look one sees in a camp when it is attacked suddenly.

It seemed to me that the sun was going down; I looked up and it was covered with a yellowish veil and seemed but a light stain, pale and round, about to disappear.

Then I beheld a most extraordinary sight. The horizon had disappeared, and a cloud-like mass was rushing toward us, swallowing everything as it came, contracting all things in sight, drowning every object.

I drew back to the tent instinctively, and just in time, for the hurricane, like an immense yellow wall, had just reached us. This wall rushed on like an engine at full speed and suddenly enveloped us in a whirlwind of sand and wind, in a storm of loose earth, burning, whistling, blinding, and suffocating.

Our tent, held to the earth as it was by enormous stones, shook like a sail, but did not yield. That of the soldiers, not so well secured, trembled for a few seconds and suddenly was torn from the ground, flew up, and disappeared in the moving mass of dust surrounding us.

Nothing could be seen ten feet away through this night of sand. We inhaled sand, we drank sand, we swallowed sand, our eyes were filled with it, so was our hair, and it filtered down the neck, up our sleeves, filling even our shoes.

This lasted all night. A burning thirst tortured us, but the water, the milk, and coffee, were all full of sand. The roast mutton was peppered with it; the kouskous seemed made of gravel, and the bread-flour was turned to powdered stone.

A big scorpion came to see us. These hurricanes, which suit these animals, bring them all out of their holes. The dogs of the tribe were not heard that night.

Next morning the storm was all over; the Sun, murdering tyrant of Africa, arose in all his glory in a clear sky.

We left a little later than usual, this inundation of sand having prevented us from sleeping.

Before us was spread the chain of the Djebel-Gada, which we were to cross. A defile opened to our right, and we followed the mountain as far as this passage, which we entered, to find ourselves in the midst of *alfa,* the horrible *alfa!* Suddenly we struck what looked like a roadway, beaten tracks where wheel-ruts could be seen. How strange to see a road here!

This is the explanation which was given me: An ancient chief of this tribe, wishing to, imitate Europeans he had seen in Algiers driving in a coach, decided to build a road. This ingenious potentate took months and months to do this, compelling all his subjects to work like slaves. These poor wretches, without a pickax, shovel, or tool of any kind, digging most of the time with their hands, succeeded eventually in leveling several thousand feet of ground. This was enough to please their master, who promenaded through the Sahara in gorgeous equipages in the company of native beauties, brought from Djelfa by his favorite, a young Arab, sixteen years of age.

One must have seen this country, denuded and barren as it is; one must know the Arab, in all the gravity of his manner, to realize how comical must have been the look of this rake, this fashionable gentleman of the desert, driving about with barefooted concubines in a cart of unpolished wood, with uneven wheels, presided over by his boy favorite. This elegance of the tropic, this Saharian debauch, this attempt at *chic* in mid-Africa, must have been highly ludicrous.

There were a great many more men in our troop this morning. Besides the chief and his son, we were accompanied by two native riders and an old man who was very thin, wearing a pointed beard. He had a hooked nose, his back was bent, and his physiognomy resembled that of a rat, his eyes were so small and furtive. He was one of the chiefs of the tribe that disbanded when the leaders became extortionate. He joined us as guide, this part of the country being unoccupied even by Arabs.

We reached by degrees the top of the defile; for a time a high peak obstructed the view, but as soon as we rounded it I had the greatest surprise of all that I had experienced in this trip.

A vast plain spread out before us, and in it lay an immense lake, dazzling and blinding in the sunlight, whose limit we could not see. A lake in this country in the midst of the Sahara! — a lake of which I had never been told, of which no traveler had made a note! Was I out of my mind?

“What is this lake?” I asked, turning to the lieutenant.

He laughed and answered:

“That is not water, but salt. The illusion is so real, that everyone takes it for water. This salt lake, which is called here Zar’ez [the Zar’ez-Chergui], is about fifty or sixty kilometers long and twenty, thirty, or forty kilometers wide, in different places. These figures are approximate, of course, the country having rarely been traversed, and only by a party such as ours. These salt lakes [there are two] give their name to all the region, which is called the Zar’ez. From Bou-Saada, the plain is called the Hodna, after the salt lake of Msila.”

I looked at this expanse of salt, glistening under the fierce sun. The whole surface, flat and crystallized, shone like an immense mirror or steel-plate; and our burning eyes could not bear the glare of this odd lake, although we were still twenty kilometers away from it, which seemed hardly possible so near did it appear.

We finally reached the foot of the Djebel-Gada, and arrived at that abandoned fort which is called Bordj-el-Hammam, where we camped, after an unusually short ride.

This building, with its battlements, was erected at the beginning of the French conquest, to enable troops to occupy this part of the country in safety, should an insurrection take place; it is now almost in ruins. The outer wall is still in fairly good condition, and some of the rooms were habitable.

As on preceding days, all day long Arabs came to relate their grievances, real or imaginary, to the "officer."

A mad woman, whom no one knew, who subsisted in this dreary solitude, no one could conceive how, persisted in keeping near us. As soon as we stepped out of the fort, we found her invariably sitting in the most extraordinary attitudes.

Travelers of a poetic turn of mind have often written of the respect Arabs have for the demented. The truth is that in their own families they simply put them to death! Several chiefs, on being closely questioned, have admitted this. Sometimes these miserable idiots attain to a certain degree of sanctity, as they do in other countries besides Africa; but the custom is to kill them. And as the practices of the tribes are to us a sealed book, thanks to the system carried on by the great native chiefs, we have not even the slightest suspicion of what goes on in regard to this matter.

As we had traveled so little, I wrote the greater part of the night. About eleven o'clock, being very hot, I spread a rug in front of the door, in order to sleep outside under the clear sky.

The full moon, with its gleaming light, filled the space, and seemed to glaze everything it touched. The mountains, the sand, the horizon, that looked so yellow under the sun, seemed of a deeper hue still under the saffron light of the yellow moon.

Before me the Zar'ez, that vast lake of congealed salt, appeared incandescent. It seemed as if a fantastical phosphorescence emanated from it and floated above it; a fairy-like mist, so supernatural, withal so soft and captivating, as to keep me from closing my eyes for over an hour. And all around me, shining under the moon’s caress, the Arabs lay wrapped in their burnous looking like enormous snowflakes.

We set out again with the rising sun.

The plain leading to the Sebkra was slightly inclined, sown here and there with *alfa,* thin and scorched. The old Arab took the lead and we followed him at a rapid pace.

The nearer we approached, the more complete was the illusion. How could this be anything but a lake? Its width, at our left, occupied the entire space between the two mountains, a distance of thirty or forty kilometers. We rode straight to its extremity on the right, as we wished to cross over the narrowest part of it.

But on the other side of the Zar’ez I could make out a low hill of a golden yellow, that seemed to separate it from the mountain. On our left that line followed the horizon along the edge of the salt lake; and on our right, where stretched the plain, bare and narrowed-in by the two mountains, I could still see that long yellow trail. The lieutenant said to me: “Those are sand-dunes. This sand-bank is more than two hundred kilometers long, and it varies in width. We will cross it to-morrow.”

The ground became like a crust of saltpeter through which the horses’ hoofs sank deep. Grasses and reeds could be seen, and one felt that water was very near the surface. The plain, shut in between mountains, absorbing periodically the water from four rivers, and receiving the heavy showers of winter, would become an immense marsh, if the sun did not dry up its surface. Now and then pools of brackish water could be seen, from which some snipe flew away with that peculiar rapid movement of theirs. Then we found ourselves on the Sebkra, and we rode on that dried ocean.

Everything was white before us, of a silvery, snowy, vaporous whiteness. And even as we advanced on this crystallized surface, powdered with a salty dust, like snow, in which the horses sank as on thin ice, the impression still remained that the whole of this was water, after all. The only thing which might indicate to an experienced eye, that this was not a liquid stretch, was the horizon. Usually, the line that divides the water from the sky is visible; the one is always darker than the other. Sometimes, it is true, it all seems one, the sea taking on that tint of blue which, mingling with the blue of the sky, blends the one into the other. But by looking very intently one can always distinguish the line of the horizon, no matter how faint it is. Here nothing of the kind can be seen, as the horizon is veiled in a white stream, a milk-like vapor of an indescribable softness. And one looks for the terrestrial limit now here in space, again too low, in the midst of the salt plain, where float the creamy mists.

As long as we were above the Zar'ez, we had a clear perception of forms and distances; when on it nothing in sight seemed real; we were enveloped in a constant mirage.

At times the horizon appeared to be at a prodigious distance; again, we perceived suddenly on this lake, which a minute ago seemed as smooth as glass, enormous fantastic rocks, giant reeds, or islands with steep banks. Yet as we drew near these strange visions they disappeared, as if by some contrivance, and instead of enormous rocks, we found only very small stones. The immense reeds proved to be only dried grass an inch high; the islands were merely light swells on the crust of salt; and the horizon, which we believed about thirty kilometers distant, was really about a hundred miles from us, obscured by the veil of trembling mist that rose from the burning layer of salt.

This lasted about an hour, and then we reached the opposite shore.

We found it at first a small hollow plain, covered with a crust of dried earth, sprinkled here and there with salt. Then we ascended a low hill; grasses now appeared and also a kind of reed, and again a small blue flower like a forget-me-not, growing on a thin, thread-like stem, and so fragrant as to perfume the whole neighborhood. This exquisite odor gave me the impression of a scented bath; we inhaled it for a time, and our chests seemed to expand as we drank in its freshness.

We perceived at last a row of poplars, grasses innumerable, more trees, and then our tents were pitched on the edge of the sand-dunes, whose undulations, eight or ten yards high, resembled sea-waves.

The heat was growing fierce, accentuated, no doubt, by the hot waves coming from the Sebkra (the salt lake). The tents, like steaming ovens, were unbearable, and on dismounting we started to find a little shade under the trees. We had to cross a forest of reeds, i was walking in front, and suddenly I began to shout and dance with joy, for I perceived vines, apricot, fig, and pomegranate trees, a series of gardens, at one time prosperous but now almost buried in the sand. These gardens belonged to the chief of Djelfa. No roast mutton for breakfast! What joy! No kouskous! Grapes, figs, apricots, instead! This fruit was not very ripe, but we ate it just the same. What a feast! even though we suffered certain ill effects from it. The water was very bad, as it was muddy and full of maggots. Needless to add that we drank very little of it.

We all plunged into the reeds and slept. A cold shiver came over me and woke me up suddenly, — an enormous toad had spat water on my face. The traveler has to be very careful in this country not to sleep in the first green spot he finds, especially where there is sand, for there are swarms of *léfaa* (horned vipers), whose sting is deadly, the death agony sometimes lasting less than an hour. This reptile is very slow and not dangerous, unless one steps on it or lies down near it. When meeting one of these creatures, if a person is careful and quick, it is easy enough to catch it if it is seized behind the head. I may add that I did not try to do this.

This small and much dreaded viper lives among the *alfa*, under stones, or in any sheltered spot. At first, when lying on the ground, one thinks of nothing else, then gradually one thinks less about it, and finally not at all. As for scorpions, we despised them; they are as common here as spiders at home. When we found one, we encircled it with dried leaves, to which we set fire. The reptile, mad with fear, would raise its tail, describe a circle with it, and sting itself to death. I was always told that it had killed itself, but I invariably saw it die in the flames.

This is how I came to see the *lêfaa* for the first time.

As we were crossing an immense plain of *alfa* one afternoon, my horse gave signs of uneasiness. He would lower his head, snort, and stop suddenly, as if suspicious of every tuft of *alfa.* I am, I must admit, a very poor rider, and these abrupt jerks, besides filling me with fear as to my being able to maintain my equilibrium, would throw me violently against the pommel of my saddle. My companion, the lieutenant, laughed most heartily. Suddenly my horse gave a leap and kept looking on the ground at something I could not see. Thinking it wiser to alight than to wait to be thrown, I did so and looked around, but could see nothing but a small tuft of *alfa,* which I hit with my stick, when away slunk a small reptile into the next green tuft.

It was a *léfaa* (a horned viper).

The night of the same day, in a bare and rocky plain, my horse jumped to one side; I leaped down, sure of seeing another *lêfaa*, but saw nothing. On moving a stone, an immense sand-colored spider, moving rapidly, disappeared under a rock before I could catch it. One of the soldiers who had caught up to me called it a "wind-scorpion," to express its velocity probably. It was a tarantula, I think.

Another night, while I was asleep, something cold crawled over my face. I jumped up frightened, but I saw only the sand in the tent; all was in darkness, I could make out only the Arabs, from their white garments, as they lay asleep around me. Had I been stung by a *Jéfaa* or by a scorpion? Whence came that cold thing against my face? Very anxious to ascertain the truth, I lighted the lantern and prepared to strike the animal with my heel, when I saw a monstrous white toad staring at me. The horrible beast had wandered in my direction and struck my face.

In revenge, I compelled him to smoke a cigarette, and he died of it. This is how it is done: Its narrow mouth is opened by force and a piece of paper filled with tobacco is introduced, which is lighted at the other end. The animal, choking, blows on it furiously to get rid of it, and of course finally has to inhale the smoke. Then he blows again, inflating and gasping in the most comical way; but he must smoke on, unless some one takes pity on him. He usually dies from suffocation and is bloated like a balloon.

Strangers are often made to witness a Saharian sport, which consists of a struggle between a horned toad and an *ouran,* or large lizard.

We have all met in southern countries small lizards, with very short tails, running along some old wall. I often wondered what had become of their tails. One day, when lying in the shade reading, I saw a viper spring from a recess in the wall and dart at a gentle little lizard sunning itself on a stone. It fled, of course, but the adder, being so much quicker, caught it by the tail, half of which remained between its teeth, while the poor little beast disappeared in a hole.

Well, this *ouran* is a sand crocodile of a species mentioned by Herodotus. It is a sort of large lizard, peculiar to the Sahara, and it treats the terrible horned toad as the adder treats the small iizard.

The fight between these two animals proved to be interesting. It usually takes place in an old soapbox. The lizard is laid in it, when it tears around, trying to escape; but as soon as the l*éfaa* has been dropped out of a small bag into the box, it becomes motionless. Its eyes alone move rapidly about. Then it seems to glide slowly toward its enemy and waits. The horned toad, in the meantime, watches the lizard, scenting danger. Then suddenly it leaps, but the other is racing around so quickly as hardly to be seen. It attacks in its turn with surprising agility, and the toad opens its little mouth ready to bite to death, but the other flies past and in a second is out of reach at the end of the box.

This pursuit lasts fifteen or twenty minutes sometimes. The toad, exasperated, creeps toward its enemy, while the *our an* rushes around always out of reach, quicker than sight, turns, stops, starts again, exhausting his adversary. Then, suddenly, it lands on its neck, and one can see only the toad, convulsed, strangled by the powerful jaws of the lizard, who catches it behind the ears, just as the Arabs do.

One thinks while watching the fight of these two little animals of the bull-fights in Spain in some large arena. But it would be more dangerous to interfere between these small reptiles than to face the infuriated horned beasts of the ring.

In the desert, one often comes across a snake more than three feet long and no thicker than a man’s little finger. In the neighborhood of Bou-Saada, this inoffensive reptile inspires the most superstitious fear. The natives assert that it will go through the hardest bodies like a gunshot, and that nothing can stop it when it perceives a brilliant object. An Arab assured me that one of his brothers had been pierced through and through by one of these animals, and that it had torn away the stirrups at the same time. Evidently the man had been shot at the moment he saw the snake.

Around Laghouat, on the contrary, this reptile is not feared, and the children often take it in their hands.

The thought of all these formidable inhabitants of the desert prevented me from sleeping comfortably; any rustling startled me beyond words.

The sun was going down, and I roused my companion and asked him to walk with me over the sand-dunes to try to find some horned toads or sand-fish.

The creature called sand-fish (the Arabs name it *dwb)* is another kind of large lizard that lives in sand, the flesh of which is good to eat, so they say. We followed the trail of one without finding it. In the sand are also insects whose habits are peculiar. I refer to the ant-lions. They dig a funnel-shaped hole and settle in the bottom of it in ambush. As soon as a spider or any other insect slips by on the incline, they throw a dash of sand up, blinding and stunning the victim, when it tumbles down into the hole and is devoured.

The ant-lion was for that day our sole recreation. Night brought back the roast mutton, the kouskous, and the bitter milk. When meal hours came round I often wished for home-made coffee.

Then we lay on rugs outside the tent, the heat being too great for us to sleep inside. And we had strange neighbors before us and behind us — the sand-dunes, or waves of sand, like a restless sea, and the level stretch of salt, like the calmest of oceans.

Next day we crossed the sand-dunes. It was like an ocean of dust in the midst of a storm, a silent tempest, with enormous motionless waves of yellow sand. They were as high as hills sometimes, uneven and heaving like billows, only larger and streaked here and there. On this raging sea, silent and motionless, the burning sun of the south poured down its direct and pitiless rays.

One must climb over these golden waves, tumble down on the other side, climb up again and again, without ceasing, without rest or shade. The horses gasp, fall knee-deep and slip when coming down on the other side of these wonderful hills.

No one spoke, as we were overcome by the heat and parched with thirst. It is said that sometimes in these valleys of sand one is astonished by a strange phenomenon, considered a sure sign of death by the Arabs.

Somewhere near, in one direction or another, the beating of a drum, the mysterious drum of the sand-dunes, can be clearly heard. It beats distinctly, louder, then fainter, stops, and then begins again its fantastic roll.

No one appears to know the cause of this astonishing sound. It is thought to be the echo, multiplied and inflated by the undulations of the dunes, of grains of sand blown about by the wind and striking some dried grasses, as this phenomenon has always been noticed in the neighborhood of certain grasses that have been burned by the sun and are as hard as parchment.

These drum-beats, then, may be called a sort of mirage of sound.

As soon as we left the dunes, we saw three riders galloping toward us. When about a hundred feet distant, one of them dismounted and with a slight limp came to meet us. He was a man perhaps sixty years of age, rather stout (an unusual thing in this country), with a hard, deep-lined face, rather fierce in expression. He wore the cross of the Legion of Honor. He was called Si Cherif-ben-Vhabeizzi, chief of the Oulad-Dia.

He made us a long speech, inviting us to his tent to partake of a collation.

I entered for the first time the tent of a nomad chief. A pile of gorgeous rugs covered the ground; others were hung about to hide the torn places in the tent, and others again were stretched above our heads, making an impenetrable roof. Divan-like seats were also covered with precious stuffs; and a screen made of Oriental hangings divided one half the tent from the other, behind which the voices of women could be heard.

We sat down. The chief's two sons sat with him, and now and then he would rise and say a word or two over the screen to some one in the apartment beyond, when an invisible person would hand over a smoking dish, which the chief would offer us. —

We could hear little children crying and playing about their mothers. Who were these women? They probably could see us through the apertures, but they were invisible to us.

The Arab woman, as a rule, is small, with a milk white skin and the innocent look of a little lamb. She is modest only about her face. The working-girls have their faces closely veiled, while their bodies are covered only with strips of cloth, one falling in front and the other behind.

At fifteen years of age, these poor creatures become deformed, exhausted by hard labor. They work from morning till night, and go for water sometimes miles away, at the same time usually carrying a child on their backs. They are old women at twenty-five. Their faces, which are seen sometimes, are tattooed with blue stars. The wives of rich Arabs are seldom seen.

We left as soon as the meal ended, and reached the rock of salt, Khang-el-Melah. It is a strange looking mountain, gray, green, and blue, with metallic rays and peculiar ridges — a mountain of salt!

Waters, more salt than those of the ocean, escape at the base, and being volatilized by the intense heat of the sun, leave on the ground a white foam, like that of waves, — a foam of salt! The earth is not to be seen, as it is hidden under a faint powder, as if a giant had spent his time grating the mountain to spread its dust about; and large rocks, broken off, lie in hollows, — rocks of salt!

Under this extraordinary rock, I was told, were very deep wells, inhabited by thousands of doves.

The next day we arrived at Djelfa. This is an ugly little French town, but it is occupied by charming officers, who made themselves very agreeable.

After a short rest we proceeded. We began once more our long journey through the barren plains. Now and then we met herds of animals. Sometimes they were sheep, the color of sand; or, far out on the horizon, we made out strange-looking beasts, who, with hunched backs, long outstretched necks, and slow movements, looked like a flock of giant turkeys. On closer view we recognized camels, with their sides inflated like a double balloon, or leathern water-bottles full to overflowing, as some of these animals are said to store within them thirteen hundred gallons of water. They, too, were of the yellowish color of the desert, like all animals born in these solitudes. The lion, the hyena, the jackal, the toad, the lizard, the scorpion, and man himself, are all of the same color, from the tones of fiery, yellowish red of the ever-shifting dunes to those of the yellowish gray of the stony mountains. And the lark of the plains is so much the color of dust that one can see it only as it flies away.

What do these animals subsist on in these arid countries?

During the rainy season the plains are covered with grass in a very short time; then the sun dries up all this vegetation in a few days. These plants take on the color of the soil, they break, crumble away, and scatter on the earth like straw chopped so fine that one cannot distinguish the particles. But the herds of animals know where to find it, and they live on it. They go about looking for this powder of dried grass. They look as if they were eating pebbles. What would an ordinary farmer think of these peculiar pasture-lands?

We crossed a land where even birds are scarce, while wells were not to be found. We could see, in the distance before us, peculiar columns of dust that looked like smoke, running along the earth and ascending now and then. The ripples of the air, cuplike, raised and swept away these transparent clouds, and these were the only things to be seen in this mournful stretch.

Five hundred yards ahead of us, a rider guided us through this dull and endless solitude. He would walk his horse about ten minutes, motionless on his saddle, singing in his own tongue some mournful song with a strange rhythm. We copied his pace. Suddenly he would trot away, his body stiffened, standing almost erect on his stirrups, with his burnous floating behind him. And we all galloped after him, until, suddenly again, he would stop and go at a slower gait.

I asked my neighbor: “How can he guide us through in bare country without any compass whatever?”

“He always has camels’ bones to follow,” he replied.

True enough, every fifteen minutes or so, we came across some large bones, half-eaten by vultures, burned by the sun, making a white spot in the sand. Sometimes it was a piece of a leg, or else a jaw at the end of a spinal column.

"Where do these bones come from?" I asked.

My fellow-traveler told me that the convoys, as they go through, drop by the way all animals not fit to follow, and the remains we saw were what the jackals had not carried away.

For days we continued this monotonous journey, always riding behind the same Arab, in the same order, always on horseback, almost without a spoken word.

One afternoon as we neared Bou-Saada, which we expected to reach that night, I made out a brown mass in the distance, the size of which was increased by the mirage. Its shape astonished me. On reaching it two vultures flew away. It was part of a man's body, still soft, notwithstanding the heat, and glossy with decayed blood. The chest alone remained, the other parts having been carried away, no doubt by the ravenous birds of prey.

"There are travelers ahead of us," remarked the lieutenant.

A few hours later we entered a sort of ravine, a defile, a burning oven, with rocks scalloped like sand, sharp-pointed against that pitiless sky. Another body lay here. A jackal ran away as we approached.

And again, as we came out on the plain once more, a gray mass, stretched out before us, made a movement, and I saw, as it slowly raised its long, outstretched neck, that it was the head of a camel. He lay there on his side, probably had been there two or three days, dying of fatigue and thirst. His long legs looked broken, inert, lying on this fiery soil. And the poor beast, hearing us, raised his head to see us. His forehead, burned by the sun, was a running sore, and his eyes followed us about with a look of resignation. He did not utter a groan, did not even try to rise. One would think that having seen so many of his brothers die on such journeys, he knew the heartlessness of men. It was his turn and that was all. We passed on.

Looking back some time after, I could see the poor animal raising his long neck from the ground, still looking after us, the last living beings he would ever see.

An hour later, we saw a dog cowering against a rock, with his mouth open, showing his shining teeth, and watching intently two vultures, who were close by, picking their feathers while waiting for him to die. He was possessed by such fear of these patient birds, waiting for his flesh, that he never turned his head, nor did he seem to feel the stones the soldiers threw at him in passing.

Suddenly, on coming out of another defile, an oasis appeared before us. It is a sight not to be forgotten. The traveler has just crossed endless plains, sharp mountains charred and bare, without seeing a tree, a plant, or even a green leaf, and then suddenly before him appears a mass of dark greenery, looking like a lake of foliage spread out on the sand. Behind this green spot the desert begins again, stretching out infinitely as far as the horizon, where its line disappears into that of the sky.

The city slopes down to the gardens. What cities they are, those cities of the Sahara! An accumulation of cubes of mud, dried in the sun. All these square huts of mud are huddled close to one another in such a way as to leave, between their uneven lines, only a narrow passage called a street, very much like a path made by the constant passing of animals.

In fact, the whole city, made of diluted clay reminds one of the dwellings of animals, of beavers, for instance, and of work done without tools, with only such weapons as nature gave the lower order of animals.

Here and there magnificent palms expand, some rising twenty feet from the ground. Suddenly we enter a forest whose aisles are inclosed between high walls of clay. To the right and left, date-trees spread out their umbrella-like leaves, sheltering their delicate fruit under the thick, fresh shade. Under the protection of these giant palms, waving in the wind like outstretched fans, grow grapes, apricots, figs, and pomegranates, and, best of all, the priceless vegetables.

The water from rivers is stored in large reservoirs, and distributed like gas in our country. Trustees keep a strict account of the amount used by each man, and it filters through trenches, an hour or two a week according to the size of the property.

Wealth is reckoned by palms. These trees guard the life, and protect the sap, of fruit-trees, and stand with their roots bathed in water, while their summit is scorched by the fiery sun.

The valley of Bou-Saada, which brings the river to the gardens, is of marvelous beauty, like a landscape seen in dreams. Covered with date and figtrees and other stately plants, it slopes down between two mountains whose summits are fiery red. All along the river, native women, with veiled faces and bare limbs, wash their linen by jumping on it. They roll it up in a bundle, throw it in the running water, and beat it down with their feet, balancing themselves gracefully.

The river flows rapidly through this ravine. On leaving the oasis, it is still abundant, but the desert awaits it, the yellow thirsty desert, and absorbs it at the very garden doors, ingulfing it abruptly in its dried sand.

From the mosque, at sunset, the city looks most peculiar. The flat roofs of the clay huts look like a cascade of chessboards. On these the whole population may be seen moving about, as they all take to the roofs at sunset. Nothing can be heard, no one is to be seen in the streets; but if one can get a glimpse of one of the nearer roofs the greatest commotion appears to be going on. Supper is being prepared. Groups of ragged children crawl in the corners, while the Arab women, in soiled white garments, go about preparing the kouskous.

Night comes, and they spread rugs on the roof, shaking them first, as scorpions swarm in these huts, and the whole family sleeps in the open air under the twinkling stars.

Although small, the oasis of Bou-Saada is one of the most charming in Algeria. One can hunt the gazelle, which is to be found in large numbers. There is also an abundance of horned toads, and of hideous long-legged tarantulas, the shadows of which can be seen at night along the walls of the huts.

Considerable business is carried on at this village, as it is on the road to Mozab.

Mozabites and Jews are the only merchants, the only tradesmen, the only industrious beings in this part of Africa.

As we go further south, the Jewish race appears under such a hideous aspect as to make one understand the intense hatred of certain nations for these people, and even to explain the recent massacres. European Jews, Algerian Jews, all Jews that we know, that we come in contact with, our neighbors, our friends, are educated, intelligent, and some of them are charming men of the world. And we are indignant when we hear that a hundred Jews or so have been massacred or drowned in some little out-of-the-way, unknown town. I should not be surprised at this now, because the Jews here are very unlike the Jews at home.

At Bou-Saada they are to be seen groveling in filthy huts, bloated and fat, watching the Arab as a spider watches a fly. They call him and offer to lend him a hundred sous, in consideration of his signing a paper. The man knows the danger, hesitates, and says he will not. But the thirst for drink, and for other things, overcomes him. A hundred sous mean so much enjoyment!

He finally yields, takes the piece of silver, and signs the greasy paper. After three months he will owe ten francs, a hundred at the end of a year, two hundred after three years. Then the Jew sells his land, if he has any, or else his camel, his horse, or donkey, all he possesses, in fact.

The chiefs, military or otherwise, are equally in the power of these men, who are the plague, the bleeding sore, of our colonies, and the great impediment to the civilization and well-being of the Arabs.

When a detachment of French soldiers makes an incursion into a rebellious tribe, a flock of Jews follows it, buying from them the spoils which they re-sell to the Arabs, as soon as the army disappears in the distance. If, for instance, six thousand sheep are confiscated in this country, what can be done with the animals?

Drive them to the city? They would die on the way, for how could they be fed, how could water be provided for them, while crossing two or three hundred kilometers of barren ground? Besides, it would require twice the number of troops to guard and care for so many animals.

Should they be killed, what slaughter, and what loss! The Jews being there, seeking to buy at two francs sheep worth twenty, they let the animals go, feeling that the treasury at least is richer by twelve thousand francs.

A week later, the first owners buy back their sheep at three francs a head. French justice is easily satisfied.

The Jew is master of all Algeria. One seldom meets an Arab who is not in debt; they hate to pay up, and prefer to renew their notes, at one or even two hundred per cent. They seem to think they will be saved if they can only gain time. A special law would have to be enacted to remedy this state of affairs.

The Jew, it has to be said, deals only in usury, employing the most dishonest methods, the real tradesmen are the Mozarabs.

On arriving at the village of the Sahara, one notices a particular race of men who have charge of everything. They alone have shops, selling European and local merchandise; they are intelligent, active, and commercial to the backbone. They are the Beni-Mozab or Mozarabs. They have been nicknamed the “Jews of the desert.”

The man that lives in a tent, the real Arab, for whom work is a disgrace, despises the commercial Mozarab, but he comes at fixed intervals to get provisions from him; he confides to his care valuables which he cannot take with him in his roving life. A sort of compact exists between them.

Thus the Mozarabs have monopolized the entire North African trade; they are to be found in our cities, as well as in the villages of Sahara. Having made his fortune, this merchant returns to the Mozab, where he must undergo some cleansing process before he is allowed to resume his political rights.

These Arabs are noted for their small height, as they are smaller and broader than any other tribe; they have large, flat faces, thick lips, and eyes usually hidden under straight, bushy eyebrows. They are schismatic Mussulmans, and belong to the three dissenting sects of North Africa, and, according to learned men, they are the actual descendants of the sect of Kharedji.

The country to which these people belong is perhaps the strangest in all Africa. Their fathers, driven out of Syria by the army of the prophet, established themselves in Djebel-Nefoussa, west of Tripoli, in the state of Barbary.

Being repelled successively from every point in these states, as everyone was jealous of their intelligence and industry, and even suspicious of them on account of their faith, they finally settled in the most arid, most desolate, and hottest part of the country. It is called Hammada (overheated) and Chebka (net) because it resembles an immense net of rocks.

The country of the Mozarabs is situated about a hundred and fifty kilometers from Laghouat.

Commandant Coyne, the man who knows the south of Africa so well, describes his arrival at Mozab in a very interesting way. He says:

“About the middle of the Chebka is a sort of circle, formed by a belt of glossy limestones, with an abrupt descent toward the interior. It is open on the northwest and the southeast by two trenches, through which flows the Oued-Mozab. This circle, about eighteen kilometers long by two wide, incloses five of the cities of the Federation of the Mozab, and the plots are made exclusively into gardens, which these people cultivate.

“Seen from the exterior, and on the northern and eastern sides, these rocks look like so many tombstones, in uneven rows; one would think the place a burial ground. Nature itself seems dead. No trace of vegetation can be seen, even birds of prey avoid these desolate regions. The fierce rays of the sun are reflected on the rocky walls, producing shadows in fantastic designs.

"Therefore great is one's astonishment, I might say enthusiasm, when, on reaching the crest of the rock, one discovers fine, well-populated towns, surrounded by gardens of a luxuriant growth, etched in dark green on the reddish bed of the river.

"Around one is the barren desert, like death; at one's feet are life and the visible proofs of a very much advanced civilization."

The Mozab is a republic, or rather a *commune*, like that which the Parisian revolutionists attempted to establish in France in 1871.

No one here is allowed to be idle; even the children, as soon as they can walk, help their fathers to water the plants and care for the gardens, which constitute their principal occupation. From morning till night, the camels or donkeys draw with leathern buckets all the water needed to water these gardens, the system of irrigation being ingeniously arranged so as not to lose a drop of water.

The Mozab has, besides, any number of reservoirs for rain-water, in which respect it is very much in advance of Algeria.

The rain means happiness, plenty, an assured harvest, so that when it pours the people are wild with joy. They come out on the streets, discharge firearms, sing and run to the gardens, and to the river to see it flow, watching the trenches as they fill.

And these people by their constant labor, their industry and forethought, have made of the most wild and desolate part of Sahara a living country, well planted and cultivated, where seven prosperous towns are to be found. Therefore the Mozarab is very jealous of his country, and forbids, as much as possible, any European from entering it. In some of these towns, like Beni-Isguem, no stranger is allowed to stay one night.

They are their own police. No one would refuse to help to keep the peace, should such a necessity arise. There are neither poor nor beggars in this country. Nearly everyone can read and write.

There are a great many schools and public buildings. A number of Mozarabs, after staying in our cities a short time, return to their own home knowing and speaking French, Italian, and Spanish.

Governor Coyne's pamphlet contains a number of interesting details about these people.

In Bou-Saada, as in all oases and cities, the Mozarabs carry on all business that is done in the exchanges and shops of all kinds, and belong to all the professions.

After staying four days in this little town, we proceeded toward the coast.

The mountains we met on our way had a most extraordinary aspect. They looked like redoubts, with endless battlements. They are regular, square, and cut out as precisely as if by mathematical rule. The highest is perfectly flat and seems inaccessible. It has been called the “billiard table,” on account of its shape. Some time before we arrived two officers had climbed it, a feat never accomplished before, and they found on its summit two enormous Roman cisterns.

CHAPTER VIII. KABYLIA, BOUGIE

WE ARE now in the richest and most populous part of Algeria. The country of the Kabyles is mountainous, overspread with forests and fields.

On leaving Aumale, we descend toward the great valley of the Sahel. Opposite rises an immense mountain, the Djurjura. Its highest peaks are gray, as if covered with ashes.

Here and there on lower hills we see villages, which from afar look like piles of white stones; others seem to cling to the sloping hill. In the whole of this fertile country a terrible struggle is going on all the time, between Europeans and natives, for the possession of the soil.

The Kabylia is more densely populated than the most populous country in France. The Kabyles are not nomads, but industrious and hard-working folk. Therefore the Algerian does his best to dispossess them.

Here are some of the modes used to drive away and rob the poor native owners:

Any man leaving France can go to the official in charge of property in Algeria, and ask for a grant of land. The officer hands out of a hat a number corresponding to a lot, which in future will be his.

He leaves, and finds on reaching his destination that the land that has been assigned to him is in a village of natives, occupied by a whole family. These people have tilled and cultivated the ground on which they live — they have nothing else. The stranger expels them. And they go, resigned, since "It is the French law!" But these people, bereft of everything, betake themselves to the desert, where they become rebels.

Sometimes they arrive at an understanding with the newcomer. The European colonist, appalled at the heat and the appearance of the country, enters into negotiations with the Kabyle, who becomes his farmer. And the native, who is allowed to remain on *his own* land, must send, whether the harvest is good or not, a thousand, fifteen hundred, or even two thousand francs, to the European, who has returned to France!

Here is another method:

The Chamber of Commerce votes forty or fifty millions to be used in colonizing Algeria. What will be done with this money? Presumably, dams will be built and trees will be planted on the tops of mountains to attract rain, in order to make the plains fruitful.

Not at all. The Arabs are dispossessed. Now, in Kabylia land has increased considerably in value.

In the best parts it is valued at sixteen hundred francs an hectare (an hectare is two acres, one rood, thirty-five perches), and it usually sells for about one hundred and sixty dollars. The Kabyles live quietly on these lands. Being rich, they do not rebel; they only ask to be left in peace.

What happens, with fifty millions to dispose of in Kabylia, the loveliest country in Algeria? Well, the Kabyles are dispossessed in favor of unknown colonists.

But how is this done? They are paid *forty francs* an hectare, while each hectare is worth, at the lowest price, eight hundred francs! And the head of the family goes away, without a word (it is the law!), no one knows where, with all his people including the women and children.

These people are neither tradesmen nor manufacturers; they only know how to cultivate the ground. So that the family lives on the ridiculous sum that has been given them until it is all used up, when they become destitute. The men snatch up a gun, and follow some brigand, like Bou-Amama, which goes to prove that Algeria can be governed only by a military head.

They say: “We leave the natives in the fertile parts of Algeria as long as no Europeans ask for the land; but, as soon as they do, we dispossess the first landowner we come to.”

“Very well, but when there are no more fertile lands to be had, what will you do?”

“Oh! well, we will fertilize, then.”

“And why not now, when you have fifty millions to dispose of?”

How is it that, seeing that private companies build gigantic dams to give water to entire sections, and knowing that talented engineers could lay out sufficient land on which to plant forests large enough to attract water and to irrigate miles of surrounding country, they do not employ these means, instead of expelling the Kabyles?

It is only fair to add that beyond the Tell the land becomes so arid and barren as to be almost impossible to cultivate.’ The Arab alone, who can subsist on a handful of wheat and a few figs, can exist in this parched country. The European cannot make a living here. There are, then, but few restricted sections where colonists may settle, unless the natives are driven away, and this is what is being done.

In fact, apart from the lucky proprietors of the plain of Mitidja, those who have obtained grants of land of Kabylia, by the means I have just described, and also those who are settled near the sea, in that narrow strip of land bounded by the Atlas mountains, the colonists, in general are a poverty-stricken lot. Algeria can receive only a very small number of strangers — they could not make a comfortable living. Moreover, it is very difficult to govern this colony, for reasons readily understood.

Algeria is as large as any kingdom in Europe, and is composed of entirely different regions, inhabited by entirely different peoples. No government, so far, seems to have grasped this fact.

It requires a profound knowledge of each section to enable anyone to govern it properly, for every section needs laws, regulations, and provisions entirely different from every other section. Now the governor, whoever he may be, is totally ignorant of all these details and customs; he must depend only on the reports made to him by his subordinates.

And who are these subordinates? Colonists? Men brought up in the country, who understand its needs? Not at all! They are all very young men who come here from Paris in the governor's retinue. We see one of these young ignoramuses governing fifty or a hundred thousand people, committing blunder after blunder ruinous to the country. What else could be expected?

There are exceptions of course. Sometimes the all-powerful delegate of the governor works hard; tries to learn, to understand. It would take him ten years to do so thoroughly. In six months' time, he is transferred; he is sent, for personal or family reasons, or others, from the frontier of Tunis to the frontier of Morocco; and having arrived there, he begins his administration with the same means he employed in the former place, confident that he has acquired valuable experience; and he proceeds to apply the same regulations and rules to people essentially different in all respects.

It is, then, not so much a good governor that is needed, but, above all, a competent staff.

An attempt was made to remedy this deplorable state of affairs and these disastrous customs by creating schools of administration, where elementary principles, necessary to the governing of the country, would be taught to young men. The project failed, however. The officials surrounding Albert Grévy made it come to naught. Favoritism won the victory once more.

The staff of these administrators is recruited in a peculiar way. It contains, no doubt, some intelligent and conscientious men. But when the government is short of capable candidates, it usually selects ex-officers who have held commissions in the native army. These, at least, know the Arabs well; but it is difficult for them to change their principles of administration with their change of costumes; and we should not, after discharging them as military officers, reengage them to fill civilian positions.

Since I have allowed myself to touch upon this difficult question of the administration of Algeria, I must add a few more words on an important point, which should be immediately settled. It is that of the great native chiefs, who are in reality the allpowerful administrators of that part of the colony which is included between the Tell and the desert.

When the French first occupied Algeria, they invested with great authority over the tribes of a large part of the territory those of the chiefs who seemed to offer a guaranty of faithfulness. These chiefs were called military chiefs, or pasha chiefs. We could have done nothing alone, so we asked the help of native chiefs won over to our ideas, confident, however, that, in many cases, they would betray us, which they did frequently. The measure proved wise and politic; it produced, in fact, excellent results. Some of the chiefs rendered valuable services, and the lives of thousands of Frenchmen were saved, thanks to them.

But though a measure may be good at a certain period, it does not follow that it is perfect, notwithstanding all the modifications time brings in a country under colonization.

To-day, the presence in the tribes of these potentates, who alone are respected and obeyed, is a cause of permanent danger to us, an insurmountable obstacle to the civilization of the Arabs. However, the military party defends energetically this system of having native chiefs against the tendency of the civil authorities to suppress them.

I do not feel competent to discuss this question; but it would be sufficient for anyone to go among these people, as I did, to realize that it is all but impossible to alter the situation as it is at present. I will give a few facts.

It is entirely due to the chief of Saïda that Bou-Amama has resisted up to this time. In the beginning of the insurrection, this chief was sent with his men to join the French army, and he met, on the way, the Trafis, who were on the same mission. Together, they joined their forces.

The chief of Saïda was head over ears in debt, and it evidently occurred to him, during the night, to make a raid on the Trafis, whom he attacked with his men. Those who were beaten at first soon regained the advantage, and the chief was compelled to flee.

Thus it was that the chief of Saida being our ally, our friend, and lieutenant, and representing French authority, the Trafis believed us to have had a hand in the attack, and, instead of joining the French army, they defected, and joined Bou-Amama whose strongest ally they became.

This is characteristic, is it not? And the chief of Saïda has remained our faithful friend. He marches under our banner.

There is, on the other hand, another celebrated chief, whom our military authorities treat with regard, because he has great influence over a large number of the tribes. Sometimes he helps us, again he betrays us, as it may prove an advantage to him. Openly allied to the French, whose authority he represents, he favors secretly all rebellions. It must be added that he forsakes either party whenever he has a chance to pillage. After taking an undeniable part in the murder of Colonel Beauprêtre, he is now allied to us. Moreover, he is strongly suspected of having taken part in a great many other outrages.

Our firm ally, the chief of Frenda, has often warned us of the double game carried on by this potentate; but we have turned a deaf ear to him because he himself renders us only interested services.

This particular position, and the openly-avowed protection guaranteed to the chief of Saida, make him commit almost daily the worst crimes with impunity.

This is what takes place:

The Arabs all over Algeria are inveterate thieves, robbing one another continually. Never a night goes by but we are notified of twenty camels stolen here, a hundred sheep there, cows from near Biskra, horses taken from Djelfa. The thieves are never found, and still there is not a single official of the Arabs who does not know what becomes of the stolen cattle! They are taken to this chief just spoken of, this receiver of stolen goods. The animals are allowed to roam among his immense herds; he keeps a number of them for his trouble, returning the others after a while, when all danger of being discovered has passed away.

FROM AN ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH. *Group of Kabyles with a tame lioness.*

No one in the south is ignorant of this state of affairs. But this man, to whom so much power has been given, is needed; his power is increased by the help he gives the freebooters, and we pretend not to see what goes on. And so this chief is immensely wealthy, while the Agha of Djelfa, for instance, is comparatively poor, as he has almost ruined himself trying to look after the interests of the colony, developing farms, clearing land, etc.

Now, besides these facts, disastrous things happen, which result from the presence of these native chiefs among the tribes. To understand this well, one must know Algeria as it is now. The territory and population are very clearly divided. There are, first, the towns on the seacoast, which have no more relations with those of the interior than any town in France has relations with this colony. These inhabitants are essentially peaceful; and they sometimes feel the after-effects of insurrections; but they have no influence over those occupying native territories.

The second zone, the Tell, is occupied chiefly by European colonists, and these see in an Arab only an enemy, from whom land is to be wrested. They hate him instinctively, pursue him always, and rob him when they can. The Arab pays them back in their own coin.

This aggressive hostility is the reason why the colonists have no civilizing influence over the Arabs. In this region things are not so very bad — the European element is eliminating the native element so rapidly that it will not be long before the Arab, ruined or dispossessed, will take refuge further south.

Therefore, it becomes absolutely necessary to see that these neighbors we have conquered keep the peace. To achieve this, we must exert our authority over them continually, and make them feel our power.

What is the state of affairs there to-day? The tribes, scattered over an immense territory, never see a European. From time to time, the officers from the Arabian bureaus perform a round of inspection, content with asking the native chiefs how things are going on. But the chiefs are under the military or pasha chiefs. If these are of good birth, and of an illustrious family respected in the desert, their power is unlimited. All the chiefs obey them implicitly, as they did before the occupation by the French, and nothing that takes place is ever known to the military authorities.

The tribes, then, are a sealed book to us, because of the fear and respect paid to the great chiefs, who carry out the traditions of their ancestors in making extortionate demands on their subjects. They are absolute masters, extorting from their followers a hundred sheep at one time, or sometimes two hundred, and acting the parts of tyrants. As they hold their power from us, what ensues is simply a continuation of the ancient policy carried out under the French *régime*, the hierarchical thieving, etc., including our being set aside and left in complete ignorance of the real state of the country. It is owing to this condition of things that we suspect revolts sometimes, but our suspicions are aroused only when the rebellions are about to break out. Hence, the presence of these great native chiefs delays indefinitely the real and direct influence of the French authorities over the Arabs.

How can this be remedied? In this way: Nearly all these chiefs, except perhaps two or three, are much in need of money. It would be necessary to give them an income of ten, twenty, or even thirty thousand livres, according to their influence and the services they have rendered us, and then compel them to live in Algiers or in one of the cities on the coast. Certain military men assert that this would be the signal for war — they probably have reasons of their own to prove this. Others again, who live in the interior of the country, claim that this would be the only way to secure peace.

This is not all. These men would have to be replaced by civil officers who would live with the tribes, having absolute control over the petty chiefs. In this way, by degrees, civilization would penetrate into these countries, once these obstacles were removed.

But useful amendments are long in being achieved in Algiers as well as in France.

In crossing Kabylia I had a proor of our powerlessness, even over the tribes that live among Europeans. We were going toward the sea, following the long valley that leads from Beni-Mansour to Bougie. Before us, in the distance, a singularly dense cloud closed the horizon. Over our head the sky was of that milky-blue color it assumes in summer in hot countries, but farther away appeared a dark cloud with yellowish rays, which seemed neither a storm nor a mist, nor even one of those tempests of sand that blow like a hurricane, burying everything under the gray dust. This cloud, opaque and heavy, almost black at the base and lighter as it rose in the sky, seemed to obstruct like a wall the whole of the valley before us. Then suddenly there was a faint odor of burned wood in the still air. But what giant fire could be the cause of this mountain of smoke? For it was undoubtedly smoke. All the forests of Kabylia were on fire!

We soon entered the suffocating semi-darkness, but could not see an object a hundred yards in front of us. The horses breathed heavily. Night seemed to have fallen, and a light breeze, which barely stirred a leaf, blew this floating darkness toward the sea.

We waited two hours at the nearest village to get some news; then our little carriage continued on its way in the real night, which had now spread over the earth.

An uncertain glare, though afar yet, lightened the sky. It increased rapidly, looking more blood-like than brilliant. But suddenly, at an abrupt turn in the valley, I thought I must be facing an immense city, all illuminated. It was an entire mountain, already burned, save the branches of the trees which had cooled, but the trunks of the elms and the olive-trees were still incandescent, like enormous coals, millions of them standing smokeless, like colossal lights on an endless boulevard, forming squares and winding streets, regular or uneven, as one sees from a distance in lighted cities at night.

We came nearer to the great furnace, and the lights grew more brilliant. During this day alone the fire had covered twenty kilometers of forest.

When we discovered the line of fire, I was terrified, yet delighted at the same time at seeing the most terrible and thrilling spectacle I had ever beheld. The fire swept like a wave over an endless distance. It razed everything to the ground advancing quickly. The branches blazed and went out; but the tree-tops waved like torches in the air, while the trees themselves burned slowly, and the small flame of the bushes ran along rapidly.

All night long we followed this brazier, and at daybreak we reached the sea. Inclosed in a belt of odd-looking mountains, with dentated crests, strange and charming with their wooded sides, lay the Gulf of Bougie, — of a creamy blue, though clear, a blue of an extraordinary transparency, — rounding itself out under the azure sky.

At the end of the hill, at the left of the slope of the mountain, in a mass of greenery, the city tumbles down to the sea in a stream of white houses.

It gives as one enters it, the impression of being one of those pretty and improbable little cities seen at the Opera, cities we dream of situated in impossible countries.

It has Moorish houses, French houses, and ruins everywhere, the kind of ruins seen in stage scenery.

On arriving at the wharf, where transatlantic ships are moored, and where those boats whose sails look like wings are made fast in the midst of a seeming fairyland, the traveler sees a ruin of such magnificence as to seem unnatural. It is an old gateway built by the Saracens.

On the wooded hills everywhere are ruins, remains of Roman walls, of crumbling Moorish monuments, and buildings abandoned by the Arabs.

The day passed slowly and was burning hot, then night came, and we had a most extraordinary spectacle. As darkness set in, another light in the horizon seemed to replace that of day. The incendiary fire, like an invading army, surrounded the town. New fires, started by the Kabyles, appeared here and there, and were marvelously reflected in the calm waters of the vast gulf, surrounded by the blazing hills. The fire at times looked like a string of Venetian lanterns, or the writhings of a huge snake on the undulations of the mountain, or else it burst like a volcanic eruption, showing a dazzling core, or it resembled an immense torch, according as the fire burned underwood or tall old trees.

I remained six days in this flaming country, then left by that beautiful road which outlines the gulf and leads on one side along hills topped by forests towering above one another, and on the other side over apparently endless golden sands bathed by the quiet waves of the Mediterranean.

Sometimes the fire had reached the road and we were compelled to jump out to remove the burning trees fallen across it; again we galloped at the topmost speed of our four horses, between two waves of fire, one wave creeping down to a ravine where flows a torrent, the other climbing up to the summits, devouring everything and leaving the mountain bare. Hills, already burned, seemed covered by a black veil, like a veil of mourning.

Sometimes we crossed countries still untouched by fire. Anxious colonists standing in doorways inquired as to the progress of the flames, just as men asked in France, during the war, if the enemy were near.

Jackals, hyenas, foxes, and rabbits flew before the scourge, terrified by the approaching flames.

On turning into a small valley, we saw, suddenly, five telegraph poles loaded down with sparrows so heavily that the wires curved, forming between each post what looked like a garland of birds.

The driver cracked his whip. A cloud of sparrows flew away, scattering everywhere, and the thick wires, relieved suddenly, leaped and stretched out like a bowstring. They throbbed for some time, with long vibrations, dying down gradually.

We then reached the pass of Chabet-el-Akhra. Leaving the sea on the left, we entered the opening in the mountain. This pass is one of the grandest in the world. It narrows now and then; peaks of granite, bare, reddish, brown, or blue, come closer, leaving at their base but a narrow passage for the water; the road itself is nothing more than a narrow cornice cut in the rock above the torrent flowing below.

The appearance of this pass, which is arid, wild, and beautiful, changes every few minutes. The two walls inclosing it rise at certain places to a height of nearly six thousand feet; and the sun cannot reach the bottom of this well, except when it passes directly above it.

On reaching the other side of the pass we arrived at the village of Kerrata. The inhabitants, for a whole week, had been watching the black smoke issuing from the defile, as from a huge chimney.

The government of Algeria declared afterward that this disaster, which could have been averted with a little forethought and energy, had not been brought about by the Kabyles. It was also said that the burned forests did not contain more than five thousand hectares.

A dispatch from the sub-prefect of Philippeville ran thus:

“I have been informed by the mayor and administrator of Jemmapes that the forests have been destroyed and that the douars (the vacated villages of Arabs) have been burned to the ground. The villages of Gastu, Aïncherchar, and that of Djendel have been threatened.

“In Philippeville all the trees have been burned. Stora, Saint-Antoine, Valée, and Damremont narrowly escaped being the prey of the flames. At Eî-Arrouch little damage was done, except to five hundred hectares burned in the douars of the Oulad-Messaoud Hazabra and El-Ghedir.

“At St. Charles about six hundred hectares were burned between Oued-Deb and the Oued-Goudi, and eight hundred hectares to the southeast and the southwest. Forage and huts destroyed. At Collo and Attia, the fire devoured everything.

“The lands Teissier, Lesseps, Levât, Lefebvre, Sider, Bessin, etc., are all or nearly all destroyed, also more than forty thousand hectares of woodland. Farms and houses at Zériban were destroyed by flames. There are a great many victims also.

“We buried this morning three zouaves, who died bravely in the discharge of their duty. The damage is very great and cannot be given, even approximately.

“The danger is almost over, for the reason that all forests have been destroyed. The wind has changed, and we hope to master the fire on the properties of Bessin, Collo, and Estaya near Robertville.

“I sent yesterday a hundred and fifty men to Collo, on a passenger ship, which I had requisitioned.”

Let me add that the fire extended to the forests of the Zeramna, Fil-Fila, the Fendeck, etc.

Mr. Bisern, during forty years contractor of the forests of El-Milia, wrote as follows:

“My staff showed the greatest energy; twice it was in great danger, and twice it fought the flames successfully. But all this was in vain. While we fought the fire on one side, the Arabs relighted it on the other side, and in many different spots.”

Here is a letter from a landed proprietor:

“I have the honor of notifying you that, during the night of Sunday, my fanner, Ripeyre, on guard on my property, situated above the drill-ground, saw four attempts at starting fire: one in the grounds of the commune, another a few hundred yards from my property, the third above Damremont, and the fourth above Valée. The wind having gone down, the fire happily did not spread.”

Here is a dispatch from Djidjelli:

“Djidjelli, August 23, 3.16 P. M.

“The fire is ravaging the forests of Beni-Amram, belonging to Mr. Edouard Carpentier, of Djidjelli.

“Last night it was started at twenty different places; a laborer, returning from the mine of Cavalho, saw distinctly all the fires as they were started.

“This morning almost under the eyes of the Chief Amar-ben-Habilès, of the tribe of the Beni-Foughal, fire was set to the canton of Mezrech; and a quarter of an hour later it blazed also on another part of the canton with the wind directly contrary. Finally, at the same moment, four hundred steps from where stood the chief and fifty of his men, another fire started, always with the wind in the opposite direction.

“It is evident that the fires were kindled by the natives, and at a given signal.”

I must add, that, having myself spent six days in the burning country, I saw with my own eyes, in one night, fire burst forth simultaneously in eight different places, in a forest ten kilometers from the nearest house.

There is no doubt that if we were more vigilant these disasters, repeated every four or five years, would not happen.

The government seems to think it has done all it should, when, as the hot season draws near, it repeats the instructions given in Article 4 of the Statute of July 17, 1874, concerning the proper patroling of the forests:

“The natives, during the periods between July 1 — November 1, are compelled, where there are forests, under the penalties of Article 8, to exercise particular vigilance, each post being assigned by the Governor-General.”

We suspect the natives of setting fire to the forests — and yet we confide them to their care!

This order was no doubt punctiliously carried out. Every native was at his post — only — he was the incendiary!

Another clause, it is true, orders a special watch on the part of the officer appointed each year by the Governor-General. This clause, however, is seldom, if ever, carried into effect.

Let us add that the Administration of Forestry, the most quarrelsome perhaps of all the Algerian administrations, does its utmost to exasperate the natives.

Finally, to resume the subject of colonization, the government, in order to favor the settling of Europeans here, has always antagonized the Arabs. And why should the colonists not follow an example, coinciding so well with their own interests?

It is fair to state, that, in the last few years, very capable men, experts in all questions of culture, seem to have guided the affairs of the colony into a better channel. Algeria is prospering and producing under their *régime.* The population now works for the interests of France, as well as for its own interests.

There is no doubt that the land in the hands of these men will yield what it never would have yielded in the hands of the Arabs; the primitive population will also disappear eventually; this state of affairs beyond doubt will prove useful to Algeria, though it is disgraceful that it should be brought about under the present conditions.

CHAPTER IX. CONSTANTINE

FROM the Chabet to Sétif is like crossing a country of gold. The grain, cut high, not mowed flat and trampled upon by herds of animals, as in France, blends its pale straw color with the reddening soil, giving the earth a warm tint like old gold.

Sétif is one of the ugliest towns to be seen. From there, we cross immense plains to Constantine. Tufts of grass, here and there, make it look like a table spread with trees out of a Noah’s Ark.

And here we see Constantine, the phenomenal city, Constantine the strange, guarded by a serpent writhing at its feet, — the Roumel, the fantastic Roumel, which Dante might have dreamed of; a river of fire, flowing in an abyss of red, as if the flames of hell had lighted it. The city is made into an island by this jealous river-god; it encircles the place in a winding whirlpool, among glistening rocks, the walls of which are straight and dented.

The Arabs say that the city looks like a burnous, spread out. They call it Belad-el-Haoua, the city of the air, the city of the ravine, the city of passions. It overlooks beautiful valleys, filled with Roman ruins, with aqueducts made of giant arcades, overgrown with greenery. Above it are Mansoura and Sidi-Meçid, on the heights.

It stands on a rock, queen-like, guarded by its gulf. It glories in an old saying: “Blessed be your ancestors,” it says to its inhabitants, “for building your city on a rock. Ravens build their nests high, but your nest is still higher.”

The crowded streets are more full of life than even those of Algiers, as they are crossed and recrossed by Arabs, Kabyles, Biskris, Mozabs, negroes, veiled Moors, native soldiers in red, others in blue, solemn-looking kadis, and brilliant officers. Merchants walk next; their loaded asses, those little animals no higher than a dog, besides horses and camels, stride by with slow and majestic step.

Hail to the Jewesses! They are here and are very beautiful, of a charming though severe beauty. They go about draped rather than clothed, draped in gorgeous stuffs, knowing thoroughly the art of blending shades and colors in order to bring out their beautiful effect. They go about with arms bare to the shoulder, statuesque arms, which they expose boldly to the sun, as they do their faces, whose lines are so pure. But the sun seems powerless to hurt their polished skin.

The great attraction in Constantine is the crowd of little girls, the very little ones. Dressed as if for a fancy-dress ball, wearing trailing robes of red or blue silk, with gold or silver veils on their heads, their eyebrows painted to form an arch over the eyes, their nails tinted, and the cheeks and forehead tattooed with a star, they trot about, with a hand in that of a tall Arab, their servant, staring boldly as they pass, conscious already of admiring glances.

One would think them a nation out of a fairy tale, a nation of little *femmes galantes;* for they look like women, these little girls, with their pretty dresses, their painted faces, and coquettish little ways. They attract like their big sisters. They are charming. One would say of them that they were a school of ten-year-old courtesans, seeds of love just coming to light.

We are now facing the palace of Hadj-Ahmed, which is said to be one of the most striking specimens of Arabian architecture. It has been praised by all travelers, some of whom have compared it to dwellings in the "Arabian Nights."

It would not be remarkable were it not for the interior gardens, which give it an Oriental touch. It would take a volume to relate all the atrocities, degradations, and infamies of the one who built it, with precious materials stolen and torn from rich dwellings in the city and the surrounding country.

The Arabian quarter of Constantine occupies half the town. The sloping streets, narrower and more tangled than those of Algiers even, taper down to the edge of the raging waters of the gulf, where flows the Oued-Roumel.

Eight bridges crossed this precipice originally, but six of them are in ruins to-day. There is now only one, of Roman origin, which gives a fair idea of what it must have been.

The river, here and there, disappears under colossal arches, built by nature. On one of these the bridge was erected. The natural vault, under which flows the river, is over one hundred and twenty feet high, and fifty-four thick. The Roman foundations are then one hundred and eighty feet above water, and the bridge itself was two stories high, two rows of arches superposed over the giant natural archway. To-day, an iron bridge, of one arch only, forms the entrance into Constantine.

We arrived at Bone, a pretty white town on the Mediterranean, reminding one of those on the coast of France.

The “Kleber” at the wharf is getting up steam. It is six o’clock. The sun goes down in the distance behind the desert when the ship leaves.

And I remained on the bridge all night, with eyes turned toward the land disappearing in a crimson cloud, in the apotheosis of the setting sun, in a glory of pink sand, under the blue and tranquil sky.

CHAPTER X. AT THE SEASHORE

JUNE 12, 1880. — I am told I must spend a month at Loëche! Loëche, heavens!

A month in that town, which is said to be the dullest of all seaside places! Did I say town? — why, it is a hole of a place, hardly a village! I might aswell be sent to the galleys!

*June 1*3. — I was awake all night, thinking of that trip I must make. There is only one thing for me to do. I must take a companion with me; it will help to pass the time. And this will also give me a chance to find out whether I can really settle down to married life.

A month of *tête-à-tête,* a month alone with the same woman, just we two, having long talks at all hours of the day and night! *Diable!*

Taking a woman for a month is not such a serious thing as taking her for life, but it is much more so than taking her for a night. I can always send her back with a few hundred louis, of course, but then, what would become of me alone in Loëche?

It will be difficult to make a choice. I will not have a flirt, nor a simpleton. She must not make me appear ridiculous, nor do I wish to feel ashamed of her. I don't mind if people say "the Marquis de Roseveyre is in luck," but I will not have them whispering: "That poor Marquis!" On the whole, I must find in this temporary companion the qualities I should expect in a life-partner — the only difference being that which exists between a new article and one borrowed for the occasion. Oh! well, I dare say it will be easy to find.

June 14. — Bertha! the very person. She is twenty years old and pretty, has just left the Conservatoire and is waiting for a rôle — sure of becoming a future star. Her manner is charming, she is witty and loving — a borrowed article that could easily pass for the real thing.

June 15. — She is free to come. Having no business or other engagement, she accepts. I have ordered her frocks myself, so that I know she will look well.

June 20: BASLE. — I will begin to write while she is asleep.

She is a dear! When she met me at the station, I could hardly recognize her, she looked so much like a woman of my world. There is no doubt that this girl has a future — on the stage.

Everything about her seemed changed, — her manner, her walk, her voice, her smile even, — she was irreproachable. She was dressed in the most charming and simple manner also. The change was so great, it showed such skill, such art, that unconsciously I came forward and offered her my arm, as a man would to his wife. And she took it with ease, as if she were really my wife.

Alone in the train, we were both quiet and dumb. Then she raised her veil and smiled — nothing more. Just the smile of a woman of the world. To tell the truth, I feared kisses, the comedy of love, that hackneyed game forever played by women of her kind. But no, she behaved herself most discreetly — I tell you, she is great!

We talked a little like newly married people, again like strangers. It was delightful. She often smiled when looking at me, and I felt at times as if I must kiss her — but, no, I controlled myself.

On the frontier an officer opened the door abruptly and said: “Your name, sir?”

I was rather surprised, but I answered: “Marquis de Roseveyre.”

“Your destination?”

“The waters of Loëche, in the Valais.”

He wrote this down. Then added:

“This lady is your wife?”

What could I do? What answer could I give? I looked at her, hesitating. She was pale and looked away from me. I felt it a shame to offend her needlessly — and then, she was to be my companion for a month.

I answered: “Yes, Monsieur.”

Her blush made me feel very happy. On arriving at the hotel the proprietor handed her the register. She passed it to me, and I knew she was watching me as I wrote. Once that page was filled, who would ever look over this book? I wrote:

“Marquis and Marquise de Roseveyre.”

June 21: Bâsle, 6 *A. M.* — We are leaving for Berne. There is no doubt of my being in luck.

June 21, 10 *P. M.* — This has been a strange day.

I actually feel excited. How ridiculous!

During the trip we spoke very little; she had to get up so early that she felt tired and dozed a little while.

On reaching Berne we wished to view the Alps, which I had never seen, and we walked through the town like a newly married couple.

Suddenly we perceived an immense plain, and in the far distance the glaciers.

From this spot, at such a distance, they did not look so very large, and still the grandeur of the sight chilled me to the marrow. A radiant sun was setting, and the heat was intense. The mountains of ice stood white and cold. The Jungfrau, the Virgin, overlooking the others, showed her white side, and all around her, raising their wan heads, were those frozen summits which the dying day showed clear and silver-like against the dark blue of the sky.

This inert and colossal mass made one think of a new and wonderful world, of steep regions, frozen and dead, but fascinating like the sea, full of mysterious charm.

The air that had blown across those frozen heights seemed to come to us over the blossoming country, different from that which we inhaled on the plains.

It was sharp and strong, savoring of inaccessible heights.

Bertha, enraptured, gazed without saying a word. Suddenly she took my hand and pressed it. I myself experienced that peculiar fever, that enthusiasm which takes hold of one at unexpected sights. I took her little trembling hand and carried it to my lips; and I believe I actually kissed it with affection. I was quite upset. But by whom? By her, or by the glaciers?

June 24: LOËCHE, *10 P.M.* — The whole trip was delightful. We spent half a day at Thun, gazing at the rough outline of the mountains we were to cross the next day.

At sunrise we crossed a lake, probably the most beautiful lake in Switzerland. Mules awaited us, we mounted them and started. After breakfasting in a little town we began the ascent, entering slowly the wooded pass, climbing upward.

Here and there, on steep hills, we could distinguish white spots; they were Swiss cottages, built here one wonders how! We crossed torrents, and saw, far up, between summits covered with pines, an immense pyramid of snow seeming so near that we could reach it in twenty minutes, although in reality it was distant twenty-four hours’ travel.

Sometimes we crossed narrow plains littered with broken rocks, as if two mountains had come in collision in this arena, leaving on the battle-field their limbs of granite.

Bertha, exhausted, tried hard to keep her eyes open. Finally she slept, and I supported her with one arm, happy to do so, pleased to feel her so close to me. Night came and we still climbed up. We stopped before the door of a little inn buried in the mountain.

We slept, oh! how we slept that night!

At daybreak I ran to the window and uttered a cry. Bertha joined me, and she too was surprised and delighted. We had slept amid the snows. All around us enormous hills whose gray tones showed through the mantle of snow, hills without pines, mournful and icy, rose so high that they seemed inaccessible.

An hour after starting again we perceived at the bottom of this funnel of stone and snow, a dark, gloomy lake without a ripple, which we followed for some time. A guide brought us a few edelweiss, the pale flowers of the glaciers. Bertha put them in her belt.

Suddenly the pass opened before us, disclosing the horizon — the whole chain of the Piedmontese Alps beyond the valley of the Rhone. The high summits, here and there, overlooked the smaller mountains. There was Mount Rose, solemn and heavy; the Cervin, the tall pyramid, where so many men have found death; the Dent-du-Midi, and a hundred other white points shone like diamonds in the sunlight.

The path we followed stopped abruptly on the edge of a precipice, and in the dark chasm, six thousand feet deep, inclosed between four walls of upright, dark, threatening granite, we saw, on a stretch of verdure, white spots that looked like sheep in a field. They were the houses of Loëche.

We had to leave our mules and walk, the road being dangerous. The path runs along the rock, turns, cornes and goes, always overlooking the precipice, and as we drew near the village, it grew larger and larger. This is called the pass of the Gemmi, one of the most beautiful passes of the Alps.

Bertha leaned on me, crying out with joy and fear, happy and timid, like a child. Once when we were a few feet behind the guides, and hidden by a rock, she kissed me — I held her close to me —

I had thought that when we reached Loëche I would let everyone understand that she was not my wife. But everywhere I had treated her as such, everywhere she had passed for the Marquise de Roseveyre; I could not now treat her differently. She would have been hurt, and truly she was charming.

So I said to her: “My dear friend, you bear my name, I am supposed to be your husband; I hope you will act toward everyone with great discretion. Don’t make any acquaintances, don’t talk and make friends with anyone. Better let them think you proud than have me regret what I have done.”

She answered: “Don’t be afraid, my dear René.” *June 26*. — Loëche is not by any means dull. It is wild, but very beautiful. That wall of granite, six thousand feet high, from which flow a hundred streams like ribbons of silver; that constant murmur of running water; this village buried in the Alps where one looks up to see the sun crossing the heavens, the neighboring glacier, so white in the distance, this valley overflowing with streams, full of trees, of freshness, of life, flowing down toward the Rhone, and showing on the horizon the snowy tops of the Piedmont, all this enchants and captivates me. I wonder — if Bertha were not here! —

She is perfect, this child, more reserved and *distinguée* than any here. I hear people say: “How pretty she is, that little Marquise!”

June 27. — My first bath. We go directly from the house into the bathing-machine, where twenty bathers dip in their woolen garments, men and women together. Some are eating, others reading or talking. We put small floating tables before us. Some play hide and seek, which is not always entirely proper. Seen from the galleries surrounding the bath, we look like enormous toads in the water.

Bertha sat in the gallery with me for a while after my bath. She was very much looked at.

June 28. — Second bath. Four hours in the water. In a week’s time I shall have to stay eight hours. My companions in diving are the Prince of Vanoris (Italy), Count Lovenberg (Austria), Baron Samuel Vernhe (Hungary or elsewhere), besides fifteen or so other men less distinguished, but all nobles. Everyone is of noble birth at the seashore. They all ask in turn to be introduced to Bertha. I answer: “Yes”; and then manage to slip away. They think I am jealous; how amusing!

June 29. — The Princess de Vanoris came up to us as we were going back to the hotel, and asked me to introduce her to my wife, which I did, of course, but I begged Bertha not to keep up the acquaintance.

July 2. — The Prince insisted on our going to his rooms yesterday, to take tea with some of his friends. Bertha certainly looked prettier and more attractive than any of the women there — what can I do?

July 3. — After all, who cares? Among these thirty noblemen, are there not at least ten with assumed names? Among the sixteen or seventeen women, how many are really married, twelve perhaps; and out of the twelve, are there six who are irreproachable? So much the worse for them; I'm not to blame, — they insisted on knowing Bertha.

July 10. Bertha is the queen of Loëche! They are all wild about her; they all make so much of her, worshiping her. She is truly charming, so graceful and *distinguée.* The men envy me!

One day the Princess de Vanoris said: "Do tell me, Marquis, where did you find such a treasure?"

I was tempted to answer her: "First prize at the Conservatoire, comedy class, engaged at the Odéon, but free again after the fifth of August, 1880!"

Heavens! I wish I could see how she would have looked if I had said that!

July 20. Bertha is truly wonderful! Not once has she made a mistake, nor has she wanted in tact on any occasion; I am amazed!

August 10: Paris. It is all over — I feel very blue. The day before we left I thought everyone would weep.

We decided to go to see the rising of the sun on the Torrenthorn before leaving. We rode on mules at midnight with guides carrying lanterns, and the long caravan wound in and out in the mountain paths of the pine forest. We crossed pasture-lands, where cows graze at will, and finally reached the stony region where no more grass can be seen.

Sometimes, in the darkness, we could distinguish a white mass of snow piled high in a recess in the mountain.

The air was very keen, biting the eyes and skin. The wind dried our throats, bringing with it the frozen breath of a hundred leagues of icy peaks.

It was midnight when we reached the top. The provisions were unpacked, so that we could drink champagne on first seeing the rising sun.

The sky grew lighter. We could see an abyss at our feet, and another peak a few hundred yards away.

The horizon seemed to turn livid, but without our being able to see anything in the distance.

Then, gradually, on the left we saw the summit of the Jungfrau, another peak, and again another. They appeared, each in turn, as if rising with the light of day. And we were astonished to find ourselves in the midst of these giants, in this desolate country of eternal snow. Suddenly, in front of us, the long chain of the Piedmont unfolded itself. Other mountains appeared in the north. It was, in truth, the immense country of great hills, with icy foreheads, from the Rhindenhorn to the ghost-like patriarch of the Alps, Mont Blanc. Some were tall and straight, others cowered low, others again looked deformed; but all were equally white, as if the Creator had thrown a cloth of immaculate whiteness on the hunchbacked earth.

Some of the mountains seemed near enough for us to leap upon; others were so far that we could hardly distinguish them.

The sky reddened, and all the peaks blushed. The clouds seemed to bleed on them. It was superb, almost fearful. But soon the flaming heavens paled and the whole army of peaks turned pink, a pale pink, like the gown of a young girl.

The sun appeared above the napkin of snow. And immediately the glaciers became white, with a dazzling whitèness, as if the horizon were filled with domes of silver.

The women, enraptured, looked on. They started when a champagne cork flew off; and the Prince de Vanoris presented a glass to Bertha, saying: “I drink to the Marquise de Roseveyre!”

All cried out: “I drink to the Marquise de Roseveyre!”

She raised herself on her mule and answered: “I drink to all my friends!”

Three hours later we took the train for Geneva, in the valley of the Rhone. We were no sooner alone than Bertha, so gay and happy a little while ago, burst out crying, burying her face in her hands.

I fell on my knees: “What is it? What is the matter? Tell me, do.”

She stammered through her tears: “It is — it is — it is all over, this being an honest woman!”

And — I came very, very near committing a great blunder, but I did not!

I left Bertha as soon as we reached Paris, afraid of my own weakness if I stayed with her much longer.

(The journal of the Marquis of Roseveyre is not of much interest for the next two years. However, we find, dated July 20, 1883, the following):

July 20, 1883: FLORENCE. — Sad memories came back to me to-day. I was walking in the Cassines, when a carriage stopped near me and a lady called me by name: It was the Princess de Vanoris.

“Oh! Marquis, my dear Marquis,” she cried “I am so glad to see you. How is your wife? I do think she was the most charming woman I ever have met.”

I was taken aback, not knowing what to say, and with a strange feeling in my heart I stammered: “I beg of you not to speak of her, Princess, I lost her three years ago.”

She took my hand in hers. “Oh! my dear friend, how I feel for you!”

She then left me. I went in, sad and discontented, as when I had left Bertha. Fate often makes mistakes! How many so-called honest women were born to be women of the street, and prove it! Poor Bertha! How many others were born to be honest — And she — well! — I must forget her.

CHAPTER XI. IN BRITTANY

THIS is the season for traveling, the bright season, when one loves new horizons, the vast expanse of blue sea which rests the eye and calms the soul, the fresh wooded valleys, where one feels sad without cause. In such a season, I was sitting one night on a grassy bank, watching at my feet a little pool of water in which the rays of the setting sun were reflected.

I love to walk in worlds which I pretend to myself are unknown to anyone else, I love the sudden wonder that takes hold of me on finding customs I knew nothing of, I love that constant interest in everything new, the joy of seeing, the awakening of thought.

But one thing, only one, spoils these charming explorations for me: the reading of guidebooks. Written by traveling clerks, with odious and false descriptions, directions invariably wrong, indicating imaginary roads, they are, with the exception of one (an excellent German guide), the comfort of tradesmen on a pleasure trip, and the despair of real travelers who go, with knapsack on back, walking-stick in hand, up and down unknown paths, deep in ravines, or strolling along beaches.

These books lie; their writers know nothing, they understand nothing, they disfigure by their stupid and emphatic prose the most delightful country; they know only the main road and their books are of no more value than those maps made by the military staff upon which certain dams of the Seine, made thirty years ago, are not yet recorded.

And yet, how pleasant to know in advance the country one will go through! What happiness when one finds a book in which some wanderer relates his impressions! Sometimes it gives one only a faint idea of the places to be seen, again it gives more. When penetrating Algeria, as far as the oasis of Laghouat, the traveler may probably read every day and at all hours of the day the admirable book written by Fromentin, “A Summer in the Sahara.” This book will open the eyes and the mind, and lighten up these plains and mountains, these burning solitudes — it reveals the very soul of the desert.

There are everywhere in France unknown and charming spots. Without attempting to make a new guidebook, I would like, now and then, to point out short excursions, ten or twelve-day trips, familiar to all pedestrians, but unknown to tourists in general.

Never following the highroad, always walking in bypaths, sleeping in haylofts, when there are no inns near, eating bread and drinking water where no other food is to be had, having no fear of rain or of long regular marches, — this is the only way to explore and enjoy a country thoroughly and to discover a thousand things one had never imagined.

Among other provinces of France, Brittany is the most remarkable; one can never understand it in ten days, for every country, like every man, has its peculiarities.

We will go from Vannes to Douarnenez, following the coast, that coast of Brittany, solitary and low, strewn with dangerous rocks, where the waters roar as if in answer to the whistling wind on the moor.

The Morbihan, a sort of inland sea, heaving under the rising tide of the near-by ocean, stretches out before the harbor of Vannes. One must cross it to reach the open sea.

It is full of islands, Druidic islands, mysterious and haunted. These are covered with tumuli, menhirs, and dolmens (long blocks and tables of stone), all those strange rocks which appear like the statues of gods. These islands, according to the natives, are as numerous as the days in the year. The Morbihan is a symbolical sea, trembling with superstition.

Therein lies the great charm of this country, it is the hotbed of legends. Dead everywhere else, they live here, rooted in the soil like granite. The oldtime stories also are eternal, and the peasant relates adventures fifteen centuries old, as if they had happened yesterday, and as if his father or grandfather had witnessed them.

There are subterranean passages where the dead remain intact, as on the day death struck them motionless, their blood alone having dried up. And so memories live eternally in this corner of France — memories, and even the manner of thought, of remote ancestors.

I left Vannes, on the same day I arrived, to visit a historical castle, Sucinio, and from there gained Locmariaker, then Carnac, and, following the coast, Pont-L’Abbé, Penmarch, the Pointe du Raz, and Douarnenez.

The road, at first, ran along the Morbihan, then led across a limitless moor, cut here and there by ditches full of water, and without a house, a tree, or a living thing, covered with reeds shivering and whistling in a raging wind, with clouds sweeping by, which seemed to groan.

A little further I crossed a small hamlet, where three men, and a buxom girl of twenty wandered about; then I went on again, seeing nothing but the bare land, marshy and deserted, reaching to the sea, whose gray line, lightened sometimes by a gleam of foam, stretched out on the horizon.

In the midst of this wild scene rose a tall ruin; a square castle, flanked with towers, stood there alone, between these two deserts, the moor and the sea. This old manor of Sucinio, which dates from the thirteenth century, is famous. There was born the great Chevalier de Richemont who recovered France from the English.

There are no doors to it. I entered a vast courtyard where the broken turrets have fallen in a heap of stones; and what with climbing remnants of staircases, scaling broken walls, holding on by creeping ivy, anything my hand could lay hold of, I finally reached the summit of a tower, from which it appeared that I could see all Brittany.

Facing me, beyond an uncultivated plain, was the ocean, roaring under a dark sky; and everywhere was the moor. At the right appeared the sea of the Morbihan, with its torn banks, and farther beyond it, barely visible, a white spot illuminated Vannes, lighted up by a ray of sun peeping out between two clouds. And further away still, a large cape loomed out — Quiberon! —

All this is dreary, melancholy, heartbreaking. The wind moans across these lonely stretches; this is truly a haunted country; and in the walls, the whistling reeds, the stagnant ditches, I imagined I could feel legendary creatures prowling about.

Next day I crossed Saint-Gildas, where the ghost of Abélard seems to wander. At Port Navalo, the sailor who took me across the strait told me about his father, who was a Chouan (an unorganized Legitimist soldiery who carried on a kind of guerrilla-warfare in Brittany in 1793); about his oldest brother, also a Chouan; his uncle the curé, another Chouan, all three dead — and his outstretched hand pointed to Quiberon.

At Locmariaker, I entered the country of the Druids. A native showed me the table of Cæsar, an immense block of granite, supported by colossal columns, and he spoke to me of Cæsar as if he had known him personally.

At last, still following the coast between the moor and the ocean, I saw before me the granite fields of Carnac.

They look fairly alive, these stones, standing in straight lines; giant blocks, some of them, and others quite small, all square, long, and flat, looking like thin elongated bodies, or short stout ones. After one has looked at them for some time they seem to move and bend, to have life!

One is easily lost among them; a wall interrupts these masses of granite, after leaping over which this strange procession is seen again, set in rows as regular as soldiers at drill, as appalling as specters. The sight makes one's heart beat; the mind becomes excited, and goes back through ages and is lost in superstitious beliefs.

As I stood motionless, surprised and delighted, a noise behind me gave me such a start that I turned abruptly; an old man, dressed in black, with a book under his arm, bowed to me, saying: "You are visiting our Carnac?" I told him of my enthusiasm and the fright he had given me. He added: "Here, my dear sir, the atmosphere is so full of legends that one gets frightened without cause. For five years I have been studying these stones; nearly all have a secret, and I sometimes think they also have souls. When I get back to my boulevard, I smile at my own foolishness; but, when I return here, I am a believer, an unconscious believer, without any particular religion, believing them all." And, striking the ground with his foot, he added: "This is a religious country; one must never jest with departed creeds; for nothing ever dies. We are with the Druids, sir; let us respect their beliefs!"

The red sun disappearing in the sea bathed the stones as if with blood. The old man smiled:

"You can imagine what strength these beliefs possess here, when I tell you that I myself have had a vision! What am I saying? It was a true apparition! There, on that doimen, one night about this hour, I distinctly saw the enchantress Koridwen boiling the miraculous water."

I interrupted him, saying that I did not know the enchantress.

He was indignant.

"What! you do not know the wife of the god Hu, and the mother of the goblins?"

"No, I confess I do not. If it is a legend, by all means tell me about it."

We sat on one of the rocks, and he spoke thus: "The god Hu, the father of the Druids, had for a wife the enchantress Koridwen. She gave him three children, Mor-Vrau, Creiz-Viou, a girl, the most beautiful girl in the world, and Aravik-Du, the most hideous being ever born.

"Koridwen, in her motherly love, wished to bestow some gift on the monster, and she resolved to make him drink the water which gives the power of divination.

"This water had to boil during a whole year. The enchantress confided the care of the vase containing it to the blind Morda and the dwarf Gwiou.

"The year had almost come to an end, when the two watchers, becoming laxing in their vigilance, allowed a little of the liquid to overflow, and three drops fell on the dwarf's hand, who, carrying these to his lips and tasting them, knew the future instantly. The vase then broke of itself, and, Koridwen appearing, Gwiou, afraid of her anger, ran away.

"She pursued him, and in order not to be caught he changed himself into a hare; but immediately the enchantress turned into a hound and darted after him. She was just about to catch him, on the edge of a river, when he became a fish and threw himself into the water. Then an enormous otter followed him so closely that, to escape it, he turned himself into a bird. A huge hawk then appeared in the sky, with outstretched wings and open beak; it was Koridwen again; and Gwiou, shivering with fright, became a grain of corn and dropped on a speck of wheat.

"Then a black hen, running up, swallowed the grain. Koridwen, feeling that she had had her revenge, was resting, when she felt she was about to become a mother.

"The grain of corn had germinated within her; and a child was born, which she abandoned on the river in a wicker cradle. But the child, rescued by the son of the King Gouydno, became a genè, the spirit of the moor, the goblin! So it is from Koridwen that come all the fantastic little beings, the dwarfs and gnomes that haunt these stones. They live in holes beneath them, it is said, coming out only at night to dart among the furze. Remain here some time, sir, in the midst of these haunted monuments; look attentively at a dolmen, lying on the ground, and you will soon feel the earth trembling; you will see the stone move, and will shiver with fear on seeing the head of a gnome staring at you, as he raises the block of granite with his forehead. Now, let us go and have dinner."

The night had come, moonless, quite dark, full of murmuring wind. With hands outstretched before me, I tried to keep clear of the rocks; and what with this tale, the strange country, and my somewhat confused thoughts, I should not have been surprised if a goblin had brushed past me.

The next day I started again, crossing moors, villages, and towns, Lorient, the pretty little valley of Quimperlé, and Quimper itself.

The highway leaves Quimper, climbs a hill, cuts through valleys, passes a small lake full of weeds, and finally reaches Pont-l'Abbé, the oddest little town of all the odd towns of Brittany from the Morbihan to the Pointe-du-Raz.

At the entrance, an old castle, flanked with towers, stands with its walls deep in a gloomy pool, where fly wild birds. A river flows from this place, on which coasters can row up to the city. In the narrow streets the men wear hats with enormous brims, jackets heavily embroidered, and four waistcoats, one over another. The first, no larger than the hand, barely covers the shoulder blades, and the last comes down far below the waist.

The women are tall, ruddy, and good-looking, and they wear tight cloth jackets that compress the bosom. Their headdress is peculiar: on the temples, two bands, embroidered in colors, frame the face, drawing back the hair, which is then piled on the head under a singular-looking cap, often woven with gold and silver threads.

The road leads away from this little ancient town of the Middle Ages, lying here apparently forgotten. It creeps on through the moorland. Now and then, I saw three or four cows, invariably accompanied by a sheep, grazing by the roadside. For days and days I came upon these groups, and I began to wonder why there was always but one sheep with the cows. This thing puzzled me for a long time and I looked for some one to explain it; but it was hard to find anyone who could speak French. Finally I met a curé, who with measured steps was reading his breviary. He explained that the lamb was the wolf's share.

A lamb is worth less than a cow, and, as its capture offers no danger, the wolf always prefers it. But it sometimes happens that the brave little cows form in a hollow square and give battle to the howling beast, impaling him on their sharp-pointed horns.

The wolf! Here is where we find him, the terrifying wolf of our childhood, the white wolf, the big white wolf that all hunters have seen, but no one has ever killed. He is never seen in the morning. About five o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun is going down, he appears making off on the heights, and his silhouette is seen against the sky.

Why has he never been shot? Ah, well! In hunting days, breakfast begins at one o'clock in the afternoon, ending about four. A good deal of wine has been imbibed by that time, and there has been much talk of the white wolf. On leaving the table, he is seen. But how is it that he is never killed?

I walked along on the gray road, cobbled with stones shining in the sunlight. The plain on both sides is flat, scattered with furze. Here and there an enormous stone reminds one of the Druids; and the wind, blowing close the ground, whistles through the bushes. Sometimes a dull roar, like the boom of a distant cannon, makes the earth quiver; I am nearing Penmarch, where the sea plunges into sonorous caves. The waves ingulfed in these caverns, shaking the whole coast, are heard on stormy days as far as Quimper.

For some time now I had been able to see the long line of gray waves which seem to hold sway over this low and barren country. Bursting through the billows, sharp-pointed rocks showed their black heads, encircled with white foam; and near the shore a few houses were hiding behind a heap of stones, as if trying to avoid the eternal hurricane and salt rain of the ocean. A large lighthouse, trembling on its base, juts out into the sea, and the keepers relate that sometimes, on stormy nights, this long column of granite pitches like a ship, and that the clock falls downward, and the pictures on the wall are loosened and come down with a crash.

From this place, as far as Conquet, is the country of wrecks. Here seems to lie in ambush the hideous death of the sea, — death by drowning. No other coast is so dangerous, so much feared, so great a destroyer of men.

In the little low houses one usually sees, in addition to the inevitable pigs, an old woman, tall girls, barelegged and untidy, and also young men, the oldest not thirty years of age. But it is seldom that one ever sees the father or the eldest son. If you ask where they are, the old woman will point to the horizon, where the waves rise and leap, as if preparing to rush upon the land.

It is not only the sea that destroys these men. It has a powerful and perfidious ally in alcohol, which is also gluttonous of human flesh. The fishermen know this and admit it, saying: “When the bottle is full, we see and avoid the dangerous rocks, but when the bottle is empty, we fail to see them.”

The shore of Penmarch terrifies one. It was here that wreckers attracted passing ships by tying to the horns of a cow, whose legs were hobbled, a deceiving lantern simulating the lights of another ship.

At the right there is a rock which was once the scene of a horrible drama. The wife of one of the last prefects of the Morbihan was sitting on this rock with her little girl on her knee. The sea, a few yards below them, seemed calm and inoffensive. Suddenly a tidal wave rolled up, and with irresistible force swept away the mother and child out to sea.

The coast-guards witnessed this, but all that remained was a pink parasol floating on the becalmed waves, and the rock, bare and glistening. For a year after, lawyers and physicians discussed and argued as to which died first, the mother or the child. Cats were drowned with their kittens, dogs with their pups, and rabbits with their young ones, to determine this point, there being a large fortune at stake, to go to either family, according as the mother or child died last.

Almost facing this sinister spot rises a Calvary of granite like many others in this pious country, where crosses are as old and as numerous as the dolmens themselves. But this Calvary rises over a strange bas-relief, representing, in a crude manner, the birth of Christ. An Englishman passing here admired the naive sculpture, and had it roofed over so as to preserve it in its originality.

I followed the shore, the endless shore, along the bay of Audierne. One must ford or wade over two little rivers, toil through the sand or seaweeds, keep on always between these two solitudes, the one moving and restless, the other motionless, — the sea and the moor.

Audierne is a dull little harbor, enlivened only by the coming and going of the fishing-smacks engaged in catching sardines.

Before leaving next morning I tasted, instead of the common *café-au-lait*, some of these fresh fish, powdered with salt, savory and perfumed, the real violets of the waves. Then I left for the Pointe-du-Raz, the Land’s End of France.

I climbed steadily upward, and suddenly I beheld two seas: to the left, the ocean, to the right, the English Channel. This is where they meet, buffeting each other, their waves, forever wild and furious, capsizing ships and ingulfing them.

“*O flots que vous savez de lugubres histoires*,
Flots profonds redoutés des mères à genoux.”

No trees here, nothing but tufts of grass on the great cape jutting out into the sea. At the extreme end are two lighthouses, and everywhere around are beacons, strung on rocks. One of these has been building for ten years, and is not yet finished. The implacable sea continually destroys the work being done by the indefatigable builders.

Far away, the isle of Sein, the sacred island, looks across, behind the harbor of Brest, at its dangerous sister, the island of Ouessant:

“*Qui voit Ouessant*
Voit son sang,”

say sailors. This is the most inaccessible island of all, the island that seamen dread most.

This high promontory ends abruptly, falling in a perpendicular line to the raging seas. A narrow path outlines it, creeping on the inclined rock, spinning itself out on crests not wider than one’s hand.

Suddenly I overlooked a fearful abyss, whose walls, black as ink, reverberated the sound of the struggle going on beneath me in that hole which has been called hell.

Though a hundred yards above the sea, I felt the flying spray on my face; and, bending over the abyss, I gazed at the fury of the waters, apparently convulsed in uncontrollable rage.

It was truly a hell, which no poet has yet adequately described. A fear possessed me at the thought of men being thrown in there, tossed about, plunging through the storm between four walls of stone, striking the sides of it only to be thrown back to the waves, and finally disappearing in the bubbling, monstrous billows.

I continued on my way, haunted by these pictures and blown about by the strong wind lashing this solitary cape.

In about twenty minutes I reached a small village. An old priest, reading his breviary in the shade, saluted me. I asked him where I could sleep for the night. He offered me his house.

An hour later, while sitting with him on the doorsteps, talking of this desolate yet impressive country, a little boy went by barefooted, with fair hair flying in the wind.

The curé called to him in his native tongue, and the little urchin approached shyly, with lowered eyes and clasped hands.

“He will recite a canticle for you,” said the priest. “He has a wonderful memory, and I hope to make something of the little fellow.”

The child muttered unknown words, in that singsong voice in which children usually recite. He rattled on, without period or comma, pronouncing every syllable as if the whole piece were of one word, stopping a second now and then to take breath, and resuming his hurried recital.

Suddenly he stopped — he had come to the end. The curé tapped him affectionately on the cheek.

“Very good! You can go now.”

And the child ran away. My host then added: “You have just heard an old canticle of this country.” I rejoined: “An old canticle? Is it well known?”

“Oh! no. I will translate it, if you like.”

The old man, with powerful voice, raising his arm in a threatening gesture, recited this superb and terrible canticle, the words of which I took down at his dictation:

“CANTICLE FROM BRITTANY.

“Hell! Hell! Do you know what it is, sinners?

“It is a furnace with raging fires, a furnace beside which the fire of a forge, the fire which reddens the bricks of an oven, is nothing but smoke!

“There is never any light there! Fire like fever burns without being visible! Hope never enters there, for the wrath of God hath sealed the door!

“There is fire on your head, fire all around you! You are hungry? — you must eat fire! — You are thirsty? you must drink at that river the sulphur and melted iron!

“You will cry during all eternity; your tears will form a sea; but that sea will not give hell one drop of water! Your tears will only be fuel for the flames, instead of putting them out; and you will hear the marrow boil in your bones!

“Your heads will be cut off from your bodies, and yet you will live! The demons will throw them to one another, and yet you will live! They will roast your flesh on the braziers; you will feel your flesh turning into burning coals; and still you will live!

“And there will be other sufferings. You will hear reproaches, curses, and blasphemies.
“The father will say to his son: ‘Cursed be you, son of my flesh; it was for you that I stole to amass a fortune.’

“And the son will answer: ‘Cursed be you, my father; for you gave me the pride that brought me here.’

“And the daughter will say to her mother: ‘A thousand curses on you, my mother; a thousand curses on you, den of impurities, because you left me free, and afterward I turned away from God!’

“And the mother will not know her children, and she will answer: ‘Cursed be my daughters and my sons, cursed be the sons of my daughters, and the daughters of my sons!’

“And then the cries will be heard all through Eternity. And these sufferings will be everlasting! That fire! — oh! that fire! — the wrath of God has lighted this fire! — it will burn forever, without flagging, without smoke, never penetrating less deeply.

“Eternity! Woe to me! Never to cease dying, never to cease drowning in oceans of sufferings!

“Oh! *Never!* thou art a word vaster than the sea! Oh! *Never!* thou art full of cries, of tears, of rage. *Never!* thou harsh word, thou art terrifying!” —

When the old priest had finished, he added:
“Is it not terrible?”

Far away we could hear the infuriated waves breaking on the cliff. I could see again that hole of raging foam, mournful and dreary, true abode of death; and something of the mystic fear that makes repenting sinners tremble came over me.
I left at break of day, expecting to reach Douarnenez before night.
A man, speaking French, who had sailed fourteen years on government ships, joined me as I walked along the coast-guard path, and we proceeded

together toward the Baie des Trépases, near the Pointe-du-Raz, It is an immense stretch of sand, of sad and melancholy aspect, giving one a despondent feeling. A bare valley, with a mournful pond without any reeds, a death-like pond, ends at this dreadful shore.

It seems a fitting antechamber to the infernal regions. The yellow sand, dreary and flat, spreads out as far as an enormous rock facing the Pointe-du-Raz, where the waves break.

In the distance, we could see three men motionless on the sand. My companion appeared surprised, for no one, it seems, ever comes into this desolate waste. On drawing near, we perceived something long, stretched at their feet, as if buried in the beach; and now and then they bent down and touched this thing.

It was a corpse, that of a sailor from Douarnenez, drowned the previous week, with four of his comrades. This spot had been watched all the time, for the current usually washes dead bodies here. He was the first to come to this last meeting-place.

But something else seemed to occupy my guide, for drowned men are not uncommon in this region.

He took me to the dreary pond, and, telling me to lean over and look in, he showed me the walls of the city of Ys. I could distinguish some ancient masonry, barely visible. Then I went to drink at a spring a thin stream of water, the best in the country he said. He then told me the story of the vanished city of Ys, as if the event had taken place in his grandfather’s time, at the very earliest.

A good but weak king had a beautiful daughter, who was very perverse. She was so beautiful that all men went mad over her, and so perverse was she that she gave herself to each one of them, then had them put to death, by being thrown into the sea from the top of a near-by cliff.

Her passions were more violent than the raging billows and as unappeasable.

God wearied of her wickedness and informed an old saint that He would punish her if she did not repent. The saint warned the king, who told his beloved daughter, whom he had not courage to punish, of God’s anger. But she would not heed him, and gave herself up to such debauchery that the whole town imitated her, and became a city of passion, from which all decency, all virtue, disappeared.

One night, God woke the saint to tell him that the hour of His vengeance had come. The saint ran to the palace to tell the king, who alone in that city had remained virtuous. The king ordered a horse, and gave one also to the saint; then a great noise was heard behind them, causing them to look back; they saw the roaring sea rising over the land. The king's daughter appeared at her window, crying: "Father, are you deserting me?" And the king took her on his horse and fled by one of the gates of the city, as the waves entered by another.

They galloped in the night, but the sea followed them with a rumbling, thundering sound. The foam had reached the horses' hoofs, and the old saint said to the king: "Sire, throw your daughter into the waves, else you are lost!" And the daughter cried: "Father, father, do not abandon me!" But the saint, rising in his stirrups, with a voice of thunder, exclaimed: "It is the will of God!" Then the king thrust from him his daughter who was clutching him, and she fell back into the waters, which immediately receded, carrying her away with them.

And this mournful pond, which covers these ruins, is the water which remained over the impure city, destroyed by the wrath of God.

This event, which is told as if it had happened yesterday, took place, it seems, in the fourth century after the coming of Christ.

That night I reached Douarnenez. It is a little hamlet of fishermen, which would become a famous watering-place were it less isolated. Its great charm is the Gulf. It lies in a hollow, and one can see the long, smooth line of the hills, undulating and rounding in delicate curves, whose crests disappear in those blue and white mists, light and transparent, emanating from the sea.

I left next day for Quimper; and that night I slept at Brest, where I took the train for Paris at daybreak.

CHAPTER XII. THE CREUSOT IRONWORKS

THE sky is blue, very blue, and full of sunshine. The train has just passed Montchanin. Before us a black cloud rises, a heavy motionless cloud, which seems to come from the earth, darkening the clear day. It is the smoke of the Creusot Ironworks. As we draw near, we can distinguish a hundred giant chimneys emit ting serpent-like clouds of smoke; others that are lower heave and throw out dense vapor. All this blends, spreads, and floats over the city, fills the streets, conceals the sky, and obliterates the sun. It is almost dark now. Coal-dust flies about, stinging the eyes, soiling the skin, staining the garments. The houses are black, as if rubbed over with soot; the sidewalks are black, the windows are powdered with coal-dust. The odor of chimneys, of tar, of floating coal-dust, contracts the throat and oppresses the lungs; sometimes an acrid taste of iron, of burning metal, makes one look up to inhale pure, wholesome air; but one can see only the thick, dark cloud of smoke, and nearer are the thousand specks of flying coal-dust.

This is the Creusot Ironworks.

A dull, incessant roar makes the earth tremble, a roar composed of innumerable sounds, broken now and then by a violent shock, which vibrates through the town.

We enter the works of the Messrs. Schneider. Here is the kingdom of Iron, where His Majesty, Fire, reigns supreme!

Fire! one sees it everywhere. The immense buildings are set in rows, as far as the eye can reach, as high as mountains, and are filled to the top with engines and machinery, which turn, fall, rise, roar, whistle, and creak.

Here are braziers, over there furnaces; further away are blocks of red-hot iron coming out of ovens to go into gearing-wheels, assuming different shapes, always red-hot. The ravenous machinery devours this glowing iron which it crushes, cuts, saws, flattens, or spins out, turning it into locomotives, ships, cannon, and a thousand other things, some as fine as the chiseled work of artists, others as monstrous as the work of giants, complicated, delicate, powerful, brutal.

Let us look and try to understand.

We enter on the right a vast gallery where four enormous engines are being operated. They go slowly, the wheels revolving, the pistons and rods moving. What are they doing? only giving air to the tall furnaces where the melting iron boils. They are the lungs of the colossal crucibles which we shall see. They breathe and nothing more; they give life and strength to the monsters.

And here are the crucibles: there are two at the further end of the gallery, each as big as towers, roaring and sputtering such flames that, a few hundred yards away, the eyes are blinded, the skin burned, and one pants as if in a sweating-room.

One would say it was a violent volcano. The fire that comes from its mouth is white, unbearable to the sight, and it is projected with a force and noise impossible to describe.

In it boils steel, Bessemer steel, of which rails are made. A strong man, young and good-looking, wearing a large felt hat, watches this fire attentively.

He is seated before a wheel similar to that of a ship, and now and then he turns it like a pilot. Immediately, the fury of the furnace rises; it throws out a hurricane of flames, the chief melter having increased the monstrous current of air which passes through it.

And still, like the captain of a snip, the man every minute looks through a spyglass, watching the color of the fire. He makes a sign, and a small cart advances and drops other metals in the roaring furnace. The melter once more inspects the changing shades of the furious flames, looking for signs, and suddenly turning another wheel, he upsets the vat.

It turns slowly, throwing a terrifying stream of sparks as high as the roof of the gallery; and then it pours in a dainty way, like an elephant trying to be graceful, a few drops of burning liquid into a mold, then straightens up again, still roaring.

A man carries away this burning metal. It is now an ingot, which is deposited under a hammer operated by steam. The hammer hits, crushes, and thins out the metal, which is then thrown into water, to cool it. It is taken between tongs and broken in two; and the foreman examines the grain before giving the order: “Cast it!”

The vat is reversed once more, and, like a waiter filling glasses, it pours the burning steel into different receptacles spread around it.

It seems to be displaced in a very simple manner. To move these fantastic engines, to make them accomplish their work, to come and go, fall or rise, it is sufficient simply to touch levers as thick as a walking-stick, or press buttons similar to those on electric bells.

A peculiar strength, a strange power, seems to hover over them, guiding the heavy motions of this wonderful machinery.

We go out with faces burning and with bloodshot eyes.

Here we see two brick towers, too high to be roofed; an intense heat comes from them. A man with a crowbar strikes at the bottom and causes a sort of glaze to fall away, then he digs still further. And we see a light; two more strokes and a torrent of fire streams out, running through troughs dug along the earth. This is the smelting-vat.

One feels suffocated before this fearful river, and is forced to retreat into the tall buildings near by, where locomotives and war-ships are being built.

On entering, the confusion is overpowering. This is a labyrinth of cranks, wheels, straps, and gearing-wheels in motion. At every step one faces some monster at work on red-hot or black iron. Here are saws dividing slabs as thick as a man’s body; there, sharp-pointed instruments penetrate blocks of steel as easily as needles pierce a piece of cloth; further away, another machine cuts through sheets of metal as scissors cut paper. All these work together, although with different movements, like a fantastic collection of wicked, roaring beasts. And there is fire under the hammers, in the furnaces, everywhere. And above it all that formidable stroke, which dominates the noise of the wheels, of the boilers, of hammers, and machines, makes the earth tremble. It is the laboring of the gigantic pestle of the Creusot Ironworks.

It stands at the end of a large building containing ten or twelve other pestles. All come down, with regular strokes, on red-hot blocks, throwing out a rain of sparks and, by degrees, flatten or roll out, assuming a curved or a straight form, according to the will of the workmen.

The largest pestle, which weighs two hundred thousand pounds, falls with the weight of a mountain on a red-hot block of steel, larger than itself. At each stroke a hurricane of fire belches forth on all sides, and we see the mass of metal gradually thinning out.

The pestle rises and falls, with an easy grace, regulated by a man who holds a slender lever in his hands; the sight reminds one of those wild beasts who in fairy tales are tamed by the touch of a child.

We now enter the rolling-mills. This is a still more interesting sight. Red serpents overrun the ground, some as thin as a thread, others as thick as a cable. Here they look like overgrown glowworms, there like immense boa-constrictors. These are wires, and the others are rails.

Men, whose eyes are protected with metallic shades, whose hands, arms, and legs are incased in leather, throw into these machines the everlasting piece of red-hot iron. The machine seizes it, stretches, lengthens, and returns it, thinning it ceaselessly. The iron squirms like a wounded reptile, seems to resist, but yields at last, lengthening indefinitely, constantly retaken and thrown out by the monster. These are the rails.

Powerless to resist, this red mass of opaque and square Bessemer steel stretches out under the effort of the machinery, and in a few seconds becomes a rail. A giant saw cuts it the exact length required, others follow ceaselessly, and nothing ever interrupts this tremendous labor.

We come out at last, as black as stokers, exhausted and with dimmed sight. Above our heads spreads a cloud of thick smoke, which rises to the sky.

Oh! for a few flowers, a field, and a grassy bank where one could lie and rest, without a sound but that of a murmuring brook and the song of birds!

SUR L'EAU

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

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CHAPTER I. “THE ANCHOR’S WEIGHED.”

I was sound asleep when my skipper Bernard awoke me by throwing up sand at my window. I opened it, and on my face, on my chest, in my very soul, I felt the cold delicious breath of the night. The sky was a clear blue gray, and alive with the quivering fire of the stars.

The sailor standing at the foot of the wall, said:

“Fine weather, sir.”

“What wind?”

“Off shore.”

“Very well, I’m coming.”

Half an hour later I was hurrying down to the shore. The horizon was pale with the first rays of dawn, and I saw in the distance behind the Baie des Anges the lights at Nice, and still further on the revolving lighthouse at Villefranche.

In front of me Antibes was dimly visible through the lifting darkness, with its two towers rising above the cone-shaped town, surrounded by the old walls built by Vauban.

In the streets were a few dogs and a few men, workmen starting off to their daily labor. In the port, nothing but the gentle swaying of the boats at the side of the quay and the soft plashing of the scarcely moving water could be heard; or at times the sound of the straining of a cable or of a boat grazing against the hull of a vessel. The boats, the flagstones, the sea itself seemed asleep under the gold-spangled firmament, and under the eye of a small lighthouse which, standing out at the end of the jetty, kept watch over its little harbor.

Beyond, in front of Ardouin’s building yard, I saw a glimmer, I felt a stir, I heard voices. They were expecting me. The “Bel-Ami” was ready to start.

I went down into the cabin, lighted up by a couple of candles hanging and balanced like compasses, at the foot of the sofas, which at night were used as beds; then I donned a leathern sailor’s jacket, put on a warm cap, and returned on deck. Already the hawsers had been cast off, and the two men, hauling in the cable, had brought the anchor apeak. Then they hoisted the big sail, which went up slowly to the monotonous groan of blocks and rigging. It rose wide and wan in the darkness of the night, quivering in the breath of the wind, hiding from us both sky and stars.

The breeze was coming dry and cold from the invisible mountain that one felt to be still laden with snow. It came very faint, as though hardly awake, undecided and intermittent.

Then the men shipped the anchor, I seized the helm, and the boat, like a big ghost, glided through the still waters. In order to get out of the port, we had to tack between the sleeping luggers and schooners. We went gently from one quay to another, dragging after us our little round dingy, which followed us as a cygnet, just hatched from its shell, follows the parent swan.

As soon as we reached the channel between the jetty and the square fort the yacht became livelier, quickened its pace, and seemed more alert, as though a joyous feeling had taken possession of her. She danced over the countless short waves, — moving furrows of a boundless plain. Quitting the dead waters of the harbor, she now felt under her the living sea.

There was no swell, and I directed our course between the walls of the town and the buoy called *Cinq-cents francs* (Twenty pounds sterling) that marks the deeper channel; then, catching the breeze astern, I made sail to double the headland.

The day was breaking, the stars were disappearing, for the last time the Villefranche lighthouse closed its revolving eye, and I saw strange roseate glimmers in the distant sky, above the still invisible Nice; the heights of the Alpine glaciers lighted up by the early dawn. I gave the helm over to Bernard, and watched the rising sun. The freshened breeze sent us skimming over the quivering violet-tinted waters. A bell clanged, throwing to the wind the three rapid strokes of the Angelus. How is it that the sound of bells seems livelier in the early dawn, and heavier at nightfall? I like that chill and keen hour of morn, when man still sleeps, and all nature is awakening. The air is full of mysterious thrills unknown to belated risers. I inhale, I drink it; I see all life returning, the material life of the world; the life that runs through all the planets, the secret of which is our eternal puzzle.

Raymond said: “We shall soon have the wind from the east.”

Bernard replied: “More likely from the west.” The skipper Bernard is lean and lithe, remarkably clean, careful, and prudent. Bearded up to his eyes, he has a frank look and a kindly voice. He is devoted and trusty. But everything makes him anxious at sea; a sudden swell that foretells a breeze out at sea, a long cloud over the Esterel mountains announcing a mistral to westward, even a rising barometer, for that may indicate a squall from the east. Moreover, a capital sailor, he exercises a constant supervision and carries cleanliness to such an extent as to rub up the brasses the moment a drop of water has touched them.

His brother-in-law, Raymond, is a strong fellow, swarthy and mustached, indefatigable and bold, as loyal and devoted as the other, but less variable and nervous, more calm, more resigned to the surprises and treachery of the sea. Bernard, Raymond, and the barometer are sometimes in contradiction with each other, and perform an amusing comedy with three personages, of which one, the best informed, is dumb. “Dash it, sir, we’re sailing well,” said Bernard. We had, it was true, passed through the Gulf of La Salis, cleared La Garoupe, and were approaching Cape Gros, a flat low rock stretching out on a level with the water.

Now, the whole Alpine mountain range appeared, a monster wave threatening the sea, a granite wave capped with snow, where each pointed tip looks like a dash of spray motionless and frozen. And the sun rises behind this ice, shedding over it the light of its molten silver rays.

Then directly after, as we round the Antibes headland, we discover the Lerins Isles, and further off behind them, the tortuous outline of the Esterel. The Esterel is the stage scenery of Cannes, a lovely keepsake kind of mountain of faintest blue, elegantly outlined in a coquettish and yet artistic style, washed in water-colors on a theatrical sky by a good-natured Creator for the express purpose of serving as model for English lady landscape painters, and as a subject of admiration for consumptive or idle royal highnesses.

With each hour of the day, the Esterel changes its aspect, and charms the gaze of the *upper ten.*

In the morning the chain of mountains, correctly and clearly cut out, is sharply delineated on a blue sky: a tender and pure blue, the ideal blue of a southern shore. But in the evening the wooded sides of the slopes darken and become a black patch on a fiery sky, on a sky incredibly red and dramatic. Never have I seen elsewhere such fairy-like sunsets, such conflagrations of the whole horizon, such an effulgence of clouds, such a clever and superb arrangement, such a daily renewal of extravagant and magnificent effects which call forth admiration but would raise a smile were they painted by men.

The Lerins Isles, which to the east close the Gulf of Cannes and separate it from the Gulf of Juan, look themselves like two operatic islands placed there for the satisfaction and delight of the invalid and winter sojourners.

Seen from the open sea, where we now are, they resemble two dark green gardens growing in the water. Out at sea, at the extreme end of Saint-Honorat, stands a romantic ruin, its walls rising out of the waves, quite one of Walter Scott's castles, ever beaten by the surf, and in which, in former days, the monks defended themselves against the Saracens; for Saint-Honorat always belonged to monks, except during the Revolution. At that period the island was purchased by an actress of the Comédie-Française.

Stronghold, militant monks, now toned down into the fattest of smilingly begging Trappists; pretty actress come thither no doubt to conceal her love affairs in the dense thickets and pines of this rock-belted islet; all, down to the very names, "Lerins, Saint-Honorat, Sainte-Marguerite," fit for Florian's fables, all is pleasing, coquettish, romantic, poetic, and rather insipid on the delightful shores of Cannes.

To correspond with the antique manor embattled, slender, and erect, which looks toward the open sea at the extremity of Saint-Honorat, Sainte-Marguerite is terminated on the land side by the celebrated fortress in which the Man in the Iron Mask and Bazaine were confined. A channel about a mile long stretches out between the headland of the Croisette and the fortress, which has the aspect of an old squat house, devoid of anything imposing or majestic. It seems to crouch down dull and sly, a real trap for prisoners.

I can now see the three gulfs. In front, beyond the islands, lies that of Cannes; nearer, the Gulf of Juan, and, behind, the Baie des Anges, overtopped by the Alps and the snowy heights. Further off, the coasts can be seen far beyond the Italian frontier, and with my glasses I can sight at the end of a promontory the white houses of Bordighera.

And everywhere, all along the endless coast, the towns by the seashore, the villages perched up on high on the mountain side, the innumerable villas dotted about in the greenery, all look like white eggs laid on the sands, laid on the rocks, laid among the pine forests by gigantic birds that have come in the night from the snowlands far above.

Villas again on the Cape of Antibes, a long tongue of land, a wonderful garden thrown out between the seas, blooming with the most lovely flowers of Europe, and at the extreme point, Eileen Rock, a charming and whimsical residence that attracts visitors from Cannes and Nice.

The breeze has dropped, the yacht hardly makes any progress. After the current of land wind that lasts all night we are waiting and hoping for a whiff of sea air, which will be most welcome, wherever it may blow, from.

Bernard still believes in a west wind, Raymond in an east one, and the barometer remains motionless at a little above 76.

The sun now radiant, overspreads the earth, making the walls of the houses sparkle from afar like scattered snow, and sheds over the sea a light varnish of luminous blue.

Little by little, taking advantage of the faintest breath, of those caresses of the air which one can hardly feel on the skin, but which nevertheless make lively and well-trimmed yachts glide through still waters, we sail beyond the last point of the headland, and the whole Gulf of Juan, with the squadron in the center of it, lies before us.

From afar, the ironclads look like rocks, islets, and reefs covered with dead trees. The smoke of a train runs along the shore between Cannes and Juan-les-Pins, which will perhaps become later on the prettiest place on the whole coast.

Three fishing-boats with their lateen sails, one red and the other two white, are detained in the channel between Sainte-Marguerite and the mainland.

All is still, the soft and warm calm of a morning's springtide in the south; and already it seems to me as if I had left weeks ago, months ago, years ago, the talking, busy world; I feel arise within me the intoxication of solitude, the sweet delights of a rest that' nothing will disturb, neither the white letter, nor the blue telegram, nor the bell at my door, nor the bark of my dog. I cannot be sent for invited, carried off, overwhelmed by sweet smiles, or harassed by civilities. I am alone, really alone, really free. The smoke of the train runs along the seaside; while I float in a winged home that is rocked and cradled; pretty as a bird, tiny as a nest, softer than a hammock, wandering over the waters at the caprice of the wind, independent and free! To attend to me and sail my boat, I have two sailors at my call, and books and provisions for a fortnight.

A whole fortnight without speaking, what joy! Overcome by the heat of the sun I closed my eyes, enjoying the deep repose of the sea, when Bernard said in an undertone:

“The brig over there has a good breeze.”

Over there it was true, far away in front of Agay, a brig was advancing toward us; I could distinctly see with my glasses her rounded sails puffed out by the wind.

“Pooh, it’s the breeze from Agay,” answered Raymond, “it is calm round Cape Roux.”

“Talk away, we shall have a west wind,” replied Bernard.

I leaned over to look at the barometer in the saloon. It had fallen during the last half hour. I told Bernard, who smiled and whispered:

“It feels like a westerly wind, sir.”

And now my curiosity awakens; the curiosity special to all those who wander over the sea, which makes them see everything, notice everything, and take an interest in the smallest detail. My glasses no longer leave my eyes; I look at the color of the water on the horizon. It remains clear, varnished, unruffled. If there is a breeze, it is still far off.

What a personage the wind is for the sailors! ‘ They speak of it as of a man, an all-powerful sovereign, sometimes terrible and sometimes kindly. It, is the main topic of conversation all the day through, and it is the subject of one’s incessant thoughts throughout the days and nights. You land folk know it not! As for us, we know it better than our father or our mother, the invisible, the terrible, the capricious, the sly, the treacherous, the devouring tyrant. We love it and we dread it; we know its maliciousness and its anger, which the warnings in the heavens or in the depths slowly teach us to anticipate. It forces us to think of it at every minute, at every second, for the struggle between it and us is indeed ceaseless. All *our* being is on the alert for the battle; our eye to detect undiscernible appearances; our skin to feel its caress or its blow, our spirit to recognize its mood, foresee its caprices, judge whether it is calm or wayward. No enemy, no woman gives us so powerful a sensation of struggle, nor compels us to so much foresight, for it is the master of the sea, it is that thing which we may avoid, make use of, or fly from, but which we can never subdue. And there reigns in the soul of a sailor, as in that of a believer, the idea of an irascible and formidable God, the mysterious, religious, infinite fear of the wind, and respect for its power.

“Here it comes, sir,” Bernard said to me.

Far away, very far away, at the end of the horizon, a blue-black line lengthens out on the water. It is nothing, a shade, an imperceptible shadow; it is the wind. Now we await it motionless, under the heat of the sun.

I look at the time, eight o’clock, and I say:

“Bless me, it is early for the westerly wind.”

“It will blow hard in the afternoon,” replied Bernard.

I raised my eyes to the sail, hanging flat, loose, and inert. Its great triangle seemed to reach up to the sky, for we had hoisted on the foremast the great fine-weather gaff topsail and its yard overtopped the masthead by quite two yards. All is motionless, we might be on land. The barometer is still falling. However, the dark line perceived afar, approaches. The metallic luster of the waters is suddenly dimmed and transformed into a slaty shade. The sky is pure and cloudless.

Suddenly, around us the polished surface of the sea is rippled by imperceptible shivers gliding rapidly over it, appearing but to be effaced, as though it were riddled by a rain of thousands of little pinches of sand.

The sail quivers slightly, and presently the main boom slowly lurches over to starboard. A light breath now caresses my face, and the shivers on the water increase around us, as though the rain of sand had become continuous. The cutter begins to move forward. She glides on upright, and a slight plash makes itself heard along her sides. I feel the tiller stiffen in my hand, that long brass crossbar which looks in the sun like a fiery stem, and the breeze steadily increases. We shall have to tack, but what matter; the boat sails close to the wind, and if the breeze holds we shall be able to beat up to Saint-Raphaël before the sun goes down.

We now approach the squadron, whose six ironclads and two dispatch boats turn slowly at their anchors, with their bows to the west. Then we tack toward the open sea to pass the Formigues rocks, which are marked by a tower in the middle of the gulf. The breeze freshens more and more with surprising rapidity, and the waves rise up short and choppy. The yacht heels under her full set of sails and runs on, followed by the dingy, which with stretched-out painter is hurried through the foam, her nose in the air and stern in the water.

On nearing the island of Saint-Honorat we pass by a naked rock, red and bristling like a porcupine, so rugged, so armed with teeth, points, and claws as to be well-nigh impossible of access; and one must advance with precaution, placing one’s feet in the hollows between the tusks: it is called Saint-Ferréol.

A little earth, come from no one knows where, has accumulated in the holes and crevasses of the rock, and lilies grow in it, and beautiful blue irises, from seeds which seem to have fallen from heaven.

It is on this strange reef, in the open sea, that for five years lay buried and unknown the body of Paganini. The adventure is worthy of this artist, whose queer character, at once genial and weird, gave him the reputation of being possessed by the devil, and who, with his odd appearance in body and face, his marvelous talent and excessive emaciation, has become an almost legendary being, a sort of Hoffmanesque phantasm.

As he was on his way home to Genoa, his native town, accompanied by his son, who alone could hear him now, so weak had his voice become, he died at Nice of cholera, on the twenty-seventh of May, 1840.

The son at once took the body of his father on board a ship and set sail for Italy. But the Genoese clergy refused to give burial to the demoniac. The court of Rome was consulted, but dared not grant the authorization. The body was, however, about to be disembarked, when the municipality made opposition, under the pretext that the artist had died of cholera. Genoa was at that time ravaged by an epidemic of this disease, and it was argued that the presence of this new corpse might possibly aggravate the evil.

Paganini’s son then returned to Marseilles, where entrance to the port was refused him for the same reasons. He then went on to Cannes, where he could not land either.

He therefore remained at sea, and the waves rocked the corpse of the fantastic artist, everywhere repelled by men. He no longer knew what to do, where to go, on which spot to lay the dead body so sacred to him, when he espied the naked rock of Saint-Ferréol in the midst of the billows. There at last he landed the coffin, and buried it in the center of the islet.

It was only in 1845 that he went back with two of his friends to take up the remains of his father, and transfer them to Genoa to the Villa Gajona.

Would one not have preferred that the extraordinary violinist should have remained at rest upon the bristling reef, cradled by the song of the waves as they break on the torn and craggy rock?

Further on, in the open sea, rises the castle of Saint-Honorat, which we had already perceived as we rounded the Cape of Antibes, and further on still, a line of reefs ended by a tower called Les Moines.

They are now quite white with surf and echoing with the roar of the breakers.

They form one of the most dangerous perils of the coast during the night, for they are marked by no light, and they are the cause of frequent wrecks.

A sudden gust heels us over, so that the water washes the deck, and I give orders for the gaff topsail to be lowered, the cutter being no longer able to carry it without endangering the safety of the mast.

The waves sink, swell, and whiten; the wind whistles, ill tempered and squally, — a threatening wind, which cries “Take care!”

“We shall have to sleep at Cannes,” said Bernard.

And in fact, at the end of half an hour, we had to lower the standing jib and replace it by a smaller one, taking a reef in the sail at the same time; then a quarter of an hour later we had to take in a second reef. Thereupon I decided to make for the harbor at Cannes, a dangerous harbor, without shelter; a roadstead open to the southwesterly sea, where the ships are in constant danger. When one thinks what a considerable amount of wealth would accrue to the town by the large number of foreign yachts that would flock there, were they certain of finding a proper shelter, one understands how inveterate must be the indolence of this southern population, who have not yet been able to obtain from government such indispensable works. At ten o’clock we dropped anchor opposite the steamboat “Le Cannois,” and I landed, thoroughly disappointed at the interruption of my trip. The whole roadstead was white with foam.

CHAPTER II. CANNES

Princes, Princes, everywhere Princes. They who love Princes are indeed happy.

No sooner had I set foot yesterday morning on the promenade of the Croisette than I met three, one behind the other. In our democratic country, Cannes has become the city of titles.

If one could open minds in the same manner as one lifts the cover off a saucepan, one would find figures in the brain of the mathematician; outlines of actors gesticulating and declaiming in a theatrical author's head; the form of a woman in that of a lover's; licentious pictures in that of a rake; verses in the brain of a poet; and in the cranium of the folk who come to Cannes there would be found coronets of every description, floating about like vermicelli in soup.

Some men gather together in gambling houses because they are fond of cards, others meet on race-courses because they are fond of horses. People gather together at Cannes because they love Imperial and Royal Highnesses.

There they are at home and, in default of the kingdoms of which they have been dispossessed, reign peacefully in the salons of the faithful.

Great and small, poor and rich, sad and gay, all are to be found, according to taste. In general they are modest, strive to please, and show in their intercourse with humbler mortals, a delicacy and affability that is hardly ever found in our own *députés,* those Princes of the ballot.

However, if the Princes, the poor wandering Princes without subjects or civil list, who come to live in homely fashion in this town of flowers and elegance, affect simplicity, and do not lay themselves open to ridicule, even from those most disrespectfully inclined, such is not the case with regard to the worshipers of Highnesses.

These latter circle round their idols with an eagerness at once religious and comical; and directly they are deprived of one, they fly off in quest of another, as though their mouths could only open to say "Monseigneur" or "Madame," and speak in the third person.

They cannot be with you five minutes without telling you what the Princess replied, what the Grand Duke said; the promenade planned with the one, the witty saying of the other. One feels, one sees, one guesses that they frequent no other society but that of persons of Royal blood, and if they deign to speak to you, it is in order to inform you exactly of what takes place on these heights.

What relentless struggles, struggles in which every possible ruse is employed in order to have at one's table, at least once during the season, a Prince, a real Prince, one of those at a premium. What respect one inspires when one has met a Grand Duke at lawn tennis, or when one has merely been presented to Wales — as the mashers say.

To write down one's name at the door of these "exiles," as Daudet calls them, of these tumble-down Princes, as others would say, creates a constant, delicate, absorbing, and engrossing occupation. The visitor's book lies open in the hall between a couple of lackeys, one of whom proffers a pen. One inscribes one's name at the tag end of some two thousand names of every sort and description, among which titles swarm and the noble particle *de* abounds! After which, one goes off with the haughty air of a man just ennobled, as happy as one who has accomplished a sacred duty, and one proudly says to the first person met: "I have just written down my name at the Grand Duke of Gerolstein's!" Then in the evening at dinner one says, in an important tone: "I noticed just now, on the Grand Duke of Gerolstein's list, the names of X — , Y — , and Z — ."

And everyone is interested and listens as if the event were of the greatest importance.

But why laugh and be astonished at the harmless and innocent mania of the elegant admirers of Princes, when we meet in Paris fifty different races of hero-worshipers who are in no wise less amusing?

Whoever has a salon must needs have some celebrities to show there, and a hunt is organized in order to secure them. There is hardly a woman in society and of the best, who is not anxious to have her artist or her artists; and she will give dinners for them in order that the whole world may know that hers is a clever set.

Between affecting to possess the wit one has not, but which one summons with a flourish of trumpets, or affecting Princely intimacies — where is the difference?

Among the great men most sought after by women, old and young, are most assuredly musicians. Some houses possess a complete collection of them. Moreover, these artists possess the inestimable advantage of being useful in the evening parties. However, people who desire a superlative *rara avis*, can hardly hope to bring two together in the same room. We may add that there is not a meanness of which any woman, a leader of society, is not capable, in order to embellish her salon with a celebrated composer. The delicate attentions usually employed to secure a painter or only a literary man, become quite inadequate when the subject is a tradesman of sounds. For him allurements and praise hitherto unknown are employed. His hands are kissed like those of a King, he is worshiped as a God, when he has deigned to execute his "Regina Coeli." A hair of his beard is worn in a ring; a button fallen from his breeches one evening in a violent movement of his arm, during the execution of the grand *finale* of his "Doux Repos" becomes a medal, a sacred medal worn in the bosom hanging from a golden chain.

Painters are of less value, although still rather sought after. They are not so divine and more Bohemian. Their manners are less courteous and above all not sufficiently sublime. They often replace inspiration by broad jests and silly puns. They carry with them too much of the perfume of the studio, and those who by dint of watchfulness have managed to get rid of it only exchange one odor for another, that of affectation. And then they are a fickle, light, and bragging set. No one is certain of keeping them long, whereas the musician builds his nest in the family circle.

Of late years, the literary man has been sought after. He presents many great advantages: he talks, he talks lengthily, he talks a great deal, his conversation suits every kind of public, and as his profession is to be intelligent, he can be listened to and admired in all security.

The woman who is possessed with the mania for having at her house a literary man, just as one would have a parrot whose chatter should attract all the neighboring *concierges,* has to take her choice between poets and novelists. There is more of the ideal about the poet, more spontaneity about the novelist. The poets are more sentimental, the novelists more positive. It is a matter of taste and constitution. The poet has more charm, the novelist has often more wit. But the novelist presents dangers that are not met with in the poet: he pries, pillages, and makes capital of all he sees. With him there is no tranquillity, no certainty that he will not, some day, lay you bare in the pages of a book. His eye is like a pump that sucks up everything, like the hand of a thief that is always at work. Nothing escapes him; he gathers and picks up ceaselessly; he notices the movements, the gestures, the intentions, the slightest incidents and events; he picks up the smallest words, the smallest actions, the smallest thing. He makes stock from morning till night of these observations out of which he will make a good telling story, a story that will make the round of the world, which will be read, discussed, commented upon by thousands and thousands of people. And the most terrible part of all is that the wretch cannot help drawing striking portraits, in spite of himself, unconsciously, because he sees things as they are, and he must relate what he sees. Notwithstanding the cunning he uses in disguising his personages, it will be said: "Did you recognize Mr. X — and Mrs. Y — ? They are striking resemblances."

It is assuredly as dangerous for people in good society to invite and make much of novelists, as it would be for a miller to breed rats in his mill. And yet they are held in great favor.

When, therefore, a woman has fixed her choice on the writer she intends to adopt, she lays siege to him by means of every variety of compliments, attractions, and indulgence. Like water which, drop by drop, slowly wears away the hardest rock, the fulsome praise falls at each word on the impressionable heart of the literary man. Then, when she sees that he is moved, touched, and won by the constant flattery, she isolates him, severing, little by little, the ties he may have elsewhere, and imperceptibly accustoms him to come to her house, make himself happy, and there enshrine his thoughts. In order the more thoroughly to acclimatize him in her house, she paves the way for his success, brings him forward, sets him in relief, and displays for him, before all the old *habitués* of the household, marked consideration and boundless admiration.

At last, realizing that he is now an idol, he remains in the temple. He finds, moreover, that the position affords him every advantage, for all the other women lavish their most delicate favors upon him to entice him away from his conqueror. If, however, he is clever, he will not hearken to the entreaties and coquetries with which he is overwhelmed. And the more faithful he appears, the more he will be sought after, implored, and loved. Ah! let him beware of allowing these drawing-room sirens to entice him away; he will immediately lose two-thirds of his value, if he once becomes public property.

Soon he forms a literary circle, a church of which he is the deity, the only deity, for true faiths never have more than one God. People will flock to the house to see him, to hear him, to admire him, as one comes from afar to visit certain shrines. He will be envied! She will be envied! They will converse upon literature as priests talk of dogmas, scientifically and solemnly; they will be listened to, both the one and the other, and on leaving this literary salon, one will feel as though one were quitting a cathedral.

Other men are also sought after, but in a lesser degree; for instance, generals, who, neglected by society and not held in much greater consideration than *députés,* are yet in demand among the middle classes. The *député* is only in request at moments of crisis. He is kept on hand, by a dinner now and then during a parliamentary lull. The scholar has also his partisans — every variety of taste exists in nature; and a clerk in office is himself highly esteemed by folk who live up six pairs of stairs. However, these sort of people do not come to Cannes; there are only a few timid representatives to be seen of the middle class.

It is only before twelve o'clock that the noble visitors are to be met on the Croisette.

The Croisette is a long semicircular promenade that follows the line of the beach, from the headland in front of Sainte-Marguerite down to the harbor overlooked by the old town.

Young and slender women, — it is good style to be thin, — dressed in the English fashion, walk along with rapid step, escorted by active young men in lawn-tennis suits. But from time to time appears some poor emaciated creature, dragging himself along with languid step, and leaning on the arm of a mother, brother, or sister. He coughs and gasps, poor thing, wrapped up in shawls notwithstanding the heat, and watches us, as we pass, with deep, despairing, and envious glances.

He suffers and dies, for this charming and balmy country is the hospital of society and the flowery cemetery of aristocratic Europe.

The terrible disease which never relents, and is now called tuberculosis, the disease that gnaws, burns, and destroys men by thousands, seems to have chosen this coast on which to finish off its victims.

How truly in every part of the world, this lovely and terrible spot must be accursed, this anteroom of Death, perfumed and sweet, where so many humble and royal families, burghers, or princes, have left some one, some child on whom they concentrated all their hopes, and lavished all their love and tenderness.

I call to mind Mentone, the warmest, and healthiest of these winter residences. Even as in warlike cities, the fortresses can be seen standing out on the surrounding heights, so in this region of moribunds, the cemetery is visible on the summit of a hill.

What a spot it would be for the living, that garden where the dead lie asleep! Roses, roses, everywhere roses. They are blood-red or pale, or white, or streaked with veins of scarlet. The tombs, the paths, the places still unoccupied and which to-morrow will be filled, all are covered with them. Their strong perfume brings giddiness, making both head and legs falter.

And all those who lie there, were but sixteen, eighteen, or twenty years of age.

One wanders on from tomb to tomb, reading the names of those youthful victims, killed by the implacable disease. 'Tis a children's cemetery, a cemetery similar to the young girls' balls, where no married couples are admitted.

From the cemetery the view extends to the left in - the direction of Italy as far as the Bordighera headland, where the white houses stretch out into the sea; and to the right as far as Cape Martin, which dips its leafy coast in the water.

Nevertheless, all around, all along these delightful j shores, we are in the home of Death. But it is discreet, veiled, full of tact and bashfulness, well bred in fact. Never does one meet it face to face, although at every moment it passes near.

It might even be thought that no one dies in this country, so thorough is the complicity of deceit in which this sovereign revels. But how it is felt, how it is detected; how often a glimpse is caught of its black robes! Truly all the roses and the orange blossoms are requisite to prevent the breeze being laden with the dread smell which is exhaled from the chamber of death.

Never is a coffin seen in the streets, never any funeral trappings, never is a death-knell heard. Yesterday's emaciated pedestrian no longer passes beneath your window, and that is all. If you are astonished at no longer seeing him, and inquire after him, the landlord and servants tell you with a smile, that he had got better and by the doctor's advice had left for Italy. In each hotel Death has its secret stairs, its confidants, and its accomplices. A philosopher of olden times would have said many fine things upon the contrast of the elegance and misery which here elbow one another.

It is twelve o'clock, the promenade is now deserted, and I return on board the "Bel-Ami," where awaits me an unpretending breakfast prepared by

Raymond, whom I find dressed up in a white apron, frying potatoes.

All the remainder of the day I read.

The wind was still violently blowing, and the yacht danced between her anchors, for we had been obliged to let go the starboard one also. The motion ended by benumbing me, and I fell into a long doze. When Bernard came into the cabin to light the candles it was seven o'clock, and as the surf along the quay made landing difficult, I dined on my boat.

After dinner I went up and sat in the open air. Around me Cannes stretched forth her many lights. Nothing can be prettier than a town lighted up and seen from the sea. On the left, the old quarter with its houses that seemed to climb one upon the other, mingled its lights with that of the stars; on the right, the gas lamps of the Croisette extended like an enormous serpent a mile and a half long.

And I reflected that in all the villas, in all the hotels, people were gathered together this evening, as they were last night, as they will be to-morrow, and that they are talking. Talking! about what? The Princes! the weather! And then? — the weather! — the Princes! — and then — about nothing!

Can anything be more dreary than *table d'hôle* conversation? I have lived in hotels, I have endured the emptiness of the human soul as it is there laid bare. In truth, one must be hedged in by the most determined indifference not to weep with grief, disgust, and shame, when one hears men talk. Man, the ordinary man, rich, known, esteemed, respected, held in consideration, is satisfied with himself, and he knows nothing, he understands nothing, yet he talks of intelligence as though he knew all about it.

How blinded and intoxicated we must be by our foolish pride to fancy ourselves anything more than animals slightly superior to other animals. Listen to them, the fools, seated round the table! They are talking! Talking with gentle confiding ingenuousness, and they imagine that they are exchanging ideas! What ideas? They say where they have been walking: "It was a very pretty walk, but rather cold coming home"; "The cooking is not bad in the hotel, although hotel food is always rather spicy." And they relate what they have done, what they like, what they believe.

I fancy I behold the deformity of their souls as a monstrous foetus in a jar of spirits of wine. I assist at the slow birth of the commonplace sayings they constantly repeat; I watch the words as they drop from the granary of stupidity into their imbecile mouths, and from their mouths into the inert atmosphere which bears them to my ears.

But their ideas, their noblest, most solemn, most respected ideas, are they not the unimpeachable proof of the omnipotence of stupidity, — eternal, universal, indestructible stupidity?

All their conceptions of God, an awkward deity, whose first creations are such failures that He must needs recreate them, a deity who listens to our secrets and notes them down, a God who, in turn, policeman, Jesuit, lawyer, gardener, is conceived now in cuirass, now in robes, now in wooden shoes; then the negations of God based upon pure terrestrial logic, the arguments for and against, the history of religious beliefs, of schisms, heresies, philosophies, the affirmations as well as the doubts, the puerility of principles, the ferocious and bloody violence of the originators of hypotheses, the utter chaos of contestation, in short, every miserable effort of this wretchedly impotent being, man, impotent in conception, in imagination, in knowledge, all prove that he was thrown upon this absurdly small world for the sole purpose of eating, drinking, manufacturing children and little songs, and killing his neighbor by way of pastime.

Happy are those whom life satisfies, who are amused and content.

There are some such who, easily pleased, are delighted with everything. They love the sun and the rain, the snow and the fog; they love festivities as well as the calm of their own homes; they love all they see, all they do, all they say, all they hear.

They lead either an easy life, quiet and satisfied amid their offspring, or an agitated existence full of pleasures and amusement.

In neither case are they dull.

Life, for them, is an amusing kind of play, in which they are themselves actors; an excellent and varied show, which though offering nothing unexpected, thoroughly delights them.

Other men, however, who run through at a glance the narrow circle of human satisfactions, remain dismayed before the emptiness of happiness, the monotony and poverty of earthly joys.

As soon as they have reached thirty years of age all is ended for them. What have they to expect? Nothing now can interest them; they have made the circuit of our meager pleasures.

Happy are those who know not the loathsome weariness of the same acts constantly repeated; happy are those who have the strength to recommence each day the same task, with the same gestures, amid the same furniture, in front of the same horizon, under the same sky, to go out in the same streets, where they meet the same faces and the same animals. Happy are those who do not perceive with unutterable disgust that nothing changes, and that all is weariness.

We must indeed be a slow and narrow-minded race to be so easily pleased and satisfied with what is. How is it that the worldly audience has not yet called out, “Curtain,” has not yet demanded the next act, with other beings than mankind, other manners, other pleasures, other plants, other planets, other inventions, other adventures?

Is it possible no one has yet felt a loathing for the sameness of the human face, of the animals which by their unvarying instincts, transmitted in their seed from the first to the last of their race, seem to be but living machinery; a hatred of landscapes eternally the same, and of pleasures never varied?

Console yourself, it is said, by the love of science and art.

But is it not evident that we are always shut up in ourselves, without ever being able to quit ourselves, forever condemned to drag the chains of our wingless dream?

All the progress obtained by our cerebral effort consists in the ascertainment of material facts by means of instruments ridiculously imperfect, which however make up in a certain degree for the inefficiency of our organs. Every twenty years, some unhappy inquirer, who generally dies in the attempt, discovers that the atmosphere contains a gas hitherto unknown, that an imponderable, inexplicable, unqualifiable force can be obtained by rubbing a piece of wax on cloth; that among the innumerable unknown stars, there is one that has not yet been noticed in the immediate vicinity of another, which had not only been observed, but even designated by name for many years. What matter?

Our diseases are due to microbes? Very well. But where do those microbes come from? and the diseases of these invisible ones? And the suns, whence do they come?

We know nothing, we understand nothing, we can do nothing, we foresee nothing, we imagine nothing, we are shut up, imprisoned in ourselves. And there are people who marvel at the genius of humanity!

Art? Painting consists in reproducing with coloring matter monotonous landscapes, which seldom resemble nature; in delineating men, and striving without ever succeeding, to give the aspect of living beings. Obstinately and uselessly one struggles to imitate what is; and the result is a motionless and dumb copy of the actions of life, which is barely comprehensible even to the educated eye that one has sought to attract.

Wherefore such efforts? Wherefore such a vain imitation? Wherefore this trivial reproduction of things in themselves so dull? How petty!

Poets do with words what painters try to do with colors. Again, wherefore?

When one has read four of the most talented, of the most ingenious authors, it is idle to open another. And nothing more can be learned. They also, these men, can but imitate men. They exhaust themselves in sterile labor. For, mankind changing not, their useless art is immutable. Ever since our poor minds have awakened man is the same; his sentiments, his beliefs, his sensations are the same. He has neither advanced nor retrograded; he has never moved. Of what use is it to me to learn what I am, to read what I think, to see myself portrayed in the trivial adventures of a novel?

Ah! if poets could vanquish space, explore the planets, discover other worlds, other beings; vary unceasingly for my mind the nature and form of things, convey me constantly through a changeful and surprising Unknown, open for me mysterious gates in unexpected and marvelous horizons, I would read them night and day. But they can, impotent as they are, but change the place of a word, and show me my own image, as the painters do. Of what use is all this?

For man's thought is motionless. And the precise limits, so nigh, so insurmountable, once attained, it turns like a horse in a circus, like a fly shut up in a bottle, fluttering against the sides and uselessly dashing itself against them. And yet, for want of any better occupation, thought is always a solace, when one lives alone.

On this little boat, rocked by the sea, that a wave could fill and upset, I know, I feel, how true it is that nothing we know exists, for the earth which floats in empty space is even more isolated, more lost than this skiff on the billows. Their importance is the same, their destiny will be accomplished. And I rejoice at understanding the nothingness of the belief and the vanity of the hopes which our insect-like pride has begotten!

I went to bed, cradled by the pitching of the boat, and slept with the deep slumber that one sleeps at sea, till the moment when Bernard awoke me to say:

“Bad weather, sir, we cannot sail this morning.” The wind had fallen, but the sea, very rough in the open, would not allow of our making sail for Saint-Raphaël. Another day that must be spent at Cannes!

At about twelve o’clock, a westerly wind again got up, less strong than the day before, and I resolved to take advantage of it and visit the squadron in Gulf Juan.

In crossing the roads, the “Bel-Ami” jumped about like a goat, and I had to steer very carefully in order to avoid, with each wave which took us broadside, having a mass of water dashed in my face. Soon however I was sheltered by the islands and entered the channel under the fortress of Sainte-Marguerite.

Its straight wall stretches down to the rocks, washed by the waves, and its summit hardly overtops the slightly elevated coast of the island. It is somewhat like a head crammed down between two high shoulders.

The spot where Bazaine descended can be easily made out. It was not necessary to be much of a gymnast to slide down those accommodating rocks.

The escape was related to me with every detail by a man who pretended to be, and probably was, thoroughly well informed.

Bazaine was allowed a good deal of liberty, his wife and children being permitted to come and see him every day. Madame Bazaine, who was an energetic woman, declared to her husband that she would leave him forever, and carry off the children, if he would not make his escape, and she explained her plan. He hesitated at first, on account of the danger of the flight and the doubtfulness of success, but when he saw that his wife was determined to carry out her plan, he consented.

Thereupon, every day some toys for the little ones were brought into the fortress, among others an entire set of appliances for drawing-room gymnastics. Out of these toys was made the knotted rope that the Marshal was to make use of. It was very slowly made, in order to give rise to no suspicion, and when finished it was hid away by a friendly hand in a corner of the prison yard.

The date of the flight was then decided upon. They chose a Sunday, the supervision appearing to be less rigorous on that day.

Madame Bazaine then absented herself for a few days.

The Marshal usually walked about in the yard till eight o’clock in the evening, in company with the governor of the prison, a pleasant man whose agreeable conversation was a resource to Bazaine. Then he would go back to his rooms, which the chief jailer locked and bolted in the presence of his superior officer.

On the evening of the escape, Bazaine pretended he was indisposed, and expressed a wish to retire an hour earlier than usual. He returned therefore to his apartment, but as soon as the governor had gone off to call the jailer and tell him to lock up the captive, the Marshal came out again quickly and hid himself in the yard.

The empty prison was locked up, and each man went home.

At about eleven o'clock Bazaine, armed with the ladder, left his hiding place, fastened the ropes, and made his descent on to the rocks.

At dawn of day, an accomplice unfastened the ladder and threw it over the walls.

Toward eight o'clock in the morning, the governor, surprised at not seeing anything of his prisoner, who was wont to be an early riser, sent to inquire about him. The Marshal's valet refused, however, to disturb his master.

At length at nine o'clock the governor forced open the door and found the cage empty.

On her side Madame Bazaine, in order to carry out her scheme, had applied to a man who was indebted to her husband for a most important service. She appealed to a grateful heart and gained an ally both energetic and devoted. Together they settled all the details; she then went under an assumed name to Genoa, and talking of an excursion to Naples hired for a thousand francs (forty pounds sterling) a day, a little Italian steamer, stipulating that the trip should last at least a week, and that it might be extended to another week on the same terms.

The vessel started, but no sooner were they at sea than the traveler appeared to change her mind, and asked the captain if he would object to going as far as Cannes to fetch her sister-in-law. The sailor willingly consented, and he dropped anchor on Sunday evening in the Gulf of Juan.

Madame Bazaine was set on shore and ordered the boat to keep within hail. Her devoted accomplice was awaiting her in another boat near the promenade of the Croisette, and they crossed the channel which separates the mainland from the little island of Sainte-Marguerite. There her husband was waiting on the rocks, his clothes torn, face bruised, and hands bleeding. The sea being rather rough, he was obliged to wade through the water to reach the boat, which otherwise would have been dashed to pieces against the coast.

When they returned to the mainland they cast the boat adrift.

They rejoined the first boat, and then at last the vessel, which had remained with steam up. Madame Bazaine informed the captain that her sister-in-law was not well enough to join her, and pointing to the Marshal, she added:

“Not having a servant, I have hired a valet. The fool has just tumbled down on the rocks and got himself in the mess you see. Send him, if you please, down to the sailors, and give him what is necessary to dress his wounds and mend his clothes.”

Bazaine went down and spent the night in the forecastle.

The next morning at break of day they were out at sea; then Madame Bazaine again changed her mind, and pleading indisposition, had herself reconducted to Genoa.

However, the news of the escape had already spread, and the populace hearing of it, a clamoring mob assembled under the hotel windows. The uproar soon became so violent that the terrified landlord insisted on the travelers escaping by a private door.

I relate this story as it was told to me, but I guarantee nothing.

We drew near the squadron, the heavy ironclads standing out in single file, like battle towers built in the sea. They were the “Colbert,” the “Dévastation,” the “Amiral-Duperré,” the “Courbet,” the “Indomptable,” and the “Richelieu”; two dispatch boats, the “Hirondelle” and the “Milan”; and four torpedo boats going through evolutions in the gulf.

I wanted to visit the “Courbet,” as it passes just now for the most perfect type in the French navy.

Nothing can give a better idea of human labor, of the intricate and formidable labor done by the ingeniously clever hands of the puny human animal, than the enormous iron citadels which float and sail about bearing an army of soldiers, an arsenal of monstrous arms, the enormous masses of which are made of tiny pieces fitted, soldered, forged, bolted together, a toil of ants and giants, which shows at the same time all the genius, all the weakness, and all the irretrievable barbarousness of the race, so active and so feeble, directing all its efforts toward creating instruments for its own self-destruction.

Those who in former days raised up cathedrals in stone, carved as finely as any lacework, fairy-like palaces to shelter childish and pious fancies, were they worth less than those who nowadays launch forth on the sea these iron houses, real temples of Death?

At the same moment that I leave the ship to get on board my cockleshell I hear the sound of firing on shore. It is the regiment at Antibes practising rifle shooting on the sands and among the pine-woods. The smoke rises in white flakes, like evaporating clouds of cotton, and I can see the red trousers of the soldiers as they run along the beach.

The naval officers suddenly become interested, point their glasses landward, and their hearts beat faster at this spectacle of mimic warfare.

At the mere mention of the word war, I am seized with a sense of bewilderment, as though I heard of witchcraft, of the inquisition, of some far distant thing, ended long ago, abominable and monstrous, against all natural law.

When we talk of cannibals, we proudly smile and proclaim our superiority over these savages. Which are the savages, the true savages? Those who fight to eat the vanquished, or those who fight to kill, only to kill?

The gallant little soldiers running about over there, are as surely doomed to death as the flocks of sheep driven along the road by the butcher. They will fall on some plain, with their heads split open by saber cuts, or their chests riddled by bullets, and yet they are young men who might work, produce something, be useful. Their fathers are old and poverty-stricken, their mothers, who during twenty years have loved them, adored them as only mothers can adore, may perchance hear in six months or a year, that the son, the child, the big fellow, reared with so much care, at such an expense, and with so much love, has been cast in a hole like a dead dog, after having been ripped open by a bullet and trampled, crushed, mangled by the rush of cavalry charges. Why have they killed her boy, her beautiful boy, her sole hope, her pride, her life? She cannot understand. Yes, indeed, why?

War! fighting! slaughtering! butchering men! And to think that now, in our own century, with all our civilization, with the expansion of science and the height of philosophy to which the human race is supposed to have attained, we should have schools, in which we teach the art of killing, of killing from afar, to perfection, numbers of people at the same time; poor devils, innocent men, fathers of families, men of untarnished reputation. The most astounding thing is that the people do not rise up against the governing power. What difference is there then between monarchies and republics? And what is more astounding still, why does society not rise up bodily in rebellion at the word “war”?

Ah, yes, we shall ever continue to live borne down by the old and odious customs, the criminal prejudices, the ferocious ideas of our barbarous forefathers, for we are but animals, and we shall remain animals led only by instinct that nothing will ever change.

Should we not have spurned any other than Victor Hugo, who should have launched forth the grand cry of deliverance and truth?

“To-day, might is called violence, and is beginning to be condemned; war is arraigned. Civilization, at the demand of all humanity, directs an inquiry and indicts the great criminal brief against conquerors and generals. The nations are beginning to understand that the aggrandizement of a crime can in no way lessen it; that if murder is a crime, to murder a great many does not create any attenuating circumstance; that if robbery is a disgrace, invasion cannot be a glory.

“Ah! Let us proclaim the peremptory truth, let us dishonor war.”

Idle anger, poetic indignation! War is more venerated than ever.

A clever artist in such matters, a slaughtering genius, M. de Moltke, replied one day to some peace delegates, in the following extraordinary words:

‘‘War is holy and of divine institution; it is one of the sacred laws of nature; it keeps alive in men all the great and noble sentiments, honor, disinterestedness, virtue, courage, in one word it prevents them from falling into the most hideous materialism.”

Therefore to collect a herd of some four hundred thousand men, march day and night without respite, to think of nothing, study nothing, learn nothing, read nothing, be of no earthly use to anyone, rot with dirt, lie down in mire, live like brutes in a continual besotment, pillage towns, burn villages, ruin nations; then meeting another similar agglomeration of human flesh, rush upon it, shed lakes of blood, cover plains with pounded flesh mingled with muddy and bloody earth; pile up heaps of slain; have arms and legs blown off, brains scattered without benefit to anyone, and perish at the corner of some field while your old parents, your wife and children are dying of hunger; this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism!

Warriors are the scourges of the earth. We struggle against nature and ignorance; against obstacles of all kinds, in order to lessen the hardships of our miserable existence. Men, benefactors, scholars, wear out their lives toiling, seeking what may assist, what may help, what may solace their brethren. Eager in their useful work, they pile up discovery on discovery, enlarging the human mind, extending science, adding something each day to the stock of human knowledge, to the welfare, the comfort, the strength of their country.

War is declared. In six months the generals have destroyed the efforts of twenty years' patience and genius. And this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism.

We have seen war. We have seen men maddened and gone back to their brute estate, killing for mere pleasure, killing out of terror, out of bravado, from sheer ostentation. Then when right no longer exists, when law is dead, when all notion of justice has disappeared, we have seen ruthlessly shot down, innocent beings who, picked up along the road, had become objects of suspicion simply because they were afraid. We have seen dogs, as they lay chained up at their master's gate, killed in order to try a new revolver; we have seen cows riddled with bullets as they lay in the fields, without reason, only to fire off guns, just for fun.

And this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism. To invade a country, to kill the man who defends his home on the plea that he wears a smock and has no forage cap on his head, to burn down the houses of the poor creatures who are without bread, to break, to steal furniture, drink the wine found in the cellars, violate the women found in the streets, consume thousands of francs' worth of powder, and leave behind misery and cholera.

This is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism.

What have they ever done to show their intelligence, these valiant warriors? Nothing. What have they invented? Guns and cannons. That is all.

The inventor of the wheelbarrow, has he not done more for humanity by the simple and practical idea of fitting a wheel between two poles, than the inventor of modern fortifications?

What remains of Greece? Books and marbles. Is she great by what she conquered, or by what she produced? Was it the invasion of the Persians that prevented her from falling into the most hideous materialism? Was it the invasion of the barbarians that saved Rome and regenerated her?

Did Napoleon the First continue the great intellectual movement begun by the philosophers at the end of the last century?

Well, yes, since governments assume the right of death over the people, there is nothing astonishing in the people sometimes assuming the right of death over governments.

They defend themselves. They are right. No one has an absolute right to govern others. It can only be done for the good of those who are governed. Whosoever governs must consider it as much his duty to avoid war as it is that of the captain of a vessel to avoid shipwreck.

When a captain has lost his ship, he is judged and condemned if found guilty of negligence or even of incapacity.

Why should not governments be judged after the declaration of every war? If the people understood this, if they took the law into their own hands against the murdering powers, if they refused to allow themselves to be killed without a reason, if they used their weapons against those who distributed them to slaughter with, that day war would indeed be a dead letter. But that day will never dawn!

CHAPTER III. AGAY

“FINE weather, sir.”

I get up and go on deck. It is three o’clock in the morning; the sea is calm, the infinite heavens look like an immense shady vault sown with grains of fire. A very light breeze comes from off the land.

The coffee is hot, we swallow it down, and, without losing a moment, in order to take advantage of the favorable wind, we set sail.

Once more we glide over the waters toward the open sea. The coast disappears, all around us looks black. It is indeed a sensation, an enervating and delicious emotion to plunge onward into the empty night, into the deep silence on the sea, far from everything. It seems as if one were quitting the world, as if one would never reach any land, as though there were no more shores and even no more days. At my feet, a little lantern throws a light upon the compass that guides me on my way. We must run at least three miles in the open to round Cape Roux and the Drammont in safety, whatever may be the wind when the sun has risen. To avoid any accidents, I have had the side-lights lit, red on the port and green on the starboard side. And I enjoy with rapture this silent, uninterrupted, quiet flight.

Suddenly a cry is heard in front of us. I am startled, for the voice is near; and I can perceive nothing, nothing but the obscure wall of darkness into which I am plunging, and which closes again behind me. Raymond who watches forward says to me: “’Tis a lugger going east, put the helm up, sir, we shall pass astern.” And of a sudden, nigh at hand, uprises a vague but startling phantom; the large drifting shadow of a big sail, seen but for a few seconds and quickly vanishing. Nothing is more strange, more fantastic, and more thrilling, than these rapid apparitions at sea during the night. The fishing and sand-boats carry no lights, they are therefore only seen as they pass by, and they impart a tightening of the heart strings, as of some supernatural encounter.

I hear in the distance the whistling of a bird. It ‘approaches, passes by, and goes off. Oh that I could wander like it!

At last dawn breaks, slowly, gently, without a cloud, and the day begins, a real summer’s day.

Raymond asserts that we shall have an east wind, Bernard still believes in a westerly one, and advises my changing our course, and sailing on the starboard tack straight toward the Drammont, which stands out in the distance. I am at once of his opinion, and under the gentle breath of a dying breeze, we draw nearer to the Esterel. The long red shore drops into the blue water, giving it a violet tinge. It is strange, pretty, bristling with numberless points and gulfs, capricious and coquettish rocks, the thousand whims of a much admired mountain. On its slopes, the pine forests reach up to the granite summits, which resemble castles, towns, and armies of stones running after each other. And at its foot the sea is so clear, that the sandy shoals or the weedy bottoms can be distinguished.

Ay, verily, I do feel on certain days such a horror of all that is, that I long for death. The invariable monotony of landscapes, faces, and thoughts, becomes an intensely acute suffering. The meanness of the universe astonishes and revolts me, the littleness of - all things fills me with disgust, and I am overwhelmed by the platitude of human beings.

At other times, on the contrary, I enjoy everything! as an animal does. If my spirit, restless, agitated, hypertrophied by work, bounds onward to hopes that are not those of our race, and then after having realized that all is vanity, falls back into a contempt for all that is, my animal body, at least, is enraptured with all the intoxication of life. Like the birds, I love the sky — like the prowling wolf, the forests; I delight in rocky heights like a chamois; the thick grass I love to roll in and gallop over like a horse, and, like a fish, I revel in the clear waters. I feel thrilling within me the sensations of all the different species of animals, of all their instincts, of all the confused longings of inferior creatures. I love the earth as they do, not as other men do; I love it without admiring it, without poetry, without exultation; I love with a deep and animal attachment, contemptible yet holy, all that lives, all that grows, all we see; for all this, leaving my spirit calm, excites only my eyes and my heart: the days, the nights, the rivers, the seas, the storms, the woods, the hues of dawn, the glance of woman, her very touch.

The gentle ripple of water on the sandy shore or on the rocky granite affects and moves me, and the joy that fills me as I feel myself driven forward by the wind, and carried along by the waves, proceeds from the abandonment of myself to the brutal and natural forces of creation, from my return to a primitive state.

When the weather is beautiful as it is to-day, I feel in my veins the blood of the lascivious and vagabond fauns of olden times. I am no longer the brother of mankind, but the brother of all creatures and ail nature!

The sun mounts above the horizon. The breeze dies away as it did the day before yesterday; but the west wind foretold by Bernard does not rise any more than the easterly one, announced by Raymond.

Till ten o'clock we float motionless like a wreck, then a little breath from the open sea starts us on our road, falls, rises again, seems to mock us, glancing across the sail, promising at each moment a breeze that does not come. It is nothing, a mere whiff, a flutter of a fan; nevertheless it is sufficient to prevent our being stationary. The porpoises, those clowns of the sea, play about around us, dashing out of the water with rapid bounds as though they would take flight, striking into the air like lightning, then plunging and rising again further off.

At about one o'clock, as we lay broadside on to Agay, the breeze completely gave way, and I realized that I should sleep out at sea if I did not man the boat to tow the yacht and take shelter in the bay.

I therefore made the two men get into the dingy, and when at a distance of some thirty yards or so, they began to tug me along. A fierce sun was glaring on the water, and its burning rays beat down upon the decks.

The two sailors rowed in slow and regular fashion like worn-out cranks, which, though working with difficulty, ceaselessly continue their mechanical labor.

The bay of Agay forms a very pretty dock, well sheltered and closed on one side by upright, red rocks, overlooked by the semaphore on the summit of the mountain, and prolonged toward the open sea by the Ile d'Or, so called on account of its color; while on the other side is a line of sunken rocks, and a small headland level with the surface of the water, bearing a lighthouse to mark the entry.

At the further end is an inn, ready for the entertainment of skippers of vessels that have taken refuge there from stress of weather, or for fishermen during the summer; and a railway station where trains only stop twice a day, and where no one ever gets out; and a pretty river that winds away into the Esterel, as far as the valley named Malin-fermet, which is as full of pink oleanders as any African ravine.

No road leads from the interior to the delicious bay. A pathway, only, takes you to Saint-Raphaël, passing through the porphyry quarries of

Drammont; but no vehicle could use it. We are therefore quite lost in the mountain.

I resolved to wander about till nightfall, in the paths bordered by cistus and lentisk. The scent of wild plants, strong and perfumed, filled the air, mingling with the powerful resinous breath of the forest, which seemed to pant in the heat.

After an hour's walk I was deep among the pine trees, scattered sparsely on a gentle declivity of the mountain. The purple granite — the bones of the earth — seemed reddened by the sun, and I wended my way slowly, happy as the lizards must be on burning hot stones, when I perceived on the summit of the mountain, coming toward me, without seeing me, two lovers lost in the depths of their love dream.

'Twas a charmingly pretty sight; on they came, with arms entwined, moving with absent footsteps through the alternating sun and shade, that flecked the sloping banks.

She appeared to me very graceful and very simple, with a gray traveling dress and a bold, coquettish felt hat. I hardly saw him, I only noticed that he seemed well bred. I had seated myself behind the trunk of a pine-tree to watch them pass by. They did not perceive me, and continued their descent with interlocked arms, silently, and without a word, so much did their love absorb them.

When I lost sight of them, I felt as though a sadness had fallen on my heart. A felicity that I knew not had passed near me, and I guessed that it was the best of all. And I returned toward the bay of Agay, too dejected now to continue my stroll.

Until the evening, I lay stretched out on the grass, by the side of the river, and at about seven o'clock I went into the inn for dinner.

My men had warned the innkeeper, and he was expecting me. My table was set in the whitewashed room by the side of another at which were already settled my love-stricken couple, face to face, with eyes fondly gazing upon each other.

I felt ashamed at disturbing them, as though were committing a mean and unbecoming action.

They stared at me for a few seconds and then resumed their low-toned conversation.

The innkeeper who has known me for a long time took a seat near mine. He talked of wild boars and rabbits, the fine weather, the *mistral,* about an

Italian captain who had slept at the inn a few nights before, and then, to flatter my vanity, he praised my yacht, the black hull of which I could see through the window, with its tall mast, and my red and white pennant floating aloft.

My neighbors, who had eaten very rapidly, soon left. As for me, I dawdled about looking at the slight crescent of the moon, shedding its soft rays over the little roadstead. At last I saw my dingy nearing the shore, scattering lines of silver as it advanced through the pale motionless light that fell upon the water.

When I went down to my boat, I saw the lovers standing on the beach gazing at the sea.

And as I went off to the quick sound of the oars, I still distinguished their outlines on the shore, their shadows erect side by side. They seemed to fill the bay, the night, the heavens, with a symbolic grandeur, so penetrating, so widespread was the atmosphere of love they diffused around them over the far horizon. And when I had reached my yacht I remained seated a long while on deck, overcome with sadness without knowing wherefore, filled with regrets without knowing why, unwilling even to decide on going down to my cabin, as though I would fain absorb a little more of the tenderness they had shed around them. Suddenly, one of the windows of the inn was lit up, and I saw their profiles on the bright background. Then my loneliness overpowered me, and in the balminess of the springlike night, at the soft sound of the waves on the sand, under the delicate crescent shedding its rays over the sea, I felt in my heart such an intense desire for love, that I was near crying out in my envious distress.

Then, all at once, I became ashamed of this weakness, and, unwilling to admit to myself that I was a man like another, I accused the moonshine of disturbing my reason.

I have moreover always believed that the moon exercises a mysterious influence on the human brain.

It fills poets with vagaries, rendering them delightful or ridiculous, and produces on lovers' affections, the effect of Ruhmkorff's pile on electric currents. The man who loves in a normal manner under the sunlight adores with frenzy under the moon.

A youthful and charming woman maintained to me one day, I forget on what occasion, that moon-strokes are infinitely more dangerous than sunstrokes. They are caught, she said, unawares, out walking perchance on a beautiful night, and they are incurable; you remain mad; not raving mad, not mad enough to be shut up, but struck with a special madness, gentle, incurable; and you no longer think on any subject like other men.

I have certainly been moonstruck to-night, for I feel strangely unreasonable and light-headed; and the little crescent in its downward course toward the sea affects me, melts me to tears, and rends my heart.

Wherein lies the power of seduction of this moon, aged and dead planet that it is, rambling through the heavens with its yellow face and sad, ghostly light, that it should thus agitate us, we whom even our vagabond thoughts disturb?

Do we love it because it is dead? as the poet Haraucourt says:

"*Put's ce fut Page blond des tiédeurs et des vents.*
La lune se peupla de murmures vivants:
Elle eut des mers sans fond et des fleuves sans nombre,
Des troupeaux, *des cités, des pleurs*, *des cris joyeux*,
Elle eut l'amour; elle eut ses arts, ses lois, ses dieux.
Et lentement rentra dans l'ombre."

("Then it was the fair age of balminess and breezes.
The moon became peopled with living whispers;
She had bottomless seas and numberless rivers,
Flocks, cities, tears, and cries full of joy,
She had love; she had her arts, her laws, her gods,
Then slowly sank back into darkness.")

Do we love it because the poets, to whom we owe the eternal illusion that surrounds us in this world, have dimmed our sight by all the images they have seen in its pallid rays, have taught our overexcited sensibility to feel in a thousand different ways the soft and monotonous effects it sheds over the world?

When it rises behind the trees, when it pours forth its shimmering light on the flowing river, when it filters through the boughs on to the sand of the shaded alleys, when it mounts solitary in the black and empty sky, when it dips toward the sea, shedding out on the undulating surface of the waters a vast pathway of light, are we not haunted by all the charming verses with which it has inspired great dreamers?

If we wander forth by night in joyous spirits, and if we see its smooth round circle, like a yellow eye watching us, perched just over a roof, Musset’s immortal ballad is recalled to our mind.

And is it not he, the mocking poet, who immediately presents it to us through his eyes?

“*C’était dans la nuit brune*
Sur le clocher jauni
    La lime
Comme un point sur un I.

“*Lune*, *quel esprit sombre*
Promène au bout d’un fil,
Dans l’ombre,
Ta face ou ton profil?”

(’Twas in the dusky night,
Above the yellowed steeple,
Stood the moon Like a dot on an I.

By what somber spirit
Is thy face or profile,
Swung as from a thread
Through the shadows of the sky?”)

If we walk in early night, full of sadness, on the beach by the side of the ocean illuminated by its rays, do we not, in spite of ourselves, at once remember the two grand and melancholy lines:

“*Seule au-dessus des mers, la lune voyageant,*
Laisse dans les Jiois noirs tomber ses pleurs d’argent?”

(“Alone above the seas, the wandering moon
Lets fall her silver tears in the black billows.”)

If we awake, to find our bed lighted up by a long beam coming in at the window, do we not feel at once as though the white figure evoked by Catulle Mendès were descending upon us:

“*Elle venait, avec un lis dans chaque main,*
La petite d’un rayon lui servant de chemin?”

(“With a lily in each hand she came,
The slanting beam her pathway.”)

If, in some evening walk in the country, we suddenly hear the long, sinister howl of a farm dog, are we not forcibly struck by the recollection of the admirable poem of Leconte de Lisle, “Les Hurleurs”?

“*Settle, la lune pâle, en écartant la nue,*
Comme une morne lampe, *oscillait tristement.*
Monde muet, *marqué d’un signe de colère,*
Débris d’un globe mort au hasard disperse,
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l’océan polaire.”

*(“*Alone the pale moon, parting the clouds Like a gloomy lamp, sadly oscillates.
Dumb world, marked by a sign of anger,
Fragment of a dead globe dispersed at haphazard,
She let fall from her frozen orb
A sepulchral reflection on a polar ocean.”*)*

At the evening trysting place one saunters slowly through the leafy path, with arm encircling the beloved one, pressing her hand, and kissing her brow.

She is perhaps a little tired, a little moved, and walks with lagging step.

A bench appears in sight, under the leaves bathed by the soft light, as by a calm shower.

In our hearts and minds, like an exquisite love-song, the two charming lines start up:

“*Et réveiller, pour s’asseoir à sa place,*
Le clair de lune endormi sur le banc!”

(“And, to take her place, one awakens
A ray of moonlight asleep on the bench.”)

Can one see the lessening crescent, as on this evening, cast its fair profile on the vast sky spangled with stars, without thinking of the end of that masterpiece of Victor Hugo’s, which is called “Boaz Endormi”:

“Et Ruth se demandait,
Immobile, ouvrant l’œil à demi sous ses voiles.

Quel Dieu, quel moissonneur de l’éternel été
Avait, en s’en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d’or dans le champ des étoiles?”

(“And Ruth, motionless,
Asked herself, as she opened her half-closed eye under her veil,
What God, what reaper of the eternal summer,
Had negligently thrown as he passed by
This golden sickle in the starry field.”)

And who has better described the moon, courteous and tender to all lovers, than Hugo:

“*La nuit vint, tout se tut; les flambeaux s’éteignirent;*
Dans les bois assombris, les sources se plaignirent.

Le rossignol, caché dans son nid ténébreux,
Chanta comme un poète et comme un amoureux.

Chacun se dispersa sous les profonds feuillages,
Les folles, en riant, entraînèrent les sages;
Uamante s’en alla dans l’ombre avec l’amant;
Et troublés comme ou l’est en songe, vaguement,
Ils sentaient par degrés se mêler à leur âme,

A leurs discours secrets, à leur regards de flamme,
A leurs cœurs, à leurs sens, à leur molle raison,
Le clair de lune bleu qui baigtiait l'horizon?"

("Night fell, all was hushed; the torches died out
Under the darkening woods, the springs lament,
The nightingale, hidden in its shady nest,
Sang like a poet and like a lover.
In the depths of the dark foliage all dispersed,
The madcaps laughing carried off the wise,
The fair one disappeared in the gloom with her lover
And with the vague trouble of some dream
They felt by degrees intermingled with their souls,
With their secret thoughts, with their glances of flame,
With their hearts, their senses, with their yielding reason
The blue moonlight that bathed the vast horizon.")

And I remember also the admirable prayer to the moon, which is the opening scene of the eleventh book of Apuleius's "Golden Ass."

Still, all the songs of mankind are not enough to account for the sentimental sadness with which this poor planet inspires us.

We pity the moon, in spite of ourselves, without knowing the reason, and for this it is we love it.

Even the tender feeling we bestow on it is mingled with compassion; we pity it like an old maid, for we vaguely feel, the poets notwithstanding, that it is not a corpse but a cold virgin.

Planets, like woman, need a husband, and the poor moon, disdained by the sun, is nothing more nor less than an old maid, as we mortals say.

And it is for this reason that, with its timid light, it fills us with hopes that cannot be realized and desires that cannot be fulfilled.

All that we vainly and dimly wait and hope for upon this earth works in our hearts like mysterious but powerless sap, beneath the pale rays of the moon. When we raise our eyes to it, we quiver with inexpressible tenderness and are thrilled by impossible dreams!

The narrow crescent, a mere thread of gold, now dipped its keen gleaming point in the water, and gradually plunged gently and slowly till the other point, so delicate that I could not detect the moment of its vanishing, had also disappeared.

Then I raised my eyes toward the inn. The lighted window was closed. A dull melancholy crushed my heart, and I went below.

No sooner had I lain down than I felt sleep was impossible, and I remained lying on my back with my eyes closed, my thoughts on the alert, and all my nerves quivering. Not a motion, not a sound, near or far, nothing but the breathing of the two sailors through the thin bulkhead could be heard.

Suddenly something grated. What was it? I know not. Some block in the rigging, no doubt; but the tone — tender, plaintive, and mournful — of the sound sent a thrill through me; then nothing more. An infinite silence seemed to spread from the earth to the stars; nothing more — not a breath, not a shiver on the water, not a vibration of the yacht, nothing; and then again the slight and unrecognizable moan recommenced. It seemed to me as I listened as though a jagged blade were sawing at my heart. Just as certain noises, certain notes, certain voices, harrow us, and in one second pour into our soul all it can contain of sorrow, desperation, and anguish. I listened expectantly, and heard it again, the identical sound which now seemed to emanate from my own self, — to be wrung out of my nerves, — or rather, to resound in a secret, deep, and desolate cry. Yes, it was a cruel though familiar voice, a voice expected, and full of desperation. It passed over me with its weird and feeble tones as an uncanny thing, sowing broadcast the appalling terrors of delirium, for it had power to awake the horrible distress which lies slumbering in the inmost heart of every living man. What was it? It was the voice ringing with reproaches which tortures our soul, clamoring ceaselessly — obscure, painful, harassing; a voice, unappeasable and mysterious, which will not be ignored; ferocious in its reproaches for what we have done, as well as for what we have left undone; the voice of remorse and useless regrets for the days gone by and the women unloved; for the joys that were vain and the hopes that are dead; the voice of the past, of all that has disappointed us, fled us and disappeared forever, of what we have not attained and shall never attain; the small shrill voice which ever proclaims the failure of our life, the uselessness of our efforts, the impotence of our minds, and the weakness of our flesh.

It spoke to me in that short whisper, recommencing after each dismal silence of the dark night; it spoke of all I would have loved, of ail that I had vaguely desired, expected, dreamed of, of all that I would have longed to see, to understand, to know, to taste, all that my insatiable, poor, and weak spirit had touched upon with useless hope, of all that toward which it had been tempted to soar, without being able to tear asunder the chains of ignorance that held it.

Ah! I have coveted all, and delighted in nothing. I should have required the vitality of a whole race, the varying intelligence, all the faculties, all the powers scattered among all beings, and the thousands of existences in reserve; for I bear within myself every desire and every curiosity, and I am compelled to see all and grasp nothing.

From whence, therefore, arises this anguish at living, since to the generality of men it only brings satisfaction? Wherefore this unknown torture, which preys upon me? Why should I not know the reality of pleasure, expectation, and possession?

It is because I carry within me that second sight which is at the same time the power and despair of writers. I write because I understand and suffer from all that is, because I know it too well, and above all because, without being able to enjoy it, I contemplate it inwardly in the mirror of my thoughts.

Let no one envy, but rather pity us, for in the following manner does the literary man, differ from his fellow-creatures:

For him no simple feeling any longer exists. Ah he sees, his joys, his pleasures, his suffering, his despair, all instantaneously become subjects of observation. In spite of all, in spite of himself, he analyzes everything, hearts, faces, gestures, intonations. As soon as he has seen, whatever it may be, he must know the wherefore. He has not a spark of enthusiasm, not a cry, not a kiss that is spontaneous, not one instantaneous action done merely because it must be done, unconsciously, without reflection, without understanding, without noting it down afterward.

If he suffers, he notes down his suffering, and classes it in his memory; he says to himself as he leaves the cemetery, where he has left the being he has loved most in the world: “It is curious what I felt; it was like an intoxication of pain, etc...

And then he recalls all the details, the attitude of those near him, the discordant gestures of feigned grief, the insincere faces, and a thousand little insignificant trifles noted by the artistic observation, — the sign of the cross made by an old woman leading a child, a ray of light through a window, a dog that crossed the funeral procession, the effect of the hearse under the tall yew-trees in the cemetery, the face of the undertaker and its muscular contractions, the strain of the four men who lowered the coffin into the grave — a thousand things, in fact, that a poor fellow suffering with all his heart, soul, and strength, would never have noticed.

He has seen all, noticed all, remembered all, in spite of himself, because he is above all a literary man, and his intellect is constructed in such a manner that the reverberation in him is much more vivid, more natural, so to speak, than the first shock — the echo more sonorous than the original sound.

He seems to have two souls: one that notes, explains, comments on each sensation of its neighbor, and the natural soul common to all men. He lives condemned to be the mere reflection of himself or others; condemned to look on, and see himself feel, act, love, think, suffer, and never to be free like the rest of mankind — simply, genially, frankly, without analyzing his own soul after every joy, and every agony.

If he converses, his words often wear the air of slander, and that only because his thoughts are clear-sighted and he cannot refrain from investigating the secret springs Which regulate the feelings and actions of others.

If he writes, he cannot refrain from throwing into his books all that he has seen, all he has gathered, all he knows; he makes no exception in favor of friends or relations, but he pitilessly lays bare the hearts of those he loves or has loved, with a cruel impartiality, — exaggerating even to make the effect more powerful, — wholly absorbed by his work and in no wise by his affections.

And if he loves, if he loves a woman, he will dissect her as he would a corpse in a hospital. All she says, all she does, is instantly weighed in the delicate scales of observation which he carries within him, and is docketed according to its documentary importance. If in an unpremeditated impulse she throws herself on his neck, he will judge the action, considering its opportuneness, its correctness, its dramatic power, and will tacitly condemn it if he feels it artificial or badly done.

Actor and spectator of himself and of others, he is never solely an actor, like the good folk who take life easily. Everything around him becomes transparent, hearts, deeds, secret intentions; and he suffers from a strange malady, a kind of duality of the mind, that makes of him a terribly vibrating and complicated piece of machinery, fatiguing even to himself.

Owing to his peculiarly morbid sensibility, he is no happier than one flayed alive, to whom nearly every sensation becomes a torture.

I can remember dark days in which my heart was so lacerated by things I had only caught sight of for a second, that the memory of those visions has remained within me like grievous wounds.

One morning, in the Avenue de l'Opéra, in the midst of a stirring and joyous crowd, intoxicated with the sunlight of the month of May, I suddenly caught sight of a creature for whom one could find no name, an old woman bent double, dressed in tatters that had been garments, with an old straw bonnet stripped of its former ornaments, the ribbons and flowers having disappeared in times immemorial. And she went by, dragging her feet along so painfully, that I felt in my heart, as much as she did, more than she could, the aching pain of each of her steps. Two sticks supported her. She passed along without seeing anyone, indifferent to all — to the noise, the crowd, the carriages, and the sun! Where was she going? She carried something in a paper parcel hanging by a string. What was it? Bread? Yes, without a doubt. Nobody, no neighbor had been able or willing to do this errand for her, and she had undertaken herself, the terrible journey from her garret to the baker. At least two hours must she spend, going and coming. And what a mournful struggle! Surely as fearful a road as that of Christ on his way to Calvary!

I raised my eyes toward the roofs of the tall houses. She was going up there! When would she get there? How many panting pauses on the steps, in the little stairway so black and winding?

Everyone turned round to look at her! They murmured, "Poor woman!" and passed on. Her skirt, her rag of a skirt hardly holding to her dilapidated body, draggled over the pavement. And there was a mind there! A mind? No, but fearful, incessant, harassing suffering! Oh! the misery of the aged without bread, the aged without hope, without children, without money, with nothing before them but death; do we ever think of it? Do we ever think of the aged, famished creatures in the garrets? Do we think of the tears shed by those dimmed eyes, once bright, joyous, full of happy emotion?

Another time it was raining. I was alone, shooting in the plains of Normandy, plodding through the deep-plowed fields of greasy mud, that melted and slipped under my feet. From time to time, a partridge overtaken, hiding behind a clod of earth, flew off heavily through the downpour. The report of my gun, smothered by the sheet of water that fell from the skies, hardly sounded louder than the crack of a whip, and the gray bird fell, its feathers bespattered with blood.

I felt sad unto tears, tears as plentiful as the showers that were weeping over the world and over me; my heart was filled with sadness and I was overcome with fatigue, so that I could hardly raise my feet, heavily coated as they were with the clay soil.

I was returning home when I saw in the middle of the fields, the doctor's gig following a crossroad.

The low black carriage was passing along, covered by its round hood and drawn by a brown horse, like an omen of death wandering through the country on this sinister day. Suddenly, it pulled up, the doctor's head made its appearance, and he called out:

"Here."

I went toward him, and he said:

"Will you help me to nurse a case of diphtheria? I am all alone, and I want some one to hold the child, while I take out the false membrane from her throat."

"I'll come with you," I replied, and I got into his carriage.

He told me the following story:

Diphtheria, terrible diphtheria that suffocates unhappy creatures, had made its appearance at poor Martinet's farm.

Both the father and son had died at the beginning of the week. The mother and daughter were now in their turn dying.

A neighbor who attended to them, feeling suddenly unwell, had taken flight the day before, leaving the door wide open, and abandoning the two sick people on their straw pallets, alone, without anything to drink, choking, suffocating, dying; alone, for the last twenty-four hours!

The doctor had cleaned out the mother's throat and made her swallow; but the child, maddened by pain and the anguish of suffocation, had buried and hidden its head in the straw bedding, absolutely refusing to allow itself to be touched.

The doctor, accustomed to such scenes, repeated in a sad and resigned voice:

"I cannot really spend all day with these patients. By Jove, these things do give one a heartache, when you think that they have remained twenty-four hours without drinking, with the wind blowing the rain in on to their very beds! All the hens had taken shelter in the fireplace."

We had reached the farm. The doctor fastened his horse to the bough of an apple-tree before the door, and we went in. A strong smell of sickness and damp, of fever and moldiness, of hospital and cellar greeted our nostrils as we entered. In this gray and dismal house, fireless and without sign of life, it was bitterly cold; the swampy chill of a marsh. The clock had stopped; the rain fell down into the great fireplace, where the hens had scattered the ashes, and we heard in a dark corner the noise of a pair of bellows, husky and rapid. It was the breathing of the child. The mother, stretched out in a kind of large wooden box, the peasant's bed, and covered with old rags and old clothes, seemed to rest quietly. She slightly turned her head toward us.

The doctor inquired:

"Have you got a candle?"

She answered in a low, depressed tone:

"In the cupboard."

He took the light and led me to the further end of the room toward the little girl's crib.

She lay panting, with emaciated cheeks, glistening eyes, and tangled hair, a pitiable sight. At each breath, deep hollows could be seen in her thin strained neck. Stretched out on her back, she convulsively clutched with both hands the rags that covered her, and directly she caught sight of us, she turned her face away and hid herself in the straw.

I took hold of her shoulders, and the doctor, forcing her to open her mouth, pulled out of her throat a long white strip of skin, which seemed to me as dry as a bit of leather.

Her breathing immediately became easier, and she drank a little. The mother raising herself on her elbow watched us. She stammered out:

"Is it done?"

"Yes, it's done."

"Are we going to be left all alone?"

A terror, a terrible terror shook her voice, the terror of solitude, of loneliness, of darkness, and of death that she felt so near to her.

I answered:

“No, my good woman, I will stay till the doctor sends you a nurse.”

And turning toward the doctor, I added:

“Send old mother Mauduit; I will pay her.”

“Very well, I’ll send her at once.”

He shook my hand, and went out; and I heard his gig drive off, over the damp road.

I was left alone with the two dying creatures.

My dog Paf had lain down in front of the empty hearth and this reminded me that a little fire would be good for us all. I therefore went out to seek for wood and straw, and soon a bright flame lit up the whole room, and the bed of the sick child, who was again gasping for breath.

I sat down, and stretched out my legs in front of the fire.

The rain was beating against the window panes, the wind rattled over the roof. I heard the short, hard, wheezing breath of the two patients, and the breathing of my dog who sighed with pleasure, curled up before the bright fireplace.

Life! life! what is it? These two unhappy creatures, who had always slept on straw, eaten black bread, suffered every kind of misery, were about to die! What had they done? The father was dead, the son was dead. The poor souls had always passed for honest folk, had been liked and esteemed as simple and worthy fellows!

I watched my steaming boots and my sleeping dog, and there arose within me a shameful and sensual pleasure, as I compared my lot with that of these slaves.

The little girl seemed to choke, and suddenly the grating sound became an intolerable suffering to me, lacerating me like a dagger, which at each stroke penetrated my heart.

I went toward her:

“Will you drink?” I said.

She moved her head to say yes, and I poured a few drops of water down her throat, but she could not swallow them.

The mother, who was quieter, had turned round to look at her child; and all at once a feeling of dread took possession of me, a sinister dread that passed over me, like the touch, of some invisible monster. Where was I? I no longer knew! Was I dreaming? What horrible nightmare was this?

Is it true that such things happen — that one dies like this? And I glanced into all the dark corners of the cottage, as though I expected to see crouching in some obscure angle a hideous, unmentionable, terrifying thing, the thing which lies in wait for the lives of men, and kills, devours, crushes, strangles them; the thing that delights in red blood, eyes glistening with fever, wrinkles and scars, white hair and decay.

The fire was dying out. I threw some more wood on it, and warmed my back, shuddering in every limb. At least, I hoped to die in a good room, with doctors around my bed and medicines on the tables! And these people had been all alone for twenty-four hours in this wretched hovel, without a fire, stretched on the straw with the death rattle in their throats! At last I heard the trot of a horse and the sounds of wheels; and the nurse came in coolly, pleased at finding some work to do, and showing little surprise at the sight of such misery.

I left her some money and fled with my dog; I fled like a malefactor, running away in the rain, with the rattle of those two throats still ringing in my ears, — running toward my warm home where my servants were awaiting me and preparing my good dinner.

But I shall never forget that scene, nor many other dreadful things that make me loathe this world.

What would I not give at times to be allowed not to think, not to feel, to live like a brute in a warm, clear atmosphere, in a country mellow with golden light, devoid of the raw, crude tones of verdure, a country of the East where I might sleep without weariness and wake without care, where restlessness is not anxiety, where love is free from anguish, and existence is not a burden?

I should choose there a large square dwelling, like a huge box sparkling in the sun.

From the terrace, I should look upon the sea and the white wing-like pointed sails of the Greek and Turkish boats, as they flit to and fro. The outer walls have hardly any apertures. A large garden with air heavily laden under the overshadowing palm-trees, forms the center of this Oriental home. Sprays of clear water shoot up under the trees and fall back again with a slight splash, into a broad marble fountain sanded with golden dust. Here I should bathe often, between two pipes, two dreams, or two kisses.

I should have slaves, black and handsome, draped in light, airy clothing, noiselessly running hither and thither over the heavy carpets.

My walls should be soft and rebounding with the round contours of a woman's bosom, and on the divans encircling each room, numberless cushions of every shape should permit of my reposing in every conceivable attitude.

Then, when I should tire of my delicious repose, of my immobility, of my eternal daydream, satiated with the calm enjoyment of my own well-being, then, I would order a horse to be brought to my door — a horse black or white, as fleet as a gazelle.

And I would spring upon his back, and in a furious gallop, quaff the tingling intoxicating air. I would dart like an arrow over the glowing country, which fills the eye with delight and has all the bouquet of wine.

In the calm hour of eve, I would fly in a mad career toward the vast horizon dyed rose color in the setting sun. Out there, all becomes rose in the twilight: the sunburned mountains, the sand, the garments of the Arabs, the dromedaries, the horses, the tents! The rose-colored flamingoes fly upward from the marshes to the rose-colored sky and I should scream with delight, plunged in the boundless infinite rosiness of all that surrounds me.

I should be released from the sight of the streets and the deafening noise of cabs on the pavement, from the sight of black-coated men, seated on uncomfortable chairs, as they sip their absinthe and talk over business.

I should ignore the state of the money market, political events, changes of ministry, all the useless frivolities on which we squander our short and vapid existence. Why should I undergo these worries, these sufferings, these struggles? I would rest sheltered from the wind in my bright and sumptuous dwelling.

The winged dream was floating before my closed eyelids, and over my mind as it sank to rest, when I heard my men awakening, lighting the boat’s lantern, and setting to work at some arduous and lengthy task.

I called out to them:

“What on earth are you doing?”

Raymond replied in a hesitating voice:

“We are getting some lines ready, sir; for we thought that you would like to fish, if it was fine enough at sunrise.”

Agay is, during the summer, the rendezvous of all the fishermen along the coast. Whole families come there, sleeping at the inn or in the boats, eating *bouillabaisse* on the beach, under the shade of the pine-trees, the resinous bark of which crackles in the sun.

I inquired:

“What o’clock is it?”

“Three o’clock, sir.”

Then, without rising, I stretched out my arm, and opened the door that separated my room from the forecastle.

The two men were squatting in the low den through which the mast passes in fitting into the step; the den was full of such strange and odd things that one might take it for a haunt of thieves; in perfect order along the partitions, instruments of all kinds were suspended: saws, axes, marline spikes, pieces of rigging, and saucepans; on the floor between the two berths, a pail, a stove, a barrel with its copper circles, glistening under the immediate ray of light from the lantern which hangs between the anchor bitts, by the side of the cable tiers; and my men were busy, baiting the innumerable hooks hanging all along the fishing lines.

“At what hour must I get up?” I asked.

“Why, now, sir, at once.”

Half an hour after, we all three embarked on board the dingy, and left the “Bel-Ami” to go and spread our net at the foot of the Drammont, near the île d’Or.

Then when our line, some two or three hundred yards long, had sunk to the bottom, we baited three little deep-sea lines, and having anchored the boat by sinking a stone at the end of a rope, we began to fish.

It was already daylight, and I could distinctly see the coast of Saint-Raphaël, near the mouth of the Argens, and the somber mountains of the Maures, themselves running out seaward till they came to an end, far away in the open sea, beyond the Gulf of Saint-Tropez.

Of all the southern coast, this is the spot I am fondest of. I love it as though I had been born there, as though I had grown up in it, because it is wild and glowing, and because the Parisian, the Englishman, the American, the man of fashion, and the adventurer have not yet poisoned it.

Suddenly the line I held in my hand quivered, I started, then felt nothing, and again a slight shock tightened the line wound round my finger, then another one more violent shook my whole hand, and with beating heart, I began to draw in the line, gently, eagerly, striving to peer through the transparent blue water, and soon I perceived in the shadow of the boat, a white flash describing rapid circles.

The fish thus seen appeared to me enormous, and when on board it was no bigger than a sardine.

Then I caught many others, blue, red, yellow, green, glittering, silvery, striped, golden, speckled, spotted, those pretty rock fish of the Mediterranean, so varied, so colored, that seem painted to please the eye; then sea-urchins covered with prickles, and those hideous monsters of the sea, conger-eels.

Nothing can be more amusing than the uplifting of a sea fishing line. What will come out of the sea? What surprise, what pleasure, or what disappointment at each hook pulled out of the water! What a thrill runs through one when from afar some large creature is perceived struggling, as it rises slowly toward us!

At ten o'clock we had returned on board the yacht, and the two men beaming with delight, informed me that our take weighed twenty-three pounds.

I was, however, doomed to pay dearly for my sleepless night! A sick headache, the dreadful pain that racks in a way no torture could equal, shatters the head, drives one crazy, bewilders the ideas, and scatters the memory like dust before the wind; a sick headache had laid hold of me, and I was perforce obliged to lie down in my bunk with a bottle of ether under my nostrils.

After a few minutes, I fancied I heard a vague murmur which soon became a kind of buzzing, and it seemed as if all the interior of my body became light, as light as air, as though it were melting into vapor.

Then followed a numbness of spirit, a drowsy, comfortable state, in spite of the persisting pain, which, however, ceased to be acute. It was now a pain which one could consent to bear, and not any longer the terrible tearing agony, against which the whole tortured body rises in protest.

Soon the strange and delightful sensation of vacuum I had in my chest extended and reached my limbs, which in their turn became light, light as though flesh and bone had melted away and skin only remained; just enough skin to permit of my feeling the sweetness of life, and enjoy my repose. Now I found that I no longer suffered. Pain had disappeared, melted, vanished into air. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding the words. At times they were but indistinct sounds, at other times a word or two reached me. But I soon recognized that these were but the accentuated buzzing of my own ears. I was not sleeping, I was awake, I understood, I felt, I reasoned with a clearness, a penetration, and power which were quite extraordinary; and a joyousness of spirit, a strange intoxication, produced by the tenfold increase of my mental faculties.

It was not a dream like that created by *hasheesh,* nor the sickly visions produced by opium; it was a prodigious keenness of reasoning, a new manner of seeing, of judging, of estimating things and life, with the absolute consciousness, the certitude that this manner was the true one.

And the old simile of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the tree of life, that all mystery was unveiled, so strongly did I feel the power of this new, strange, and irrefutable logic. And numberless arguments, reasonings, proofs, rose up in my mind, to be, however, immediately upset by some proof, some reasoning, some argument yet more powerful. My brain had become a battle-field of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with an invincible intelligence, and I enjoyed prodigious happiness in the sensation of my power.

This state lasted a long, long time. I still inhaled the fumes of my ether bottle. Suddenly, I perceived that it was empty. And I again began to suffer.

For ten hours I endured this torture for which there is no remedy, then I fell asleep, and the next day, brisk as after convalescence, having written these few pages I left for Saint-Raphaël.

CHAPTER IV. SAINT-RAPHAEL

On our way here the weather was delightful, and a light breeze carried us over in six tacks. After rounding the Drammont, I caught sight of the villas of Saint-Raphaël hidden among the pine-trees, among the little slender pines beaten all the year round by the everlasting gusts of wind from Fréjus. Then I passed between the Lions, pretty red rocks that seemed to guard the town, and I entered the port which, choked up with sand at the further end, obliges one to remain some fifty yards off the quay. I then went on land.

A large crowd was gathered in front of the church. Some one was being married. A priest was performing in Latin, with pontifical gravity, the solemn and comical act which so disturbs mankind, bringing with it so much mirth, suffering, and tears. According to custom, the families had invited all their relatives and friends to the funeral service of a young girl's innocence, to listen to the piously indecorous ecclesiastical admonitions, preceding those of the mother, and to the public benediction, bestowed on that which is otherwise so carefully veiled.

And the whole countryside, full of broad jokes, moved by the greedy and idle curiosity that draws the common herd to such a scene, had come there to see how the bride and bridegroom would comport themselves. I mingled with the crowd, and watched it.

Good heavens, how ugly men are! For at least the hundredth time I noticed, in the midst of this festive scene, that, of all races, the human race is the most hideous. The whole air was pervaded by the odor of the people, the nauseous, sickening odor of unclean bodies, greasy hair, and garlic, that odor of garlic, exhaled by the people of the south, through nose, mouth, and skin, just as roses spread abroad their perfume.

Certainly men are every day as ugly and smell as obnoxious, but our eyes, accustomed to the sight of them, our nostrils, used to their odor, fail to distinguish their ugliness and their emanations, unless we have been spared for some time the sight and odor of them.

Mankind is hideous! To obtain a gallery of grotesque figures, fit to raise a laugh from the dead, it would be sufficient to take the ten first-comers, set them in a line, and photograph them with their irregular heights, their legs, either too long or too short, their bodies too fat or too thin, their red or pale, bearded or smooth faces, their smirking or solemn looks.

Formerly, in primeval days, the wild man, the strong, naked man, was certainly as handsome as the horse, the stag, or the lion. The exercise of his muscles, a life free from restraint, the constant use of his vigor and his agility, kept up in him a grace of motion, which is the first condition of beauty, and an elegance of form, which is produced only by physical exercise. Later on, the artistic nations, enamored of form, knew how to preserve this grace and this elegance in intelligent man by the artificial means of gymnastics. The care bestowed on the body, the trials of strength and suppleness, the use of ice-cold water and vapor baths, made the Greeks true models of human beauty, and they have left us their statues to show us what were the bodies of these great artists.

But now, O Apollo! Look at the human race moving about in its festive scenes. The children rickety from the cradle, deformed by premature study, stupefied by the school life that wears out the body at fifteen years of age and cramps the mind before it is formed, reach adolescence with limbs badly grown, badly jointed, in which all normal proportions have completely disappeared.

And let us contemplate the people in the street, trotting along in their dirty clothing! As for the peasant! Good heavens! Let us go and watch the peasant in the fields, his gnarled, knotted frame, lanky, twisted, bent, more hideous than the barbarous types exhibited in a museum of anthropology.

In comparison how splendid are those men of bronze, the negroes; in shape, if not in face; how elegant, both in their movements and their figure, the tall, lithe Arabs. Moreover, I have yet another reason for having a horror of crowds.

I cannot go into a theater, nor be present at any public entertainment. I at once experience a curious and unbearable feeling of discomfort, a horrible unnerving sensation, as though I were struggling with all my might against a mysterious and irresistible influence. And in truth, I struggle with the spirit of the mob, which strives to take possession of me.

How often have I observed that the intelligence expands and grows loftier when we live alone, and that it becomes meaner and lower when we again mix among other men. The contact, the opinions floating in the air, all that is said, all that one is compelled to listen to, to hear, to answer, acts upon the mind. A flow and ebb of ideas goes from head to head, from house to house, from street to street, from town to town, from nation to nation, and a level is established, an average of intellect is created by all large agglomerations of individuals.

The inherent qualities of intellectual initiative, of free will, of wise reflection, and even of sagacity, belonging to any individual being, generally disappear the moment that being is brought in contact with a large number of other beings.

The following is a passage from a letter of Lord Chesterfield to his son (1751) which sets forth with rare humility, the sudden elimination of all active qualities of the mind in every large body of people:

> "Lord Macclesfield, who had the greatest share in forming the bill, and who is one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers in Europe, spoke afterward with infinite knowledge, and all the clearness that so intricate a matter would admit of, but as his words, his periods, and his utterance were not near so good as mine, the preference was most unanimously, though most unjustly, given to me.
>
> "This will ever be the case; every numerous assembly is a *mob*, let the individuals who compose it be what they will. Mere reason and good sense is never to be talked to a mob; their passions, their sentiments, their senses, and their seeming interests, are alone to be applied to.
>
> "Understanding they have collectively none, etc...."

This deep observation of Lord Chesterfield, a remark, however, that has often been made, and noted with interest by philosophers of the scientific school, constitutes one of the most serious arguments against representative government.

The same phenomenon, a surprising one, is produced each time a large number of men are gathered together. All these persons, side by side, distinct from each other, of different minds, intelligences, passions, education, beliefs, and prejudices, become suddenly, by the sole fact of their being assembled together, a special being, endowed with a new soul, a new manner of thinking in common, which is the unanalyzable resultant of the average of these individual opinions.

It is a crowd, and that crowd is a person, one vast collective individual, as distinct from any other mob as one man is distinct from any other man.

A popular saying asserts that “the mob does not reason.” Now why does not the mob reason, since each particular individual in the crowd does reason? Why should a crowd do spontaneously what none of the units of the crowd would have done? Why has a crowd irresistible impulses, ferocious wills, stupid enthusiasms that nothing can arrest, and, carried away by these thoughtless impulses, why does it commit acts that none of the individuals composing it would commit alone?

A stranger utters a cry, and behold! a sort of frenzy takes possession of all, and all, with the same impulse, which no one tries to resist, carried away by the same thought, which instantaneously becomes common to all, notwithstanding different castes, opinions, beliefs, and customs, will fall upon a man, murder him, drown him, without a motive, almost without a pretext, whereas each one of them, had he been alone, would have rushed, at the risk of his life, to save the man he is now killing.

And in the evening, each one on returning home, will ask himself what passion or what madness had seized him and thrown his nature and his temperament out of its ordinary groove; how he could have given way to this savage impulse?

The fact is, he had ceased to be a man, to become one of a crowd. His personal will had become blended with the common will, as a drop of water is blended with and lost in a river.

His personality had disappeared, had become an infinitesimal particle of one vast and strange personality, that of the crowd. The panics which take hold of an army, the storms of opinion which carry away an entire nation, the frenzy of dervish dances, are striking examples of this identical phenomenon.

In short, it is not more surprising to see an agglomeration of individuals make one whole than to see molecules, that are placed near each other, form one body.

To this mysterious attraction must without doubt be attributed the peculiar temperament of theater audiences, and the strange difference of judgment that exists between the audience of general rehearsals and that of the audience of first representations, and again between the audience of a first representation and that of the succeeding performances, and the change in the telling effects, from one evening to another; and the errors of judgment condemning a play like “Carmen,” which, later on, turns out an immense success.

What I say about crowds must be applied to all society, and he who would carefully preserve the absolute integrity of his thought, the proud independence of his opinion, and look at life, humanity, and the universe as an impartial observer free from prejudice, preconceived belief and fear, must absolutely live apart from all social relations; for human stupidity is so contagious that he will be unable to frequent his fellow-creatures, even see them, or listen to them, without being, in spite of himself, influenced on all sides by their conversations, their ideas, their superstitions, their traditions, their prejudices, which by their customs, laws, and surprisingly hypocritical and cowardly code of morality, will surely contaminate him.

Those who strive to resist these lowering and incessant influences, struggle in vain amid petty, irresistible, innumerable, and almost imperceptible fetters; and through sheer fatigue soon cease to fight.

But a backward movement took place in the crowd; the newly-married couple were coming out. And immediately I followed the general example, raised myself on tiptoe to see, — and longed to see, — with a stupid, low, repugnant longing, the longing of the common herd. The curiosity of my neighbors had intoxicated me; I was one of a crowd.

To fill up the remainder of the day, I decided on taking a row in my dingy up the Argens. This lovely and almost unknown river separates the plains of Frèjus from the wild mountain range of the Maures.

I took Raymond, who rowed me along the side of the low beach to the mouth of the river, which we found impracticable and partly filled up with sand. One channel only communicated with the sea; but so rapid, so full of foam, of eddies, and of whirlpools, that we were unable to ascend it.

We were therefore obliged to drag the boat to land and carry it over the sand-hills to a kind of beautiful lake, formed by the Argens at this spot.

In the midst of a green and marshy country, of that rich green tint given by trees growing out of water, the river sinks down between two banks, so covered with verdure, and with such high impenetrable foliage, that the neighboring mountains are barely visible; it sinks down, still winding, still looking like a peaceful lake, without showing or betraying that it continues twisting its way through the calm, lonesome, and magnificent country.

As in the low northern plains, where the springs ooze out under the feet, running over and vivifying the earth like blood, the clear, cold blood of the soil, so here we find again the same strange sensation of exuberant nature which floats over all damp countries.

Birds, with long legs dangling as they fly, spring up from among the reeds, stretching their pointed beaks heavenward; while others, broad-winged and slow, pass from one bank to another with heavy flight, and others, smaller and more rapid, skim along the surface of the river, darting forward like rebounding pebbles. Innumerable turtledoves cooing on the heights, or wheeling about, fly from tree to tree, and seem to exchange messages of love. One feels a sensation that all around this deep water, throughout all this plain, up to the foot of the mountains, there is yet more water; the deceitful water of the marsh, sleeping yet living; broad, clear sheets, in which the skies are mirrored, over which the clouds flit by; in which, widely scattered, all manner of strange rushes spring up; the fertile limpid water, full of rotting life and deathly fermentation; water breeding fever and miasma, at the same time food and poison, spreading itself out in attractive loveliness over the mysterious mass of putrefaction beneath it. The atmosphere is delightful, relaxing, and dangerous. Over all the banks which separate the vast still pools, amid all the thick grasses, swarms, crawls, jumps, and creeps a whole world of slimy, repugnant, cold-blooded animals. I love those cold, subtle animals that are generally avoided and dreaded; for me there is something sacred about them.

At the hour of sunset the marsh intoxicates and excites me. After having been all day a silent pond lying hushed in the heat, it becomes at the moment of twilight a fairy-like and enchanted country. In its calm and boundless depths the skies are mirrored: skies of gold, skies of blood, skies of fire; they sink in it, bathe in it, float, and are drowned in it. They are there up above, in the immensity of the firmament, and they are there below, beneath us, so near and yet so completely beyond our touch, in that shallow pool, through which the pointed grasses push their way like bristling hairs. All the color with which earth has been endowed, charming, varied, and enthralling, appears to us deliciously painted, admirably resplendent, and infinitely shaded around a single leaf of the water-lily. Every shade of red, rose, yellow, blue, green, and violet are there, in a little patch of water which shows us the heavens, and space, and dreamland, and the flight of the birds as they skim across its face. And then there is still something else — I know not what — in the marshes beheld in the setting sun. I feel therein a confused revelation of some unknown mystery, an original breath of primeval life, which is, perhaps, nothing more than the bubble of gas rising from a swamp at the fall of day.

CHAPTER V. SAINT-TROPEZ

WE LEFT Saint Raphaël at about eight o'clock this morning, with a strong northwest breeze.

The sea in the gulf, though it had no waves, was white with foam, white like a mass of soapsuds, for the wind, the terrible wind from Frèjus which blows almost every morning, seemed to throw itself on the water as though it would tear it to pieces, raising a rolling mass of little waves of froth, scattered one moment, reformed the next. The people at the port having assured us that this squall would fall toward eleven o'clock, we decided upon starting with three reefs in and the storm-jib. The dingy was placed on board at the foot of the mast, and the "Bel-Ami" seemed to fly directly it left the jetty. Although it carried scarcely any sail, I had never felt it dash along like this. One might have thought that it hardly touched the water, and one would never have suspected that it carried at the bottom of its large keel, two and a half yards de a slab of lead weighing over thirty hundredweight, besides thirty-eight hundredweight of ballast in its hold, and all we had on board in the shape of rigging, anchors, chains, cables, and furniture.

I had soon crossed the bay, at the further end of which the Argens throws itself into the sea; and as soon as I was under shelter of the coast the breeze completely fell. It is there that the splendid, somber, and wild region begins, which is still called the land of the Moors. It is a long peninsula, composed of mountains, with a contour of coast over sixty miles long.

Saint-Tropez, situated at the entry of the lovely gulf, formerly called Gulf of Grimaud, is the capital of the little Saracen kingdom, of which nearly every village, built on the summit of a peak in order to secure it from attack, is still full of Moorish houses with arcades, narrow windows, and inner courtyards, wherein tall palm-trees have grown up and are now higher than the roofs.

If one penetrates on foot into the unknown valleys of this strange group of mountains, one discovers an incredible country, devoid of roads and lanes; without even footpaths, without hamlets, without houses.

At intervals, after seven or eight hours' walking, appears a hovel, often abandoned, or sometimes inhabited by a poverty-stricken family of charcoal burners.

The Monts des Maures have, it appears, a system of geology peculiar to themselves, a matchless flora said to be the most varied in Europe, and immense forests of pines, chestnuts, and cork-trees.

Some three years ago, I made an excursion into the very heart of the country to the ruins of the *Chartreuse de la Verne,* and have retained an ineffaceable recollection of it. If it is fine to-morrow I shall return there.

A new road follows the sea, going from Saint-Raphaël to Saint-Tropez. All along this magnificent avenue, opened up through the forest by the side of a matchless beach, new winter resorts are being started. The first one planned is called Saint Aigulf.

This bears a peculiar stamp. In the midst of a forest of fir-trees stretching down to the sea, wide roads are laid out in every direction. There is not a house, nothing but the barely indicated plan of the streets, running through the trees. Here are the squares, the crossroads, and the boulevards. The names are even written up on metal tablets: Boulevard Ruysdaël, Boulevard Rubens, Boulevard Van Dyck, Boulevard Claude Lorrain. One wonders at all these painters' names. Why indeed? Simply because the *Company* has decided, like God before he lit the sun: "This shall be an artists' resort!"

The *Company!* No one knows in the rest of the world, all this word contains of hopes, dangers, money gained, and money lost on the Mediterranean shores! The *Company!* fatal and mysterious word, deep and deceitful!

In this instance, however, the *Company* seems to have realized its expectations, for it has already found purchasers, and of the best, among artists. At various places one reads: —

"Building lot bought by M. Carolus Duran; another by M. Clairin another by Mlle. Croizette, etc."

Nevertheless — who can tell? The Mediterranean Companies are not in luck just now. Nothing is more ludicrous than this fury of speculation, which generally ends in terrible failures. Whosoever has gained ten thousand francs (four hundred pounds) over his field, at once buys ten millions' (four hundred thousand pounds) worth of land at twenty sous (tenpence) the meter, in order to sell it again at twenty francs (sixteen shillings). Boulevards are traced, water is conveyed, gas-works are prepared, and the purchaser is hopefully expected.

The purchaser does not make his appearance, but instead of him — ruin.

Far off in front of me I perceive the towers and the buoys that mark the breakers on both sides, at the opening of the Gulf of Saint-Tropez.

The first tower is called "Tour des Sardinaux," and marks a regular shoal of rocks, level with the top of the water, some of which just show the tips of their brown heads; the second one has been christened "Balise de la Sèche à l'huile." (Buoy of the oily scuttle-fish!)

We now reach the entrance of the gulf, which extends back between two ridges of mountains and forests as far as the village of Grimaud, built at the very extremity, on a height. The ancient castle of Grimaldi, a tall ruin that overlooks the village, appears in the distant haze like the evocation of some fairy scene.

The wind has fallen. The gulf looks like an immense calm lake, into which, taking advantage of the last puffs of the squall, we slowly make our way.

To the right of the channel, Sainte-Maxime, a little white port, is mirrored in the water which reflects the houses topsy-turvy, and reproduces them as distinctly as on shore. Opposite, Saint-Tropez appears, guarded by an old fort.

At seven o'clock the "Bel-Ami" anchored at the quay, by the little steamboat which carries on the service with Saint-Raphaël. The only means of communication between this isolated little port and the rest of the world is by this "Lion de Mer," an old pleasure yacht, which runs in connection with a venerable diligence that carries the letters and travels at night by the one road which crosses the mountains.

This is one of those charming and simple daughters of the sea, one of those nice modest little towns, which, fed upon fish and sea air, and breeder of sailors, is as much a produce of the sea as any shell. On the jetty, stands a bronze statue of the Bailli de Suffren.

The pervading smell is one of fish and smoking tar, of brine and hulls. The stones in the streets glitter like pearls with the scales of the sardines, and along the walls of the port, a population of lame and paralyzed old sailors bask in the sun on the stone benches. From time to time they talk of past voyages, and of those they have known in bygone days, the grandfathers of the small boys running yonder. Their hands and faces are wrinkled, tanned, browned, dried by the wind, by fatigue, by the spray, by the heat of the tropics, and by the icy cold of northern seas, for they have seen, in their roamings over the ocean, the ins and outs of the world, every aspect of the earth and of all latitudes. In front of them, propped upon a stick, passes and repasses the old captain of the merchant service, who formerly commanded the “Trois-Sœurs,” or the “Deux-Amis,” or the “Marie-Louise,” or the “Jeune-Clémentine.”

All salute him, like soldiers answering the roll-call, with a litany of “Good day, captain,” modulated in many tones.

This is a true land of the sea, a brave little town, briny and courageous, which fought in days of yore against the Saracens, against the Duc d’Anjou, against the wild corsairs, against the Connétable de Bourbon, and Charles-Quint, and the Duc de Savoie, and the Duc d’Epernon. In 1637, the inhabitants, fathers of these peaceful citizens, without any assistance repelled the Spanish fleet, and every year they renew with surprising realism the representation of the attack and their defense, filling the town with noisy bustle and clamor, strangely recalling the great popular festivities of the Middle Ages.

In 1813, the town likewise repulsed an English flotilla, that had been sent against it.

Now it is a fishing town, and the produce of its fisheries supplies the greater part of the coast with tunny, sardines, *loups,* rock-lobsters, and all the pretty fish of this blue sea.

On setting foot on the quay after having dressed myself, I heard twelve o’clock strike, and I perceived two old clerks, notary’s or lawyer’s clerks, going off to their midday meal, like two old beasts of burden, unbridled for a few minutes while they eat their oats at the bottom of a nosebag.

Oh, liberty! liberty! our sole happiness, sole hope, sole dream! Of all the miserable creatures, of all classes of individuals, of all orders of workers, of all the men who daily fight the hard battle of life, these are the most to be pitied, on these does Fortune bestow the fewest of her favors.

No one believes this, — no one knows it. They are powerless to complain; they cannot revolt; they remain gagged and bound in their misery, the shamefaced misery of quill-drivers.

They have gone through a course of study, they understand law, they have taken a degree, perhaps.

How dearly I like that dedication by Jules Vallès:

“To all those, who, nourished upon Greek and Latin, have died of starvation.”

And what do they earn, these starvelings? Eight to fifteen hundred francs (thirty-two to sixty pounds) a year!

Clerks in gloomy chambers, or clerks in office, you should read every morning over the door of your fatal prison, Dante’s famous phrase:

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!”

They are but twenty when they first enter, and will remain till sixty or longer. During this long period not an event takes place! Their whole life slips away in the dark little bureau, ever the same, carpeted with green portfolios. They enter young, at the age of vigorous hopes; they leave in old age, when death is at hand. All the harvest of recollections that we make in a lifetime, the unexpected events, our loves, — gentle or tragic memories, our adventures, all the chances of a free existence, are unknown to these convicts.

The days, the weeks, the months, the seasons, the years, all are like. They begin the day’s work at the same hour; at the same hour they breakfast; at the same hour they leave; and this goes on for sixty or seventy years. Four accidents only constitute landmarks in their existence: marriage, the birth of the firstborn, and the death of father or mother. Nothing else; stop though, yes, a rise in salary. They know nothing of ordinary life, nothing of the world! Unknown to them are the days of cheerful sunshine in the streets, and idle wanderings through the fields, for they are never released before the appointed hour. They become voluntary prisoners at eight o’clock in the morning, and at six the prison doors are opened for them, when night is at hand. But, as a compensation, they have, for a whole fortnight in the year, the right — a right indeed much discussed, hardly bargained for and grudgingly granted — to remain shut up in their lodgings. For where can they go without money?

The builder climbs skyward; the driver prowls about the streets; the railway mechanic traverses woods, mountains, plains; moves incessantly from the walls of the town to the vast blue horizon of the sea. The employee never quits his bureau, his coffin, and in the same little mirror, wherein he saw himself a young fellow with fair mustache the day of his arrival, he contemplates himself bald and white-bearded, on the day of his dismissal. Then, all is finished, life is played out, the future closed. How can he have reached this point? How can he have grown old without any event having occurred, without having been shaken by any of the surprises of existence? It is so nevertheless. He must now make way for the young! for the young beginners!

Then the unfortunate mortal steals away, more wretched than before, and dies almost immediately from the sudden snapping of the long and obstinate habit of his daily routine, the dreary routine of the same movements, the same actions, the same tasks at the same hours.

As I went into the hotel for breakfast, an alarmingly big packet of letters and papers was handed to me, and my heart sank as at the prospect of some misfortune. I have a fear and a hatred of letters; they are bonds. Those little squares of paper bearing my name seem to give out a noise of chains, as I tear them open, — of chains linking me to living creatures I have known or know.

Each one inquires, although written by different hands: “Where are you? What are you doing? Why disappear in this way, without telling us where you are going? With whom are you hiding?” Another adds: “How can you expect people to care for you if you run away in this fashion from your friends? It is positively wounding to their feelings.”

Well then, don’t attach yourselves to me! Will no one endeavor to understand affection without joining thereto a notion of possession and of despotism. It would seem as if social ties could not exist without entailing obligations, susceptibilities, and a certain amount of subserviency. From the moment one has smiled upon the attentions of a stranger, this stranger has a hold upon you, is inquisitive about your movements, and reproaches you with neglecting him. If we get as far as friendship, then each one imagines himself to have certain claims; intercourse becomes a duty, and the bonds which unite us seem to end in slipknots which draw tighter. This affectionate solicitude, this suspicious jealousy, eager to control and to cling, on the part of beings who have met casually and who fancy themselves linked together because they have proved to be mutually agreeable, arises solely from the harassing fear of solitude, which haunts mankind upon this earth.

Each of us, feeling the void around him, the unfathomable depth in which his heart beats, his thoughts struggle, wanders on like a madman with open arms and eager lips, seeking some other being to embrace. And embrace he does, to the right, to the left, at haphazard, without knowing, without looking, without understanding, that he may not feel alone. He seems to say, from the moment he has shaken hands: “Now, you belong to me a little. You owe me some part of yourself, of your life, of your thoughts, of your time.” And that is why so many people believe themselves to be friends, who know nothing whatever of each other, so many start off hand in hand, heart to heart, without having really had one good look at one another. They must care for some one, in order not to be alone, their affections must be expended in friendship or in love, but some vent must be found for it incessantly. And they talk of affection, swear it, become enthusiastic over it, pour their whole heart into some unknown heart found only the evening before, all their soul into some chance soul with a face that has pleased. And from this haste to become united, arise all the surprises, mistakes, misunderstandings, and dramas of life.

Just as we remain lonely and alone, notwithstanding all our efforts, so in like manner we remain free, notwithstanding all our ties.

No one ever belongs to another. Half unconsciously we lend ourselves to the comedy — coquettish or passionate — of possession, but no one really gives himself — his ego — to another human being. Man, exasperated by this imperious need to be the master of some one, instituted tyranny, slavery, and marriage. He can kill, torture, imprison, but the human will inevitably escapes him, even when it has for a few moments consented to submission.

Do mothers even possess their children? Does not the tiny being but just entered into the world set to work to cry for what he wants, to announce his separate existence, and proclaim his independence?

Does a woman ever really belong to you? Do you know what she thinks, whether even she really adores you? You kiss her sweet body (waste your whole soul on her perfect lips): a word from your mouth or from hers — one single word — is enough to put between you a gulf of implacable hatred!

All sentiments of affection lose their charm when they become authoritative. Because it gives me pleasure to see and talk with some one, does it follow that I should be permitted to know what he does, and what he likes? The bustle of towns, both great and small, of all classes of society, the mischievous, envious, evil-speaking, calumniating curiosity, the incessant watchfulness of the affections and conduct of others, of their gossip and their scandals, are they not all born of that pretension we have to control the conduct of others, as if we all belonged to each other in varying degrees? And we do in fact imagine that we have some rights over them and over their life, for we would fain model it upon our own; over their thoughts, for we expect them to be of the same style as our own; over their opinions, in which we will not tolerate any difference from ours; over their reputation, for we expect it to conform to our principles; over their habits, for we swell with indignation when they are not according to our notions of morality.

I was breakfasting at the end of a long table in the Hotel Bailli de Suffren, and still occupied with the perusal of my letters and papers, when I was disturbed by the noisy conversation of some half-dozen men, seated at the other end.

They were commercial travelers. They talked on every subject with assurance, with contempt, in an airy, chaffing, authoritative manner, and they gave me the clearest, the sharpest feeling of what constitutes the true French spirit; that is to say, the average of the intelligence, logic, sense, and wit of France. One of them, a great fellow with a shock of red hair, wore the military medal, and also one for saving life — a fine fellow. Another, a fat little roundabout, made puns without ceasing and laughed till his sides ached at his own jokes, before he would leave time to the others to understand his fun. Another man, with close-cut hair, was reorganizing the army and the administration of justice, reforming the laws and the constitution, sketching out an ideal republic to suit his own views, as a traveler in the wine trade. Two others, side by side, were amusing each other thoroughly with the narrative of their *bonnes fortunes;* adventures in back parlors of shops and conquests of maids-of-all-work.

And in them I saw France personified, the witty, versatile, brave, and gallant France of tradition.

These men were types of the race, vulgar types, it is true, but which have but to be poetized a little to find in them the Frenchman such as history — that lying and imaginative old dame — shows him to us.

And it is really an amusing race, by reason of certain very special qualities which one finds absolutely nowhere else.

First and foremost it is their versatility which so agreeably diversifies both their customs and their institutions. It is this which makes the history of their country resemble some surprising tale of adventure in a *feuilleton,* of which the pages, "to be continued in the next number," are full of the most unexpected events, tragic, comic, terrible, grotesque. One may be angry or indignant over it, according to one's way of thinking, but it is none the less certain that no history in the world is more amusing and more stirring than theirs.

From the pure art point of view — and why should one not admit this special and disinterested point of view, in politics as well as in literature? — it remains without a rival. What can be more curious, and more surprising, than the events which have been accomplished in the last century?

What will to-morrow bring forth? This expectation of the unforeseen is, after all, very charming. Everything is possible in France, even the most wildly improbable drolleries, and the most tragic adventures.

What could surprise them? When a country has produced a Joan of Arc and a Napoleon, it may well be considered miraculous ground.

And then the French love women: they love them well, with passion and with airy grace, and with respect.

Their gallantry cannot be compared to anything in any other country.

He who has preserved in his heart the flame of gallantry which burned in the last centuries surrounds women with a tenderness at once profound, gentle, sensitive, and vigilant. He loves everything that belongs to them; everything that comes from them; everything that they are; everything they do. He loves their toilette, their knickknacks, their adornments, their artifices, their *naïvetés*, their little perfidies, their lies, and their dainty ways. He loves them all, rich as well as poor, the young and even the old, the dark, the fair, the fat, the thin. He feels himself at his ease with them, and among them. There he could remain indefinitely, without fatigue, without *ennui,* happy in the mere fact of being in their presence.

He knows how, from the very first word, by a look, by a smile, to show them that he adores them, to arouse their attention, to sharpen their wish to please, to display for his benefit all their powers of seduction. Between them and him there is established at once a quick sympathy, a fellowship of instincts, almost a relationship through similarity of character and nature. Then begins a combat of coquetry and gallantry; a mysterious and skirmishing sort of friendship is cemented and an obscure affinity of heart and mind is drawn closer.

He knows how to say what will please them, how to make them understand what he thinks; how to make known without ever shocking them, without offending their delicate and watchful modesty, the admiration, discreet yet ardent, always burning in his eyes, always trembling on his lips, always alight in his veins. He is their friend and their slave, the humble servitor of their caprices, and the admirer of their persons. He is ever at their beck and call, ready to help them, to defend them, as a secret ally. He would love to devote himself to them, not only to those he knows slightly but to those he knows not at all, to those he has never seen.

He asks nothing of them but a little pretty affection, a little confidence, or a little interest, a little graceful friendliness or even sly malice.

He loves in the street the woman who passes by, and whose glance falls upon him. He loves the young girl with hair streaming down her shoulders, who, a blue bow on her head, a flower in her bosom, moves with slow or hurried step, timid or bold eye, through the throng on the pavements. He loves the unknown ones he elbows, the little shopwoman who dreams on her doorstep, the fine lady who lazily reclines in her open carriage.

From the moment he finds himself face to face with a woman, his heart is stirred, and his best powers are awakened. He thinks of her, talks for her, tries to please her, and to let her understand that she pleases him. Tender expressions hover on his lips, caresses in his glance; he is invaded by a longing to kiss her hand, to touch even the stuff of her dress. For him it is women who adorn the world and make life seductive.

He likes to sit at their feet, for the mere pleasure of being there; he likes to meet their eye, merely to catch a glimpse of their veiled and fleeting thoughts; he likes to listen to their voice, solely because it is the voice of woman.

It is by them, and for them, that the Frenchman has learned to talk and to display the ready wit which distinguishes him.

To talk! What is it? It is the art of never seeming wearisome, of knowing how to invest every trifle with interest, to charm no matter what be the subject, to fascinate with absolutely nothing.

How can one describe the airy butterfly touch upon things by supple words, the running fire of wit, the dainty flitting of ideas, which should all go to compose talk?

The Frenchman is the only being in the world who has this subtle spirit of wit, and he alone thoroughly enjoys and comprehends it.

His wit is a mere flash and yet it dwells; now the current joke, now the wit, which illumines the national literature.

That which is truly innate is wit, in the largest sense of the word, that vast breath of irony or gaiety which has animated the nation from the moment it could think or speak: it is the pungent raciness of Montaigne and Rabelais, the irony of Voltaire, of Beaumarchais, of Saint-Simon, and the inextinguishable laughter of Molière.

The brilliant sally, the neat epigram, is the small-change of this wit. And nevertheless it is an aspect of it, a characteristic peculiarity of the national intelligence. It is one of its keenest charms. It is this that makes the sceptical gaiety of Paris life, the careless cheerfulness of their manners and customs. It is part and parcel of the social amenity.

Formerly, these pleasant jests were made in verse, nowadays they appear in prose. They are called, according to their date, epigrams, *bons mots,* traits, hits, *gauloiseries.* They fly through town and drawingroom, they spring up everywhere, on the boulevard as well as in Montmartre. And those of Montmartre are often just as good as those of the boulevard; they are printed in the papers; from one end of France to the other they excite laughter. For, at least, the French know how to laugh.

Why should one good thing more than another, the unexpected, quaint juxtaposition of two terms, two ideas, or even two sounds, a ridiculous pun or some unexpected cock-and-bull story, open the floodgates of our gaiety, and cause explosions of mirth, fit to blow up all Paris and the provinces like a mine?

Why do all the French laugh, while all the English and all the Germans can understand nothing of the fun? Why? Solely and wholly because they are French, because they possess the intelligence which is peculiar to the French, and because they possess the delightful, enviable gift of laughter.

With them, moreover, a little mother-wit enables any government to hold its own.

Good spirits take the place of genius, a neat saying consecrates a man at once and makes him great for all posterity. The rest matters little. The nation loves those who amuse it, and forgives everything to those who can make it laugh.

A glance thrown over the past history of France will make us understand that the fame of their great men has only been made by flashes of wit. The most detestable princes have become popular by agreeable jests, repeated and remembered from century to century.

The throne of France is maintained by the cap and bells of the jester.

Jests, jests, nothing but jests, ironic or heroic, polished or coarse, — jests float forever to the surface in their history, and make it like nothing so much as a collection of puns and witticisms.

Clovis, the Christian king, cried on hearing the story of the Passion:

“Why was I not there with my Franks?” This prince, in order to reign alone, massacred his allies and his relations, and committed every crime imaginable. Nevertheless, he is looked upon as a pious and civilizing monarch.

“Why was I not there with my Franks?”

We should know nothing of good King Dagobert, if the song had not apprised us of a few particulars, no doubt erroneous, of his existence.

Pepin, wishing to remove the king Childeric from the throne, proposed to Pope Zacharias the following insidious question:

“Which of the two is the more worthy to reign; He who worthily fulfills all the kingly functions without the title, or he who bears the title without knowing how to reign?”

What do we know of Louis VI.? Nothing. Pardon! In the battle of Brenneville, when an Englishman laid hands upon him, crying, “The king is taken,” this truly French monarch replied: “Do you know, knave, that a king can never be taken, even at chess?”

Louis IX., saint though he was, has not left a single good saying to remember him by. In consequence, his reign appears to the French a wearisome episode, full of orisons and penances.

That noodle, Philip VI., beaten and wounded at the battle of Crécy, cried as he knocked at the gates of the castle of Arbroie: “Open: here are the fortunes of France!” They are still grateful to him for this melodramatic speech. John II., made prisoner by the Prince of Wales, remarks with chivalrous goodwill and the graceful gallantry of a French troubadour: “I had counted upon entertaining you at supper tonight; but fortune wills otherwise, and ordains that I should sup with you.”

It would be impossible to bear adversity more gracefully.

“It is not for the King of France to avenge the quarrels of the Duke of Orléans,” was the generous declaration of Louis XII. And it is, truly, a kingly saying; one worthy of the remembrance of all princes.

That hare-brained fellow, Francis I., more apt at the pursuit of the fair sex than at the conduct of a campaign, saved his reputation and surrounded his name with an imperishable halo by writing to his mother those few superb words, after the defeat of Pavia: “All is lost, Madame, save honor.”

Does not that phrase remain to this day as good as a victory? Has it not made this prince more illustrious than the conquest of a kingdom? We have forgotten the names of the greater number of the famous battles fought in these long bygone days, but shall we ever forget: “All is lost, save honor?” Henry IV.! Hats off, gentlemen! Here is the master! Sly, sceptical, tricky, deceitful beyond belief, artful beyond compare; a drunkard, debauchee, unbeliever, he managed by a few happy and pointed sayings to make for himself in history an admirable reputation as a chivalrous, generous king, a brave loyal, and honest man.

Oh! the cheat! well did he know how to play upon human stupidity!

“Hang yourself, brave Crillon, we have gained the day without you.”

After a speech like this, a general is always ready to be hanged or killed for his master’s sake.

At the opening of the famous battle of Ivry: “Children, if the colors fall, rally to my white plumes, you will find them always on the road to honor and victory.”

How could a man fail to be victorious who knew how to speak thus to his captains and his troops?

This sceptical monarch wishes for Paris; he longs for it, but he must choose between his faith and the beautiful city: “Enough,” he murmurs, “after all, Paris is well worth a mass!” And he changes his religion as he would have changed his coat. Is it not a fact, however, that the witticism caused a ready acceptance of the deed? “Paris is well worth a mass,” raised a laugh among the choicer spirits, and there was no violent indignation over the change.

Has he not become the patron of all fathers of families, by the question put to the Spanish ambassador, who found him playing at horses with the dauphin: “Are you a father, M. l’Ambassadeur?” The Spaniard replied: “Yes, sire.”

“In that case,” said the king, “we will go on.” But he made a conquest for all eternity of the heart of France, of the *bourgeoisie,* and of the people, by the finest phrase that prince ever pronounced, — a real inspiration of genius, full of depth, heartiness, sharpness, and good sense.

"If God prolongs my life, I hope to see in my kingdom no peasant so poor that he cannot put a fowl in the pot for his Sunday's dinner."

It is with words such as these that enthusiastic and foolish crowds are flattered and governed. By a couple of clever sayings, Henry IV. has drawn his own portrait for posterity. One cannot pronounce his name without at once having a vision of the white plumes, and of the delicious flavor of a *poule-au-pot.*

Louis XIII. made no happy hits. This dull king had a dull reign.

Louis XIV. created the formula of absolute personal power: "The State is myself."

He gave the measure of royal pride in its fullest expansion: "I have almost had to wait."

He set the example of sonorous political phrases, which make alliances between two nations: "The Pyrenees exist no longer!"

All his reign is in these few phrases.

Louis XV., most corrupt of kings, elegant and witty, has bequeathed to posterity that delightful keynote of his supreme indifference: "After me, the deluge."

If Louis XVI. had inspired enough to perpetrate one witticism, he might possibly have saved his kingdom. With one *bon mot*, might he not perhaps have escaped the guillotine?

Napoleon I. scattered around him by handfuls the sayings that were suited to the hearts of his soldiers.

Napoleon III. extinguished with one brief phrase all the future indignation of the French nation in that first promise: "The Empire is peace." The Empire is peace! Superb declaration, magnificent lie! After having said that, he might declare war against the whole of Europe without having anything to fear from his people. He had found a simple, neat, and striking formula, capable of appealing to all minds, and against which facts would be no argument.

He made war against China, Mexico, Russia, Austria, against all the world. What did it matter? There are people yet who speak with sincere conviction of the eighteen years of tranquillity he gave to France: "The Empire is peace."

And it was also with his keen words of satire, phrases more mortal than bullets, that M. Rochefort laid the Empire low, riddling it with the arrows of his wit, cutting it to shreds and tatters.

Maréchal MacMahon himself has left as a souvenir of his career to power: “Here I am, here I remain!” And it was by a shaft from Gambetta that he was, in his turn, knocked down: “Submission or dismissal.”

With these two words, more powerful than a revolution, more formidable than the barricades, more invincible than an army, more redoubtable than all the votes, the tribune turned out the soldier, crushed his glory, and destroyed his power and prestige.

As to those who govern France at this moment, they must fall, for they are devoid of wit; they will fall, for in the day of danger, in the day of disturbance, in the inevitable moment of seesaw, they will not be capable of making France laugh, and of disarming her.

Of all these historical phrases there are not ten really authentic. But what does it matter so long as they are believed to have been uttered by those to whom they are attributed:

“*Dans le pays des bossus*
Il faut l’être
Ou le paraître.”

(“In the country of hunchbacks
One must be so,
Or at feast appear so.”)

says the popular song.

Meanwhile the commercial travelers were talking of the emancipation of women, of their rights, and of the new position in society they longed for.

Some approved, others were annoyed; the little fat man jested without ceasing, and ended the breakfast, as well as the discussion, by the following entertaining anecdote:

“Lately,” said he, “there was a great meeting in England, where this question was discussed. One of the orators had been setting forth numerous arguments in favor of the women’s case, and wound up with this observation:

“‘To conclude, gentlemen, I may observe that the difference between man and woman is after all, very small.’”

A powerful voice, from an enthusiastic and thoroughly convinced listener, arose from the audience, crying: “Hurrah for the small difference!”

CHAPTER VI. THE CHARTREUSE DE LA VERNE

As it was remarkably fine this morning, I started for the Chartreuse de la Verne.

Two recollections draw me toward this ruin: that of the sensation of infinite solitude and the unforgettable melancholy of the deserted cloister, and also that of an old peasant couple, to whose cottage I had been taken the year before by a friend who was guiding me across this country of the Moors.

Seated in a country cart, for the road soon became impracticable for a vehicle on springs, I followed the line of the bay to its deepest point. I could see upon the opposite shore the pine woods where the "Company" is attempting to create another winter resort. The shore indeed is exquisite, and the whole country magnificent. Then the road plunges into the mountains and soon passes through the town of Cogolin. A little further on, I quitted it for a rough broken lane, which was scarcely more than a long rut. A river, or rather a big stream, runs by the side, and every hundred yards or so cuts through the ravine, floods it, wanders away a little, returns, loses itself again, quits its bed, and drowns the track, then falls into a ditch, strays through a field of stones, appears suddenly to calm down into wisdom, and for a while follows its due course; but seized all at once by some wild fancy, it precipitates itself again into the road and changes it into a marsh, in which the horse sinks up to the breastplate and the high vehicle up to the driving seat.

There are no more houses, only from time to time, a charcoal burner's hut; the poorest live in absolute holes. Is it not almost incredible that men should inhabit holes in the ground, where they live all the year, cutting wood and burning it to extract the charcoal, eating bread and onions, drinking water, and sleeping like rabbits in their burrows, in narrow caverns hewn in the granite rock? Lately, too, in the midst of these unexplored valleys, a hermit has been discovered, a real hermit, hidden there for these Thirty years, unknown to anyone, even to the forest rangers.

The existence of this wild man, revealed by I know not whom, was, no doubt, mentioned to the driver of the diligence, who spoke of it to the postmaster, who talked of it to the telegraph clerk, male or female, who flew with the wonder to the editor of some little local paper, who made out of it a sensational paragraph, copied into all the country journals of Provence.

The police set to work to hunt out the hermit, without apparently causing him any alarm, whence we may conclude that he had kept all needful papers by him. But a photographer, excited by the news, set off in his turn, wandered three days and three nights among the mountains, and ended by photographing some one, the real hermit some say, an impostor, others will tell you.

Last year, then, the friend who first revealed to me this strangely quaint country, showed me two creatures infinitely more curious than the poor devil who had come to hide in these impenetrable woods a grief, a remorse, an incurable despair, or perhaps, simply the mere *ennui* of living.

This is how he first discovered them: Wandering on horseback among these valleys, he suddenly came across a prosperous farm: vines, fields, and a farmhouse, which looked comfortable though humble.

He entered. He was received by a woman, a peasant, about seventy years old. The husband, seated under a tree, rose and came forward to bow.

“He is deaf,” she said.

He was a fine old fellow of eighty, amazingly strong, upright, and handsome. They had for servants a laborer, and a farm-girl. My friend a little surprised to meet these singular persons in the midst of a desert, inquired about them. They had been there for a long time; they were much respected and passed for being comfortably off, that is, for peasants.

He came back several times to visit them, and little by little became the confidant of the wife. He brought her papers and books, being surprised to find that she had some ideas, or rather remains of ideas, which scarcely seemed those of her class. She was, however, neither well read, intelligent, nor witty, but there seemed to be, in the depths of her memory, traces of forgotten thoughts, a slumbering recollection of a by-gone education. One day she asked him his name.

“I am the Count de X — he said.

Moved by the obscure vanity which is lodged deep in all souls, she replied:

"I too am noble."

Then she went on, speaking certainly for the first time in her life of this piece of ancient history, unknown to anyone.

"I am the daughter of a colonel. My husband was a non-commissioned officer in my father's regiment. I fell in love with him and we ran away together."

"And you came here?"

"Yes, we hid ourselves."

"And you have never seen your family since?"

"Oh, no! don't you see my husband was a deserter."

"You have never written to anyone?"

"Oh, no!"

"And you have never heard anyone speak of your family, of your father, or mother?"

"Oh, no, mamma was dead."

This woman had preserved a certain childishness, the simplicity of those who throw themselves into love as over a precipice.

He asked again:

"You have never told this to anyone?"

She answered: "Oh, no! I can say it now, because Maurice is deaf. As long as he could hear, I should not have dared to mention it. Besides, I have never seen anyone but the peasants since I ran away."

"At least, then, you have been happy?"

"Oh, yes, very happy. I have been very happy. I have never regretted anything."

Well, I also had gone last year to visit this woman, this couple, as one goes to gaze at some miraculous relic.

I had contemplated with surprise, sadness, and even a little disgust, this woman who had followed this man, this rustic Adonis, attracted by his hussar uniform, and who had continued to see him under his peasant's rags, with the blue dolman slung over his back, sword at his side, and the high boot with clanking spur.

She had, however, become a peasant herself. In the depths of this wilderness, she had become perfectly accustomed to this life without luxuries, without charm, or delicacy of any sort, she had adapted herself to these simple manners. And she loved him still. She had become a woman of the people, in cap and coarse petticoat. Seated on a straw-bottomed chair at a wooden table, she ate a mess of cabbage, potatoes, and bacon from an earthenware plate. She slept on a straw mattress beside him.

She had never thought of anything but him! She had regretted neither ornaments, nor silks, nor elegance, nor soft chairs, nor the perfumed warmth of well-curtained rooms, nor repose in a comfortable bed. She had never needed anything but him! As long as he was there, she had wanted nothing else!

She was quite young when she abandoned life, the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. Alone with him she had come to this savage ravine. And he had been everything to her, everything that could be longed for, dreamed of, expected, ceaselessly hoped for. He had filled her life with happiness from one end to another. She could not have been happier.

Now I was going for the second time to see her again, filled with the surprise and the vague contempt with which she inspired me.

She lived near the Hyères road, on the opposite slope of the mountain on which stands the Chartreuse de la Verne, and another carriage was awaiting me on this road, for the deep track we had followed had now ceased and become a mere footpath, only accessible to pedestrians and mules. started therefore alone, on foot and with slow steps, to climb the mountains. I was in a delightful wood, a real Corsican thicket, a fairy-tale wood composed of flowering creepers, aromatic plants with powerful scents, and huge, magnificent trees.

The granite fragments in the track sparkled as they rolled beneath my steps, and in the openings between the branches, I saw sudden peeps of wide gloomy valleys full of verdure, winding lengthily away to the distance.

I was warm, the quick blood flowed within my flesh, I felt it coursing through my veins, burning, rapid, alert, rhythmical, and alluring as a song; the vast song, brutish and gay, of life in movement under the sun. I was happy, I was strong, I quickened my pace, climbed the rocks, ran, jumped, and discovered — every minute a larger view, a more gigantic network of desert valleys, from whence not one single chimney sent up a wreath of smoke.

Then I reached the top, dominated by other heights, and after making a circuit, I perceived on the slope of the mountain before me a bleak ruin, a heap of dark stones, and of ancient buildings supported by lofty arcades. To reach it, it was necessary to go round a large ravine and to cross a chestnut grove. The trees, old as the abbey itself, enormous, mutilated, and dying, had survived the building. Some had fallen, no longer able to sustain the weight of years; others, beheaded, had now only a hollow trunk in which ten men could conceal themselves. And they looked like a formidable army of giants, who in spite of age and thunderbolts are ready still to attempt the assault of the skies. In this fantastic wood one feels the moldy touch of centuries, the old, old life of the rotting roots, amid which, at the feet of these colossal stumps, nothing can grow. For among the gray trunks the ground is of hard stones and a blade of grass is rare.

Here are two fenced springs, or fountains, kept as drinking places for the cows.

I approach the abbey, and find myself face to face with the old buildings, the most ancient of which date back to the twelfth century, while the more recent are inhabited by a family of shepherds.

In the first court, one sees by the traces of animals that a remnant of life still haunts the spot; then after traversing crumbling and tumbling halls, like those of all ruins, one reaches the cloister, a long and low walk still under cover, surrounding a tangled square of brambles and tall grasses. In no spot in the world have I felt such a weight of melancholy press upon my heart as in this ancient and sinister cloister, true pacing-court of monks. Certainly, the form of the arcades and the proportions of the place contribute to my emotion, to my heartache, and sadden my soul by their action on my eyes, exactly as the happy curve of some cheering bit of architecture would rejoice them. The man who built this retreat must have been possessed of a despairing heart, to have an inspiration so desolate and dreary. One would fain weep and groan within these walls, one longs to suffer, to reopen all the wounds of one’s heart, to enlarge and make the very utmost of all the sorrows compressed within it.

I climbed upon a breach in the wall to see the view outside, and I understood my emotion. Nothing living around, nothing anywhere but death. Behind the abbey a mountain ascending up to the sky, around the ruins the chestnut grove, in front a valley, and beyond that more valleys, — pines, pines, an ocean of pines, and on the far horizon, pines still on the mountain tops.

And I left the place.

I crossed next a wood of cork-trees, where, a year ago, I had experienced a shock of strong and moving surprise.

It was on a gray day of October, at the time when they strip the bark of these trees to make corks of it. They strip them thus from the foot to the first branches, and the denuded trunk becomes red, a blood red as of a flayed limb. They have grotesque and twisted shapes, the look of maimed creatures writhing in epileptic fits, and I suddenly fancied myself transported into a forest of tormented beings, a bleeding and Dantesque forest of hell, where men had roots, where bodies deformed by torture resembled trees, where life ebbed incessantly, in never-ending torment by these bleeding wounds, which produced upon me the tension of the nerves and faintness that sensitive people feel at the sudden sight of blood, or the unexpected shock of a man crushed, or fallen from a roof. And this emotion was so keen, this sensation so vivid, that imagined I heard distracting cries and plaints, distant and innumerable; I touched one of these trees to reassure my fainting spirit, and I fancied that my hand, as I drew it back, was covered with blood.

To-day they are cured till the next barking.

At length the road appears, passing near the farm which has sheltered the long happiness of the non-commissioned officer of hussars and the colonel’s daughter.

From afar I recognize the old man walking among the vines. So much the better; the wife will be alone in the house.

The servant was washing in front of the door.

“Your mistress is here,” I said.

She replied, with a singular look, in the accent of the south:

“No, sir; six months ago she died.”

“She is dead?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And of what?”

The woman hesitated, then muttered:

“She is dead — dead, I tell you.”

“But of what?”

“Of a fall, then!”

“A fall! where from?”

“From the window.”

I gave her a few pence.

"Tell me about it," I said.

No doubt she strongly wished to talk of it, no doubt, too, she had often repeated this history for the last six months, for she retailed it at great length, as a story well-known by heart and invariable in its repetition.

Then I learned that for thirty years the old deaf man had had a mistress in the neighboring village, and that his wife, having learned this by chance from a passing carter, who spoke of it without knowing who she was, rushed panting and bewildered to the attic, and there hurled herself from the window, not perhaps with deliberate purpose, but impelled by the torture of the horrible agony caused by her discovery, which goaded her forward in an irresistible gust of passion, like a whip lashing and cutting. She had flown up the staircase; burst open the door, and without knowing, without being able to stop her headlong speed, had continued to run straight ahead and had leaped into empty space.

He had known nothing of it; he did not know even now; he would never know, because he was deaf. His wife was dead, that was all. All the world must die some time or other!

I could see him at a distance giving orders by signs to his laborers.

Then I caught sight of the carriage which was waiting for me in the shade of a tree, and I returned to Saint-Tropez.

CHAPTER VII. MONTE CARLO

WAS going to bed yesterday evening, although it was only nine o'clock, when a telegram was handed to me. A friend, one of my dearest, sent me this message:

"I am at Monte Carlo for four days, and have been telegraphing to you at every port on the coast. Come to me at once."

And behold, the wish to see him, the longing to talk, to laugh, to gossip about society, about things, about people; the longing to slander, to criticise, to blame, to judge, to chatter, was alight within me in a moment, like a conflagration. On that morning, even, I should have been furious at this recall, yet in the evening I was enchanted at it; I wished myself already there, with the great dining-room of the restaurant full of people before my eyes, and in my ears that murmur of voices in which the numbers of the roulette table dominate all other phrases, like the *Dominus vobiscum* of the church services.

I called Bernard.

"We shall start at about four o'clock in the morning for Monaco," I said to him.

He replied philosophically:

"If it is fine, sir."

"It *will* be fine."

"The barometer is going down, though."

"Pooh! it will go up again."

The mariner smiled an incredulous smile. I went to bed and to sleep. It was I who woke the men. It was dark, and a few clouds hid the sky. The barometer had gone down still more. The two men shook their heads with a distrustful air.

I repeated: "Pooh! it will be fine. Come, let us be off!"

Bernard said:

"When I can see the open, I, know what I am about; but here, in this harbor, at the end of this gulf, one knows nothing, sir, one can see nothing; there might be a fearful sea on, without our knowing anything about it."

I replied:

"The barometer has gone down, therefore we shall not have an east wind. Now, if we have a west wind, we can put into Agay, which is only six or seven miles off." The men did not seem much reassured; however, they got ready to start.

"Shall we take the dingy on deck?" asked Bernard. "No, you will see it will be quite fine. Let it tow astern as usual."

A quarter of an hour later, we had quitted the harbor and were running through the entrance of the gulf, to a light and intermittent breeze.

I laughed.

"Well you see, the weather is good enough."

Soon we had passed the black and white tower built upon the Rabiou shoal, and although sheltered by Cape Camarat, which runs far out into the open sea, and of which the flashing light appeared from minute to minute, the "Bel-Ami" was already lifted forward by long, powerful, slow waves; those hills of water which move on, one behind the other, without noise, without shock, without foam, menacing without fury, alarming in their very tranquillity.

One saw nothing, one only felt the ascent and descent of the yacht over the dark and silently moving waters.

Bernard said:

"There has been a gale out at sea to-night, sir; we shall be lucky if we get in without accident."

The day broke brightly over the wild crowding waves, and we all three looked anxiously seaward to see if the squall were returning.

All this time the boat was running a great pace before the wind and with the tide. Already Agay appeared on our beam, and we held counsel whether we should make for Cannes, to escape the rough weather, or for Nice, running to seaward of the isles.

Bernard would have preferred Cannes, but as the breeze did not freshen, I decided in favor of Nice.

For three hours all went well, though the poor little yacht rolled like a cork in the awful swell.

No one who is unacquainted with the open sea, that sea of mountains, moving with weighty and rapid strides, separated by valleys which change place from second to second, filled up, and formed again incessantly, can guess, can imagine the mysterious, redoubtable, terrifying, and superb force of the waves.

Our little dingy followed far behind us, at the extremity of forty yards of hawser, through this liquid and dancing chaos. We lost sight of it every moment, then suddenly it would reappear perched on the summit of a wave, floating along like a great white bird.

We saw Cannes in the depth of its bay, Saint-Honorat with its tower standing up among the waves, and before us the Cape d'Antibes.

The breeze freshened little by little, and the crests of the waves became flocks of sheep, those snowy sheep which move so fast, and which in countless troops career along without dog or shepherd under the endless sky.

Bernard said to me:

"It will be all we shall do to make Antibes."

And indeed seas began to break over us, with inexpressible and violent noise. The sharp squalls shook us, throwing us into yawning gulfs, whence as we emerged, we righted ourselves with terrible shocks.

The gaff was lowered, but at every oscillation of the yacht, the boom touched the waves and seemed ready to tear away the mast, which if it should fly away with the sail, would leave us to float alone and lost upon the wild waves.

Bernard cried out:

"The dingy, sir."

I turned to look. A huge wave filled it, rolled it over, enveloped it in foam as if it would devour it, and, breaking the hawser by which it was made fast to us, took possession of it, half sinking, drowned; a conquered prey which it will presently throw upon the rocks down there, below the headland.

The minutes seem hours. Nothing can be done, we must go on, round the point in front of us, and when we have done that, we shall be sheltered, and in safety.

At last we reach it! The sea is now calm and smooth, protected as it is by the long tongue of rocks and earth which forms the Cape of Antibes.

There is the harbor from which we started only a few days ago, although it seems to me we have been voyaging for months, and we enter just as noon is striking.

The men are radiant on finding themselves back again, though Bernard repeats at every other moment:

"Ah, sir! our poor little boat; it went to my heart to see it go down like that!"

As for me, I took the four o'clock train to go and dine with my friend in the principality of Monaco.

I wish I had time to write at length about this surprising State; smaller than many a village in France, but wherein one may find an absolute sovereign, bishops, an army of Jesuits and seminarists more numerous than that of the ruler; an artillery, the guns of which are nearly all rifled, an etiquette more ceremonious than that of his lamented Majesty Louis XIV., principles of authority more despotic than those of William of Prussia, joined to a magnificent toleration for the vices of humanity, on which indeed, live the sovereign, bishops, Jesuits, seminarists, ministers, army, magistrates, everyone in short.

Hail to this great pacific monarch, who without fear of invasion or revolution, reigns peacefully over his happy little flock of subjects, in the midst of court ceremonies which preserve intact the traditions of the four reverences, the twenty-six handkissings, and all the forms used once upon a time around Great Rulers.

This monarch, moreover, is neither sanguinary nor vindictive, and when he banishes, for he does banish sometimes, the measure is put in force with the utmost delicacy.

Is a proof needful?

An obstinate player, on a day of ill luck, insulted the sovereign. A decree was issued for his expulsion.

During a whole month he prowled around the forbidden Paradise, fearing the sword blade of the archangel, in the guise of the saber of the policeman. One day, however, he hardened his heart, crossed the frontier, reached the very center of the kingdom in thirty seconds, and penetrated into the precincts of the Casino. But suddenly an official stopped him:

"Are you not banished, sir?"

"Yes, sir, but I leave by the next train."

"Oh! in that case it is all right. You can go in."

And every week he came back: and each time the same functionary asked him the same question, to which he invariably gave the same answer.

Could justice be more gentle?

Within the last few years, however, a very serious and novel case occurred within the kingdom.

This was an assassination.

A man, a native of Monaco, — not one of the wandering strangers of whom one meets legions on these shores, — a husband, in a moment of anger, killed his wife; killed her without rhyme or reason, without any excuse that could be accepted.

Indignation was unanimous throughout the principality.

The Supreme Court met to judge this exceptional case (a murder had never taken place before), and the wretch was with one voice condemned to death.

The indignant sovereign ratified the sentence.

There only remained to execute the criminal. Then arose a difficulty. The country possessed neither guillotine nor executioner.

What was to be done? By the advice of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prince opened negotiations with France to obtain the loan of a headsman and his apparatus.

Long deliberations took place in the ministry at Paris. At last they replied by sending an estimate of the cost of moving the woodwork and the practitioner. The whole amounted to sixteen thousand francs (six hundred and forty pounds).

The monarch of Monaco reflected that the operation would cost him dear; the assassin was certainly not worth that price. Sixteen thousand francs for the head of a wretch like that! Never!

The same request was addressed to the Italian government. A King and a brother would no doubt show himself less exacting than a Republic.

The Italian government sent in a bill which amounted to twelve thousand francs (four hundred and eighty pounds).

Twelve thousand francs! It would be necessary to impose a new tax, a tax of two francs (twenty pence) a head! This would be enough to cause serious, and hitherto unknown trouble in the State.

Then they bethought them of having the villain beheaded by a simple soldier. But the general, on being consulted, replied hesitatingly, that perhaps his men had scarcely sufficient practice to acquit themselves satisfactorily of a task, which undoubtedly demanded great experience in the handling of the sword.

Then the Prince again assembled the Supreme Court, and submitted to it this embarrassing case.

They deliberated long, without finding any practical way out of the difficulty. At last the first president proposed to commute the sentence of death to that of life-long imprisonment, and the measure was adopted.

But they did not possess a prison. It was necessary to fit one up, and a jailer was appointed who took charge of the prisoner.

For six months all went well. The captive slept all day on a straw mattress in the nook arranged for him, and his guardian lazily reclined upon a chair before the door, while he watched the passers-by.

The Prince, however, is economical — extravagance is not his greatest fault — and he has accurate accounts laid before him of the smallest expenses of his State (the list of them is not a long one). They handed him, therefore, the bill of the expenses incurred in the creation of this new function, the cost of the prison, the prisoner, and the watchman. The salary of this last was a heavy burden on the budget of the sovereign.

At first he merely made a wry face over it; but when he reflected that this might go on forever (the prisoner was young), he requested his Minister of Justice to take measures to suppress the expense.

The minister consulted the President of the Tribunal, and the two agreed to suppress the expense of a jailer. The prisoner, thus invited to guard himself, could not fail to escape, which would solve the question to the satisfaction of all parties.

The jailer was therefore restored to his family, and it became the duty of a scullion from the palace kitchen to carry to the prisoner his morning and evening meals. But the captive made no attempt to recover his liberty.

Finally, one day, as they had neglected to furnish him with food, they beheld him tranquilly appear at the palace to claim it; and from that day forward, it became his habit to come at meal-times to the palace to eat with the servants, whose friend he became, and thus save the cook the trouble of the walk to and fro.

After breakfast he would take a turn as far as Monte Carlo. He sometimes went into the Casino, to venture a five-franc piece on the green cloth. When he had won, he gave himself a good dinner at one of the most fashionable hotels; then he returned to his prison, carefully locking his door on the inside.

He never slept away a single night.

The situation became a little puzzling, not for the convict, but for the judges.

The court assembled afresh, and it was decided that they should invite the criminal to leave the State of Monaco.

When this decision was announced to him, he simply replied:

"You are pleased to be facetious. Well, and what would become of me in that case? I have no longer any means of subsistence. I have no longer a family. What would you have me do? I was condemned to death. You did not choose to execute me. I made no complaint. I was afterwards condemned to imprisonment for life, and placed in the hands of a jailer. You took away my guardian. Again I made no complaint.

"Now, to-day, you want to turn me out of the country. Not if I know it. I am a prisoner, your prisoner, judged and condemned by you. I am faithfully fulfilling my sentence. I remain here."

The Supreme Court was floored. The Prince was in a terrible rage, and ordered fresh measures to be taken.

Deliberations were resumed.

Then, at last, they decided to offer to the culprit a pension of six hundred francs (twenty-four pounds), if he would leave the State and live elsewhere.

He accepted.

He has rented a little plot five minutes' walk from the kingdom of his former sovereign, and lives happily upon his property, cultivating a few vegetables, and despising all potentates.

However, the court of Monaco has profited, though a little late, by this experience, and has made a treaty with the French government, by which they send their convicts over to France, who keeps them out of sight, in consideration of a modest compensation.

In the judicial archives of the principality, one is shown the decree which settles the pension, by which the rascal was induced to leave the State of Monaco.

Opposite to the palace, rises the rival establishment, the Roulette. There is, however, no hatred no hostility between them; for the one supports the other, which in return protects the first. Admirable example! Unique instance of two neighboring and powerful families living in peace in one tiny state: an example well calculated to efface the remembrance of the Capulets and the Montagues. Here, the house of the sovereign; there, the house of play; the old and the new society fraternizing to the sound of gold.

The saloons of the Casino are as readily opened to strangers as those of the Prince are difficult of access.

I turn to the first.

A noise of money, continuous as that of the waves, a noise at once deep, light, and terrible, fills the ears from the moment one enters, then fills the soul, stirs the heart, troubles the mind, and bewilders thought. Everywhere this sound, this singing, crying, calling, tempting, rending sound.

Around the tables, a motley crowd of players, the scum of every continent and of every society; mixed with princes, or future kings, women of fashion, *bourgeois,* money lenders, disreputable women; a mixture unique in the world, of men of all races, of all castes, of all kinds, of every origin; a perfect museum of adventurers from Russia, Brazil, Chili, Italy, Spain, Germany; of old women with reticules, of disreputable young ones carrying little bags containing keys, a handkerchief, and the last three five-franc pieces which are kept for the green cloth, when the vein of luck shall chance to return.

I approached the first table, and saw a pale face, with lined forehead and hard-set lip; features convulsed, with an expression of evil — the young woman of Agay Bay, the beautiful sweetheart of the sunny wood, and the moonlit bay. He, too, is there, seated before her, his hand resting on a few napoleons. “Play on the first square,” said she.

He inquired anxiously:

“All?”

“Yes, all.”

He placed the coins in a little heap.

The croupier turned the wheel. The ball ran, danced, and stopped.

“Rien ne va plus”— “Nothing further counts,” jerks forth the voice, which resumes after a moment: “Twenty-eight.”

The young woman started, and in a hard, sharp tone said:

“Come away.”

He rose, and without looking at her, followed her; and one felt that some dreadful thing had sprung up between them.

Some one remarked:

“Good-bye to love. They don’t look as if they were of one mind to-day.”

A hand taps me on the shoulder. I turn round. It is my friend.

* * * * * * *

I have only now to ask pardon for having thus tier passed on my reader by talking so much of myself. I had written this journal of day-dreams entirely for myself, or rather, I had taken advantage of my floating solitude to capture the wandering ideas which are wont to traverse our minds, like birds on the wing.

But I am asked to publish these few pages, which, unconnected, deficient in composition and in art follow one after the other without a reason, and abruptly conclude without a motive; simply because a squall of wind put an end to my voyage.

I have yielded to this request. Perhaps I am wrong.

LA VIE ERRANTE

OR, IN VAGABONDIA

Translated by M. Walter Dunne

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CHAPTER I. WEARINESS

I LEFT Paris and France also, because, for one thing, I was weary to death of the Eiffel Tower,, Not only could I see it from every direction, but I found it everywhere, copied in all kinds of known materials, exhibited in every show-window, a perpetual racking nightmare.

It was not the tower alone that gave me that irresistible longing to live alone for a while, but all that went on around it, inside and above it, in fact, everything in its vicinity.

How dare the newspapers call it a new style of architecture, when speaking of this metallic shell? For architecture, the least understood, the most neglected, of all the arts to-day, is perhaps the most aesthetic, the most mysterious, and the most prolific in ideas.

It has had, throughout the centuries, the privilege of symbolizing each era, as it were, of summing up by a very few typical monuments, the manner of thought, the feelings, and dreams of different races of varied civilizations.

A few temples and churches, a few palaces and castles, comprise throughout the world the whole history of architecture, conveying to our eyes better than books the harmony of lines and the charm of design, with all the grace and grandeur belonging to a certain epoch.

I often wonder what will be thought of our generation, if some unheard-of process of nature does not tumble down before long this high and slender pyramid of iron ladders, this unsightly giant skeleton, whose base seems built to support an enormous cyclopean monument, and ends in a ridiculously slight profile of something that looks like the stack of a factory.

This tower is the solving of a problem, we are told. Even so, but science has not benefited by it in any way, and I prefer, to this childish attempt at rebuilding the Tower of Babel, the one that was made in the twelfth century, by the architects of the Tower of Pisa.

The idea of building that delightful tower, with its eight stories of marble columns, leaning over as if about to fall, proving to an astonished posterity that the center of gravity is, after all, a useless prejudice of engineers, and that monuments, and superb ones, too, can do without it. This, and the fact that after seven centuries it draws more visitors than the Eiffel Tower in seven months, certainly constitutes a problem, — since we all admit there is one, — but a problem more original in its conception than that of this huge piece of ironwork, daubed with the hues of the rainbow, which is evidently intended to appeal to any but artistic eyes.

I know it has been said that the Tower of Pisa has gradually come to lean over of itself. Who knows? — this splendid monument keeps well its secret, which is continually discussed but can never be proved.

What matters to me, after all, this tower of Eiffel? It was only the beacon of an International Kirmess, as it was called, the memory of which will always haunt me as a nightmare, the horrible sight to a disgusted man of a human crowd disporting itself.

I do not mean to criticise this colossal political enterprise, The Universal Exposition, which proved to the world, at a time when it was necessary to do so, the strength and vitality, the activity and inexhaustible wealth, of this wonderful country, France.

We gave much pleasure, much entertainment, and we set an example to all nations and peoples. They enjoyed it all to their heart's content — we did well, and so they did well.

I found, though, on the very first day, that these amusements did not appeal to me. After inspecting, with profound admiration, the machinery and noting the fantastic discoveries of science and mechanism, of physiology and modern chemistry, on finding that the *danse du ventre* and other Arabian dances have really no charm or character except in the *ksours,* the white tents of Algeria, I concluded that to come here now and then would be very fatiguing, but somewhat entertaining, and one could rest from it all, at home or at one's friends.

But I had not dreamed of what would become of Paris, invaded by the universe. At daybreak, the streets were filled with people, the sidewalks overcrowded. They were all coming from the Exposition, or returning to it. On the roads, the carriages were so close to one another that they resembled an end less train. Not one was empty; no cabman would consent to take a fare anywhere but to the Exposition. No cabs were to be had at the Club, they were all engaged by strangers; not a table could be secured in restaurants, not a friend dined at home, nor was there one who would consent to dine at your home. If he accepted your invitation, it was on condition that you take him to the Eiffel Tower — it was more fun. And everyone by general consent invited their friends there every day of the week, either to lunch or to dine.

In all that heat, that dust, that offensive odor, in that crowd of common people, merry and perspiring, in the midst of greasy papers flying about, with the smell of cooking meat and spilled wine, with the breath of three hundred thousand persons around you, with the elbowing, the jostling, the entangling of all this overheated mass of human beings, I could understand how one could come and eat here, once or twice, disgusted, but curious to see and taste the cookery of these aerial eating-houses; but what seemed incredible to me was, that anyone could dine here every night in that foul crowd, as did many persons in good society, those fastidious ones who are considered the *élite,* the dainty creatures who are so easily nauseated when confronted with the sight of the common working classes.

This proves decidedly, however, the complete triumph of democracy. There is no caste now, no blue blood, no real aristocracy. There are the rich and the poor — no other classing can better render the degrees of modern society.

An aristocracy of another order is being established, which was unanimously recognized at the Exposition, that is, the aristocracy of science, or rather the scientific element of trade and industry.

As for the Arts, they are vanishing; the meaning of them is being forgotten by the best people of a nation, who looked on without protesting at the horrible decoration of the central dome, and those of some buildings near by.

The modern Italian taste is gaining on us, and the contagion is such that even the small space reserved for artists in that popular bazaar, which has just closed, had the appearance of advertising booths, or the booths of a country fair.

I would not protest, however, against the coming and the reign of learned scientists, if the very nature of their work and discoveries did not compel me to state that, after all, they are nothing but commercial scientists.

It is not their fault, no doubt. But it seems as if the higher flight of the human mind must be confined between two walls, which will never again be scaled: trade and barter.

At the beginning of civilization, the soul of man leaned toward the beautiful in art. It seems as if, finally, some jealous divinity had said: “I forbid you to think of these things any more, but give all your thoughts to the material side of life, and I will permit you to make endless discoveries."

It is true that, to-day, the entrancing and powerful spirit of the artistic centuries is gradually dying out, while, at the same time, great minds of an entirely different order are awakening and inventing machinery of all kinds, astonishing apparatus, mechanism which is as complicated as that of the human body, and also combining different substances which give astounding and wonderful results. All this helps either to assist man's physical needs or to annihilate him. —

Ideal conceptions, as well as purely disinterested science, those of Galileo, Newton, and Pascal, seem forbidden to us, while our imagination is easily carried away in speculating on discoveries useful to our material existence.

Does not the genius of the man, whose thought, in one bound, went from the fall of an apple to the great law that governs the world, seem born of a germ more nearly divine than that of the practical mind of the American inventor, the wonderful manufacturer of bells, speaking tubes, and lighting apparatus?

Is not this the secret vice of the modern mind, the sign of its inferiority in the midst of its triumph?

I am, perhaps, entirely at fault. However, these things, which are only of practical interest, do not appeal to us as do the thoughts of former days. For us, poor irritable slaves of dreams of delicate beauty, they haunt and spoil our lives.

I felt that it would be very pleasant to revisit Florence, and I bade farewell to France.

CHAPTER II. NIGHT

LEAVING the harbor of Cannes at three o’clock in the morning, we could still inhale the breeze wafted from the land during the night. A breath of sea-air blew our yacht with its outspread sails toward the Italian coast.

Ours is a vessel of twenty tons, painted white, with a slender strip of gold surrounding it, as a girdle might encircle the breast of a swan. Its sails of new canvas, under the rays of an August sun, throwing flames on the water, look like the silky wings of a bird against the blue sky. The jib-sails, light triangles rounded out by a breath of wind, blow about gently, and the mainsail is slack under its fifty-four-foot peak, which points upward like an arrow; the mizzen-sail, at the stern of the boat, flaps in a sleepy way.

We all doze on deck. It is the afternoon of a perfect summer day on the Mediterranean — the wind has died away. The fierce sun fills the sky and turns the sea into a soft, bluish sheet, motionless and without a ripple, asleep, as it were, under a glittering misty down.

Notwithstanding the awnings, which have been put up as a protection from the sun, the heat is so great that I am forced to go below and rest on a divan.

It is always cool here. The yacht is of deep draught; it was built for rough weather in the northern seas. A crew and passengers, six or seven people, perhaps, can live comfortably in the floating abode, and eight can sit down at dinner in the little dining-room.

The interior is finished in varnished pine, framed with teak-wood, brightened by the brasses of locks, hinges, and chandeliers, all the yellow metals that are the luxury of yachts. —

How strangely quiet everything is, after the hubbub of Paris! I hear absolutely nothing. Now and then, the sailor who sleepily watches at the helm gives a slight cough, the clock hanging on the wall ticks with a noise that sounds formidable in this silence of the heavens and the sea. And this ticking of the clock, which alone disturbs the quiet of the elements, gives me suddenly the wonderful sensation of being in endless solitude, where the sound of murmuring worlds is deadened and becomes almost imperceptible in this universal silence.

It seems as if something of the eternal calm of space came down and spread over the motionless sea on this stifling hot day. It is an oppressive, irresistible feeling that lulls and deadens like contact with infinite space. The will falters, thought stops, and sleep takes hold of both body and soul.

Night had almost come when I awoke. A twilight breeze, hardly hoped for, swept us along until the sun went down.

We were very near the coast, in sight of the city of San Remo, which we could not reach that night, however. Other small villages or towns were spread out at the foot of the high mountain, looking like bundles of clothes drying on the beach.

Night came, the mountains disappeared, and fires were lighted on the water's edge, all along the coast.

A delicious smell of cooking, coming from the interior of the yacht, mingled agreeably with the salt air.

After dinner I lay at full length on deck. This quiet day of drifting had wiped out all there was in my mind, as a sponge clears a tarnished glass; and memories crowded upon my thoughts, memories of the life I had left behind me, of well-known people, loved or otherwise.

Nothing is so conducive to all kinds of thoughts, and to giving rein to one's imagination, as to be alone at sea with the sky overhead on a hot night. I felt excited, vibrating in all my being, as if I had been drinking some rich wine, inhaling ether, or were still in the passionate embrace of a beloved one.

The night breeze, moistening the skin with a chill of rapidly cooling air, crept over me, entered my lungs, and both body and soul were at peace.

Is there any higher enjoyment for those who receive their sensations through every pore, as well as through the eyes, the mouth, the sense of smell, and that of hearing? It is a rare and much-to-be-dreaded faculty, perhaps, this highly excitable and nervous feeling that pervades certain organisms and creates emotion in the face of the simplest physical impressions, making one feel sorrowful or joyful, according to the change in temperature, or to the fragrant odors emanating from the soil, or as the day is bright or gloomy.

Not to care to enter a theater, because the contact with a crowd unnerves one in an inexplicable manner; not to like a ballroom because the fictitious gaiety and the whirling motion of the dancers irritate like an insult; to feel downhearted or happy without any perceptible cause, according to the decorations or combinations of light, and to encounter sometimes, through certain perceptions, physical pleasures which nothing can ever reveal to less delicately organized natures — is this to be deplored or otherwise? I do not know; but if the nervous system is not sensitive to a point which reaches pain or ecstasy, then it can give us only very ordinary sensations and vulgar gratifications.

This mist of the sea was like a caress, filling me with happiness. It spread over the heavens, and I watched with delight the stars enveloped in it, looking somewhat paler in the darkened sky. The coast, meanwhile, had received behind us this vapor floating over the sea, and each star appeared as if surrounded with a halo. The earth looked as if some supernatural hand had packed it in fleecy clouds, as if about to ship it to an unknown destination.

Suddenly through this snowy shadow, a sound of distant music came over the sea. I thought some serial orchestra must be hovering in space serenading me. The faint but clear sounds were wafted through the night in a murmur of operatic music.

A voice near me said: “This is Sunday, and the band is playing in the public park of San Remo.”

I heard this with astonishment, thinking I must be dreaming. I listened a long time, and with growing delight, to the strains of music carried so far through space. But suddenly, in the middle of a well-known air, the sound swelled, increased in volume, and seemed to gallop toward us. It was so strange, so weird, that I rose to listen. Without doubt it was drawing nearer and louder every second. All was coming toward me, but how — on what phantom raft would it appear? It seemed so near that I peered into the darkness excitedly, and suddenly I was bathed in a hot breeze fragrant with aromatic plants, the strong perfume of the myrtle, the mint, and the citron, with lavender and thyme scorched on the mountain by the burning sun.

It was the land breeze, overcharged with the breath of the hills, that was carrying toward the sea, intermingled with the Alpine odor, these harmonious strains of music.

I was breathless, intoxicated with delight, pulsating in every sense. I could not tell whether I were hearing music and breathing perfumes, or sleeping in the stars.

This perfumed breeze blew us out to sea, where it floated away in the night. The sounds died out gradually, as the ship moved on.

I could not sleep, and I wondered how a modern poet, of the so-called school of symbolism, would have explained the confusing, nervous vibration which I had just experienced, and which seems to me, in plain language, untranslatable. No doubt, some on those poets who take such pains to give expression to the artistic sensitiveness of thought would have come out with honor, giving in euphonious rhymes, replete with intentional sonorousness, the unintelligible though perceptible meaning of these perfumed sounds, this starry mist, and the sweet land-breeze, scattering music to the winds.

I recalled a sonnet from their patron, Baudelaire:

“Nature is a temple where living columns
Sometimes allow jumbled words to escape.
Man walks through forest of symbols
That watch him with familiar looks.
Like long-drawn echoes mingling in the distance,
In a dark and deep unity,
As vast as night, as vast as light,
Perfumes, colors, and sounds, answer each other.
There are perfumes as sweet as a child’s lips,
Sweet as a clarinet, green as the meadows,
And others, again, strong and overpowering,
Having the breadth of infinite space,
Like ambergris, musk, benzoin, and incense,
Which exalt the enraptured mind and senses.”

Had I not just felt, in my inmost soul, the meaning of this mysterious line:

“Perfumes, colors, and sounds answer each other.”

And not only do they answer each other in nature, but the answer is also given within us, and they mingle “in a dark and deep unity,” as the poet says, by the pressure of one organ against another.

This phenomenon, however, is known to medical science, and a great many articles have been written on the subject, under the title of “Colored

Hearing."

It has been proved that in certain nervous and highly-strung natures, when one sense receives a shock that affects it, the concussion spreads like the ripples of a wave to the other senses, which respond each in its own way. Thus music, with certain people, evokes colored visions; it must then be a kind of sensitive contagion, transformed according to the normal action of each nerve-center.

In this way can be explained a sonnet from Arthur Rimbaud, who declares that there are shades and colors in vowels, an article of faith which has been adopted by the school of symbolism.

Is he right or wrong? To the breaker of stones on the highway, and even in the opinion of many of our great men, this poet is either a fool or a dreamer. But, in the mind of many others, he has discovered and expressed an absolute truth, though these explorers of minute perceptions must differ in their opinion of shades and mental pictures evoked in us by the mysterious vibrations of vowels or of music.

If it is a recognized fact, according to science, — the science of to-day, — that musical sounds acting on certain organisms can give out color, if *sol* can be red, *fa,* lilac or green, why would not these identical sounds carry taste to the palate or odors to the nostrils?

Why should not fastidious though somewhat hysterical natures enjoy everything with every one of their senses at the same time, and why could not symbolists reveal a delightful sensitiveness to beings of their own kind, incurable and privileged poets that they are? This is decidedly more a question of artistic pathology than even one of true æstheticism.

Can it be, however, that some of these interesting writers, who have become neurotic through their very enthusiasm, have reached such a degree of excitability that every impression received creates in them a sort of concerted unison of all the perspective faculties?

For is not all this expressed in their strange poetry of sounds, which, although somewhat unintelligible, attempts, nevertheless, to run the whole gamut of sensations and prove by the very harmony of words, much more than by their rational union and their known significance, the existence of meanings that are obscure to us, but clear as day to them?

Artists have come to the end of their resources, there is nothing more to publish, nothing unknown in the way of emotions or figures of speech. Since the beginning of time, all the flowers of this particular field have been culled. And so, in they powerlessness to create, they feel in an infinite way that for man there may still be a broadening of the soul and of the senses. And the mind having five gates, half-open and chained, called the five senses, it is at these portals that the men who are enamored of the new art keep continually tugging with their utmost strength.

The mind, that blind and hard-working Unknown, cannot learn, understand, or discover anything except through the senses. They are its providers, the only agents between it and nature. The mind works on the materials furnished by them alone, which they themselves can gather only according to their sensitiveness, their strength, and acuteness.

The value of thought must then depend directly on the value of the organs, and its breadth is limited according to their number.

M. Taine, however, has handled and developed this idea in a masterly treatise. There are only five senses. These reveal to us, by interpreting them, certain properties of surrounding matter and an unlimited number of other phenomena that we are unable to perceive.

Let us suppose that man had been created without ears; he would exist in very much the same manner; but to him the universe would be silent; he would have no idea of noise, of music, which are both transformed vibrations.

But suppose he had been given other organs, powerful and sensitive, capable of transforming into acute perceptions the actions and attributes of all the inexplicable things that surround us, how much more varied would be the extent of our knowledge and emotions!

It is into this inscrutable domain that every artist attempts to enter, by tormenting, violating, and exhausting the mechanism of his thoughts. Those whose brains have given way, Heine, Balzac, Baudelaire, the wandering Byron, — seeking death, disconsolate at the misfortune of being a great poet, — Musset, Jules de Goncourt, and so many others besides, did they not all break down under the strain of attempting to overthrow the material barrier in which is imprisoned the human mind?

Yes, our organs are the nourishers, the masters of artistic genius. The ear begets the musician, the eye creates the painter. Every organ co-operates in helping the poet. With the novelist, the sense of vision usually predominates. It predominates to such an extent that it becomes easy to detect, on reading a sincere and well-written novel, the physical qualities and attributes of the author’s glance. The magnifying of details, giving their importance or their insignificance, whether they encroach on the general scheme or not, — all these illustrate, in a decided manner, the degree and difference of short-sightedness. The proportion of the lines, the perspective offered to the most minute observation, the fact of neglecting to point out some slight information which very often would be the clue to the characteristics of a person or a locality, — do not these indicate the farseeing though careless glance of the passer-by?

CHAPTER III. THE ITALIAN COAST

THE sky is overcast — day is breaking through the mists of the night, which spread like a wall, thicker in some places, almost white in others, between dawn and us.

We fear, vaguely, with a tightening of the heart, that the fog may remain throughout the day, obscuring the glorious light, and our eyes look up in anguish in a sort of silent prayer. But at times we can see, by the clear spaces which now and then divide the mass, that the sun is shining above these mists, illuminating their snowy surface and the blue sky. We wait and hope.

By degrees they lighten and become thinner, appearing to fade gradually away. One feels that the sun is burning them, crushing them in its ardor; that the immense ceiling of clouds is too weak to resist, and that it must break and part under the great weight of the glaring light.

A faint glimmer is seen in the sky, then there is a gap, through which glistens a ray of sunshine, in a long, slanting line, spreading as it falls. It seems as if fire would break out in this parting of the heavens — it is a mouth that opens, widens, and throw’s out flames through burned lips, scattering a cascade of golden light on the waves. Then, in a great many places at once, the shadowy arch breaks and falls away, a hundred arrows of brilliant light rain down on the water, scattering over the horizon the joyousness of the radiant sun.

The air has freshened through the night; a ripple of wind caresses the sea, and the blue, silky surface quivers under its touch.

Before us, on a high rocky peak, which seems to rise out of the sea and lean upon the hills, nestles a little town, painted rose color by the hand of man, as the horizon is by the victorious dawn. A few blue houses, here and there, give variety to the scene. One would think it the abode of a princess out of the “Arabian Nights.” It is Port Maurice.

When one gets so fine a view of it, one should never land — I did so, however. I found everything in ruins, the houses crumbling on each side of the streets. A part of the city which has fallen down — probably during an earthquake — shows from the top to the bottom of the hill a row of roofless and dismantled dwellings, old houses of plaster, through which the wind blows. And the rose tint, so pretty from a distance where it harmonized with the rising sun, on nearer view shows a fearfully faded conglomeration of colors, stained by the sun and washed out by the rain.

All along the winding streets, filled with dust and stones, a nameless, indescribable odor floats, so powerful and penetrating that I hurried back to the yacht, disgusted and disappointed. Yet this city is the chief town of one of the provinces. It stands out at the entrance to this Italian country like a flag of distress.

Facing it, on the other side of the gulf, is Oneglia, also a foul, ill-smelling town, though somewhat less poor and more lively, if one may judge by the look of the place.

Under the gateway leading to the Royal College, which stands wide open during the vacation, an old woman sits mending a dirty mattress.

We enter the harbor of Savona.

A large group of manufactories or foundries, whose chimneys are fed every day by the coal brought here by four or five English steamers, emit through their giant openings volumes of winding smoke that fall back on the city in a shower of soot, blown here and there by the wind, like a black snow-fall.

Never go into that harbor, sailors of small sailing vessels, if you wish to keep your pretty white sails clean!

Notwithstanding this, Savona is charming, a typical Italian town; its narrow streets are full of bustling merchants, with fruit spread on the ground, ripe red tomatoes, black or yellow grapes, transparent as if filled with light; green lettuce cleansed in a hurry, the leaves of which spread about in abundance — all this vegetation makes the place look as if the gardens had invaded the town.

After returning to the yacht, I saw along the wharf, on an immense table which filled the deck of a Neapolitan boat, a startling sight — at first glance it looked like a murderers' banquet. On seeing a crimson color spreading over the boat, my first impression was that the sailors were having a feast of raw flesh, torn in pieces, but on looking more attentively, I found that this banquet was composed of about a hundred halves of blood-red watermelons. It looked as if these men were burying their teeth in raw flesh, as do wild animals in captivity when being fed. They were holding a festival — several sailors of neighboring craft had been invited — and all were enjoying themselves. The caps these men wore were less sanguine than the flesh of this juicy fruit.

When night came, I went back to the town. The sound of music attracted me to its far end, and I found an avenue where groups of people were walking leisurely toward the evening concert, given two or three times a week by the municipal band. In this musical country, these orchestras equal, even in the small towns, those of our best theaters. I recalled the one I had heard on the deck of my yacht one night, the memory of which remained as one of the sweetest sensations I had ever experienced.

This avenue ended in a square almost on the beach, and there, scarcely lighted by the yellowish gas-jets here and there, the orchestra discoursed music to an attentive audience.

The sound of the waves could be heard in a regular and monotonous rhythm, mingling with the lively strains of music; and the sky, of a glassy purplish tint, was filled with a golden dust of stars as night crept over us. Its transparent darkness fell over this silent crowd, few of whom ever whispered, as they walked around the inclosure where the musicians played or sat on benches surrounding them, or on large stones here and there on the beach, some even on large beams, piled up near the high wooden framework of a ship in course of construction.

I do not know whether the women of Savona are pretty, but I do know that they are charming, as they go about bareheaded at night, each carrying a fan. It was fascinating, this silent beating of imprisoned wings, these white or black or spotted wings, and they looked like fluttering moths held between the fingers. As I met each woman, in every group walking or resting, I found this waving of fans, and there was something so coquettish and truly feminine about it that it appealed strongly to a man’s nature. And, behold! in the midst of the palpitating fans and uncovered heads all about me, I began to fancy myself in fairyland, as I used to do when a mere boy at boarding-school, in the cold dormitory at night, when before dropping off to sleep, I lived again as the hero of forbidden stories under cover of a desk. Sometimes, deep in my old, incredulous heart, memories come to me of the simple innocence of my Youth.

One of the most beautiful sights in this world is Genoa, seen from the sea. At the head of a bay the city rises as if out of water. Around the hills, rounded out on each side as if to inclose and protect it, there are fifteen small towns, whose bright little houses are reflected in the water. To the left are Cogoleto, Arenzano, Voltri, Pra, Pegli, Sestri-Ponente, San Pier d'Arena, and to the right Sturlo, Quarto, Quinto, Nervi, Bogliasco, Sori, Recco, and Camogli, the last white spot on the Cape of Porto-Fino, which closes the gulf on the southeast.

Genoa rises above her immense harbor on the first hill of the Alps, which stand out behind it like a giant wall. On the jetty is a small, square tower, a light-house, called "The Lantern," which looks like an exaggerated candle.

We pass into the outer port, an enormous basin well sheltered, where innumerable tugboats go about seeking trade; then, after rounding the eastern pier, we enter the port itself, where there is a crowd of ships, those ships of the south and the east, with their delightful coloring, the triangular, one-masted ships, painted and rigged in the most fantastic manner, carrying on their prows blue or gilt madonnas, or even strange-looking animals, which are regarded as talismans.

This fleet, with its figureheads, is lined up along the wharves, their sharp and uneven bows turned toward the center of the basin. Then, further on, are the powerful iron steamers, narrow and high, with colossal outlines. There are also, in the midst of these pilgrims of the sea, brigs and three-masted ships, clothed in white, like the Arabs, on whose shining dress the sunlight appears to glitter.

If there is nothing prettier than the entrance to the port of Genoa, then there is nothing uglier than the entrance to the city. The wharf is a swamp of rubbish, and the narrow streets are inclosed like corridors between two winding rows of very tall houses, from which emanate pestilential and sickening odors. One feels in Genoa as in Florence, and still more so in Venice, that these once aristocratic cities have fallen into the hands of the people.

We are reminded of fierce barons fighting or bartering at sea, who, with money brought home from their conquests — either by capture or by trade — have built those astonishing marble palaces which still line the principal streets. When we enter these magnificent residences, odiously daubed by the descendants of the haughtiest of all republics, when we compare the style, the courts, the gardens, the porticos, the interior galleries, and all the decorative and gorgeous appointments, with the barbaric wealth of the finest mansions of modern Paris, with the palaces of millionaires who only know how to handle money, who are powerless to conceive, to wish for, or to create a new thought with their gold, — we understand, then, that the real supremacy of the intelligence, the meaning of the rare beauty of forms, the perfection of proportions and lines, have disappeared from our democratic society, composed now of rich financiers without taste and parvenus without traditions.

It ‘s really an interesting thing to observe this hackneyed way of building modern hotels. On entering the old palaces of Genoa, you will see a series of galleried and colonnaded courts, marble staircases of marvelous beauty, each one designed and executed by a true artist, for men of cultivated taste.

On entering the old chateaux of France, you will notice the same tendency toward a new and original ornamentation. But, again, on entering any one of the wealthiest homes of Paris at the present time, you will admire curious ancient articles, carefully catalogued, labeled, and exhibited in glass cases, according to their known value, vouched for by experts, but not once will you see any new or original idea in any part of the building itself.

The architect is told to build a fine house, to cost several millions, five or ten per cent, of which is his commission, according to the amount of artistic work he puts upon it.

The upholsterer, for a given remuneration, takes charge of the decoration of the interior. As these men realize the lack of artistic knowledge in their clients, they do not venture to propose anything original or unknown, and so they repeat the same designs.

After you have visited these ancient palaces of Genoa, after you have admired a few paintings, especially three masterpieces of Van Dyck, there is nothing more to see, except the Campo-Santo, which is a modern cemetery, an extraordinary museum of funeral sculpture, the most ridiculous and comical place in the world. Along the four sides of an immense gallery, in a giant cloister, opening on a yard paved with the flat white gravestones of the poor, we file past a series of statues of tradesmen mourning their dead.

What an extraordinary idea! The chiseling of the figures shows a remarkable talent, and proves that they are the work of artists. The material of the robes, of the waistcoats, and trousers is depicted in a most realistic manner. I saw a figure wearing a *moiré* silk gown, the carving of which made the material almost indistinguishable from the real article, and, in my opinion, nothing can be so irresistibly grotesque, so trivial and common, as these figures mourning some beloved one.

Who is to blame for this? Is it the sculptor, who can see in his models only the commonplace physiognomy of the modern tradesman, who cannot discover that divine spark in human beings, which Flemish artists expressed so well when depicting even the most ordinary and sometimes the ugliest types of their race? Or is the tradesman himself to blame, — this man whom the low democratic civilization has tossed about like a pebble on a beach, wearing away his distinctive characteristics, making him lose, in this constant friction, the last marks which remained of the originality with which all social classes were endowed by nature.

The Genoese are very proud of this extraordinary museum, which upsets our idea of the artistic fitness of things.

From the port of Genoa to the point of Porto-Fino is a series of towns, a scattering of houses on the beach, between the bright blue of the sea and the brilliant green of the mountain. A breeze from the southeast compels us to tack. It is a light breeze, but it blows in gusts that make the yacht keel over on its side, then dart swiftly forward, leaving behind on both sides two white streaks of foam. Then the wind goes down, the boat rights itself and continues on its quiet way, toward the shore or away from it, according to the direction of the wind.

About two o'clock the captain sweeps the horizon with his glass to make out, according to the quantity of sails and the tacking of either vessel, the direction and strength of the wind, which in these parts sweeps with great suddenness across the water, or comes in gentle zephyrs, as capricious as the moods of a pretty woman.

"We must take in sail, sir," he says, "the two schooners ahead of us have just hauled down their topsails; a stiff gale is coming."

The order was given, and the inflated canvas slid down from the top of the mast, flapping limply and palpitating somewhat, as if conscious of the coming storm.

There were no waves, just a few ripples here and there; but suddenly in the distance I saw the water was quite white, as if a sheet were spread over it. And it was coming toward us, growing nearer every second, hastening along rapidly, and when this foamy patch was only a few yards away from us the sails of the yacht were struck by a furious wind that tore over the sea, scattering the flying spray, which resembled fine feathers plucked from the breast of a goose.

All this foam, torn from the water, flew about, dispersing under the invisible whistling attack of the wind, and with our vessel lying over on its side, with our lee gunwale under water, the deck washed by the surging waves, and the weather shrouds drawn taut, with masts and spars creaking, we rushed along at a mad, reckless pace. It is a unique sensation, this excitement of holding between your hands, with muscles strained from head to foot, the iron bar that guides through the storm this wild animal made of wood and canvas.

The fury of the gale lasted only about three quarters of an hour; and then suddenly, as the Mediterranean resumed its beautiful blue tint, the atmosphere became quiet, as if the sky's ill humor had passed away. The storm had spent itself in a paroxysm of rage; it was the end of an ugly morning, and the sun's joyous laugh again spread over the earth.

As we neared the cape, I saw at its far end, at the foot of a steep rock, a church and three houses. Who can possibly live here? I thought. What can these people do? How can they communicate with the outer world, except through one of the little canoes pulled up on the beach.

After clearing the cape, the line of the coast is uninterrupted until Porto-Venera is reached, at the entrance of the Gulf of Spezzia; all this part of the shore is captivating.

In a wide, deep bay, opening before us, we get a glimpse of Santa-Margherita, then Rapallo, Chiavari, and further away Sestri-Levante.

The yacht, having tacked about, glided along only two cable lengths from the rocks, and at the end of the cape, which we had almost rounded, we discovered suddenly a gorge where the sea enters, a gorge hidden away, barely seen, filled with pine, olive, and chestnut-trees. The tiny village of Porto-Fino spreads out in a half-circle around this quiet haven.

We sailed slowly through the narrow strait which joins this delightful, natural harbor to the sea, and entered the amphitheater of houses, crowned by a forest of brilliant green, both being reflected in the quiet, round mirror where a few fishing-smacks lie apparently idle.

One of them draws near, and in it is seated an old man. He bows and welcomes us, points out where we may anchor, takes hold of our cable to moor us to the land, returns to offer his services, his advice, in fact, does the honors of this little fishing hamlet. He is the harbor-master.

I never, perhaps, experienced a pleasanter sensation than that of entering this delightfully green creek; I had a feeling of rest, soothing to the nerves, the ceasing of the vain struggle of life's battles; and it was more delightful still to hear the noise of the falling anchor, announcing that here we were to remain for some time.

For eight days now I have been rowing. The yacht is moored in the midst of this quiet stream, and I go about in my canoe along the coast, in grottoes where the sea moans in invisible gaps, around small islands which it kisses continually as it rises, and over rocks wholly submerged with water or covered with seaweeds. I love to see floating under water, waving in the barely perceptible motion of the waves, those aquatic red and green weeds, where are entangled and hidden immense families of fish yet to be hatched. They are like silver needle-points, alive and swimming.

On looking at the rocks on the bank, I see groups of naked boys whose bodies are browned by the sea, starting in surprise at sight of an intruder. They are there in large numbers; they might also be the offspring of the sea, a tribe of young tritons born yesterday, frolicking and climbing up the rocks of granite, as if to inhale the air. They are to be seen everywhere, hidden in crevices, standing on the edge of promontories, where their frail, graceful little forms look like bronze statuettes, outlined against the Italian sky. Others, seated, with legs swinging, are resting between dips.

We left Porto-Fino to spend a little time in Santa-Margherita. This is not a seaport, but it lies deep in a gulf, somewhat sheltered by a mole.

The land here is so attractive that it almost makes one forget the sea. The town is protected by a deep angle formed by two mountains — a valley leading to Genoa divides them. On those hills innumerable little paths, running between two stone walls, about three feet high, cross and recross, go up and down; they are narrow, full of stones, deep as ravines sometimes, and again climbing like a stairway. These paths divide countless gardens of olive and fig-trees, garlanded with red vines. Through the foliage of the climbing vines in the trees, we can descry the blue sea, the red capes, the white villages, the green pines on the hills, and the tall, gray summits of stone. We saw here and there, sitting before their houses, peasant women making lace. In all this country we seldom pass a doorway where there are not two or three of these women employed in this hereditary work, handling, with their delicate fingers, numerous white or black threads, from which dangle, with a continual hop and skip, little bits of yellowish wool. These women are often pretty, tall, and graceful, but they are careless in dress, and show no coquetry whatever. A great many still reveal traces of their Oriental ancestry.

One day, in the street of a hamlet, one of them passed near me, giving me an impression of such exquisite beauty as I have never seen anywhere. Under a heavy coil of dark hair which fell over her eyes, and which had been put up evidently with hurried carelessness, were the oval, brown features of an Oriental, the features of the daughters of her ancestors, the Moors, whose graceful carriage she still retained; but the Florentine sun had tinted her skin with gold. Her eyes — such eyes! — were very large, and of the deepest black, and she looked at me from under the longest and thickest eyelashes I ever have seen. The skin around her eyes was so strangely dark that if I had not seen her in the glare of day I should have been inclined to think that she had had recourse to art.

When we meet such lovely creatures in tatters, why cannot we carry them away with us, if only to adorn them, to tell them how beautiful they are, and just lie at their feet admiring them! What if they do not understand the mystery of our enthusiasm, if they are unresponsive, like all idols, bewitching, made only to be worshiped by frenzied beings, trying to find words worthy of expressing praise of their beauty!

However, if I could choose between the most beautiful of living beings, and that of the famous picture of a woman painted by Titian, which I was to see a week later in the great Hall of the Council, I would take Titian’s reclining woman.

Florence, the city where of all places I should have loved to live in bygone days, — which has for eye and my heart an unspeakable charm, — still attracts me in a sensual way by that painting of Titian, which is a wonderful dream of carnal attraction. When I think of this city, so full of marvels, from which one returns at the end of the day weary like a sportsman after a long hunt, suddenly, like a glorious light illuminating my thoughts, this woman, lying on the long canvas, appears to me a vivid reality in her golden-haired, nude beauty.

And, after all this conjuring of all the powerful seduction of the human body, the thought of the sweet and pure Madonnas rises in my mind, those of Raphael first, the “Madonna of the Goldfinch,” the “Madonna Granduca,” the “Madonna of the Chair,” and others besides, those of minor artists, with their simple features, their pale hair, idealized and mystical, and those other Madonnas of grosser artists, represented in blooming health.

When going about, not only in this unique city, but in all this part of Tuscany, where the men of the Renaissance have scattered masterpieces of art with such a free hand, we wonder at the glorious and fruitful minds, intoxicated with beauty, madly productive, of these generations trembling in artistic delirium. In the churches of the small towns, where we go in search of objects not noticed by the common traveler, we discover in some walls, or deep in the sanctuaries, priceless paintings of these unpretending masters, who did not sell their canvases in the yet unexplored America, but went about poverty-stricken without hope of a fortune, working for art's sake, like true workmen.

And this race, which never faltered, has left nothing inferior. The same ray of undying beauty appeared from the brush of painters, from the chisel of sculptors, and was magnified in lines of stone on the face of monuments. Their churches and chapels are filled with sculptures of Lucca della Robbia, Donatello, and Michelangelo; their bronze portals are by Bonannus or John of Bologna.

On reaching the Piazza Della Signoria, facing the Loggia dei Lanzi, we perceived, grouped together under the same portico, the "Rape of the Sabines," and "Hercules Wrestling with the Centaur"; "Nessus," by John of Bologna; "Perseus with the Head of Medusa," by Benvenuto Cellini; "Judith and Holofernes," by Donatello. It sheltered also, only a few years ago, the "David" of Michelangelo.

But the more you are intoxicated the more you are overcome by the seductive charms of a trip through this land of masterpieces, the more do you feel strange uneasiness mingling with the joy of seeing. It comes from the amazing contrast of the modern commonplace throng, so ignorant of what it is viewing and of the places it inhabits. We perceive that the dainty, haughty, and refined feelings of the old nations that have disappeared are not to be found under headgears of soft, brown felt, in the indifferent eyes of this matter-of-fact population.

On returning to the coast, I stopped at Pisa, to see once more the Duomo, Who can explain the impressive and melancholy charm of some of these dead towns? Pisa is one of them. No sooner have you entered it than you feel an irresistible languor, a powerless desire to run away, at the same time wishing to stay, a listless longing to go, and still remain to enjoy forever the mournful sweetness of its atmosphere, its sky, its streets and houses, in which live the most quiet, the most mournful and silent of people. Life seems to have left it when the sea receded, destroying the once powerful seaport, and in its place now grows a forest between the shore and the city. The river Arno glides through it, with its yellowish waves undulating gently between high walls supporting the two principal promenades, where are rows of yellowish houses, some hotels, and a few unassuming palaces. On the wharf itself, where alone it breaks the sinuous curve of the river, the little chapel of Santa-Maria della Spina, which belongs to the French architecture of the thirteenth century, shows just above the water its wrought-iron profile.

Through the Via Santa-Maria one reaches the Duomo, or Cathedral.

For those men who can still feel the beauty and mystical power of monuments, assuredly nothing is more surprising and thrilling than this vast grassy square, hemmed in by high bulwarks, inclosing in their totally different attitudes the Duomo, the Campo Santo, the Baptistry, and the Leaning Tower.

When we reach the edge of this deserted and wild field, surrounded by old walls, suddenly before our eyes rise these enormous buildings of marble extraordinary in profile, in color, in harmonious and stately grace. We are amazed and overcome with admiration before the rarest and grandest sight that human art can offer to our gaze.

The Duomo holds our attention by its inexpressible harmony, the irresistible power of its proportions, and the grandeur of its *façade.* It is a basilica of the eleventh century, built in Tuscan style in white marble, with black and colored inlaid work. We do not experience, on seeing this all-perfect piece of architecture of the Roman-Italian order, the same awe that we feel in the presence of certain Gothic cathedrals, with their daring height, the charm of their graceful towers and belfries, and all the stone lace-work in which they are enveloped. But we remain entranced with the irreproachable proportions, the beauty of the lines, of the forms, of the decorations of the *façade* below, of the pilasters joined by arcades above, of four galleries of columns, each row growing smaller, so that the attraction of the monument reminds you of a beautiful poem.

It is useless to describe these things; one must see them, and see them under this classical sky, of a peculiar blue, where the clouds, rolling about in silver masses, seemed copied from the paintings of Tuscan artists. For these old artists were realists, after all, imbued with the Italian atmosphere;

and those that have imitated them under another sky are only art-counterfeiters.

Behind the Cathedral, the Tower, forever leaning over as if about to fall, gives one an uncomfortable feeling, upsetting our sense of equilibrium; and facing it is the Baptistry, which, with its tall conical cupola, stands before the door of the Campo Santo.

And in this ancient cemetery, whose frescoes are paintings of the greatest interest, stretches out a delightful cloister, with a subtle and gloomy charm, in the midst of which two lime-trees hide under their greenery such a quantity of dead wood that the wind rattles it with a strange sound of dead bones.

The days go by — summer is drawing to an end. I wish to see a far-away country, where other men have left memories, less vivid perhaps, but memories that will also be eternal. These people, indeed, are the ones that have endowed their country with a Universal Exposition that will always be visited in the centuries to come.

CHAPTER IV. SICILY

THE French are under the impression that Sicily is a wild country, difficult of access, and even dangerous to explore. Now and then some traveler, who is thought very daring, ventures as far as Palermo, and returns with the information that it is a very interesting town. But what makes Palermo and all Sicily so interesting? No one can explain. To tell the truth, this is only a question of custom. This island, a jewel of the Mediterranean, is not on the list of those countries usually visited by tourists, which it is considered in good taste to know. It is not, like Italy, part of the education of a well-bred man.

From two special points of view, however, Sicily should attract travelers, because its natural and artistic beauties are as singular as they are wonderful. We know how fruitful and full of life is this land, which was called the granary of Italy, and which nations invaded and mastered one after the other — so strong was their desire to possess it; which was the cause of so many men fighting and dying for her sake, as they would for a beautiful woman ardently desired. Like Spain, it is the country of oranges, whose fragrance fills the air in springtime. And every night it kindles, high above the sea the monster lantern of Etna, the largest volcano in Europe. But what constitutes, above all, a land unique and most interesting in this world, is that it is, from one end to the other, a strange and divine museum of architecture.

In this country, still artistic, architecture is dead, in the sense that it seems lost, the gift of creating beautiful things with stone, the mysterious secret of the attraction of lines, the sense of charm in movements. We seem not to understand any more than even the simple proportions of a wall can convey to the mind the same artistic delight, the same deep and secret rapture, that one feels in the presence of a masterpiece of Rembrandt, of Velasquez, or of Paul Veronese.

Sicily had the good fortune to be occupied by prolific nations, who came now from the north and now from the south and covered its territory with works of infinite variety, where mingle, in an unexpected and charming manner, the most contrary influences. From this has sprung a special art, unknown elsewhere, where the influence of the Arab is felt, in the midst of

Greek and even Egyptian memories, where the harshness of the Gothic style brought here by the Normans is tempered by the wonderful art of Byzantine ornamentation and decoration.

And it is a delightful pastime to look for the special marks of each school, in these exquisite monuments, to discriminate between the detail from Egypt, like the lanceolated ogives, brought by the Arabs, the vaults in high relief or rather pendentive, resembling the stalactites of marine grottoes, and that of the genuine Byzantine ornament, or the beautiful Gothic friezes, which awaken the memory of the tall cathedrals of colder countries, or the churches built by Norman kings.

After seeing these monuments, which, though belonging to different periods and being of different origin, still have the same character, the same nature, one can say that they are neither Gothic, nor Arabic, nor Byzantine, but Sicilian; one can assert that there is a Sicilian art and style, forever recognizable, which is assuredly the most delightful, the most varied, more highly colored and full of conceptions, than all the other styles of architecture. It is also in Sicily that the most magnificent and complete examples of ancient Greek architecture can be found, in the midst of scenery of peerless beauty.

It is an easy passage from Naples to Palermo. One is astonished, on leaving the boat, at the activity and life of this city of two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, which is filled with shops, and although it is less animated than Naples it is still quite as lively. One is attracted, at first, by the carts. These are little square boxes perched on yellow wheels, decorated with crude and odd paintings, representing historical facts, adventures of all kinds, contests, and even the meetings of sovereigns, but especially the battles of Napoleon the First and those of the Crusaders. A peculiarly shaped piece of wood and iron secures the body of the cart to the axle; and the spokes of the wheels are also fretwork. The animal that draws it wears an ornament on his head, and another in the middle of the back, and is harnessed with coquettish, colored leather straps, decorated with red wood and tiny bells. These painted carts passing through the streets, so queer and all unlike each other, are attractive to the eye, as they stroll about, looking like puzzles we try to solve.

The appearance of Palermo is peculiar. The town, lying in the midst of a vast circle of bare-looking mountains of a grayish blue, tinted here and there with red, is divided into four parts by two long, straight streets, forming a cross in the middle. From this crossroad, we see, on three sides, the mountain at the end of the immense corridors of houses, and on the fourth the sea, a deep blue spot, which appears to be quite close, as if the town had tumbled into it!

I was haunted, on the day of my arrival, by a wish to see the Chapel Palatine, which I had been told was a marvel of marvels. This chapel, the most beautiful in the world, the most surprising religious jewel ever evolved by the human mind and executed by the hand of an artist, is inclosed within the heavy edifice of the Palais-Royal, an ancient fortress built by the Normans.

This chapel has no exterior. As we enter the palace we are immediately struck with the beauty of the interior court, which is surrounded by columns. A beautiful winding staircase gives a perspective of a startling, because unexpected, effect. Facing the entrance door, another door, cut through the wall of the palace, opens suddenly on a deep and narrow horizon, revealing an endless expanse of country and boundless vistas, which greet the eye through this arched gap, and carry it away with irresistible force toward the blue crest of the hills in the distance, above an immense orange grove.

On entering the chapel, we are overcome with awe on beholding a most surprising sight, whose potency is felt before it is thoroughly understood. The calm beauty and attractiveness of this little chapel, which is positively the most wonderful masterpiece of its kind, causes one to stand entranced before these walls covered with immense mosaics on a golden background, shining with a soft light that dimly illumines the whole edifice, leading one’s mind into biblical and heavenly landscapes, where one sees, standing against a burning sky, ail those who were associated with the life of Christ.

The strong impression produced by these Sicilian monuments comes from the fact that the art of decoration is more striking at first sight than that of architecture. The harmony of the lines and of the proportions is only a frame for the blending of colors. On entering our Gothic cathedrals, we experience a stern, almost gloomy, sensation. Their grandeur is impressive; they are striking in their stateliness; but they do not captivate us. Here we are conquered, affected by that almost sensual impression which color adds to the beauty of form.

The men who conceived and executed these luminous though dim churches, must have had an entirely different idea of the religious feeling from that of the architects of German and French cathedrals; and their particular concern was that the light should enter these wondrously decorated naves in such a way that it would neither be seen nor felt, but would glide in imperceptibly, producing mysterious and delightful effects, as if the light came from the walls themselves, or from the deep golden ceiling peopled with apostles.

The Chapel Palatine, built in 1132 by King Roger II., after the Norman-Gothic style, is a small basilica with three naves. It is only one hundred feet long by forty feet wide, and is a gem, a basilica jewel. Two rows of beautiful marble columns, of different colors, lead to the cupola, where a colossal figure of Christ, surrounded by angels with outstretched wings, is looking down. The mosaic which fills the back of the lateral chapel, on the left is a striking piece of art. It represents St. John preaching in the desert. One would say it was by Puvis de Chavannes, but more highly colored, more powerful, truer, and better chosen, executed at a time of deep religious faith, by an inspired artist. The apostle is speaking to a few people; behind him is the desert, and, beyond that, a few blue mountains, whose soft outlines are lost in the mist, — those mountains so well known to all who have traveled in the Orient. Above the saint, around and behind him, is a golden and marvelous sky, where God seems to abide.

Returning to the entrance, we stop under the pulpit, a simple square of red marble, surrounded by a frieze of white marble, inlaid with small mosaics, and supported on four columns delicately chiseled. And one wonders at what taste can accomplish, the true taste of an artist with such slight materials. The effect of these churches comes, however, from the contrast of the marbles and mosaics; in this lies their chief attraction. The lower walls, which are white and are decorated with small designs in fine stone embroideries, bring out forcibly, by the very fact of their simplicity, the wealth of color in the large paintings above.

But we discover, even in that small lace-work running along the lower wall, delightful things that could be held in the hollow of the hand; for instance, two peacocks, whose beaks are intertwined, carrying a cross between them. This style of decoration is to be found in many churches in Palermo. The mosaics of the Martorana are perhaps even more remarkable in their execution than those of the Palatine Chapel; but one cannot find, in any other monument, the wonderful ensemble which makes this divine masterpiece unique.

I came back slowly to the Hotel of the Palms, which has one of the finest gardens in the city, — the gardens of tropical countries, filled with enormous and strange plants. A traveler, seated on a bench, gives me in a few words the events of the past year, and going back to the memories of by-gone years, he says, among other things: “This happened when Wagner lived here.” Astonished at this, I said: “What, here, in this hotel?”

“Why, yes, it was while here that he wrote the last notes of ‘Parsifal ‘ and corrected the proofs.”

And I am told that the illustrious German master spent a whole winter in Palermo, and that he left this town only a few months before his death. Here, as everywhere else where he ever lived, he showed his ungovernable temper and unendurable pride, while he left the impression of being the most unsociable of men. I wished to see the room occupied by this musical genius, for it seemed to me something must still remain of his strong personality — that I would perhaps find some beloved object, a favorite chair, or the table he worked at, surely some trace of his sojourn here. I saw at first just a fine hotel room. I was shown the changes he had made here and there, the couch in the middle of the room, which he covered with brilliant rugs worked in gold. Then I opened the door of a mirrored cabinet. A delicious and powerful perfume blew out, like the caress of a breeze passing over a field of roses. The owner of the place, who was my guide, said: “He kept his clothes in here, after perfuming them with essence of roses. This odor will never evaporate.” I inhaled this breath of flowers, inclosed in this piece of furniture, forgotten here, a captive; and it seemed, in truth, as if I had found something of Wagner, in this perfume which he loved — a little of his personality, of his desires, of his soul, in this mere trifle, of the secret and beloved habits which are the making of the intimate life of a man. I then went out and wandered through the town.

No one is less like a Neapolitan than a Sicilian. In the lower class, one finds a Neapolitan three-fourths jack-in-the-box. He gesticulates, bustles about, becomes excited without cause, expresses himself by gestures as well as by words, is always amiable, as if taking an interest in what concerns you; gracious through cunning as well as by nature, he always answers by pleasant words the most disagreeable things said to him. But in the Sicilian one sees a great deal of the Arab. He has his sedateness of manner, combined with the liveliness of the Italian. His native pride, his love of titles, the very nature of his pride, and even his features, make him more like a Spaniard than like an Italian. But that which gives to one setting foot in Sicily the impression of the Orient, is the peculiar voice, the nasal intonation of the street-criers. One hears everywhere this shrill note of the Arab, which seems to come down from the forehead to the throat, instead of, as in the north, rising from the chest to the mouth. And the drawling song, monotonous and soft, heard through the open door of a house as we pass by, is surely the same, as to rhythm and accent, as that sung by the rider clothed in white, who guides travelers through the endless and bare regions of the desert.

At the theater, though, the Sicilian becomes thoroughly Italianized, and it is very interesting to assist in Rome, in Naples, or Palermo, at an operatic performance. Every impression of the public is expressed as soon as felt. Excessively nervous, gifted with an ear as true as it is sensitive, loving music to distraction, the entire audience becomes a sort of vibrating animal, which feels but cannot reason. In five minutes it will applaud an actor with enthusiasm and hiss him with frenzy; it stamps with joy or with rage, and if a false note falls from the throat of the singer, a strange cry, exasperated and in a high key, bursts from every voice at the same time. When opinions differ, the hissing and cheering are deafening. Nothing is allowed to pass unnoticed by these attentive and quivering listeners, who express their feelings every moment, and sometimes, seized with sudden anger, roar as would a menagerie of wild animals. “Carmen,” just now fascinates the Sicilian people, and one hears from morning till night the famous Toreador air hummed in the streets.

The streets of Palermo are not remarkable in any way. They are wide and well-kept in the rich sections, but in the poorer ones they are like the narrow lanes, winding and tortuous, of all Oriental towns. The women, dressed in gowns of red, blue, or yellow, sit chatting before their doors, watching passers-by with their brilliant black eyes shining under a forest of dark hair.

Sometimes, in front of the building of the official lottery, which is in permanent use, like a religious service, and from which the State draws a large dividend, we witness a typical, if comical, incident. Facing this building is a Madonna in its niche, with a lantern burning at its feet. A man comes out of the office, his lottery ticket in hand, puts a sou in the sacred box that opens its little black cavity before the statue, and then makes the sign of the cross with the numbered paper he has just intrusted to the care of the Virgin, hoping that this paltry offering will bring him luck.

We stop here and there to look at photographic views of Sicily, and my eye is attracted by a strange picture representing a vault full of dead bodies, grinning skeletons, oddly clothed. I read underneath: “Cemetery of the Capuchin Friars.” What can this be? If you ask a native of Palermo, he answers with disgust: “Do not go to see that horror. It is a barbarous thing, which will soon disappear, thank goodness! However, no one has been buried there for some years now.” Only with difficulty can one obtain any precise and detailed information on the subject, such is the horror Sicilians have of these extraordinary catacombs. This is what I learned finally: The ground on which the convent of the Capuchin Friars is built possesses the peculiar property of hastening the decomposition of dead flesh, so that in a year there is nothing left on the bones but a dried, black skin, which clings to them, retaining sometimes the hair of the head and cheeks. The coffins are inclosed in small lateral vaults, each one containing eight or ten bodies, and when the year is passed the coffins are opened, from which are taken these horrible mummies, bearded and convulsed, as if howling in awful pain. Then they are hung up in one of the principal galleries, where the family can come to see them from time to time. People who wished to have their bodies preserved in this manner, asked for it before they died, and they will remain forever lined up under these dim vaults, like objects kept in museums, in consideration of a stipulated sum paid annually by the relatives. When the latter cease to pay, the bodies are buried in the usual manner.

Immediately I was possessed by a strong desire to visit this sinister collection of departed beings. At the door of a small convent of most unpretending appearance, an old Capuchin friar, clad in a brown robe, received and preceded me without a word, knowing full well what strangers come here to see. We cross a poor chapel, and we go down with slow steps a stone staircase, and, suddenly, I see before me an immense gallery, high and wide, whose walls are covered with skeletons, clothed in the strangest and most grotesque fashion. Some are hung far up, side by side, others lie on five tables of stone, one over the other, from the floor to the ceiling. A row of dead bodies is on the ground, a solid row, whose horrible heads seem about to speak. Some are overrun by a hideous vegetation, which distorts the bones and the jaws, and others again retain their hair, others a bit of mustache or a wisp of beard. Some look upward with their empty eyes, others look down; here are some that appear to grin horribly, and others that are contorted as if in pain; others again seem affrighted as if by some supernatural fear. And they are all clothed, these hideous and ridiculous dead, clothed by their families, who have had them taken from their coffins and placed in this frightful assemblage. Nearly all have some sort of black robe, the hood of which is sometimes drawn over the head. But some are dressed sumptuously; a miserable skeleton with a headdress consisting of a cap of Greek embroideries, and wrapped in a dressing-gown, like that of a man of wealth, lies on its back, as if sleeping a terrifying though comical sleep. A placard, like that a blind man carries, hangs from the neck, bearing the name and the date of death. These last give one a shiver, for they read: 1880 — 1881 — 1882. This, then, was a man eight years ago! It lived, laughed, spoke, ate, and drank, and was full of joy and hope. And now!

Before this double row of lifeless beings coffins and boxes are piled up; some are expensive coffins, in ebony, with brass ornaments and small, square glass openings. One would think they were traveling-boxes, bought in some shop by those going on the long voyage, as people used to say.

Other galleries open to the right and left, indefinitely lengthening out this subterranean cemetery. Here are the women, who are still more ridiculous than the men, for their relatives have tried to dress them coquettishly. The heads look at you, squeezed in lace and be-ribboned bonnets, seemingly white as snow, around those black faces decayed and worn away by the strange workings of the earth. The hands, resembling the roots of a tree, peep out from the sleeves of a new robe, and the stockings that inclose the bones of the leg seem empty. Sometimes the skeleton has only shoes on, great big shoes for the poor dried-up feet.

Here are the young girls, the hideous young girls, in their white garments, with a crown of metal on the forehead, signifying innocence. They look old, with their grinning faces. They are sixteen, eighteen, or twenty. It is horrible!

We then reach a gallery filled with little glass coffins. These are the children. The bones barely formed have not resisted the elements. And it is hard to make out what one really sees, such is the distorted and fearful appearance presented by these wretched little beings. But you are moved to tears, for the mothers have dressed them carefully in the last garments they wore on earth; and the parents come to see them once more, these beloved children!

In many instances a photograph hangs above the skeleton, showing the child as it looked in life, and nothing is so startling as this contrast evoked by this comparison of the two.

We cross a still darker and lower gallery, which is reserved for the poor. In a dark corner are apparently about twenty of them, hung up under a transom, through which blows the outer air in fitful gusts. They are clothed in a sort of black linen, tied at the neck and feet, and they all lean over one another. They look as if they were shivering with cold, and as if they were trying to break away, crying out “Help!” It might be the drowned crew of some ship, still buffeted about by the wind, clad in the brown and tarred oilskins worn by the sailors in a storm.

And now comes the part set aside for the priests, a long gallery of honor. At first sight, they are even worse to look at than the others, clothed in their sacred vestments — black, red, or purple. But, on nearer view, they simply excite a nervous feeling of ridicule, as they stand in the strangest and most comical attitudes. Here are some that look as if about to sing; others are in a praying position, their hands crossed and their heads raised. Some wear the biretta of an officiating priest, which, placed on the fleshless brow, now and again falls over the ear or on the nose. It is the carnival of death, rendered more ludicrous still by the gilded glory of the sacerdotal garments. Now and then, it is said, some of the heads roll to the ground, the cords of the neck having been gnawed away by the mice. Thousands of these rodents live within the human charnel house.

I was shown the remains of a man who died in 1882. A few months previous, when full of life and happy, he had come here accompanied by a friend, and had laughingly remarked: “My place will be there,” pointing out a certain spot. The friend comes here alone now, and gazes for hours at a time at the motionless skeleton standing there.

On certain feast-days, the catacombs of the Capuchin Friars are opened to the public. A drunkard once fell asleep here, and awoke in the night. He called, shrieking with fright and running about on all sides and trying to escape, but no one heard him. He was found next morning, clinging so tightly to the bar of the entrance gate that he was removed with difficulty. He had become insane. Since that day an enormous bell has hung near the doorway.

After leaving this sinister spot, I felt that I must see something pleasant, so I was driven to the Villa, whose gardens, lying in a forest of orange-trees, are filled with magnificent tropical plants.

On returning to Palermo, I saw to the left, a small town about halfway up a hill, and on the summit a ruin. This town is Monreale, and the ruin is that of Castellaccio, the last refuge of the Sicilian brigands, I was told.

Théodore de Banville wrote a treatise on French prose, which should be mastered by all who attempt to make words rhyme. One of the chapters of this very good book is entitled: “Poetical licenses,” and on turning the pages, we read: “There are none.” Thus, on reaching Sicily, we ask sometimes from idle curiosity, again with anxiety: “Where are the brigands?” and everyone answers: “There are none.” There have been none, it is true, for five or six years. Thanks to the complicity of some landed proprietors, whose interests they served as often as they plundered them, they managed to exist in the mountains of Sicily until the arrival of General Palavicini, who is still the commanding officer in Palermo. This man pursued them with such energy that the last of them disappeared in a short time. It is true that there are often attacks by armed men, and assassinations are frequent still; but these are crimes committed by lone criminals, and not by organized bands, as formerly. On the whole, Sicily is as safe a country for any traveler as England, France, Germany, or Italy, and those who are seeking adventures of the *Fra Diavolo* sort, had better look elsewhere. In truth, man is safer anywhere than in large towns. If one could count the number of travelers held up and plundered by bandits in wild countries, and those assassinated by the wandering tribes of the desert, and if we compared the accidents that happen in these places, reputed so dangerous, with those that occur in a month in London, Paris, or New York, we should find how comparatively safe these dreaded regions are. Moral: If you are looking for cut-throats, go to Paris or London, but do not come to Sicily. In this country we can go about the highways day and night without an escort and unarmed; we meet none that is not gracious to strangers, excepting, perhaps, the men employed by the post and telegraph offices. I say this, however, only for those of Catania.

About halfway up one of the mountains, which overlooks Palermo, is a little town called Monreale, famous for its ancient monuments; and in the vicinity of this place the last brigands were to be found. The practice of placing sentinels along the road that leads to it is still in force. Is this to reassure travelers or to frighten them? I do not know.

The soldiers, met at every turn in the road, remind one of the legendary sentinel of the War Minister in France. For ten years, without any known reason, a soldier was always placed on sentry duty, in the corridor leading to the Minister's apartments, with orders to keep passers-by away from the wall. Now it happened that a new Minister, of an inquisitive turn of mind, on succeeding fifty others who had passed this functionary without any inquiry whatever, asked wherefrom came this custom. No one could tell him, neither the Cabinet Minister nor any of his colleagues. But the usher, who was gifted with a good memory, probably writing his memoirs, recalled to mind that a soldier had been put there in days gone by, because the wall had been freshly painted and the Minister's wife, not having been cautioned, ruined her gown. The paint had dried, but the sentinel still remained.

And so the brigands have disappeared, but the sentinels are still to be seen on the road to Monreale. This road runs around the mountain and finally reaches the city, which is very strange, highly colored, and ill kept. The streets are in steps, and are paved with square stones. The men wear a red handkerchief bound about their heads, after the Spanish fashion.

The Cathedral, more than three hundred feet long, is in the shape of a Maltese cross, with three apses and three naves, divided by eighteen columns of Oriental granite, resting on a base of white marble and a pedestal of gray marble. The portal is truly magnificent, with gorgeous bronze doors, designed by "Bonannus, civis Pisanus."

The interior of this building displays, in the way of decorations of mosaic with gold background, the most complete, the richest, and the most startling work of the kind ever seen. These mosaics, the largest in Sicily, cover the walls entirely — a surface of 19,200 feet. It is almost impossible to imagine these immense and superb decorations, which present, through the length and breadth of the church, the mythical stories of the Old Testament, of the Messiah, and of the apostles. On a golden sky, which shows a wide horizon round the naves, we see, larger than life-size, the prophets announcing the coming of the Redeemer; then, Christ himself and those who lived in His time.

Back of the choir, an immense figure of Jesus, whose features resemble those of Francis the First, towers over the whole church, seeming to fill it entirely, so large and impressive is this strange picture.

It is to be regretted that the ceiling, which was destroyed by fire, should have been redecorated in the crudest manner. The loud tone of the colors is very displeasing.

Quite close to the Cathedral, we enter the old cloister of the Benedictines. Let these who care for cloisters go and walk through this one, and they will immediately forget all others ever seen before.

How could anyone not worship in these quiet places, closed and cool, invented, it seems, for inspiring thought, deep and true — thoughts that flow freely from the lips, as one walks with slow, measured steps under these long, melancholy arcades. How appropriate they seem for daydreams, these stone paths with small columns, inclosing a garden, which rests the eye without causing it to wander, without diverting one's attention.

The cloisters of France possess something sad in their monastic austerity, even the most attractive of them, like Saint Wandrille, in Normandy. They cause a tightening of the heart, and sadden the soul. And as for the cloister of the Chartreuse, in Verne, in the wild mountains of the Maures, it strikes a chill to the very marrow of one's bones. The wonderful cloister of Monreale, on the contrary, gives you such a charming sensation that you wish to remain in it for an indefinite time. It is very large, square, and possessed of great charm; no one that has not seen it can even understand the harmony of a colonnade. The exquisite proportions, the incredible slenderness of all these slight columns, as they stand two-by-two, each pair different, some in mosaics and others plain, — these covered with sculptures of peerless delicacy and those ornamented with a simple design in stone, which climbs up and around, like creeping ivy, — astonish, then charm one, producing that artistic delight that one feels in a perfect taste. And, like these delicate columns, the capitals also are of charming and varied designs. It is marvelous to note the admirable effect of the whole, and the perfection of every detail. One cannot view this masterpiece of artistic beauty without recalling the verses of Victor Hugo on the Greek artist who could put

“Something as beautiful as the human smile,
On the profile of the Propylæa.”

This beautiful walk is inclosed between very high and very old walls, with pointed arcades; it is now all that is left of the convent. —

Sicily is the birthplace, the true and only country, of colonnades. The interior courts of the old palaces and houses of Palermo contain some that are beautiful, which would be renowned anywhere, but particularly so in this island so rich in monuments. The small cloister of the Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, one of the oldest churches in Normandy, which is of Oriental character, though less remarkable than that of Monreale, is still superior to any in existence.

On leaving the convent, we enter the garden, whence we look down on a valley of orange blossoms. An incessant breeze arises from this perfumed forest, a breeze that enraptures alike the mind and the senses. The uncertain and poetical craving that forever haunts the soul, prowling about, maddening and unattainable, here seems on the point of being realized. This odor surrounds you, mingling the refined sensation of perfumes with the artistic joys of the mind, throws you for a few seconds into a state of thought and body that is almost happiness.

On raising my eyes toward the high mountain, towering above the town, I perceive on its summit the ruin I had noticed before. A friend, who is with me, questions the natives, who answer that this old castle was the last refuge of the Sicilian brigands. And to-day very few persons ever climb to this ancient fortress, called Castellaccio. The path, on a hill difficult of access, is barely known. But we wished to go, and one of the gentlemen of Palermo, who insists on doing the honors of his country, gives us a guide. Not being able to find one who is sure of the way, he applied without our knowledge to the chief of police, and in a short time a man of whose calling we were ignorant began the ascent of the mountain with us. But he hesitates on the way and, meeting another man, asks him to join us, another guide to guide the first one. And both inquire of the natives we encounter — of some women driving a donkey. Finally, a curé we meet advises our walking straight ahead. And we continue to climb, followed by our so-called guides. The road becomes impracticable. We must scale rocks, lifting ourselves by the strength of our arms and this lasts a long while. A burning sun meanwhile pours down on us. We finally reach the summit, where the castle is buried in a wonderful chaos of enormous gray stones, smooth or sharp-pointed, which surround it and spread far out on all sides of the walls.

The view from this height is wonderful. All round this bristling hill are deep valleys inclosed by other hills, showing toward the interior of Sicily an endless horizon of peaks and summits. Facing us is the sea; at our feet lies Palermo. The city is surrounded by that forest of orange-trees which has been called “the Shell of Gold,” and this forest of black verdure spreads like a dark stain at the foot of grayish and reddish mountains, which seem burned, consumed and gilded by the sun, so bare and yellow are they.

One of our guides has disappeared, the other follows us into the ruins. These have a wild beauty, and are quite large, and on going through them you feel that no one ever comes here. Everywhere the ground sounds hollow beneath our feet; sometimes we see the entrance to subterranean passages. The man examines them with curious eyes, and tells us that a great many brigands lived there a few years ago. This was their safest refuge, and the one most dreaded. As we are about to descend, the first guide reappears, but we decline his services, and find without any difficulty a very easy path which could even be used by women.

The Sicilians appear to have taken pleasure in exaggerating and multiplying stones of bandits to frighten strangers, and to-day travelers hesitate to land on this island, which is as quiet and as safe as Switzerland.

Here is one of the last adventures credited to these evildoers. I can guarantee the truth of it: A celebrated entomologist of Palermo, Mr. Ragusa, discovered a beetle that was often mistaken for the *Polyphylla Olivieri.* A learned German, Mr. Kraatz, knowing that it belonged to a particular species, was very anxious to possess a few specimens, and so wrote to one of his friends in Sicily, Mr di Stephani, who in his turn asked Mr. Giuseppe Miraglia to procure a few of these insects for him. But they had disappeared from that part of the coast. Just at that time Mr. Lombardo Martorana, from Trapani, sent word to Mr di Stephani that he had captured more than fifty of these *Polyphyllœ.* Mr di Stephani hastened to notify Mr. Miraglia in the following letter:

“My DEAR JOSEPH:

The *Polyphylla Oliveri,* having had wind of your murderous intentions, has taken another route and has found refuge on the coast of Trapani, where my friend Lombardo has already captured fifty of these, individuals.”

Just here the adventure takes on the tragi-comical appearance of an improbable epic. About this time the country about Trapani was being ransacked by a brigand called Lombardo. It happened that Mr. Miraglia threw his friend’s letter into the wastepaper basket, which in turn was emptied out in the street by the servant. The scavenger carried its contents out into the fields, where a peasant, seeing a lovely blue paper, barely rumpled, picked it up and put it into his pocket, partly through weariness and partly from a natural dislike to see anything wasted. Several months later this man was called to the tax-office, and this paper slipped from his pocket to the ground. A gendarme pounced upon it, gave it to the judge, who read the words: "murderous intentions," "taken another route," "refuge," "captured," "Lombardo." The peasant was imprisoned, questioned, and threatened, but he could only tell how he came by the paper. He was kept a prisoner, and strict inquiry was made into the matter. The judges published the letter; but, as the words appeared in print *Petronilla Olivieri,* instead of *Polyphylla*, the entomologists never gave it a thought. Finally, Mr di Stephani's signature was deciphered and he was haled to court. His explanations were not believed. Mr. Miraglia, who was also called, finally cleared up the mystery. The peasant, in the meantime, had been in jail three months.

So it turned out that one of the last famous brigands of Sicily was, in reality, a sort of beetle, known to men of science under the name of *Polyphylla Ragusa.*

To-day there is no danger whatever in traveling through this dreaded Sicily, in carriages, on horseback, or even on foot. All the most interesting excursions, however, can be made almost entirely by carriage. The first one to be taken is that to the temple of Segesta.

So many poets have sung the praises of Greece that each of us carries a picture of it in his mind; we all believe we know it a little, we all see it in a dream as we wish it to be. For me, Sicily has realized this dream; and when I think of that artistic country I picture to my mind tall mountains, with soft classical outlines, and on their summits those stern-looking temples, somewhat massive, perhaps, but admirably majestic, which one meets everywhere in that island.

Everyone has seen Pæstum and admired the three superb ruins scattered on this bare plain, bounded by the sea in the distance and inclosed on the other side by a large circle of bluish hills. But if the Temple of Neptune is in better condition and in purer style (so it is said) than the temples of Sicily, these are placed in such unexpected, marvelous landscapes that words cannot render the impression they make on the mind.

On leaving Palermo, we first reach the vast forest of orange-trees called the Shell of Gold; then the railway follows a beach of reddish mountains and rocks. The road finally leads toward the interior of the island, and we leave the train at the station of Alcamo-Calatafimi.

Then we go through a country that waves here and there like the swell of a motionless sea. There are no trees, but plenty of vines and cultivated fields, and the road lies through two uninterrupted rows of blossoming aloes. It looks as if, at a word, they had all grown to the same height, forming the thick and strange column sung by so many poets. We can see, as far as the eye can reach, a multitude of these warlike plants, which are thick and sharp-pointed, carrying with them, as it were, the weapons and banner of battle.

After two hours of traveling, we suddenly perceive two high mountains, joined by an easy path, shaped like a crescent, which rises between their summits, and in the middle of this crescent is the profile of a Greek temple, one of those impressive and beautiful monuments that a bygone artistic nation erected to its human gods.

We must go around one of these hills by a winding road, and then we see the temple once more, but this time we get a full view of it. Seen from here it appears as if leaning on the mountain itself, from which it is, in reality, divided by a deep ravine; but the mountain spreads behind and above it, infolds and surrounds it, as if sheltering it. It stands out distinctly, with its thirty-six Doric columns against the green draperies, which form a background for this enormous monument, standing alone in this solitary country.

One feels, on seeing this magnificent landscape, that nothing but a Greek temple could be erected here, and only here would it be in touch with its surroundings. The master decorators who have taught humanity their art have shown, especially in Sicily, what deep and refined science they brought to bear on the setting and effect of their work. This temple of Segesta was placed at the foot of the mountain by a man of genius, who appears to have been inspired as to the exact position it should occupy. It gives life to the wide landscape; it fills it with animation and makes it divinely beautiful.

On the mountain top, whose base we followed to reach the temple, we find the ruins of a theater.

When one is traveling in a country that the Greeks have inhabited or colonized, it is only necessary to find their theaters to get the finest points of view. If they set their temples just where they could show to the best advantage, where they were an ornament to the landscape, they placed their theaters, on the contrary, where the eye would be enraptured by the perspective. That of Segesta, on the crest of a mountain, is the center of an amphitheater of small mountains, whose circumference is from 150 to 200 kilometers. There are still more summits behind these, and through a wide valley facing us we behold the sea, which is a deep blue in the midst of all this green.

The day following the visit to Segesta we went to see Selinonte, an immense pile of columns that have fallen in a row, side by side, like dead soldiers, or else in a crumpled heap. The ruins of these giant temples, the greatest in Europe, fill a large plain and also cover a small hill beyond that. They follow the beach, a long beach of light-colored sand, where are moored a few fishing-smacks, without any place in sight that fishermen might inhabit. This shapeless heap of stones, however, can only be of interest to archaeologists or to poetical souls affected by the footsteps of time.

But Girgenti, the ancient Agrigentum, placed like Selinonte on the southern coast of Sicily, offers the most extraordinary collection of temples that it can be given anyone to see.

At the side of a long hill, stony, barren, and of a reddish tint, without a blade of grass or a shrub, and overlooking the sea, the beach, and the seaport, three magnificent stone temples are silhouetted from below against the blue of the southern sky. They appear to stand on air, in the midst of a grand though desolate landscape. Everything around them is lifeless. The sun has burned and destroyed the earth. Is it the sun, after all, that has bleached the soil in this manner, or the deep fire that forever burns in the veins of this volcanic island? For all about Girgenti is the peculiar country of the sulphur mines. Everything about here is sulphurous — the earth, the stones, and even the sand.

The temples, the eternal abode of the gods who are dead, remain on their wild hills, with only a distance of half a kilometer between them. First, there is the Juno Lacinienne, which contained, it is said, the famous painting of Juno by Zeuxis, who had for models the five most beautiful girls of Acragas. Then the Temple of the Concord, one of the temples of antiquity still in the best state of preservation, which was used as a church in the Middle Ages. Farther on are the ruins of the Temple of Hercules; and finally the gigantic Temple of Jupiter, praised by Polybius, and described by Diodorus. It was built in the fifth century and contains thirty-eight half-columns, eighteen feet in circumference. A man can stand erect in each fluting. seated on the roadside, which runs along the foot of this wonderful hill, we call to mind, before these admirable mementos, the most artistic of all nations. It seems as if the whole of Olympus were before us, the Olympus of Homer, and the Greek poets, the Olympus of charming, carnal gods, who were of the same clay and as passionate as we are, who impersonated, in a poetical manner, the tender love of our hearts, the dreams of our souls, and all the instincts of our senses.

Antiquity itself rears its head against this ancient sky. A powerful and strange feeling comes over us, a desire to kneel before the august remains left here by the masters of our masters.

Surely, this Sicily is, first of all, a god-like land; for if we find these last abodes of Juno, Jupiter, Mercury, or Hercules, we also meet with the most remarkable Christian churches in the world. And the memory of the cathedrals of Cefalu or Monreale, and of the Palatine Chapel, that marvel of marvels, remains even deeper and more powerful than that of the Greek monuments.

At the end of the hill of the temples of Girgenti begins a most extraordinary country, which might be the Kingdom of Satan; for if, as was formerly believed, the devil inhabited a vast subterranean region, filled with melting sulphur, where he boiled the souls of the damned, then it is assuredly in Sicily that he elected to have his mysterious abode. Sicily supplies almost the whole world with sulphur. There are thousands of mines in this island of fire.

First of all, a few kilometers from the town, we come across a strange little hillock, called Maccàluba, composed of clay and limestone and covered with small cones two or three feet high. One would think they were blisters, some anomalous malady of nature, for from them flows a warm mud, as if the soil were suppurating; and at times they hurl stones to a considerable height, roaring and throwing out foul gases. They seem to growl, these horrible leprous little volcanoes, these running sores.

We next visited the sulphur mines. As we enter the mountain, before us stretches a desolate country, a wretched soil, which appears to have been cursed and condemned by nature. The valleys, here and there, are gray, yellow, stony, and sinister, bearing the stigma of divine reprobation in their solitude and poverty. Finally we reach a few miserable, low buildings. Here are the mines. There are, it is said, more than a thousand in this part of the country.

On entering one of the inclosures, we notice at first, a singular hillock, grayish and smoky. It is a well of sulphur, erected by human hands. The sulphur extracted from the soil is black and mixed with earth, stones, etc., and becomes a kind of stiff and brittle stone. As soon as it is brought from the mines it is made into a sort of hillock, and a fire is built inside. Then this burns continuously, for weeks at a time, and melts the interior of this artificial mountain, from which the pure sulphur pours out like water, by means of a small canal. The produce thus obtained is put into vats, where it boils and becomes clear.

The mine where the extraction is made resembles all other mines. We go down a narrow staircase, of enormous and uneven steps, into wells dug in sulphur. The floors, which are one above the other, communicate by large holes, which give air to the deepest ones. We choke, as if asphyxiated by the sulphurous emanations, and the horrible steam causes the heart to beat faster and a profuse perspiration to break out.

From time to time, we meet, climbing this rough staircase, children carrying baskets. They pant and groan, these poor little urchins, under their heavy load. They are ten or twelve years old, and they go up and down these steps fifteen times in a day, receiving a copper for each downward trip. They are small, thin, and yellow, with enormous and shining eyes; they have delicate features and very brilliant teeth. This revolting and inhuman method of utilizing children is one of the most painful things to be seen.

But on another side of the island, a few hours from the coast, is such a wonderful natural phenomenon that one forgets, on beholding it, the poisoned mines where children are slaughtered. I mean the island of the Volcano, this fantastic flower of sulphur, which blooms in mid-ocean.

We leave Messina at midnight, in a wretched steamboat, where the first-class passengers cannot even find a seat on deck. There is not a breath of air; the boat alone disturbs the stillness of the night. The shores of Sicily and those of Calabra exhale such a powerful odor of blossoming orange-trees that the whole of the channel is perfumed by it. We soon leave the city behind us, and pass between Scyila and Charybdis; the mountains about us are lower, and above them appears the flat and snowy summit of Mount Etna, silvery in the light of the full moon.

We doze a little, lulled by the monotonous noise of the ship’s paddles, and open our eyes to find it is already day. Opposite us are the Lipari Islands. The first on the left and the last on the right emit a thick white smoke. They are the Volcano and the Stromboli. Between these two volcanoes we see the Lipari, the Filicuri, the Alicuri, and a few other low and small islands.

The boat stops before the island and town of Lipari. There are just a few white houses, at the foot of a green hill. Nothing else, not even an inn, can be found, for strangers never land here. The place is fruitful and charming, surrounded by beautiful rocks of a peculiar shape and of a deep though soft red. There are mineral waters, which made it a popular resort in bygone days, but the Bishop Todaso had the baths destroyed, so as to remove his people from the wealth and influence of strangers.

Lipari ends on the north side in an unusually white mountain, which we should take for a mountain of snow were it in a colder country. This supplies pumice stone to the whole world.

I hired a boat with four oarsmen, to go and see the island of Volcano. Our route follows the fertile coast, which is planted with vines. The reflection of the red rocks in the blue sea is a strange sight. We pass through the little strait that divides the two islands. The crest of the island of Volcano rises above the waves, like a submerged crater. It is a small, uncultivated island, whose peak is about 1200 feet high, and it has a surface of twenty square kilometers. We go around another small island, the Volcanello, which rose abruptly from the sea about the year 200 B. C., and is united to the larger island by a narrow strip of land, overflowed by the waves on stormy days.

We are now in a deep bay facing the smoking crater. At its foot is a house occupied by an Englishman, who is sleeping evidently, or else I could never climb this volcano, which this manufacturer is exploiting; but he sleeps, and so I cross a large kitchen garden, then some vineyards belonging to the Englishman, then again a forest of blossoming gorse. One would say it was a scarf of yellow, draped about the sharp cone, whose top is also of the same blinding color under the glare of the sun. I ascend by a narrow path, steep and slippery, winding through cinders and lava. As in Switzerland we sometimes see a stream falling from the top of a mountain, so here we find an unruffled cascade of sulphur that has poured out through the crevices. They are fairy-like streams of congealed light, the fluid rays of the sun.

I finally reached the crest, where a large platform surrounds the crater. The earth quakes, and in front of me, from an opening the size of a man’s head, issues with terrific force an immense jet of flame and steam, while from the edge of this hole pours the liquid sulphur, gilded by the fire. It forms immediately around this fantastical spring into a yellow lake. Farther away, other crevices throw out white vapors, which rise slowly in the blue atmosphere.

I advance with care on the hot cinders and lava, as far as the edge of the crater, and the most wonderful sight here greets the eye. Deep in this immense well, called the Fossa, which is 1500 feet wide and about 600 feet deep, from a dozen giant fissures and round holes pour fire, smoke, and sulphur, with a noise as of a steam-engine. I go down the sides of this abyss and walk along the edge of the volcano. Everything is yellow round about and under our feet —— a blinding, maddening, yellowish glare. The ground is yellow, the high walls, and even the sky itself. The yellow sun pours its brilliant light into this raging whirlpool; the heat from which burns like a scald. And the yellow liquid boils, and we see dazzling crystals and strange acids on the edge of this furnace.

The Englishman whom we left asleep at the foot of the hill, gathers, stores, and sells these acids and liquids — in fact, everything the crater throws up; for all this is worth money, a great deal of money.

I came back slowly, out of breath, panting, suffocated by the unendurable fumes of the volcano; and on climbing back to the summit I saw all the Lipari Islands scattered about on the waves. Far away, rises Stromboli; while behind me gigantic Etna appears to look down on its children and grand-children.

On reaching the boat I noticed an island hidden behind that of Lipari. The boatman called it Salina. From it is taken the Malmsey wine. I wished to drink from the spring itself a bottle of this famous wine. It is like a syrup of sulphur. It is the wine of volcanoes — thick, sweet, golden, and so full of sulphur that the taste remains for hours. It should be called the devil’s drink. The wretched boat that brought me takes me back. At first I look at Stromboli, a high mountain whose summit smokes and whose base is deep in water. Clinging to its sides, I notice a few houses, which look like sea-shells. Then my eyes turn toward Sicily, which we are nearing, and I cannot see anything but Mount Etna, which seems to crush it down with its enormous weight, rearing its snow-covered head above all the other mountains on the island. They look like dwarfs, these other large mountains below it, and Mount Etna itself seems of low stature, such is its great massiveness. To realize thoroughly the size of this clumsy giant, one must see it from far out at sea.

To the left are the hilly shores of Calabria and the Strait of Messina, which looks like the mouth of a gulf. We pass through it, and presently enter the harbor. The city is uninteresting, and we leave on the same day for Catania. The steamer pursues its course along a most beautiful coast rounding wonderful gulfs where nestle little white villages on sandy beaches in deep bays. We are now at Taormina.

Were a man to spend but one day in Sicily, and should he ask: “What must one see?” I should not hesitate to answer: “Taormina.” It is only a landscape, but a landscape where you find everything that can possibly appeal to the eye, the mind, and the imagination. The village rests on a tall mountain, as if it had tumbled down from the top; but we do not stop in it, although it contains some pretty relics of the past, and we reach the Greek temple to see the sunset.

I have said, speaking of the theater of Segesta, that the Greeks, incomparable decorators that they were, knew how to choose the one and only place where theaters, those houses built for the pleasures of our artistic senses, should be erected. This one of Taormina is so marvelously well situated that there cannot be another spot in the world that can compare with it. After entering it, and going over the stage, the only one that has come down to us in a fair state of preservation, we climb the tumbledown and grass-grown steps that spectators formerly occupied, where 35,000 people could be seated: and we stand here and gaze at it all — at the ruins, which are melancholy though beautiful, at the charming columns, still white and crowned with their capitals; at the sea below us stretching out indefinitely, and at the beach with its enormous rocks, its golden sand, and its small white villages. And, towering above all this, to the right, filling half the sky with its huge mass, is Mount Etna, smoking and covered with snow.

Where are the nations to-day who would know how to accomplish such things? Where are the men who could erect, for the pleasure of the masses, a building such as this? These men of other days possessed a soul and eyes that were not like ours, and in their veins flowed with the blood something that has vanished — love and admiration of the Beautiful.

We go back to Catania, whence I wish to climb the volcano. Now and then, between two hills, we see it covered with a cloud of motionless vapor from its crater. All about us, the ground is of a bronze color and the train runs along on a beach of lava. But the monster is still distant, thirty-six or forty kilometers, perhaps. Now we realize its enormous size. From its black, cavernous mouth it has thrown up, from time to time, a burning flow of bitumen, which, running down its gentle or rapid slopes, has filled valleys, buried villages, drowned men as a river would, and finally has ended at the sea, driving it back with great force. They have formed cliffs, mountains, and ravines, these slow waves so clammy and red; and as their color darkened when they were stiffening they have caused the soil all around this immense volcano to become blackened, full of crevices, of dents, of unseemly designs, caused by the vagaries of eruptions and the whimsical humor of the hot lava.

Sometimes Mount Etna remains inactive for centuries at a time, only blowing into the sky the ponderous smoke of its crater. Then, under the influence of sun and rain, the lavas of the ancient volcano overflow, become pulverized, forming a sort of cinder, a black and sandy soil, in which grow olive, orange, and citron-trees, pomegranates, and vines.

Nothing is so green, so pretty, or so charming as Aci-Reale, in the midst of a forest of orange and olive-trees. But now and again we come across a large black stretch, on which time has had no softening effect, where are fantastical forms, extraordinary shapes that look like animals with their twisted limbs intertwined.

We reached Catania, a large and fine city built entirely on lava, and from the windows of the Grand Hotel we could see the summit of Mount Etna. Before climbing it, I will write its history in a few words: The Ancients called it Vulcan’s workshop. Pindar describes the eruption of 476, but Homer does not speak of Mount Etna as a volcano. It had compelled the Sicanians to fly from it before the historical era. About 80 eruptions are known to us. The most violent were those of 396, 126, and 122 B. C., and next those of 1169, 1329, 1557, and especially that of 1669, in which a great many persons perished and the homes of more than 27,000 were destroyed. On that occasion two high mountains, called the Mounts Rossi, rose abruptly from the earth. In 1693 an eruption, accompanied by a terrible earthquake, destroyed about forty towns, burying under the ruins nearly 100,000 persons. In 1755 another eruption caused still more frightful ravages. Those of 1792, 1843, 1852, 1865, 1874, 1879, and 1882 were equally violent and disastrous. The lava was thrown up from the immense crater, or it burst through the sides of the mountain, making crevices that were sometimes 180 feet wide, through which it poured in a stream to the plains. On May 26, 1879, the lava that had been ejected from the crater in 1874, broke out from a new cone, which was originally 510 feet high, and raised it to a height of about 7350 feet. It ran rapidly down the road from Linguaglossa to Rondazzo, and came to a stop near the river of Alcantara. The area of this flood of lava was 22,860 hectares, notwithstanding that the eruption lasted only ten days. During that time the top of the crater emitted only dense vapors, sand, and ashes.

Thanks to the kindness of Mr. Ragusa, a member of the Alpine Club and proprietor of the Grand Hotel, we were enabled to make the ascent of the volcano with great facility: it is a rather fatiguing climb, but not by any means dangerous. A carriage drove us first to Nicolosi, through fields and gardens full of trees grown in the pulverized lava. Now and then we, crossed a stretch of land through which the road ran where the ground was completely black. After driving up gentle slopes for three hours, we reached the last village at the foot of Mount Etna, called Nicolosi, which is 2100 feet high, though only fourteen kilometers from Catania. We now left the carriage, and resumed our journey with guides, mules, rugs, woolen stockings, and gloves.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and the fiery sun of Oriental countries poured down on this strange land, heating and burning it. The animals walked slowly, with weary footsteps, in the midst of clouds of dust that rose above them. The last mule of all, which carried the bundles and provisions, stopped every few minutes, with the look of one discouraged at the thought of making, once more, this useless and painful trip.

All about us now were vines that had been planted in lava; some were young, others quite old. And now we reached a moor of lava covered with blossoming furze, a field of gold. We then crossed the enormous *coulée* of 1882, and were startled at the sight of the immense river so black and motionless, a bubbling and petrified stream, which poured down from the very top of the smoking crater, fully twenty kilometers away. It had passed valleys, rounded peaks, and crossed plains, this river, and here it was now before us, checked in its progress as its source of fire had become exhausted.

We continued to climb, leaving on our right the Mounts Rossi, and were constantly discovering new mountains, called by the guides the sons of Mount Etna, which have grown up near the monster, who carries about him this necklace of volcanoes. There are about three hundred and fifty of these black offspring of this giant parent, and many of them are as high as Vesuvius.

We now crossed a sparsely wooded copse, also grown in lava, and suddenly the wind rose. It was at first a sharp and violent gust, followed by a moment of calm, then a furious hurricane, which raised a huge cloud of dust. We stopped behind a wall of lava to let it pass, and we had to remain there until night, when we were obliged to go on, though there was no abating of the storm.

By degrees the cold overtook us, the penetrating cold of the mountains, which congeals the blood and paralyzes one's limbs. It seemed hidden in ambush in the wind as it were; it stung the eyes and nipped the skin with its icy breath. We went along, wrapped in our blankets, looking like Arabs, wearing gloves and hoods, allowing our mules to walk unguided as they followed one another, stumbling now and then in the rough and dark path.

We finally reached La Casa del Bosco, a kind of hut inhabited by five or six woodcutters. The guide declared it was impossible to go further in this windstorm, and we begged to be allowed to stop here over night. The men got up, lighted a fire, and gave us two thin straw mattresses, which appeared to contain nothing but fleas. The shed trembled under the blasts of the hurricane, and the wind blew furiously through the loose tiles of the roof.

We found we should not be able to see the rising of the sun from the summit, but after a few hours of rest without sleep we proceeded. Daylight had come, and the wind had died out. All about us now was a land full of valleys, the soil of which was black. It climbed gently toward the region of snow which glittered at the foot of the last cone, 900 feet high.

Although the sun rose in a very blue sky, the bitter cold of the high summits numbed our fingers and made the skin smart. Our mules, one behind the other, followed slowly in the winding path, which passed around the fantastic lava. We were now on the first snow level. This we avoided by a turn in the road. But another followed it very soon, which we had to cross in a straight line. The mules hesitated, tested the ground with their hoofs, advancing carefully. Suddenly, I felt as if I were sinking into the earth. The two front legs of my mount broke through the crust on which he was treading, and he fell in up to his breast. The poor beast struggled affrighted, rising only to fall back, when all four feet broke through the ice. All the other mules were in the same predicament and we jumped down to quiet them and to help them along. Every few minutes they fell, plunging in this white and cold mass, where our feet also sank at times up to our knees. Between these snow passes, which filled up the valleys, we found again great fields of lava, looking like stretches of black velvet, glittering in the sun with the same brilliancy as the snow. It was the deserted region, the dead region, which seemed in mourning, either all white or all black, blinding and horrible, though superb, — a sight never to be forgotten.

After four hours of exertion and difficult walking, we reached the Casa Inglese, a small stone house, which was surrounded with ice and was almost buried in the snow at the foot of the last cone, which rises to a great height and is perfectly straight and crowned with smoke. Usually the night is spent here, on a bed of straw, before anyone can go to see the sun rise from the edge of the crater. We left our mules and began to creep up this dreadful wall of hardened ashes, which gave way under foot, for there was nothing to take hold of, and we fell back one step out of three. We went on, breathing heavily, panting, and driving the iron-shod staffs into the deep soil, and still we were compelled to stop every few minutes. We had to plant the sticks between our legs, so as not to slide back, for the descent was so steep that we could not even sit down to rest.

It took us about an hour to climb those nine hundred feet. For some time sulphurous and suffocating vapors had been floating about. We had noticed to the right, and again to the left, huge jets of steam bursting from crevices in the soil, and our hands had felt the burning heat of large stones. At last we reached a narrow platform. Before us a dense cloud rose slowly, like a white curtain coming up from the earth. We advanced a few steps, with covered nostrils and mouth, so as not to be suffocated by the fumes of sulphur, and suddenly at our feet opened an enormous and fearful abyss, about three miles in circumference. We could hardly make out, through the stifling vapor, the other side of this huge hole, which was 4500 feet wide, and whose straight wall plunged down to the mysterious and terrible land of fire. The beast was quiet — it slept at the bottom of the pit, at the very bottom of it. The smoke alone escaped from the stupendous chimney, which was 9956 feet high.

It was still more wonderful all about us. Sicily was hidden under mists that ended at the coast, concealing only the land, so that we seemed to be in the heavens as it were, above the sea, above the clouds, so very high that the Mediterranean spread out on all sides as far as the eye could reach, looking like part of the sky itself. We were enveloped in the azure, we stood on an extraordinary mountain, that had come out of the clouds and was bathed in the sky, stretched above our heads, about our feet, everywhere.

But by degrees the shadows over the islands rose about us, inclosing very soon the immense volcano in a circle of vapors, an abyss of clouds. It was now our turn to be in the bottom of an entirely white crater, from which as we looked up we could see only the blue sky. On other days the spectacle is entirely different, I was told.

We awaited the rising of the sun, which appeared from behind the hills of Calabria. They threw out their shadow in the distance over the sea, as far as the foot of Mount Etna, whose dark silhouette covered Sicily with its immense triangle, disappearing as the sun ascended in the sky. We then had before us a panorama 250 miles in diameter and 800 in circumference, with Italy at the north and the Lipari Islands also, whose two volcanoes looked as if they were saluting their sire; while toward the south, barely visible, we saw Malta. In the harbors of Sicily the ships had the appearance of insects on the sea.

Alexandre Dumas, the elder, has given an excellent and very enthusiastic description of this spectacle.

We retraced our way now, sliding as much on our backs as on our feet down the steep hill of the crater, and soon entered the dense belt of clouds that enveloped the summit of the mount. After an hour’s walk through the mists, which we finally cleared, we discovered beneath our feet the green and pretty island with its gulfs, its capes, its towns, and the big blue sea that surrounds it.

After returning to Catania, we left next day for Syracuse. An excursion in Sicily should always end in this strange and charming little town. It was as illustrious, at one time, as any of the larger towns; its tyrants rendered their reigns as celebrated as that of Nero; it produces a wine poets have rendered famous, it has, at the head of the bay it overlooks, a very small river, the Anapo, where grows the papyrus, the secret guardian of thoughts, and it has also within its walls one of the most beautiful Venuses in the world. Some persons cross continents on a pilgrimage to a miraculous statue — as for me, I came here to worship at the shrine of the Venus of Syracuse. In a traveler’s sketch-book I had seen a picture of this sublime woman in marble; and I became enamored of her, as one becomes enamored of a real woman. It was she, probably, who induced me to take this trip; I dreamed of her, I spoke of her incessantly, long before seeing her.

But we were too late to enter the museum, which was intrusted to the care of a learned professor, Francesco Severio Cavalari, who, modern Empedocles that he is, descended into the crater of Mount Etna to drink a cup of coffee. He took me through the town, which is built on an island and is separated from the land by three walls, between which pass three arms of the sea.

Then We went to the Latomias, immense roofless excavations, which were originally stone-quarries, but had become prisons, where, for eight months after the defeat of Nicias, the captured Athenians were confined, tortured by hunger and the horrible heat of these caldrons swarming with vermin, where they lay in agony. In one of these, the Latomia of Paradise, we noticed, deep in a grotto, a peculiar opening, called the ear of Dionysius, who it was said came to listen at the hole, to hear the moanings of his victims. Other versions also are given of it. Certain ingenious learned men assert that this grotto, when put in communication with the theater, was used as a subterranean hall for performances, to which it lent an echo that was wonderfully sonorous; for the slightest noise is carried with an extraordinary resonance. The most remarkable of the Latomias is assuredly that of the Capuchins, a vast and deep garden divided by vaults, arches, and enormous rocks, and inclosed in white cliffs.

A little farther on we visited the Catacombs, whose area covers 500 acres and here Mr. Cavalari discovered one of the most beautiful Christian sarcophagi known to art.

We then returned to the modest hotel, which overlooks the sea, and we sat up late, dreamily watching the red and green lights of the ships in the harbor.

Next morning, as our coming had been heralded, the doors of the delightful little palace that contains the art collections and masterpieces of the town were opened to us. On entering the museum, I saw her (the Venus) at the end of a hall, and she was as beautiful as I had imagined her to be. She had no head, and one arm was missing; but never has the human form appealed to me more admirable or more enticing. It was not a poetical woman, nor an idealized woman, neither was it a divine or majestic woman, like the Venus of Milo, but it was a real woman, a woman such as we love, such as we desire, a woman we long to clasp in our arms. She had a large frame, well-developed breasts, powerful hips, and rather heavy limbs; she was a carnal Venus. One arm covered her breasts, and with the remaining hand she held a drapery before her, with a most charming gesture. The whole attitude of the body was conceived and executed to show the grace of this movement, the lines all seemed to concentrate here. This simple and natural gesture, full of modesty, and of lust also, which hid and revealed at the same time, attracting and concealing, seems to define, in truth, the attitude of all women on earth. And the marble was full of life. One would like to touch it, convinced that it would give under a pressure, like living flesh. The hips, especially, were inexpressibly beautiful. The undulating line of the feminine back, which curves from the neck to the heels, unfolded itself with great charm, showing in the contour of the shoulders, in the decreasing roundness of the limbs, in the slight curve of the instep, all the modulations of human grace.

A work of art is superior only when it expresses at one and the same time a symbol and the exact reproduction of a reality. The Venus of Syracuse is a woman, and it is also a symbol of the flesh. Before the head of the Joconda, one is beset by I know not what enervating and mystical temptation of love. There are also living women whose eyes give us that dream of unrealized and mysterious tender affection. We expect to find in them, beyond the outward appearance, that ideal of which they seem to be the expression. But we pursue this ideal without ever attaining it, now in a wonder of beauty which seems to harbor certain feelings, again in the depth of glances that are only certain shades of blue, in the charm of smiles that come from the curve of the lips and a flash of ivory, or in the grace of an attitude born of chance and the harmony of the lines of the figure.

In this way have poets forever been tormented by the thirst of mystical love. The natural exaltation of a poetical mind, exasperated by artistic excitement, compels those favored beings to conceive a kind of cloudy love, desperately tender, never satisfied, sensual without being carnal, so very fragile that a breath will cause it to vanish, so unrealizable and superhuman is it. And these poets are, perhaps, the only men that never have really loved a woman, a real woman of flesh and blood, with her womanly qualities and defects, her limited and charming mind, her feminine nerves, and her disquieting femininity.

All creatures before whom their dream is magnified are the symbols of a mysterious but enchanted being, the being sung by them. This living adored one is somewhat like a painted statue, the image of a god before whom people bend the knee. Where is that God? Who is that God? What part of the heavens is inhabited by this Unknown, which they have all worshiped, these fools, from the first dreamer to the last? No sooner do they touch a hand that responds to their pressure, than their soul takes flight in the invisible dream, far from the carnal reality. The Woman they clasp is transformed, perfected, or disfigured by their artistic poetry. It is not her lips they really kiss, but the lips they dreamed of. It is not in the depths of her blue or black eyes that their feverish glances sink, but in those of some unknown or unreal being! The eye of their mistress is only the glass through which they try to see the paradise of an ideal love.

But if some passionate women can give our souls that rare delusion, others excite in us only the impetuous love from which the race is perpetuated. The Venus of Syracuse is the personification of this powerful beauty, wholesome and simple. This admirable torso, in Parian marble, is, we are told, the Venus Callipygus, described by Athenæus and Lamprededius, which was given by Heliogabalus to the people of Syracuse. It has no head! What of that? Its symbol is only the more complete. It is the body of a woman that expresses all the real poetry of a caress. Schopenhauer has said that nature, wishing to perpetuate the species, has made a snare of reproduction. This marble figure, seen in Syracuse, is truly the human snare divined by the ancient artist, the woman who conceals and reveals the disquieting mystery of life. Is this a snare? Very well, then! It attracts the lips, the touch of the hand, giving to kisses the perceptible reality of white and buoyant flesh, so firm and rounded, delightful to clasp. It is divine, not because it renders an idea, but because it is beautiful.

And one thinks, also, on beholding her, of the bronze ram of Syracuse, the most beautiful piece of statuary in the museum of Palermo, which seems to be the embodiment of the whole world’s animality. The powerful beast is lying down, the body rests on the legs, the head is slightly turned to the left. And this animal’s head is like that of a god, a bestial god, wicked and superb. The forehead is broad and high, the eyes are set wide apart, the nose is long and thick and has a most brutish expression. The horns, which are thrown back, fall, rounded and curved, with their sharp points parted under the thin ears, which also somewhat resemble horns. And the animal’s glance impresses you with its stupid, uneasy, and hard look. On reaching this bronze we feel as in the presence of a wild animal.

Who could have been the two wonderful artists that have expressed, under two such different aspects, the simple beauty of a being? These two are the only statues I have ever felt a passionate desire to see again, a feeling akin to that I have experienced toward certain human beings.

On leaving the museum, I gave one more loving look toward the marble figures, a look such as we give the beloved one at parting, and I immediately embarked to go and pay my respects to the papyrus of the river Anapo, as a dutiful writer should.

We crossed the gulf from one side to the other, and on the flat and bare shore we saw the mouth of a very small river, where the boat entered.

The current was strong and hard to pull against. Sometimes the men had to row, again they used a pole to glide over the water which ran rapidly between banks covered with small bright yellow flowers —— two banks of gold. Here were reeds, which rustled as we touched them, which bent and rose, and there, with their roots in water, were deep blue irises, on which fluttered innumerable dragon-flies with glassy wings, pearl-like and quivering. Some of these flies were almost as large as humming-birds. Again on both the slopes that imprisoned us grew giant thistles and bind-weeds, weaving together the plants of the land and the reeds of the stream. Beneath us, deep in the water, was a forest of tall, waving grasses, which moved and floated as if they were swimming in the current that tossed them about. Then the river Anapo became separated from the ancient Cyane, its tributary, and we were still moving on between the two banks, with the help of a pole. The stream wound in and out, giving delightful views, perspectives which were both blossoming and charming. An island appeared finally, covered with strange bushes. The frail and triangular stems, eight or nine feet high, bore at the top round clusters of green threads, soft and flexible, like human hair. They resembled heads that had become plants, which might have been thrown into this sacred stream by one of the pagan deities who lived here in days gone by. And this was the ancient papyrus. The peasants, however, call this reed *parucca.* Farther on, a whole forest of these quivered and rustled, bending and entangling their hairy heads, looking as if they were conversing about unknown and mysterious things.

Is it not strange that this wonderful plant, which brought to our minds the thoughts of the dead, which was the guardian of human genius, should have on its ancient body an enormous mane of thick and flowing hair, such as poets affect?

We returned to Syracuse as the sun went down; and we saw in the harbor a steamer, just arrived, which was to carry us away that night toward Africa.

CHAPTER V. FROM ALGIERS TO TUNIS

ON THE wharves of Algiers, in the streets of the village of natives, on the plains of the Tell, on the mountains of the Sahel, on the sands of the Sahara, are men clothed in robes resembling those of monks. Cowled in a turban, which floats behind them, with stern features and steady glance, these men look as if they belonged to some austere religious order, spread over half the globe. Their very walk is that of priests; their gestures, those of men who preach; their attitude, that of mystics full of contempt for the outer world. We are, in truth, with men overpowered by the religious idea, which effaces all else, regulates their actions, decides their conscience, forms their hearts, governs their thoughts, is above all earthly interests, all preoccupation, all excitement. Religion is the great inspirer of their actions, of their souls, of their qualities, and their faults. It is for religion's sake that they are good, brave, tender-hearted, and faithful, for they seem to be nothing in themselves, to possess qualities which are only inspired or commended by their faith. We seldom discern the spontaneous or primitive nature of the Arab without finding that it has been, so to say, created anew by his beliefs, by the Koran, by the teachings of Mahomet. No other religion ever has become incarnate in any beings in such a manner.

Let us go and witness them praying in their white mosque, which we can see in the distance, at the end of the wharf of Algiers.

In the first courtyard, under an arcade of small green, blue, or red columns, men, seated or lying down, were conversing in low tones with the tranquil gravity of Orientals. Facing the entrance at the back of a small square room, which looked like a chapel, the cadi, a Turkish judge, administered justice. Plaintiffs awaited their turn, a kneeling Arab spoke, while the magistrate sat enveloped, almost hidden, in the numerous folds of his garments and the massiveness of his turban, with only part of the face showing, looking at the plaintiff with a stern and calm glance and listening to him. A wall, in which was a small grated window, divided this apartment from that where the women, who are considered much less important than men, and consequently cannot face the cadi, are awaiting their turn to make complaints through the little wicket.

The sun, which fell in showers of fire on the snow-white walls of these small buildings, similar to tombs of marabouts, and on the courtyard, where an old woman was throwing dead fish to an army of black and yellow cats, was reflected in the interior on the burnous, the lean brown limbs and the impassive faces. Farther on was the school, by the side of a fountain, where the water flowed beneath a tree. Everything was here within these calm and peaceful walls — religion, justice, and learning.

I entered the mosque, after taking off my shoes, and I stepped over the rugs in the midst of bright columns whose regular lines filled this quiet temple, which was deep and low. These columns were very wide, with one side facing toward Mecca, so that each believer, standing in front of it, sees nothing, is not in any way distracted, and with eyes turned toward the Holy City becomes absorbed in prayer. Some were kneeling, others were standing, whispering the formulas of the Koran in the prescribed attitudes; others again, having performed their religious duties, conversed together, sitting on the ground along the walls; for the mosque is not only a place of prayer, it is also a place of rest, where they tarry, sometimes remaining for days at a time.

Everything is very plain, bare, and white. All is peaceful and quiet in these houses of faith, so different from most Christian churches which are so full of animation when crowded, with the noise of the services, the moving about of assistants, the pomp of ceremonies and the singing; and then, again, when they are empty how sad they become, how they oppress the heart, looking like a death-chamber, like a cold room of stone, where the Christ suffers once more.

Arabs were entering incessantly, the poor and the rich, the porter from the harbor, the ancient chief, and the man of noble birth, in the silky whiteness of his shining burnous. Each one, barefooted, performed the same rites, prayed to the same God, with the same devout and simple faith, without pose or affectation. They remained standing at first, with head up, the hands opened as high as the shoulders, in an attitude of entreaty. Then the arms fell by the side, and the head was bent; they were before the sovereign of the world, in an attitude of resignation. The hands were joined across the breast, as if bound, they were captives to the will of the Master. Finally they kneeled several times very quickly, without a sound. After sitting on their heels with hands outstretched on their knees, they bent forward to the ground, which they touched with the forehead. This prayer, which is always the same, and begins with the recital of the first verses of the Koran, must be repeated five times a day by the faithful, who before entering have washed their face, hands, and feet.

One heard, through the silent temple, nothing but the murmur of the running water in the interior court, through which, the light fell in the mosque. The shadow of the fig-tree that grew above the fountain where they made their ablutions threw a green reflection on the plaited mats at the door.

The Mussulman women may enter, as well as the men, but they seldom come. God is too far away, too high, altogether too imposing, for them. They would never dare tell Him their troubles, confide in Him, ask of Him the help, the consolation, the relief for their families, their husbands and children, which the heart of all women craves for. They must have an intercessor between Him, who is so great, and themselves, who are so humble. This intercessor is the dead Turkish priest. In the Catholic religion, the faithful have the saints and the Virgin Mary, who are the natural advocates with God for timid souls. It is, then, at the tomb of their saint, in the small chapel where he is buried, that we shall find the Arabian woman in prayer. Let us go and see her.

The Zaouia Abd-er-Rahman-el-Tcalbi is the most original and interesting in Algiers. The name *zaouia* is given to a small mosque joined to a *koubba* (a marabout’s tomb), containing also a school and a higher course of study for the educated Mussulmans. To reach the *zaouia* of Abd-er-Rahman we first had to cross the Arabian town. It was an extraordinary climb, through a labyrinth of lanes, tangled and winding between the windowless walls of Moorish houses. They almost met at the top, and the sky seen between the terraces seemed a blue design of irregular and odd shape. Sometimes a long passage, sinuous and arched, abrupt like a mountain path, appeared to lead straight to the azure, which we saw suddenly on turning a wall, at the top of the steps, the glorious blue of the bright sky.

All along these narrow corridors, at the foot of the houses, Arabs lay sleeping in their tattered garments; others filled the Moorish *cafés,* seated on circular benches, or on the ground, always with a stolid face, drinking out of very small china cups. In these narrow streets, which we had to climb, the sun coming down in unexpected places, in streaks or streams at every break in the paths that cross one another, threw on the walls strange designs, of a blinding glare. We saw, through the open doors, the interior courts from which came a little fresh air. And there was always a square well, inclosed by a colonnade upholding galleries. A sound of soft and strange music was heard now and then coming from these houses, and women came out, sometimes two by two; they gave us, as they passed, between the folds of the veils which covered their faces, a gloomy and sad look, the look of prisoners.

They all wore a headdress made of a piece of cloth tightly bound about the head, their bodies were covered with the *hath,* and their lower limbs were incased in the wide trousers of linen or calico, which were very narrow at the ankle, and gave them a peculiar walk, slow and awkward, full of hesitancy. We tried to make out their features under the veil, which clung closely and outlined the face. The two bluish curves of the eyebrows, lengthened by a dash of antimony, extended far over the temples.

Suddenly I heard voices calling me. I turned, and through an open door I perceived, on the walls, large and very improper paintings, such as are sometimes found in Pompeii. The loose morals that were depicted, the joyous, disorderly crowd, crudely daring even in the streets, showed the great difference between the European sense of decency and that of the Orientals. We must not forget that it is only a very few years since the performances of Caragoussa, a kind of obscene Punch and Judy, were forbidden. Children looked on with their big black eyes, some ignorant and others corrupt, laughing and applauding the improbable and vile exploits, which are impossible to narrate.

All through the upper part of this Arabian town, between the dry-goods shops, the groceries, and fruit-stands of the incorruptible Mozabites, — Mahometan Puritans, who are contaminated by contact with other men, and who will have to be purified on returning to their own country, — are open houses where a traffic in human beings is carried on, where one is invited to enter in every known tongue. The Mozabite alone, seated in his little shop, with his wares carefully set out around him, appears to see nothing, to know, to understand nothing, that goes on about him. On his right the Spanish women warble plaintively like doves; on his left the Arabian women purr like kittens. He looks, seated between the impure and nude pictures painted on both those houses to attract customers, like a fakir, a seller of fruit, hypnotized.

I turned to the right by a small passage, which appeared to end at the sea, spreading out in the distance behind the point of Saint Eugene, and I perceived at the end of this tunnel, a few feet below me, a gem of a mosque, or rather a very small *zaouia,* a series of small buildings, and square, round, and pointed tombstones, ranged along a staircase winding from terrace to terrace. The entrance was concealed by a wall, which one would say was built of silvered snow, framed with bricks of green tiles, and perforated here and there with regular openings, through which we saw the harbor of Algiers.

I entered — beggars, old men, women, and children were seated on every step, asking alms in Arabic. On the right, in a small structure, also crowned with tiles, was the first vault where, through an open door, we saw the faithful seated before the tomb. Farther down was the rounded and glittering dome of the *koubba* of the marabout Abd-er-Rahman, next to the tall square minaret from which the call to prayer is made.

Again, all along the descent, were other tombs less known than that of the famous Ahmed Bey of Constantine, who caused dogs to gnaw at the entrails of his French prisoners.

From the last terrace, at the entrance of the marabout, the view was delightful. Our Lady of Africa in the distance overlooked Saint Eugene, and the sea stretched out to the horizon, where it mingled with the sky. Nearer to the right, was the Arabian town, climbing from roof to roof, to the *zaouia,* and farther beyond it, displaying its little houses of chalk. All about me were tombs, a cyprus, a fig-tree, and Moorish ornaments framing and crowning the sacred walls.

After taking off my shoes, I entered the *koubba.* First of all, in a small room, a learned Mussulman, seated on his heels, was reading a manuscript, which he held on a level with his eyes. Books and parchments were spread about him on rugs. He did not even turn his head.

A little farther, I heard a rustling and whispering. As I drew nearer, the women, all sitting about the tomb, covered their faces quickly. They looked like enormous snowflakes wherein shone bright eyes. Among them, in all this foam of flannel, silk, wool, or linen, children slept, moved about, dressed in red, blue, or green garments; it was charming and very primitive. They were at home here in their saint’s dwelling, which they had decorated. To their stunted minds, God was too far away, too great for their lowliness.

These women did not turn their faces toward Mecca, but to the marabout, and they put themselves under his care. This is typical of the confidence that women repose in men. It is now, and always will be, the men’s salvation. Their womanly eyes, so sad and gentle, eyes underlined by two white bandages, cannot understand the spiritual side of things; they see only the human being. A man, when he lives, supports and defends them; so a man must be the only one who can speak to God after death. They sat about, close to the tomb, which they had decorated and trimmed. This looked very much like the bridal bed of a native of Brittany, covered as it was with costly fabrics, silks, flags, and gifts of all kinds. They whispered and talked in a low voice among themselves, and some related to the marabout their anxieties, their quarrels, and their troubles with their husbands. It was a gathering of friends gossiping around this relic.

The whole chapel was filled with their strange gifts: clocks of all sizes which kept time, ticking out the seconds and striking the hours; votive banners, hanging-lamps of every description in brass and crystal. There were so many of these that one could not see the roof. They swung side by side, in different sizes, as in a lamp-maker’s shop. The walls were decorated with graceful tiles of charming designs, the principal colors being always red or green. The floor was covered with rugs, and the light came from the cupola through a group of three arched windows, one of these being above the other two.

This was not the stern looking and bare mosque where God is alone; it was a sitting-room for prayer, decorated with the childish taste of uncivilized women. Very often lovers come here to see them, to make an appointment or to say a few words in secret. Europeans that can speak their language often become attached to these creatures, whose eyes alone they can see.

When the marabout’s masculine contingent comes in its turn to perform its devotions, it does not pay the same exclusive attention to the saint occupying this place. After bowing profoundly to the tomb, the men turn toward Mecca and worship God — for there is no other divinity but God, as they repeat in all their prayers.

CHAPTER VI. TUNIS

BEFORE reaching Tunis, the railroad passes through a beautiful country of wooded mountains. After climbing to a height of about twenty-three hundred feet, describing meanwhile innumerable curves, where it overlooks an immense and gorgeous landscape, it finally penetrates into Tunisia by the Kroumiria.

The scene is then a series of deserted hills and valleys, where Roman cities formerly stood. There are first the remains of Thegasta, where St. Augustine was born; his father was a decurion. Farther on is Thubursicum Numidarem, whose ruins cover a succession of green, rounded hills. Farther still is Madarus, where Apuleius was born, toward the end of the reign of the Trojan. I never could enumerate the dead cities near which we passed until we reached Tunis.

Suddenly, after many hours on the road, we perceived in the low plain, the tall arches of an aqueduct cut away in some places and almost destroyed, which formerly extended from one mountain to the other. It was the aqueduct of Carthage, of which Flaubert speaks in his “Salammbo.” We passed a beautiful village, then followed a dazzling lake, and discovered the walls of Tunis.

We finally entered the town. To judge it properly, one must climb a neighboring hill to view it. The Arabs compare Tunis to a burnous spread out, and this comparison is very apt. The city stretches over the plain, raised slightly by the undulations of the ground, which causes houses to project here and “ there, and also the domes of mosques and the belfries of minarets. It is difficult to believe that these are houses, so compact and even is this endless stretch of white. Around the town are three lakes, that glitter like plains of steel under the powerful Oriental sun. To the north, in the distance, the Sebkra-er-Bonan and to the west, the Sebkra-Seldjoum are seen above the city; to the south is Lake Bahira, or the Lake of Tunis; looking again toward the north, the sea appears, looking also like a lake in its frame of distant mountains.

All about this flat town are miry swamps, an accumulation of filth, an incredible belt of putrid drains; low and barren fields, where small winding streams of water shine like snakes. These are the sewers of Tunis which, under the blue sky, flow incessantly, tainting the atmosphere, dragging their slow and nauseous mire through a land impregnated with filth toward the lake, which they have filled completely in its entire length and breadth, for the sounding-line goes down fifty-four feet deep in the mud. A channel is made through this mire to allow the passage of small boats.

But on a bright sunny day, this city lying among all these lakes, in a land inclosed by mountains, the highest of which (Zagh-ouan) is nearly always seen topped with clouds in winter, is the most striking sight, without doubt, to be seen on the borders of the African continent. On coming down from the hill and entering the town, we find it has three distinct sections: the French, the Arab, and the Jewish quarters.

Tunis, is, in truth, neither a French nor an Arabian town, it is decidedly Jewish. This is one of the rare spots on the earth where the Jew seems at home, as if he were in his own country, where he is outwardly almost the master, where he shows a tranquil assurance, though quaking somewhat yet. It is very interesting to see him, to observe him, in this labyrinth of narrow lanes where circulates, moves, and swarms a population, which is the most garish, and contains the greatest medley of odd costumes, glittering and silken, of all those on this Oriental shore.

Where are we? Is this Arabian soil, or the dazzling capital of a harlequin? A very artistic harlequin he must be, a friend of painters, an inimitable colorist who has taken pleasure in dressing his people in an amazing and stunning manner. He must have passed through London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, this wonderful costumer, and returning here, full of contempt for the northern people, has dressed his subjects in these motley colors, but with a taste which never falters, and a fancy that knows no limit. Not only has he given their garments every original and graceful shape possible, but he has used to color them all the shades that ever have been created, blended, or dreamed of, by the most fastidious painter of *aquarelles.*

To the Jews alone he allowed the loud tones, forbidding at the same time the too brutal clashing of these, adjusting the splendor of their costumes with a prudent daring. As for the Moors, his favorites, whether they are quiet merchants seated in their shops, active young men or corpulent citizens walking slowly through the narrow streets, he took pleasure in clothing them with such a variety of coloring that the eye is carried away on seeing them. Oh! for these, for his beloved Orientals, his Levantines, his mixed breed of Turks and Arabs, he has blended such delicate shades, so soft, so gentle, so dim and harmonious, that to walk among them is a constant delight to the eye.

There are burnouses of shimmering cashmere like streams of light; there are gorgeous rags, side by side with *gebbas* of silk, long tunics that fall to the knee and small jackets worn over the vest, with innumerable buttons all along the edges. And these *gebbas* and vests, these jackets and *haïks* are blended in such a manner that they show the most wonderful colorings. There are pink, azure, blue, lilac, Nile green, deep blue, leafy brown, salmon pink, orange, faded mauve, wine-color, and slate-gray. It is a filing past of pictures of fairyland, from the most faded tints to the loudest tones, these latter drowned in such a current of dim coloring that there is nothing harsh to be seen along the streets through which filters the brilliant light of day, as they wind continually between the low, white houses.

Frequently these narrow passageways are almost entirely obstructed by enormous creatures, whose hips and shoulders seem about to touch both walls as they advance. On their heads is a pointed covering, often silvered or gilt, a sort of magician’s bonnet, from behind which hangs a scarf. On their huge bodies, a mass of quivering flesh, they wear loose bodices of bright colors. Their misshapen hips are imprisoned in white trousers that cling to them. Their ankles, embedded in fat, inflate the stockings; when in gala dress, gaiters of cloth of gold or silver are worn. They walk along with mincing steps in half sandals which they drag after them, for the foot is only partly shod, the heel striking the ground at every step. These strange, bloated creatures are Jewesses, the beautiful Jewesses!

As soon as the marriageable age draws near, when rich men begin to court them, the daughters of Israel think of nothing but increasing their size; for the heavier a woman is the more she is sought after, and the greater chance has she of choosing a husband to her liking. At fourteen and fifteen, these girls have slender figures, and are marvels of beauty, of refinement, and charm. They have light complexions, somewhat pale and of a transparent delicacy; regular features, the features of an ancient and exhausted race, whose blood has never been renewed; dark eyes under smooth brows, over which falls a heavy mass of fluffy hair, and with the graceful way in which they run from door to door, they fill the Jewish quarter with one long dream of passionate young Salomés.

After a while they begin to think of a husband — then begins this extraordinary fattening of the body, which makes monsters of them. After eating every morning the little ball of aperient herbs that stimulate the appetite, they remain motionless for the whole day, eating thick pastes which swell them to an enormous size. The breasts become inflated, the waists distended, and the hips increase in proportion, while the outline of the wrists and ankles disappears under an accumulation of flesh. And amateurs flock to see them, to judge, compare, and admire them, as they would in a competition of fat cattle. This is what makes them beautiful, attractive, and charming, these enormous girls who are to be married.

Then we see them go by, these extraordinary beings, wearing a headdress in the shape of a sharp cone, called the *koufia,* from which hangs the *bechkir,* dressed in the flowing *camiza* in plain linen, or in brilliant silks, with trousers sometimes white, again richly embroidered, and with trailing slippers called *saba;* they are astonishing-looking creatures, whose faces are sometimes pretty, notwithstanding the fact that their forms resemble hippopotamuses.

They are to be found in their houses, which are always wide open, every Saturday, which is a holy day, set apart for gala dress and for receiving callers; they sit in white rooms, close by each other, like symbolical idols covered with silk and shining jewelry, goddesses of flesh and metal, with gold gaiters on the limbs, and on the head a crown of gold.

The wealth of Tunis is in their hands, or rather in that of their husbands, who are always smiling, full of welcome, and ready to offer their services. In a very few years, no doubt, they will become European ladies, will adopt Parisian styles, and to be in the fashion, will fast to grow thinner. It will be their gain, but our loss, we spectators.

In the Arabian part of the town, the most interesting quarter is that of the Souks, in which are long streets arched or roofed with boards, where the sun glides in, its shafts of fire looking as if they were cutting pedestrians and merchants in two. These are the bazaars, winding and crossing one another, where sellers, standing or seated in the midst of their wares, in little covered shops, call loudly for buyers; others squat motionless among heaps of rags, of colored stuffs, leathers, bridles, harness, saddles embroidered in gold, and yellow and red beaded Turkish slippers.

Each section has its streets, and along the galleries divided by a thin partition the men of the same trades are grouped together, all working with the same movements. It is impossible to describe the animation, the coloring and liveliness of these markets, for one could never express in words the glare, the noise, and commotion.

One of the shops is of such a very peculiar character, that the memory of it remains like a dream. It is the perfume shop. In compartments so narrow that they remind one of the cells of bees, in a line from one end to the other, on both sides of a rather dark gallery, young men with fair complexions, most of them quite young, are clad in light garments and seated in the attitude of Buddhist idols; they remain rigidly still in a framework which is fastened on the shoulders; this framework, forming some mystical design about the head, is filled with tapers. The higher ones are short, those about the shoulders are longer, and those over the arms are longer still. The decorations vary slightly in the different shops. The sellers, pale and motionless, look like wax figures, in this chapel of wax-tapers. About their knees or their feet, or again within reach of their hands, are all perfumes imaginable, some inclosed in small boxes, in tiny phials, or even little bags. An odor of incense and aromatic plants, very strong at times, penetrates the air from one end of the section to the other.

Some of these extracts are very expensive, some, even, are sold by the drop. To count these the man uses a small piece of cotton, which he takes from his ear and replaces there.

When night comes, the whole quarter where the shops are is closed with heavy doors at the entrance to each of the galleries, like a valuable treasure house inclosed within another.

When walking through the other streets, however, the newer streets that end at the marsh, a peculiar chant was heard, which was accompanied with rhythmical sounds, muffled like the roar of a distant cannon and interrupted now and then for a few minutes. On looking about we discovered on a level with the ground, a dozen or so of negroes, whose heads were covered with scarfs, handkerchiefs, turbans, or rags. They all sang some Arabian chorus, while in their hands were rammers with which they beat down the earth, keeping time. They were in a trench, the stones and mortar of which they rammed down for the foundations of a new house which was to be built in this oily, muddy soil.

At the edge of this gap an old negro, who was at the head of these pounders of stone, kept time, laughing meanwhile like a hyena; and the others were all laughing also, as they continued their peculiar song, striking with energy at each new verse. They looked up in a sly manner at the passers-by who stopped; and the people laughed also, the Arabs because they understood the meaning of the song, and others because it all sounded so comical; but no one seemed to enjoy it quite so much as the negroes themselves, for when the old man cried out:

"Now then, strike!" they all took up in chorus, striking hard three times, crying:

"Hit the dog of a Christian!"

The negro shouted, pretending to crush something: "Now then, strike!"

And all repeated: "Hit the dog of an infidel!" And this is how the European section is being built in the new district of the city of Tunis!

This new district! When one thinks how it is entirely built on mud which has become solidified, built on an unnamable soil, composed of unclean matter rejected by the town, one wonders how it is that the whole population is not decimated by every possible malady, every fever, every epidemic. And on viewing the lake near by, where the same conditions exist, from which the odors at night are so overpowering that they make one ill, it is hard to understand how even the old town can manage to live under such circumstances.

On recalling to memory the fever-stricken wretches of certain villages of Sicily, Corsica, or Italy, that part of the deformed population that trembles and shivers with ague, poisoned by clear streams and limpid ponds, one is sure that Tunis must be a hotbed of infectious diseases.

Well, it is not so! Tunis is a very salubrious town! The impure air one inhales is invigorating, the mildest and most soothing to overwrought nerves that I have ever breathed. After the Department des Landes, which is the most healthful in France, Tunis is the one place where there are fewer epidemics than in any other country.

This does not seem possible, but it is so. O modern physicians, grotesque oracles, professors of hygiene, who send your patients to inhale the invigorating air of the mountains or the pure air of the green fields, come and see these dunghills that surround Tunis, then look at this soil, which is neither sheltered nor cooled with the shade of a tree; remain for a year in this country, this low plain with its torrid heat in summer, its immense marshes from the winter rains, then enter the hospitals — and they are empty!

Look up the statistics and you will find that people die here oftener of old age than of any disease. Then you may ask yourselves whether it is not modern science which is poisoning us with its so-called progress; if the drains in our cellars, so close to our wines and water-cisterns, are not distilleries of death in our homes, hotbeds and propagators of more serious epidemics than the stream of mire flowing in the sunlight in Tunis: you will perhaps admit then, that the pure air of the mountains is less soothing, that the bacillus-infected heaps of dirt in cities, and the dampness of woods is to be dreaded as more likely to engender fevers, than the putrefied moisture of marshes a hundred leagues from the smallest kind of forest. To tell the truth, the undeniable healthfulness of Tunis is astonishing, and can be attributed only to the purity of the water that we: drink in that city; which goes to prove that the: modern theory is correct as to the manner in which germs are propagated.

The waters of the Zagh'ouan, coming from a distance of eighty kilometers from Tunis, are imprisoned underground, and reach the houses without ever coming in contact with the outer air, and, consequently, cannot gather any contaminating germs.

The astonishment I experienced in regard to this undeniable salubrity made me curious to visit the hospitals of the town, and the Moorish physician who managed the most important one very kindly took me through it.

As soon as the wide door, which led to a vast Arabian courtyard, was thrown open, I perceived a long covered gallery, supported on columns, and my feelings were such that I almost forgot what had brought me here.

Around me on all four sides of the yard were narrow cells, grated like those of prisons and containing men who, rising on seeing us clung to the iron bars; their faces were livid and ghastly. One of them, putting out his hand and shaking it at us, muttered something insulting. Then the others began jumping up and down in their respective cells, like animals in a menagerie, and all shouted loudly; while above them, in a higher gallery and looking down on them, was an old Arab with a long beard and wearing a heavy turban; his neck was encircled with brass necklaces and his arms, covered with bracelets, as were his hands with rings, hung carelessly over the balustrade, as he smiled at the noise below. He was a lunatic, but being quiet was free; he fancied himself a king of kings, reigning over the maniacs below him.

I wished to see these fearful lunatics, so picturesque in their Oriental costumes; they seemed more interesting and less sad to behold than our

European insane, probably because they are so different in every way.

I was allowed to enter the cell of the first inmate. Like most of his companions, the use of hasheesh (an intoxicating narcotic which produces hallucinations) was the cause of his insanity. He was very young, exceedingly pale, and looked at me with enormously large and staring eyes. What was he saying? He asked for a pipe to smoke, adding that his father was waiting for him. Now and then, he raised himself, displaying under his *gebba* and his burnous thin spider-like limbs; his keeper, a giant negro with white shining eyeballs, threw him back on his rug every time, by simply touching his shoulder, which pressure seemed to crush the poor fellow down.

His neighbor was also a sort of yellow grinning monster, a Spaniard from Ribera, who crouched and clung to the bars, begging for tobacco or some hasheesh, with a threatening look.

There were two in the next cell, one of them was another smoker of the deadly hemp, and greeted us with wild gestures; he was tall and of powerful build, while his companion sat motionless on his heels, watching us with shining eyes, like those of a wild-cat. His was a rare beauty; his short, black, curly beard rendered his skin livid, and his nose was well shaped, his face long and very refined. He was a Mozabite, who became insane after finding his young son dead, for whom he had searched two days.

Then came an old man who laughed and cried out to us, as he jumped about like a monkey:

“Crazy, crazy, we are all crazy, I, you, the doctor, the keeper, the Bey, everyone is crazy!”

He said this in Arabic, but we could understand his meaning, so perfect was his mimicry, so irresistible the manner in which he pointed his finger at us. He indicated each one of us and laughed, so sure was he that we were all insane, repeating incessantly: “Yes, yes, you, you, you, you are crazy!”

And truly one felt, deep in the soul, a breath of insanity, a sort of contagion and a terrifying feeling in the presence of this malignant lunatic.

When leaving, I could see above them all a patch of blue sky, and looking down on this dwelling of the damned, was the self-styled lord of all these demented beings, the Arab with the long beard. He smiled constantly, as calm and beautiful as one of the Magi. He leaned over, and in the sunlight shone the countless articles of brass, iron, and bronze, keys and rings, with which he proclaimed his imaginary sovereignty.

For fifteen years he had been here, this sage who walked about with slow steps, with such a calm majestic air that one involuntarily saluted him with respect. He answered, with the mien of a king, a few words signifying: “You are welcome, I am pleased to see you.” Then he went on and did not look at us again. For fifteen years that man had never lain down. He slept seated on a step in the middle of the stone staircase of the hospital — he had never been known to stretch himself out.

What cared I now for the other invalids, so few in number, however, that one could count them in the large white halls, from the windows of which we could see the glittering town, whose mosques and domes of *koubbas* shone out above everything?

I left with a mingled feeling of pity and envy for these demented beings who continue to exist in this prison, as the result of the dream found one day at the bottom of the little pipe filled with a few yellow leaves.

The night of that same day, a French officer, having a special warrant, offered to let us see some houses of ill repute, a privilege seldom granted to strangers.

We had to be accompanied by a special guard from the police of the Bey, otherwise, no door, not even that of the lowest native brothel, would have even been opened for us.

The Arabian quarter of the town in Algiers is usually full of animation at night, but as soon as the day ends, Tunis becomes a dead town. The small narrow streets, winding and uneven, seem like the corridors of a deserted city, where a few gas-jets, here and there, have been forgotten.

We went very far through this white labyrinth and finally entered a Jewish house, where three women performed the *danse du ventre.* This dance is very ugly, not even graceful, and is attractive only to curious sightseers. Three sisters, all very much dressed, were going through immodest contortions under the encouraging glance of their mother, an enormous ball of living fat, who wore a headdress of gilt paper and begged for the general fund of the household after each spasm of her daughters. From this room opened three doors, revealing low couches. A fourth room showed a woman, who seemed beautiful; she was lying down. They all fell on me as I peeped in at her, mother, dancers, two negro servants, and a man who was in hiding behind the curtain. It seemed she was the legitimate wife of this last-named person, and the daughter and sister-in-law of these abandoned women. They showed me her little daughter, three or four years of age, who was also attempting the *danse du ventre.*

I came away disgusted.

With every precaution, I was then allowed to enter the dwelling of some great Arabian courtesans. We had to wait at the end of the street, and were admitted only after a great deal of parleying and threatening — for if the natives knew that strangers entered their homes they would leave them, considering them disgraced and dishonored. I saw some fine girls, fairly good-looking, in wretched rooms filled with long mirrors.

And again we followed our guide, groping our way through never-to-be-forgotten dark lanes, lighting matches in order to see, stumbling into holes, striking the houses either with shoulder or hand, and hearing voices sometimes or sounds of music, the clamor of wild revels coming through the walls, as if from a distance, fearful in their muffled mysteriousness.

We stopped beside a certain door and hid on both sides of it, while the officer struck with his fists, calling out at the same time an Arabian phrase, an order of some kind.

The weak voice of an old woman answered him through the boards; and we now distinguished the sounds of “musical instruments amid the shrill singing of women from the depths of this room.

They would not open — the officer became angry and used the most violent language. At last the door half opened; the officer pushed it back and entered as if it were a conquered city, and, with an air of triumph, motioned us to follow him.

We did so, going down three steps into a low room, where three or four little children were asleep on rugs along the walls — they were little Arabs, the children of the household. Another old women, one of those hideous natives, who looked like a bundle of old clothes, from which emerged a witch-like head, inexpressibly ugly and tattooed, tried to stop our advance. But the door had been shut, and we entered another room where a few men obstructed the opening leading still further, and all were listening in a religious silence to the harsh sounds going on within. The officer entered first, motioning the *habitués* aside, and we finally reached a long narrow room, where a great many Arabs were seated on boards on both sides of the long white wall extending from one end of the room to the other.

There, on a large French bedstead, which was almost as wide as the room itself, a pyramid of Arabs could be seen, and from the burnouses turbaned heads peeped out.

At the foot of the bed, and facing us, next to a small mahogany table containing glasses, bottles of beer, coffee cups, and small pewter spoons, four women were seated, singing an endless monotonous southern melody, which a few Jewish musicians accompanied on their instruments.

The women were sumptuously dressed, like princesses in a fairy-tale, and one of them, a girl about fifteen years of age, was so surprisingly beautiful that her loveliness lighted up this strange place, making it a sight never to be forgotten, so unexpected was it.

Her hair was held back under a scarf of gold which went from one side of the forehead to the other. Under this straight metallic band, her eyes appeared large, with a staring, unfeeling look. They were black, set well apart; her nose was beautifully shaped; her mouth was like that of a child as she opened it to sing, and it was the only feature in her face that had any life in it. She had no expression whatever, only a wonderful regularity of lines, primitive, but superb, so unexpected as to make the whole visage charming.

In every face we meet, it seems, we could easily wish to alter a feature here or a line there. But in the head of this young girl, we never would care to change anything, so perfect and typical was her face. The smooth forehead, the nose, the cheeks, so beautifully molded and coming to a point at the chin, were framed in a perfect oval of a somewhat brown skin; the only eyes, the only nose and mouth which could possibly fit in, were there also, and the absolutely ideal beauty we might imagine was realized in this girl.

Next to her was another young girl, charming also, but not so beautiful, one of those milk-white faces with very fair skin. On either side of these stars two other women were seated; they were of a low type, with short necks and prominent cheekbones, two nomad prostitutes, those wretched creatures left on the road by some tribe, where they are taken up some day by a troop of soldiers who bring them into town.

They sang, beating time on the *darbouka* with hands reddened by henbane (a substitute for opium), while the Jewish musicians played on small guitars, tambourines, and shrill flutes.

Everyone listened without saying a word, with never a laugh, and with solemn countenances.

Where were we? In the temple of some barbarous religion, or in a house of ill repute?

In a house of ill repute. Yes, indeed, and nothing in the world ever gave me so unexpected, vivid, and delightful a sensation, as when I entered this long, low room where these girls, adorned, one would say, as for a sacred festival, awaited the caprice of one of the solemn-looking men, who seem to be muttering words from the Koran, in the midst of their debauchery.

One of them was pointed out to me, as he sat with his tiny cup of coffee, with eyes raised as if in deep meditation. He it was who had retained the idol; and nearly all the others were invited guests. He offered them refreshments and music and the sight of this beautiful girl, until the time when he would ask them to retire. And they will bow to him in a very respectful way as they file out. He was handsome, this man who showed such good taste, and also young and tall, with the diaphanous skin of the city Arab which showed still clearer, owing to a black beard, shining and silky, growing somewhat thin on the cheeks.

The music ceased, and we applauded. Everyone joined with us. As we were seated on stepladders, surrounded by a crowd of men, suddenly a long black hand touched me on the shoulder and a voice — one of those peculiar voices of natives trying to speak French — said:

“I am not from here, I am French, like you.”

I looked around and I saw a giant in a burnous, one of the tallest, thinnest, and boniest of all the Arabs I ever have met.

“Where are you from, then?” I asked in surprise.

“From Algeria!”

“Ah, I am sure you must be a Kabyle?”

“Yes, sir.”

And he laughed, delighted that I should have guessed his origin, and pointing to his comrade, added:

“So is he.”

“Ah, truly.”

This was between the acts, as it were.

The women, to whom no one spoke, stood perfectly still, as immovable as statues, and I began a conversation with my two neighbors from Algeria, with the help of the officer of the native police.

I learned that they were shepherds, proprietors near Bougie, and that they carried in the folds of their burnouses the flutes of their country, on which they played at night to amuse themselves. They evidently wished me to praise their talent, and they showed me two slender reeds cut by them near a river.

I asked that they be allowed to play, and everyone became silent at once, with perfect good-breeding.

Oh! the astonishing and delightful sensation that filled my being on hearing the first notes, so faint, so strange, the unknown and unexpected voices coming from the two little weeds grown in water! The strains were sweet, abrupt, and lively: sounds that flowed on, one after another, without ever catching up as it were, never mingling together, a melody forever dying out and beginning again, floating around us like the faint breath of the life of the leaves and the woods, the life of the streams and the wind, brought into this house of ill repute in this section of Tunis, by these two tall shepherds of the Kabyle mountains!

CHAPTER VII. ON THE ROAD TO KAIRWAN

WE LEFT Tunis by a beautiful road leading along a small hill, followed a lake for a short time, and then crossed a plain. The wide horizon, inclosed by mountains with misty summits, was quite bare, only spotted here and there with white villages, where, from a distance, we could see overlooking the indistinct mass of houses the tall, pointed minarets and the small domes of the *koubbas.*

Wherever we go in this fanatical land, we see these shining little domes of *koubbas,* whether in the fertile plains of Algeria or Tunisia or as a beacon on the top of mountains; far back in forests of cedars or pines, on the edge of deep ravines, or in thickets of mastic or cork-trees; sometimes in the yellow desert with two date-trees leaning over them, one on the left and one on the right, throwing on the milk-white cupola the faint and delicate shade of their palms.

They contain, as a sacred seed, the bones of marabouts, which have impregnated the limitless soil belonging to the Faith of Mahomet, and have caused to germinate from Tangiers to Timbuctoo, from Cairo to Mecca, from Tunis to Constantinople, and from Khartoum to Java, the most powerful, the most mysteriously domineering of all religions that have mastered the human conscience.

Small, round, solitary, and so white that they throw out a radiance, they certainly look like divine seeds thrown in handfuls throughout the universe, by that great sower of faith, Mahomet, brother of Aïssa and Moses.

For a long time we went along at the full speed of four horses driven abreast, through endless plains planted with vines or sown with cereals just beginning to sprout.

Then suddenly the beautiful road, built on bridges and embankments since the French occupation, came abruptly to an end. A small bridge had broken down during the last rains, because it was too weak to resist the torrent of water coming down from the mountain. We went down into a ravine with great difficulty, and the carriage finally ascending on the other side, we regained the highway, one of the principal arteries of Tunisia, as they say in official language. For a few kilometers we went at full speed once more, until we came across another small bridge, which had also given way under the pressure of the waters. Then, a little further on, it was the bridge instead that remained standing; it was evidently indestructible and looked like a small triumphal arch, while on both sides of it the road had been washed away, forming an abyss about this ruin, which itself looked quite new.

About noontime we perceived before us a peculiar building. It stood on the edge of the road, which had all but disappeared, and was an agglomeration of small houses joined together and barely reaching a man’s height. They were sheltered under a continuous line of roofs, some of which were a little higher than the others, giving this strange village the appearance of a series of tombs. On these roofs some white dogs ran about, barking at us.

This hamlet is called Gorombalia; it was founded by an Andalusian Mahometan chief, Mahomet Gorombali, who was driven from Spain by Isabella the Catholic.

We took breakfast and then proceeded. All about, with the aid of a field-glass, we could see the ruins of Roman buildings. First of all, Vico Aureliano, then Siago, more important still, where there are Byzantine and Arabian structures. And now the beautiful road, the principal artery of Tunisia, became a disgraceful ditch, the waters having destroyed and undermined it everywhere. Now and then the bridges had fallen down, leaving nothing but a heap of stones in the ravines; again, they remained intact while the water overlooking them had made a path for itself on the slopes of embankments, forming trenches sometimes 150 feet wide.

And why this havoc, these ruins? A child, at first sight, could account for this state of things. All the cuiverts are altogether too narrow to begin with, and all are below the level of the waters as they pour down. Some, then, washed over by the torrents filled with loose, dragging branches, are overturned, while the whimsical stream, refusing to run along the other channels, which are out of its course, goes back to the path of other times, in spite of engineers. This route from Tunis to Kairwan is dreadful to see. Far from being of any help to travelers and vehicles, it is almost impracticable, full of innumerable dangers. The old road was good, but it has been demolished and replaced by a series of quagmires, tumble-down archways, ruts, and holes. It needs to be all made over even before it is completed. After every rainfall the work is begun again, without anyone being willing to admit that this long line *of* crumbling bridges will have to be forever repaired.

The bridge of Enfidaville was twice rebuilt — it has just been carried away again. That of Oued-el-Hammam was destroyed four times. They are swimming bridges, diving bridges; only those built by the Arabs can resist the rainfalls.

We were often angry at the delays, for the carriages had to go down into deep and almost impassable ravines, where ten times in an hour we felt sure we must upset, but we finally ended by laughing at it all as being a good joke. To avoid these dangerous bridges, we had to go in a roundabout way, to the north, then again to the south, turn to the east, to come back to the west. The poor natives, by dint of using pickaxes and chopping with hatchets, made a way through brushwood, evergreens, *thuja*, *leutisk,* heather, and fir-trees, the old path having been destroyed.

Very soon after this the shrubs disappeared and we could see nothing but a stretch of undulating ground, with the earth crevassed by ravines, and, here and there, lay the shining bones of some carcass, or a half-devoured carrion abandoned by the birds of prey or the dogs.

For fifteen months not a drop of rain had fallen on this land, and half the animals had died of hunger. Their skeletons were everywhere, infecting the air, and giving to these plains the look of a barren country, parched by the sun and laid waste by a plague. The dogs alone had fattened on this decaying flesh. We often saw two or three of them fighting over the same carcass. With rigid legs, they tore apart the long limbs of a camel or the short ones of a young ass; they dismembered the breast of a horse or picked at the stomach of a cow. Others, again, wandered around in search of dead flesh, with nose in the air, hair bristling, and muzzle pointed forward.

It is strange to think that this soil, which has been charred for two years by a pitiless sun, drowned for a month under a deluge of rain, will become toward March and April a boundless prairie with grass as high as a man's shoulder and innumerable flowers such as we seldom see in our gardens. Every year during the rainy season the whole of Tunisia goes through, within a few months of each other, the most frightful aridity and the most wonderful fertility. From being like a Sahara without a blade of grass, it becomes suddenly — almost in a few days and as if by magic — a Normandy riotously green, a land intoxicated with heat, throwing through the harvests such shoots, such seeds, that they come out of the earth and grow, yellowing and ripening with so great a rapidity as to be almost visible to the naked eye.

This land is cultivated in a peculiar manner by the Arabs. They occupy either the white villages, seen here and there, or *gourbis,* huts made of branches, or brown tents, shaped like enormous mushrooms, hidden behind dried brushwood or forests of cactus. When the last harvest has been plentiful, they decide early to till the ground, but when the drought has caused them almost to starve, they wait for the first rains to risk their few seeds or to borrow from the government the seedlings, which are usually easy enough to secure. Then, sometimes, as soon as the heavy autumn showers have softened the earth, they go to the cadi who holds sway over the fertile territory, or to the new European landowner who often rents the land dearer but at least does not rob them, and who administers justice in their dealings and their debates, — a fair justice, not a venal one, — and they point out the land chosen by them, which they stake and lease for one season only, and which they till.

Then what an extraordinary sight greets the eye! As we leave the dry stony regions and get nearer to the fruitful sections, from afar we can see the peculiar silhouettes of camels harnessed to the plows. The tall, fantastic-looking beast drags with slow steps the mean-looking implement of wood, which the Arab, clothed in a simple shirt, pushes before him. Very soon these astonishing groups grow more numerous as we reach a choice section. They come and go, crossing one another, showing against the sky an extraordinary combination of camel, plow, and man, who seem welded together, like one solitary being, comical in their solemnity.

The camel is now and then replaced by cows, asses, and sometimes by women. We met one, coupled with a donkey, and she pulled as hard as the beast, while the husband pushed and urged them both on.

The Arab’s furrow is not like the deep, straight furrow of the European plowman, but a kind of festoon even with the ground, which winds capriciously around tufts of lote-trees. The lazy husbandman never stops, nor stoops to tear up an obnoxious weed in his way. He avoids it by a turn, showing great regard for it, inclosing it within the winding circuit of his tilling, as if it were some very precious, sacred plant. Consequently, their fields are full of weeds, some of them so small that a twist of the hand would pull them up. The sight of this mixed farming of weeds and cereals becomes so exasperating that one feels like taking a pick and going to work to clear this land, where through the wild lote-trees passes this fantastical triad of camel, plow, and Arab.

In this quiet indifference, this regard for the plant already grown in God's earth, the fatalist soul of the Oriental shows itself. If that weed grew there, then the Master willed it so, evidently. Why undo His work and destroy it? Is it not better to turn and avoid it? If it grows to the extent of covering the whole field, is there not land elsewhere? Why take so much trouble, why go to any effort, increase one's fatigue, no matter how slight it may be, or add to the necessary toil? Why, indeed?

With us, the laborer, who loves his land, who is more jealous of it than of his wife, would, pickax in hand, declare war on the hostile weed and would never rest until he had destroyed it, striking with the strength of a woodcutter at the tenacious roots, sunk deep in the ground.

Here, what do they care? Never do they remove any stone, they go around it. Certain fields could be cleared in an hour's time of the loose stones that make the sock of the plow go up and down incessantly. But they never will be removed. The stones were there — well, then, let them stay where they are. Is it not the will of God?

When the nomad families have sown the territory chosen by them, they go away, seeking pastures elsewhere for their herds, leaving but one family to watch the harvests.

We now reached an immense department of 140,000 — hectares, called the Enfida, which belongs to the French. The buying of this large piece of land, which was sold by the General Kheired-Din, former minister to the Bey, was one of the principal factors in bringing about French rule in Tunisia.

The circumstances attending this sale were amusing and characteristic. When the French capitalists and the general had come to terms, they went to the cadi to have the act registered; but the Tunisian law contains a special provision which allows the next-door neighbor of a property sold, to claim a preference on equal terms.

With us, by equal terms, we should understand an equal sum in any money in currency; but the Oriental code, which always leaves a door open for disputes, claims that the price must be paid by the neighbor, in moneys identically the same: the same number of legal titles and of the same kind, of bank bills of the same denominations as well as of gold, silver, or brass pieces. Finally, so as to make this as complicated as possible, it authorizes the cadi to allow the original buyer to add to the stipulated sum a handful of small coins of any denomination, even foreign coins, which makes it impossible for the neighbor to find a sum equivalent in kind to the first.

On account of the objections of a Jew, who was a neighbor of this tract of land, the Enfida, the Frenchmen asked the cadi to be allowed to add to the stipulated sum this handful of coins. But this was refused.

The Mussulman law is prolific in ways and means, however, and another scheme was thought of. This was to buy this enormous piece of land of 140,000 hectares, less a strip of about three feet all around. In this way, there was no contact with any neighboring land, and the Franco-African Company became, notwithstanding its enemies and the Bey's ministry, sole proprietor of the Enfida.

This company has had the land tilled, has planted vines and trees, established villages, and divided the land in regular sections of ten hectares each, so that the Arabs have every facility to choose and indicate their piece of ground without danger of any error.

It took two days to cross this Tunisian province before we finally reached the farthest end. For some time the road, which was a mere trail through tufts of jujube, had been steadily improving, and we hoped to reach before night Bou-Ficha, where we were to stop, and we felt very much cheered at the thought, when suddenly we beheld an army of workmen, of all nationalities, occupied in replacing the tolerably fair road by a French highway, that is, a series of dangerous passes, and we were compelled to walk the horses once more. They are extraordinary, these workmen. The thick-lipped negro, with big, white eyes and dazzling teeth, digs next to the Arab with his delicate profile; the hairy Spaniard, the native of Morocco, the Moor, the Maltese, and also the French laborer work side by side, stranded here in this country, one knows not why or how; there are also Greeks, Turks, and all the different types from the east; and one naturally thinks of the degrees of morality, honesty, and friendliness of this motley horde.

About three o'clock we reached the largest caravansary I ever have seen. It is a whole town, or rather a village, inclosed within one wall, containing three immense courtyards, in which the men — the bakers, shoemakers, and other tradesmen — are placed in small huts, and under the arches are the animals. A few clean cells, with beds and rugs, are reserved for distinguished visitors.

On the wall of the terrace, two silvery white pigeons gazed at us, their little red eyes shining like rubies.

The horses having had some water, we continued our journey. The road now led a little nearer to the sea, whose blue line we could see on the horizon. At the end of a cape a city appeared, whose straight, glittering light appeared to run over the water to the setting sun. This was Hommamet, called Put-Put under the Roman rule. In the distance, on the plain before us, rose a circular ruin, which, through a mirage-like effect, appeared gigantic. It was another Roman tomb, only thirty feet high, called Kars-el-Menara.

Night was closing in. Above us the sky was still blue, but in front of us a dense purplish cloud spread out, behind which the sun went down. At the base of these clouds a narrow rose-colored ribbon unfurled itself in a straight line, becoming more and more luminous every moment as the invisible orb descended toward it. Large birds flew slowly above our heads; they were buzzards, I think. The sensation at night in this wild moor, which extended for two days' travel yet, as far as Kairwan, filled the mind and the heart with wonderful thoughts and feelings. Such must be the appearance at twilight of the Russian steppes. We met three men, clad in their burnouses. From a distance they looked like negroes, they were so dark and shiny, but on closer view I recognized the Arab type. They were men from the Souf, a peculiar oasis hidden in the sand, between the *chotts* (the salt lakes) and Tongourt. Night at last fell all around us. The horses could only walk. Suddenly through the shadows appeared a white wall; it was the intendant's house at the northern end of the Enfida, the Bordj of Bou-Ficha, a kind of square fortress, protected by an iron gateway and walls without any openings against the attacks of the Arabs. We were expected, and Madame de Moreau, the wife of the intendant, had prepared an excellent dinner for us. We had traveled over eighty kilometers, notwithstanding the state of the bridges and roads.

DECEMBER 12.

We left at break of day. The sky at dawn was of a deep rose-color. How can I ever describe it! I might say it was almost a salmon pink, were it a little brighter. Truly we are at a loss for words to express the varied combinations of color tones. Our glance, the glance of the present day, can perceive the endless scale of shades, — it can distinguish the blending of colors, the different degrees, the modifications they undergo under the influence of light and shadow at certain hours of the day. But to express these thousands of subtle colorings, we only have a few words, the plain words which our forefathers used to describe the wonderful colors that greeted their primitive eyes.

On looking at new weaves, for instance, how many inexpressible tones are there between the chief ones? To conjure them up we can only use comparisons, which are insufficient.

What I saw that morning in a few minutes I never could express properly, even with the help of verbs, nouns, and adjectives.

We drew still nearer to the sea, or rather to a pond that opened into the sea. With my field-glass I saw flamingoes in the water, and I left the carriage to creep through the brushwood, in order to get a closer view of them.

As I advanced, I could see them distinctly. Some were swimming and others stood about on their long legs. They looked like floating red and white spots, or enormous flowers, growing on a slender red stalk; hundreds were grouped together, either in the water or on the banks. One would think it a hedge of carmined lilies from which emerged, as from a corolla, the blood-stained heads of birds on a long, curved neck.

As I crept still closer, some of them felt my near presence and flew away. One rose at first, then all followed. It was like the flight of a garden, with flower-baskets rising toward the sky, one after the other With my glass I watched for a long while those pink and white clouds going toward the sea, dragging behind them their slender, ruddy legs, like the boughs of a tree.

This large pond was used formerly as a place of refuge for the ships of natives of Aphrodisium, a band of pirates who found shelter here.

We saw in the distance the ruins of this town, where Belisarius halted on his march to Carthage. A triumphal arch stands there still, also the remains of a temple of Venus, and of a large fort.

On the territory of Enfida alone there are traces of seventeen Roman cities. Near the banks of the river is Hergla, which was the wealthy Aurea Cœlia of Antoninus; and if, instead of turning toward Kairwan, we continued our way in a straight line, we should see, after a three days' march, the amphitheater Ed-Djem, standing in an immense uncultivated plain; it was as large as the Coliseum in Rome, and could seat 80,000 spectators.

Around this gigantic building, which would be almost intact if Hamouda, the Bey of Tunis, had not fired upon it, to compel the Arabs who refused to pay taxes to leave it, there are remains everywhere of a large and luxurious city of vast cisterns, and also the ruin of a Corinthian capital, a single block of white marble of the purest type.

What is the history of this town, the Tusdrita of Piiny, Ptolemy's Thysdrus, whose name is transcribed once or twice by historians? What did it need to become famous since it was so powerful, so largely populated, and wealthy? Oh! very little — only a Homer. Without him, what would Troy have been? who would know of Ithaca?

In this country we learn with our eyes what history is, and especially, what the Bible was. We understand that the patriarchs and all the legendary folk, so great in books and impressed so strongly on our minds, were, after all, poor men wandering through the primitive tribes, just as these Arabs, solemn and simple-minded and having the ancient customs and ideas as well as the costumes, wander to this day. But the patriarchs' lives and deeds were sung by poetical historians, and became immortal.

Once a day, at least, at the foot of an olive-tree or on the edge of a forest of cactus, we come across what might be taken to be the "Flight into Egypt"; and we smile when we think of gallant artists who had it that Mary was seated on the ass, when without doubt Joseph, her husband, must have ridden it, while she most likely walked by his side, with heavy footsteps, carrying on her back, in a burnous gray with dust, the Infant Child.

Another picture we meet very frequently at almost every well is Rebecca. She is usually dressed in a blue woolen robe, gracefully draped, and has silver anklets on her feet, and on her breast a necklace of the same metal, which is held by chains. Sometimes she hides her face, as we come near; again, if she is beautiful, she displays a fresh, brown countenance, and looks at us with big, black eyes. She is truly the woman of the Bible, the one of whom the Canticle says: *"Nigra sum sed formosa,"* the one who, holding the water-bottle on her head when walking over the stony road, shows the firm, bronzed flesh of her limbs, as she steps slowly, balancing herself gracefully; she who tempted the angels tempts us also, — we who are not angels.

In Algeria and in the Algerian Sahara, all women dress in white, those of the city as well as those of the tribes. In Tunisia, on the contrary, women of the city are draped from head to foot in veils of black India muslin, giving them the look of apparitions as they go through the streets, which are so bright in the little southern towns. The women of the country are clothed in robes of deep blue, which are full and graceful in effect, giving them a biblical appearance.

We crossed a plain where the handiwork of man may be seen everywhere, for we were nearing the center of the Enfida called Enfidaville, after bearing the name of Dar-el-Bey.

In the distance we saw trees! What a surprise! They were quite tall, too, though planted only four years before, which goes to prove how astonishingly productive is this land when it is properly cultivated. Amid the trees we could see large buildings on which waved the French flag. This was the residence of the general manager, and the heart of the future city. A village had already been erected around these principal buildings, and a mart was open every Monday, when extensive business transactions were carried on. The Arabs came in large numbers from distant points.

It is very interesting to make a study of the management of this immense property, where the interests of the natives have been looked after as carefully as those of the Europeans. It is a model agrarian government for those mixed countries, where customs are entirely different, calling for special foresight in making the laws.

After taking breakfast in this capital of the Enfida, we departed to visit a very peculiar village built on a rock, a distance of about five kilometers. We went through vineyards at first, then returned to the moor, to those long stretches of yellow soil, strewn here and there with only a few tufts of jujube-trees.

The subterranean water-courses are only eight or twelve, or sometimes fifteen feet below the surface in nearly all these plains, which, with a little labor, could become immense fields of olive-trees.

Only now and then could we see a few cactus woodlands, about the size of an ordinary orchard at home.

The following is the origin of these woodlands: There exists in Tunisia a very interesting custom called the “right to vivify the soil,” which allows Arabs to take possession of any uncultivated lands and make them fruitful, if the proprietor is not there to oppose them. So that an Arab, perceiving a field which looks fertile, plants either olives or especially a species of cactus mistakenly called by him fig-trees of Barbary, securing, by doing this, half of every crop as long as the tree lives. The other half belongs to the landowner, who has only to watch the sale of the fruit to claim his share.

The invading Arab must care for the field, fertilize it, protect it from thieves, and defend it in every way as if it really belonged to him; and each year he puts up his fruit for sale, so that the proceeds may be divided equally. Very nearly always, however he becomes the owner of the trees and pays to the real proprietor a kind of irregular rent in proportion to the value of each crop.

These woodlands of cactus are an extraordinary sight. The twisted trunks look like the bodies of dragons, the limbs of monsters whose scales are blown about and bristling with sharp points. On coming across them at night, by moonlight, one feels as if in a land of nightmares.

The foot of this steep rock, on which is the village of Tac-Rouna, is covered with these tall, diabolical-looking plants. We feel that this must be the forest of Dante; that these objects are about to move, to wave their large, round, thick leaves, with ends like long needles, and take hold of you, crushing and tearing you apart with their frightful claws. I know of nothing so terrorizing as this chaos of enormous stones and cacti, standing guard over that mountain.

Suddenly, in the midst of these ferocious-looking rocks and plants, we found a well, surrounded by women coming to draw water. The silver jewelry on their necks and ankles shone in the sun. On seeing us, they hid their brown faces in the folds of the blue robes with which they were draped, and with the arms raised as high as the forehead, they waited until we passed, peeping at us meanwhile.

The path was very steep, barely passable for mules. The cacti also climbed all along the road in the rocks. They seemed to be one of us, surrounding, inclosing, following, and even preceding us. Above, at the top of the hill, appeared the inevitable glittering dome of a k*oubba.*

We finally reached the village: a mass of ruins and of crumbling walls, where it was hard to distinguish the inhabited hovels from those which were deserted. The walls still standing to the north and the west were so much undermined and so dangerous that we dared not venture among them: a blow would knock them over.

The view was superb from above. To the south, the east, and the west was the endless plain washed by the sea on almost all sides. To the north were barren, reddish mountains, dentated like a cock’s comb. In the distance, the

Djebel-Zaghonan towered over the whole country. These were the last mountains we were to see until we reached Kairwan.

This small village of Tac-Rouna was a kind of Arabian stronghold, well sheltered from any attack. Tac, is an abbreviation of Takesche, which signifies fortress. One of the principal functions of the inhabitants, for one cannot in this case say "occupations," consists in keeping in pits the seeds which the natives confide to their care after the harvest.

We returned at night to sleep at Enfidaville.

DECEMBER 13.

At first we went through the vineyards planted by the Franco-African Society, and reached endless plains where wandered, from side to side, that extraordinary combination consisting of a camel, a plow, and an Arab. Then the ground became arid, and with the help of a field-glass we beheld a wilderness of enormous stones standing upright in all directions further than the eye could see. On getting nearer we recognized these as dolmens. This was a burial-ground, the proportions of which were inconceivable, for they covered forty hectares! Every tomb is made of four flat stones, three of which are standing, the fourth being placed on top, forming a roof. For many years all efforts made by the intendant of the Enfida to discover any kind of vault beneath these megalithic monuments remained useless. About eighteen months ago, — or perhaps two years, — M. Harny, who is in charge of the Museum of Ethnology in Paris, succeeded, after many researches, in discovering the entrance to these subterranean tombs, which was hidden with wonderful skill under a bed of heavy stones. He found therein a few bones and earthen vases revealing Barbary sepulchers. M. Mangiavacchi, the manager of the Enfida, has also discovered, not far from there, the almost obliterated traces of a large Barbary city. What manner of town could this have been, which covered with its dead an extent of forty hectares?

With the Oriental, however, we are forever astonished at the space given up in this world to ancestors. The cemeteries are immense and impossible to number — we come across them everywhere. The tombs in the city of Cairo occupy more room than the houses. With us, on the contrary, land is expensive, and the bodies of the departed are of little importance. They are piled up in heaps one over another, in a small space away from the town, in a suburb between four walls. The marble slabs and the wooden crosses cover generations buried in the same spot for centuries. There is a dunghill for dead bodies at the very door of the cities. They are given just sufficient time to lose their identity, in the earth already fattened by human bones, time to mix their decayed flesh with this cadaverous clay; then, as others are forever coming in, and as in the neighboring fields vegetables for the living are being cultivated, men dig with pickaxes into the soil that devours mankind, and tear out the bones, heads, and ribs of men, women, and children, forgotten and huddled together; these are thrown helter-skelter into a trench, and to the late dead whose names are still known, is offered the place stolen from those whom nobody remembers, who have returned to dust, because one must be economical in civilized communities.

On leaving this ancient and immense burial-ground, we perceived a white house. It was El-Menzel, the residence of the manager of the South Enfida, where our journey ended.

As we had sat talking for a long while after dinner, we thought it would be pleasant to go out a few minutes before retiring. A glorious moon lighted up the steppe, and gliding through the scales of gigantic cacti rising a few feet above us, gave them a supernatural look like a herd of infernal beasts, exploding suddenly and throwing into the air in every direction, the round slabs of their hideous bodies.

Having stopped to look at them, distant sounds, continuous and powerful, attracted our notice. There were innumerable voices shrill or deep, of all tones imaginable, whistlings, cries, and calls, the strange and terrifying clamor of a panic-stricken crowd, a countless unreal mob which must be coming to blows somewhere. Straining our ears in every direction, we finally discovered that the outcry came from the south. Then some one exclaimed “The noise must come from the birds of Lake Triton.”

We were, in fact, to pass next day, by the side of this lake, called by the Arabs El-Kelbia (the dog). It has an area of 10,000 to 13,000 hectares, and has been called by certain modern geographers the ancient interior sea of Africa, which had been placed until now in the *chotts* (salt lakes) Fedjedz, R’Arsa, and Melr’ir.

The strange noises came, in truth, from a flock of squalling waterfowl, encamped on the banks of the lake, like an army of sundry tribes. This lake was about sixteen kilometers distant from us, but we could hear in the night the uproar caused by thousands of these birds of all breeds, all shapes, and plumage, from the flat-billed duck to the stork with the long beak.

There were hordes of flamingoes and cranes, colonies of wild ducks and gulls, companies of grebes, of plover, snipe, and sea-gulls. And on bright moonlight nights all these birds, cheered by the light, and being far from men, who have no habitations near this large watery kingdom, become excited, shrieking out, conversing no doubt in bird language, and filling the luminous sky with their shrill voices, to which the only answer given is that of the distant barking of the Arabian dogs and the yelping of jackals.

DECEMBER 14.

After crossing a few more plains, cultivated here and there by natives but having remained most of the time untilled, though they could easily have been made fruitful, we discovered on the left the long sheet of water of Lake Triton. As we approached, it appeared to be covered with innumerable islands, some white and some black. These were colonies of swimming birds, floating about in compact groups. On the banks, gigantic cranes walked along in pairs or three by three, standing high on their long legs. Others were to be seen on the plains, between tufts of brushwood, above which rose their heads looking anxiously around.

This lake, whose depth is from eighteen to twenty-four feet, was completely dry this summer, after the fifteen months of drought which Tunisia had sustained, the longest within the memory of man. But, notwithstanding its large extent, it was filled again in the autumn, for here gather all the rainfalls that come from the middle mountains. The wonderful wealth of this country comes from this: that instead of being crossed by rivers very often dried up but the course of which is regular, forming canals for the rainwater as in Algeria, it is overrun by ravines where the slightest dam is sufficient to check the torrents. So, as the level is the same everywhere, all showers that fall on the distant hills spread over the entire plains, making them for a few days or a few hours an immense marsh, depositing at each inundation a layer of slime that fattens and fertilizes it, like an Egypt without a Nile.

We now found ourselves on a limitless moor where grew an intermittent herb, a small grayish-green plant, of which camels are very fond. We could see, as far as the sight carried, large herds of dromedaries feeding upon it. When we passed among them they looked at us with big shining eyes, and made us feel as if this was the beginning of Time, as if we were living in the days when the hesitating Creator threw handfuls of various types upon earth, as if to judge of the value of his doubtful creations, the shapeless animals, which he has since destroyed little by little, allowing, however, a few primitive types to survive on this neglected continent of Africa, where he has evidently forgotten the giraffe, the ostrich, and the dromedary.

And what an amusing thing we saw here: a camel that had just given birth to a little one was going toward the next camping-place, followed by the little camel being pushed along by twigs in the hands of two young Arabs, whose heads did not reach the back of the small animal. He was already tall, standing on decidedly long legs carrying a very small body, which ended in a neck like a bird's. There was an astonished look in the comical face that had been gazing at the new things of this world for a quarter of an hour only: the light, the moon, and the great animal walking before him. He walked very well indeed, without any hesitancy on this uneven ground, and he got closer all the time to the udder, nature having made this little animal just tall enough to allow him to reach the maternal breast.

There were others a few days older, others again a few months old, and then also some very tall ones whose hair looked like brushwood; some of these camels were yellow, others a grayish white, and still others were black. The scenery became very strange, unlike anything I ever had seen. To the right and left, rows of stone rose from the earth, ranged like soldiers all in the same order, pointed in the same direction toward Kairwan, which was still invisible. They looked as if they were on the march in battalions, these stones standing one behind another, with a distance of about a hundred feet between them. They covered in this manner several kilometers, and between them was the clayey sand. This upheaval is one of the strangest things in the world, and there is a legend attached to it.

When Sidi-Okba arrived with his riders in this sinister desert, where remains to-day all that is left of the sacred city, he struck camp in this solitude. His companions, astonished at seeing him choose this spot, advised him to go farther, but he answered: “We must remain here and found a city, for it is the will of God that we should do so.”

They objected that there was no water to drink, and neither stones nor wood with which to build.

Sidi-Okba commanded silence by these words: ‘‘God will provide.”

Next day he was told that a greyhound had found some water. They dug in that spot and at forty-eight feet below ground they discovered the spring that supplies the large well crowned with a cupola, where a camel turns all day long the windlass that draws up the water.

The day following this, some of the Arabs who had been sent to reconnoiter announced to Sidi-Okba that they had seen forests on the slope of neighboring mountains. And on the next day, riders who had left in the morning galloped back, shouting that they had met walking stones, an army of them, which without doubt were being sent by God.

Kairwan, notwithstanding this miracle, is built entirely of bricks.

The plain now became a marsh of yellow mud, where the horses slipped; they pulled at the carriage without advancing a step, and fell exhausted, sinking in the mire up to their knees, the wheels buried to the hub. The sky was overcast and presently a fine rain fell, filling the horizon with mists. Sometimes the road appeared to be improving, as we climbed one of the seven undulations called the seven hills of Kairwan, and again it became a frightful sewer. Suddenly the carriage stopped; one of the back wheels had broken down.

We had to get out and walk. We were then in the rain with the wind beating down on us, and we raised with each step enormous lumps of clay that clung to our shoes, weighing us down until we were exhausted. Again we plunged into quagmires, out of breath and cursing the stormy south; but we continued our pilgrimage to the Sacred City, which surely must be credited to us in the other world if, by any chance, the God of the Prophet is the true God. For it is said that, to the faithful, seven pilgrimages to Kairwan equal one pilgrimage to Mecca.

After tramping in this exhausted way for a kilometer or so, we saw through the fog, in the distance before us, a slender, pointed tower, which was barely visible and whose summit was lost in a cloud. It was a vague and startling apparition, growing clearer by degrees and taking on a decided form. At last we saw that it was a large minaret standing against the sky, so that we could see nothing else, nothing around or about it; neither the city nor the walls nor even the cupolas of the mosques. The rain continued to beat down on us, and we proceeded slowly toward the grayish beacon light standing erect before us like a phantom tower which might disappear before long and sink back within the mists from where it had emerged.

Then to the right appeared a monument covered with domes: it was the mosque called after Mahomet’s barber; and finally the city could be distinguished, though it was still an indistinct and undetermined mass behind the curtain of rain. The minaret seemed less high now than it had a while ago, as if it had sunk back within the walls, after rising to the sky to guide us to the city.

Oh, this melancholy city lost in the desert, in this barren and desolate country! Through narrow, winding streets, the Arabs sheltered in the sellers' shops watched us as we went by; and when we met a woman, between these walls yellowed by the rain, she looked like death itself walking about.

Hospitality was offered us by the Tunisian governor of Kairwan, Si-Mahomet-el-Marabout, a general of the Bey, a noble and very pious Mussulman who had already performed the pilgrimage to Mecca three times. He conducted us with great politeness toward the rooms reserved for strangers, where we found large divans and wonderful Arabian rugs in which we wrapped ourselves to sleep. To honor us especially, one of his sons brought us with his own hands all the different things we needed.

We dined that night at the house of the French consul and civil comptroller, where we found a warm and charming reception, which consoled and recompensed us for our previous hardships.

DECEMBER 15.

Daylight had not appeared yet when one of my companions awoke me. We had arranged to take a Turkish bath the first thing before visiting the town.

The streets were already filled, for Orientals rise before the sun, and we could see between the houses a fine sky full of promise of heat and light.

We followed lane after lane, we passed the well where the camel imprisoned in the cupola was turning around without ceasing, drawing water, and we finally entered a dark house with thick walls, in which we could see nothing at first and where the damp, hot atmosphere suffocated us on entering.

We saw some Arabs sleeping on rugs, and the proprietor of the baths, after making us undress, took us into the sweating-rooms, cell-like places, dark and vaulted, where daylight came in from the top by a narrow window; the floor was covered with a glue-like water, in which we could not walk without fearing to fall at every step.

After all the massage operations had been gone through and we had returned to the open air, we were intoxicated with pleasure, as we perceived in the bright sunlight the streets of Kaifwan, the Sacred City, which is like all Arabian towns, but indeed fiercer, more harshly characteristic, stamped with fanaticism, and more striking in its obvious poverty, its wretched yet haughty nobility, than any other city.

The inhabitants had just come through a period of drought, and it was easy to detect the look of famine which seemed to pervade even the houses. They sold, as in all the market towns of central Africa, all sorts of little things in box-like shops, where the merchants were squatting after the Turkish fashion, There were dates from Gafso or the Souf, gathered in large bundles of clammy paste, from which the seller detached fragments with his fingers. There were also vegetables, pimentos, and dough, and in the *souks,* which were long, winding, covered bazaars, were fabrics, rugs, saddlery embroidered in gold and silver, and an incredible quantity of cobblers making Turkish slippers of yellow leather. Until the French occupation, the Jews had never succeeded in entering this impenetrable city. Now they swarmed and preyed upon it. They already possessed the jewelry of the women and the legal titles of property to most of the houses on which they had lent money; they soon became owners of these, thanks to the renewing system and the multiplication of debts, which they carry on with consummate skill and rapacity.

We went toward the mosque, Djama-Kebir or Sidi-Okba, whose tall minaret overlooked the city and the desert which cuts it off from the world. It appeared suddenly at the turn of the road. It is a large, massive building supported by enormous buttresses, a white mass stately in its inexplicably fierce beauty. On entering it, a magnificent courtyard appeared first, inclosed by a double cloister upheld by two graceful rows of Roman columns. We might have been in the interior of one of the beautiful monasteries of Italy.

The mosque itself was on the right, and it received the light from the court through seventeen folding doors, all of which we caused to be opened before we entered.

I know of only three other religious structures in the world that have inspired in me the unexpected and startling emotion that I felt before this barbaric and astonishing monument: Mont Saint-Michel, Saint Mark’s of Venice, and the Chapel Palatine in Palermo.

These are masterpieces conforming to reason, studied and admirable conceptions of great architects, who were confident of the effect to be produced; pious men, no doubt, but men who were artists before everything, inspired by the love of lines, of design, and decorative beauty, as much as, and perhaps more than, by love of God. Here was a very different matter. A fanatical wandering tribe, barely capable of erecting walls, had come upon this land covered with ruins left by its predecessors, and, gathering everything that seemed beautiful, had raised, compelled by a divine inspiration, a monument to its God, a building composed of materials torn from crumbling towns, but a structure as perfect and stately as the purest conceptions of the greatest hewers of stone.

Before us appeared a huge temple that looked like a sacred forest, for one hundred and eighty columns in onyx, porphyry, and marble supported the arches of seventeen naves corresponding to the seventeen doors.

The glance was held for the moment and then carried away through this deep entanglement of slim, round pillars of an irreproachable grace, whose every shade blended and harmonized, and whose Byzantine capitals of the African and Oriental school were of rare workmanship and infinite variety. Some certainly were perfect, and the most original, perhaps, represented a palm-tree twisted by the wind.

As we advanced in this divinely beautiful abode all the columns seemed to be moving, to be forming about us varied designs of a delightful, changeable regularity.

In our Gothic cathedrals the effect of vastness is obtained through the intended disproportion between the height and the width. Here, on the contrary, the sole harmony of this low temple consisted in the proportion and the number of these slender shafts upholding the edifice, filling, peopling, and making it what it was, creating its charm and grandeur. Their colored multitude gave an impression of limitless space, while the building, not being very high, conveyed to the mind a feeling of weightiness. It seemed as vast as the world, and one felt crushed, as under the power of a God.

The God who inspired this superb masterpiece of art is without doubt the One who dictated the Koran, not the God of the Gospels. His ingenious doctrine spreads more than it rises, astonishes by its propagation more than by its loftiness.

Everywhere we found remarkable details. The room of the Sultan, who entered by a special door, was built from a wooden wall carved as if by a master sculptor. The pulpit, also, in panels wonderfully chiseled, was of a very excellent design, and the *muhrab* which indicated the Mecca was a beautiful niche of sculptured marble, both painted and gilt, and exquisitely decorated.

Next to this *muhrab,* two neighboring columns left barely room between them for a human body to glide through. Those of the Arabs who can do so are cured of rheumatism, according to some, others again pretend they can obtain other more ideal favors.

Facing the middle door of the mosque the ninth to the right, as well as to the left, the minaret stood upright on the other side of the courtyard. It had a hundred and twenty-nine steps, which we climbed.

From that height, Kairwan at our feet seemed a checkerboard of plaster terraces, from which flashed the large, glittering cupolas of the mosques and *koubbas.* All about us was a yellow, limitless desert, while near the walls appeared here and there the green slabs of the field of cacti. This boundless horizon was infinitely void and sad, and was more depressing than the Sahara itself.

Kairwan, it seems, was a much larger city, and the names of the districts which have disappeared are still mentioned. These are Draa-el-Temmar, the hill of the date-sellers; Draa-el-Ouiba, the hill of the wheat-measurers; Draa-el-Kerronia, the hill of the gingerbread-sellers; Draa-el-Gatrania, the hill of the tar-sellers; Derb-es-Mesmar, the district of the nail-merchants.

Isolated where it stands outside the city about one kilometer away, the *zaouia,* or rather the mosque of Sidi-Sahab (the prophet's barber) attracts the eye from afar; we went toward it. We found this *zaouia* very different from that of Djama-Kebir, which we had just left; though not stately like the latter, this one was the most graceful, the most highly colored and coquettish of all the mosques, and was the most perfect specimen of Arabian decorative art that I ever have seen.

We entered, by a staircase of antique tiles of a delightful design, into a small entrance hall, paved and ornamented in the same manner. A long, narrow courtyard came next, surrounded by a cloister with arches, in the shape of a horse-shoe, resting on Roman columns and reflecting, when the day is bright, the dazzling brilliancy of the sun, which pours down in sheets of gold on all these walls, covered evenly with tiles of wonderful coloring and infinite variety. The large square courtyard which followed was also entirely decorated in the same manner. The light shone, streaming and gilding with fire, this immense enameled palace, where were lighted up, under the blazing Saharan sky, all the designs and colorings of Oriental pottery. Above these were inexpressibly delightful arabesques. It was from this fairy-like courtyard that opened the door of the sanctuary containing the tomb of Sidi-Sahab, companion and barber to the prophet, three hairs of whose beard he carried on his breast to his dying day.

This sanctuary, decorated with regular designs in white and black marble, in which inscriptions are traced, which was filled with thick rugs and standards, appeared to me less beautiful than the two wonderful courts by which we reached it. On leaving it, we crossed a third court, peopled with young men. It was a Mussulman college, a school for fanatics. All these *zaouias*, of which the land of Islam is covered, are, as it were, the eggs of the innumerable orders and fraternities between which are divided the special devotions of the faithful.

The principal one in Kairwan (I am not speaking here of the mosques which belong to God alone) are: the *zaouia* of Si-Mahomet-Elonani, the *zaouia* of Sidi-Abd-el-Kader-ea Djalani, the greatest and most revered saint of Islam; the *zaouia* Et-Tid-Jani; the *zaouia* Sidi-Mahomet-Ben-Aissa from Mekues, which contains tambourines, derboukas, swords, iron heads, and other instruments necessary to the fierce ceremonies of the Aissaouas.

These innumerable brotherhoods and fraternities of Islam, which resemble the Catholic orders in many points, and which, placed under the protection of a venerated marabout, are connected with the prophet by a chain of pious doctors called by the Arabs, “Selselat,” have increased considerably since the beginning of the present century especially, and they form the most formidable bulwarks of the Mahometan religion against the civilization and domination of Europeans.

Under the title of “Marabout and Khouan,” the commander-in-chief, General Rim, has enumerated and analyzed them in the most complete manner. I find in that book a few very curious texts on the doctrines and practices of these confederations. Each one insists that it has maintained intact the obedience to the five commandments of the Prophet, and has also received from him instructions showing the only way to reach a perfect union with God, which is the aim of all religious Mussulmans. Notwithstanding this pretense of an absolute orthodoxy and purity of creed, all these orders and fraternities have customs, teachings, and tendencies widely differing from one another. Some of these organize powerful religious associations, which are directed by learned theologians leading an austere life, men truly superior, as well versed theoretically as they are formidable diplomatists in their relations with us; who govern with unusual skill their schools of sacred science, of higher philosophy, and also schools of warfare against Europeans. Others, again, form peculiar unions with fanatics or quacks who look like religious jugglers, and who are sometimes possessed of exaggerated enthusiasm; again mere mountebanks taking advantage of the stupidity and simple-mindedness of men.

As I have already said, the sole aim of all good Mussulmans is an intimate union with God. Various mystical processes lead to that perfect state, and each confederation has its own method of enthusiasm. In general, this method leads the adept to a state of complete subjection which makes him a blind and easy tool in the hands of the chief.

Each order has at its head a *sheik,* a master of the order. The rules say:

> "You will be in the hands of your *sheik* like the corpse in the hands of the washer of dead bodies. Obey him in everything he says, for it is the voice of God himself who commands through him. Do not forget that you are his slave, and that you must not do anything without his consent.
>
> "The *sheik* is the beloved of God; he is superior to all other human beings, and takes rank after the prophets. So that you must see only him and see him everywhere. Banish from your heart every other thought but that which has God or the *sheik* for object."

Next to this sacred personage are the Moquaddem, vicars to the *sheik,* propagators of the Faith.

Finally, those who are merely initiated to the order are called the *Khouan,* the brothers.

Each fraternity, in order to attain that state of hallucination where man is one with God, has its special prayers, or rather its particular stupefying gymnastics. This is called the *dirkr.* It is nearly always a very short invocation, or rather a repetition of a word or phrase for an infinite number of times. The adepts pronounce, with regular motions of the head and neck, two hundred, five hundred, or even a thousand times, either the word God or the formula which recurs in all their prayers: "There is no other God but God," adding also a few verses indicating the fraternity to which they belong.

The neophyte, at the moment of his initiation, is called *talamid,* then *faquir, Soufi, Salek,* and then *med-jedoub,* (the enraptured, the fanatic). It is at this moment that either inspiration or lunacy takes place, the spirit being separated from the body responds to a sort of mystical hysteria. This man thenceforth does not belong to physical life. Spiritual life alone exists for him, and he does not have to perform the practices of his religion.

Above this position, there is only that of *touhid,* which is the supreme beatitude, the complete loss of identity with God.

Ecstasy has also its degrees, which are curiously described by Sheik-Snoussi, affiliated to the order of the Khelonatya, who are seers, interpreting dreams. The wonderful similarity between these and the Christian Mystics is worthy of notice.

This is what Sheik-Snoussi writes:

“.. The adept enjoys thereafter the sight of other lights which are to him the most perfect talismans.

“The number of these lights is seventy thousand; this is subdivided into several series and composes the seven degrees by which we reach the perfect state of the soul. The first of these degrees is humaneness. We perceive ten thousand lights, which are perceptible only to those who can reach this degree: their color is dull — they blend one into the other. To attain the second degree, the heart must have been purified. Then we discover ten thousand other lights belonging to this degree, which is that of passionate ecstasy; their color is light blue. We reach the third degree, the ecstasy of the heart. Then we see hell and its attributes, as well as ten thousand other lights, whose color is as red as that produced by a vivid fire. At this point we are enabled to see genii and their symbols, for the heart can enjoy seven spiritual conditions, accessible only to certain affiliated.

“Rising after this to another degree, we see ten thousand new lights, belonging to the state of ecstasy of the material soul. These lights are of a pronounced yellow. We can then see the souls of prophets and of saints.

“The fifth degree is that of the mysterious ecstasy. We behold the angels and ten thousand other lights of a dazzling white.

“The sixth is the ecstasy of evil spirits. We enjoy also ten thousand other lights, whose color is that of limpid mirrors. Having reached this point we feel a delightful rapture of the mind, called *el-Khadir,* which is the fundamental origin of spiritual life. Then only do we see the prophet Mahomet.

"Finally we reach the last ten thousand hidden lights attaining the seventh degree, which is beatitude. These lights are green and white, but they undergo successive transformations; for instance, they pass through the color of precious stones to take on a clearer light; then they finally acquire a shade which has no similarity, no resemblance whatever to any other shade, which is not in existence anywhere, but is spread all over the universe. Having reached this state, God's attributes are revealed to us. It is then as if we did not belong to this world. Terrestrial things have disappeared for us."

Are these not the seven visions of heaven of St. Theresa, and do not the seven colors correspond to the seven degrees of ecstasy? To attain this state of agitation, here is the special process employed by the Khelonatya:

One man sits with legs crossed repeating for a certain length of time: "There is no God but Allah," putting the lips alternately to the right shoulder and then to the heart. Then one recites the invocation, which consists in setting forth the names of God, giving an idea of his greatness and power, mentioning only the ten following names, in the order in which they are given: "Him, the Just, the Living, the Irresistible, the Greatest Giver, the Greatest Provider, the One who opens to Truth the hardened hearts of men, the Only, the Eternal, the Immutable One."

The adepts, after each invocation, must recite certain prayers a hundred times, or even more, in succession. They form a circle to recite these special prayers. The one who says them aloud, when pronouncing *Him,* bends his head forward to the center of the ring, slanting it to the right, when he throws it back toward the left to the back of the circle. One of the others begins the word *Him,* after which the others all join in chorus, bending their heads first to the right, then to the left.

Let us compare these practices with those of the Quadrya. "Having seated themselves with legs crossed, they touch the tip of the right foot, then the principal artery, called *el-Kias,* which passes around the entrails; they then place the open hand, with outstretched fingers, on the knee, bend the head to the right, saying *ha,* to the left, saying *hou,* and again forward, saying *hi* then they begin once more. It is very important and altogether necessary that the one who pronounces the words, should stop on the first of these names as long as his breath will allow; then, when he has been purified, he emphasizes the name of God in the same manner, and this as long as his soul may be liable to reproach; alter which he pronounces the word *hou* when the body is willing to obey; and finally when the soul has attained the longed-for degree of perfection, he can say the word *hi.”*

These prayers, which are to bring about the complete annihilation of a man’s individuality, which absorb him into the essence of God (that is, the state in which one reaches the contemplation of God in His attributes) is called *ouerd-debered.*

But among all the Algerian fraternities, surely that of the Aissaoua attracts strangers more than any other. We know of the frightful practices of these hysterical mountebanks, who after working themselves up to a state of ecstasy, by forming a sort of magnetic chain and reciting certain prayers, can eat the thorny leaves of the cactus also nails, ground glass, scorpions, and snakes. Sometimes these madmen devour, with fearful convulsions, a living lamb, wool, skin, and bleeding flesh, leaving only a few bones on the ground. They thrust spearheads in their cheeks or bodies; and after death, if an autopsy is performed, all kinds of different objects are found in the lining of their stomachs.

We find in the text-books of the Aissaoua the most poetic prayers and teachings of all the lslamitic fraternities.

I will give only a few phrases taken from General Rim’s book:

“The prophet said to Abou-Dirr-el R’ifari, one day: ‘O Abou-Dirr, the laugh of the poor is a worship; then games, the proclamation and the praise of God; their sleep a charity.’

“The *sheik* again said:

‘“To pray and fast in a solitude, and not to have any mercy in the heart, that is called hypocrisy.

“‘Love is the highest degree of perfection. He who loves not has not reached any degree of perfection. There are four ways of loving, to love with the mind, to love with the heart, to love with the soul, and the mysterious love.’”

Who has ever described love in a more complete, more subtle, and more beautiful manner?

It would be easy to multiply these quotations indefinitely.

But next to these mystical orders belonging to the Great Mussulman orthodox rites, comes a dissenting sect, that of the Ibadites, or Beni Mozab, which presents very strange peculiarities.

The Beni-Mozab inhabit, south of the French possessions in Algeria, in the most arid part of the Sahara, a small country, the Mozab, which they have rendered fertile through stupendous efforts.

We find with astonishment, in this small republic of these Puritans of Islam, the principles of government of a socialist community and also the organization of the Scottish Presbyterian Church. Their philosophy is harsh, intolerant, inflexible. They have a horror of blood being spilt, and admit its possibility only in defense of the creed. Half of the ordinary actions of mankind, the accidental or voluntary contact with the hand of a woman, a damp object, or one which is soiled and forbidden, are grave faults requiring special and prolonged ablution.

Celibacy which leads to debauchery, anger, singing, music, gambling, dancing, all manner of luxuries, tobacco and coffee taken in a public-house, are sins, which if persevered in, incur a much dreaded excommunication called the *tebria.*

Contrary to the doctrines of a Mussulman congregation, where a majority proclaim that the pious practices, the prayers, and the mystical enthusiasm are sufficient to save the faithful, no matter what their actions may be, the Ibadites maintain that the eternal salvation of man cannot be gained without his leading a pure life. They carry to excess the observance of the precepts of the Koran, treating the dervishes and fakirs as heretics, and not believing that God, who is a just and inflexible master, approves of the intervention of the Prophets and Saints, whose memory they venerate, however. They deny the inspired and enlightened ones, and do not even recognize the right of the Iman to forgive his fellow-men, for God alone can rightly judge of the importance of faults and the value of repentance.

The Ibadites, however, are schismatics who belong to the most ancient of the schisms of Islam, descendants of the Assassins of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet.

But the orders which contain in Tunisia the greatest number of adherents, who seem to be on a line with the Aissaoua, are those of the Tid-janya and the Iadrya, this last founded by Abd-el-Kader-el-Djmani, the holiest man in the Islam faith, according to Mahomet.

The *zaouias* of these two marabouts, which we visited after that of the barber, were far from possessing the grace and beauty of the two monuments we had first seen.

DECEMBER 16.

The road from Kairwan toward Susa increased the feeling of depression felt in the Sacred City.

After passing long cemeteries, vast fields of stone, we came across hillocks of rubbish accumulated for centuries; then began once more the marshy plain, where we often drove over the backs of tortoises, and again the moor where camels pastured. Behind us, the town, the domes, the mosques, and minarets rose in that mournful solitude like a mirage of the desert, then they receded, and finally disappeared.

After driving several hours, we halted for the first time near a *koubba,* in a clump of olive-trees. We found ourselves at Sidi-L'Hanni, and I never saw the sun make of a white cupola a more astonishing marvel of colorings. Was it white? Yes, of a blinding whiteness! and yet the light was so strangely transformed on this large, egg-like structure that we could perceive an enchanting blending of mysterious shades, which seemed imaginary rather than real, so delicate and faint, so steeped in that whiteness of snow, that we did not see them immediately, only after the first astonished, dazzling glance were they revealed to us. And then we could see nothing but these numerous shadings, so varied and potent, though barely visible at the same time. The more we looked at them, the more pronounced did they become. Showers of gold flowed on these outlines, bathed in a dim lilac-like mist, crossed here and there by bluish rays. The motionless shadow was sometimes gray, or green, or yellow. Under the shelter of a cornice, the wall below it seemed violet; and I surmised the atmosphere must be mauve around that blinding dome, which fooked to me now almost pink; for on looking at it too closely, the tones and shades, so bright and clear, became confused under the brilliancy of the light. And the shadow thrown on the ground of this *koubba,* of what shade was it? Who could ever analyze, describe, or paint it? How many years should we have to steep our eyes and our thoughts in these indescribable colorings, so novel to us who have been taught to gaze at the atmosphere of Europe with its effects and reflections, before we could understand these, distinguish and express them so that we could give to those who would see them on canvas, where they would be painted by the brush of an artist, the complete rendering of their beauty as it really is?

We now reached a country less barren, where olive-trees grew. At Mouriddin, near a well, a beautiful girl laughed, showing her teeth as we passed by, and a little further on we overtook a rich merchant of Susa returning to town, riding a donkey and followed by a little negro boy who carried his gun. He had no doubt been inspecting his field of olives or his vineyards. In the road, boxed in with trees, he made a pretty picture. He was young, clothed in a green vest and a pink jacket, partly hidden under a silk burnous draped about his shoulders and hips. Seated like a woman on his donkey, which trotted along, he dangled his two legs incased in stockings of the purest white, while on his feet were two glossy slippers without heels, which held on in some inexplicable manner.

And the little negro boy, dressed in red, with a gun on his shoulder, ran with a wonderful agility behind his master's mount.

Here we were at Susa.

But I must have seen this town before to-day! Yes, of course, I had this luminous vision in days gone by, in the days of my life at school, when I studied the Crusades in the "History of France" by Burette. Oh, I have known it for so long! There must be Saracens behind that long battlemented rampart, so high and slender, with towers here and there, with the round doors and turbaned men roaming about at the entrance. Oh! that wall, it must be the very one that was drawn in our picture-books, so regular and clear-looking is it that one might think it cut out of cardboard. How pretty and bright!

If only to see Susa, this long trip is worth making. What a beautiful wall, reaching as far as the sea, for carriages cannot enter the narrow and winding streets of this town of other times. This wall ran along to the shore, with its battlements and square towers, then it made a curve, followed the beach, turned once more, ascended and continued in a circle, without once changing, not even for a few feet, the coquettish appearance of its Saracen bulwarks. And without ever ending, it began again, and looked like a chaplet of indented parapets and turrets, inclosing in its dazzling circle, as if in a crown of white paper, the city with its many stories of plaster houses; the lower wall was bathed in the sea while the topmost wall showed in profile against the sky.

After going through the town, an interweaving of astonishing lanes, as we had still another hour of daylight, we decided to go to see, at a distance of ten minutes from the gateway, the excavations being made by the authorities, on the site of the burial-ground in Hadrumetum. Large vaults have been discovered, containing as many as twenty sepulchers, some of which bear traces of mural paintings. These researches are due to the officers, who become enthusiastic archaeologists, and who would render science invaluable help if the administration of fine arts did not curb their zeal by most vexatious measures.

In 1860 there came to light in this same necropolis a very curious mosaic representing the labyrinth of Crete with the Minotaur in the center, and near the entrance, a bark bringing Theseus, with Ariadne and her thread. The Bey wished to have this remarkable mosaic brought to his museum, but it was completely destroyed on the way.

A photograph was kindly offered to me, made from a drawing of Mr. Larmande, draughtsman to the Government.

We returned to Susa at sunset, to dine at the residence of the French Civil Manager, who is one of the most learned and most interesting *raconteurs* of the manners and customs of this country. From his house we could see the whole town, a cascade of square, whitewashed roofs, where black cats ran about, and sometimes a phantom arose, draped in light or colored garments. From place to place a tall palm-tree grew between the houses and spread its green leaves over this even whiteness.

Then, when the moon rose, all this became a silver foam rolling toward the sea, a wonderful poet’s dream realized, the improbable apparition of a fantastic city from which a gleam of light ascended to the heavens.

We wandered through the streets until a late hour. The door of a Moorish *café* attracted us, so we entered. It was full of men, seated or lying either on the ground or on the boards covered with rugs, around an Arabian story-teller. He was a fat old man with a roguish look, who spoke with a comical mimicry that was very amusing. He was relating a joke, the story of an impostor who tried to pass himself off for a marabout but whose identity the Iman revealed. His simple-minded auditors were delighted, and followed with great attention a recital which was interrupted only by loud laughter. We left after awhile and walked about for hours, for we could not retire, it was such a glorious night.

And behold, in a narrow street, we stopped in front of a fine Oriental house, whose open door showed a long straight staircase, decorated in tiles and illuminated from top to bottom by an invisible lamp, throwing a shower of light coming apparently from nowhere. Under this inexplicable radiance each enameled step seemed to be awaiting someone, perhaps some old fat Mussulman, but I think it must have been a young lover. Never did I understand the meaning of expectancy as I did before this open door and this deserted staircase, where an unseen lamp held vigil. Outside, on the wall lighted by the moon, hung a large closed balcony called a *barmakli.* There were two darkened openings in the middle, behind the valuable chiseled ironwork of the *moucharabis.* Was she in there, watching, listening, and hating us, this Arabian Juliet whose heart beat high? Perhaps so. But her desires were not like those which, in our country, would raise our senses to unknown heights on such a night. On this enervating and lukewarm soil, so captivating that the legend of the lotus-eaters came from the island of Djerba, the atmosphere is sweeter than anywhere else, the sun warmer, daylight clearer, but the heart does not know how to love. The women, beautiful and intense, are ignorant of our tender caresses. Their simple souls are strangers to our sentimental emotions, and their kisses, it is said, are passionless.

The Criticism

GUY DE MAUPASSANT by Joseph Conrad

To introduce Maupassant to English readers with apologetic explanations as though his art were recondite and the tendency of his work immoral would be a gratuitous impertinence.

Maupassant's conception of his art is such as one would expect from a practical and resolute mind; but in the consummate simplicity of his technique it ceases to be perceptible. This is one of its greatest qualities, and like all the great virtues it is based primarily on self-denial.

To pronounce a judgment upon the general tendency of an author is a difficult task. One could not depend upon reason alone, nor yet trust solely to one's emotions. Used together, they would in many cases traverse each other, because emotions have their own unanswerable logic. Our capacity for emotion is limited, and the field of our intelligence is restricted. Responsiveness to every feeling, combined with the penetration of every intellectual subterfuge, would end, not in judgment, but in universal absolution. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. And in this benevolent neutrality towards the warring errors of human nature all light would go out from art and from life.

We are at liberty then to quarrel with Maupassant's attitude towards our world in which, like the rest of us, he has that share which his senses are able to give him. But we need not quarrel with him violently. If our feelings (which are tender) happen to be hurt because his talent is not exercised for the praise and consolation of mankind, our intelligence (which is great) should let us see that he is a very splendid sinner, like all those who in this valley of compromises err by over-devotion to the truth that is in them. His determinism, barren of praise, blame and consolation, has all the merit of his conscientious art. The worth of every conviction consists precisely in the steadfastness with which it is held.

Except for his philosophy, which in the case of so consummate an artist does not matter (unless to the solemn and naive mind), Maupassant of all writers of fiction demands least forgiveness from his readers. He does not require forgiveness because he is never dull.

The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a moral and an excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification. The spectacle of this immense talent served by exceptional faculties and triumphing over the most thankless subjects by an unswerving singleness of purpose is in itself an admirable lesson in the power of artistic honesty, one may say of artistic virtue. The inherent greatness of the man consists in this, that he will let none of the fascinations that beset a writer working in loneliness turn him away from the straight path, from the vouchsafed vision of excellence. He will not be led into perdition by the seductions of sentiment, of eloquence, of humour, of pathos; of all that splendid pageant of faults that pass between the writer and his probity on the blank sheet of paper, like the glittering cortège of deadly sins before the austere anchorite in the desert air of Thebaïde. This is not to say that Maupassant's austerity has never faltered; but the fact remains that no tempting demon has ever succeeded in hurling him down from his high, if narrow, pedestal.

It is the austerity of his talent, of course, that is in question. Let the discriminating reader, who at times may well spare a moment or two to the consideration and enjoyment of artistic excellence, be asked to reflect a little upon the texture of two stories included in this volume: "A Piece of String," and "A Sale." How many openings the last offers for the gratuitous display of the author's wit or clever buffoonery, the first for an unmeasured display of sentiment! And both sentiment and buffoonery could have been made very good too, in a way accessible to the meanest intelligence, at the cost of truth and honesty. Here it is where Maupassant's austerity comes in. He refrains from setting his cleverness against the eloquence of the facts. There is humour and pathos in these stories; but such is the greatness of his talent, the refinement of his artistic conscience, that all his high qualities appear inherent in the very things of which he speaks, as if they had been altogether independent of his presentation. Facts, and again facts are his unique concern. That is why he is not always properly understood. His facts are so perfectly rendered that, like the actualities of life itself, they demand from the reader the faculty of observation which is rare, the power of appreciation which is generally wanting in most of us who are guided mainly by empty phrases requiring no effort, demanding from us no qualities except a vague susceptibility to emotion. Nobody has ever gained the vast applause of a crowd by the simple and clear exposition of vital facts. Words alone strung upon a convention have fascinated us as worthless glass beads strung on a thread have charmed at all times our brothers the unsophisticated savages of the islands. Now, Maupassant, of whom it has been said that he is the master of the *mot juste*, has never been a dealer in words. His wares have been, not glass beads, but polished gems; not the most rare and precious, perhaps, but of the very first water of their kind.

That he took trouble with his gems, taking them up in the rough and polishing each facet patiently, the publication of the two posthumous volumes of short stories proves abundantly. I think it proves also the assertion made here that he was by no means a dealer in words. On looking at the first feeble drafts from which so many perfect stories have been fashioned, one discovers that what has been matured, improved, brought to perfection by unwearied endeavour is not the diction of the tale, but the vision of its true shape and detail. Those first attempts are not faltering or uncertain in expression. It is the conception which is at fault. The subjects have not yet been adequately seen. His proceeding was not to group expressive words, that mean nothing, around misty and mysterious shapes dear to muddled intellects and belonging neither to earth nor to heaven. His vision by a more scrupulous, prolonged and devoted attention to the aspects of the visible world discovered at last the right words as if miraculously impressed for him upon the face of things and events. This was the particular shape taken by his inspiration; it came to him directly, honestly in the light of his day, not on the tortuous, dark roads of meditation. His realities came to him from a genuine source, from this universe of vain appearances wherein we men have found everything to make us proud, sorry, exalted, and humble.

Maupassant’s renown is universal, but his popularity is restricted. It is not difficult to perceive why. Maupassant is an intensely national writer. He is so intensely national in his logic, in his clearness, in his æsthetic and moral conceptions, that he has been accepted by his countrymen without having had to pay the tribute of flattery either to the nation as a whole, or to any class, sphere or division of the nation. The truth of his art tells with an irresistible force; and he stands excused from the duty of patriotic posturing. He is a Frenchman of Frenchmen beyond question or cavil, and with that he is simple enough to be universally comprehensible. What is wanting to his universal success is the mediocrity of an obvious and appealing tenderness. He neglects to qualify his truth with the drop of facile sweetness; he forgets to strew paper roses over the tombs. The disregard of these common decencies lays him open to the charges of cruelty, cynicism, hardness. And yet it can be safely affirmed that this man wrote from the fulness of a compassionate heart. He is merciless and yet gentle with his mankind; he does not rail at their prudent fears and their small artifices; he does not despise their labours. It seems to me that he looks with an eye of profound pity upon their troubles, deceptions and misery. But he looks at them all. He sees — and does not turn away his head. As a matter of fact he is courageous.

Courage and justice are not popular virtues. The practice of strict justice is shocking to the multitude who always (perhaps from an obscure sense of guilt) attach to it the meaning of mercy. In the majority of us, who want to be left alone with our illusions, courage inspires a vague alarm. This is what is felt about Maupassant. His qualities, to use the charming and popular phrase, are not lovable. Courage being a force will not masquerade in the robes of affected delicacy and restraint. But if his courage is not of a chivalrous stamp, it cannot be denied that it is never brutal for the sake of effect. The writer of these few reflections, inspired by a long and intimate acquaintance with the work of the man, has been struck by the appreciation of Maupassant manifested by many women gifted with tenderness and intelligence. Their more delicate and audacious souls are good judges of courage. Their finer penetration has discovered his genuine masculinity without display, his virility without a pose. They have discerned in his faithful dealings with the world that enterprising and fearless temperament, poor in ideas but rich in power, which appeals most to the feminine mind.

It cannot be denied that he thinks very little. In him extreme energy of perception achieves great results, as in men of action the energy of force and desire. His view of intellectual problems is perhaps more simple than their nature warrants; still a man who has written *Yvette* cannot be accused of want of subtlety. But one cannot insist enough upon this, that his subtlety, his humour, his grimness, though no doubt they are his own, are never presented otherwise but as belonging to our life, as found in nature, whose beauties and cruelties alike breathe the spirit of serene unconsciousness.

Maupassant’s philosophy of life is more temperamental than rational. He expects nothing from gods or men. He trusts his senses for information and his instinct for deductions. It may seem that he has made but little use of his mind. But let me be clearly understood. His sensibility is really very great; and it is impossible to be sensible, unless one thinks vividly, unless one thinks correctly, starting from intelligible premises to an unsophisticated conclusion.

This is literary honesty. It may be remarked that it does not differ very greatly from the ideal honesty of the respectable majority, from the honesty of law-givers, of warriors, of kings, of bricklayers, of all those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands.

The work of Maupassant’s hands is honest. He thinks sufficiently to concrete his fearless conclusions in illuminative instances. He renders them with that exact knowledge of the means and that absolute devotion to the aim of creating a true effect — which is art. He is the most accomplished of narrators.

It is evident that Maupassant looked upon his mankind in another spirit than those writers who make haste to submerge the difficulties of our holding-place in the universe under a flood of false and sentimental assumptions. Maupassant was a true and dutiful lover of our earth. He says himself in one of his descriptive passages: “Nous autres que séduit la terre . . .” It was true. The earth had for him a compelling charm. He looks upon her august and furrowed face with the fierce insight of real passion. His is the power of detecting the one immutable quality that matters in the changing aspects of nature and under the ever-shifting surface of life. To say that he could not embrace in his glance all its magnificence and all its misery is only to say that he was human. He lays claim to nothing that his matchless vision has not made his own. This creative artist has the true imagination; he never condescends to invent anything; he sets up no empty pretences. And he stoops to no littleness in his art — least of all to the miserable vanity of a catching phrase.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT by Leo Tolstoy

This article was written by Tolstoy in 1894, to serve as preface to a Russian edition of a selection of Guy de Maupassant's stories.

It was, I think, in 1881 that Turgénev while visiting me took out of his portmanteau a small French book entitled *La Maison Tellier,* and gave it to me.

"Read it some time," said he in an off-hand way just as, a year before, he had given me a number of *Russian Wealth* that contained an article by Garshin, who was then only beginning to write. Evidently on this occasion, as in Garshin's case, he was afraid of influencing me one way or the other and wished to know my own unbiassed opinion.

"It is by a young French writer," said he. "Have a look at it. It isn't bad. He knows you and appreciates you highly," he added as if wishing to propitiate me. "As a man he reminds me of Druzhinin. He is, like Druzhmin, an excellent son, an admirable friend, *un homme d'un commerce sûr,* and, besides that, he associates with the working people, guides them, and helps them. Even in his relations with women he reminds me of Druzhinin." And Turgénev told me something astonishing, incredible, of Maupassant's conduct in that respect.

That time (1881) was for me a period of most ardent inner reconstruction of my whole outlook on life, and in this reconstruction the activity called the fine arts, to which I had formerly devoted all my powers, had not only lost the importance I formerly attributed to it, but had become simply obnoxious to me on account of the unnatural position it had hitherto occupied in my life, as it does generally in the estimation of the people of the well-to-do classes.

And therefore such works as the one Turgénev was recommending to me did not then interest me in the least. But to please him I read the book he had handed me.

From the first story, *La Maison Tellier,* despite the indecency and insignificance of the subject of the story, I could not help recognizing that the author had what is called talent.

He possessed that particular gift called talent, which consists in the capacity to direct intense concentrated attention according to the author's tastes on this or that subject, in consequence of which the man endowed with this capacity sees in the things to which he directs his attention some new aspect which others have overlooked; and this gift of seeing what others have not seen Maupassant evidently possessed. But judging by the little volume I read, he unfortunately lacked the chief of the three conditions, besides talent, essential to a true work of art. These are: (1) a correct, that is, a moral relation of the author to his subject; (2) clearness of expression, or beauty of form, — the two are identical; and (3) sincerity, that is, a sincere feeling of love or hatred of what the artist depicts. Of these three, Maupassant possessed only the two last and was quite lacking in the first. He had not a correct, that is a moral, relation to the subjects depicted.

Judging by what I read I was convinced that Maupassant possessed talent, that is to say, the gift of attention revealing in the objects and facts of life with which he deals qualities others have not perceived. He was also master of a beautiful style, expressing what he wanted to say clearly, simply, and with charm. He was also master of that condition of true artistic production without which a work of art does not produce its effect, namely, sincerity; that is, he did not pretend that he loved or hated, but really loved or hated what he described. But unfortunately lacking the first and perhaps the chief condition of worthy artistic production, a correct moral relation to what he described — that is to say, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil — he loved and described things that should not have been loved and described. Thus, in this little volume, the author described with great detail and fondness how women seduce men, and men women; and in *La femme de Paul* he even describes certain obscenities difficult to understand. And he presents the country labouring folk not merely with indifference but even with contempt, as though they were animals.

This unconsciousness of the difference between good and evil is particularly striking in the story, *Une partie de campagne,* in which is given, as a very pleasant and amusing joke, a detailed description of how two men rowing with bare arms in a boat tempt and afterwards seduce at the same time, one of them an elderly mother and the other a young girl, her daughter.

The sympathy of the author is evidently all the time so much on the side of these two wretches that he not merely ignores, but simply does not see, what must have been felt by the seduced mother and the maid (her daughter), by the father, and by a young man who is evidently engaged to the daughter; and therefore, not merely is an objectionable description of a revolting crime presented in the form of an amusing jest, but the occurrence itself is described falsely, for what is given is only one side, and that the most insignificant — namely, the pleasure received by the rascals.

In that same little volume there is a story, *Histoire d'une fille de ferme,* which Turgénev particularly recommended to me and which particularly displeased me, again by this incorrect relation of the author to his subject. He evidently sees in all the working folk he describes mere animals, who rise to nothing more than sexual and maternal love, so that his descriptions give one an incomplete and artificial impression.

Lack of understanding of the life and interests of working people and the presentation of them as semi-brutes moved only by sensuality, spite, and greed, is one of the chief and most important defects of most recent French writers, including Maupassant, who not only in this but in all his other stories where he refers to the people, always describes them as coarse, dull animals at whom one can only laugh. Of course the French writers should know the nature of their own people better than I do; but despite the fact that I am a Russian and have not lived among the French peasants, I nevertheless affirm that in so representing their people the French authors are wrong, and that the French labourers cannot be such as they represent them to be. If France — such as we know her, with her truly great men and the great contributions those great men have made to science, art, citizenship, and the moral development of mankind — if this France exists, then that working class which has maintained and maintains on its shoulders this France with its great men, must consist not of brutes but of people with great spiritual qualities, and I therefore do not believe what I read in novels such as *La terre* and in Maupassant's stories; just as I should not believe it if I were told of the existence of a beautiful house standing without foundations. It may very well be these high qualities of the people are not such as are described to us in *La petite Fadette* and *La mère aux diables,* but I am firmly convinced that these qualities exist, and a writer who portrays the people only as Maupassant does, describing with sympathy only the *hanches* and *gorges* of the Breton servant-girls and describing with detestation and ridicule the life of the labouring men, commits a great artistic mistake, because he describes his subject only from one, and that the least interesting, physical, side and leaves quite out of sight another, and the most important, spiritual, side wherein the essence of the matter lies.

On the whole, the perusal of the little book handed me by Turgénev left me quite indifferent to the young writer.

So repugnant to me were the stories, *Une partie de campagne, La femme de Paul, L'historie d'une fille de ferme,* that I did not then notice the beautiful story, *Le papa de Simon*, and the story, excellent in its description of the night, *Sur Veau.*

"Are there not in our time, when so many people want to write, plenty of men of talent who do not know to what to apply this gift, or who boldly apply it to what should not, and need not, be described?" thought I. And so I said to Turgénev, and thereupon forgot about Maupassant.

The first thing of his that fell into my hands after that was *Une Vie,* which someone advised me to read. That book at once compelled me to change my opinion of Maupassant, and since then I have read with interest everything signed by him. *Une Vie* is excellent, not only incomparably the best of his novels, but perhaps the best French novel since Hugo's *Les Misérables.* Here, besides remarkable talent — that special strenuous attention applied to the subject, by which the author perceives quite new features in the life he describes — are united in almost equal degree all three qualities of a true, work of art, first, a correct, that is a moral, relation of the author to his subject; secondly, beauty of form; and thirdly, sincerity, that is, love of what the author describes. Here the meaning of life no longer presents itself to the author as consisting in the adventures of various male and female libertines; here the subject, as the title indicates, is life — the life of a ruined, innocent, amiable woman, predisposed to all that is good, but ruined by precisely the same coarse animal sensuality which in his former stories the author presented as if it were the central feature of life, dominant over all else. And in this book the author's whole sympathy is on the side of what is good.

The form, which was beautiful in the first stories, is here brought to such a pitch of perfection as, in my opinion, has been attained by no other French writer of prose. And above all, the author here really loves, and deeply loves, the good family he describes; and he really hates that coarse debauchee, who destroys the happiness and peace of that charming family and, in particular, ruins the life of the heroine.

That is why all the events and characters of this novel are so life-like and memorable. The weak, kindly, debilitated mother; the upright, weak, attractive father; the daughter, still more attractive in her simplicity, artlessness, and sympathy with all that is good; their mutual relations, their first journey, their servants and neighbours; the calculating, grossly sensual, mean, petty, insolent suitor, who as usual deceives the innocent girl by the customary empty idealization of the foulest instincts; the marriage, Corsica with the beautiful descriptions of nature, and then village life, the husband's coarse faithlessness, his seizure of power over the property, his quarrel with his father-in-law, the yielding of the good people and the victory of insolence; the relations with the neighbours — all this is life itself in its complexity and variety. And not only is all this vividly and finely described, but the sincere pathetic tone of it all involuntarily infects the reader. One feels that the author loves this woman, and loves her not for her external form but for her soul, for the goodness there is in her; that he pities her and suffers on her account, and this feeling is involuntarily communicated to the reader. And the questions: Why, for what end, is this fine creature ruined? Ought it indeed to be so? arise of themselves in the reader's soul, and compel him to reflect on the meaning of human life.

Despite the false notes which occur in the novel, such as the minute description of the young girl's skin, or the impossible and unnecessary details of how, by the advice of an abbé, the forsaken wife again became a mother — details which destroy all the charm of the heroine's purity — and despite the melodramatic and unnatural story of the injured husband's revenge; notwithstanding these blemishes, the novel not only seemed to me excellent, but I saw behind it no longer a talented chatterer and jester who neither knew nor wished to know right from wrong — as from his first little book Maupassant had appeared to me to be — but a serious man penetrating deeply into life and already beginning to see his way in it.

The next novel of Maupassant's that I read was *Bel-Ami.*

Bel-Ami is a very dirty book. The author evidently gives himself a free hand in describing what attracts him, and at times seems to lose his main negative attitude towards his hero and to pass over to his side: but on the whole *Bel-Ami,* like *Une Vie,* has at its base a serious idea and sentiment. In *Une Vie* the fundamental idea is perplexity in face of the cruel meaninglessness of the suffering life of an excellent woman ruined by a man's coarse sensuality; whereas here it is not only perplexity, but indignation, at the prosperity and success of a coarse, sensual brute who by that very sensuality makes his career and attains a high position in society; and indignation also at the depravity of the whole sphere in which the hero attains his success. In the former novel the author seems to ask: “For what, and why, was a fine creature ruined? Why did it happen?” Here in the latter novel he seems to answer: all that is pure and good has perished and is perishing in our society, because that society is depraved, senseless, and horrible.

The last scene in the novel — the marriage in a fashionable church of the triumphant scoundrel, decorated with the Legion of Honour, to the pure girl, the daughter of an elderly and formerly irreproachable mother whom he had seduced; a wedding blessed by a bishop and regarded as something good and proper by everybody — expresses this idea with extraordinary force. In this novel, despite the fact that it is encumbered with dirty details (in which it is to be regretted that the author seems to find pleasure) the same serious demands are presented to life.

Read the conversation of the old poet with Duroy when after dinner, if I remember rightly, they are leaving the Walters. The old poet bares life to his young companion, and shows it as it is, with its eternal and inevitable concomitant and end — death.

“She has hold of me already, *la gueuse (the old hag)* says he of death. “She has already shaken out my teeth, torn out my hair, crippled my limbs, and is now ready to swallow me. I am already in her power. She is only playing with me, as a cat does with a mouse, knowing that I cannot escape. Fame? Riches? What is the use of them, since they cannot buy a woman’s love? For it is only a woman’s love that makes life worth living, and that too death takes away. It takes that away, and then one’s health, strength, and life itself. It is the same for everyone, and there is nothing else.”

Such is the meaning of what the old poet says. But Duroy, the successful lover of all the women who please him, is so full of sensual energy and strength that he hears and does not hear, understands and does not understand, the old poet’s words. He hears and understands, but the source of sensual life throbs in him so strongly that this unquestionable truth, foretelling the same end for him, does not disturb him.

This inner contradiction, besides its satirical value, gives the novel its chief significance. The same idea gleams in the fine scenes of the death of the consumptive journalist. The author sets himself the question: What is this life? How solve the contradiction between the love of life, and the knowledge of inevitable death? He seems to seek, pauses, and does not decide either one way or the other. And therefore the moral relation to life in this novel continues to be correct.

But in the novels that follow, this moral relation to life grows confused. The appraisement of the phenomena of life begins to waver, to grow obscure, and in the last novels it is quite perverted.

In *Mont-Oriol* Maupassant seems to unite the motives of his two previous novels and repeats himself to order. Despite the fine descriptions of the fashionable watering-place and of the medical activity in it, which is executed with delicate taste, we have here the same bull-like Paul, just as empty and despicable as the husband in *Une Vie;* and the same deceived, frank, meek, weak, lonely — always lonely — good woman, and the same impassive triumph of pettiness and triviality as in *Bel-Ami.*

The thought is the same, but the author’s moral relation to what he describes is already much lower, lower especially than in *Une Vie.* The author’s inner appraisement of right and wrong begins to get confused. Notwithstanding his abstract wish to be impartially objective, the scoundrel Paul evidently has all his sympathy, and therefore the love story of this Paul and his attempts at and success in seduction produce a discordant impression. The reader does not know what the author intends: is it to show the whole emptiness and vileness of Paul (who turns indifferently away from, and insults, a woman merely because her waist has been spoilt by her pregnancy with his child); or, on the contrary, is it to show how pleasant and easy it is to live as this Paul lives?

In the next novels, *Pierre et Jean, Fort comme la mort,* and *Notre cœur,* the authors moral attitude towards his characters becomes still more confused, and in the last-named is quite lost. All these novels bear the stamp of indifference, haste, unreality, and, above all, again that same absence of a correct moral relation to life which was present in his first writings. This began from the time when Maupassant’s reputation as a fashionable author had become established and he became liable to the temptation, so terrible in our day, to which every celebrated writer is subject, especially one so attractive as Maupassant. In the first place the success of his first novels, the praise of the press, and the flattery of society, especially of women; in the second the ever increasing amount of remuneration (never however keeping up with his continually increasing wants); in the third the pertinacity of editors outbidding one another, flattering, begging, and no longer judging the merits of the works the author offers but enthusiastically accepting everything signed by a name now established with the public. All these temptations are so great that they evidently turn his head, and he succumbs to them; and though he continues to elaborate the form of his work as well as or sometimes even better than before, and even though he is fond of what he describes, yet he no longer loves it because it is good or moral and lovable to all, or hates it because it is evil and hateful to all, but only because one thing pleases and another thing happens to displease him.

On all Maupassant's novels, beginning with *Bel-Ami,* there lies this stamp of haste and still more of artificiality. From that time Maupassant no longer did what he had done in his first two novels. He did not take as his basis certain moral demands and on that ground describe the actions of his characters, but wrote as all hack novelists do, that is, he devised the most interesting and pathetic, or most up-to-date persons and situations, and made a novel out of them, adorning it with whatever observations he had opportunity to make which fitted into the framework of the story, quite indifferent as to how the incidents described were related to the demands of morality. Such are *Pierre et Jean, Fort comme la mort,* and *Notre cœur.*

Accustomed as we are to read in French novels of how families live in threes, always with a lover known to everyone except the husband, it still remains quite unintelligible to us how it happens that all husbands are always fools, *cocus et ridicules, (*Deceived and ridiculous) but all lovers (who themselves in the end marry and become husbands) are not only not *cocus et ridicules,* but are heroic! And still less comprehensible is it how all women can be depraved, and yet all mothers saintly.

And on these unnatural and unlikely, and above all profoundly immoral, propositions *Pierre et Jean* and *Fort comme la mort* are built, and therefore the sufferings of the characters so situated affect us but little. The mother of Pierre and Jean, who can live her whole life deceiving her husband, evokes little sympathy when she is obliged to confess her sin to her son, and still less when she justifies herself by asserting that she could not but avail herself of the chance of happiness which presented itself. Still less can we sympathize with the gentleman who, in *Fort comme la mort,* having all his life deceived his friend and debauched his friend's wife, now only regrets that having grown old he cannot seduce his mistress's daughter. The last novel, *Notre cœur,* has even no kernel at all beyond the description of various kinds of sex-love. The satiated emotions of an idle debauchee are described, who does not know what he wants, and who first lives with a woman yet more depraved than himself — a mentally depraved woman, who lacks even the excuse of sensuality — then leaves her and lives with a servant girl, and then again rejoins the former, and, it seems, lives with them both. If in *Pierre et Jean* and *Fort comme la mort* there are still some touching scenes, this last novel excites only disgust.

The question in Maupassant's first novel, *Une Vie*, consists in this: here is a human being, good, wise, pleasing, ready for all that is good, and this creature is for some reason offered up as a sacrifice first to a coarse, small-minded, stupid animal of a husband, without having given anything to the world. Why is this? The author puts that question and as it were gives no answer, but his whole novel, all his feeling of pity for her and abhorrence of what has ruined her, serves as answer. If there is a man who has understood her suffering and expressed it, then it is redeemed, as Job put it to his friends when they said that no one would know of his sufferings. When suffering is recognized and understood, it is redeemed; and here the author has recognized and understood and shown men this suffering, and the suffering is redeemed, for once it is understood by men it will sooner or later be done away with.

In the next novel, *Bel-Ami,* the question no longer is, Why do good persons suffer? but Why do wealth and fame go to the unworthy? What are wealth and fame? How are they obtained? And as before, these questions carry with them their own answers, which consist in the repudiation of all that the crowd of men so highly prize. The subject of this second novel is still serious, but the moral relation of the author to the subject he describes already weakens considerably, and whereas in the first novel blots and sensuality which spoil it only appear here and there, in *Bel-Ami* these blots have increased and many chapters are filled with dirt alone, which seems to please the author.

In the next book, *Mont-Oriol,* the questions: Why, and to what end, does the amiable woman suffer and the savage male secure success and happiness? are no longer put; but it seems tacitly admitted that it should be so, and hardly any moral demands are felt. But without the least necessity, uncalled for by any artistic consideration, dirty sensual descriptions are presented. As an example of this violation of artistic taste, resulting from the author's incorrect relation to his subject, the detailed description in this novel of the heroine in her bath is specially striking. This description is quite unnecessary, and is in no way connected either with the external or the inner purpose of the novel: “Bubbles appear on her pink skin.”

“Well, what of that?” asks the reader.

“Nothing more,” replies the author. “I describe it because I like such descriptions.”

In the next novels, *Pierre et Jean* and *Fort comme la mort,* no moral demand at all is perceptible. Both novels are built on debauchery, deceit, and falsehood, which bring the actors to tragic situations.

In the last novel, *Notre cœur*, the position of the actors is most monstrous, wild, and immoral; they no longer struggle with anything, but only seek satisfaction for their vanity, sensuality, and sexual desires; and the author appears quite to sympathize with their aims. The only deduction one can draw from this last novel is that the greatest pleasure in life consists in sexual intercourse, and that therefore one must secure that happiness in the pleasantest way.

Yet more striking is this immoral relation to life in the half-novel, *Yvette.* The subject, which is horrible in its immorality, is as follows: A charming girl, innocent in soul and depraved only in the manners she has learned in her mother’s dissolute circle, leads a libertine into error. He falls in love with her, but imagining that this girl knowingly chatters the obscene nonsense she has picked up in her mother’s society and repeats parrot-like without understanding — imagining that she is already depraved — he coarsely offers her an immoral union. This proposal horrifies and offends her (for she loves him); it opens her eyes to her own position and to that of her mother, and she suffers profoundly. This deeply touching scene is admirably described: the collision between a beautiful innocent soul and the depravity of the world. And with that it might end; but the author, without either external or inner necessity, continues to write and makes this man penetrate by night to the girl and seduce her. Evidently in the first part of the story the author was on the girl’s side, but in the later part he has suddenly gone over to the debauchee, and the one impression destroys the other — the whole novel crumbles and falls to pieces like ill-kneaded bread.

In all his novels after *Bel-Ami* (I am not now speaking of the short stories, which constitute his chief merit and glory — of them later) Maupassant evidently submitted to the theory which ruled not only in his circle in Paris, but which now rules everywhere among artists: that for a work of art it is not only unnecessary to have any clear conception of what is right and wrong, but that, on the contrary, an artist should completely ignore all moral questions, there being even a certain artistic merit in so doing. According to this theory the artist may or should depict what is true to life, what really is, what is beautiful and therefore pleases him, or even what may be useful as material for "science"; but that to care about what is moral or immoral, right or wrong, is not an artist's' business.

I remember a celebrated painter showing me one of his pictures representing a religious procession. It was all excellently painted, but no relation of the artist to his subject was perceptible.

"And do you regard these ceremonies as good and consider that they should be performed, or not?" I asked him.

With some condescension to my naïveté, he told me that he did not know about that and did not want to know it; his business was to represent *life.*

"But at any rate you sympathize with this?"

"I cannot say so."

"Well then do you dislike these ceremonies?"

"Neither the one thing nor the other," replied, with a smile of compassion at my silliness, this modern, highly cultured artist who depicted life without understanding its purpose and neither loving nor hating its phenomena.

And so unfortunately thought Maupassant.

In his preface to *Pierre et Jean* he says that people say to a writer, *"Consolez-moi, amusez-moi, attristez-moi, attendrissez-moi, faites-moi rêver, faites-moi rire, faites-moi frémir, faites-moi pleurer, faites-moi penser. Seuls quelques esprits d'élites demandent à Vartiste: faites-moi quelque chose de beau dans la forme qui vous conviendra le mieux d'après votre tempérament."*

("Console me, amuse me, sadden me, touch my heart, make me dream, make me laugh, make me tremble, make me weep, make me think. Only a few chosen spirits bid the artist compose something beautiful, in the form that best suits his temperament.")

Responding to this demand of the *élite* Maupassant wrote his novels, naïvely imagining that what was considered beautiful in his circle was that beauty which art should serve.

And in the circle in which Maupassant moved, the beauty which should be served by art was, and is, chiefly woman — young, pretty, and for the most part naked — and sexual connection with her. It was so considered not only by all Maupassant's comrades in art — painters, sculptors, novelists, and poets — but also by philosophers, the teachers of the rising generation. Thus the famous Renan, in his work, *Marc Aurèle,* p. 555, when blaming Christianity for not understanding feminine beauty, plainly says:

"La défaut du christianisme apparaît bien ici. Il est trop uniquement moral; la beauté, chez lui, est tout-à-fait sacrifiée. Or, aux yeux d'une philosophie complète, la beauté, loin d'etre un avantage superficiel, un danger, un inconvénient, est un don de Dieu, *comme la vertu. Elle vaut la vertu*; *la femme belle exprime aussi bien une face du but divin, une des fins de Dieu, que l'homme de génie ou la femme vertueuse. Elle le sent et de là sa fierté. Elle sent instinctivement le trésor infini qu'elle porte en son corps; elle sait bien que, sans esprit, sans talent, sans grande vertu, elle compte entre les premières manifestations de Dieu. Et pourquoi lui interdire de mettre en valeur le don qui lui a été fait, de sertir le diamant qui lui est échu? La femme, en se parant*, *accomplit un devoir; elle pratique un art*, *art exquis, en un sens le plus charmant des arts. Ne nous laissons pas égarer par le sourire que certain mots provoquent chez* LES GENS FRIVOLES. *On décerne le palme du génie à l'artiste grec qui a su résoudre le plus délicat des problèmes, orner le corps humain, c'est à dire orner la perfection même, et Von ne veut voir qu'une affaire de chiffons dans l'essai de collaborer à la plus belle œuvre de Dieu*, *à la beauté de la femme! La toilette de la femme, avec tous ses raffinements est du grand art à sa manière. Les siècles et les pays qui savent y réussir sont les grands siècles, les grands pays, et le christianisme montra, par l'exclusion dont il frappa ce genre de recherches, que l'idéal social qu'il concevait ne deviendrait le cadre d'une société complète que bien plus tard, quand la révolte des gens du monde aurait brisé le joug étroit imposé primitivement à la secte par un piétisme exalté."*

(The defect of Christianity is clearly seen in this. It is too exclusively moral; it quite sacrifices beauty. But in the eyes of a complete philosophy beauty, far from being a superficial advantage, a danger, an inconvenience, is a gift of God, like virtue. It is worth as much as virtue; the beautiful woman expresses an aspect of the divine purpose, one of God's aims, as well as a man of genius does, or a virtuous woman. She feels this, and hence her pride. She is instinctively conscious of the infinite treasure she possesses in her body; she is well aware that without intellect, without talent, without great virtue, she counts among the chief manifestations of

God. And why forbid her to make the most of the gift bestowed upon her, or to give the diamond allotted to her its due setting? By adorning herself woman accomplishes a duty; she practises an art, an exquisite art, in a sense the most charming of arts. Do not let us be misled by the smile which certain words provoke in the *frivolous.* We award the palm of genius to the Greek artist who succeeded in solving the most delicate of problems, that of adorning the human body, that is to say, adorning perfection itself, and yet some people wish to see nothing more than an affair of *chiffons* in the attempt to collaborate with the finest work of God — woman's beauty! Woman's toilette with all its refinements is a great art in its own way. The epochs and countries which can succeed in this are the great epochs and great countries, and Christianity, by the embargo it laid on this kind of research, showed that the social ideal it had conceived would only become the framework of a complete society at a much later period, when the revolt of men of the world had broken the narrow yoke originally imposed on the sect by a fanatical pietism.)

(So that in the opinion of this leader of the young generation only now have Paris milliners and coiffeurs corrected the mistake committed by Christianity, and re-established beauty in the true and lofty position due to it.)

In order that there should be no doubt as to how one is to understand beauty, the same celebrated writer, historian, and savant wrote the drama, *L'Abbesse de Jouarre,* in which he showed that to have sexual intercourse with a woman is a service of this beauty, that is to say, is an elevated and good action. In that drama, which is striking by its lack of talent and especially by the coarseness of the conversations between d'Arcy and the abbesse, in which the first words make it evident what sort of love that gentleman is discussing with the supposedly innocent and highly moral maiden, who is not in the least offended thereby — in that drama it is shown that the most highly moral people, at the approach of death to which they are condemned, a few hours before it arrives, can do nothing more beautiful than yield to their animal passions.

So that in the circle in which Maupassant grew up and was educated, the representation of feminine beauty and sex-love was and is regarded quite seriously, as a matter long ago decided and recognized by the wisest and most learned men, as the true object of the highest art — *Le grand art.*

And it is this theory, dreadful in its folly, to which Maupassant submitted when he became a fashionable writer; and, as was to be expected, this false ideal led him in his novels into a series of mistakes, and to ever weaker and weaker production.

In this the fundamental difference between the demands of the novel and of the short story is seen. A novel has for its aim, even for external aim, the description of a whole human life or of many human lives, and therefore its writer should have a clear and firm conception of what is good and bad in life, and this Maupassant lacked; indeed according to the theory he held, that is just what should be avoided. Had he been a novelist like some talentless writers of sensual novels, he would, being without talent, have quietly described what was evil as good, and his novels would have had unity, and would have been interesting to people who shared his view. But Maupassant had talent, that is to say, he saw things in their essentials and therefore involuntarily discerned the truth. He involuntarily saw the evil in what he wished to consider good. That is why, in all his novels except the first, his sympathies continually waver, now presenting the evil as good, and now admitting that the evil is evil and the good good, but continually shifting from the one standpoint to the other. And this destroys the very basis of any artistic impression — the framework on which it is built. People of little artistic sensibility often think that a work of art possesses unity when the same people act in it throughout, or when it is all constructed on one plot, or describes the life of one man. That is a mistake. It only appears so to a superficial observer. The cement which binds any artistic production into one whole and therefore produces the illusion of being a reflection of life, is not the unity of persons or situations, but the unity of the author's independent moral relation to his subject. In reality, when we read or look at the artistic production of a new author the fundamental question that arises in our soul is always of this kind: "Well, what sort of a man are you? Wherein are you different from all the people I know, and what can you tell me that is new, about how we must look at this life of ours?" Whatever the artist depicts — saints, robbers, kings, or lackeys — we seek and see only the artist's own soul. If he is an established writer with whom we are already familiar, the question no longer is, "What sort of a man are you?" but, "Well, what more can you tell me that is new?" or, "From what new side will you now illumine life for me?" And therefore a writer who has not a clear definite and just view of the universe, and especially a man who considers that this isn't even wanted, cannot produce a work of art. He may write much and admirably, but a work of art will not result.

So it was with Maupassant in his novels. In his first two novels, and especially in the first, *Une Vie,* there was a clear, definite, and new relation to life, and it was an artistic production; but as soon as, submitting to the fashionable theory, he decided that this relation of the author to life was quite unnecessary and began to write merely in order *faire quelque chose de beau* (to produce something beautiful), his novels ceased to be works of art. In *Une Vie* and *Bel-Ami* the author knows whom he should love and whom he should hate, and the reader agrees with him and believes in him — believes in the people and events he describes. But in *Notre cœur* and *Yvette* the author does not know whom he should love and whom he should hate, and the reader does not know either. And not knowing this, the reader does not believe in the events described and is not interested in them. And therefore, except the two first or, strictly speaking, excepting only the first novel, all Maupassant's, as novels, are weak; and if he had left us only his novels he would have been merely a striking instance of the way in which brilliant talents may perish as a result of the false environment in which he developed and of these false theories of art that have been devised by people who neither love nor understand it. But fortunately Maupassant wrote short stories in which he did not subject himself to the false theory he had accepted, and wrote not *quelque chose de beau,* but what touched or revolted his moral feeling. And in these short stories — not in all, but in the best of them — we see how that moral feeling grew in the author.

And it is in this that the wonderful quality of every true artist lies, if only he does not do violence to himself under the influence of a false theory. His talent teaches its possessor and leads him forward along the path of moral development, compelling him to love what deserves love and to hate what deserves hate. An artist is an artist because he sees things not as he wishes to see them but as they really are. The possessor of a talent, the man, may make mistakes, but his talent if only it is allowed free play, as Maupassant gave it free play in his short stories, discloses, undrapes the object, and compels love of it if it deserves love and hatred of it if it deserves hatred. With every true artist, when under the influence of his circle he begins to represent what should not be represented, there happens what happened to Balaam, who, wishing to bless, cursed what should be cursed, and wishing to curse, blessed what should be blessed: involuntarily he does, not what he wishes to do but what he should do. And this happened to Maupassant.

There has hardly been another writer who so sincerely thought that all the good, all the meaning of life, lies in woman — in love, and who with such strength of passion described woman and her love from all sides; and there has hardly ever been a writer who reached such clearness and exactitude in showing all the awful phases of that very thing which had seemed to him the highest and the greatest of life's blessings. The more he penetrated into the question the more it revealed itself, and the more did the coverings fall from it and only its horrible results and yet more horrible essence remain.

Read of the idiot son, of the night with a daughter *(L'ermite),* of the sailor with his sister (*Le port). Le champ d'oliviers, La petite Roque,* of the English girl *(Miss Harriet*), *Monsieur Parent, L'armoire* (the girl who fell asleep in the cupboard), the wedding in *Sur Veau,* and last expression of all, *Un cas de divorce.* Just what was said by Marcus Aurelius when devising means to destroy the attractiveness of this sin in his imagination, is what Maupassant does in most vivid artistic forms, turning one's soul inside out. He wished to extol sex-love, but the better he came to know it the more he cursed it. He cursed sex-love for the misfortunes and sufferings it bears within it, and for the disillusionments and, above all, for the falsification of real love, for the fraud which is in it from which man suffers the more acutely the more trustingly he has yielded to the deception.

The powerful moral growth of the author in the course of his literary activity is recorded in indelible traits in these charming short stories and in his best book, *Sur Veau.*

And not alone in this involuntary and therefore all the more powerful dethronement of sex-love is the moral growth of the author seen, but also in the more and more exalted moral demands he makes upon life.

Not alone in sex-love does he see the innate contradiction between the demands of animal and rational man; he sees it in the whole organization of the world.

He sees that the world as it is, the material world, is not only not the best of worlds, but might on the contrary be quite different — this thought is strikingly expressed in *Horla* — and that it does not satisfy the demands of reason and life. He sees that there is some other world, or at least the demand for such another world, in the soul of man.

He is tormented not only by the irrationality of the material world and its ugliness, but by its unlovingness, its discord. I do not know a more heart-rending cry of horror from one who has lost his way and is conscious of his loneliness, than the expression of this idea in that most charming story, *Solitude.*

The thing that most tormented Maupassant and to which he returns many times, is the painful state of isolation, spiritual isolation, of man; the barrier standing between him and his fellows; a barrier, he says, the more painfully felt the nearer one's bodily connexion.

What is it torments him, and what would he have? What can destroy this barrier? What end this isolation? Love — not feminine love, which has become disgusting to him, but pure, spiritual, divine love. And that is what Maupassant seeks. Towards it, towards this saviour of life long since plainly disclosed to all men, he painfully strains from those fetters in which he feels himself bound.

He does not yet know how to name what he seeks. He does not wish to name it with his lips alone, lest he should profane his holy-of-holies. But his unexpressed striving, shown in his dread of loneliness, is so sincere that it infects and attracts one more strongly than many and many sermons about love, uttered only by the lips.

The tragedy of Maupassant's life is that being in a most monstrous and immoral circle, he by the strength of his talent, by that extraordinary light which was in him, was escaping from the outlook on life held by that circle, and was already near to deliverance, was already breathing the air of freedom but, having exhausted his last strength in the struggle and not being able to make a last effort — perished without having attained freedom.

The tragedy of that ruin lies in what still afflicts the majority of the so-called cultured men of our time.

Men in general never have lived without an expression of the meaning of their life. Always and everywhere, highly-gifted men going in advance of others have appeared — the prophets, as they are called — who have explained to men the meaning and purport of their life; and always the ordinary, average men, who had not the strength to explain that meaning for themselves, have followed the explanation of life their prophets have disclosed to them.

That meaning was explained eighteen hundred years ago by Christianity, simply, clearly, indubitably, and joyfully, as is proved by the lives of all who acknowledge it and follow the guidance of life which results from that conception.

But then people appeared who misinterpreted that meaning so that it became meaningless, and men are placed in the dilemma either of acknowledging Christianity as interpreted by Orthodoxy, Lourdes, the Pope, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and so forth, or of going on with life according to the teachings of Renan and his kind, that is, living without any direction or understanding of life, following only their lusts as long as they are strong, and their habits when their lusts become feeble.

And people, ordinary people, choose the one or the other, sometimes both, first dissoluteness and then Orthodoxy; and thus whole generations live, shielding themselves with various theories, invented not to disclose the truth but to hide it. And ordinary, and more especially dull, people are content.

But there are others — not many, they are rare — such as Maupassant, who with their own eyes see things as they are, see their significance, see the contradictions in life concealed from others, and vividly realize to what these contradictions must inevitably lead them — and seek to solve them in advance. They seek these solutions everywhere except where they are to be found, namely in Christianity, because Christianity appears to them outlived and discarded, repelling them by its absurdity. And vainly trying to find these solutions for themselves, they come to the conviction that there are no solutions, and that it is inherent in life that one should always bear in oneself these unsolved contradictions. And having come to such a conclusion, if these people are feeble unenergetic natures, they put up with such meaningless life and are even proud of their position, accounting their ignorance a quality and a sign of culture. But if they are energetic, truthful, and gifted natures, such as Maupassant was, they do not endure this, but one way or other try to get out of this senseless life.

It is as if men thirsting in a desert sought water everywhere except near those people who, standing round a spring pollute it and offer stinking mire instead of the water that unceasingly flows beneath the mire. Maupassant was in this position; he could not believe — evidently it never even entered his head — that the truth he sought had long ago been found and was so near him; but neither could he believe that man can live in such contradiction as that in which he felt himself to be living.

Life, according to the theories in which he had been brought up, which surrounded him and were corroborated by all the lusts of his young, and mentally and physically strong, being — life consists in pleasure, of which the chief is to be found in woman with her love, and in the reproduction of this pleasure in its reflection, in the presentation of this love, and in exciting it in others. All this might be well; but on examining these pleasures quite other things emerge, alien and hostile to this love and this beauty: woman for some reason is disfigured, becomes unpleasantly pregnant and repulsive, gives birth to children, unwanted children; then come deceptions, cruelties, moral suffering, then mere old age, and ultimately death.

Then is this beauty indeed beauty? And why is all this so? It would be all very well if one could arrest life, but life goes on. And what does that mean? “Life goes on” means that the hair falls out, turns grey, the teeth decay, and there are wrinkles and offensive breath. Even before all is finished, everything becomes dreadful, repulsive: the rouge, the powder, the sweat, the smell, and the disgustingness, are evident. Where then is that which I serve? Where is beauty? But she is all! And if she is not, there is nothing left. There is no life!

But not merely is there no life in what seemed to be life: one begins to forsake it oneself, one becomes weaker, more stupid, one decays; others before one’s eyes seize those delights in which all the good of life lay. Nor is that all. Some other possibility of life begins to glimmer on one’s mind; something else, some other kind of union with men, with the whole world, one which does not admit of all these deceptions, something which cannot by any means be infringed; which is true and forever beautiful. But this cannot be. It is only the tantalizing vision of an oasis when we know that it does not exist and that there is nothing but sand everywhere.

Maupassant reached that tragic moment in life when the struggle begins between the falseness of the life about him and the truth of life of which he began to be conscious. Pangs of spiritual birth had already begun in him.

And it is these pangs of this birth that are expressed in his best work, especially in the short stories printed in this edition.

Had he not been fated to die while still suffering, but to fulfil all his possibilities, he would have left us great and illuminating works; but even what he gave us in the midst of his pain is much. Let us then be thankful to this strong and truthful man for what he has given us.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT by Henry James

I.

THE first artists, in any line, are doubtless not those whose general ideas about their art are most often on their lips — those who most abound in precept, apology, and formula and can best tell us the reasons and the philosophy of things. We know the first usually by their energetic practice, the constancy with which they apply their principles, and the serenity with which they leave us to hunt for their secret in the illustration, the concrete example. None the less it often happens that a valid artist utters his mystery, flashes upon us for a moment the light by which he works, shows us the rule by which he holds it just that he should be measured. This accident is happiest, I think, when it is soonest over; the shortest explanations of the products of genius are the best, and there is many a creator of living figures whose friends, however full of faith in his inspiration, will do well to pray for him when he sallies forth into the dim wilderness of theory. The doctrine is apt to be so much less inspired than the work, the work is often so much more intelligent than the doctrine. M. Guy de Maupassant has lately traversed with a firm and rapid step a literary crisis of this kind; he has clambered safely up the bank at the further end of the morass. If he has relieved himself in the preface to *Pierre et Jean*, the last-published of his tales, he has also rendered a service to his friends; he has not only come home in a recognisable plight, escaping gross disaster with a success which even his extreme good sense was far from making in advance a matter of course, but he has expressed in intelligible terms (that by itself is a ground of felicitation) his most general idea, his own sense of his direction. He has arranged, as it were, the light in which he wishes to sit. If it is a question of attempting, under however many disadvantages, a sketch of him, the critic's business therefore is simplified: there will be no difficulty in placing him, for he himself has chosen the spot, he has made the chalk-mark on the floor.

I may as well say at once that in dissertation M. de Maupassant does not write with his best pen; the philosopher in his composition is perceptibly inferior to the story-teller. I would rather have written half a page of *Boule de Suif* than the whole of the introduction to Flaubert's *Letters to Madame*

Sand; and his little disquisition on the novel in general, attached to that particular example of it which he has just put forth, is considerably less to the point than the masterpiece which it ushers in. In short, as a commentator M. de Maupassant is slightly common, while as an artist he is wonderfully rare. Of course we must, in judging a writer, take one thing with another, and if I could make up my mind that M. de Maupassant is weak in theory, it would almost make me like him better, render him more approachable, give him the touch of softness that he lacks, and show us a human flaw. The most general quality of the author of *La Maison Tellier* and *Bel-Ami,* the impression that remains last, after the others have been accounted for, is an essential hardness — hardness of form, hardness of nature; and it would put us more at ease to find that if the fact with him (the fact of execution) is so extraordinarily definite and adequate, his explanations, after it, were a little vague and sentimental. But I am not sure that he must even be held foolish to have noticed the race of critics: he is at any rate so much less foolish than several of that fraternity. He has said his say concisely and as if he were saying it once for all. In fine, his readers must be grateful to him for such a passage as that in which he remarks that whereas the public at large very legitimately says to a writer, "Console me, amuse me, terrify me, make me cry, make me dream, or make me think," what the sincere critic says is, "Make me something fine in the form that shall suit you best, according to your temperament." This seems to me to put into a nutshell the whole question of the different classes of fiction, concerning which there has recently been so much discourse. There are simply as many different kinds as there are persons practising the art, for if a picture, a tale, or a novel be a direct impression of life (and that surely constitutes its interest and value), the impression will vary according to the plate that takes it, the particular structure and mixture of the recipient.

I am not sure that I know what M. de Maupassant means when he says, "The critic shall appreciate the result only according to the nature of the effort; he has no right to concern himself with tendencies." The second clause of that observation strikes me as rather in the air, thanks to the vagueness of the last word. But our author adds to the definiteness of his contention when he goes on to say that any form of the novel is simply a vision of the world from the standpoint of a person constituted after a certain fashion, and that it is therefore absurd to say that there is, for the novelist's use, only one reality of things. This seems to me commendable, not as a flight of metaphysics, hovering over bottomless gulfs of controversy, but, on the contrary, as a just indication of the vanity of certain dogmatisms. The particular way we see the world is our particular illusion about it, says M. de Maupassant, and this illusion fits itself to our organs and senses; our receptive vessel becomes the furniture of *our* little plot of the universal consciousness.

"How childish, moreover, to believe in reality, since we each carry our own in our thought and in our organs. Our eyes, our ears, our sense of smell, of taste, differing from one person to another, create as many truths as there are men upon earth. And our minds, taking instruction from these organs, so diversely impressed, understand, analyse, judge, as if each of us belonged to a different race. Each one of us, therefore, forms for himself an illusion of the world, which is the illusion poetic, or sentimental, or joyous, or melancholy, or unclean, or dismal, according to his nature. And the writer has no other mission than to reproduce faithfully this illusion, with all the contrivances of art that he has learned and has at his command. The illusion of beauty, which is a human convention! The illusion of ugliness, which is a changing opinion! The illusion of truth, which is never immutable! The illusion of the ignoble, which attracts so many! The great artists are those who make humanity accept their particular illusion. Let us, therefore, not get angry with any one theory, since every theory is the generalised expression of a temperament asking itself questions."

What is interesting in this is not that M. de Maupassant happens to hold that we have no universal measure of the truth, but that it is the last word on a question of art from a writer who is rich in experience and has had success in a very rare degree. It is of secondary importance that our impression should be called, or not called, an illusion; what is excellent is that our author has stated more neatly than we have lately seen it done that the value of the artist resides in the clearness with which he gives forth that impression. His particular organism constitutes a *case*, and the critic is intelligent in proportion as he apprehends and enters into that case. To quarrel with it because it is not another, which it could not possibly have been without a wholly different outfit, appears to M. de Maupassant a deplorable waste of time. If this appeal to our disinterestedness may strike some readers as chilling (through their inability to conceive of any other form than the one they like — a limitation excellent for a reader but poor for a judge), the occasion happens to be none of the best for saying so, for

M. de Maupassant himself precisely presents all the symptoms of a “case” in the most striking way, and shows us how far the consideration of them may take us. Embracing such an opportunity as this, and giving ourselves to it freely, seems to me indeed to be a course more fruitful in valid conclusions, as well as in entertainment by the way, than the more common method of establishing one’s own premises. To make clear to ourselves those of the author of *Pierre et Jean* — those to which he is committed by the very nature of his mind — is an attempt that will both stimulate and repay curiosity. There is no way of looking at his work less dry, less academic, for as we proceed from one of his peculiarities to another, the whole horizon widens, yet without our leaving firm ground, and we see ourselves landed, step by step, in the most general questions — those explanations of things which reside in the race, in the society. Of course there are cases and cases, and it is the salient ones that the disinterested critic is delighted to meet.

What makes M. de Maupassant salient is two facts: the first of which is that his gifts are remarkably strong and definite, and the second that he writes directly *from* them, as it were: holds the fullest, the most uninterrupted — I scarcely know what to call it — the boldest communication with them. A case is poor when the cluster of the artist’s sensibilities is small, or they themselves are wanting in keenness, or else when the personage fails to admit them — either through ignorance, or diffidence, or stupidity, or the error of a false ideal — to what may be called a legitimate share in his attempt. It is, I think, among English and American writers that this latter accident is most liable to occur; more than the French we are apt to be misled by some convention or other as to the sort of feeler we *ought* to put forth, forgetting that the best one will be the one that nature happens to have given us. We have doubtless often enough the courage of our opinions (when it befalls that we have opinions), but we have not so constantly that of our perceptions. There is a whole side of our perceptive apparatus that we in fact neglect, and there are probably many among us who would erect this tendency into a duty. M. de Maupassant neglects nothing that he possesses; he cultivates his garden with admirable energy; and if there is a flower you miss from the rich parterre, you may be sure that it could not possibly have been raised, his mind not containing the soil for it. He is plainly of the opinion that the first duty of the artist, and the thing that makes him most useful to his fellow-men, is to master his instrument, whatever it may happen to be.

His own is that of the senses, and it is through them alone, or almost alone, that life appeals to him; it is almost alone by their help that he describes it, that he produces brilliant works. They render him this great assistance because they are evidently, in his constitution, extraordinarily alive; there is scarcely a page in all his twenty volumes that does not testify to their vivacity. Nothing could be further from his thought than to disavow them and to minimise their importance. He accepts them frankly, gratefully, works them, rejoices in them. If he were told that there are many English writers who would be sorry to go with him in this, he would, I imagine, staring, say that that is about what was to have been expected of the Anglo-Saxon race, or even that many of them probably could not go with him if they would. Then he would ask how our authors can be so foolish as to sacrifice such a *moyen,* how they can afford to, and exclaim, "They must be pretty works, those they produce, and give a fine, true, complete account of life, with such omissions, such lacunæ!" M. de Maupassant's productions teach us, for instance, that his sense of smell is exceptionally acute — as acute as that of those animals of the field and forest whose subsistence and security depend upon it. It might be thought that he would, as a student of the human race, have found an abnormal development of this faculty embarrassing, scarcely knowing what to do with it, where to place it. But such an apprehension betrays an imperfect conception of his directness and resolution, as well as of his constant economy of means. Nothing whatever prevents him from representing the relations of men and women as largely governed by the scent of the parties. Human life in his pages (would this not be the most general description he would give of it?) appears for the most part as a sort of concert of odours, and his people are perpetually engaged, or he is engaged on their behalf, in sniffing up and distinguishing them, in some pleasant or painful exercise of the nostril. "If everything in life speaks to the nostril, why on earth shouldn't we say so?" I suppose him to inquire; "and what a proof of the empire of poor conventions and hypocrisies, *chez vous autres,* that you should pretend to describe and characterise, and yet take no note (or so little that it comes to the same thing) of that essential sign!"

Not less powerful is his visual sense, the quick, direct discrimination of his eye, which explains the singularly vivid concision of his descriptions.

These are never prolonged nor analytic, have nothing of enumeration, of the quality of the observer, who counts the items to be sure he has made up the sum. His eye *selects* unerringly, unscrupulously, almost impudently — catches the particular thing in which the character of the object or the scene resides, and, by expressing it with the artful brevity of a master, leaves a convincing, original picture. If he is inveterately synthetic, he is never more so than in the way he brings this hard, short, intelligent gaze to bear. His vision of the world is for the most part a vision of ugliness, and even when it is not, there is in his easy power to generalise a certain absence of love, a sort of bird's-eye-view contempt. He has none of the superstitions of observation, none of our English indulgences, our tender and often imaginative superficialities. If he glances into a railway carriage bearing its freight into the Parisian suburbs of a summer Sunday, a dozen dreary lives map themselves out in a flash.

"There were stout ladies in farcical clothes, those middle-class goodwives of the *banlieue* who replace the distinction they don't possess by an irrelevant dignity; gentlemen weary of the office, with sallow faces and twisted bodies, and one of their shoulders a little forced up by perpetual bending at work over a table. Their anxious, joyless faces spoke moreover of domestic worries, incessant needs for money, old hopes finally shattered; for they all belonged to the army of poor threadbare devils who vegetate frugally in a mean little plaster house, with a flowerbed for a garden."...

Even in a brighter picture, such as the admirable vignette of the drive of Madame Tellier and her companions, the whole thing is an impression, as painters say nowadays, in which the figures are cheap. The six women at the station clamber into a country cart and go jolting through the Norman landscape to the village.

"But presently the jerky trot of the nag shook the vehicle so terribly that the chairs began to dance, tossing up the travellers to right, to left, with movements like puppets, scared grimaces, cries of dismay suddenly interrupted by a more violent bump. They clutched the sides of the trap, their bonnets turned over on to their backs, or upon the nose or the shoulder; and the white horse continued to go, thrusting out his head and straightening the little tail, hairless like that of a rat, with which from time to time he whisked his buttocks Joseph Rivet, with one foot stretched upon the shaft, the other leg bent under him, and his elbows very high, held the reins and emitted from his throat every moment a kind of cluck which caused the animal to prick up his ears and quicken his pace. On either side of the road the green country stretched away. The colza, in flower, produced in spots a great carpet of undulating yellow, from which there rose a strong, wholesome smell, a smell penetrating and pleasant, carried very far by the breeze. In the tall rye the cornflowers held up their little azure heads, which the women wished to pluck; but M. Rivet refused to stop. Then, in some place, a whole field looked as if it were sprinkled with blood, it was so crowded with poppies. And in the midst of the great level, taking colour in this fashion from the flowers of the soil, the trap passed on with the jog of the white horse, seeming itself to carry a nosegay of richer hues; it disappeared behind the big trees of a farm, to come out again where the foliage stopped and parade afresh through the green and yellow crops, pricked with red or blue, its blazing cartload of women, which receded in the sunshine."

As regards the other sense, the sense *par excellence,* the sense which we scarcely mention in English fiction, and which I am not very sure I shall be allowed to mention in an English periodical, M. de Maupassant speaks for that, and of it, with extraordinary distinctness and authority. To say that it occupies the first place in his picture is to say too little; it covers in truth the whole canvas, and his work is little else but a report of its innumerable manifestations. These manifestations are not, for him, so many incidents of life; they are life itself, they represent the standing answer to any question that we may ask about it. He describes them in detail, with a familiarity and a frankness which leave nothing to be added; I should say with singular truth, if I did not consider that in regard to this article he may be taxed with a certain exaggeration. M. de Maupassant would doubtless affirm that where the empire of the sexual sense is concerned, no exaggeration is possible: nevertheless it may be said that whatever depths may be discovered by those who dig for them, the impression of the human spectacle for him who takes it as it comes has less analogy with that of the monkeys' cage than this admirable writer's account of it. I speak of the human spectacle as we Anglo-Saxons see it — as we Anglo-Saxons pretend we see it, M. de Maupassant would possibly say.

At any rate, I have perhaps touched upon this peculiarity sufficiently to explain my remark that his point of view is almost solely that of the senses. If he is a very interesting case, this makes him also an embarrassing one, embarrassing and mystifying for the moralist. I may as well admit that no writer of the day strikes me as equally so. To find M. de Maupassant a lion in the path — that may seem to some people a singular proof of want of courage; but I think the obstacle will not be made light of by those who have really taken the measure of the animal. We are accustomed to think, we of the English faith, that a cynic is a living advertisement of his errors, especially in proportion as he is a thorough-going one; and M. de Maupassant's cynicism, unrelieved as it is, will not be disposed of off-hand by a critic of a competent literary sense. Such a critic is not slow to perceive, to his no small confusion, that though, judging from usual premises, the author of *Bel-Ami* ought to be a warning, he somehow is not. His baseness, as it pervades him, ought to be written all over him; yet somehow there are there certain aspects — and those commanding, as the house-agents say — in which it is not in the least to be perceived. It is easy to exclaim that if he judges life only from the point of view of the senses, many are the noble and exquisite things that he must leave out. What he leaves out has no claim to get itself considered till after we have done justice to what he takes in. It is this positive side of M. de Maupassant that is most remarkable — the fact that his literary character is so complete and edifying. "Auteur à peu près irréprochable dans ungenre qui ne l'est pas," as that excellent critic M. Jules Lemaître says of him, he disturbs us by associating a conscience and a high standard with a temper long synonymous, in our eyes, with an absence of scruples. The situation would be simpler certainly if he were a bad writer; but none the less it is possible, I think, on the whole, to circumvent him, even without attempting to prove that after all he is one.

The latter part of his introduction to *Pierre et Jean* is less felicitous than the beginning, but we learn from it — and this is interesting — that he regards the analytic fashion of telling a story, which has lately begotten in his own country some such remarkable experiments (few votaries as it has attracted among ourselves), as very much less profitable than the simple epic manner which "avoids with care all complicated explanations, all dissertations upon motives, and confines itself to making persons and events pass before our eyes." M. de Maupassant adds that in his view "psychology should be hidden in a book, as it is hidden in reality under the facts of existence. The novel conceived in this manner gains interest, movement, colour, the bustle of life." When it is a question of an artistic process, we must always mistrust very sharp distinctions, for there is surely in every method a little of every other method. It is as difficult to describe an action without glancing at its motive, its moral history, as it is to describe a motive without glancing at its practical consequence. Our history and our fiction are what we do; but it surely is not more easy to determine where what we do begins than to determine where it ends — notoriously a hopeless task. Therefore it would take a very subtle sense to draw a hard and fast line on the borderland of explanation and illustration. If psychology be hidden in life, as, according to M. de Maupassant, it should be in a book, the question immediately comes up, “From whom is it hidden?” From some people, no doubt, but very much less from others; and all depends upon the observer, the nature of one’s observation, and one’s curiosity. For some people motives, reasons, relations, explanations, are a part of the very surface of the drama, with the footlights beating full upon them. For me an act, an incident, an attitude, may be a sharp, detached, isolated thing, of which I give a full account in saying that in such and such a way it came off. For you it may be hung about with implications, with relations, and conditions as necessary to help you to recognise it as the clothes of your friends are to help you know them in the street. You feel that they would seem strange to you without petticoats and trousers.

M. de Maupassant would probably urge that the right thing is to know, or to guess, how events come to pass, but to *say* as little about it as possible. There are matters in regard to which he feels the importance of being explicit, but that is not one of them. The contention to which I allude strikes me as rather arbitrary, so difficult is it to put one’s finger upon the reason why, for instance, there should be so little mystery about what happened to Christiane Andermatt, in *Mont-Oriol,* when she went to walk on the hills with Paul Brétigny, and so much, say, about the forces that formed her for that gentleman’s convenience, or those lying behind any other odd collapse that our author may have related. The s rule misleads, and the best rule certainly is the tact of the individual writer, which will adapt itself to the material as the material comes to him. The cause we plead is ever pretty sure to be the cause of our idiosyncrasies, and if M. de Maupassant thinks meanly of “explanations,” it is, I suspect, that they come to him in no great affluence. His view of the conduct of man is so simple as scarcely to require them; and indeed so far as they are needed he *is,* virtually, explanatory. He deprecates reference to motives, but there is one, covering an immense ground in his horizon, as I have already hinted, to which he perpetually refers. If the sexual impulse be not a moral antecedent, it is none the less the wire that moves almost all M. de Maupassant's puppets, and as he has not hidden it, I cannot see that he has eliminated analysis or made a sacrifice to discretion. His pages are studded with that particular analysis; he is constantly peeping behind the curtain, telling us what he discovers there. The truth is that the admirable system of simplification which makes his tales so rapid and so concise (especially his shorter ones, for his novels in some degree, I think, suffer from it), strikes us as not in the least a conscious intellectual effort, a selective, comparative process. He tells us all he knows, all he suspects, and if these things take no account of the moral nature of man, it is because he has no window looking in that direction, and not because artistic scruples have compelled him to close it up. The very compact mansion in which he dwells presents on that side a perfectly dead wall.

This is why, if his axiom that you produce the effect of truth better by painting people from the outside than from the inside has a large utility, his example is convincing in a much higher degree. A writer is fortunate when his theory and his limitations so exactly correspond, when his curiosities may be appeased with such precision and promptitude. M. de Maupassant contends that the most that the analytic novelist can do is to put himself — his own peculiarities — into the costume of the figure analysed. This may be true, but if it applies to one manner of representing people who are not ourselves, it applies also to any other manner. It is the limitation, the difficulty of the novelist, to whatever clan or camp he may belong. M. de Maupassant is remarkably objective and impersonal, but he would go too far if he were to entertain the belief that he has kept himself out of his books. They speak of him eloquently, even if it only be to tell us how easy — how easy, given his talent of course — he has found this impersonality. Let us hasten to add that in the case of describing a character it is doubtless more difficult to convey the impression of something that is not one's self (the constant effort, however delusive at bottom, of the novelist), than in the case of describing some object more immediately visible. The operation is more delicate, but that circumstance only increases the beauty of the problem.

On the question of style our author has some excellent remarks; we may be grateful indeed for every one of them, save an odd reflection about the way to "become original" if we happen not to be so. The recipe for this transformation, it would appear, is to sit down in front of a blazing fire, or a tree in a plain, or any object we encounter in the regular way of business, and remain there until the tree, or the fire, or the object, whatever it be, become different for us from all other specimens of the same class. I doubt whether this system would always answer, for surely the resemblance is what we wish to discover, quite as much as the difference, and the best way to preserve it is not to look for something opposed to it. Is not this indication of the road to take to become, as a writer, original touched with the same fallacy as the recommendation about eschewing analysis? It is the only *naïveté* I have encountered in M. de Maupassant's many volumes. The best originality is the most unconscious, and the best way to describe a tree is the way in which it has struck us. "Ah, but we don't always know how it has struck us," the answer to that may be, "and it takes some time and ingenuity — much fasting and prayer — to find out." If we do not know, it probably has not struck us very much: so little indeed that our inquiry had better be relegated to that closed chamber of an artist's meditations, that sacred back kitchen, which no *a priori* rule can light up. The best thing the artist's adviser can do in such a case is to trust him and turn away, to let him fight the matter out with his conscience. And be this said with a full appreciation of the degree in which M. de Maupassant's observations on the whole question of a writer's style, at the point we have come to to-day, bear the stamp of intelligence and experience. His own style is of so excellent a tradition that the presumption is altogether in favour of what he may have to say.

He feels oppressively, discouragingly, as many another of his countrymen must have felt — for the French have worked their language as no other people have done — the penalty of coming at the end of three centuries of literature, the difficulty of dealing with an instrument of expression so worn by friction, of drawing new sounds from the old familiar pipe. "When we read, so saturated with French writing as we are that our whole body gives us the impression of being a paste made of words, do we ever find a line, a thought, which is not familiar to us, and of which we have not had at least a confused presentiment?" And he adds that the matter is simple enough for the writer who only seeks to amuse the public by means already known; he attempts little, and he produces "with confidence, in the candour of his mediocrity," works which answer no question and leave no trace. It is he who wants to do more than this that has less and less an easy time of it.

Everything seems to him to have been done, every effect produced, every combination already made. If he be a man of genius, his trouble is lightened, for mysterious ways are revealed to him, and new combinations spring up for him even after novelty is dead. It is to the simple man of taste and talent, who has only a conscience and a will, that the situation may sometimes well appear desperate; he judges himself as he goes, and he can only go step by step over ground where every step is already a footprint.

If it be a miracle whenever there is a fresh tone, the miracle has been wrought for M. de Maupassant. Or is he simply a man of genius to whom short cuts have been disclosed in the watches of the night? At any rate he has had faith — religion has come to his aid; I mean the religion of his mother tongue, which he has loved well enough to be patient for her sake. He has arrived at the peace which passeth understanding, at a kind of conservative piety. He has taken his stand on simplicity, on a studied sobriety, being persuaded that the deepest science lies in that direction rather than in the multiplication of new terms, and on this subject he delivers himself with superlative wisdom. "There is no need of the queer, complicated, numerous, and Chinese vocabulary which is imposed on us to-day under the name of artistic writing, to fix all the shades of thought; the right way is to distinguish with an extreme clearness all those modifications of the value of a word which come from the place it occupies. Let us have fewer nouns, verbs and adjectives of an almost imperceptible sense, and more different phrases variously constructed, ingeniously cast, full of the science of sound and rhythm. Let us have an excellent general form rather than be collectors of rare terms." M. de Maupassant's practice does not fall below his exhortation (though I must confess that in the foregoing passage he makes use of the detestable expression "stylist," which I have not reproduced). Nothing can exceed the masculine firmness, the quiet force of his own style, in which every phrase is a close sequence, every epithet a paying piece, and the ground is completely cleared of the vague, the readymade and the second-best. Less than any one to-day does he beat the air; more than any one does he hit out from the shoulder.

II.

HE has produced a hundred short tales and only four regular novels; but if the tales deserve the first place in any candid appreciation of his talent it is not simply because they are so much the more numerous: they are also more characteristic; they represent him best in his originality, and their brevity, extreme in some cases, does not prevent them from being a collection of masterpieces. (They are very unequal, and I speak of the best.) The little story is but scantily relished in England, where readers take their fiction rather by the volume than by the page, and the novelist's idea is apt to resemble one of those old-fashioned carriages which require a wide court to turn round. In America, where it is associated pre-eminently with Hawthorne's name, with Edgar Poe's, and with that of Mr. Bret Harte, the short tale has had a better fortune. France, however, has been the land of its great prosperity, and M. de Maupassant had from the first the advantage of addressing a public accustomed to catch on, as the modern phrase is, quickly. In some respects, it may be said, he encountered prejudices too friendly, for he found a tradition of indecency ready made to his hand. I say indecency with plainness, though my indication would perhaps please better with another word, for we suffer in English from a lack of roundabout names for the *conte leste* — that element for which the French, with their *grivois,* their *gaillard*, their *égrillard*, their *gaudriole,* have so many convenient synonyms. It is an honoured tradition in France that the little story, in verse or in prose, should be liable to be more or less obscene (I can think only of that alternative epithet), though I hasten to add that among literary forms it does not monopolise the privilege. Our uncleanness is less producible — at any rate it is less produced.

For the last ten years our author has brought forth with regularity these condensed compositions, of which, probably, to an English reader, at a first glance, the most universal sign will be their licentiousness. They really partake of this quality, however, in a very differing degree, and a second glance shows that they may be divided into numerous groups. It is not fair, I think, even to say that what they have most in common is their being extremely *lestes.* What they have most in common is their being extremely strong, and after that their being extremely brutal. A story may be obscene without being brutal, and *vice versâ,* and M. de Maupassant's contempt for those interdictions which are supposed to be made in the interest of good morals is but an incident — a very large one indeed — of his general contempt. A pessimism so great that its alliance with the love of good work, or even with the calculation of the sort of work that pays best in a country of style, is, as I have intimated, the most puzzling of anomalies (for it would seem in the light of such sentiments that nothing is worth anything), this cynical strain is the sign of such gems of narration as *La Maison Tellier L'Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme*, *L'Ane*, *Le Chien*, *Mademoiselle Fifi, Monsieur Parent*, *L'Héritage, En Famille*, *Le Baptême, Le Père Amable.* The author fixes a hard eye on some small spot of human life, usually some ugly, dreary, shabby, sordid one, takes up the particle, and squeezes it either till it grimaces or till it bleeds. Sometimes the grimace is very droll, sometimes the wound is very horrible; but in either case the whole thing is real, observed, noted, and represented, not an invention or a castle in the air. M. de Maupassant sees human life as a terribly ugly business relieved by the comical, but even the comedy is for the most part the comedy of misery, of avidity, of ignorance, helplessness, and grossness. When his laugh is not for these things, it is for the little *saletés* (to use one of his own favourite words) of luxurious life, which are intended to be prettier, but which can scarcely be said to brighten the picture. I like *La Bête à Maître Bélhomme, La Ficelle, Le Petit Fût, Le Cas de Madame Luneau, Tribuneaux Rustiques,* and many others of this category much better than his anecdotes of the mutual confidences of his little *marquises* and *baronnes.*

Not counting his novels for the moment, his tales may be divided into the three groups of those which deal with the Norman peasantry, those which deal with the *petit employé* and small shopkeeper, usually in Paris, and the miscellaneous, in which the upper walks of life are represented, and the fantastic, the whimsical, the weird, and even the supernatural, figure as well as the unexpurgated. These last things range from *Le Horla* (which is not a specimen of the author's best vein — the only occasion on which he has the weakness of imitation is when he strikes us as emulating Edgar Poe) to *Miss Harriet,* and from *Boule de Suif* (a triumph) to that almost inconceivable little growl of Anglophobia, *Découverte* — inconceivable I mean in its irresponsibility and ill-nature on the part of a man of M. de Maupassant's distinction; passing by such little perfections as *Petit Soldat*, *L'Abandonné*, *Le Collier* (the list is too long for complete enumeration), and such gross imperfections (for it once in a while befalls our author to go woefully astray), as *La Femme de Paul*, *Châli, Les Sœurs Bondoli.* To these might almost be added as a special category the various forms in which M. de Maupassant relates adventures in railway carriages. Numerous, to his imagination, are the pretexts for enlivening fiction afforded by first, second, and third class compartments; the accidents (which have nothing to do with the conduct of the train) that occur there constitute no inconsiderable part of our earthly transit.

It is surely by his Norman peasant that his tales will live; he knows this worthy as if he had made him, understands him down to the ground, puts him on his feet with a few of the freest, most plastic touches. M. de Maupassant does not admire him, and he is such a master of the subject that it would ill become an outsider to suggest a revision of judgment. He is a part of the contemptible furniture of the world, but on the whole, it would appear, the most grotesque part of it. His caution, his canniness, his natural astuteness, his stinginess, his general grinding sordidness, are as unmistakable as that quaint and brutish dialect in which he expresses himself, and on which our author plays like a virtuoso. It would be impossible to demonstrate with a finer sense of the humour of the thing the fatuities and densities of his ignorance, the bewilderments of his opposed appetites, the overreachings of his caution. His existence has a gay side, but it is apt to be the barbarous gaiety commemorated in *Farce Normande,* an anecdote which, like many of M. de Maupassant's anecdotes, it is easier to refer the reader to than to repeat. If it is most convenient to place *La Maison Tellier* among the tales of the peasantry, there is no doubt that it stands at the head of the list. It is absolutely unadapted to the perusal of ladies and young persons, but it shares this peculiarity with most of its fellows, so that to ignore it on that account would be to imply that we must forswear M. de Maupassant altogether, which is an incongruous and insupportable conclusion. Every good story is of course both a picture and an idea, and the more they are interfused the better the problem is solved. In *La Maison Tellier* they fit each other to perfection; the capacity for sudden innocent delights latent in natures which have lost their innocence is vividly illustrated by the singular scenes to which our acquaintance with Madame and her staff (little as it may be a thing to boast of), successively introduces us. The breadth, the freedom, and brightness of all this give the measure of the author's talent, and of that large, keen way of looking at life which sees the pathetic and the droll, the stuff of which the whole piece is made, in the queerest and humblest patterns. The tone of *La Maison Tellier* and the few compositions which closely resemble it, expresses M. de Maupassant's nearest approach to geniality. Even here, however, it is the geniality of the showman exhilarated by the success with which he feels that he makes his mannikins (and especially his woman-kins) caper and squeak, and who after the performance tosses them into their box with the irreverence of a practised hand. If the pages of the author of *Bel-Ami* maybe searched almost in vain for a manifestation of the sentiment of respect, it is naturally not by Mme. Tellier and her charges that we must look most to see it called forth; but they are among the things that please him most.

Sometimes there is a sorrow, a misery, or even a little heroism, that he handles with a certain tenderness (*Une Vie* is the capital example of this), without insisting on the poor, the ridiculous, or, as he is fond of saying, the bestial side of it. Such an attempt, admirable in its sobriety and delicacy, is the sketch, in *L'Abandonné,* of the old lady and gentleman, Mme de Cadour and M. d'Apreval, who, staying with the husband of the former at a little watering-place on the Normandy coast, take a long, hot walk on a summer's day, on a straight, white road, into the interior, to catch a clandestine glimpse of a young farmer, their illegitimate son. He has been pensioned, he is ignorant of his origin, and is a commonplace and un conciliatory rustic. They look at him, in his dirty farmyard, and no sign passes between them; then they turn away and crawl back, in melancholy silence, along the dull French road. The manner in which this dreary little occurrence is related makes it as large as a chapter of history. There is tenderness in *Miss Harriet,* which sets forth how an English old maid, fantastic, hideous, sentimental, and tract-distributing, with a smell of india-rubber, fell in love with an irresistible French painter, and drowned herself in the well because she saw him kissing the maid-servant; but the figure of the lady grazes the farcical. Is it because we know Miss Harriet (if we are not mistaken in the type the author has had in his eye) that we suspect the good spinster was not so weird and desperate, addicted though her class may be, as he says, to "haunting all the *tables d'hôte* in Europe, to spoiling Italy, poisoning Switzerland, making the charming towns of the Mediterranean uninhabitable, carrying everywhere their queer little manias, their *mœurs de vestales pétrifiées,* their indescribable garments, and that odour of india-rubber which makes one think that at night they must be slipped into a case?" What would Miss Harriet have said to M. de Maupassant's friend, the hero of the *Découverte*, who, having married a little Anglaise because he thought she was charming when she spoke broken French, finds she is very flat as she becomes more fluent, and has nothing more urgent than to denounce her to a gentleman he meets on the steamboat, and to relieve his wrath in ejaculations of "Sales Anglais"?

M. de Maupassant evidently knows a great deal about the army of clerks who work under government, but it is a terrible tale that he has to tell of them and of the *petit bourgeois* in general. It is true that he has treated the *petit bourgeois* in *Pierre et Jean* without holding him up to our derision, and the effort has been so fruitful, that we owe to it the work for which, on the whole, in the long list of his successes, we are most thankful. But of *Pierre et Jean,* a production neither comic nor cynical (in the degree, that is, of its predecessors), but serious and fresh, I will speak anon. In *Monsieur Parent, L'Héritage, En Famille, Une Partie de Campagne, Promenade,* and many other pitiless little pieces, the author opens the window wide to his perception of everything mean, narrow, and sordid. The subject is ever the struggle for existence in hard conditions, lighted up simply by more or less *polissonnerie.* Nothing is more striking to an Anglo-Saxon reader than the omission of all the other lights, those with which our imagination, and I think it ought to be said our observation, is familiar, and which our own works of fiction at any rate do not permit us to forget: those of which the most general description is that they spring from a certain mixture of good-humour and piety — piety, I mean, in the civil and domestic sense quite as much as in the religious. The love of sport, the sense of decorum, the necessity for action, the habit of respect, the absence of irony, the pervasiveness of childhood, the expansive tendency of the race, are a few of the qualities (the analysis might, I think, be pushed much further) which ease us off, mitigate our tension and irritation, rescue us from the nervous exasperation which is almost the commonest element of life as depicted by M. de Maupassant. No doubt there is in our literature an immense amount of conventional blinking, and it may be questioned whether pessimistic representation in M. de Maupassant's manner do not follow his particular original more closely than our perpetual quest of pleasantness (does not Mr. Rider Haggard make even his African carnage pleasant?) adheres to the lines of the world we ourselves know.

Fierce indeed is the struggle for existence among even our pious and good-humoured millions, and it is attended with incidents as to which after all little testimony is to be extracted from our literature of fiction. It must never be forgotten that the optimism of that literature is partly the optimism of women and of spinsters; in other words the optimism of ignorance as well as of delicacy. It might be supposed that the French, with their mastery of the *arts d'agrément,* would have more consolations than we, but such is not the account of the matter given by the new generation of painters. To the French we seem superficial, and we are certainly open to the reproach; but none the less even to the infinite majority of readers of good faith there will be a wonderful want of correspondence between the general picture of *Bel-Ami,* of *Mont-Oriol,* of *Une Vie, Yvette* and *En Famille,* and our own vision of reality. It is an old impression of course that the satire of the French has a very different tone from ours; but few English readers will admit that the feeling of life is less in ours than in theirs. The feeling of life is evidently, *de part et d'autre*, a very different thing. If in ours, as the novel illustrates it, there are superficialities, there are also qualities which are far from being negatives and omissions: a large imagination and (is it fatuous to say?*)* a large experience of the positive kind. Even those of our novelists whose manner is most ironic pity life more and hate it less than M. de Maupassant and his great initiator Flaubert. It comes back I suppose to our good-humour (which may apparently also be an artistic force); at any rate, we have reserves about our shames and our sorrows, indulgences and tolerances about our Philistinism, forbearances about our blows, and a general friendliness of conception about our possibilities, which take the cruelty from our self-derision and operate in the last resort as a sort of tribute to our freedom. There is a horrible, admirable scene in *Monsieur Parent,* which is a capital example of triumphant ugliness. The harmless gentleman who gives his name to the tale has an abominable wife, one of whose offensive attributes is a lover (unsuspected by her husband), only less impudent than herself. M. Parent comes in from a walk with his little boy, at dinner-time, to encounter suddenly in his abused, dishonoured, deserted home, convincing proof of her misbehaviour. He waits and waits dinner for her, giving her the benefit of every doubt; but when at last she enters, late in the evening, accompanied by the partner of her guilt, there is a tremendous domestic concussion. It is to the peculiar vividness of this scene that I allude, the way we hear it and see it, and its most repulsive details are evoked for us: the sordid confusion, the vulgar noise, the disordered table and ruined dinner, the shrill insolence of the wife, her brazen mendacity, the scared inferiority of the lover, the mere momentary heroics of the weak husband, the scuffle and somersault, the eminently unpoetic justice with which it all ends.

When Thackeray relates how Arthur Pendennis goes home to take pot-luck with the insolvent Newcomes at Boulogne, and how the dreadful Mrs.

Mackenzie receives him, and how she makes a scene, when the frugal repast is served, over the diminished mutton-bone, we feel that the notation of that order of misery goes about as far as we can bear it. But this is child's play to the history of M. and Mme. Caravan and their attempt, after the death (or supposed death) of the husband's mother, to transfer to their apartment before the arrival of the other heirs certain miserable little articles of furniture belonging to the deceased, together with the frustration of the manœuvre not only by the grim resurrection of the old woman (which is a sufficiently fantastic item), but by the shock of battle when a married daughter and her husband appear. No one gives us like M. de Maupassant the odious words exchanged on such an occasion as that: no one depicts with so just a hand the feelings of small people about small things. These feelings are very apt to be "fury"; that word is of strikingly frequent occurrence in his pages. L'*Héritage* is a drama of private life in the little world of the Ministère de la Marine — a world, according to M. de Maupassant, of dreadful little jealousies and ineptitudes. Readers of a robust complexion should learn how the wretched M. Lesable was handled by his wife and her father on his failing to satisfy their just expectations, and how he comported himself in the singular situation thus prepared for him. The story is a model of narration, but it leaves our poor average humanity dangling like a beaten rag.

Where does M. de Maupassant find the great multitude of his detestable women? or where at least does he find the courage to represent them in such colours? Jeanne de Lamare, in *Une Vie*, receives the outrages of fate with a passive fortitude; and there is something touching in Mme. Roland's *âme tendre de caissière*, as exhibited in *Pierre et Jean.* But for the most part M de Maupassant's heroines are a mixture of extreme sensuality and extreme mendacity. They are a large element in that general disfigurement, that *illusion de Vignoble, qui attire tant d'êtres,* which makes the perverse or the stupid side of things the one which strikes him first, which leads him, if he glances at a group of nurses and children sunning themselves in a Parisian square, to notice primarily the *yeux de brute* of the nurses; or if he speaks of the longing for a taste of the country which haunts the shopkeeper fenced in behind his counter, to identify it as the *amour bête de la nature;* or if he has occasion to put the boulevards before us on a summer's evening, to seek his effect in these terms: "The city, as hot as a stew, seemed to sweat in the suffocating night. The drains puffed their pestilential breath from their mouths of granite, and the underground kitchens poured into the streets, through their low windows, the infamous miasmas of their dishwater and old sauces." I do not contest the truth of such indications, I only note the particular selection and their seeming to the writer the most *apropos*.

Is it because of the inadequacy of these indications when applied to the long stretch that M. de Maupassant's novels strike us as less complete, in proportion to the talent expended upon them, than his *contes* and *nouvelles?* I make this invidious distinction in spite of the fact that *Une Vie* (the first of the novels in the order of time) is a remarkably interesting experiment, and that *Pierre et Jean* is, so far as my judgment goes, a faultless production. *Bel-Ami* is full of the bustle and the crudity of life (its energy and expressiveness almost bribe one to like it), but it has the great defect that the physiological explanation of things here too visibly contracts the problem in order to meet it. The world represented is too special, too little inevitable, too much to take or to leave as we like — a world in which every man is a cad and every woman a harlot. M. de Maupassant traces the career of a finished blackguard who succeeds in life through women, and he represents him primarily as succeeding in the profession of journalism. His colleagues and his mistresses are as depraved as himself, greatly to the injury of the ironic idea, for the real force of satire would have come from seeing him engaged and victorious with natures better than his own. It may be remarked that this was the case with the nature of Mme. Walter; but the reply to that is — hardly! Moreover the author's whole treatment of the episode of Mme. Walter is the thing on which his admirers have least to congratulate him. The taste of it is so atrocious, that it is difficult to do justice to the way it is made to stand out. Such an instance as this pleads with irresistible eloquence, as it seems to me, the cause of that salutary diffidence or practical generosity which I mentioned on a preceding page. I know not the English or American novelist who could have written this portion of the history of *Bel-Ami* if he would. But I also find it impossible to conceive of a member of that fraternity who would have written it if he could. The subject of *Mont-Oriol* is full of queerness to the English mind. Here again the picture has much more importance than the idea, which is simply that a gentleman, if he happen to be a low animal, is liable to love a lady very much less if she presents him with a pledge of their affection. It need scarcely be said that the lady and gentleman who in M. de

Maupassant’s pages exemplify this interesting truth are not united in wedlock — that is with each other.

M. de Maupassant tells us that he has imbibed many of his principles from Gustave Flaubert, from the study of his works as well as, formerly, the enjoyment of his words. It is in *Une Vie* that Flaubert’s influence is most directly traceable, for the thing has a marked analogy with *L’Education Sentimentale.* That is, it is the presentation of a simple piece of a life (in this case a long piece), a series of observations upon an episode *quelconque,* as the French say, with the minimum of arrangement of the given objects. It is an excellent example of the way the impression of truth may be conveyed by that form, but it would have been a still better one if in his search for the effect of dreariness (the effect of dreariness may be said to be the subject of *Une Vie,* so far as the subject is reducible) the author had not eliminated excessively. He has arranged, as I say, as little as possible; the necessity of a “plot” has in no degree imposed itself upon him, and his effort has been to give the uncomposed, unrounded look of life, with its accidents, its broken rhythm, its queer resemblance to the famous description of “Bradshaw” — a compound of trains that start but don’t arrive, and trains that arrive but don’t start. It is almost an arrangement of the history of poor Mme de Lamare to have left so many things out of it, for after all she is described in very few of the relations of life. The principal ones are there certainly; we see her as a daughter, a wife, and a mother, but there is a certain accumulation of secondary experience that marks any passage from youth to old age which is a wholly absent element in M. de Maupassant’s narrative, and the suppression of which gives the thing a tinge of the arbitrary. It is in the power of this secondary experience to make a great difference, but nothing makes any difference for Jeanne de Lamare as M. de Maupassant puts her before us. Had she no other points of contact than those he describes? — no friends, no phases, no episodes, no chances, none of the miscellaneous *remplissage* of life? No doubt M. de Maupassant would say that he has had to select, that the most comprehensive enumeration is only a condensation, and that, in accordance with the very just principles enunciated in that preface to which I have perhaps too repeatedly referred, he has sacrificed what is uncharacteristic to what is characteristic. It characterises the career of this French country lady of fifty years ago that its long gray expanse should be seen as peopled with but five or six figures. The essence of the matter is that she was deceived in almost every affection, and that essence is given if the persons who deceived her are given.

The reply is doubtless adequate, and I have only intended my criticism to suggest the degree of my interest. What it really amounts to is that if the subject of this artistic experiment had been the existence of an English lady, even a very dull one, the air of verisimilitude would have demanded that she should have been placed in a denser medium. *Une Vie* may after all be only a testimony to the fact of the melancholy void of the coast of Normandy, even within a moderate drive of a great seaport, under the Restoration and Louis Philippe. It is especially to be recommended to those who are interested in the question of what constitutes a "story," offering as it does the most definite sequences at the same time that it has nothing that corresponds to the usual idea of a plot, and closing with an implication that finds us prepared. The picture again in this case is much more dominant than the idea, unless it be an idea that loneliness and grief are terrible. The picture, at any rate, is full of truthful touches, and the work has the merit and the charm that it is the most delicate of the author's productions and the least hard. In none other has he occupied himself so continuously with so innocent a figure as his soft, bruised heroine; in none other has he paid our poor blind human history the compliment (and this is remarkable, considering the flatness of so much of the particular subject) of finding it so little *bête.* He may think it, here, but comparatively he does not say it. He almost betrays a sense of moral things. Jeanne is absolutely passive, she has no moral spring, no active moral life, none of the edifying attributes of character (it costs her apparently as little as may be in the way of a shock, a complication of feeling, to discover, by letters, after her mother's death, that this lady has not been the virtuous woman she has supposed); but her chronicler has had to handle the immaterial forces of patience and renunciation, and this has given the book a certain purity, in spite of two or three "physiological" passages that come in with violence — a violence the greater as we feel it to be a result of selection. It is very much a mark of M. de Maupassant that on the most striking occasion, with a single exception, on which his picture is not a picture of libertinage it is a picture of unmitigated suffering. Would he suggest that these are the only alternatives?

The exception that I here allude to is for *Pierre et Jean,* which I have left myself small space to speak of. Is it because in this masterly little novel there is a show of those immaterial forces which I just mentioned, and because Pierre Roland is one of the few instances of operative character that can be recalled from so many volumes, that many readers will place M. de Maupassant's latest production altogether at the head of his longer ones? I am not sure, inasmuch as after all the character in question is not extraordinarily distinguished, and the moral problem not presented in much complexity. The case is only relative. Perhaps it is not of importance to fix the reasons of preference in respect to a piece of writing so essentially a work of art and of talent. *Pierre et Jean* is the best of M. de Maupassant's novels mainly because M. de Maupassant has never before been so clever. It is a pleasure to see a mature talent able to renew itself, strike another note, and appear still young. This story suggests the growth of a perception that everything has not been said about the actors on the world's stage when they are represented either as helpless victims or as mere bundles of appetites. There is an air of responsibility about Pierre Roland, the person on whose behalf the tale is mainly told, which almost constitutes a pledge. An inquisitive critic may ask why in this particular case M. de Maupassant should have stuck to the *petit bourgeois,* the circumstances not being such as to typify that class more than another. There are reasons indeed which on reflection are perceptible; it was necessary that his people should be poor, and necessary even that to attenuate Madame Roland's misbehaviour she should have had the excuse of the contracted life of a shopwoman in the Rue Montmartre. Were the inquisitive critic slightly malicious as well, he might suspect the author of a fear that he should seem to give way to the *illusion du beau* if in addition to representing the little group in *Pierre et Jean* as persons of about the normal conscience he had also represented them as of the cultivated class. If they belong to the humble life this belittles and — I am still quoting the supposedly malicious critic — M. de Maupassant *must,* in one way or the other, belittle. To the English reader it will appear, I think, that Pierre and Jean are rather more of the cultivated class than two young Englishmen in the same social position. It belongs to the drama that the struggle of the elder brother — educated, proud, and acute — should be partly with the pettiness of his opportunities. The author's choice of a *milieu,* moreover, will serve to English readers as an example of how much more democratic contemporary French fiction is than that of his own country. The greater part of it — almost all the work of Zola and of Daudet, the best of Flaubert's novels, and the best of those of the brothers De Goncourt — treat of that vast, dim section of society which, lying between those luxurious walks on whose behalf there are easy presuppositions and that darkness of misery which, in addition to being picturesque, brings philanthropy also to the writer's aid, constitutes really, in extent and expressiveness, the substance of any nation. In England, where the fashion of fiction still sets mainly to the country house and the hunting-field, and yet more novels are published than anywhere else in the world, that thick twilight of mediocrity of condition has been little explored. May it yield triumphs in the years to come!

It may seem that I have claimed little for M. de Maupassant, so far as English readers are concerned with him, in saying that after publishing twenty improper volumes he has at last published a twenty-first, which is neither indecent nor cynical. It is not this circumstance that has led me to dedicate so many pages to him, but the circumstance that in producing all the others he yet remained, for those who are interested in these matters, a writer with whom it was impossible not to reckon. This is why I called him, to begin with, so many ineffectual names: a rarity, a "case," an embarrassment, a lion in the path. He is still in the path as I conclude these observations, but I think that in making them we have discovered a legitimate way round. If he is a master of his art and it is discouraging to find what low views are compatible with mastery, there is satisfaction, on the other hand in learning on what particular condition he holds his strange success. This condition, it seems to me, is that of having totally omitted one of the items of the problem, an omission which has made the problem so much easier that it may almost be described as a short cut to a solution. The question is whether it be a fair cut. M. de Maupassant has simply skipped the whole reflective part of his men and women — that reflective part which governs conduct and produces character. He may say that he does not see it, does not know it; to which the answer is, "So much the better for you, if you wish to describe life without it. The strings you pull are by so much the less numerous, and you can therefore pull those that remain with greater promptitude, consequently with greater firmness, with a greater air of knowledge." Pierre Roland, I repeat, shows a capacity for reflection, but I cannot think who else does, among the thousand figures who compete with him — I mean for reflection addressed to anything higher than the gratification of an instinct. We have an impression that M. d'Apreval and Madame de Cadour reflect, as they trudge back from their mournful excursion, but that indication is not pushed very far. An aptitude for this exercise is a part of disciplined manhood, and disciplined manhood M. de Maupassant has simply not attempted to represent. I can remember no instance in which he sketches any considerable capacity for conduct, and his women betray that capacity as little as his men. I am much mistaken if he has once painted a gentleman, in the English sense of the term. His gentlemen, like Paul Brétigny and Gontran de Ravenel, are guilty of the most extraordinary deflections. For those who are conscious of this element in life, look for it and like it, the gap will appear to be immense.

It will lead them to say, "No wonder you have a contempt if that is the way you limit the field. No wonder you judge people roughly if that is the way you see them. Your work, on your premisses, remains the admirable thing it is, but is your 'case' not adequately explained?"

The erotic element in M. de Maupassant, about which much more might have been said, seems to me to be explained by the same limitation, and explicable in a similar way wherever else its literature occurs in excess. The carnal side of man appears the most characteristic if you look at it a great deal; and you look at it a great deal if you do not look at the other, at the side by which he reacts against his weaknesses, his defeats. The more you look at the other, the less the whole business to which French novelists have ever appeared to English readers to give a disproportionate place — the business, as I may say, of the senses — will strike you as the only typical one. Is not this the most useful reflection to make in regard to the famous question of the morality, the decency, of the novel? It is the only one, it seems to me, that will meet the case as we find the case to-day. Hard and fast rules, *a priori* restrictions, mere interdictions (you shall not speak of this, you shall not look at that), have surely served their time, and will in the nature of the case never strike an energetic talent as anything but arbitrary. A healthy, living and growing art, full of curiosity and fond of exercise, has an indefeasible mistrust of rigid prohibitions.

Let us then leave this magnificent art of the novelist to itself and to its perfect freedom, in the faith that one example is as good as another, and that our fiction will always be decent enough if it be sufficiently general. Let us not be alarmed at this prodigy (though prodigies are alarming) of M. de Maupassant, who is at once so licentious and so impeccable, but gird ourselves up with the conviction that another point of view will yield another perfection.

1888.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT: A STUDY by P. Neveux

"I entered literary life as a meteor, and I shall leave it like a thunderbolt." These words of Maupassant to Jose Maria de Heredia on the occasion of a memorable meeting are, in spite of their morbid solemnity, not an inexact summing up of the brief career during which, for ten years, the writer, by turns undaunted and sorrowful, with the fertility of a master hand produced poetry, novels, romances and travels, only to sink prematurely into the abyss of madness and death. . . . .

In the month of April, 1880, an article appeared in the "Le Gaulois" announcing the publication of the Soirees de Medan. It was signed by a name as yet unknown: Guy de Maupassant. After a juvenile diatribe against romanticism and a passionate attack on languorous literature, the writer extolled the study of real life, and announced the publication of the new work. It was picturesque and charming. In the quiet of evening, on an island, in the Seine, beneath poplars instead of the Neapolitan cypresses dear to the friends of Boccaccio, amid the continuous murmur of the valley, and no longer to the sound of the Pyrennean streams that murmured a faint accompaniment to the tales of Marguerite's cavaliers, the master and his disciples took turns in narrating some striking or pathetic episode of the war. And the issue, in collaboration, of these tales in one volume, in which the master jostled elbows with his pupils, took on the appearance of a manifesto, the tone of a challenge, or the utterance of a creed.

In fact, however, the beginnings had been much more simple, and they had confined themselves, beneath the trees of Medan, to deciding on a general title for the work. Zola had contributed the manuscript of the "Attaque du Moulin," and it was at Maupassant's house that the five young men gave in their contributions. Each one read his story, Maupassant being the last. When he had finished Boule de Suif, with a spontaneous impulse, with an emotion they never forgot, filled with enthusiasm at this revelation, they all rose and, without superfluous words, acclaimed him as a master.

He undertook to write the article for the Gaulois and, in cooperation with his friends, he worded it in the terms with which we are familiar, amplifying and embellishing it, yielding to an inborn taste for mystification which his youth rendered excusable. The essential point, he said, is to “unmoor” criticism.

It was unmoored. The following day Wolff wrote a polemical dissertation in the Figaro and carried away his colleagues. The volume was a brilliant success, thanks to Boule de Suif. Despite the novelty, the honesty of effort, on the part of all, no mention was made of the other stories. Relegated to the second rank, they passed without notice. From his first battle, Maupassant was master of the field in literature.

At once the entire press took him up and said what was appropriate regarding the budding celebrity. Biographers and reporters sought information concerning his life. As it was very simple and perfectly straightforward, they resorted to invention. And thus it is that at the present day Maupassant appears to us like one of those ancient heroes whose origin and death are veiled in mystery.

I will not dwell on Guy de Maupassant’s younger days. His relatives, his old friends, he himself, here and there in his works, have furnished us in their letters enough valuable revelations and touching remembrances of the years preceding his literary debut. His worthy biographer, H. Edouard Maynial, after collecting intelligently all the writings, condensing and comparing them, has been able to give us some definite information regarding that early period.

I will simply recall that he was born on the 5th of August, 1850, near Dieppe, in the castle of Miromesnil which he describes in Une Vie. . . .

Maupassant, like Flaubert, was a Norman, through his mother, and through his place of birth he belonged to that strange and adventurous race, whose heroic and long voyages on tramp trading ships he liked to recall. And just as the author of “Education sentimentale” seems to have inherited in the paternal line the shrewd realism of Champagne, so de Maupassant appears to have inherited from his Lorraine ancestors their indestructible discipline and cold lucidity.

His childhood was passed at Etretat, his beautiful childhood; it was there that his instincts were awakened in the unfoldment of his prehistoric soul. Years went by in an ecstasy of physical happiness. The delight of running at full speed through fields of gorse, the charm of voyages of discovery in hollows and ravines, games beneath the dark hedges, a passion for going to sea with the fishermen and, on nights when there was no moon, for dreaming on their boats of imaginary voyages.

Mme. de Maupassant, who had guided her son's early reading, and had gazed with him at the sublime spectacle of nature, put, off as long as possible the hour of separation. One day, however, she had to take the child to the little seminary at Yvetot. Later, he became a student at the college at Rouen, and became a literary correspondent of Louis Bouilhet. It was at the latter's house on those Sundays in winter when the Norman rain drowned the sound of the bells and dashed against the window panes that the school boy learned to write poetry.

Vacation took the rhetorician back to the north of Normandy. Now it was shooting at Saint Julien l'Hospitalier, across fields, bogs, and through the woods. From that time on he sealed his pact with the earth, and those "deep and delicate roots" which attached him to his native soil began to grow. It was of Normandy, broad, fresh and virile, that he would presently demand his inspiration, fervent and eager as a boy's love; it was in her that he would take refuge when, weary of life, he would implore a truce, or when he simply wished to work and revive his energies in old-time joys. It was at this time that was born in him that voluptuous love of the sea, which in later days could alone withdraw him from the world, calm him, console him.

In 1870 he lived in the country, then he came to Paris to live; for, the family fortunes having dwindled, he had to look for a position. For several years he was a clerk in the Ministry of Marine, where he turned over musty papers, in the uninteresting company of the clerks of the admiralty.

Then he went into the department of Public Instruction, where bureaucratic servility is less intolerable. The daily duties are certainly scarcely more onerous and he had as chiefs, or colleagues, Xavier Charmes and Leon Dierx, Henry Roujon and Rene Billotte, but his office looked out on a beautiful melancholy garden with immense plane trees around which black circles of crows gathered in winter.

Maupassant made two divisions of his spare hours, one for boating, and the other for literature. Every evening in spring, every free day, he ran down to the river whose mysterious current veiled in fog or sparkling in the sun called to him and bewitched him. In the islands in the Seine between Chatou and Port-Marly, on the banks of Sartrouville and Triel he was long noted among the population of boatmen, who have now vanished, for his unwearying biceps, his cynical gaiety of good-fellowship, his unfailing practical jokes, his broad witticisms. Sometimes he would row with frantic speed, free and joyous, through the glowing sunlight on the stream;

sometimes, he would wander along the coast, questioning the sailors, chatting with the ravageurs, or junk gatherers, or stretched at full length amid the irises and tansy he would lie for hours watching the frail insects that play on the surface of the stream, water spiders, or white butterflies, dragon flies, chasing each other amid the willow leaves, or frogs asleep on the lily-pads.

The rest of his life was taken up by his work. Without ever becoming despondent, silent and persistent, he accumulated manuscripts, poetry, criticisms, plays, romances and novels. Every week he docilely submitted his work to the great Flaubert, the childhood friend of his mother and his uncle Alfred Le Poittevin. The master had consented to assist the young man, to reveal to him the secrets that make chefs-d'oeuvre immortal. It was he who compelled him to make copious research and to use direct observation and who inculcated in him a horror of vulgarity and a contempt for facility.

Maupassant himself tells us of those severe initiations in the Rue Murillo, or in the tent at Croisset; he has recalled the implacable didactics of his old master, his tender brutality, the paternal advice of his generous and candid heart. For seven years Flaubert slashed, pulverized, the awkward attempts of his pupil whose success remained uncertain.

Suddenly, in a flight of spontaneous perfection, he wrote Boule de Suif. His master's joy was great and overwhelming. He died two months later.

Until the end Maupassant remained illuminated by the reflection of the good, vanished giant, by that touching reflection that comes from the dead to those souls they have so profoundly stirred. The worship of Flaubert was a religion from which nothing could distract him, neither work, nor glory, nor slow moving waves, nor balmy nights.

At the end of his short life, while his mind was still clear: he wrote to a friend: "I am always thinking of my poor Flaubert, and I say to myself that I should like to die if I were sure that anyone would think of me in the same manner."

During these long years of his novitiate Maupassant had entered the social literary circles. He would remain silent, preoccupied; and if anyone, astonished at his silence, asked him about his plans he answered simply: "I am learning my trade." However, under the pseudonym of Guy de Valmont, he had sent some articles to the newspapers, and, later, with the approval and by the advice of Flaubert, he published, in the “Republique des Lettres,” poems signed by his name.

These poems, overflowing with sensuality, where the hymn to the Earth describes the transports of physical possession, where the impatience of love expresses itself in loud melancholy appeals like the calls of animals in the spring nights, are valuable chiefly inasmuch as they reveal the creature of instinct, the fawn escaped from his native forests, that Maupassant was in his early youth. But they add nothing to his glory. They are the “rhymes of a prose writer” as Jules Lemaitre said. To mould the expression of his thought according to the strictest laws, and to “narrow it down” to some extent, such was his aim. Following the example of one of his comrades of Medan, being readily carried away by precision of style and the rhythm of sentences, by the imperious rule of the ballad, of the pantoum or the chant royal, Maupassant also desired to write in metrical lines. However, he never liked this collection that he often regretted having published. His encounters with prosody had left him with that monotonous weariness that the horseman and the fencer feel after a period in the riding school, or a bout with the foils.

Such, in very broad lines, is the story of Maupassant’s literary apprenticeship.

The day following the publication of “Boule de Suif,” his reputation began to grow rapidly. The quality of his story was unrivalled, but at the same time it must be acknowledged that there were some who, for the sake of discussion, desired to place a young reputation in opposition to the triumphant brutality of Zola.

From this time on, Maupassant, at the solicitation of the entire press, set to work and wrote story after story. His talent, free from all influences, his individuality, are not disputed for a moment. With a quick step, steady and alert, he advanced to fame, a fame of which he himself was not aware, but which was so universal, that no contemporary author during his life ever experienced the same. The “meteor” sent out its light and its rays were prolonged without limit, in article after article, volume on volume.

He was now rich and famous . . . . He is esteemed all the more as they believe him to be rich and happy. But they do not know that this young fellow with the sunburnt face, thick neck and salient muscles whom they invariably compare to a young bull at liberty, and whose love affairs they whisper, is ill, very ill. At the very moment that success came to him, the malady that never afterwards left him came also, and, seated motionless at his side, gazed at him with its threatening countenance. He suffered from terrible headaches, followed by nights of insomnia. He had nervous attacks, which he soothed with narcotics and anesthetics, which he used freely. His sight, which had troubled him at intervals, became affected, and a celebrated oculist spoke of abnormality, asymetry of the pupils. The famous young man trembled in secret and was haunted by all kinds of terrors.

The reader is charmed at the saneness of this revived art and yet, here and there, he is surprised to discover, amid descriptions of nature that are full of humanity, disquieting flights towards the supernatural, distressing conjurations, veiled at first, of the most commonplace, the most vertiginous shuddering fits of fear, as old as the world and as eternal as the unknown. But, instead of being alarmed, he thinks that the author must be gifted with infallible intuition to follow out thus the taints in his characters, even through their most dangerous mazes. The reader does not know that these hallucinations which he describes so minutely were experienced by Maupassant himself; he does not know that the fear is in himself, the anguish of fear "which is not caused by the presence of danger, or of inevitable death, but by certain abnormal conditions, by certain mysterious influences in presence of vague dangers," the "fear of fear, the dread of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible terror."

How can one explain these physical sufferings and this morbid distress that were known for some time to his intimates alone? Alas! the explanation is only too simple. All his life, consciously or unconsciously, Maupassant fought this malady, hidden as yet, which was latent in him.

As his malady began to take a more definite form, he turned his steps towards the south, only visiting Paris to see his physicians and publishers. In the old port of Antibes beyond the causeway of Cannes, his yacht, Bel Ami, which he cherished as a brother, lay at anchor and awaited him. He took it to the white cities of the Genoese Gulf, towards the palm trees of Hyeres, or the red bay trees of Antheor.

After several tragic weeks in which, from instinct, he made a desperate fight, on the 1st of January, 1892, he felt he was hopelessly vanquished, and in a moment of supreme clearness of intellect, like Gerard de Nerval, he attempted suicide. Less fortunate than the author of Sylvia, he was unsuccessful. But his mind, henceforth "indifferent to all unhappiness," had entered into eternal darkness.

He was taken back to Paris and placed in Dr. Meuriot’s sanatorium, where, after eighteen months of mechanical existence, the “meteor” quietly passed away.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT by John Cowper Powys

To read for the first time, one of the short stories of Guy de Maupassant is to receive a staggering enlargement of one's ideas as to what mere literature can do. They hardly seem like literature at all, these blocks from the quarry of life, flung into one's face with so unerring an aim.

"If you prick them, they bleed. If you tickle them, they laugh." The rough rain-smelling earth still clings to them; when you take them in your hands, the mud of the highway comes off upon your fingers. Is it really, one wonders, mere literary craft, mere cunning artfulness, which gives these sentences the weight of a guillotine-blade crashing down upon the prostrate neck of bound helpless reality?

Is it simply the art of a pupil of the euphonious Flaubert, this power of making written sentences march full-armed like living men, and fall, when their work is done, with a metallic ring of absolute finality— "as a dead body falls"?

As one reads Guy de Maupassant one breathes heavily as if it were oneself and not another upon whom the tension and the sweat of the crisis has come. One touches with one's naked hand every object he describes. One feels the gasping breath of every person he brings forward. His images slap one's cheeks till they tingle, and his situations wrestle with one to the ground.

Not for nothing was he a descendant of that race which, of all races except the Turks, has loved love better than literature and war better than love. Words are resounding blows and smacking kisses to Guy de Maupassant. He writes literature as a Norman baron, and when he rounds off a sentence it is as if he dug a spur into the flanks of a restless filly. There is nothing like his style in the world.

They never taught me Tacitus when I was at school. My Latinity stops short at Caesar and Cicero. One is, however, led to suppose that the great executioner of imperial reputations was a mighty pruner, in his day, of the "many, too many" words. But I am sure that this other "Great Latin," as Nietzsche calls him, cleans up his litter and chops off his surplusage quite as effectively as Tacitus, and I suspect that neither Tacitus nor any other classic writer hits the nail on the head with so straight, so steady, so effective a stroke.

I suppose it is the usual habit of destiny to rush into literary paths people who are essentially dreamers and theorists and Utopians; people who by instinct and temperament shrink away from contact with brute reality.

I suppose even the great imaginative writers, like Balzac, live, on the whole, sedentary and exclusive lives, making a great deal, as far as the materials for their work go, of a very little. Now and then, however, it happens that a man of action, a man of the world, a man of love and war and sport, enters the literary arena; and when that occurs, I have an idea that he hits about him with a more trenchant, more resolute, more crushing force than the others.

The art of literature has become perhaps too completely the monopoly of sedentary people — largely of the bourgeois class — who bring to their work the sedentary sensitiveness, the sedentary refinement, the sedentary lack of living experience, which are the natural characteristics of persons who work all day in studies and studios. That is why the appearance of a Walt Whitman or a Maxim Gorki is so wholesome and air-clearing an event.

But not less salutary is the appearance of a ferocious aristocrat from the class which has ridden rough-shod over the fields of submissive actuality for many tyrannous centuries.

In the hard shrewd blows of a Maxim Gorki, the monopolising tribes of sedentary dreamers receive their palpable hit, receive it from the factory and the furrow. In the deadly knocks of a Guy de Maupassant they get their “quietus” from the height, so to speak, of the saddle of a sporting gentleman.

Do what they can to get the sharp bitter tang of reality into their books, the bulk of these people, write they never so cleverly, seem somehow to miss it.

The smell of that crafty old skunk — the genuine truth of things — draws them forward through the reeds and rushes of the great dim forests’ edge, but they seldom touch the hide of the evasive animal; no, not so much as with the end of their barge-pole.

But Guy de Maupassant plunges into the thickets, gun in hand, and we soon hear the howl of the hunted.

A love of literature, a reverence and respect for the dignity of words, does not by any means imply a power of making them plastic before the pressure of truth. How often one is conscious of the intervention of "something else," some alien material, marbly and shiny it may be, and with a beauty of its own, but obtruding quite opaquely between the thing said and the thing felt.

In reading Guy de Maupassant, it does not seem to be words at all which touch us. It seems to be things — things living or dead, things in motion or at rest. Words are there indeed; they must be there — but they are so hammered on the anvil of his hard purpose that they have become porous and transparent. Their one rôle now is to get themselves out of the way; or rather to turn themselves into thin air and clean water, through which the reality beyond can come at us with unblurred outlines.

It is a wonderful commentary, when one thinks of it, upon the malleability of human language that it can so take shape and colour from the pressure of a single temperament. The words in the dictionary are all there — all at the disposal of every one of us — but how miraculous a thing to make their choice and their arrangement expressive of nothing on earth but the peculiar turn of one particular mind!

The whole mystery of life is in this; this power of the unique and solitary soul to twist the universe into the shape of its vision.

Without any doubt Guy de Maupassant is the greatest realist that ever lived. All other realists seem idealists in comparison. Many of the situations he describes are situations doubtless in which he himself "had a hand." Others are situations which he came across, in his enterprising debouchings here and there, in curious by-alleys, and which he observed with a morose scowl of amusement, from outside. A few — very few — are situations which he evoked from the more recondite places of his own turbulent soul.

But one cannot read a page of him without feeling that he is a writer who writes from out of his own experiences, from out of the shocks and jolts and rough file-like edges of raw reality.

It is a huge encouragement to all literary ambitions, this immense achievement of his. The scope and sweep of a great creative imagination is given to few among us, and Guy de Maupassant was not one of these. His imagination was rigorously earth-bound, and not only earth-bound but bound to certain obvious and sensual aspects of earth-life. Except when he tore open the bleeding wounds of his own mutilated sensibility and wrote stories of his madness with a pen dipped in the evil humours of his diseased blood, he was a master of a certain brutal and sunburnt objectivity.

But how cheerful and encouraging it is for those among us who are engaged in literature, to see what this astonishing man was able to make of experiences which, in some measure, we must all have shared!

There is never any need to leave one's own town or village or city to get "copy." There is scarcely any need to leave one's own house. The physiological peculiarities of the people who jostle against us in the common routine of things will completely suffice. That is the whole point of de Maupassant's achievement.

The same thing, of course, is true of the great imaginative writers. *They* also are able to derive grist for their mill from the common occurrences; they also are free to remain at home. But their sphere is the sphere of the human soul; his was the sphere of the human body.

He was pre-eminently the master of physiology — the physiological writer. Bodies, not souls, were his "métier" — or souls only in so far as they are directly affected by bodies.

But bodies — bodies of men and women are everywhere; living ones on the earth; dead ones under the earth. One need not go to the antipodes to find the nerves and the tissues, the flesh and the blood, of these planetary evocations, of these microcosms of the universe. The great imaginative writers have the soul of man always under their hand, and Guy de Maupassant has the body of man always under his hand.

It is not the masters who are found journeying to remote regions to get inspiration for their work. Their "America," as Goethe puts it, lies close to their door.

It is singularly encouraging to us men of letters to contemplate what Guy de Maupassant could do with the natural animal instincts and gestures and mutterings and struggles of the bodies of men and women as their desires make them skip.

"Encouraging" did I say? Tantalizing rather, and provocative of helpless rage. For just as the spiritual insensitiveness of our bourgeois tyrants renders them dull and obtuse to the noble imaginations of great souls, so their moral bigotry and stupidity renders them obstinately averse to the freedom of the artist in dealing with the physical eccentricities of the grotesque human animal.

We must not deal at large with the spirit lest we weary the vulgar and the frivolous; we must not deal at large with the body, lest we infuriate the Puritanical and the squeamish.

It is absurd to rail at de Maupassant because of his “brutality.” One cannot help suspecting that those who do so have never recognised the absurd comedy of their own bodily activities and desires.

It is idle to protest against the outrageous excursions of his predatory humour. The raw bleeding pieces — each, as one almost feels, with its own peculiar cry — of the living body of the world, clawed as if by tiger claws, are strange morsels for the taste of some among us. But for others, there is an exultant pleasure in this great hunt, with the deep-mouthed hounds of veracity and sincerity, after the authentic truth.

One touches here — in this question of the brutality of Guy de Maupassant — upon a very deep matter; the matter namely of what our pleasure exactly consists, as we watch, in one of his more savage stories, the flesh of the world’s truth thus clawed at.

I think it is a pleasure composed of several different elements. The first of these is that deep and curious satisfaction which we derive from the exhibition in art of the essential grossness and unscrupulousness of life. We revenge ourselves in this way upon what makes us suffer. The clear presentation of an outrage, of an insult, of an indecency, is in itself a sort of vengeance upon the power that wrought it, and though it may sound ridiculous enough to speak of being avenged upon Nature, still the basic instinct is there, and we can, if we will, personify the immense malignity of things, and fancy that we are striking back at the gods and causing the gods some degree of perturbation; at least letting them know that we are not deceived by the illusions they dole out to us!

The quiet gods may well be imagined as quite as indifferent to our artistic vengeance as Nature herself, but at any rate, like the man in the Inferno who “makes the fig” at the Almighty, we have found vent for our human feelings. Another element in it is the pleasure we get — not perhaps a very Christian one, but Literature deviates from Christianity in several important ways — from having other people made fully aware, as we may be, of the grossness and unscrupulousness of life.

These other people may easily be assumed to be fidgety, meticulous, self-complacent purists; and as we read the short stories of Guy de Maupassant, we cannot resist calling up an imaginary company of such poor devils and forcing them to listen to a page of the great book of human judgment upon Nature's perversity.

Finally at the bottom of all there is a much more subtle cause for our pleasure; nothing less in fact than that old wild dark Dionysian embracing of fate, of fate however monstrous and bizarre, simply because it is there — an integral part of the universe — and we ourselves with something of that ingredient in our own heathen hearts.

An imaginary symposium of modern writers upon the causes of human pleasure in the grosser elements of art lends itself to very free speculation. Personally I must confess to very serious limitations in my own capacity for such enjoyment. I have a sneaking sympathy with tender nerves. I can relish de Maupassant up to a certain point — and that point is well this side of idolatry — but I fancy I relish him because I discern in him a certain vibrant nerve of revolt against the brutality of things, a certain quivering irony of savage protest. When you get the brutality represented without this revolt and with a certain unction of sympathetic zest, as you do in the great eighteenth century novelists in England, I confess it becomes more than I can endure.

This is a most grievous limitation and I apologise to the reader most humbly for it. It is indeed a lamentable confession of weakness. But since the limitations of critics are, consciously or unconsciously, part of their contribution to the problems at issue, I offer mine without further comment.

It is an odd thing that while I can relish and even hugely enjoy ribaldry in a Latin writer, I cannot so much as tolerate vulgarity in an English or Scotch one. Perhaps it is their own hidden consciousness that, if they once let themselves go, they would go unpleasantly far, which gives this morbid uneasiness to the strictures of the Puritans. Or is it that the English-speaking races are born between the deep sea of undiluted coarseness and the devil of a diseased conscience? Is this the reason why every artist in the world and every critic of art, feels himself essentially an exile everywhere except upon Latin soil?

Guy de Maupassant visualises human life as a thing completely and helplessly in the grip of animal appetites and instincts. He takes what we call lust, and makes of it the main motive force in his vivid and terrible sketches. It is perhaps for this very reason that his stories have such an air of appalling reality.

But it is not only lust or lechery which he exploits. He turns to his artistic purpose every kind of physiological desire, every sort of bodily craving. Many of these are quite innocent and harmless, and the denial of their satisfaction is in the deepest sense tragic. Perhaps it is in regard to what this word *tragic* implies that we find the difference between the brutality of Guy de Maupassant and the coarseness of the earlier English writers.

The very savagery in de Maupassant's humour is an indication of a clear intellectual consciousness of something monstrously, grotesquely, wrong; something mad and blind and devilish about the whole business, which we miss completely in all English writers except the great Jonathan Swift.

Guy de Maupassant had the easy magnanimity of the Latin races in regard to sex matters, but in regard to the sufferings of men and of animals from the denial of their right to every sort of natural joy, there smouldered in him a deep black rage — a *saeva indignatio* — which scorches his pages like a deadly acid.

In his constant preoccupation with the bodies of living creatures, it is natural enough that animals as well as men should come into the circle of his interest. He was a great huntsman and fisherman. He loved to wander over the frozen marshes, gun in hand, searching for strange wildfowl among the reeds and ditches. But though he slew these things in the savage passion of the chase as his ancestors had done for ages, between his own fierce senses and theirs there was a singular magnetic sympathy.

As may be often noticed in other cases, as we go through the world, there was between the primitive earth-instincts of this hunter of wild things and the desperate creatures he pursued, a far deeper bond of kinship than exists between sedentary humanitarians and the objects of their philanthropy. It is good that there should be such a writer as this in the world.

In the sophisticated subtleties of our varnished and velvet-carpeted civilisation, it is well that we should be brought back to the old essential candours which forever underlie the frills and frippery. It is well that the stark bones of the aboriginal skeleton with its raw "unaccommodated" flesh should peep out through the embroideries.

It is, after all, the "thing itself" which matters — the thing which "owes the worm no silk, the cat no perfume." Forked straddling animals are we all, as the mad king says in the play, and it is mere effeminacy and affectation to cover up the truth.

Guy de Maupassant is never greater than when appealing to the primitive link of tragic affiliation that binds us to all living flesh and blood. A horse mercilessly starved in the fields; a wild bird wailing for its murdered mate; a tramp driven by hunger and primitive desire, and harried by the “insolence of office”; an old man denied the little luxuries of his senile greed; an old maid torn and rent in the flesh that is barren and the breasts that never gave suck; these are the natural subjects of his genius — the sort of “copy” that one certainly need not leave one’s “home town” to find.

One is inclined to feel that those who miss the tragic generosity at the heart of the brutality of Guy de Maupassant, are not really aware of the bitter cry of this mad planet. Let them content themselves, these people, with their pretty little touching stories, their nice blobs of cheerful “local colour” thrown in here and there, and their sweet impossible endings. Sunday school literature for Sunday school children; but let there be at least one writer who writes for those who know what the world is.

The question of the legitimacy in art of the kind of realism which Guy de Maupassant practised, goes incalculably deep. Consider yourself at this moment, gentle reader, lightly turning over — as doubtless you are doing — the harmless pages of this academic book, as you drink your tea from a well appointed tray in a sunny corner of some friendly cake-shop. You are at this moment — come, confess it — hiding up, perhaps from yourself but certainly from the world, some outrageous annoyance, some grotesque resolution, some fear, some memory, some suspicion, that has — as is natural and proper enough, for your father was a man, your mother a woman — its physiological origin. You turn to this elegant book of mine, with its mild and persuasive thoughts, as if you turned away from reality into some pleasant arbour of innocent recreation. It is a sort of little lullaby for you amid the troubles of this rough world.

But suppose instead of the soothing cadences of this harmless volume, you had just perused a short story of Guy de Maupassant; would not your feelings be different? Would you not have the sensation of being fortified in your courage, in your humour, in your brave embracing of the fantastic truth? Would you not contemplate the most grotesque matters lightly, wisely, sanely and with a magnanimous heart?

The perverted moral training to which we have been all of us subjected, has “sicklied o’er with the pale cast” of a most evil scrupulousness our natural free enjoyment of the absurd contrasts and accidents and chances of life.

French humour may be savage — all the better — we need a humour with some gall in it to deal with the humour of the universe. But our humour, stopping short so timorously of stripping the world to its smock, is content to remain vulgar. That is the only definition of vulgarity that I recognise — a temptation to be coarse without the spiritual courage to be outrageous! Coarseness — our Anglo Saxon peculiarity — is due to temperamental insensitiveness. Outrageous grossness — with its ironical, beautiful blasphemy against the great mother's amazing tricks — is an intellectual and spiritual thing, worthy of all noble souls. The one is the rank breath of a bourgeois democracy, the other is the free laughter of civilised intelligences through all human history.

English and Americans find it difficult to understand each other's humour. One can well understand this difficulty. No one finds any obstacle — except Puritan prejudice — in understanding French humour; because French humour is universal; the humour of the human spirit contemplating the tragic comedy of the human body.

One very interesting thing must be noted here in regard to the method of Guy de Maupassant's writings; I mean the power of the short story to give a sense of the general stream of life which is denied to the long story.

Personally I prefer long stories; but that is only because I have an insatiable love of the story for its own sake, apart from its interpretation of life. I am not in the least ashamed to confess that when I read books, I do so to escape from the pinch of actual facts. I have a right to this little peculiarity as much as to any other as long as I don't let it invade the clarity of my reason. But in the short story — and I have no scruple about admitting it — one seems to get the flavour of the writer's general philosophy of life more completely than in any other literary form.

It is a snatch at the passing procession, a dip into the flowing stream, and one gets from it the sort of sudden illumination that one gets from catching a significant gesture under the street lamp, or meeting a swift tale-telling glance beneath a crowded doorway.

Bitterly inspired as he is by the irony of the physiological tragedy of human life, Guy de Maupassant is at his greatest when he deals with the bizarre accidents that happen to the body; greatest of all when he deals with the last bizarre accident of all, the accident of death.

The appalling grotesqueness of death, its brutal and impious levity, its crushing finality, have never been better written of. The savage ferocity with which he tears off the mask which the sentimental piety of generations has thrown over the features of their dead is no sign of frivolousness in him. The gravity of the undertaker is not an indication of deep emotion; nor is the jesting of Hamlet, as he stands above Ophelia's grave, a sign of an inhuman heart.

The last insult of the scurrilous gods — their flinging us upon oblivion with so indecent, so lewd a disregard for every sort of seemliness — is answered in Guy de Maupassant by a ferocious irony almost equal to their own.

But it would be unfair to let this dark-browed Norman go, without at least a passing allusion to the large and friendly manner in which he rakes up, out of brothel, out of gutter, out of tenement, out of sweat-shop, out of circus-tent, out of wharf shanty, out of barge cabin, every kind and species of human derelict to immortalise their vagrant humanity in the amber of his flawless style.

There is a spacious hospitality about the man's genius which is a rare tonic to weary aesthetes, sick of the thin-spun theories of the schools. The sun-burnt humour of many queer tatterdemalions warms us, as we read him, into a fine indifference to nice points of human distinction. All manner of ragged nondescripts blink at us out of their tragic resignation and hint at a ribald reciprocity of nature, making the whole world kin.

In his ultimate view of life, he was a drastic pessimist, and what we call materialism receives from his hands the clinching fiat of a terrific imprimatur. And this is well; this is as it should be. There are always literary persons to uphold the banners of mysticism and morality, idealism and good hope. There will always be plenty of talent "on the side of the angels" in these days, when it has become a kind of intellectual cant to cry aloud, "I am no materialist! Materialism has been disproved by the latest scientific thinkers!"

To come back to the old, honest, downright, heathen recognition of the midnight, wherein all candles are put out, is quite a salutary experience. It is good that there should be a few great geniuses that are unmitigated materialists, and to whom the visible world is absolutely all there is. One is rendered more tolerant of the boisterousness of the players when one feels the play ends so finally and so soon. One is rendered less exacting towards the poor creatures of the earth when one recognises that their hour is so brief.

There will always be optimists in the countries where “the standards of living are high.” There will always be writers — scientific or otherwise — to dispose of materialism. But meanwhile it is well that there should be at least one great modern among us for whom that *pulvis et umbra* is the last word. At least, one, if only for the sake of those whom we mourn most; so that, beholding their lives, like torch-flames against black darkness, we shall not stint them of their remembrance.

A NOTE ON MAUPASSANT by Brander Matthews

A student of the literature of our own time who has only recently completed his first half century of life cannot help feeling suddenly aged and almost antiquated when he awakes to the fact that he has been privileged to see the completed literary career of two such accomplished craftsmen as Robert Louis Stevenson and Guy de Maupassant. In youth they were full of promise, and in maturity they were rich in performance; and all too soon the lives of both came to an end, when their powers were still growing, when their outlook on life was still broadening, and when they bid fair, both of them, to bring forth many another book riper and wiser than any they had already given us.

The points of contrast between the two men thus untimely taken away are as striking as the points of similarity. Both were artists ardently in love with the technic of their craft, delighting in their own skill, and ever on the alert to find new occasion for the display of their mastery of the methods of fiction. Stevenson was a Scotchman; and his pseudo-friend has told us that there was in him something of “the shorter catechist.” Maupassant was a Norman, and he had never given a thought to the glorifying of God. The man who wrote in English found the theme of his minor masterpieces in the conflict of which the battle-ground is the human heart. The man who wrote in French began by caring little or nothing for the heart or the soul or the mind, and by concentrating all his skill upon a record of the deeds of the human body. The one has left us ‘Markheim’ and the ‘Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,’ while the other made his first bid for fame with ‘Boule de suif.’

In the preface of ‘Pierre et Jean,’ Maupassant has recorded how he acquired from Louis Bouilhet the belief that a single lyric, a scant hundred lines, would give immortality to a poet if only the work were fine enough, and that for the author who sought to escape oblivion there was only one course to pursue — to learn his trade thoroly, to master every secret of the craft, to do his best always, in the hope that some fortunate day the Muse would reward his unfailing devotion. And from Flaubert, the author of that merciless masterpiece ‘Madame Bovary,’ the young man learned the importance of individuality, of originality, of the personal note which should be all his own, and which should never suggest or recall any one else's. Flaubert was kindly and encouraging, but he was a desperately severe taskmaster. At Flaubert's dictation Maupassant gave up verse for prose; and for seven years he wrote incessantly and published nothing. The stories and tales and verses and dramas of those seven years of apprenticeship were ruthlessly criticized by the author of 'Salammbô,' and then they were destroyed unprinted. In all the long history of literature there is no record of any other author who served so severe a novitiate.

Douglas Jerrold once said of a certain British author who had begun to publish very young that "he had taken down the shutters before he had anything to put up in the shop window." From being transfixt by such a jibe Maupassant was preserved by Flaubert. When he was thirty he contributed that masterpiece of ironic humor 'Boule de suif,' to the 'Soirées de Médan,' a volume of short-stories put forth by the late Émile Zola, with the collaboration of a little group of his friends and followers. On this first appearance in the arena of letters Maupassant stept at once to a foremost place. That was in 1880; and in 1892 his mind gave way and he was taken to the asylum, where he soon died. In those twelve years he had published a dozen volumes of short-stories and half a dozen novels. Of the novel he might have made himself master in time; of the short-story he proved himself a master with the very earliest of all his tales.

It must be admitted at once that many of Maupassant's earlier short-stories have to do with the lower aspects of man's merely animal activity. Maupassant had an abundance of what the French themselves called "Gallic salt." His humor was not squeamish; it delighted in dealing with themes that our Anglo-Saxon prudery prefers not to touch. But even at the beginning this liking of his for the sort of thing that we who speak English prefer to avoid in print never led him to put dirt where dirt was not a necessary element of his narrative. Dirty many of these tales were, no doubt; but many of them were perfectly clean. He never went out of his way to offend, as not a few of his compatriots seem to enjoy doing. He handled whatever subject he took with the same absolute understanding of its value, of the precise treatment best suited to it. If it was a dirty theme he had chosen — and he had no prejudice against such a theme — he did whatever was needful to get the most out of his subject. If it was not a dirty theme, then there was never any touch of the tar-brush. Whenever the subject itself was inoffensive his treatment was also immaculate. There is never any difficulty in making a choice out of his hundred or two brief tales; and it is easy to pick out a dozen or a score of his short-stories needing absolutely no expurgation, because they are wholly free from any phrase or any suggestion likely to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of innocence. In matters of taste, as we Anglo-Saxons regard them, Maupassant was a man without prejudices. But he was a man also of immitigable veracity in his dealing with the material of his art, in his handling of life itself. He told the truth as it was given to him to see the truth; not the whole truth, of course, for it is given to no man to see that. His artistic standard was lofty; and he did his best not to lie about life. And in some ways this veracity of his may be accepted, if not as an equivalent for morality, at least as a not wholly unworthy substitute.

The most of Maupassant's earlier tales were not a little hard and stern and unsympathetic; and here again Maupassant was the disciple of Flaubert. His manner was not only unemotional at first, it was icily impassive. These first stories of his were cold and they were contemptuous; — at least they made the reader feel that the author heartily despised the pitiable and pitiful creatures he was depicting. They dealt mainly with the externals of life, — with outward actions; and the internal motives of the several actors were not always adequately implied. But in time the mind came to interest Maupassant as much as the body. In the beginning he seems to have considered solely what his characters did, and he cared little to tell us what they felt and what they thought; probably he did not know himself and did not try to know.

The inquirers who should read his stories in the strict sequence of their production could not fail to be struck with the first awakening of his curiosity about human feeling; and they might easily trace the steady growth of his interest in psychologic states. Telling us at first bluntly and barely what his characters did, he came in time to find his chief pleasure in suggesting to us not only what they felt, but especially what they vaguely feared. Toward the end of his brief career the thought of death and the dread of mental disease seemed to possess him more and more with a haunting horror that kept recurring with a pathetic persistence. He came to have a close terror of death, almost an obsession of the grave; and to find a parallel to this we should have to go back four hundred years, to Villon, also a realist and a humorist with a profound relish for the outward appearances of life. But Maupassant went far beyond the earlier poet, and he even developed a fondness for the morbid and the abnormal. This is revealed in ‘Le Horla,’ the appalling story in which he took for his own Fitzjames O’Brien’s uncanny monster, invisible, and yet tangible. In the hands of the clever Irish-American this tale had been gruesome enough; but the Frenchman was able to give it an added touch of terror by making the unfortunate victim discover that the creature he feared had a stronger will than his own and that he was being hypnotized to his doom by a being whom he could not see, but whose presence he could feel. There is more than one of these later tales in which we seem to perceive the premonition of the madness which came upon Maupassant before his death.

At first he was an observer only, a recorder of the outward facts of average humanity. He had no theories about life, or even about art. He had no ideas of his own, no general ideas, no interest in ideas. He did not care to talk about technic or even about his own writings. He put on paper what he had seen, the peasants of Normandy, the episodes of the war, the netherworld of the newspaper. He cared nothing for morality, but he was unfailingly veracious, never falsifying the facts of existence as he had seen it himself. Then, at the end, it is not what his characters do that most interested him, not what they are, not what they think, but what they feel, and, above all, what they fear.

In every work of art there are at least four elements, which we may separate if we wish to consider each of them in turn. First of all, there is the technic of the author, his craftsmanship, his mastery of the tools of his trade; and by almost universal consent Maupassant is held to be one of the master craftsmen of the short-story. Second, there is the amount of observation of life which the author reveals; and here again Maupassant takes rank among the leaders, altho the sphere in which he observed had its marked limitations and its obvious exclusions. Thirdly, there is the underlying and informing imagination which invents and relates and sustains; and there is no disputing the vigor of Maupassant’s imagination, altho it was not lofty and altho it lacked variety. Finally, there is always to be taken into account what one may term the author’s philosophy of life, his attitude toward the common problems of humanity; and here it is that Maupassant is most lacking, — for his opinions are negligible and his attempts at intellectual speculation are of slight value.

Technic can be acquired; and Maupassant had studied at the feet of that master technician Flaubert. Observation can be trained; and Maupassant had deliberately developed his power of vision. Imagination may be stimulated by constant endeavor to a higher achievement; and Maupassant's ambitions were ever tending upward. Philosophy, however, is dependent upon the sum total of a man's faculties, upon his training, upon his temperament, upon the essential elements of his character; and Maupassant was not a sound thinker, and his attitude toward life is not that by which he can best withstand the adverse criticism of posterity. Primarily, he was not a thinker any more than Hugo was a thinker, or Dickens. He was only an artist — an artist in fiction; and an artist is not called upon to be a thinker, altho the supreme artists seem nearly all of them to have been men of real intellectual force.

1902

The Biography

Clinique de Passy, where Maupassant died, aged 42. In his later years he developed a constant desire for solitude and suffered extreme paranoia, caused by the syphilis he had contracted in his youth. On January 2, 1892, he tried to commit suicide and was committed to the private asylum in Paris, where he died on July 6, 1893.

Maupassant, close to the end of his life

RECOLLECTIONS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT BY HIS VALET by François Tassart

Translated by Mina Round

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Franc'ois Tassart was Maupassant's valet from 1883 till the author's death in 1893. Seven years later, Tassart published this memoir of his time serving the famous author.

CHAPTER I. NOVEMBER 1883-MAY 1884

My service begins on November 1st, 1883 — Ten days at Étretat — We return to Paris — Too many dinners — The foundation of a club — Work and rowing — A fire — In March we return to Paris — A move — We are established in the rue Montchanin — The month of May — From Paris to Rouen on a yawl — A first-rate boatman.

IT was on November 1st, 1883, that Monsieur R — , who was M. Guy de Maupassant's tailor, introduced me to him as valet and cook. We entered the drawing-room; there I found two gentlemen, who were standing, warming themselves, with their backs to the fire. The first, a well-built fellow, with a florid complexion, heavy fair moustache, and very curly brown hair (his open nightshirt showed his column-like throat), wore tight-fitting trousers, and Turkish slippers.

I said to myself: —

"That's the master."

The other one, still a young man, was slender, and completely bald, with a black beard; he was well dressed, in plain clothes.

The master mentioned his terms, none of which pleased me. I expressed my regrets as well as I could, and withdrew into the ante-room, to await the tailor. Monsieur R — appeared a quarter of an hour later with his parcel under his arm, and told me to return to the drawing-room, which I did. My future master then asked me *my* terms, and *my* ways of thinking. I told him in a couple of minutes. The slender man, turning towards his friend, then gave signs of great approval.

"When can you come to me?" asked Monsieur de Maupassant.

"Whenever you please, sir."

"Then come to-morrow morning at eight."

And I was taking a paper (my character) out of my pocket; he refused to see it, saying: —

"That's of no use; I shall very soon see if you suit me."

He smiled and nodded to his companion, who was his cousin, M. Le Poitevin.

I then joined my friend the tailor, and apologized to him for having refused to wear livery. He wished me good luck and shook hands.

The next day, at noon, I had cooked the lunch and waited at table.

"Will you come and spend a few days at my country house?" asked my master.

"Certainly, sir," I answered.

"Then, the day after to-morrow, we'll take the eight o'clock train in the morning. The cook, who was all last season with me, is still there; she will tell you what my tastes are."

At eleven in the morning, on the 4th of November, we reached the station nearest his house; there was still a drive of about nine miles.

A two-horse brougham awaited us. I glanced at the two poor beasts, which really excited one's pity.

"In this country," said my master, "every horse is broken-kneed, on account of the atrocious hills!"

I thought the fact might also be attributable to the coachmen's want of skill.

We bowled along merrily on the road, which was a very good one. My master had stretched his feet out against the front of the brougham, and I was soon obliged to do the same; for the bench, covered with moleskin, was so slippery and so rickety, that it was impossible to keep on to it when we went down hill. My master swore at the livery stable keeper, who, notwithstanding his constant reproaches, had invariably sent him this ramshackle old vehicle for the last fifteen years.

After passing several hamlets and farms, surrounded by the famous *carrés normands* or gardens, we arrived at the top of the hill, whence one could see in the hollow Étretat, with its tiled roofs mingling with the tints of the sea. On the left a huge valley slopes down. The sky was very clear, the sun rather pallid, resembling almost a waning moon, one of those African moons which throw such sad beams on the ocean of sand after a storm.

My master touched my arm.

"See there, quite at the bottom of the valley, that is 'La Guillette,' my own house, which I am so fond of."

Then he rose.

"How beautiful it is!" cried he, facing the sea. "What a splendid tint! Dark violet! It is indeed lovely! Only, if a painter gave us that colour, those tones, every one would say: 'How false! '"

I, too, thought it splendid.

We stopped at the Post-Office, then we reached the house, where the cook and the gardener were awaiting us.

The next day, about ten in the morning, my master told me to bring a plate and pick strawberries with him. While picking the fruit, he told me how fertile his garden was, but said how difficult everything became when the summers were dry, as watering had to go on twice a day. I saw how quickly he gathered the strawberries; it was a species of exercise in which he was well practised.

The cook informed me M. de Maupassant was perhaps somewhat fanciful; but according to her, he was the kindest of masters, an excellent fellow, and born in that very countryside, so that everyone called him by his Christian name. Also, "Nobody else could swim like him."

He, his brother, and his cousin, Le Poitevin, could swim round the South-Western Needle out at sea, which, there and back again, meant swimming four miles.

He never meets anyone without a cordial greeting; he knows everybody's name. Besides which, he is a very clever man, and has already published several books: his publisher came to see him this year, and, depend upon it, if he came so far it was probably to be sure he would have the disposal of what my master writes.

The house stands isolated in the great valley, and there is not much of a view. In the garden there is a hut made of a boat supported by brick pillars, and surrounded by a privet hedge; this was the bathroom; and it was also my room. To me it seemed very strange. I had never supposed one could turn an old boat into a dwelling-house, and yet it was not uncomfortable.

In the *carré normand* a pretty little pond was inhabited by goldfish; in the fields all around us were cabbages; beyond the fields were grey and melancholy cliffs, on the top of one of these rose a house and a wooden hut; "that is the hamlet of New-Caledonia," Désirée, the cook, told me.

On the second day, towards seven in the evening, I took a lantern and accompanied my master to the garden-gate; soon a carriage drove up, and a lady, muffled up to the eyes, got out. My master took her hand and we returned to the house, I walking backwards and trying to make my lantern as useful as possible.

In the ante-room my master helped the lady to take off a whole series of shawls. He was extremely kind and attentive. I observed how perfectly charming his way of speaking was, when he chose.

When dessert had been put on the table I went into the kitchen, where Désirée was awaiting me, so as we might dine.

“She is handsome, that lady, is not she?” exclaimed Désirée.

“Certainly, she is handsome,” replied I, laughing, “and she gives herself the airs of an empress.”

“You need not laugh,” gravely said Désirée; “that lady was Napoléon’s friend; everybody knows it here. Napoléon was simply mad about her; he gave her a title. She has had a coronet engraved on all her jewels, and on every article in her house.”

At ten o’clock the carriage was again there. I took my lantern up, and accompanied my master and his guest; he stepped into the carriage with her and said to me: —

“You need not wait for me, I have my keys.”

I closed the gates, returned to the kitchen, where I left my lantern; then in the dark I went along the privet-hedge, and reached my room. A pungent sort of smell of pitch and tar half choked me; people say it is very wholesome, but it is certainly unpleasant when one is not accustomed to it.

I took stock of my room, it looked like a huge coffin newly done up for the long journey.

I took the inventory: an iron bedstead, a cupboard, two small benches fixed larboard and starboard, a shelf on which was a basin; opposite was a porthole; near the head of the bed a nail to hang one’s watch on, that was all. The wainscoting showed traces of the Renaissance style; later on, I learnt that was the work of an artistic wood sculptor, who came from the south and established himself at Étretat, I went to bed, but I could not sleep. I heard a noise which seemed afar off, then it would come quite near me. It was the roaring of the waves coming across the land, rocking the sides of my poor boat, hoisted upon its brick walls, and lifting it up by their roll, just as when it was on the sea.

She had sailed for a good forty years, tossed about by the waves and now continued, groaning each time they hit her. After having carried turbots by hundred of tons, mackerel by hundreds of thousands, herrings and sardines by the million, after having glided peacefully along on the beautiful sunny days, and also suffered under awful blasts, she was now stranded at La Guillette, housing the servant of a great writer.

Next day my master asked if I was comfortable in my old boat, telling me how difficult it was to get one, “as all the owners of villas required them, and turned them into spare rooms.”

After breakfast he opened the kitchen door, saying:— “We have forgotten the bread for the goldfish.” That was the hour at which he used to pay them a visit. They knew it, and all awaited him at the surface of the water. Quantities of small birds had acquired the habit of being present at the feast. They flew all about my master, alighted at his feet; they were so numerous, so tame, and crowded so thickly about him, that he was obliged to take great care not to tread upon them.

The weather, magnificent when we arrived, changes for the worse; the wind rises, the sea roars violently, our ten days come to an end and we can’t prolong our stay, for the daily mail-bag from Paris grows heavier and heavier.

My master gives the gardener his instructions and a few notions about the spring plantations. Then, delighted, we start for Paris, of course in the celebrated brougham, the stable keeper possessing nothing better. At the Ifs station my master said to me: —

“You will see how pretty this place is in the summer.”

True, the station, built on ground belonging to a splendid park, is surrounded by big trees; one can see broad avenues, and in the distance a white chateau, with pointed gables.

It is cold. My master stamps about on the platform to warm his feet; he hates the waiting-rooms, saying that “in every country they smell of grease.”

In Paris I did my best to put the apartment into proper order. But I really did not know how to set about it.

There were books, pamphlets, newspapers, piled up against the walls, against the furniture, on the ground, anywhere. On the tables there were mountains of them. I cleaned and polished every day; it was labour lost; my master walked about from his wash handstand to his desk, with towels all dripping wet.

One day as the portress came up with a packet of letters I mentioned to her my distress at all this litter. She told me that a short while ago, as my master was taking his revolver out of his pocket, he sent a bullet through his finger. “ And I took care of him,” added she, with immense pride. “Oh! *he* can stand pain! He might go to the wars, you would never hear *him* complain!"

"Well," said I, "was he not a soldier in 1870?"

"Yes, he fought; he was one of the eighteen-year-old recruits, and when he reached Rouen, he and his friends played a few tricks on the admiral who commanded the town; later, on some of the Prussians; when the Germans became masters of Rouen, he managed to get to Havre, where he took care of the small-pox patients, as if he were a sister of charity." On December the 15th I was holding a calendar, when my master opened the drawing-room door. He looked gloomy.

The evening before he had been at a party at a Prince's house, and had brought home a red-haired young woman, not pretty, but rather pleasing. After breakfast she flew away, but not for long; she came back at four o'clock, had to wait till six, and at seven, she was off again, as my master was dining out.

The next day she was again there at nine in the morning. This lasted four days; after which my master said to me: "Do what you will with her, I don't want her any longer.... Every time she says she is going to Vienna, and she always comes back.... Put her out of the door if she forces you to do it!' The invitations to dinners and evening parties used to pour in. One day we received seventeen!

"François," said my master, " prepare all we may want for two months, we shall start next week for Cannes, and when we come back we shall stay at my cousin L— 's in a more comfortable *appartement.*

Here it is too confined, I can't breathe."

My master took the Rapide, I followed by the express. A porter awaited me at the station with a countersign.

Madame de Maupassant and her son, M. Hervé, occupied very pretty rooms.

My master took an *appartement with* a fine view of the sea, a bright place, well in the sun. It was immediately settled that his mother and brother should dine every day with him. His life became much quieter. He worked from nine till noon, then dressed and lunched.

Three times a week he went in the afternoon to a friend's house, to practise shooting with other amateurs.

One morning an odd-looking gentleman with a heavy moustache came to see "Monsieur de Maupassant." I told him my master was never at home in the morning. Then he wrote a few words on his card, and when he gave it to me he began to laugh, all the hair on his face bristling; he really looked like a brush.

My master was at work; I would not have disturbed him for worlds. I obeyed his orders. At noon I gave him the card. He read it aloud.

“Very well,” said he, “ I will go to him this afternoon.”

The next morning this gentleman came to lunch with his wife; we saw him several days running. He talked tremendously, seemed to know heaps of things, and told such numerous tales about so many different countries, that the world really seemed quite small. He proposed to my master to found a club which would become very important, put Nice in the shade, and perhaps Monte-Carlo. He wrote down statutes, got excited, enthusiastic, declaring he could obtain an authorisation for the gambling tables, etc.

A few days later my master told me he was going to give a lunch to twelve gentlemen.

“We are about to form a limited company....

It is only a trick we intend playing on Count L — , the founder of the club. He will be the acting president, Comte O —— the honorary president and principal shareholder; that is to say, he is to invest about a hundred and twenty thousand pounds; Mr K — is to be secretary, I, baron R — , P. A — , and a few others shall constitute the Board of Directors, and buy up the island of Ste Marguerite.”

Twelve gentlemen came to lunch; it was quite a serious meeting. Count O —— seemed gloomy, often passing his hand over the back of his head, his attitude being that of a man who is hesitating, asking himself if he may venture to engage in an affair of business, or whether it would not be more prudent to abstain. Though wealthy, a hundred and twenty thousand pounds are something!...

Baron R. discreetly makes a remark to the future president about this hesitation of the principal shareholder, but M. P. A — and my master show, by rows of figures, and unimpeachable documents, that it is a first-class affair; the principal shareholder is convinced and gives all his approbation, the other shareholders imitate him with most edifying unanimity.

The future president is purple with triumph and delight.... After lunch the whole Board of Directors, accompanied by the future dignitaries, walk towards the harbour.

The *Louisette* was awaiting them, so as to take them to the island of the Iron-Mask, of which they already called themselves the owners.

I was not a witness of the disappointment of the president when he learnt that the Island of Ste Marguerite was not for sale, but belonged to the State. I did not see him again till two years later, and then in Paris, somewhat altered, and already quite white-haired.

My master was finishing a novel which was to be published in April, the proofs arrived continuously, I was always on the way to the Post-Office. The smart people were coming by shoals to Cannes. My master received many invitations, which flowed in just as much as in Paris.

The Mediterranean fleet was at anchor in the Golfe de Juan; my master wished to go and see the vessels. One day there were to be some manœuvres out at sea, and I accompanied him to his boat, the *Louisette*, carrying a few things he wanted. He was going out alone, for the sea was very rough and the wind blew stiffly from the south-west. I watched him, going off with his old boatman Galice, who at first sight looked beyond the age to go to sea at all.

That evening the old Jack-tar, who had brought back the different articles which were never left on board, took as usual a glass of good wine. When he had refreshed himself, and was more comfortable, he told me that during his whole career (a long one) as a sailor, he had never seen the equal of M. de Maupassant.

“He is so handy,” said he, “ his eyes are everywhere, and he knows the waves like an old sailor. His boldness sometimes is enough to make one shudder. This afternoon, with our light open boat, we had to cross enormous breakers, going towards the open sea. It was a rough business; but he did not seem tired, and went at it with all his heart!”

I thought the good fellow well deserved a second glass.

He went away, saying: —

“Now, I shall never be afraid when I am on the sea with M. de Maupassant.”

One night, towards two in the morning, I heard master calling me.

“Come,” said he, “I have set fire to my room; I struck a match and the phosphorus flew on to the bed curtains; they are in flames.”

I rushed in, my wet apron tied round me, and another about my head. I threw bucketfuls of water on the bed, which was all on fire; the curtains and mosquito-net were already burnt up. I asked my master to pass me the can of water, but as he put the huge porcelain jug on the sink he broke it.

"Now, don't burn yourself," said he; "I have got my manuscripts, the remainder is not very important."

The door of the room was burning; the jute hangings of the staircase had also caught fire; luckily we succeeded in tearing them off. Fortunately the window-panes did not crack, so there were no draughts to fan the flames.

The water I threw put the fire out.... Then, of course, the firemen came and finished the destruction of the remains of the bed and furniture.

My master went off and spent two days at Monte Carlo. When he came back, he found his room in proper order; but he saw with some annoyance that articles he rather cared about were spoiled, for instance some old books, his dictionaries, and a portfolio bound in antique leather. He set to work again but not with so much spirit. He got up later than before.

One day he went to see the bay of Agay and the Esterel mountains. Another time he drove with his mother to Vallauris, taking the Chemin de Californie through the village, where you see the porcelain factory of Massier brothers. In the evening my master and his mother talked during dinner about this excursion. He was delighted with the china he had bought for his little villa La Guillette. He talked about Messrs Massier, who were so civil, and such good men of business. He recalled all the details of the journey, the view along the Corniche, the immense green slopes, the sea, the islands afar off. He seemed charmed, and as if describing a dream.

One morning M. de Maupassant told Galice that the first time a good breeze arose they would take the *Louisette* to Antibes.

"As to you, François," added he, "you are not to take my pistols again to the house of M. A — ; we shall be off soon. I've had enough of this place! I can't go two steps in the street without taking off my hat to bow to all those Serene Highnesses who are swarming there. They invite me too often to dinner; it tires me and doesn't always amuse me. And my book is coming out; I must be in Paris."

On February the 27th, old Galice was there. The wind was all right. My master started with him to take the *Louisette* back to her moorings; I saw them pass the Croisette, and they were soon in the open sea.

I asked in the evening if the journey had been pleasant.

"Yes, at first," replied my master; "but after we had passed the Garousse the wind became fitful, blowing now from the east, now from the coast, with a tremendous ground-swell coming from the Gulf of Genoa. Two or three times the *Louisette* shipped a good deal of water, and poor Galice did not feel at all happy; I made him drink a glass of rum, and encouraged him, telling him that the worst was over, and when an hour afterwards we got into the harbour, Galice could not conceal his delight! Now he will only have to take care of the *Louisette* safely anchored behind the jetty."

Paris. — My master is not satisfied. This is the 3rd of March; it is awfully cold and big flakes of snow are falling, making the streets quite impracticable for foot passengers. As my master does not care for driving, he hardly goes out, so he writes a few articles, and gives the finishing touches to his proofs.

About the 20th, as the weather gets better, he, with his upholsterers, sees to his new flat. It is decided that the dining-room is to be dark red, the drawingroom Louis-Seize-blue, the bedroom yellow, the winter-garden olive green.... The hangings are purchased without delay.

On April the 2nd, the day before the move, we pack up all the choice things, the plates, the old Rouen dishes, the valuable books.

On April the 3rd the upholsterer Kakléter and two workmen appear at the rue Montchanin. They open the packages and all the stuffs are unrolled. My master is perfectly happy. What fun for him, to have three men working under his orders! Kakléter and his customer begin the drawing-room, and in three days the hangings and the curtains are up. For three weeks M. de Maupassant works hard at furnishing the rooms, with only an occasional afternoon off. Many of the articles occupied temporary habitats before they found their final destinations. There were two angels' heads in wood, with distended cheeks, intended for the gods of the wind, which went about everywhere; at last they found a home in the conservatory.

Then Kakléter brought the shelves of the bookcase. That was the piece of furniture that pleased me the most. At last I should be able to put the books in order. There would be no more on the ground, along the walls, and around the legs of the tables; the bureau would be a little less encumbered. The bookcase was a real relief, and I hastened to help my master to place the books on the shelves as he classified them.

When all was finished, my master told the upholsterer to send his bill in at once.

"One can breathe better here," said he, walking about the flat, and looking about him. "Kakléter is uncommonly strong; when driving a nail in, he moderates his blow and does not break the nail! Those angels' heads weigh a hundred and thirty pounds; when he fixed them up he held them at arm's length; and he's very quick; he's a very clever workman. What I admire above all, is his calmness, for I must confess I have often given him cause for impatience, and he's never shown the least temper. My friend, M. M — , who told me about him, has really found a treasure. Of course, M — is a connoisseur!

If you could see his little ground-floor, and how delightfully it is arranged! His study is entirely hung with a light blue-green stuff, charmingly soft for the eye, and extremely pretty."

The painting of the bathroom alone remained to be done; my master put that off "till next time I go When he returned, M. de Maupassant told me the weather had been splendid, but that poor M. A — was not strong enough to take such a long journey.

"Constantly," added he, "I had to take the oars from him, and sometimes I rowed for four hours without stopping."

CHAPTER II. JUNE-OCTOBER 1884

Étretat — A model gardener — Pistol-firing — Hens and a cock — Watering the strawberries — Playing at bowls — The two wooden saints — The spare room — The young American lady — The Fox — A fire in the house — Marie Seize — October — Autumn leaves — Bel Ami is finished.

ÉTRETAT, June 1884. — We are among the first who have arrived at Étretat. My master takes advantage of the fact to have a rest; and also to work at a tale, when not writing articles for newspapers.

He is much occupied with his garden; he spends hours with Cramoyson discussing where the flower beds are going to be placed. It is necessary to see which of the trees have grown the most rapidly, so as to choose the kind it would be best, according to the nature of the soil, to plant in the future.

Up at eight, he won't take any breakfast; he says it prevents his working, and protests that milk and coffee in the morning constitute a meal only fit for a woman. He walks several times round his garden, pays a visit to his goldfish, goes in to bathe his eyes; very often he writes till eleven o'clock, then he takes his cold tub, dresses, and lunches. After which, every day, he takes his pistol, and fires off from forty to fifty bullets. He begins by firing ten shots at a mark at the distance of twenty paces; then ten at word of command; then ten bullets at a mark, at forty paces distance, and ten at word of command; "One, Two, Three"; the last twenty always with a double load. When he is satisfied with his shooting he fires ten more bullets, but he hardly ever fires more, " For," as he says, "it is useless, and you may spoil a good shot."

Of course the provision of bullets brought from Paris soon came to an end; François Jeanne was then asked for some old lead, and my master taught me how to make the missiles. I was able, quite at the outset, to turn out five or six hundred of them in an afternoon.

"See," said he, "how skilful you are already! and don't you find it most amusing! Only be careful that the spoon does not slip into the water, as then the boiling lead would fly into your eyes; it's very dangerous. I should like you to wear spectacles, as I should be less anxious."

With a pair of glasses on my nose I managed to cast a thousand bullets in an afternoon, and to find it quite an entertaining occupation.

About half-past two or three o'clock, M. de Maupassant sometimes goes to have a look at the sea; more frequently at half-past five.

One day, as we were talking about the cooking, my master told me the butcher Vimont had excellent meat.

"You know him? He's uncommonly strong! *His* flesh isn't flabby! I think he has twelve children. And how he drinks champagne! I've known him drink sometimes fourteen bottles!... Ah! I say, François, I have an idea, I should like to keep some hens, so as to be sure to have fresh eggs for breakfast; you might boil me some eggs every day. Tell the woman to bring six hens and a fine cock, the finest she can sell me! I'll ask Cramoyson to make me a fence directly with iron trellis-work, next the shed where the wood is kept, large enough for the fowls to have sufficient grass and things to peck at."

Two days after, the hens came with a splendid cock, he had a most remarkable crest and a gold-coloured throat.

My master told me to take the greatest care of them, and give the fowls mashes made of bread, bran, and milk. "And I," said he, "will give them seed."

Cramoyson put a sackful in the shed.

My master went many times a day to see his goldfish, but he liked particularly to linger near the hens; he was never tired of looking at them, observing with much amusement all their ways. I must say they were most beautiful, and the cock soon grew ruddier than when he came.

"Isn't he handsome, that fellow!" my master used to say. "I should like to be a painter; certainly I should make a most successful picture of him. Look at the expression of his head. How proud his eye is! And his superb crest, so gorgeously scarlet! Then his shining, shaded throat, how brilliant; and such a majestic presence! Look at his tail. What a magnificent plume! But in general, the bird does not keep his tail very long. The eggs are excellent, their taste is so superior to that of the Paris egg. Tell the dealer that for the month of July I shall require six more good laying hens, for by that time these will be exhausted."

The garden flourished; Cramoyson informed us some French beans were ready for picking; and the peas were in flower. "Yes," said my master, "they are very fine. You must know, François, that I eat neither carrots, cabbage, or sorrel. And particularly no spinach! Cramoyson will bring you as many French beans, broad beans, peas, as he can, and all kinds of salads to cook. You may give me cooked salad every day, of course, done up in fresh cream.” One day, examining his roses, M. de Maupassant observed a small tree on the edge of the path. He showed it to Cramoyson.

“Look how that ash tree has grown in a year! Since this ground suits it, we will plant a row in the meadow along the hedge; for the sycamores do not prosper; really they do not give much shade. Before the house, on the side of the path along the big hedge, we will add a few white poplars. They grow very quickly, and are bright to look at.”

I had brought from Paris a small Japy pump with the pipes for watering the whole length of the garden, on both sides. It was most convenient; one of us pumped, while the other directed the pipe; a much quicker proceeding than with watering-pots, and less tiring.

“Thus, Cramoyson,” observed my master, “when you are not on the spot I will assist François to keep the strawberries sufficiently damp, so that we may have the fruit without any interruption.”

The small sucking and forcing pump, installed close to the large pump, which occupied already the top of the well, looked like a small plaything, and I think my master considered it as such, for he was constantly making it play, saying: —

“That is to prevent the liquid being wasted.” When it was time to water, it was always his turn to stand at the pump. When I offered to replace him, he sent me away, saying that I knew better than he how to distribute the water gently, as if it were rain. Thus it was better that I should hold the nozzle.

On the 22nd of June we received the visit of a lady; on the 24th there came another lady, and we gave a dinner-party of eight people.

They began to play at bowls. My master was delighted; it was a pleasure to hear him laugh when he had played well, or when he could displace the bowls the ladies had “laid down,” which made them run about, screaming like so many children.

One morning he told us to shake all the apples down, so that the sap of his young trees should not become exhausted.

The mornings of each day are spent in the same way. My master walks about and works, but after lunch he never leaves the large hedge on the side of the garden looking towards Étretat. There is an opening in that hedge, through which he can see the ladies coming from the bottom of the Pass, and leaving Justin’s riding-school. As soon as he catches sight of them he hastens to get the bowls out, or else he sets the croquet hoops.

And the games must begin directly. Often he did not even give the ladies time to take their hats and cloaks off in the house. Their wraps had to be spread out on the small thorn-hedge separating the meadow from the garden; and the game began immediately. The player threw himself into it with such ardour that one might question if the author of *A Life* paid any attention to the amiable speeches of the ladies, the high but sweet tones in which they cried: “Very well, dear fellow!” or “Now mind, my friend!” all of which the echo of the Fécamp coast repeated slowly, but most accurately.

On the 20th, night was falling when I saw on the path to the kitchen a tall woman pushing a well-laden barrow. It was the forewoman of the old curiosity shop, the Vieux Rouen, bringing the articles my master had bought that day.

Showing me two wooden saints among the lot, my master said: “Look how well they are sculptured; it is very fine work, and I am pleased with them, because they are saints belonging to the country over the water, and yet there is nothing English about them!”

The other purchases were spread about in every direction, principally in the spare room; he wanted it to look bright, because a married couple was soon to stay there. Then with care worthy of a good housekeeper, he took note of all that was still wanting in the room; a box for *poudre de riz,* perfume bottles, a three-leaved mirror for hair-dressing, and a pincushion.

“This afternoon I will buy all these,” said he; “is there a writing pad, with paper, pens and blotting book? Yes! That’s all right!...”

A young American lady, who had published many novels in France, was the first to occupy the room on which he had lavished so much care. This lady was as intelligent as she was beautiful. One morning as the girl who attended her was not there to give her her breakfast, she said to me: —

“François, you can very well come into my room and put the tray on the table, it does not disturb me, as I am quite covered up with the bedclothes.”

Another time this same lady, in the midst of a discussion on literary subjects, said to my master: “All your critics, who take such infinite trouble to analyse a new work, make me laugh, for really literature is not so complicated. I have never learnt French, I write out all the words, trusting to the analogies, and yet, as you know well, they accept my books! If they talked to me,” she added, “about the great difficulty two people who thoroughly love each other find in reaching a complete understanding!... in feeling absolute happiness when together!... you understand what I mean... well, if that happens they are immediately separated by an abyss!"

My master did not laugh, he looked gloomy, and I observed a nervous contraction of his eyes. I did not hear his answer, for he begged me to bring the next dish....

A few years afterwards he sent me to the hotel Meyerbeer (at the Rond-point of the Champs-Elysées) to inquire after this lady's health. A page led me to her room. I had hardly reached the threshold when the lady exclaimed: —

"Come in, come in, François! come and sit down by the bed, you know I'm not a fool!" I sat down as she told me, and she asked for news of my master.

"Tell me all about him," said she; "that subject will never tire me."

When I had talked for a long time, as she wished, she said with some emotion: —

"Well, my good François, you have almost penetrated the nature of a man who does not make himself known to others; to understand him, one must live near him as I have done.... You are aware that I not only love your master as a literary man, but I love him for himself, as they say in my country: 'for his good heart, for his extreme loyalty, and his great kindness.' On that table lies the paper on which I have transcribed the whole of our conversation of the day before yesterday. That dear kind friend remained with me the entire afternoon, he was loth to go away. We wondered if that would be our last interview; for, François, in two or three days I am to undergo an operation; and we never know what the result may be. But tell my friend Maupassant that if I die under chloroform, my last thought will be for him...."

I gave my master this message, and he was deeply touched by it.

For a long time I seemed to see this lady's beautiful face; she had magnificent golden hair, which a lace fichu could hardly restrain. It harmonized with her beautiful complexion; she really *was* lovely!

July. — The games of bowls are most successful. My master is in excellent health. Friends come, two rooms are given them. Luckily they sleep till eleven o'clock, which allows master to work all the morning. After lunch he takes them to the seashore, or else to Saint-Jouin, to the "Belle

Ernestine's" Inn. He gave a few dinner-parties, and the evenings were extremely merry. They used to play the handkerchief game, and the newcomers could not understand anything about it, but they had to play, and once started they went into the fun and laughed more than the usual players. Certainly it was the game that most pleased my master.

One morning, as I was coming home with my provisions, I saw my master in the meadow, surrounded by all his hens. He called me to him: "Come and see this enormous hole in the fence of the field, the trellis-work is all turned up, and the ground underneath is deeply hollowed out. No doubt it's a fox! The rascal has smelt the fowls! But he'll meet his match!... I shall write off to Paris to-day, so as they may send me immediately a trap. I know all about it, and Cramoyson also; we'll quickly do for that fox!"

My master walked back with me to the house, always followed by his hens; they seemed to understand he was seeing to their safety. He had some trouble to get rid of them while passing through the small grating which divided the meadow from the garden.

When Cramoyson arrived my master showed him the hole, and requested him to put all in order, and strengthen the trellis-work, whilst awaiting the arrival of the wolf trap.

August. — Every day after this event, my master, as soon as he was up, examined the condition of the carré normand. The trap came; it was a sort of infernal machine, rather dangerous to handle. It was placed behind the sheds where the hens roosted; it was thought the mischievous animal would come and be trapped, attracted by the scent of the fowls.

September.— "While I think of it," ordered M. de Maupassant, "I should wish you to carry, now and again, a basket of pears to the Post-Office ladies, and also to Madame C — . She is the daughter of Offenbach, the great composer. It is not on account of the pears, but I know she values any attention that is paid her very much... She was deeply affected by the loss of her brother; her sorrow was great and lasting. I also was extremely sorry for the death of that poor fellow. I was much attached to him; he was a kind and sincere comrade, and he was only twenty-two!"

On September the 12th my kitchen oven refused to be lighted; to persuade it, I administered a few spoonfuls of fat; in a couple of minutes the chimney was on fire. My master, hearing the crackling of the sparks, came and told me. We went into the garden and saw the sparks caught up by the wind.

“That will do no harm,” said my master; “still we must be careful, for my first villa, the one I had before this one, was burnt down, and I never knew how it had caught fire. True, it was lightly built, and the roof was thatched. We were playing in the garden when we saw the fire bursting out everywhere. As we had no means of quenching the flames, we all began to sing and dance round this impromptu bonfire!”

One evening at the end of September, as night was falling, I heard loud voices in the garden in the vicinity of my boat. I drew near, and beheld my master talking to Marie Seize, a celebrity of the local “Bohemia.” I ran back to my kitchen, and master followed immediately.

“There’s a woman for you!” he exclaimed. “What a burr she is! Never saw anyone to equal her! Fancy, all these years she used to sleep in the boats on the seashore, with her husband and her six children; and to get rid of her the parish hired a hut for her up there, at the top of the cliff. I have always helped her, but really this year she goes too far! I have given her ten francs more than twenty times; as she dare not come here, she constantly waits for me when I pass; now she has been telling me she, her husband, and her children have not a rag to wear this winter; that I must clothe them, unless I wish to see them die of cold! I have given twenty francs. But if she comes back, send her packing!...”

While my master sat at table he went on talking about Marie Seize.

“Oh! isn’t she cunning! She comes at night-fall, because she daren’t go out in the day; she has nothing on but a wretched petticoat, and a bodice in tatters; her feet, her legs, her arms are bare. You must confess she is a most extraordinary creature, and so dirty! She is disgusting! When she complains to me, she always says: ‘ M. de Maupassant, if you don’t assist me, the only thing left for me to do is to throw myself into the sea with all my children. Yes, into the sea; I’ll tie them up together, and into the sea they’ll go!’ There! As if ’twas already done! But I feel quite easy on that score.”

Hardly a week had elapsed when my master called me one morning, desiring me to see who was walking up the avenue. ’Twas again Marie Seize, coming to say she had no more coals, and no money to buy any.

“Very well,” said he, without a moment’s thought, “ give her ten francs.”

October. — The last apples have been picked up, the leaves are falling fast, the trees no longer keep enough foliage to shelter my master on his morning walks; and he is obliged to wear his shooting boots, because the damp earth clings so heavily to one’s feet. But some charm seems to detain him.

“How exquisite is the autumn in the country,” he exclaims, “ the fresh air filling one’s lungs gives such an agreeable sensation.... Then how romantic is the fall of the leaves, and so interesting! Before they fall off, they take on such varied colours! I have seen some pass through five or six gradations of shade; it is most fascinating to watch those of the white poplar.”

October 26th. — Towards two I carried his pittance to the cock and his last companion, all the others having ended their lives in the stewpan. My master walked round the pond, and followed me to see his cock fed. He held a branch of fuchsia. “I have finished *Bel Ami”* said he, “and I hope the book will satisfy those who are always asking me for something lengthy; for there are pages upon pages, and so closely written! There is one part for the ladies which will interest them, I do believe. As to the journalists, they’ll take what they like of it; I am waiting for them!... Favoured by that beautiful bright sun,” added he, “ I might photograph those two fowls, which look as if they were deserted!”

He tried his best, but they did not come out well, and I do not know why. A lady then appeared and she photographed my master; she succeeded in obtaining a small picture.

CHAPTER III. NOVEMBER 1884-FEBRUARY 1885

Shower-baths — The conservatory — Purchases — Piroli — A New Year's gift — A wonderful ceiling — A journey to Italy — The return — Badly packed — The piece of rock-sulphur — Work and social life — The schoolboy's dinner — A Dutch sleigh — Étretat — Normandy in blossom — The old Roman vases — The real China basin — Bel Ami is published.

PARIS, November 1884.— "You see, François, I shall be very comfortable here with that heating apparatus. It is cleverly put up; heats well, perhaps rather too much; but when the air holes are opened upstairs in my cousin's flat, the heat in mine will abate. Then you tell me it only costs a franc a day; that's nothing in comparison with the expense of woodfires.... I am going down with you to look at the stove."

I opened the two upper doors, showing the four red plates of the stove, and my master felt the tremendous heat.

"How can you stand near it when you fill it up? It is like the infernal regions!"

He thought for a minute.

"Since I am down here," said he, "let us see if in the first wine-cellar I can't put up a shower-bath, as it is close to the heating apparatus it would be delightful to take a shower-bath here."

The architect was sent for, and the thing was done, to my master's great satisfaction.

"What a good idea I've had! the town water gives a more than sufficient pressure, and see how simple it is. Now, I can take my shower-bath every day, without leaving my house; even two if I like. Certainly a bath, a tub, and a shower-bath are the best things for a man's health."

Then my master added, with emphasis: —

"Fancy! Flaubert never would have anything to do with a water-cure, not even massage! What a pity... he would not have died so young. But he never would spare a thought for hygiene. Only think! He was but sixty when he died; he was strong and still full of vitality; no doubt a shower-bath, like this, would have prolonged his life!

A few days afterwards my master sends for the upholsterer to fix up the saints; they are placed in the conservatory, one on each side of the Buddha; then the hangings are put up, dividing it from the bedroom, into which, unluckily, they prevent the light from coming, and as there is only half a window looking on to the courtyard, my master says to Kakléter: —

"You have arranged my conservatory very well; it is all very pretty, but with those hangings I don't get any air in my room! If I don't put them up, the light, striking at night on my eyes, will harm them, so I shall buy a pair of Japanese blinds, made of rushes and beads; these will soften the light, but I shall at least have more air in my room."

This was done, and M. de Maupassant was quite satisfied.

He was very much pleased with the conservatory, a sort of winter garden always filled with palm trees, plants, and flowers; and there he usually sat. There he found the restful quiet, and the necessary light for his work. Every day he brought some article home to embellish his apartment. One evening he gave me a parcel.

"Please unpack this most carefully," said he, "for it contains Venetian glass scent-bottles; they are beautiful and most valuable. They are just what I want, as they contain two pints each. As I use a great deal of scent, one will be for eau-de-Cologne, another for lavender water. I will see what I shall do with the two others...

December. — Cold has come, but my master never misses taking his baths, etc., every day. He said the water was extremely cold; and he was delighted, because afterwards a glowing reaction used to set in. One day, the water being even colder than usual, my master rushed quickly upstairs, his heavy moustache still quite wet.

"It is perfect! You give a splendid shower-bath; soon I might take you for a pupil of Pascal, the celebrated doucheur!"

I was always so pleased when my master was satisfied, and quickly followed, to rub him well with eau-de-Cologne, after which he freely used a horsehair glove.

"Look here, François," said he one day, "I think that for this ground floor we ought to keep a cat; its presence would send away rats and mice, and it is better to prevent them coming than to have to get rid of them!"

A few days afterwards we took in a kitten my master called Piroli. She soon became very tame, and was very fond of being petted. She was always playing about, often with the Japanese blinds; this used to last sometimes for hours, and my master, extended on his couch in the conservatory, loved admiring the pretty little creature, with her graceful, supple motions. He became very much attached to little Piroli, and the liking was reciprocated. The moment he came in she never left him.

"To-morrow," said my master on Christmas Eve, "I shall give a dinner party. But on New Year's Day I shall dine out, as you will be very busy.... One of these days you will take a carriage, in which you will place two large clothes-baskets; then you will visit those little booths erected on the boulevards, where you can find innumerable sets of cheap and amusing articles just created by Parisian taste; you will buy several of the same kind, anything which seems to you comical or interesting. Don't forget to buy some of those bearded little devils that start up as you take off the lid of the box.... I'll tell you what to do with them on New Year's Day."

The day before New Year's Eve I came in with my two baskets filled with what I had bought in the little booths. My master spread out all the contents, made his choice, and the next day he filled up several cases, one of which he was very careful about; on the top, just inside the cover, he put a whole row of those "bearded devils". he had told me to buy. We had taken care to undo the hooks, so that it was the cover of the case which held them in their boxes.

"This one," said he, " is for Madame O — . You will carry it to her at the hour of lunch, and you must beg the butler to give it her directly. Tell him the cover must be taken off on the dining-room table; insist on his doing what I say."

On the first of the year, at noon, I was in Madame O— 's pantry, arguing with the butler, who would not listen to anything I said.

"You understand," said he, " there are people lunching, I can't take your case in."

"Never mind the people," replied I; "on the contrary, the more the merrier!"

At last I convinced him, and explained to him how he must take off the cover with a rush. Five minutes hardly had elapsed when I heard a most extraordinary uproar. They moved their chairs, they laughed, they stamped for joy! I was just going away when the butler came out of the diningroom.

“They are laughing till they cry,” said he; “here’s to our next merry meeting!”

When I was dressing my master that evening I told him the trouble I had had in getting the butler to take the case into the room.

“I am not at all astonished at that,” said he, “all those butlers of big establishments are alike. They are as tall as an organ-loft, and often serve very badly, having manners like sham sacristans. I think one is much better cared for in houses where they keep only two maids.... But you heard them all laughing. The trick evidently was rather a success; that’s all I wanted.”

He took his hat up. “It is uncommonly cold tonight,” said he; “put Piroli in her basket next the hot-air hole, and leave all the air holes of the flat open. When I come in I will close them if I think proper.”

On January the 6th (twelfth night) my master had a few friends to dinner, painters and literary men. When every one was gone, and I was preparing his bed, he took me into the conservatory.

“You can’t imagine how I love this comer. Well, I am going to improve it. My friend Oudinot, the painter on glass, is selling me a ceiling in coloured glass, which was made for an American who has vanished. It appears this ceiling is most beautiful, which does not surprise me since Oudinot’s work is always splendid; that man has the soul of an artist. He painted the glass windows at M. Thiers’ monument at Père-Lachaise, and they are marvellous. So, as soon as you can, you will go and see the architect, the locksmith, the plumber, and the electrician; you must get them to come here, all of them, at the same hour, so as they may understand each other and make no delays. I want to settle everything with them before I start for Italy. There must be an electric machine for the light. I shall make them put it up above the ceiling. Through the coloured glass that will give a pretty light and very soft tones. As soon as I shall have settled everything with them about the work, I shall be off to Italy and Sicily with some of my friends, Gervex, Amic, etc.... But it will be but a short trip, a month or six weeks at most, as I must be at work so as to publish a volume at the end of May. I shall start towards the 18th, somewhat before my friends, so as to stay a few days with my mother at Cannes. You’ll see that everything is ready, and my shirts prepared by that person who is such a good worker.”

All was ready on January the 17th. My master went off; his principal order was this: —

"If you go away for more than a day, you must send Piroli to my cousin's, and tell the maid to take good care of her. Then, please, hasten the workmen, so that I may find none of them here when I return; I want to work in peace."

February. — My master is at Rome, with his friends Gervex, G. Legrand, etc. They are all having a great deal of fun.

March. — I receive some small packages from Girgenti (Sicily). They seem to be in a very bad condition.

March the 28*th*. — M. de Maupassant arrived from Italy at eight in the morning, and the moment he stepped into the hall Piroli recognised his voice, rushed in and threw herself between his legs, mewing with delight.

"Good morning, my little kitten," he said, "but first let me come in"; but she would not listen, he had to take her in his arms, she cried so piteously.

"Well, you must pay the coachman, since I must give myself up to this Piroli. How she's altered! She is a splendid cat!"

Then Piroli, having jumped on to the bureau while my master was reading the most important of his letters, was arching her back and purring, trying to put her paws on her master's chest, nuzzling at his moustache as if she was going to kiss him. He did not get through his correspondence without some trouble.

While he was at breakfast my master admired the ceiling, and called me to learn how to handle the lighting apparatus, and how to manipulate the electric machine by which it worked. He went two or three times through the performance, and was quite satisfied.

"Everything goes well," said he, "these twelve lights go up at once. I am sure it will look uncommonly well in the evening. The ceiling is beautiful, the tints are soft and charming to the eye. The room looks much more agreeable with that ceiling; the twelve lights will warm and dry everything; the damp and cold will be checked by the glass roof. I shall hide that wall with some Genoese stuffs; that nasty painting will disappear, as well as those green hangings, which are extremely ugly. Thus transformed the conservatory will be turned into a boudoir. When there are a few people in the other drawingroom, you can make visitors come in here. Then, once my room is closed, this will form a separate little apartment."

We returned to the dining-room; the cases my master had sent from Italy were on the sideboard. I had left almost all the articles in their boxes, so as my master might see how badly they had been packed. They had been done up in a small piece of paper that was all torn. Naturally everything was broken, excepting two small statuettes somewhat more solid than the rest. When he saw this disaster my master turned very red, but he was able to control himself.

“As the things were not well packed,” said he, “ the railway people are not in fault. It is those beasts of shopkeepers! But they evidently settle between themselves that everything must be badly packed, for I bought all these curios at different places.... It is perhaps the fashion to pack in that way in their country.... They are such extraordinary creatures! They are revolting, filthy, and disgusting; and in spite of everything they are as beautiful as their country, which contains wonders, I must confess, in the shape of palaces and museums. Their galleries are full of innumerable riches, and are most perfect. Around all these beautiful objects there grovels an unclean population: the contrast is both striking and mournful. All these exquisite objects lose greatly their charm by being placed among such surroundings.

“Ah! you are unpacking my trunk, François? Give me a piece of rock-sulphur which is at the bottom.”

I gave it to him, and he saw it was beginning to crumble.

“I fetched it myself from the bottom of a mine. We started, fifteen or sixteen of us, with the intention of going down; I left them all scattered on the way. I went with the guide, alone, on to the end. I can’t tell you it was very pleasant. No! The way was difficult, the smell abominable, but I would not have had anyone say I hadn’t the pluck to follow a guide into a sulphur-mine!”

Piroli, who never ceased to rub herself against my master’s legs, received some of the dust of the sulphur in her eyes. She began to mew, and raced round the room like a mad thing; it was not easy to catch her and wipe her eyes. My master was so sorry about it that he was ready to throw the stone out of the window.

“Certainly,” said he, “all is unlucky that comes from that country!” and taking Piroli on to his lap he caressed her, saying: —

“Poor little thing! my pretty one!”

When she had calmed down he said: “ François, prepare my dress-suit for this evening, I dine with Madame X — , and go afterwards to the theatre; this lady wishes to introduce me to M. Raymond Deslandes. Every one keeps telling me I ought to write plays, but it does not appeal to me; and if I did so, it would surely not be in the style of what has been done hitherto. I hate that tricky sort of thing. No! no! I shall never consent to that. Every time I go to the theatre I come out horrified.

Were it not for the charming society one always meets there I should never set foot inside one. I confess I should prefer my bed this evening to this party, and yet I slept pretty well from Cannes to Paris....”

My master is working again; he writes a few articles for the papers, so as to be able afterwards to dedicate all his time to his new novel.

April. — One Sunday my master consulted his pocket-book.

“I am dining out,” says he, “every day this week excepting Tuesday. On that day a few friends are coming; you will cook the usual dinner; we shall be fourteen. On Friday, however, we shall only be four; still I wish the dinner to be good: indeed, you might prepare two kinds of dishes, one with meat, the other without, for I think the ladies will only eat vegetables and fish; as to the boy, who will be the fourth at table, he will take his choice.”

On Friday, at the dinner-hour, there came two extraordinarily smart ladies, both very stout, very handsome, and wafting the sweetest scents. Then the bell rings again, I open the door, and a schoolboy stands before me. I ushered him into the diningroom. He entered gracefully, bowed first to master and then to the ladies, rather awkwardly, just like a flurried schoolboy.

But once at table he soon regained his self-possession, and told quantities of amusing stories about schools, like a fellow who knows all about those barracks full of boys. He was handsome, with a pretty mouth, a little down on the Upper lip, an aquiline nose, delicate nostrils, large dark eyes; and his hair curled as closely as a young negro’s.

Champagne flowed during the whole meal. By the time desert came all were merry; tiny feet were advanced under the table, and the scene became most comical. The ladies attacked the young fellow, who kept a bold front, and though showing occasionally a slight timidity, he did not hesitate to say that he would gladly prove to them that he was both plucky and amiable. They laughed loudly, but the schoolboy did not, and seemed to play his part with great earnestness. My master was twisting in his fingers a *marron glacé* in its little paper hood; he no longer ate, or drank, or laughed; he gnawed his moustache, sometimes pulled at his little imperial, and drew it between his teeth. Suddenly he glanced at me; I saw his eyes were red and moist.

“François,” said he, “please give us the coffee.”

At half-past nine I went to fetch a carriage for the young schoolboy, who was due home by ten. My master accompanied him to the door, and squeezing his hand, said emphatically: —

“To our next merry meeting, my young friend.” The ladies wished to know who this charming youth could be; they were never told....

The next morning I brought in my master’s tea and began to put things in order. He begged me to assist him in altering the position of some of the furniture. While we were busy he was laughing to himself. Suddenly he said: —

“Well, François, what did you think yesterday about that schoolboy?”

“I thought him quite a charming fellow, sir.”

Then my master roared with laughter.

“Indeed, you thought him charming! Why, man, ’twas a girl! You remember the little school-teacher who came last year to ask me to recommend her to the Secretary for Public Instruction; that’s she!... She got the post she wanted, and wrote to thank me. I remembered her boyish look, and asked her to come and play this small part, in which she was perfectly successful. She lives with her mother, and is a very honest girl. But did you see how the ladies looked? They went away convinced it was a Condorcet schoolboy. I can’t tell you how amused I was. I shall certainly play the same trick on some other people!” *April the 9th*. — My master, having dressed to pay some visits, asked me if I intended to go out that afternoon. “ Because,” said he, “ I bought a Dutch sleigh yesterday, and should like you to be there when they bring it.”

The next day master asked me to help him to measure a piece of Louis-XVI.-blue silk. He wanted to see if there would be enough of it to cover his sleigh.

“For see, François, how hideous is the yellow covering. But it will be very pretty done up in that blue silk; the shape of the sleigh is quite original. Look at those large flowers that follow the shape of the back; they are not very delicately traced, but the colours are of the period, and quite in the Dutch style.

Send a line to my upholsterer Kakléter, begging him to come and work at it.... I’ll send him a telegram that will hurry him. This is the 10th. I must not forget that on the 14th I give a dinner party to some journalists; the 18th or 19th we’ll go and spend a few days at Étretat. I want to make some arrangements for next summer, as I have good shooting over all the ground belonging to that large farm, Martin-de-Bordeaux-Saint-Clair, and the surrounding woods; there are first-rate rabbit-warrens; you'll see, in the autumn, you'll have plenty of rabbits to put into your saucepans. I must also examine my mother's houses at Étretat. I shall ask you to help me, so as to see they are well furnished, at least as far as is necessary, so that this year we may succeed in letting them."

On April the 16th my master said to me: "We start to-morrow for Étretat. I have written to Cramoyson to have the fires kindled. I am taking a friend with me, M. B — ; he knows nothing about Normandy, and he will see it for the first time under its prettiest aspect."

At ten o'clock on the 17th we reached the Ifs station; the everlasting brougham was awaiting us. When I had closed the door I climbed on to the seat, the gentlemen had put the windows down, and I heard all their conversation. We reached a *carré normand;* all the fruit trees were in blossom. I asked the coachman to slow down, which he did most civilly, only too happy to please M. de Maupassant. Thus the gentlemen were able to admire the beautiful sight quite at their ease. My master's friend was delighted, and most enthusiastic when he saw these innumerable pink, mauve, violet, and white flowers of the freshest and softest hues forming immense coloured plots, encircled by a wide border of light green turf. It is that which in Normandy is called "a moat." We could see here and there a few thatched roofs, laden with the brown and silvery moss of the lichen, surrounded by these lovely flowers. Through the gaps in the elm plantation forming the entrance of the farm this beautiful panorama became visible beneath a marvellously pure blue sky, and my master's friend was constantly repeating:— "How pretty! how exquisite! It is fairyland!" We were just reaching the last houses of Bordeaux-Saint-Clair when my master said to me: —

"You have seen, François, how beautiful it all is I" Cramoyson was awaiting us on the threshold of la Guillette; my master shook hands with him.

"Good morning, my good Cramoyson; how do you do?"

Cramoyson was delighted to see us.

"Thank you, thank you, sir," replied he. "And how are you?"

The provisions had all been brought.

At noon I told the gentlemen that lunch was on the table. They were quite ready. When people have been up since six o'clock their appetite is whetted. The scrambled eggs with cream and Vimont's excellent cutlets did not remain long on the table. When the meal was over my master glanced at me.

"Have you food in the kitchen for you and Cramoyson?"

"Yes, yes, sir, thank you."

He thought of everything.

Our four days were quite filled up by examining his mother's houses and preparing for the shooting party, buying dogs, etc. At last my master said one morning: —

"Pack up the two large old Rouen vases; you will put them in the two big cases of Châtel-guyon water. See that they are well packed; I should be miserable if anything happened to them. They are very fine, and extremely rare, and I inherited them from my grandfather, who was a great lover of beautiful things. He possessed a most interesting collection in his old Norman château. He loved hunting too, had splendid horses, and certainly the cleverest pack of hounds in all Normandy."

Paris, April 24th. — My master called me.

"I do not know if it is the journey, but I have an awful headache. I am going to rub the back of my neck with vaseline, and if at eleven I am not better I shall inhale a little ether."

At twelve he took his shower-bath, a foot-bath with mustard in it, and lunched lightly at one o'clock. He felt much better in the evening, and was able to dine out.

A few days later he said to me after lunch: —

"I am going to see my publisher on the other side of the water; I shall dine out in my jacket, so you need not wait for me."

The next day they brought an old basin of porcelain.

"See, François," said my master, "that's what I found yesterday; 'tis real China, and I did not pay too much for it."

He placed it on the wash stand, two-thirds of which it covered.

"The basin's rather big," added he, "but not too big for me; it must be that size to allow me to wash my head in it.... I bought other articles at Mademoiselle Guillan's, which they will bring directly. Everything's paid for, you only have to pay the porter." Then he took his little Piroli on to the sofa, and talked to her: " Yes, yes, you would like to go and walk about, but here you can’t, you would lose yourself. Patience, you will be able to run about at Étretat. How you will skip about on the grass! How many new things for you to see — the trees, the birds, the fishes!” and he stroked her, repeating: “Patience, patience, we shall soon be off!”

May 22nd.— “It is a week now,” said my master, “since *Bel Ami* was published; there is a large demand from the provinces, and the press is favourable. Did I not tell you so, hey?” and he laughed under his heavy moustache.

CHAPTER IV. MAY 1885-JUNE 1886

Étretat — The Barbary ducks — The crowing of a cock — Successful firing — Paff — Excessive heat — Walks — The shooting season begins — Salammbô — Departure from Étretat — Sojourn in Paris — Arrival at Antibes — The Villa Muterse — January 1886 — The olive harvest — Madame de Maupassant — The Louisette — The Bel Ami — We return to Paris in the Rue Montchanin — We regret the Southern sun — Mademoiselle Perle and les Sœurs Rondoli — A walk in the Parc Monceau — The graceful reader.

ÉTRETAT, end of May 1885. — When we arrived at Étretat everything was already very much advanced; the trees were covered with leaves, the rosebuds were just coming out, the strawberry plants were showing their little white flowers, their roots being excessively damp for the nonce. One morning two blue Barbary ducks were brought from Madame Valois' house. My master immediately came out to put them himself into the pond, and they readily began to swim, plunged three or four times and shook themselves, flapping their wings. They seemed perfectly happy, as if they thought that small pond had been devised especially for them. My master gave the porter some money and went in, convinced the ducks were not trying to escape, and that they soon would be quite accustomed to their new quarters. After lunch I brought them a quantity of food, and my master came to look at the feast.

"They *are* handsome!" cried he, "such pretty plumage! You must always give them more than they want, otherwise they would eat the bread I give the fish."

Piroli never left her master, but at the sight of the ducks she hid herself among the spindle-trees surrounding the pond, waving her tail about, rolling her large eyes, and doubtless asking herself whence came these strange animals she had never seen before; however, she soon became accustomed to them, and wanted to play with the little ducks; as they fled at her approach, she became exceedingly plucky, and made a few attempts to reach them, but she gave up as soon as she found her paws were wet. Then my master spoke to her: —

"I hope, Miss Piroli," said he, "you are not going to take those tiny ducks for large birds and fight them! Mind you don't, for I shall be angry!"

Then he took her into his arms, and in a few days she understood those small blue balls formed part of the household. As we were going in we saw a tall woman coming up the avenue.

"Now, that is Marie Seize," exclaimed my master; "she saw the shutters were open, and she has lost no time.... Never mind!" added he with a deep sigh. And Marie Seize got what she wanted.

The hens are as handsome as last year; the cock is not so imposing as his predecessor, but he makes up for it by crowing lustily. —

"That cock is simply terrifying," said my master one day; " he crows, and is gifted with a most powerful voice, but I am sure you do not know how often a good cock crows when he wakes up."

I confessed my ignorance.

"Well," said he, "when he first crows he gives forth a series of from thirty-four to thirty-five calls; the second time seventeen; the third time and so forth it becomes irregular."

Often, when recalling my master's remarks, I noticed our cock gave exactly the series of crows he had indicated; it was a good cock.

June 2nd. — My master told me to carry his pistols to the shooting gallery, he got there before me and shot twenty times at two targets. I counted fifteen hits, and five bullets in the bull's eye. When I said: "Now, that's brilliant shooting!"

"Yes, pretty good, if you like." And laughing he added:

"But we can't always be brilliant! You know my friend M. E. — , he is but forty years of age, he is as strong as a hunter, well, lately, he was not at all brilliant with Madame X. — ! But I have shot long enough for to-day; I must go and get the bowls ready, the ladies will soon be here."

A few days afterwards, my master was shooting, when he called me. I hurried up with some bullets, thinking he wanted them.

"That is not what I called you for," says he. " See, I can't get this rod out of the pistol, it sticks so hard! Each of us will take one of the two ends, and we'll have a tug-of-war!"

And several times my master sent me flying, for each of us tried as hard as he could. After many efforts we succeeded; but our hands were heated and seemed as if they had a sort of St Vitus's dance."

As he was re-loading his pistol: “ Wait, François,” he said, “I will shew you that my hand does not shake, even after all these trials of strength.”

And he held his pistol at arm’s length.

“You can see the first leaf of a small isolated branch on the right of that tree? I am going to cut it off just at the point where it joins on to the branch.” One shot, and the tiny leaf turning a somersault in the air, fell down on the grass and took up its position as a dead leaf.

We measured the distance; twenty-eight paces, and my master said:

“I could go on shooting ten leaves off like that.. Suddenly we heard voices.

“Those are the ladies,” said he; “now pick everything up, and please pass some sandpaper over that ramrod.”

Étretat, end of June. — My master has bought a retriever, it is well broken in, and has just arrived. The pretty creature immediately took to its master who in the morning went to fetch it at the kennel. It only left him at meal time. My master was delighted with his dog, a superb Pont-Audemer spaniel, with a pretty mask and most intelligent eyes. Speech alone was wanting. He was so well trained that he did not even run after the hens. My master loved him dearly.

“I think,” said he to me, “that pretty Paff will be a jolly help to me when I shoot.”

During the summer the keeper came to fetch Paff and brought him to M. Martin’s farm, making him reconnoitre the shooting-ground.

July. — M. de Maupassant has been amusing himself with fireworks; but this year the heat had dried everything up, even the sea-bents on the coast; their green hue had turned into a tarnished mahogany colour; half-dead and their heads bowed down, they were quite ready to blaze up, and that is exactly what happened. Many people who were present ran about to stamp the fire out, that was neither prudent or practical. I took a strong mat thoroughly wetted, and I soon extinguished the bents, pressing them down with this very simple contrivance. As I returned to the garden I heard Dr Pouchet saying to my master:

“Well, your François has got his wits about him.”

“Yes,” replied my master, “he’s full of resources. He’s never at a loss what to do, not only about a fire, but about anything else.”

August. — La Guillette is entirely filled with guests. The heat is increasing; it is not only the strawberry bed that wants constant watering, but all the shrubs, if we wish to keep them alive. So every morning, very early, the gardener, his wife, I, and even my master (who considers it quite an amusement), water the garden properly before the sun rises, and thus all is green, and the flowers keep fresh.

In the afternoon my master is always occupied with his guests. One day he will take them to the Casino, another to the cliffs to see the “Man Hole,” the Needle, and the “Ladies’ Chamber.” They return by the Valois wood so as to enjoy a cool walk; they also visit the “Mossy Fountain” by the “ Priest’s Staircase.”

The shooting season begins this year a fortnight earlier than usual. My master is not sorry for it, he wants to try his new gun; he has made all his cartridges himself, so as to be sure, says he, of the quantity of powder that is used, and thus obtain perfect regularity in shooting.

On the opening day six friends are to join him at nine in the morning so as to take a turn before lunch at twelve. My master came to see me making an omelet on a wood fire in the large fireplace, decked out with all the necessary kitchen utensils. Everyone of them is of wrought iron and shines like silver. My master said to me in a low voice: —

“It is a pleasure to see such a handsome fireplace, so well fitted up, and so well kept.”

Then all sat down and I brought the omelette, stuffed with mushrooms, with golden-brown truffles delicately seasoned, and tossed up in excellent fresh butter. They said it was exquisite, and stated that a wood-fire is, after all, the best for cooking things that should be done quickly.

At one o’clock the sportsmen took to the plain. It is hot, the little quails are lazy, so are the partridges, a hundred and forty-three birds are brought down. Really a splendid result for a small piece of ground. My master stood at the head of the list with thirty-seven birds, M. Arraux with twenty-three. Master, much pleased, attributes his success to his gun, to young Paff who behaved beautifully, also to the composition of his cartridges, which he intends to continue making himself.

One day the driver forgot to fetch us. It was hotter than before. When my master saw the sun about to set, he decided on walking back to Étretat! He gave me his gun to carry. We started at a good pace, and in five-and-twenty minutes we had accomplished a march of four miles!

“See, François,” said my master delightedly, “if a general could get his men to march like that, it would often be the way to win an unexpected victory!”

Yes, but we were as damp as if we had come out of a bath, and I hardly think the poor soldiers could stand such a strain!

When the autumn came on, my master went after rabbits with his small beagles, which are really quite remarkable for their endurance and good hunting qualities. I pitied them, their short comical legs did not seem made for such fatiguing exercise.

One evening there was rain and a raging storm; M. de Maupassant remained alone the whole evening. Going up to bed he went through the kitchen, and caught sight of the book *Salammbô* on the table.

“You have finished it?” asked he.

“Yes sir, it is a beautiful work; but to understand it thoroughly I ought to read it over several times.”

“I am pleased that you should speak so frankly,” said my master “for I know it can’t be otherwise, that volume represents the work for fifteen years of the finest, doubtless the cleverest brain of our century.”

My left hand was on another book. “Hullo!” said my master, “What have you there?”

I took my hand off and let him see the title: *Pope Honorius the Great’s Grimoire.*

“I don’t dabble in occult science, sir,” replied I, “ and I don’t think any of the tricks described in this book could be executed, still I like to look at it occasionally, because ’tis the volume in which my father taught me to read.”

“It’s a beautiful edition, François: I have never occupied myself with that science, but I know some men who did, and who were not fools.”

Antibes, 1885-1886. — We left Étretat on November the 25th, and after staying ten weeks in Paris, time enough to allow my master to settle his business with his publisher, on Christmas Eve we came into possession of the villa Muterse at Cap d’Antibes. On one side this old house has the appearance of a long wall; there is no break either of windows or doors; the front looks southwards, and opens on to a large yard hedged round with beautiful clumps of trees. You see the fields, the vineyards beyond which are olive groves, and further still, a tall white lighthouse at the point of the Cape.

The winter was mild. Every day after breakfast my master came out and sat with his mother on a bench before the drawing-room full in the sun, and well sheltered from the cold north wind which sometimes came down from the Alps all covered with snow; they are apparently far away when it is fine, and quite close on the rare days when their summits seem to hold the clouds up.

My master was so happy alone on that bench with his mother! They discuss freely the scheme of some new tale; the plot is altered, at last they are both of the same opinion.

"That's perfect," exclaims my master with a laugh, "my tale now falls on its feet like the porter's cat."

This cat was always playing endless games on the bench with my master; and the little thing, which seemed so sad when we arrived, soon understood it had now found a comrade and a friend. Now it never missed coming to this spot at the appointed time. It was a pretty creature with its thick grey and white fur, it had a small head, and really intelligent shining yellow eyes! It gave my master the idea of writing his essay on cats.

Every morning he enjoyed walking along an avenue on the right of the house, bordered by enormous laurels of various species, pepper plants and fine palm trees. At the end stood the conservatory, then a plantation of olive-trees, many of them a hundred years old and with forked stems; both parts growing well though they took their sap from the same trunk; very long branches start from the tops as if they wanted to spring still higher up towards the sky.

My master liked walking beneath these trees; he spent several mornings there, interested by the olive-harvest. Women dressed in men's clothes were perched on the branches. Armed with sticks they struck vigorously about them, and the fruit fell noiselessly on the green turf. Others picked it up, putting it first in baskets and then in sacks. My master, who was a great observer, followed the details of these operations most attentively. Often, he was not satisfied with spending the morning there as a looker-on, but would return to the scene in the afternoon. As soon as he had finished his game with the cat, he took the path under the olive-trees where the women were at work, his grey hat pulled down over his eyes, and holding his stout alpenstock. Then he made as if walking very quickly, but with short steps, and managed to pass quite close to the women picking up the olives. In the evening, during dinner, he told his mother how pleased he was to have examined all the details of this harvest, which he intended to make use of later on.

“For really,” added he, “besides its comical aspect, there is also a good deal of poetry about it all.”

Madame de Maupassant then told her son of one of her journeys in the wilds of Corsica, where she had beheld this same kind of work performed by beings even stranger than these.

“They wore,” said she, “ costumes that I really cannot describe, but which, I assure you, would have frightened any one but me! If you beheld the sight, you would find more than poetry, you would feel the most startling sensations. In that country some of the olive-trees are of monstrous size, their trunks bend down so as to touch the ground, follow it for yards, and then start upwards again like young trees.”

At this place I must tell that Madame de Maupassant did not know fear. She had journeyed alone, on foot, with her alpenstock, throughout Italy in every direction, penetrating into the remotest comers. She explored also part of the Two-Sicilies, then Corsica which she liked particularly, finding there impressions which suited her turn of mind, wild landscapes of primitive beauty, then “the rocks mingling with the sea in a most unusual manner, “ she would say, “forming quite an unforgettable sight.” Every day Madame would talk of bandits and vendettas, always with her peculiar enthusiasm, describing for her son the things she had seen, using literary language, and her expressions, when she gave an account of all she had witnessed, reminded me very much of Flaubert’s style.

Often when in the evening my master was away, she would describe to me and to Marie her maid the fantastic scenes she had beheld during her two years’ stay in Corsica. Sometimes she told us these extraordinary adventures, frequently so mysterious, with such impetuosity that cold shudders used to run down my back. She confessed to us she had never tasted anything so delicious as the small and delicate field-fares which the banditti gave her for breakfast, particularly in Bellacoscia’s cavern in the thickets.

And Madame would add: “ All those men always treated me with every attention and perfect politeness.”

Now and then my master takes a trip in his *Louisette* which is moored in the harbour of Aubernon (bay of the Salice). This boat being only of use for short excursions, he bought the *Bel Ami,* so as to be able to take lengthy trips along the coasts. This boat goes easily in and out of the harbours, which suits my master. Now he does not remain long on the bench; as soon as lunch is over he goes to see his *Bel Ami* at Antibes. M. Muterse, an ex-naval captain, often accompanied him on his new boat; they afterwards became fast friends, holding each other in great esteem. It was M. Muterse who found Bernard for my master, a capital sailor, prudent, handy, supple, well-mannered, just the fellow for pleasure-trips.

After going out several times my master soon acquired the necessary knowledge for handling his boat. He used to entertain at lunch people belonging to Cannes society; the afternoon was given up to sailing on the *Bel-Ami.* Once he even went as far as Nice.

One day I had taken the plaids on board, and stood on the jetty contemplating the yacht carrying a whole party out to sea, when the breeze blew out her sails. It was rather a pretty sight, she cut well through the water, but the black paint of the hull though picked out by a yellow circle that looked like a golden girdle, was not of a pleasant aspect. Her flat shape was never liked by my master.

Our stay at the Cape was coming to an end. They were over, those beautiful evenings when I wandered about the roads running like so many white ribbons through meadows covered with sweet-smelling thyme, forming a brilliant carpet under the moonlight. The large trunks of the olive-trees threw fantastic shadows across the road, the double effect of the rays of the moon and those of the lighthouse, standing at the point called “la Garousse,” caused them to take curious distorted shapes.

One evening my master came in late for dinner. He immediately told me he had hired a châlet composed of two pavilions, one facing south, the other north.

“Thus,” said he, “the house can be inhabited at any time; Madame will live there entirely, and we can go there whenever I like. It is a very pretty abode, there is a splendid view, the house stands close to the road from Antibes to Cannes, on a little hill called “ la Badine.”

We stayed a few days longer at Antibes, so as M. Gervex should finish my master’s portrait, then we returned to Paris.

Paris, March the 8th, rue Montchanin. — It is cold, the weather is dull, the stove is lighted, the apartment is nice and warm. My master takes his bath, and Piroli, seated next the Jewish lamp, on a little Gothic stand, follows with her eyes all my master’s motions, provoked at seeing him where she can’t get at him for her usual game of play.

M. de Maupassant is correcting the first proofs of his new novel *Mont-Oriol.* While returning from a visit paid to his publisher, he bought a splendid white bearskin which covered half the drawing-room floor. It looked well and somewhat cheered up the room which, with its northern aspect, seemed so monotonous and so dull after our stay in the South.

Doctor X — was then my master’s medical man; he ordered him vapour baths. In a room downstairs we placed a large rush-bottomed armchair with blankets, the whole was covered up by a huge waterproof. The treatment did my master a great deal of good, he took his shower-bath after his vapour-bath, which gave him a tremendous reaction. He was quite satisfied.

For people literally imbued as we were with the good southern sun we had just left behind us, this flat my master had furnished so well seemed somehow too confined, too hot and airless. The bedroom, only about nine feet long, all hung with stuffs and tapestry, was very badly lighted, and the air was only renewed through the next room. My master slept badly in this molehill. Once I was bold enough to tell him we should be much better off on a fifth floor with a large balcony, but I had no success. He was quite wedded, for the time being, to the ground floor.

There was another nuisance: dogs in a neighbouring courtyard barked all night long, which is awfully provoking to light sleepers. I enquired whether there was no possibility of altering this state of things, but I learnt that the nearest neighbour of these noisy dogs had taken action against their owner, and that all he had obtained from the court was an order to pay the costs.

M. de Maupassant has at last turned the conservatory into his study; the light coming from the illuminated ceiling above tires his eyes much less, and there are no street noises to speak of. The Louis Seize table (decorated with brass ornaments) is laden with manuscripts and writing-paper; one can see the titles of two tales: *Mademoiselle Perle* and *Les Sœurs Rondoli.* On the first page of a novel not yet baptized can be read a series of names, differently spelt, and written in large Gothic letters. He worked at all these at the same time, besides the two weekly articles for newspapers.

One day I ventured to tell my master that so much work carried on at once must tire his brain.

“No indeed,” said he, “ I am in such good training! When I am tired of one thing I take another up as a rest. Still, I intend henceforth to suppress politics, which bore me. Here is my last article, you will be kind enough to take it to the *Figaro* this afternoon. I’ll go there one of these days, so that they may know they must not expect any more of those articles I used to give them.”

My master said to me the morning after a splendid day in May: —

“Yesterday I called on Count Cernuschi; his house in the Parc Monceau is a beautiful place. The interior is not in the least like an ordinary dwelling-house, it is a real museum. There is some interesting china, but what is most curious is his drawing-room, about 35 feet high, and of course very large. It contains a collection of superb Japanese bronzes, a Mejouro Buddha mounted under a dais, the whole about 22 feet high, then a perfume-bumer from Kioto; another, most artistic, and representing a dragon; he has also a Chinese and a Japanese war-god, both with most comical accoutrements (without mentioning their odd faces with pointed beards). He certainly possesses articles of the greatest value. When I left M. de Cernuschi I intended to take the Friedland Avenue; I might have chosen the central alley in the park, or else that of the nursemaids on the left, it was my shortest way, but I do not know why, I went to the right, choosing the path following the Boulevard de Courcelles. I passed by the duck-pond where there are two miserable white swans. Shortly afterwards I observed a lady seated alone reading a book which seemed to absorb her completely. I went on a few steps and sat down for an instant admiring the grace of the lady who attended to nothing but her book. Then I went to sit in the sun. There, on a bench near mine, I saw a couple, middle-aged; the wife was crocheting, the husband was asleep, his face was red; evidently a case of blood to the head and a bad digestion. I felt so comfortable there; the sun stealing through the branches just struck me on the legs, the beautiful fresh green soothed my eyes; I heard the tree bursting into leaf above my head, making a clatter similar to that of large rain-drops when they fall on green leaves.

“That park is a delicious spot at this season. I spent a most agreeable time there, I was dreaming away just as if influenced by those sweet oriental perfumes which come from the Gods and send you into most extraordinary fantasies.... I was taken from my dreams by the noise made by three gardeners who were coming to plant a superb shrub, a musaceum. I enjoyed being present at the operation; the gardeners were most careful in handling the plant, they touched it most gently; when it was in its place I got up to admire it. It was a lovely specimen! I left the park, still charmed with the quiet rest I had found there, and with the satisfaction I felt while admiring that beautiful plant.”

It is exactly where this plant which so pleased my master was, that a monument has been erected to his memory! It is the companion to Musset’s willow!

CHAPTER V. OCTOBER 1886-MAY 1887

At the Alp châlet — The frame of a new novel — Picturesque walks — René Maizeroy and Aurélien Scholl — Princely and fashionable visits — An earthquake — The house falls to pieces — Piroli is delighted to return to Paris — A candid marquise.

ANTIBES, the Alp Châlet, October 2nd. — My master is walking to and fro in his study on the second floor, I ought to say he goes from one window to another, for this circular room is pierced by five openings. Whichever you choose to look out from, space stretches before you further than you can see. On the northern side you first behold the tops of the hills covered with pines and groups of houses, while farm villages cling to their slopes. All these dwellings are painted pink and white; the effect is both picturesque and charming.

Then the chain of the Alps spreads out to the frontier; Italy, Nice, the Promenade des Anglais, the whole of the splendid Golfe des Anges are visible; a black line edges the Gulf; it is the railway. Nearer, there is a fort in the shape of a star starting from the sea; Antibes with its two square towers and the ramparts of Vauban; the slopes, the manœuvring-ground so grey, near which a square of dark green spreads out. This is the Antibes cemetery shaded by tall cypresses, and mirrored in the waters of the small cove surrounding the harbour. A graveyard in that bay, close to the sea which is so blue, seems to have been placed there in order that the departed may be lulled by the waves.

Through the windows towards the north there is the Cape with its enormous mass of silvery verdure. The Golfe Juan and the Islands of Lerins strike the eye towards the right. It is in this matchless scene that my master is laying the plan of a novel on which he sets a great value. May those marvellous sites, that splendid panorama, those natural beauties that charm the sight and touch the heart, help and inspire him in the work he is about to conceive! Such is the wish I formed when with him I had gazed at the magnificent country that surrounded us, and placed us in marvellous surroundings, surely designed for those who required a restful retreat!

The heat is still very great during the day, but the evenings are delicious; the sky crowded with stars is splendidly clear. I regret that the Étretat astronomer should be so far from us, for I think he would be delighted to behold this diamond-studded vault which we admire every evening.

Piroli is here, hunting after crickets and coming occasionally to a dead point before the glow-worms, which are so numerous that they frighten her.

When the time to sleep comes, we are loth to leave the garden, which is so enjoyable; the nights are so mild they make you think of the earthly paradise mentioned in the Bible. I sleep with my window open, the warm breeze that comes in smells so delightfully. Sleep is restful and wholesome under its influence.

The winter visitors are not yet here. M. de Maupassant plans his own day; he rises at eight, takes the air in the garden under the pepper-trees of which the light branches bend towards the ground like the weeping willow. Those trees with their lead-coloured leaves which turn silvery where the wind whips them, look gay all the winter. My master keeps at work till eleven, takes his shower-bath and lunches at twelve; towards two he goes for a walk, often in the woods at the right of Vallauris which stretch out very far over the mountains.

One day he lost himself in these woods where the ravines constitute the only roads; it was half-past nine in the evening when he came home; we were all exceedingly anxious. He told us the details of his wanderings, describing the gigantic trees he had seen on the rocks in almost inaccessible places.

“Without my compass,” added he, “I can’t say when I should have got out of that wood. I really was lost!”

Thrice a week he used to fence in the house with a sergeant; though not a good fencer, the exercise amused him. He did his best!

End of October. — He has his boat fitted out and takes a second sailor on board, a powerful fellow called Raymond, Bernard’s brother-in-law. They go out in the *Bel Ami,* as far as Cannes and St Raphaël; my master comes home delighted with his sail. M. Maizeroy came to spend a few days at the house, also M. Aurélien Scholl, for a longer time.

November. — My master leaves us once a week for twenty-four hours, from the Thursday till Friday at noon. With the exception of this outing, he spends his time in his study or on his yacht. The top of the mast of the *Bel-Ami* can easily be seen from the study. Thus it is settled that when Bernard thinks it will be fine, he is to haul the flag up at nine in the morning, so that before eleven my master will know whether or not he can go for a sail in the afternoon.

My master has often invited his mother to come for an excursion on his boat, which now behaves very well, but Madame declines with thanks, saying she prefers walking, which is so good for her health.

"Presently," says she, "I will pay a visit to Mme. King, at the château of La Pinède; then I shall push on to the end of the Cape. If you are anywhere about in that direction I shall see you; on account of the shape of the sails, I could pick your boat out amid a hundred."

My master has given several luncheon parties to the Princes now staying at Cannes, and all say the view of the Alps from this place is infinitely more beautiful than from any other point of the coast, which pleases him greatly. He therefore thanks them profusely, with many polite speeches to the great ladies; so much so that I ask myself sometimes if he is not going a little too far. Those who know him as well as I do can detect occasionally a slight irony scarcely concealed beneath his compliments.

The day after these luncheons, M. de Maupassant, unlike himself when with us, used to become exceedingly talkative. Here are some of his remarks: "These fashionable ladies don't please me; they have some wit, true, but it is wit set in a mould, like a rice-pudding with cream. Their wit comes from their education at the *Sacré Cœur*, always the same sentences, composed of the same words. That's the rice. Then all the small-talk society has furnished them with. That's the cream! And they continually put the same dish before you. You know how fond I am of rice, still I absolutely decline to eat it every day."

"I cannot compare women of the world to artistic women living in an intellectual set. These delight you, because all they say is unexpected. Their chatter does not suddenly stop short; they can talk to you about picture-galleries, theatres, music, mountains, towns; it is all said in a way that bewitches you to such a degree that one often loses all idea of time. One would willingly remain resting on the cushions of the divan, dreaming of being carried off to fairyland...."

When my master had done descanting on the ladies, he praised the way the flowers on the table were arranged.

"Where do you find them all? I don't see any about."

I replied that if sought after carefully, there were a few to be found.

We were nearing the anniversary of Sainte Colette, always celebrated in the family. The winter hardly exists on this coast, it had already vanished before the advent of spring, which had beautified the garden. This sunny region, said to be the loveliest in the world, desired apparently to maintain its reputation.

This morning, at half-past five, all the bells in the house rang furiously, all the wood-work of the northern part of the châlet began to twist itself with a frightful noise, as if the house was coming down.

I sprang out of bed, and reached the staircase without understanding what was happening. Then I heard my master shouting with the whole strength of his lungs: “Hurry! hurry out! it’s an earthquake!” But the first shock was already over.

“Let us make haste to dress,” said my master, “ and go down into the garden, for the counter-stroke is sure to come in a few minutes.” We reached the garden, M. de Maupassant stamped impatiently on the ground, because neither Madame nor her maid had run downstairs. Then came the second stroke, and at last Madame appeared.

“Now, my dear boy,” said she, “ when this kind of thing happens, think of yourself, but not of me, I pray you, for I can’t hurry, and you know any earthquake leaves me perfectly indifferent.”

We then went into the gardener’s dwelling, which only consists of the ground-floor. My master thought it more prudent, expecting other shocks. I kindled the fire, and prepared breakfast. When our milkmaid appeared, she was still frightened to death, and sobbed out:

“Yes, I was climbing the Badine hill, when suddenly I lost my balance and was about to fall backwards; instinctively I threw myself forward. But my milk-pans, which I carried on my head, had been thrown down, quite a long way off.” Here she wiped the tears from her eyes. “I can’t give you any milk this morning,” added she, “on account of that horrid earthquake.”

After drinking the tea we returned courageously to the châlet, though large cracks were visible everywhere. We decided on leaving all the doors open, so as to be ready to go out the instant we felt the slightest movement under our feet.

About eight my master was ready to take his shower-bath. There was another violent shock, but we were not disturbed, being already accustomed to that sort of surprise. On the whole, we had not suffered, and few things were broken in the house. It was not so in the neighbouring villa; the ceilings had fallen down, and caused a good deal of damage. Happily, no one was hurt.

My master went in the afternoon to the telegraph office, and heard about the awful disaster at Nice. A good deal of harm had been done at Antibes, particularly in the old streets, but only one person had been killed, and few were wounded.

My master told us in the evening, that, according to the indications given by the Nice observatory, one might expect more shocks, but not such violent ones. This was not a great inducement to go to bed! Madame declared that she was on no account to be disturbed, as she certainly would not come downstairs for any earthquakes!

A week went by, during which we heard about all the misfortunes that had happened in Italy; one day, when my master was at Nice, he called at the Meteorological office, where they had registered seventeen shocks since the first day of the earthquake, and he was told there would be more.

When he came home he sent for M. Mary, who was a master-builder at Antibes. This man examined the house, and said it would be the height of imprudence to continue living in the two-storied part, as there were long cracks extending from the cellars to the garrets, the floors were now separated from the walls, and felt like spring-boards as you walked on them.

My master was thus obliged to leave his study; he established himself in a gallery covered with glass, just above the hall where he used to fence. I slept for six weeks on a mattress placed on the floor of this lobby, which was about fifteen yards long; the door remained open night and day all this time, I had only hung up a blind so as the night air should not strike my eyes....

Custom is everything; we had no fear; my master, who generally bolted even his room door, now slept as it were in the open air, none of the outlets of the house were closed, they all gave on to the high road, pervaded night and day by all the rascals sent out of Italy towards the coast, and marching on to Toulon and Marseilles. I must confess that not one of them was even rude to us; it is true that when the same tramp came begging four times in the same day, I made as if I did not know him again, and bestowed another mite on him, without making any remark.

Sometimes in the evening my master and I would walk to the end of the garden, whence one could see Nice and the long row of gas lamps on the

Promenade des Anglais; the conversation always returned to the earthquake; my master described it so as to make me shudder, and frightened me to death for the whole night.

One evening we remarked that on the Antibes fortifications the watch-fires were much more numerous than before; about two hundred families camped out there, having had to quit their dwellings which were tumbling down after all these shocks. My master went one evening to see them; he was most generous towards those who were really in want. It was a melancholy and miserable sight; here a mother and her four children slept on two straw mattresses joined together. Next them lay a whole family from the grandmother to the babies; here and there, stoves, night lights, Jewish lamps hung on wooden posts. It was a lugubrious sight, but luckily the weather was not cold.

I am surprised my master did not write an article on all this wretchedness, his pen would have described it so graphically. He would only have had to transcribe the account he gave his mother the next day.

The End of March. — Our house is still standing; but the cracks get broader and broader, particularly above the door and windows.

To forget our trials, I sometimes go and pick violets in the field with the neighbours. We are often fifteen and it is great fun; everyone cracks his jokes; but we do not linger by the way, as there is no time to lose. Each of us has his basket and his two rows, and his pride is in being the first to finish the job. My master often passes by, and looks as if he would like to imitate us....

Everything is blossoming in the garden, a small arbutus is already covered with its ripe fruit, red as any strawberry.

At the end of April we left the châlet, where we had stood seventy-two shocks. My master has given his orders; the masons will succeed us.

When we reached the flat, we found it comfortably warmed. Piroli recognizes her dwelling. She is particularly happy to find her beaded blind, and the bearskin with its peculiar scent. She is always trying to examine it; she scratches the fur the wrong way, applies her nose to it and sniffs at it for a long time, probably with the hope of finding out what kind of beast this enormous animal can be. She seems satisfied, and has taken up all her old habits. It is not the same with my master; he appears tired already and does not conceal it; he sees too many people, and above all, receives too many invitations. They will not leave him alone.

He was out one afternoon when a small yellow dog-cart stopped before the house. A young lady dressed in a pretty tailor-made costume of grey, with a hat of the same colour, jumped down. I opened the door, and she asked me sharply if M. de Maupassant was at home.

“No,” said I, “my master is out.”

“Well,” she replied, “ I am coming in, give me some writing materials.”

And on a sheet of foolscap she found on the bureau she wrote one word in large letters filling the page:

“PIG!”

When my master came in he saw the sheet, read it and burst out laughing.

“The devil take them all!” exclaimed he suddenly, adding:

“The young marquise who writes so well is the daughter of a former minister of the Second Empire. But I will not see her.... I am dead tired of her.... I’ll tell you at once, François, I will not stay any longer in Paris; here they don’t give me time to breathe; it’s really wearisome... so I’ll just rent a place at Chatou....”

CHAPTER VI. MAY-JUNE 1887

Chatou — Exotic decoration — Mme. O— 's frogs — The Countesses at dinner — Some painful truths and agreeable feminine philosophy — Piroli's maternal instinct — Pleasant ending to a tragedy — Unexpected camping out — Ahoy! boatmen! — An unlucky illness — The millionaire's proposition.

MY master told me he had heard of a pretty flat at Chatou between the two arms of the Seine, close to the bridge.

"We will spend six weeks there," said he, " before starting for Étretat. I hope I shall be less persecuted by people than I am here; also I shall be able to move about and stretch my arms out." We reached the flat three days later. In a sort of a turret behind the drawing-room there is a tiny place that can do duty as a study.

"I shall work," says my master, "in that room, which looks out on the running water. To-morrow I shall go to Paris and bring back what is wanted to decorate those walls, which are too bare; and make the place gay and bright; you'll see!..

Next morning he returned with cases, and began to nail on to the angular walls of the little room Chinese and Japanese figures with parasols, Hottentot women holding each other's hands and making grimaces.

There were also fish with strange heads, silver eyes, and moustaches of golden thread. He tried to glue them on to the wall, occasionally upside down, with their tails sticking up, or horizontally, so as to judge which was the best way. Then he blocked a window up, the shutters were closed as well as the curtains, one window being sufficient to give light. Even the blind of this second window was pulled down so as to soften the light and the brilliant reflection of the water, as the May sun already shone powerfully. It was getting rather late, when I asked my master if I could prepare lunch.

All this decoration took us several days. When everything was finished my master sat down before his table and tried to write; but the light came from the side, and he could not stand it; we had to bring all the writing materials back to the drawing-room table.

One morning, as I came in, I found him at the window.

"Now," he said, "look at the bank on the other side, how melancholy it looks when the water is low! That mud gives it the aspect of a frog-pond without rushes; and those dirty white houses are really ugly. It is true they are but fishermen's dwellings.... Look here, I should like to settle with one of those fishermen to procure me a hundred and fifty live frogs. I'll pay him ten francs."

It was soon done; next morning the fisherman brought the frogs, but there were only a hundred and ten. As soon as the man had departed, my master called me.

"Immediately after lunch you'll go to Paris, you must buy a proper basket to contain these frogs, and you can carry them to Madame O — ; you must arrange so that she opens the basket herself. I should like the frogs to jump up into her face, and spread themselves all over her drawing-room!"

As soon as I reached Paris I took my jumping frogs from one basket and put them into another. It was not an easy job, fright no doubt increasing their agility. When it was done I took a cab and went to the lady's house. It was a magnificent palace in one of those large Parisian avenues, where one day, as my master prophesied to me, the statue of the author of "The Human Comedy" will stand on its pedestal.

When in the anteroom I heard a voice speaking in a tube next door; then a footman told me to follow him. We stepped on to a monumental stair-case in Italian marbles of different colours, most beautifully harmonized. When we had reached the top of this marvel, I was ushered into a room where my feet sank in the soft carpet. Mirrors all round reflected the trees in the garden. I could have thought myself in a fairy palace. I was still holding my basket like a small maid going to school, when I beheld Madame

O , who had come in without my seeing or hearing her.

"Good morning, François," said she.

"Good morning, Madame."

I offered her my basket, but she did not take it.

"What are you bringing me here, François?"

"Well, I do not know, Madame; my master gave me this basket, ordering me to deliver it into your own hands, you alone can be allowed to see the contents!"

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed Madame O — , so loudly that her voice rang through the salon; then she attempted to speak to me with great severity.

“François, you are going to tell me at once what that basket contains.”

I tried to hold my own, stating that according to master’s express order, Madame alone was to know the secret of the basket.

But I could say no more, by a gesture she stopped me.

“François, I am waiting for your reply!” said she in a soft voice, yet with so much authority, that there was no escaping from the injunction.

Stammering, I told her what my master had sent her.

“Well,” said she, “what can one do with these poor little beasts?”

“I really do not know, Madame.”

“Still, they surely can be made use of in some way?”

“Yes, Madam, in some restaurants they prepare the legs *à la poulette,* which makes a very appetizing dish!”

“Ah! very well, that’s it! The legs *à la poulette...* quite a delicacy... yes, the leg is the interesting part...

And she roared with laughter.

“Mind you thank M. de Maupassant, and when he might have been taken for a wizard or else have been suspected of often accompanying the absentees into the houses he described so graphically.

These speeches might seem rather rude; but the noble ladies apparently did not mind, for all began to proclaim their indifference about the details he had just given them, and which they had long been familiar with. They added that their husbands preferred tainted meat in some of the restaurants to good fresh roast beef in their own houses.

“Don’t be anxious on that subject,” they concluded, “ you good-looking fellow with dark brown hair. We have not awaited your revelations before making good use of the liberal gifts of Heaven to us, and having as much fun as we could manage to get....We leave our husbands to their own preferences....”

I did not hear the wizard’s reply, as I had to go to the pantry and fetch the other dishes... also Piroli was constantly rubbing herself against my legs, and mewing, inviting me to go and see her kittens, born that afternoon.

In the evening, when everyone was gone, Piroli went and complained to my master.

“The poor little thing is whimpering so much,” said he, “that something unusual must have happened.”

We followed her to the tiny study decorated with Chinese figures, now the dwelling of Piroli and her children.... One of the kittens was dead, and she had pulled it out of the basket.

“So that is why you are so miserable, my little pet!” said my master.

While he was comforting her I took the little body away, and Piroli immediately returned to her place in the basket with the remainder of her offspring.

“Really,” said my master, “ speech is the only thing she lacks.”

Then I told him that I had taught her in two or three days how to go down morning and evening to the banks of the Seine, where she found refreshing herbs and sometimes the grasshoppers, which she loved to eat....

One day, after breakfast, M. de Maupassant said to me:

“I am going to take a turn in the island; should people ask to see me, say I am gone to Paris.”

M. L — came towards three.

“Is your master at home?”

“No, sir; he is taking a walk in the island.”

“Well, I have just come from Paris, and have travelled with Madame N — who does not know me. She is in a frightfully excited state; several times she drew a revolver out of her pocket, and the object of her anger is M. de Maupassant. There is no doubt about her intentions; I am going to find your master and warn him. Do you wait for the lady, and do your best to persuade her to return to Paris.” In less than a quarter of an hour this person appeared.

“François,” says she, very calmly, “ is M. de Maupassant at home?”

“No, Madame; my master is in Paris.”

“No, no,” she exclaimed loudly. “I intend to...”

She stopped suddenly, turned pale, and was swaying backward when I seized her in my arms (she might have hurt herself considerably by a fall). I carried her on to the cane sofa in the dining-room. As soon as she was flat on her back I rubbed her hands, bathed her temples with cold water and vinegar; it was all of no use. Then I took the salts bottles, thrusting them occasionally up her nostrils. Still, she did not come to; she did not seem to breathe; she was so pale I began to ask myself if she was not dead.

I got really frightened; I threw the window open so as to get some air, and I was about to cry out for assistance, when I remembered that in these cases it is advisable to loosen a fainting woman’s dress. I came back to her, and undid her bodice, then tried to lift her head and make her smell the salts.

At last she began to breathe, at first very slightly, then more deeply; her lips moved as if she were thirsty, her eyelids quivered as if about to open, and, slowly inhaling the salts, she came to herself.

When she was better she took my two hands and wept profusely.

“François,” said she, between her sobs, “ let me see M. de Maupassant; let me see him or I shall die. I must see him; I tell you I must see him!... I shall do him no harm, believe me, I promise... but let me see him...” she cried again.

I quieted her as well as I could, promising to go immediately and search for my master.... I went downstairs, but no one had seen him. I was returning to the lady, when I heard the door open; it was my master coming home.

“I know,” he said directly, “I am coming to settle all that.”

He was as calm as if this was quite an everyday matter.

In the evening my master, accompanied by the lady, came to the kitchen door.

“François,” said he quite coolly, as if nothing of any importance had happened; “all is settled now.”

“Yes, we are now very good friends,” added the lady.

On May the 15th M. de Maupassant informed me he had invited some friends of his youth to dine with him on the following Tuesday.

He impressed on me I was to cook a good dinner.

“You will put the wine on the table, I will pour it out. There will be young and old, bachelors, married people, and even unmarried couples, among the guests. Of course, all these friends will bring their better halves; they will be here in the afternoon, so as we may have a boating-party. Mind you have a few cakes to offer them before we start for the river.”

Then my master threw back his head, passing his hand through his hair.

“I wonder what trick I can find to play on them,” said he. “Oh, I know, I will make them miss the last train, that *will* be fun!...”

On the Tuesday everyone came. The dinnerparty was exceedingly merry; they all remained long at table; there were so many old recollections to talk about; after coffee there came the liqueurs, the cigars which took up some time.... It was a beautiful evening; my master sought me out.

“François,” said he, “I am taking all my guests into the island. I shall manage so as to come home too late to catch the last train; anyhow, you must stop all the clocks at a quarter past eleven.”

Towards midnight they all came home singing. But they were stupefied when they saw the last train for Paris was gone! Some laughed heartily, and went on singing, but some of the ladies began to scold most ruefully.... So as to quiet everybody, champagne was served, and then they reckoned up the number of beds that would be wanted. Mattresses are laid on the ground, they help each other, even the grumblers make up their minds, and jollity reigns again. It was all very quickly done, with much amusement and fun.

The noise made Piroli quite anxious; she came out of the little Japanese study, which she inhabited with her kittens, so as to see what all this row could mean. My master took her in his arms to comfort her; everyone began coaxing her; quite satisfied she purred with delight; all vied in flattering her.

Just then one of the ladies came to say she could only sleep when she was alone. My master told her that he was exactly in the same condition, and that for once they would not even try to sleep. Then more champagne was served, and master proposed to draw lots for the sleeping accommodation.

This idea excited general laughter.

"If you like," said my master, to pacify his guests, "we will have all the doors open, so as the air may circulate freely."

From the dining-room window one could see the Seine, in which thousands of stars were reflected; one might have thought they were silvered fish on the surface of the water. At last I turned the key on all the bivouacking sleepers, and went to bed.

Chocolate and coffee were ready the next morning before six. Those whom their occupations recalled to Paris, hurried back to town; the lucky ones who had nothing to do but to enjoy existence, remained for lunch at eleven.

In the afternoon, as I was putting a spring-mattress back into its place, my master came to me, rubbing his hands, and caressing Piroli.

"You see, François, all went well; I had told you so, and it was great fun!"

Then there was another series of guests.

"Next week," announced M. de Maupassant, "I shall have a boating-party and keep my friends to dinner; I will let you know in time.... Would it not be better to take two of the kittens away, three really must be too much for Piroli.... See how thin she is! Here, we will keep that little thing of three colours. I think she will be as pretty as her mother; we will call her Pussy."

Then returning to the drawing-room, he began to whistle, a rare occurrence with him, for in ten years I only heard him whistle three times. It is the day of the boating party, and I take the orders.

"I am very fit," says my master, showing me his arms, " there is strength there, it is but natural, I have done so much rowing and gone in for physical exercises of every sort! And yet my hands have not developed; they have remained small, but that does not prevent my being strong, and when I hold a thing I hold it firmly.

"And with this chest of mine, I can both breathe freely and bear up against fatigue; which is not the case with all those fancy-boatmen. I am ready to show them what I can do, if they will stand up against me; but I rather doubt it....You will bring the water for my shower-bath at seven; let it be very cold, for certainly I shall be very hot. Give me a light lunch, but let it be strengthening; two boiled eggs, a grilled steak, French beans, Gruyere cheese, and very hot tea."

Just before lunch, my master went to see Alphonse Fournaise, great Admiral of Chatou! Everything was ready, the four boats on one line: *Le Bon Cosaque; Monsieur; Madame;* and *Bel-Ami.*

Towards two, my master went off, everything he wore was new: white jersey and knickerbockers, and a magnificent white yachting cap. As he was going out he rubbed his hands.

"I have some first-rate tallow just now," said he gaily.

It was more than six when he came in; his face was distorted, pale, with violet patches; the sight terrified me.

"Quick, François," said he, "my shower-bath immediately."

I helped him to take off jersey and breeches; his body had a livid hue. Nevertheless, he took his shower-bath, and I began to rub him with a horsehair glove and eau-de-Cologne. A minute after, he asked me if the dinner might not be burning. I was so wretched at seeing him in such a state that I could not help exclaiming:

"Once in a way, let the dinner be burnt, what does it matter!"

He continued the friction for a long time, but he could not obtain the usual reaction. Then he wanted to tell me about the boating-party, but his voice failed him; he chopped his words, not being able to pronounce them.

Though not silent at dinner, he was not cheerful; he did not feel well, and on the following day seemed dull; still, he told me about the boating party.

“My guests,” said he, “left me the most to do, but I showed them what a well-trained man can accomplish in that line. We finished up by returning from Marly, M. X... on a yawl with a lady, and M. M... in the small boat with two ladies; they chose the dead-water; I went up the running water in the *Bon-Cosaque* with three ladies on board, and I got to shore before them! All those fat fellows make me think of the keepers of the Grand Turk’s harem....”

After this adventure, my master seemed quite morose for several days; he would spend hours on his divan, caressing his two cats and only disturbing himself to come to the kitchen and make them drink milk.

During one of these visits he said:

“I will also try some milk to-morrow. I do not feel well; I have always a pain inside. Please cook me some endives in cream.”

In the evening, with the lamp turned down, he combed his cats’ fur the wrong way with a tortoiseshell comb he had brought from Italy, and enjoyed seeing the phosphorescent sparks fly up in the dark.

A few days went by in this way, and my master was no better; he used, however, to take walks in the island, and went to see his boats. But soon sharp intestinal pains came on, all the remedies usually employed in similar cases failed to relieve him. He then resolved to take every quarter-of-an-hour fifteen drops of perchloride of iron in a little water, continuing to apply linseed poultices with laudanum; and that stopped the pain.

He went to Paris, and consulted a doctor, but he came back dissatisfied; and complained of the small knowledge of these luminaries of the medical faculty.

One morning, my master coming back from M. Fournaise’s house, passed before the kitchen, and asked me to come and give him his shower-bath. I observed he walked with a certain agitation and clenching his hands. I was sure something had provoked him. His toilet was finished sooner than usual, and he sat down to his lunch.

“What do you think, François?” he exclaimed. “A rich American has offered me a steam yacht! A beauty they say, but he is mistaken about me, and he must have known that he was, for I straightway refused! I was polite towards his messenger, but what could the millionaire think of me, when he made me this proposal? Was he dreaming or was he *drunk*?”

End of June. — My master feels he gets no better, and resolves to start for Étretat.

“It is too damp for me here,” said he, “this place between the two arms of the Seine is never dry! But I love boating, I love the water, wherever I can find it! Unfortunately, it does not suit my health; we will start the day after to-morrow. I think you must buy a second basket for Pussy; she has grown so much that I fear she will disturb her mother. Then you will take all my belongings off the walls, don’t forget the little bureau: make a special case for all those things; we shall take them to Étretat, they will be of use to me there. Now I will tell Alphonse Fournaise to make out my account, and take care of my boats.”

CHAPTER VII. JULY-AUGUST 1887

We return to Étretat — Guy de Maupassant studies astronomy in his kitchen — Is reconciled to spinach — The fugitive tortoises — Marie Seize charms tortoises — The revenge... let us always think of it! — The Hovla — Black shadows pass — Influence of the Invisible — Pierre et Jean composed in the Ash-tree Avenue — Madame Pasca — Death of Piroli.

JULY 1887. — Here we are back at Étretat. One morning my master hangs up in the kitchen a celestial planisphere, and moving it about, he gives me a description of the heavens, names the principal stars, and distinguishes the planets from the satellites.

"You see," said he, "I can find my way about, and yet I only went once with Camille Flammarion to his observatory. What a delightful man, and how cultivated! His scientific knowledge is very deep and so interesting!"

I then told him Étretat also possessed a most distinguished astronomer, naming M. Louis.

"That is quite true," replied my master, "I have known him since I was a child, I used to meet him at M. L...'s. Will you ask him if he will oblige me by coming here one fine evening? I am sure he will not refuse."

M. Louis came and spent many evenings with my master. Once he took him to cliff of Havre beyond the *Lady's Chamber*. This was the spot this astronomer preferred; he had the best view of the heavens from it, and penetrated their secrets. For the last thirty years he had watched from that cliff all that went on above, writing to those papers with which he corresponded about any novelty he had discovered. My master told me that M. Louis interested him deeply, and added, "I never should have supposed I was in the neighbourhood of a man gifted with such a mind."

My master came occasionally to move his map of the heavens. I asked myself why he had chosen the kitchen to study astronomy in. Later on, I learnt my presence had something to do with the fancy. One evening coming home with him from some excursion, I had named several stars to him; the result of very little knowledge, as I only knew those my father had taught me about when I was a little fellow, but this had sufficed to direct master towards that study.

One morning, my master was turning his map about; this lasted some time and there was not much room. Suddenly, he looked at me.

“Why,” said he, “you are making chocolate?”

“For this evening,” replied I.

I had to explain to him that if chocolate is to be good, it must simmer on the fire for twelve hours in company with a vanilla pod.

“Oh! I’ve nothing to say,” he exclaimed, “I only know that your recipe is excellent.”

During July the heat was very great. Paff lies full length in the avenue opposite the kitchen, in the shade of the hedge and the tall wild apple-tree that keeps the well cool. Piroli is between the hedge and Paff, on the edge of the ivy border; she is in a ball and puts her four white velvet paws on her friend’s long ear. My master passes by on his way to his tub.

“François” (he is calling me), “have you seen this picture? How graceful these creatures are! But the heat has become so great, it is impossible to keep them in my study, and yet it is very pleasant in there, with the door open towards the north.” Cramoyson has made the new kitchen-garden large enough for plenty of vegetables; I observe some splendid spinach, yet, one day, my master had classed it among the vegetables he never ate. All the same I tried to offer him a dish of it; when he had finished eating, he asked me what those green herbs were. I told him it was an improved plant which came from Tetragonia, so the gardener had told me.

“Never mind the name of the plant,” said my master, “thus prepared, it is simply exquisite.” Then he begged Cramoyson always to grow that same vegetable. I told the gardener master had found the spinach delicious, and it was settled between us that the plant had been discovered by Cramoyson, who was exceedingly proud of what he had done.

Our zoological garden is now enriched by the presence of eight fine tortoises. They wander about at will in the *carré normand.* Master was pleased with them, he no longer saw slugs about; sometimes he amused himself by standing (his feet joined together) on their backs.

“There’s solidity for you!” he would say to me. “Even the wheel of a heavily-laden cart would make no impression on that armour that is so resistant.”

One day, to our great astonishment, we discovered all the tortoises had disappeared. We sought after them in every comer, and finally found a hole, smaller than the rabbits generally make, under the wire fence. We supposed those creatures which get along so slowly had begun their journey there. Part of the hill and the almost impenetrable underwood of bents and broom were explored, without any success.

A week later, I caught sight of a tall woman coming down the path from the coast. It was Marie Seize, whose habitat was always on the hill called New Caledonia. A few minutes afterwards, I was surprised to see her at the kitchen door with my master. She was holding her apron up. She undid it; there were our eight tortoises inside it; they immediately went back to the meadow and Marie Seize was paid for her trouble. My master never ceased praising the honesty of this poor woman, who might, he said, have made soup of the poor creatures.

Of course the wire fence was carefully examined. Now we were at ease on the subject of the tortoises. But hardly a month had gone by, when again they escaped. In spite of all our care, we never were able to keep them. Several times they played us the same trick, and ’twas always Marie Seize who brought them back. It was a most mysterious occurrence!

What conclusion could one draw? Was she a tortoise-charmer? Or, as said my master, laughing: was the reward rather too generous the first time? It was so tempting....

A few days later, Cramoyson at work near the boat was repairing a border, when my master went up to him, and asked him how he felt. (He had been ill for some days.) He said he was better, but always liable to suffer from those nasty fevers he had caught when a prisoner in Germany. My master then expressed his horror of war, and particularly his hatred of the Prussians.

“Still,” said he, “I cannot understand how we French can brag thus about our revenge. We shall never get it in that way; we ought to prepare ourselves without showing it, and fall upon them at a suitable moment!”

I do not exactly recollect the date at which my master told me what follows. I did not write it down, but I remember quite well I had gone into the garden to inform him his dinner was ready. I found him in admiration before a hydrangea-bed.

“See, François,” said he, “how splendid these are this year; each stem supports a bouquet of a wonderful size; they are a better colour than usual, which probably depends on their vital strength.”

The sun, disappearing behind the hill of the Valois woods, struck obliquely across our eyes. To avoid the rays, my master turned back towards the house, speaking as if he were in a hurry: —

"To-day I forwarded to Paris the manuscript of *Le Horla;* before a week elapses all the papers will publish the fact that I am mad. It is just as they please, but I am perfectly sane, and knew very well what I was doing, when writing that tale. It is a work of imagination that will startle the reader, and send a few shudders down his back, for it is a strange tale. I must tell you that we do not understand many of the things around us. When, later on, we discover them, we are quite astonished not to have perceived them sooner. Then, our apathy makes us fancy everything is impossible, improbable. For instance, when my book *Une Vie* appeared, the critics, those chatterboxes, who often try to crush a masterpiece because they don't understand it, could not coin terms harsh enough in which to state that my novel was untrue, and that the facts were impossible. Well, those same facts described in my book have just taken place at Fontainebleau; the printed account of them now lies in my bureau. I can only regret having written my book too soon, for the reality is much better defined and more complete than my novel. That would have enabled me to defeat the most ferocious of my critics!"

September. — My master goes shooting as he did in former years, but with less spirit, I fancy. Still he has finished the greater part of his novel *Pierre et Jean.* He began it when we came here, two months and a half ago, and made good progress. My master tells me the shade already given on the path by the young ash trees has been most useful. It was as he was walking there, that *Pierre et Jean* was composed; the whole was written in a very short time, especially when you think of the articles and tales produced every week.

"Before we go to Africa," said my master, "I still have a preface to write, which I shall put in front of the novel, telling some things I think about the critics, and how I regard a novel."

As the weather was still very fine, there are yet a good many bathers on the sea-shore. People come to dine almost every evening at "Le Guillette." Among those who come most frequently I remark a tall, white-haired lady. From her complexion, I think she used to be a brunette. They call her Madame Pasca. My master says she is a great actress. She is certainly a most superior person, intelligent, full of common-sense. It was delightful to hear her talk; every one was under the charm of her quiet conversation, so perfectly to the purpose. She had a good influence over my master, who showed the greatest regard for her....

In August, Piroli again had kittens. She did not seem to get well. My master sent for the veterinary, who wrote out a lengthy prescription. When he had done telling us how we were to take care of the poor creature, he added “You know, sir, that cats are nervous; it is therefore extremely difficult to care for them in the way they require.”

We did all we could, but the poor little cat died on September the 15th, on my bed in the old boat. That day, my master was shooting at Ste Hélène, M. Amoux’s place. Next morning, when he came home, I told him the sad news. He went into the bathroom where I had kept the little body, and asked if she had suffered much; he wished to hear all the details about the last moments. I said they were harrowing; the poor little thing rolled about groaning, and clung to me, as if asking me to help her.

Little Pussy remained with us as a living remembrance of Piroli; she was left in the care of the woman who was to look after the flat during our journey to Africa.

CHAPTER VIII. OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1887

Our journey to Algeria — White Algiers — We take a flat in the rue Ledru-Rollin — Striking impression produced by an excursion to Cap Matifou with M. Masqueray — When following the "Disenchanted" — What is said by the Arabian women in the mosques — To the Hamman-Righa baths — Unsuccessful shooting — The Mahometan priests and Voltaire — On the road to Kabylia.

MARSEILLES, October 3*rd.* — My master is occupying his usual room at the Hotel de Noailles, it looks out on to the Cannebière.

Towards eleven he told me I was free for the day.

"I have taken our berths on board for twelve to-morrow, I will lunch at the 'Réserve,' and shall be back here at six for dinner."

Next morning my master took me to the old harbour to look at a yacht. It was paid off; they had told him it was for sale. He was pleased with the shape, and the size was exactly what he required.

We had an excellent passage; the sea was like glass; magnificent weather. We reached Algiers, looking snow-white, and built amphitheatre fashion; landing was not an easy matter, indeed it was a disagreeable experience, the Arabs seizing your luggage against your will, and carrying it off to the hotel that strikes their fancy. Luckily, our porters made no mistakes; we went to the Grand Hotel de l'Oasis on the quay.

My master was ready to sally forth next morning at nine.

"François, this is what I have settled. As I cannot work at the hotel, I shall take a flat so as to be quite at home. Pray look about you in this neighbourhood, and see if you can find anything suitable; I will explore Mustapha, a suburb I know well, and if I can find a small villa or flat of the kind I require, I shall ask my mother to come and spend the winter with me."

At last, we took a flat in the rue Ledru-Rollin, after having examined many, and seen numerous Algerine, Arabian, Moorish and Jewish landladies, with large velvety eyes.

Though two of the windows looked South, the apartment had nothing bright about it; its only advantage was being close to the post. We were on the third floor; a water-carrier was necessary. I hired the one the portress sent me; he was a regular Biskri, small, thin, with bare legs and feet; he had lost his right eye; the left one was so quick and shifty, I was never able to detect its colour. I offered him so much a week, good average terms, traveller's price. To show he was pleased, I suppose, he beat a tattoo with his thin fingers on the brass jug he held under his arm.

On October the nth, at one o'clock, I was finishing my lunch, alone as usual, seated before my little wooden table placed against the wall, when my attention was attracted by the dance of the coffee in my glass; I immediately went to tell my master, giving him details, leaving not the slightest doubt there was an earthquake.

In the evening, during dinner:

"You were quite right," said my master, "it really was an earthquake. At three minutes to one, at the officers' club, they registered three oscillations of several seconds, from East to West. I am delighted," added he, " to have met all those officers here, their society is very agreeable, they are all charming fellows, well-bred, cultivated; and some of them thoroughly understand literature. Though we are on French ground, still there is the Mediterranean between us and our own fatherland, that is enough to give us the sensation of being in a foreign country, particularly when you see all those Arabs about the streets, and hear their lingo. We feel stranded, and it is comforting to meet some real Frenchmen, speaking our language, as if we were in Paris. If I listened attentively, I think I could hear the beating of their hearts when the Boulevards and the Maison Dorée are spoken of. Thursday, several of those officers will come to lunch, as well as M. Masqueray and M. Bureau."

October the 14th.— "To-morrow, François," said my master to me, "I shall make an excursion to the point of that headland — Cap Matifou, with M. Masqueray. Will you come? Perhaps you will never have such an opportunity again.... You the heavens... never did I see anything so captivating and which has stirred me so deeply...."

M. Masqueray, bending slightly towards my master, approves of all he says; then, in scientific terms that I am of course unable to reproduce, gives an explanation of the phenomena.

The whistle had sounded and the train was already moving when I was able to persuade the gentlemen to get into their seats.

The remainder of the journey was less interesting, though the view of the open sea from the extremity of the headland was superb. For me the scenery had lost all attraction; I was absorbed by the pleasure of listening to the conversation of these two men of genius, who so thoroughly understood each other.

M. de Maupassant often went to Upper Mustapha to dine with M. Tirman, who had explained to him his views on the future of Algeria, on the dams that ought to be constructed, on the budget which ought to be given up to the colony, on the railway question, etc. Apparently all this interested my master, but his face was infinitely more animated when he told me about his Friday walks towards the Arabian cemetery, which amused him so much, that he would often repeat them twice on the same day.

"Hear," he would say, "what the customs of these races are. Those Arabs, who will hardly allow their wives to go out to a mosque, will send them every Friday far out into the country (out of affectation) to the tombs of their departed relatives, to straighten the few pointed stones which keep in memory these masses of buried humanity. As soon as they come out of these melancholy Elysian fields, most of them turn again into women. To-day, so as to make sure of the facts, I went twice over the road from Lower Mustapha to Hussein-Dey's garden. Well, several of those women, when there were only two of them, and they were sure of not being observed, would lift their veils as they saw me approach. Their faces, always untouched by the light of day, are of a chalky white, and one might say their velvety cheeks are slightly tinted by mauve coloured powder. With their large black eyes, most of them are very pretty."

And I saw a smile behind my master's moustache.

Another time, my master pointed out to me a small mosque, behind the Casbah, near a public garden overhanging the road to St Eugene. It is a very pretty dwelling for a Mahometan saint. My master has described it in his *Travels.* I resolved to go and see it. I had to take my shoes off before entering the sanctuary. From the threshold, I could hear soft, yet far-reaching lamentations. I drew nearer and saw women moaning with strange gesticulations, doubtless invoking some particular saint. In fact, I could not make out what they were about.

As I went out, I met the keeper of the square.

"Did you understand what you saw?" asked he.

"Well, no," I answered.

"Why, you can't understand since you don't know the Arabian language," said he, in a humorous tone; " you clever Frenchmen, you are all the same!... Do you know what they are up to, all those women with their droll and most laughable attitudes? Why, they are telling the saint all their misfortunes; for the Arabian women have not the right to pray directly to their God; that supreme honour is reserved to the men. And I must tell you that they do not say any prayers, only go there to tell their troubles, particularly to slander their husbands, and to confide to the saint their most private sorrows. I must confess they are often right, since the Arabs always keep two or three concubines besides their legitimate wives.”

On November the fourth, M. de Maupassant resolves to leave Algiers; the town tires him, and he hates his flat on account of the mosquitoes.

“This is what we shall do,” says he; “first we shall go to the hot baths at Hammam-Righa, where I intend to follow a certain treatment; M. Lefèvre, a charming fellow whose acquaintance I have made, will accompany us. When I shall have taken as many baths as I shall think necessary, we will go and hunt panthers with M. Lefèvre in the forests of Theniét-el-Haad, where he alone possesses a house. You will have to take care of the horse; I suppose you will be able to manage that?”

I told my master not to be uneasy on that score... *November 6th*. — My master is detained for a few hours at Algiers; I start alone with M. Lefèvre in his carriage from the Bou-Medfa station for Hammam-Righa. The hill is a stiff one, the horse often goes a foot pace; M. Lefèvre is driving. He is perhaps rather inquisitive, but certainly most intelligent; he makes me talk as we follow the road which winds about always uphill, and I tell him about some tales of my master’s, most of which are already written. He praises me for being so well acquainted with the works of the great writer.

Hammam-Righa, November 9th. — My master gives up shooting in the Theniét-el-Haad forests. M. Lefèvre starts by himself, and my master persists in taking baths, but their temperature is much too high, from 42 to “ degrees; certainly they do him harm; his nights are very restless. M. Dufour, manager and landlord of the hotel, is a well-bred man with perfect manners; he is very attentive to his guest, and seeks to provide him with everything that can please him. We possess a most remarkable guide, aged nineteen; he knows the woods as well as the cleverest of hounds. He is called Bou-Hyahia, and is covered with that hideous and disgusting scurvy to which most of the inhabitants of this unhappy country are victims.

“The weather is fine,” said M. de Maupassant to me one day; “directly after lunch, we will go towards the great ravine and see if there’s anything to kill there. Bou-Hyahia will accompany us. Mind you don't allow him to touch my gun, because of that awful skin disease of his. Bar that, he is just the man one wants; he knows the country and every nook in the forests perfectly well."

We started at one o'clock; the heat was intense; the more we went down into, the hollow, the more we felt the sun. We walked along a small torrent, bright and clear; oleanders growing on the slope threw their shade on the mirror-like water it was so pleasant to follow, and from which arose a refreshing coolness. I was stopping before this burn and admiring it, when my master called me.

"Come, François, let us go towards that little wood; perhaps I may find some game..."

Bou-Hyahia approves, in those extremely flattering terms Arabs know how to find.

We went round the trees, and found ourselves in a splendid meadow; in the shade we beheld groups of Arabs magnificently dressed. They were rolling about on the fresh green turf. When they saw us they were extremely displeased, as if that delightful nook belonged exclusively to them, and was meant for their amusement.

Bou-Hyahia informed us these people were wealthy Arabs who lived in villages on the heights, and that during the excessive heat they came down here in the afternoon to enjoy the refreshing coolness of the river, near the shady trees, accompanied by women.

"If you like, sir," added he, "we will remain hidden in the bushes for a short time and watch them."

Bou-Hyahia said these words as if he were making a request and letting us understand how pleased he would be if it was granted.... But my master, as if he had not even heard him, went up the river, making me observe at the same time the multitude of roots and laurels fed by that beautiful clear water, and of course depositing fever germs in its bed.

After having walked a few hundred yards to the right, we found a lovely, winding, Arabian path, leading, our guide told us, to the forest. We took it and halted half-way (for it was a stiff climb), and we sat down on the slope. A few birds of the country then passed before us. My master shouldered his gun and shot, but brought nothing down; he shot a second time with no success.

"That gun must be defective!" he exclaimed.

So as to make sure, he took aim at an aloe. Well, we only found a few shot scattered about the leaves of the plant. It was a new percussion-gun master had bought to shoot panthers with; he gave me the defective weapon, frowned, and cursed roundly the unscrupulous gun-smith who had sold it him....

I then gave him his old gun, which was much heavier, but with which he brought down a bird every time he shot.

When we reached the great forest on the heights, the sun was sinking below the horizon, far away behind the Arabian villages, which, built on the summit of a series of small mountains, looked as if they belonged as much to heaven and to space as to the earth. It was my master who made that observation.

“How delightful it must be,” added he, “to live there in that isolation, almost alone; when one is accustomed to it!”

“Yes, sir,” said Bou-Hyahia, “putting aside the intense heat; those hills are very wholesome, the air is so pure....”

We are now walking on a narrow path, shaded by great leafy trees forming an avenue of foliage; the coolness is delightful.... Our guide goes on quickly; he wishes to show us the mausoleum of an Arab of some note. He was in past times the saint and governor of the country.

Night has fallen when we reach the mausoleum of the saint described by Bou-Hyahia; he relates all the miracles performed by this holy Mahometan: they do not much interest my master. True, these stories have a family likeness, and, judging by what our guide tells us, the principal miracles accomplished by the celebrated saint exemplified his clever ways of extracting the poor peasants’ savings from their slender purses.

This revolted my master.

“Yes!” exclaimed he; “ never mind which country it is, or which religion; wherever you go, ’tis always the same thing; ’tis universally a question of money! All these different cults make you sick; but if you put them down, they will be replaced by others with the same results. Did you ever read Voltaire, François?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, what Bou-Hyahia tells us about his saint makes me think of Voltaire. After he had abused every religion, and particularly the Roman Catholic religion, he was expelled from France. He settled in a small borough called Ferney, near the Swiss frontier; he was penniless, and by his saintly cleverness, if you like to call it that, he made an income out of the credulous peasants around him, and lived most comfortably. He ended his life very pleasantly in a château built with the money bestowed on him by the Catholics."

Next day we went to take photographs of Bou-Mahomet's tomb.

Bou-Hyahia seized the opportunity of leading us near the haunts of wild boars. We had guns, but not one of these animals showed his snout, to my master's great disappointment, and also to that of the guide, as had he been lucky enough to show some game to his generous patron he would have been certain of an increase of pay.

Rather dissatisfied with the result of the treatment, we left Hammam-Righa, stopped two days at Algiers (in order to get a few things, such as Russian leather boots, my master ought to have received at Théniét-el-Haad for the panther-hunt), and started for Tunis. My master has been told the climate is damper and less enervating than that of Algeria.

We are obliged to take the first train, at six in the morning, for it is the only one! M. de Maupassant sits at the window, so as to see the sun rise on the sea; we are alone in the carriage. He throws a glance on the road towards the Arabian cemetery and Hussein Dey's garden, where, sitting on the gates, huge monkeys are visible.

"How frightfully ugly they are!" he exclaims.

The train stops at every station, and moves along slow as any tortoise — one might be driving; and we have leisure to admire the landscape. We pass between lofty mountains, then suddenly we hear a most infernal noise.

"We are now passing the ' Iron Gates,'" says my master; "we are in the country of the Kabyles, a country I went through a few years ago on horseback, and which has left me some curious recollections.... You know the Kabyle differs absolutely from the Algerine. The latter is a lazy fellow; the Kabyle is both courageous and business-like. You ought to see him at home; he is as clever as the keenest of our Normans."

We pass a small station, then a pretty hamlet, consisting of a few houses. In every direction the eucalyptus brightens the valley.

"That is Thiers," says my master; " the village is small, like the man after whom it is named. But what a brain that man had! What an enormous quantity of work he could accomplish! When I think of that painful moment — the peace of 1871!" My master's face became crimson, as it always did when, during a conversation, the recollection of the Prussians arose in his mind.

He remained silent, closing his eyes, as if he wished to sleep, so as to think no more of the sorrows of 1870, which made his heart bleed.... Still, with closed eyes, he went on telling me about a Kabyle household, living again through those unforgettable events he described so well in his volume, “Au Soleil.”

We reached Soukaras about three. After we had climbed rapidly up the incline for a few hundred yards, they changed the engine specially destined to drag the trains up from Duvivier to this station.

While we were waiting and walking up and down the platform, my master made me observe how everything was new in this country; even the rails had been quite recently laid down.

“How beautiful this scene is!” cried he in an ecstasy, and stopping still; “how wide the horizon! It is splendid! And the heavens are rose-coloured, do you see?”

The sun was behind us. M. de Maupassant began to name to me all the tints before us, from the depths of the sky to the width of the horizon, which was merged afar into the undulation of the land.... He finished by the enumeration of the different hues floating nearer us above the vineyards.... These varying tints depend on whether the vines are still green, or have taken on their reddish winter dress.

My master was enraptured by this magnificent sight; he wished me so much to understand, and to share his subtle impressions, that he never seemed tired of describing the splendour of what he saw.

“You understand, François, to see and to distinguish, the eye must be educated; therefore, when you look, you must notice everything; never be content with want of precision; you must give time for the eye to define and to follow out those things which are but faintly visible. It is only by slow and patient practice that you can make your eyes do all the work they are capable of. Even the greatest painters must give themselves trouble, a great deal of trouble, to educate their eyes, and make them really useful.” Then he took out his little green pocketbook and wrote three notes on it, the only ones I saw him write down in the course of ten years. He always wrote from memory, and hardly ever hesitated; his marvellous memory was of the greatest use to him.

CHAPTER IX. NOVEMBER 1887-JANUARY 5TH, 1888

In Tunisia — The Moorish baths — Great success at the officers' club — We journey to Kairouan at a splendid pace — Our stay at Tunis, Maxine Avenue — An inspiriting fire — Excellent massage by the negro — On the ruins of Carthage — The frolics of Tahya — Italian macaroni? — The stout Tunisian — Tahya is sea-sick.

TUNIS, November. — Our first morning was occupied with visiting the ancient Roman baths of Hammam-Lif, a mile and three-quarters from Tunis.

"These hot springs," said my master, "were somewhat celebrated in the olden times; but I am told they have now lost some of their virtue. It may be that the mineral beds, on which they ran underneath the soil, are now exhausted. Let us at least see what kind of an establishment the people keep." While my master spoke, we went through large fields, where more than forty pairs of oxen were drawing ploughs, and turning up a rich, dark-brown mould nearly black; it is about the most fertile ground that exists, full of all the substances that bring good crops. The numerous labourers work with groups of three or four teams; they follow each other, and look like one, being so much alike and stepping so regularly as they tread by the furrow which takes them almost out of sight, and so far that the distance makes them look like dwarfed creatures.

On our left, almost on the shore of the lake, we saw some huge white walls. My master questioned the guide.

"Those are the farm buildings of M. Brolmann," said he.

Still we followed the high road; a little farther on, we reached a railway barrier, and saw the rails all covered with rust.

"That," said my master, "is the beginning of the railway; now it only goes as far as Hammam-Lif; but they will soon continue it into the interior of the province."

After a quarter of an hour's walk, we stopped before an old building forming a square of a certain size, but in very bad preservation; the windows were exceedingly small, some were rounded, others square, all had iron bars. It looked like a prison, or else an antiquated fortress. Some dirty children, in tatters, were playing in a dark alley, the entrance to this strange dwelling. The threshold consists of a grey stone, a foot and a half high, so that one must lift one's legs up considerably to get in.

Once in, my master questioned the tallest of the boys. He understood French very well, and went to call the tenant of these Moorish baths. She was a long-legged woman, with a short waist, a dark oval face, and swelling hips, and she was tying a striped pink and red apron on while coming towards us.

"If you wish to see the baths, gentlemen," said she very politely, "pray come this way."

We followed her through numerous dark and narrow passages, and finally got to the bathroom.

"Is that all you have?" asked my master.

"Yes," answered she.

My master hastened to thank her, and she took us back to the entrance. It was just as well she did so, otherwise we never should have found our way.

As soon as he got outside, my master took a deep breath and looked about him, like a man who has been for a long time deprived of both air and light.

"Did you ever see anything so hideous?" exclaimed he. "It was repugnant, such dirt, such a horrid aspect! Those baths looked like so many sarcophagi, they were all chipped and broken. Only just deep enough to receive a human body. Those boxes, lit up by a little porthole, made me think of the subterranean dungeons of the Middle Ages. No, no, my good lady, I shan't be one of your customers; you won't see me here again!"..."She's a Maltese, that woman," he added, "and of an interesting type; I am not sorry to have seen her."

After crossing the railway again, we met an old carriage, apparently of the fashion of 1830. Inside it M. de Maupassant recognised the son of the Bey of Tunis. Then we walked very quickly, like people who have already lost too much time. We have hardly enough leisure to observe the entrance to the town, a large open doorway, about which we see some mounds of earth, all that remains, we are told, of the fortifications. Not a tree: all is bare, dry, and melancholy.

My master came in at seven in the evening.

"Please prepare my portmanteau, with all I may require for an eight or ten days' trip. I went to the officers' club, having letters of introduction for several of them. After the first few words, one of them exclaimed, 'We are delighted to see you, and how lucky you should have come to us just to-day! ' And he added, 'Stop a minute, I will run and see if there is still time.' He put his cap on and was away a quarter of an hour, during which I continued to chat about the manners and customs of the Tunisians, and also of the Parisians. He came in, looking very pleased.

"'This, M. de Maupassant,' said he, 'is what I am able to offer you, on the part of the Manager of the Bank of Tunis; will you accompany him on a journey he is about to take in his landau through Tunisia up to Kairouan, where he is going to inspect the farms of Lanfida, farms such as probably you have never seen yet? He was to have started to-day, but if you will kindly accept his invitation, he will put his departure off till to-morrow morning at nine. You will be a party of four: the manager will be accompanied by two secretaries, both ex-officers who have taken part in the French expedition to this beautiful Tunisia, which, I am sure, will inspire you to write pages still more eloquent than those you have written on Algeria in your volume "Au Soleil!"

"Well, I accepted!"..."And on all the faces surrounding me I could read the joy given by my visit. Away from the heart of France, life is so monotonous! I understand the pleasure they felt in conversing a few moments with a writer who had amused them often by his tales and his novels. Suddenly, I began to laugh mentally; I had just perceived that without knowing it, they were forming a circle round me, just as men do at an evening party, round a beauty who is much admired.... I felt a sort of saddened joy, they were all such charming fellows, and their countenances were so open! At last we sat down and the conversation continued, interesting but unpretending: we discussed the writers of the day. I saw that most of these soldiers were admirers of Paul Bourget."

Next morning at nine, a landau stops before the door of the hotel; four gentlemen are seated inside; they all wear large cloaks with capes, and light grey wideawakes. One of these is my master, and without my noticing any motion of the coachman's, the two splendid horses start at a great pace, carrying off, towards the Mountains of Numidia, the literary godson of that Flaubert who, by his magical skill, evoked in his "Salammbô" all the mighty past, the magnificence of that country.

December. — M. de Maupassant has returned, delighted with his journey. He was deeply interested by the great mosque of Kairouan; and he found his trip by sea, from Sfax to Susa, most agreeable.

"I had a good inspiration," said he, " before I left, in telling you to read my mother's letters; thus, by the telegraphic summaries you sent me, my news of her was as regular as if I had remained here."

I then informed my master that I had discovered in the modern part of Tunis a Hammam perfectly well appointed; there were shower-baths and vapour-baths.

"Excellent!" cried he; "now, I must have private rooms, for I shall never be able to work in this hotel. I won't live in the Arabian city, not at any price. See what you can find in the French town."

After searching a good deal, I found at last, through the good offices of a Jew, a nice lodging on the Avenue de la Marine, exactly what we wanted. The first night, however, my master felt cold, and this was most embarrassing, as there was no fireplace! It was the same in all the apartments we had seen. My master was extremely provoked.

"Only think, François,... under that terrace there is no warmth, the damp of the night falls on my head!..

I understood that at any price we must kindle a fire, and resolved that in a couple of hours (it was then half-past seven) there would be a good fire in the dining-room. And before ten struck, a stove was roaring there and, like a little steam-engine, was sending its smoke up above the terrace.

A few days elapsed; my master was apparently satisfied. One day, during breakfast, he praised the Hammam.

"Their shower-baths are first-rate! Yesterday I took an excellent vapour-bath, followed by massage. That negro who massages is extraordinary, and incredibly strong, like Kakléter. He turns you about on the table as if you were a small child. He juggles with your limbs as if he intended to detach them from the body, and yet with absolute gentleness, without hurting you in the least. To finish you up he jumps on to the table, seizes your legs, and passes his heel all down your spine; then he puts you back on the table, just like a rabbit that one has killed by this same operation.

"Afterwards I interviewed the manager of the establishment, for, I confess, I was somewhat frightened. But he reassured me completely, giving me very precise details about the skill of this negro-masseur. Really, I never met with a masseur who could vie with him."

December 17th. — My master is working hard; the little stove has had a beneficial influence.

December 18*th.*— “François,” said my master, “you will wake me to-morrow at five; I am going to the hospital, where Dr Charvot is to amputate the leg of an unfortunate fellow who in ten days’ time will walk with a wooden leg adapted to the stump. If the doctor is to be believed, he is to apply a preparation to the limb which will cure it in a very short time.”

M. de Maupassant came in at nine, and asked for water for his toilet.

“I am not inclined to work this morning,” said he; “I want to take the air. You can’t imagine what that hospital is: it is a human charnel-house, a mass of corruption — horrible! Or rather all the horrors put together — it is shameful — shameful.

Outside, around the walls, the dead, the dying rolled in rags; they are Arabs, I am told, not admitted inside, there being no room. Twice a week, a cart comes round; they look to see which are dead; they are thrown into the cart, and buried in some comer.

During breakfast, M. de Maupassant looked at me, “Why, François, you are looking ill?”

“Yes, sir, I have pains in the chest, and can’t rest at night.”

“Well, if you like, this afternoon you will drive with me to Carthage; we will take the dog Tahya; we will make her run — that will do her good.”

When the carriage started, the dog seemed delighted, and bounded about like a mad thing. But, scarcely a quarter of an hour after we had left the city-gates behind us, she saw a flock of sheep. She flew off as fast as her legs would carry her. My master, surprised, made me observe she ran faster than the Italian train going towards La Goulette.

Carthage was a most disappointing sight for my master: there only remain a few traces of walls, and stones scattered about the ground. A few blades of grass grow between the pebbles. Not a vestige of the palace of Salammbo, or of the site of the sycamore wood, or of the field of roses. Now, it is but a plain.... My master remains silent; his mind doubtless is absorbed by the events of which this spot was the scene. Perhaps he is evoking Salammbo undergoing Tanit’s influence, or he sees her again under Mathô’s tent, and beholds the surprise of that barbarian.

“Although nothing remains,” he says at last, “the atmosphere seems yet pervaded by the perfume of lemon-trees and cypresses....”

Then, throwing his glance afar, towards the blue sea, he adds: —

“The imaginary island,” that Mathô offered Salammbô in his delirious love, when he had broken her symbolical chain, was very far away!”

As we were returning to Tunis, we passed on the road a donkey decorated with a collar of bells, and two Arabs on bicycles.

“That donkey,” said my master, “is evidently the one Flaubert mentions in Salammbo; he wears round his neck the insignia of the fortune of battle;... but the bicyclists would certainly have astonished the Carthaginians....”

Three days after this, Major Charvot, who had given Tahya to my master, brought her back, telling him she had been found at Bizerte by a washerman of that town who had taken her to him; but that was not her first escapade.

My master resolved to put her on to the terrace of the house where she could gambol about; this would accustom her to know her own dwelling. Hardly an hour had elapsed when I heard some one calling at the bottom of the staircase. It was a neighbour begging me to come and take back our dog. Tahya, by a most powerful bound, had jumped over the walls that divided the two houses, and gone down a small staircase leading to this lady’s kitchen, no doubt attracted by the scent of the stew!

Then we decided on tying her up, but my master soon changed his mind, for she resisted with all the impetus of her vagabond spirit. If we had persisted, she certainly would have bitten us; thus she was allowed to do as she pleased. She often absented herself, then after a few days she would return, rather ashamed of herself, but that feeling was soon forgotten, and she looked out for her next chance. She did not belie her parentage.

December 23*rd.* — M. de Maupassant is working more and more. To-day I see the heap of paper he has used has much increased, I count the leaves, he has covered thirty-seven foolscap pages with writing in one day. I mention this to him, saying it is too much, and that if he tires his brain he will be a victim to headaches.

“No, no,” replies he, smiling, “this does not tire me, I am merely giving an account of a journey, the words come spontaneously, I do not have to seek for them, my memory could furnish them to two pens like mine.”

All this work does not prevent my master from lunching very often at the officer’s club, or else some of them come here.

“Next Thursday,” said he one day, “several of those gentlemen are coming to dinner; I want you to cook a dish of macaroni in the Italian fashion with great care, for you know the manager of the Bank was formerly an Italian Minister. We don’t exactly know, but it is said he killed in various duels several of his countrymen, which fact caused him to

December 25th. — Some richly dressed Jewesses are passing along the Avenue de la Marine; while looking at them my master asked me if the guide had pointed out to me the fat Tunisian woman, one of the celebrities of the place.

“Yes, sir!”

“What a monster it is!” said he, ’tis not even a round ball but a mountain of fat. That is what they admire here. What a curious town it is with its mixture of nationalities and customs!... Later on we will return here for a few months; for I intend to extract an interesting novel from this complicated mass of ingredients. ‘Twill be amusing to write and highly comical....”

January 6th, 1888. — This is the day of our departure. The landlady comes about the inventory. I tell her all we have bought, furniture, kitchen utensils, etc., will become hers.... She blushed slightly, and asked if she would be allowed to thank M. de Maupassant. I introduced her to my master, who bowed very low to this lady, widow of a Spanish officer; she was very beautiful....

For our journey to the station I was helped by two porters, the washerman, and a delegate of the butcher. Having registered the luggage, I kept somewhat in the background with all these people. Master was in the midst of the platform, surrounded with about twenty civilians and military men; many of the officers wished to accompany him to thesmall boat that starts from La Goulette, carrying the passengers on board the transatlantic steamer in the offing....

It is the *Moses* which is to convey us in thirty-six hours to Marseilles. All our luggage is aboard.... My master talks to the captain who is on the bridge. It is six in the evening, we are out at sea, land has disappeared. Besides, it is night, I walk about on deck where my master joins me.

“Those officers and fellow-countrymen,” says he, “who live at Tunis, have shown me tremendous kindness which I fancy may be sincere, still occasionally it seemed to me rather exaggerated; I forgot that you must look at things on all sides, and that being far away from France, we must allow people to be rather expansive. And you know, François, we are on one of the good old boats of the Transatlantic Company. The captain tells me he has every confidence in her, she is almost entirely built of wood and she is a good sea-goer."

We went towards that part of the ship where poor Tahya had been put, according to rule, and where her fellow-creatures were kept. The poor thing is already sea-sick, her beautiful muzzle sinks into the dirt; her tail, her pretty tail which she generally carries so proudly, now droops behind her like a rag. My master speaks to her, she does not even appear to know him; the slough was paying her tribute to the sea.

The passage was anything but a good one, the sea was running high, and our *Moses* did not roll, but already pitched hard. By order every one had to leave the deck.

"François," said my master, "you can go to your berth, I have given my orders to the steward, we shall have all we want, and if you are sea-sick, remain lying down, it is the best thing you can do."

I thanked him, and hardly had I reached the cabin when I found myself in the same condition as poor Tahya.

Once I had landed at Marseilles all my sickness disappeared as if by magic. I could not say as much for poor Tahya, she could not stand on her legs, so, at the *hôtel de Noailles* where we put up, she was the first that needed to be attended to.

CHAPTER X. JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1888

The Zingara transformed into the Bel Ami — A perilous voyage — At Porquerolles — A mysterious apparition — The exile of a Second Empire Cassandra — Strange revelations about the society of the Tuileries — Curious foresight about the catastrophe of the "Year of Terror" — We start for Cannes on board the Bel Ami — Tahya's significant welcome.

WE were most comfortable at the *hôtel de Noailles.* It is true my master has stayed there for many years. He is always served by the same people, and has the same room at the corner looking out on the Cannebière.

It is singular that whenever we stay at this hotel we always meet a Monsignore there — my master notices it.

"Every time we come here," says he with a good-natured smile, "I see violet braid on the carpet."

My master's first thought was for the yacht he had remarked when he passed through in October 1887, and which he had been tempted to buy. The boatmen examined it with him; Raymond, armed with a hatchet, stove in part of the flooring, he went down into the hold and hit the lining of the yacht; it groaned as if it was hurt. Bernard also had gone down; they came up together. My master put a few questions to the keeper of the boat; then we went back to town, following the quay of La Fraternité which is lined with popular restaurants and shops where they sell soup and the famous Marseilles dish, "Bouillabaisse." The quay does not belie its name, it is really "Fraternity" here, those who make up this stirring crowd are on the best of terms; the whole picture would appear original and striking were we not in Marseilles.

As we walked along, the seamen told my master that the yacht was in capital condition and built with the best wood that exists, white Scotch oak.

On January the 18th, at six in the morning, my master, Bernard, Raymond and I, were in the old harbour of Marseilles, and went on board the *Zingara,* which from that day took the name of *Bel Ami.* The weather is uncertain, there is a slight swell.

"That means billows afar," says Bernard. And yet we decide on going to sea. Towards seven a small tug drew the *Bel Ami* in half-an-hour to a point opposite the Chateau d’lf. The hawser was unfastened, we were left to our own resources. The big sail was unfurled, then a jib, and the mizzen sail. That was all, we could no longer spread the standing jib. There was no particular wind, but the ground-swell tossed our poor little vessel about most unmercifully.

“I should prefer a hurricane,” said Bernard, “to this breeze on such a sea.”

Then he began to curse; but the Golfe du Lion apparently did not listen to Bernard, and continued to send us huge waves, sometimes fighting against each other and striking vehemently, as they broke, on the sides and the deck of the *Bel Ami.*

My master was at the helm, and seemed quite collected; I can’t say as much for myself, for though we were very busy in sailing our boat, I was feeling rather cold, probably on account of the heavy sea.

My master noticed it.

“François,” said he, “take a glass of champagne.”

We saw it was useless to try and rise above these enormous waves, and decided to ply between the coast and the islands of Jarre and Rion.

We had just passed the Ile de Maire, and after we had tossed about for an hour, the sea was becoming somewhat calmer, when we fell into a deep fog; we were in complete darkness and hardly moving, as we did not know where we were going, the boat was running through a compact mass of white foam. Towards halfpast ten the fog cleared, we could see the sky. The current was driving us towards the coast, near which there was a good deal of danger. The *Bel Ami* was moving with difficulty. Bernard swore, Raymond cursed, calling on all the gods of the sea, my master was always at the tiller showing the same self-possession.... Raymond stepped into the small boat and took us in tow, plying his oars well. It was necessary to avoid the coast.

Then my master begged Bernard to take the tiller, saying he would go down and rest on the divan. But he gave orders he should be told as soon as we should be nearing Cassis; he wished to take the helm again when we entered that small harbour. We arrived at one o’clock, lunching for the first time on board the *Bel Ami.* I think it was the best meal we ever enjoyed there. Our excursion had given us a tremendous appetite.

In the afternoon my master took a walk that soon made him forget the little annoyances of the morning. He came back, looking as merry as usual.

"What splendid weather!" he exclaimed, "those fields full of yellow flowers, bright with the sunlight, are simply dazzling!"

Next day, in the early morning, the *Bel Ami,* after leaving the narrow channel of Cassis, launched her prow resolutely towards the open sea. The yacht was in good trim, the weather seemed fine, there was a fresh breeze. All went well, that day was perfect for our sailing trip.

At two o'clock the *Bel Ami* was moored in the harbour of the little bay of Porquerolles, and M. de Maupassant, in grey hat and jacket, carrying his alpenstock, went off to explore this unknown comer. Raymond and I set off in search of soft water. I saw some superb cauliflowers in a kitchen-garden on the way, and asked the countrywoman if she would sell me two, which she did very willingly. We returned to the yacht as pleased as if we had made the most unheard-of discovery.

When he came in that evening, my master asked about our walk, and whether we had found some soft water.

"Yes," said Raymond, "and better still, François discovered some splendid cauliflowers, also milk and cream."

I went into the saloon.

"It seems you have brought back some provisions," said my master.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, and I have found an excellent subject for an article. I really am the only man who meets with these surprising events! I went off with the intention of exploring the island; of course I had not the least idea of all I was to learn and see. I had already walked a long way and was about to turn to the right so as to come back, for on the southern slope the paths are difficult, indeed scarcely traced out. Still I thought I should like to see the shore beyond that wild-looking spot. And I went on, taking a narrow path bordered by encroaching bushes.

"I was astonished when in that deserted corner I saw a lady coming towards me! I went on, she advanced also. She was tall, and her dress recalled to me the fashion of 1830; she came nearer and nearer. I asked myself if I was dreaming. When she was quite close to me I stood back among the bushes to allow her to pass, and I bowed to her. She immediately stopped.

"Oh! sir," said she, "I quite understand your astonishment at finding a woman alone in such an isolated spot, and I must tell you I have lived here many years, and you are but the second Parisian whom I have seen! Do not tell me you do not come from Paris! I see it, I feel it, though fashions have altered since the time when I lived in that delightful place!

She said all this without my having uttered a word; she added she would be much pleased if I would tell her my name, which I did.

“Will you kindly come this way?” she added. “We can find a broader road which will take us towards the sea.”

As we were walking side by side she spoke again.

“I am extremely happy to have met you and to know who you are; you will forgive my not revealing my name to you. Besides, it would tell you nothing. What may perhaps interest you is to know the motive for which I have been here for so many years, alone, absolutely alone with my maid, in the midst of this wilderness, before this blue immensity” (she was showing me the sea). “Still I like the ocean; my only amusements come from its eternal variety, the ships that pass and repass.... The sea and the blue sky are my only confidants, I am never tired of admiring the innumerable stars that are reflected in that vast and incomparably beautiful mirror. It is mine, mine only.... I somewhat satisfy with that possession a little of my former vanity. In winter when the sea is high, strange noises are heard; I am accustomed to them, and happily for me, I do not know fear.

“But I have not told you the reason of my presence here. Listen.

“When Napoleon III. reigned over our dear France, I was a great lady and lived in Paris; my connections, those of my family were such as to enable me to see from afar the public calamities that threatened my beloved country. I did my best, seeking to warn the Government; they would not listen to me; I then spoke out, I wrote... I was arrested.... Still I went on, and was condemned to banishment....

“Such, sir, is my story. Napoleon, a very clever man, whatever people may say, had but one fault, he was ill.... However, knowing my love for my country, he consented to my staying here on French ground on one condition, which was, that I should never leave this spot or reveal to anyone my name and position. I gave my word, and must keep it.”

“Then we conversed about the period of the Second Empire. The names that recurred most frequently were those of Ricord the Emperor’s doctor, and Feuillet the writer. She had known Monsieur Thiers and Jules Simon well. I bowed to her most respectfully when I left her. She put her hand out to me, saying: ‘Allow me to shake hands with the celebrated writer, M. de Maupassant,’ and added almost below her breath: ‘If I dared, I would ask if your *Bel Ami* still continues to reap its great success....' She may be fifty-five years of age, and must have been exquisitely pretty; there is still a great deal of character in her face."

On the 21st, at nine o'clock in the morning, we began manoeuvring to leave the harbour of Porquerolles. We had a great deal of trouble, the breeze was too slight, the *Bel Ami's* sails are not ample enough; besides which, they are in a very bad condition. The yacht moved heavily, did not yield, was very difficult to steer, and seemed on the point of touching the rocks bordering that bay.

Then Bernard gave me a boat-hook telling me how to use it. Armed with this heavy perch I was trying as hard as I could to push the boat away without much altering its position; at last a slight wind came to our assistance and the *Bel Ami* went on by its own impetus. My master, of course, was at the tiller, but he said never a word. When we were in difficulties, Bernard bore all the responsibility.

As soon as we had left the harbour we went on towards the open sea. When five miles out, we sailed towards Cannes (which was to be our goal), as well as the wind permitted; tacking about occasionally.

We passed Cap Benat; the Port-Cros and Levant islands; Bernard told us the names of these bays, harbours, islands and capes; he knew all the points of the coast apparently. My master looks at the map, everything is correct. Much flattered by this approbation, Bernard continues naming the capes we are about to pass: Cap Nègre, the Baie de Cavalaire, Cap Lardier, La Tour de Camaret, St Tropez, etc. He also showed us behind the Moorish mountains a rock in the shape of an enormous eagle's beak.

"That," said he, "is an excellent guiding-mark for sailors."

The day and night were not too unpleasant, we really had gone pretty far; on the second day the wind was quite the thing for the *Bel Ami*; on the second night, towards half-past one in the morning, we passed St Raphael, and three-quarters of an hour later we saw afar, and very low down, the tiny light of the pretty bay of Agay.

"Towards half-past four sir," said Raymond, "we shall reach Cannes."

Hardly ten minutes had elapsed when Bernard spoke: —

"That's a bad sign, sir, the breeze is leaving us and a ground-swell is coming on from Genoa."

Bernard went forward, stooped down, got up again, put his hands above his eyes; then he declared the sea was very high out yonder. We had already found that out, the *Bel Ami* was dancing about in fine style.

It was decided that we should re-enter the bay of Agay, and we backed accordingly. I think we were at about a mile from the entrance to this bay, I can't say exactly, because it was very hard work, and at night, the lights can mislead the most practised eye, — anyhow, neither the sailors or my master felt sure of getting into harbour....

Raymond was pluck itself.

"We must bear out to sea!" cried he.

So they manoeuvred again, and the breeze from the gulf was of use to the *Bel Ami* which got a little out at sea, where the wind seemed to die away.

But the billows were surging more and more, they formed huge mountains of water, then made holes into which the boat dropped, till one might think it would never come up again.

"Not a bad boat," said Bernard, "it is never taken unawares, but climbs on to the waves like a lion on the rocks."

About ten we were still worse off, and had a very bad time, we really knew no longer what to do; many ropes and the rigging had given way, there remained only the big sail on the yacht, the perpetual rocking and the surf had detached the fastenings. We repaired all we could, but hardly had we finished on one side than everything gave way on the other. All the ropes securing the large sail were tied to the netting as well as to the foot of the masts. I thought of Tahya at that moment. She had been sent to Cannes, and was quietly lying in a warm railway carriage.

We took some champagne several times, really we needed it; my master drank tea. Though always at the helm, he seemed quite composed. When things were at the worst, he would say a few comforting words to us.

"When at sea," he would add, "one must always be prepared for the unexpected!"

There was an improvement at three in the afternoon, the swell was lower and less jerky, we had made about two miles since two in the morning. Towards four in the afternoon the breeze grew stronger, blowing from the open sea; then there were not enough of us to hoist the sails! We put up all the canvas we could. At seven the *Bel Ami* was anchored in Cannes harbour; next us was the *Ville de Marseilles,* which in future was destined to be often our neighbour.

That evening we went to the apartment Madame de Maupassant had furnished, rather plainly, for herself and my master at the villa.

Tahya was awaiting us at the door as if she knew we were coming, she was most demonstrative towards my master, constantly jumping up to him. But my master went straight to his mother who was in the hall and gave her a sound kiss.

“How are you?” asked he.

“Pretty well, and you, my dear child?”

But Tahya was dissatisfied, she continued to oblige my master to take notice of her, opening a huge mouth and whimpering. Her complaints were both angry and beseeching; occasionally one might have supposed they were produced by some unknown musical instrument or else were the language of the wild inhabitants of the desert, the birthplace of this tender-hearted Tahya.

“Perhaps,” thought I, “she is talking to my master in the dialect she heard when a puppy, away in the sand-desert!”

At last he noticed her, it was but time, she was just on the point of becoming aggressive.

When in my bed all night I felt as if being tossed about, undergoing the same sensation as if I were still on the deck of the yacht.

Next morning my master made an appointment with the Antibes shipbuilder, and it was decided the *Bel Ami* should be refitted with copper, should be strongly ballasted, and that new sails should be immediately ordered from Livton’s, the best English firm. These sails were to be larger, stronger, more developed than the former ones.

CHAPTER XI. FEBRUARY 1888-FEBRUARY 1889

Tahya and Pussy are introduced to each other — Rue Montchanin — A dinner-party at the house of Alexandre Dumas the younger — Mysterious disappearance of an ancient ivory carving, replaced by the portrait of a lady — We return to Cannes — The Bel Ami on the stocks — Noble confession of a writer who "struggles sometimes so as not to think" — Recollections about Flaubert — M. de Maupassant defeats the Duke de Chartres in the battle of flowers — General A — tells of his last charge in 1870 — They were very great ladies... — I go to M. Waldeck Rousseau's house — A duel which does not come off — To Aix-les-Bains — In the mountains, Maupassant resolves to remain a bachelor — An English lord wants to know the site of one of Maupassant's works, and wishes to become acquainted with refined French wit — Old furniture, old friends — François does not understand titles — An aristocratic dinner-party — Philology is mentioned and Madame de Maupassant shows her great learning — Fort comme le Mort is published — Young literary men mob the author — Dolls are given to the writer — A Norman doctor moulded his brain.

TEN days later we returned to Paris, and here at the rue Montchanin all our trunks arrived from Africa, and also Pussy, quite as inquisitive as her mother used to be. Her nose examined all the parcels; she took her time, it was a regular inspection.... My master also has taken note of every thing, nothing has been lost, all is satisfactory. The large Kairouan carpet has been placed in the drawing-room, the others are dispersed in various directions. My master is pleased with their effect, and proud of his purchases....

What a change in the weather! It is snowing, and bitterly cold, which seems even more painful after leaving those sunny lands! Tahya does not want to go out, she has chosen the softest carpet and lies full length on it. Pussy may tease her and jump on her back as much as she likes, it is of no use, she will not stir. My master is with them in the drawing-room seated in his sleigh which I have surrounded with tables, he is looking over the work accomplished during his journey and preparing more.

"This evening," said M. de Maupassant, on February the 2nd, "I am dining with M. Dumas the younger; he has written me a charming letter, almost too amiable. I really think he is desirous of hearing me recount my travels!"

Next morning my master told me about the evening. “ How amusing Dumas is, and how sincere! On the threshold of the drawing-room, he said, addressing his wife: ‘ Go in, my dear, go in, because I intend to kiss Marie in the ante-room.’ Marie is a friend of his; and he did exactly as he said he would.” My master was about to continue, when he abruptly changed the subject.

“I shall give Tahya away — here she is bored to death; where she is going, there is a large courtyard, and there are horses. That will amuse her; she must find it very cold in this country when she goes out, notwithstanding her coat. Ah! I have bought myself a fur pelisse. They will bring it tomorrow, they had to alter it slightly. And pray, François, send my shower-bath apparatus to Cannes. And while I think of it, on Thursday I am giving a dinner of sixteen; cook us a good dinner, let us have some sweetbreads *en caisse* if you can manage it.”

On one of the panels of the drawing-room my master has hung a pretty water-colour of M. Leloir’s, representing people in fancy dresses appearing before the police; on the right, on the same panel, there are ancient miniatures of my master’s ancestors; below is placed an exquisite Louis XV. writing-table, supporting an old-rose China vase, and a beautiful ivory carving, most exquisitely finished. This carving represented the coronation of King Clovis by St Remy in the Cathedral of Reims.

One morning I was astounded, the beautiful carving was replaced by the portrait of a lady: Such was my disappointment that I did not even notice whether she was ugly or pretty! I was no longer to have a chance of admiring this treasure, where every figure was so perfect and stood out so beautifully! The figures were small, but exquisitely finished; a soft patina embellished this triumph of art, and it had probably disappeared for ever! I was really distressed, and so provoked about the lady’s portrait, that I should have enjoyed throwing it out of the window! Luckily, it did not remain there even a day; that evening it was replaced by an old picture in a small frame. My master, generally so outspoken on the subject of his art-treasures, preserved absolute silence about this alteration.

On March the 12*th* M. d’Hubert walked into the drawing-room. He came to plead the cause of the *Gil Bias,* the editor of which wished to publish M. de Maupassant’s next novel. After his departure my master immediately set to work with me to alter arrangements in the dining-room. A red cloth rug, picked out with yellow silk and gold embroidery, was placed on the ground facing the door of the drawingroom. The shopkeeper who sold it stated it had been worn by Henry the Second's charger.

Cannes, April 6th. — We went to Antibes to see how the workmen were getting on with the repairs of the *Bel-Ami.* We found the yacht aground, resting on its keel, supported on each side by great wooden posts. All the lower part, up to the water line, was covered with pretty red copper; above that line she had been scraped, mended, and had already received a coat of painting: the important repairs are finished.

"Inside," says Bernard, " everything is done; but all the openings are shut up to avoid dust. I can't let you see it to-day."

"All right," said my master smiling. "To examine the *Bel-Ami,* we should also have had to climb a ladder, rather high up, too, for the yacht, standing out of the water, looks like a sort of giant."

My master seems pleased his boat can be set afloat again in a week.

"I have received a letter from Livton's firm," said he to Bernard; "the sails will be sent in a few days."

We returned to Cannes on foot from Antibes, by the high road, thus passing before our old dwelling, the " Châlet des Alpes."

"We were not uncomfortable there," said my master, looking at it.

But he now is bent on buying a house at the Golfe Juan, which we reached twenty minutes later. We saw a path leading to a large white château, standing rather far down the valley.

"It is in this direction," says my master.

I beheld, about a thousand yards away, an isolated house, very dismal-looking, almost in a swamp; there were reeds everywhere. I showed my master this detail, stating that it was certainly a very damp neighbourhood, enough to give one fever.

"Certainly not," replied master, "it is too near the sea. And I shall keep a carriage and horse, so as you may fetch the provisions and carry my letters to the post. When the fine weather comes my boat will be moored opposite, with two anchors and solid moorings; there will be no danger.... My mother will come and live with me here; I am sure she will be happy in this isolated spot."

I was very much grieved to see my master keep to this plan, which I thought unsuitable in every way. As we were walking on the road, always rather too quick for me (for my master's step was longer than mine), I felt uneasy, as if I already had a touch of fever. I wanted to find a way of convincing my master this house was not at all what he wanted, particularly if he thought of buying it.

"And why should he? My master already possesses La Guillette, and many other dwellings!"

Still talking we reached a point higher up, above Cannes and the Croisette; further on were the islands, and, lastly, a rose-coloured sun sent its rays on Cap Roux as if it would pour its fire on that mass of red porphyry.

"After all," said I, "this side is much more beautiful; there is a wider perspective than at the extremity of the Golfe Juan— "

"Yes, on this side the prospect is much more attractive, and perhaps you are right. That house we have just seen would be rather far off. But what would you have? We artists, sometimes, do hanker after solitude. I must also confess that when it comes to business we are not always very practical. For instance, when at Marseilles I saw you had given me excellent advice about the sale and purchase of my boats, and particularly for the excursion on board the smaller *Bel-Ami.* Perhaps the explanation is that our mind is occupied by the novel developing in our brain. At least it is so with me, *though I sometimes struggle hard not to think....* Wherever I am, anything I see, as long as it is interesting, becomes for me a subject of study. This fact causes us to be only half ourselves, and we become inferior beings when it is a question of the details of everyday life.

"And yet I do not allow myself to be entirely absorbed, as Flaubert was. Nothing but his work existed for him; his prose and his person formed In the evening, during dinner, my master told his mother about his charming excursion, explaining in detail the qualities of the boat with its new sails, much larger than the former ones, giving the little yacht quite a different sort of motion.

"I really think," said he enthusiastically, "that next year we can cruise about the Moorish coast on this boat thus equipped...."

Villa Continentale, *Cannes*, *April* 1888. — I wondered that day what could be the matter with my master. Twice he asked me if Madame had come in.

"It is past six o'clock," I answered. "Madame will not be much later, for she hates being out in the dark...."

My master walks from the extremity of the anteroom to the farther end of the drawing-room; there is something he wants to tell his mother. At last she comes, and he hardly allows her time to sit down.

“I have had a pleasant day,” says he in a burst of eloquence, “which finished up with a most interesting circumstance. I met General A — , and we walked together towards the Croisette. During that walk he related to me his last charge in 1870, at the head of his squadron. ‘We knew,’ said he, ‘all was lost, and General D — was convinced of the fact, when he exclaimed: “Now for the honour of the army!.. Then the whole squadron, with the same thought, bounded forward, for the honour of the army of France! I cannot describe what I felt when drawing my sword and giving that order! It was a kind of enthusiasm which throws you into a delirious, indescribable state, which gives you an unknown strength of will, superhuman powers.... We flew thus till the shock came!... then the few of us that remained struck at the adversary with positive fury. And when, almost alone, I no longer found anyone before me, I could only say: “What! it is already over!...” It seemed as if the slaughter had only lasted an instant!... Alas, it was over, and the few officers still surviving joined me....’ While telling this the general was deeply moved; all the nerves of his soldier’s soul were as highly strung as the chords of a harp sounding its highest note; and, as if giving again the order to charge, he lifted his hand, pointing to the horizon.... I was thrilled, while hearing him, by the attitude of this brave general; I had understood, and one day I shall manage to describe the effect produced on the soul of a soldier by these deeds on the field of battle.

“We returned towards the Reserve. The Hesperides’ Garden sent up the sweet and delicious perfumes of the large-leaved orange trees, and, in the splendid atmosphere of the dying day, the red setting sun made the gulf blaze like a great lake of blood.”

May 16th. — We have returned to Paris, and given several dinner-parties. One day my master told me he intended giving a tea-party to several great ladies of the smart set, whom, as he was à bachelor, he could not invite to dinner. He would also ask some gentlemen.

“You know nothing about that kind of reception,” added he; “however you will do for the best, and I will tell you what to get.”

At four o’clock, on the 22nd of May, everyone came to the tea-party. I had burnt quite a variety of perfumes. The samovar was calling the guests by the light sound of steam escaping.... I drew aside the hangings separating the drawing-room from the dining-room, and all seated themselves round the table. My master, generally so thoroughly at his ease, seemed rather embarrassed; the fine ladies were already laughing loudly, and two of them, instead of sitting at table, placed themselves on to a beautiful Renaissance coffer near the window. The one nearest it began to play with the tassel of the curtain, making it swing to and fro; her neighbour accompanied her by beating a tattoo with her heels on the sides of the coffer, and both laughed so heartily you could see all their white teeth. The ladies round the table joined in....

They were in a state of merriment I could hardly understand; after all, thought I, notwithstanding their titles, they are but women, and since they have just passed through an ancient door of the Grand Turk's harem turned into a dining-room *portière,* they have perhaps received an electric shock!

At last Princess — and M. Alexander Dumas the younger, the two most important persons of the party, silenced the others, and it was agreed for conversation to be intelligible, that no two people should speak at the same time.

Then M. Dumas cracked a few jokes. Instantly the fun became fast and furious; it was impossible to understand anything. There was again a cry of "Order!" and the Princess then spoke, probably spurred on by something M. Dumas had said; she told a larky anecdote. It was a bachelor's house, why not be merry?...

Several of these ladies seemed unable to sit still; they examined every article in the dining-room; one of them drew attention to the majestic attitude of a Gallic cock on an old Rouen plate. Another insisted on knowing every detail about the harem *portière* which closed the dining-room. But my master, questioned, only laughed....

Great was their delight when they discovered a china elephant with its little ones on the mantelpiece, and a pig, a sow and their progeny. Each lady seized upon a piece of china, turned it over, then held it out at arm's length; they insisted on M. de Maupassant's explaining to them the presence in his house of all these articles.... And my master tried to satisfy them, but he did not succeed in being heard, for they all chattered at once, each requiring her own separate explanation; they surrounded him, crowding close; really he was taken by siege.

The Princess and M. Dumas never ceased laughing; they went into the drawing-room, followed by the swarm —

When Her Highness departed my master said how much he was flattered by the honour of her visit.

“Yes, yes,” said the Princess; “come to me as often as you like, but as to *my* coming here, no! I really should be ill!..

“I laughed to such a degree yesterday,” said my master the next day, while taking his vapour-bath, “that my sides are still aching; I hope to feel better when getting nice and hot!”

Then he talked about M. Alexander Dumas, telling me about his first interview with him; he struck him as being reserved, dry, disinclined to trust anyone, but that did not last long; they understood each other before the end of the conversation.

“From that day he was always charming; he is a first-class writer, and an accomplished man of the world. And how full of fun he is! Again, no one can come up to him in lively anecdotes and witty repartees.”

May 21*st,* 1888. — About six in the evening M. de Maupassant sends me with a note to M. Waldeck Rousseau, apologizing for not being able to go and dine with him. He has an awful headache and cannot get rid of it. He told me when I came back that with fatherly kindness M. Waldeck had often advised him to accept the decoration of the Legion of Honour, but he had always declined.

“Yet,” added he, “one ought to listen to the sensible advice of an eminent man. When I am dining at his house, I am always on the point of telling him that it is his cook who ought to be decorated, she is certainly the very best cook in Paris. I have nowhere met with anything approaching the delicacy of her cooking.”

It is the month of June. M. de Maupassant wishes to take baths at Aix-les-Bains before going to Étretat.

He was dressing one evening to go out to dinner, and told me he was going to fight a duel next day; he seemed as cool as usual, but showed his firm intention of chastising an impudent fellow, “who had dared,” said he, “to allude to a married lady in a newspaper article....”

“They may say what they like,” he declared, “about my writings, but don’t let them dare allude to my private life, for I shall take it up. As I am the offended party, I insist on a duel with pistols at twenty paces, to continue till one of the adversaries be disabled. And, I can assure you, that with a good pistol I shall soon have stroked my opponent’s skin!

“I went this afternoon to Gastine Renette’s shooting-gallery. I shot seventeen times, and sixteen of the bullets caught the dummy in the chest. The attendant then said to me: ‘Sir, you are evidently practising because you are about to fight, but really it is not necessary. If, with your skill, you have a good pistol, well! I pity the man who will stand up against you.'"

My master came home at eleven. I was waiting for him, though he had not told me to do so, always hoping some incident would prevent the duel.... He seemed surprised when he saw me in the diningroom.

"You are there, are you, François? Well, you can go to bed; we have made it up; I am not going to fight...

M. de Maupassant received a charming note from M. Gounod, asking him again (he had already done so when they had met at a friend's house) to write him a piece of poetry he could set to music.

"Perhaps I ought to do so," exclaimed my master, " he is such a splendid composer!"

In our dwelling at Aix-les-Bains, my master and his mother lunch in a small room on the ground floor, fitted up as a dining-room. There is an Empire chest of drawers, with fine brass ornaments, which does duty as a dresser; the sideboard is a Regency console with the beautiful gilding of that period.

The large glass door, which is also the window, remains wide open. My master sits opposite; in front of him is a splendid bed of scarlet geraniums bordered with different-coloured plants, and another bed of roses and shrubs with variegated leaves — white and purple. These flowers picked out with greenery made the garden very gay; one could fancy the little dining-room had been made for this charming frame.

My master seems so happy to be alone with his mother! They talk rather loudly, as is their habit when alone together; each of them is aware the other is extremely intelligent, they trust each other completely; but they love discussion, and almost always finish by being both of the same opinion.

To-day the chief subject of their conversation is the great affection that fills their hearts; they are so happy that I am deeply impressed by it. Maternal love is such a noble feeling! It made me think of my dear mother, whom, alas! I do not see very often, and this touching picture of master with his mother gave me the fond wish of rushing off to see mine, to embrace her, and tell her I should never leave her again!

My master related to his mother his ascent of the *Dent-du-Chat,* in company with one of those dauntless Englishwomen one meets with everywhere.

"As we slipped a good deal," said he, "we had to use our hands as hooks; it was rather amusing...."

Did M. de Maupassant see that I looked somewhat melancholy? Very possibly, for nothing escaped his sharp eye. He asked me if I had already walked up the Renard. I answered that I had not.

"But you must see it," said he. "I am going there this afternoon; if you like to come too, I will take you with me."

"Yes, sir, I will come, but on one condition: that I shall not be obliged to follow you, sir, when the hill becomes very steep."

"Very well, be ready at half-past two, I will put you on the road, then I shall pay a visit to my doctor. During that time, you will have taken a good start ahead of me."

All went well, my master joined me just as I was taking the last turn towards the top of the hill. Then we walked in the direction of Mont Blanc, which we could see before us, as well as other Italian and Swiss mountains.

"We shall return this way," said he, turning to the right, then showing me the site where lay Chamonix, behind great slopes.

"You cannot imagine," he said, "how beautiful this part of Switzerland is when you follow the mountains and the lakes up to Monte Rosa in Italy. I took that journey many years ago, and am acquainted with the whole region. Indeed, it is there that Fate decided about my life, and made a bachelor of me. I made the excursion in the society of a numerous family; she who was to have been my wife was among the tourists, and, how I know not, by some unforeseen circumstance, another woman, a foreigner, slipped in amongst us. That was a deathblow to my intended marriage.... For unfortunately (it is frequently so in this miserable life) the honest woman is often the dupe of the designing one.

... Sometimes I ask myself whether my happiness would not have been ensured by this projected marriage, for I knew the young lady well; she was high-minded, generous, and with broad views, full of information; life at her side would have been agreeable, and she possessed all the qualities which would have enabled her to second me in my work.... But Fate!..."

After a pause my master began to describe to me all the mountains on the other side of the small Bourget lake. He stopped suddenly.

"Now I recollect I must go to Marlioz. I will start now. You had better return home by the same way you came."

This is the last week of our stay at Aix. M. de Maupassant asks if I have been to the Villa des Fleurs.

"No, sir."

"Well, you must go, here are some tickets; now do you take notice of all you see: the women, the gambling, the 'horse-racing game,' the comings and goings of the public, and the whole organization of the establishment."

I thanked him, and retired into the kitchen, whence I heard my master talking to his mother.

"You understand, mother," he was saying, "François, by those few evenings he is about to spend at the Villa des Fleurs, may some day be of use to me, for he has an excellent memory, sees things as they are, and knows how to describe them."

Two days before our departure my master gave his mother's maid some tickets for the Club Theatre. They were playing *François les Bas Bleus*; most of the actors belonged to the Paris Opera Comique; we went, and spent a very pleasant evening.

We are back in Paris; an English nobleman is a guest at my master's table. I must return to the past, to explain his presence.

During 1886 my master was often invited to lunch by a titled lady who lived near the Parc Monceau; he went there again the following spring. His place at table was always reserved for him, but he was very discreet. For, notwithstanding all the kind attentions lavished on him, and which pleased him, he used to tell me that life among the smart people bored him intensely.

It was during one of these luncheons he became acquainted with the nobleman I have mentioned. How he managed to captivate master, I never knew. Anyhow, they became fast friends, and my master invited him to Étretat. He spent ten days there in the summer, with his valet; they lived in a large villa belonging to Madame de Maupassant, much more comfortable than La Guillette.

My master, during the first morning, showed him the beach with its large pebbles, and *Les Aiguilles*. In the afternoon his intimate friends came, and they played bowls. The English nobleman joined in, and played well, only he did not know how to pick the bowls up from the ground, he was tall, and at his age the spine is no longer very supple. Madame R — , always amiable and flexible as a willow, hurried to pick up the bowls, which she gave him, saying quite seriously, and without any attempt at quizzing:

“Here, my lord.”

In the evening, there was a dinner-party at the Verguies, followed by music, and next day an excursion to the Val d’Antifer, and lunch at “La Belle Ernestine’s,” at Saint Joint. Ah, many are the celebrities who went to admire the “Belle Ernestine’s” grandfather clocks of the good old times, when the apples furnished as much brandy as cider!

In the evening they played the handkerchief game.

At first Lord — was somewhat surprised at this game, but he soon understood it; it was much more amusing than the music, always the same that he had been listening to for the last sixty years....

One day M. de Maupassant drove out with Lord — .

“How strange!” I thought. “ No ladies?”

Two days after, as I was giving my master his shower bath, he told me about the drive.

“I went to see the Monastery of Benedictines at Fécamp with Lord — . He wished also to see the *Maison Tellier,* which is situated in reality at Rouen, but I had my reasons for transporting the story to Fécamp. I showed Lord — a house at Fécamp, and he recognized it by the description in my tale... it was very funny...

After ten days of this quiet, wholesome sort of life, during which this nobleman had been entertained by childish games, he was quite transformed. He was obliged to leave, on business, and he would dearly have liked to remain. He loved this circle of people, apparently so simple, but so artistic, so witty and so full of inexhaustible fun!

“It is heaven on earth,” said his valet to me, “I’ve been fifteen years with My Lord, and have never seen him for so long in a good humour!”

But they had to go away.

“It’s lucky for that nobleman that he *is* a Lord,” thought I. “Of course he has been spared on account of the great respect they bear to his title! Still, how is it possible he has spent ten days here without a single trick being played on him!”

Hitherto no such fact had been recorded at La Guillette.

During the following autumn, my master informed me Lord — was coming to dinner with some literary celebrities.

“We shall only be four,” added he; “you will cook but few dishes, but give us good things.”

On the evening for the dinner-party Lord — came in a smoking jacket; he wore an English cravat passed through a gold and diamond ring.... I ushered him into the drawing-room where my master was awaiting him with the two “literary celebrities,” in reality the two very handsome ladies who had dined a few years previously with the Condorcet school-boy.

Of course I did not see the face of the Englishman at that moment, but at table, he was most courteous, and the dinner was very gay. The two ladies, who had belonged to the stage, and now were occupied with literature, knew England very well, and, helped by their natural flow of language, and their choice expressions from the Parisian stage, could describe excellently the beauties of the British Isles and the qualities of the inhabitants.

When Lord — took his leave, his shaven face showed how much he had enjoyed the grace and charm of French literature!

November 12*th*. — Here we are at Cannes. On the 14th, we were advised of the arrival of furniture coming from one of Madame de Maupassant’s villas; her son had had it packed at Étretat. I went to fetch it at the Rocca station, and had it taken to a villa, quite close to ours, where an apartment is being prepared for Madame.

Then my master took into his bachelor abode several old pieces of furniture belonging to Madame. Some are beautiful: an Empire bedstead with finely chiselled brass ornaments, a Louis the Sixteenth table which he uses as his bureau, then a tiny writing desk of the same period, only five feet high and a foot and a half broad; it is composed of small secret drawers. Sometimes my master opens it and writes his letters on it. He has also a chiffonier with many drawers, containing cravats, gloves, etc., in great order.

A clock with green marble columns is placed on the mantel-piece; it is of the seventeenth century and is of great beauty, the shape is very elegant. I must also mention a Dutch chest, a Norman cupboard, and a few fancy articles; luckily the flat is spacious, for really we have enough to furnish it with.

Before settling where these things are to remain, my master frequently alters their position, the smaller pieces of furniture, in which he has classed his letters, his newspapers and his books, are moveable, but that gigantic Dutch chest is awfully heavy. Never mind, it must dance about like the others! It is such fun for my master! That morning, as we were very hard at work, he told me what he should prefer.

“If I were rich,” said he, “I should have a large house in a pretty but retired spot; I would fill it with all kinds of pretty things, of rare articles that would please me; I should never be tired of looking at them. My ideal would be to live in perfect quiet, to spend my days contemplating things that please me, far from that worldly turmoil that tires me so, that I am obliged to follow, and which I loathe.”

The next day, I rubbed all this furniture with a solution of sublimate so as to destroy an almost invisible insect that gnawed it; after which wax and a brush had their turn.

Fort comme la Mort gets on well; it is to be finished on January 15th, so as to appear in a newspaper; and in the spring, it is to be published in book form. My master says he is sure it will succeed; still Madame is dissatisfied with the ending.

End of December. — The *Bel Ami* is in Cannes harbour; my master often goes for a sail.

There are already many visitors at Cannes, and always numerous Princes and Princesses. Yesterday a Duke came to see us. I did not know this man.... I received him politely, but treated him like everybody else.... In the evening, when I gave my master his card, he asked me how I had addressed him. “Of course, I said ‘Sir.’...”

Then he told me in future to call him “Monseigneur “ and to address in the same way all the Dukes and Princes. I promised to do what I could to obey his injunctions, and I was quite sincere. But my unfortunate disposition was rebellious; to me, all these grand people were merely “sir” and “madame,” and I had to take care to manage to articulate: “Monseigneur.” I always made a slip of the tongue, notwithstanding my good intentions.

It is the first of the year. My master dines out again at a Princess’s.... His mother dines at home with a friend. Their conversation turns on the small value of titles. I took advantage of the circumstance to tell Madame how badly educated I was on this point, and of my awkwardness, confessing to her that though I had tried my best, still I made mistakes, on the yacht and at home. Madame thinks I shall manage better, since I do try. She finished by saying that she understood me, though she did not approve of me, and perhaps might do the same.... The ladies were much amused by some anecdotes on titles which I told them.

On January the 22nd. — My master gave a large dinner-party, inviting the aristocratic society residing at Cannes. The ladies are much more numerous than the men. Madame de Maupassant was present as well as a very intelligent little lady, the same one that had acted as a somnambulist and predicted the future to some great ladies at a party master gave at Étretat.

The dinner is already far advanced; all these ladies, who at their own houses, scarcely eat a morsel, here show excellent appetites; they honoured every dish with their attention, not one escaped. My master noticed it, and I read on his face great satisfaction and a certain pride. Here the cookery is not that of a professional, but great care is taken; no routine, but new attempts which succeed happily, and my master is pleased, not only for himself, but above all for his guests. They hardly ever leave without praising the good things they have enjoyed.

All the ladies were acquainted with each other, excepting the intelligent little lady, who belongs to a lower set. She speaks but little, noticing everything. She does not lose a gesture of these great ladies, she listens to them, with undisguised attention; the conversation is commonplace, still literature is alluded to. No one dares say much on this subject, probably on account of the presence of an author. This is a mistake, as my master is never jealous of praise bestowed on a brother-writer; indeed, he is always pleased to hear people speak well of other men’s work.

One of the gentlemen told the tale of what happened during a cruise on the coast of Greece. All the passengers landed so as to go shooting in a picturesque green wood, expecting to find game of a kind they were perhaps unacquainted with. Hardly had they walked for a few minutes in untrodden paths, when they perceived they were followed, then surrounded by men in tatters, who looked like savages who might be difficult to deal with. They were bandits who did not disguise their intentions; if the travellers did not give up money and valuables, they would be fired at!

“We might,” said the story-teller, “have tried to resist, since we were armed; but we thought it wiser to submit, and empty our purses in the hands of those robbers, instead of proceeding to extremities which might have been dangerous. But how relieved we were to get back on board our vessel! We were cured of the idea of landing.”

My master listened most attentively, since he fully intended cruising about the coasts of Morocco on his *Bel Ami.*

Greece had been alluded to; one of the great ladies, who had some knowledge of dead languages, turned the conversation on to that subject. She little thought she was seated next a lady (Madame de Maupassant) who was a complete mistress of those tongues. There was a discussion on the formation of some French words of Latin origin, with Greek roots. But the great lady did not go very far, as Madame de Maupassant gave her the dates, the author's names, and told of the documents on which the changes of these words from one language to the other, had been inscribed, with such precision that everyone was surprised.

It would have taken all the knowledge of the most celebrated professor to give a lesson to Madame de Maupassant, who, without appearing to attach any importance to such things, knew all about languages; she spoke them with such consummate ease, she might just as well have been born on the shores of the Thames, as on those of the Tiber.

She was well known among the great polyglot professors, and none of those who came to the Riviera failed to pay a visit to Madame de Maupassant. She loved seclusion and quiet, and only mingled with society just as much as was necessary to please her son; but she received learned men, scholars, men of letters with the greatest delight.

One day, when I announced to her the arrival of an English couple: Dr X — and his wife, her enthusiasm knew no bounds. She hastened to smooth her white hair with a tiny comb, and without taking her dressing-gown off, rushed to meet her friends, who were both most learned people. Conversation began briskly, there were none of the usual polite commonplace sentences, and from two till seven in the evening, it was a dialogue of lecturers, only stopping for Mrs X — to take her tea, and the Doctor his glasses of water. During the afternoon he absorbed the contents of three water-bottles. Madame de Maupassant, who does not drink, told me laughing, that she observed this feat, without a draught, like a certain animal when crossing the desert.

In the evening, at dinner, Madame, still under the influence of this charming day, recounted to her son all she could recollect of the delightful conversation. She bent towards him, as if thus she could the better make him understand; her attitude is exactly that of a mother speaking to her child, her voice occasionally scans the words, and her intonation is louder or softer according to what she says. One feels her heart is in it; the mother and the professor united in one, speak to my master. He listens scrupulously, uttering occasionally a word or two, for he knows that on a day like this, it is not for him to speak, and that he has a great deal more to gain by listening.

My master has suffered from headaches; during several nights he has been unable to sleep; which has allowed him to find out that in the passage extending from one end to the other of the flat above ours, someone walks day and night, without stopping for one single instant. That apartment is occupied by three Englishwomen; my master supposes they have taken a vow to some British saint, and that to keep this vow, one of them must always be walking. For several days we paid special attention, but we never could catch them, for they never stopped; evidently they were descendants of the Wandering Jew.

End of January. — M. de Maupassant has finished his novel; now he gives himself up to taking the ladies for a sail on his yacht. One day he took them to lunch at a little inn at Agay. I was not of the party.

“François,” said my master a few days afterwards; “you must come on board this afternoon to serve tea, because Bernard often has to attend to the boat.” There were a good many guests, I only appeared on deck to serve tea, cakes and the simple glass of sugared water. However, towards evening I put my head out of the trap which was in reality the kitchen door, because it seemed to me it was time to return home and that we should have no breeze. Hardly had I taken up this position, rather akin to that of a man about to be guillotined since I was up to my throat in this species of circular hole, when I was hit in the face by a wave, which knocked my head against the edge of the trap door.

At the same time, I heard shrieks proceeding from the deck; this tremendous billow had covered the boat, inundating all the ladies. Their dresses, which were most expensive, were completely spoilt, all the napkins and handkerchiefs on board were taken to try and repair the disaster, which of course was only increased, because the more we rubbed, the more the colours got mixed up. Nothing could be done; all was lost. No one could explain why the sea acted so treacherously, just at the moment when Bernard was at the helm. The order to return home was given immediately.

Later on, the inundation was explained. It was time to get home, but on account of the wish expressed by one of the ladies, we were still going out to sea, so Bernard, with a view of getting my master to return to Cannes, allowed the deck of the *Bel Ami* to be well soused in three feet of water. He swore he had been quite surprised by the event; people thought what they liked, I certainly can safely say it is the only time such an accident befel him.

My master rose later than usual the day after the sail. While I served his tea, he seemed to me but half awake, as if he had not got over the submersion by that wave. While walking to and fro in the drawing-room, he told me he still failed to understand Bernard’s mistake.

“Did you look at the Princess,” added he, “while she lay on the deck? She took up half the length of the *Bel Ami*.... I like the mind of the Princess, merry, subtle, with occasionally magnificent flights of imagination. Some day I will tell you her story. This morning, I remained in bed an hour later than usual, I was making out the tale I shall write to-day.”

We are at the beginning of March, vegetation is already far advanced, the gardens are full of flowers of all kinds, the balconies also are lined with them, and the atmosphere is one perfume. Some of the walls, on the road to Frèjus, are hung with roses and different flowery creepers. It is an enchanting sight; there are spots where one might suppose triumphal arches had been built for the reception of some prince-Charming who intended to reside in the midst of these immense beds of flowers and greenery.

One day, as M. de Maupassant was taking a walk in that direction, he resolved to invite his friends for a sail on the *Bel Ami* to St Honorât, where, said he, vegetation must be very far advanced.

Two days after, towards two in the afternoon, in very fine weather, the *Bel Ami* with every sail spread, was cruising to the Iles de Lerins. My master kindly took me with him. We returned quietly, there was no animation. In the evening my master described to his mother the magnificent view to be seen from the promontory, and the ladies’ enthusiasm, but he remained silent about his visit to the cloisters....

M. Riou, the painter, came to spend the day on board the *Bel Ami.* Madame de Maupassant consented to accompany her son during this excursion. My master is delighted, he is very fond of M. Riou and appreciates his talent; he wants to ask him to paint a picture of the *Bel Ami.*

“Riou is a master,” said M. de Maupassant to me during dinner, “ *The Arrival of Napoleon III. in Egypt* and *The Inauguration of the Suez Canal* are two of his pictures.... He is a very great artist!”

March 10*th.* — We have returned to Paris. On the 16th *Fort Comme la Mort* will be published. All goes well; my master is satisfied, he thinks that as it is spring there will be a good sale of the novel on the book stalls, and his new publisher has a more extensive connection than the old one had.

On the day of publication, my master goes to the publishers to sign the dedications on the copies he gives his friends.

“There are a considerable number,” he says, “and a great variety of dedications. I like to accomplish all that on the spot, and also to send the volumes directly from the publisher’s, excepting for some of my intimate friends, who will get choice copies, on Dutch or Japanese paper.”

The publication of this novel was a triumph for my master, but brought him such a large amount of young writers’ visits that at last he began to complain.

“But they tire me to death! I want the mornings for my work, and really they are becoming too numerous! Henceforth, I will only receive them by appointment. Of course I like to be of use to them; but very often, what I tell them does no good. Now, that young fellow who has just left me; it is a waste of time to give him good advice: he is so dissipated. He never thinks about his work, and yet imagines he will become a novel-writer! It is impossible, impossible! You understand, in order to write a novel, you must think of it constantly, all the characters must be in their proper places, everything must be settled before you begin writing the first pages, otherwise you must begin every day all over again. Then there is a muddle, from which you can never come out successfully. It is not the work of one day, even for a practised writer, let alone for a beginner.”

One day a messenger brought a large parcel for M. de Maupassant. It was most carefully packed, with a strict recommendation to give it “specially to him.” The man wished to wait, but as I gave him a good gratuity, he did not insist, and went off. Luckily for him; as my master only came in at eight for dinner. We unpacked the parcel, first there was a stout paper, then stiff wooden boards and a series of tiny boxes, each containing a beautiful little doll about four inches high. There were twenty-four in all. Six were dressed like smart ladies with long trains; six others as nuns, all in black with white coifs; they were less attractive in their black drapery than the smart ladies, and they looked quite austere; six wore the Dominican religious habit, which is entirely white; they were really charming; the last half-dozen were widows, dressed in crape with long veils.

They were all placed in a line on the dining-room table, and my master sat down to his meal. Inquisitive Pussy wanted to jump on to the table, so as to inspect these playthings, but we were afraid she would hit them with her paw.

As to Jacquot, the parrot, when he saw the pretty decoration formed by these exquisite little dolls, he left his perch to come and examine them quite closely, curiosity being one of his attributes. My master allowed him to remain a short time on the table. He was a most amusing parrot, he turned to the right, then to the left, talking away all the time; then he said to Mother: ‘You see, madame, I have made him a head round as an apple, which, be sure, will later on give him a most active brain, and intelligence of first-class order.’

“He did the same with my poor brother, but whether the six years between us had weakened the doctor’s hands, or whether he was not in such good form, he never succeeded in giving that small head the shape he wished. It slipped, constantly escaping him, and he was so provoked he actually swore in a big Norman oath!... Sometimes I ask myself if really it is on account of the doctor’s massage of my young brain that I now can accomplish with such ease so much more than the average quantity of work.”

CHAPTER XII. APRIL-AUGUST 1889

At Poissy — François has known Flaubert — Madame Bovary in the pantry — Zola and de Maupassant — The Rougon-Macquarts judged by, a truthful man-servant — Pot Bouille is an unfair accusation — A parallel drawn by Maupassant between Zola and Flaubert — Arabian dances rue Montchanin — Sojourn at Triel — A meal at the restaurant — Maupassant tells of his struggle against ferocious dogs — Saving a woman's life in the night — The engineer's wife — Why not have a medal? — Passing before Médan — Messrs Zola and H. Pessard lunch at our house — Super-nourishment ordered by Dr Grubby — Merry excursion on a steamer — A dinner-party on the water — A page of the Decameron — We return to Étretat — Notre Cœur — Symptoms of over-fatigue — Fear of spiders.

PARIS, end of April 1889 — This year, the sun shines brilliantly in Paris. Yesterday my master suffered from headache, and to-day, his eyes are red. He does not complain, he can stand pain, he only takes a little ether or antipyrine to combat these awful headaches. What he does regret, is being unable to work for days, for he needs complete rest after these attacks. Then I prepare very light food for him; his digestion, says he, is troubling him much. Perhaps his nerves cause all this suffering.

He does not like his apartment, the incessant noise of vehicles passing over the stone pavement tires him. It looks out on a bit of waste land, bathed in the sun, but enclosed within boards painted black. This view seems to him a nonsensical kind of thing that ought not to exist. So as to hide this sunny horror, my master puts up some green cloth blinds. They may be good for the sight! but they make the apartment so dark, so depressing! I am obliged to grope about to find anything that may be wanted, and I am always afraid of breaking some article!... My master is so bored in this house that he decides on taking up boating again.

"To-morrow, François," says he, "I shall take you to Poissy where I have sent my boats; for at Chatou, I could not stand the neighbourhood, packed with adventuresses. I am sorry for Alphonse and Madame Papillon, who have always been so nice to me, and who took such care of my boats. You must become acquainted with the landlord of the *Hotel de l'Esturgeon,* and also with the keeper of my boats."

He rang me up at eight in the morning.

“Are you ready, François?” said he, “for we must catch the first train, so as to reach the hotel in time for lunch.”

And we started.... As soon as my master arrived at Poissy, he called on the keeper of his boats, begging him to come immediately and see what would have to be done, so as to have everything ready in a fortnight. He ordered lunch when we passed before the hotel.

My master when at the dock gave lengthy directions to the keeper, then sent me to fetch a shipwright who would see to painting the boats. Everything being settled, we went in for lunch.

“Really,” said he, “I did well to take you with me, those people are not very intelligent; and you or I shall have to come here, occasionally...

He consulted his railway-guide immediately after lunch.

“Now we have no direct train,” said he, “and I can’t do my boating, nothing is ready.... Well, I will run off to Villennes; if you like to accompany me, you will learn to know the country-side, which will be useful, should you have to go there later on.”

We start; we pass the avenues which from Poissy, skirt the river, we find ourselves in small meadows planted with clusters of trees; on the left, beyond the railway, we suddenly see a white château in a beautiful situation. Here, we take a most picturesque path; my master walks in front, as there is only room for one person at a time.

“How beautiful,” he exclaims, “is Nature in full bloom!”

The path, running along a slope covered with grass and mosses, was wonderfully pretty; in the fields, on the hills, the cherry-trees were all in blossom; to the right, gigantic brambles were climbing up the trees; along the Seine, tall poplars sent their tops towards the sky.... When we reached a spot where the path became wider, we found another descending towards the Seine; my master stopped, and turned towards the underwood.

“This opening,” said he, “recalls Flaubert to my mind.... By the by, François, don’t let me forget that next Thursday our committee for the monument to Flaubert meets at Rouen. It is written down in my pocket-book, but two heads are better than one. Did not you tell me you had known him?...”

“Yes, sir, I had the great honour to wait at table on M. Flaubert, in 1876 and 1877 at Madame de T— ‘s, whose house, in the rue Murillo, adjoined that of M. Flaubert. My recollections are the more distinct because of my extreme surprise when the butler, showing me M. Flaubert, spoke as follows: —

"' You see that gentleman? He is always to be served first, even before the ladies.'

"He sat on the right of the mistress of the house; on the left was Claudius Popelin.

"'This is done,' continued the butler, ' because that gentleman is a most distinguished genius, and a most remarkable writer. I will lend you one of his books; you will thus be able to judge for yourself.'

"And he lent me *Madame Bovary*, which I read first by myself. The book made a tremendous impression on me; it seemed to me so striking, so true to life, that during several evenings I read it aloud in the kitchen to the servants. There were discussions between the maids on the subject of Madame Bovary's first ride with her landed neighbour, and they were still more excited when I read them the passage where one morning Madame Bovary, returning from the château, has a struggle before the hut with the poacher.

"'If I had been Madame Bovary,' said the English maid, 'I should have gone into the hut, pretended I was fond of him, turned his head, got hold of his gun, and killed him! Then he could not have told the country-people he had seen me coming back from the château!'

"As far as I am concerned, sir, I must confess that for a long time I used to dream about the apothecary. From the kitchen window, one could see right into M. Flaubert's dining-room. After I had read *Madame Bovary* aloud, this window was always occupied by one or two of the maids, trying to see the author of the splendid book. One would say: 'I have seen a corner of his dressing-gown,' another: 'I have just caught sight of his bald head.' A third would add, ' I have seen his long locks of hair falling on to his back.'"

My master listened to my gossip, quite happy to hear me, in my simple language, talking of M. Flaubert, whom he was so fond of.... We were just beneath the celebrated Sophora-tree of Villennes; a restaurant and all kinds of games have been established under its gigantic branches. My master offered me refreshments, but I declined them.

"Come here," said he, "we will cross the railway and I will show you the wharf in case we should have to make use of it some day...."

From the wharf, he showed me the Triel bridge in the distance.

After recrossing the railway, and turning to the right, we followed a path skirting an old church halfconcealed by budding foliage, then we reached the high road on the top of the hill. There, the panorama was magnificent.

M. de Maupassant stopped to contemplate it.

"See, François," said he, "how grand is that splendid view! And that immense plain! Opposite stands the forest of St Germains; more to the left the chain of Cheverchemont; lower down Triel and Vaux; Meulan; in the valley Mantes-la-Jolie, towards which flows the lovely river, beautified by all the islands. You must also know this road takes you to Médan, to M. Zola's house. Probably I shall have to send you there. Now, on this side, we shall pass through the woods, I know them well, we shall not be lost, don't fear.... That Zola is a first-class writer.... Have you read any of his books?"

"Yes, sir, but not many, only the *Rougon-Macquart* series."

"Well?"

"Sir, I don't know what to say, it is literature, which, of course, I do not understand...

"But you know well how to cook," says my master, "one can't know everything. Still, you did read the *Rougon-Macquart* series?"

"Yes, sir; and since you really wish to know what I think of those books, I will tell you. M. Zola exaggerates terribly when talking about servants; he puts all sorts of horrors in the mouths of the maids; in *Pot-Bouille*, he makes them scream the nastiest expressions out of the courtyard windows. I repeat, sir, all this is exaggerated. Twenty-five years have I been a servant, and I have never heard speeches bordering in any way on those M. Zola puts into the mouths of his characters. Then that fellow Trublot, I dare say such people exist, but they are exceedingly rare — I don't say maids and cooks have not their feelings, like other women.... No, but to state they are all of them ready to hide Trublots in their kitchens, while awaiting the instant when they can lead them up to their garrets, no, sir, no!

"M. Zola sought his documents on the very lowest rung of the ladder; I wonder where he got them. It is not fair to attack defenceless beings, who are often very interesting. How many times during the day does a poor maid-servant trample on her own self-respect, so as to keep her place and remain an honest girl! And that, so as at the end of the month, she may pocket thirty francs, out of which she buys what she cannot do without, sending the rest to her old father and mother, who still are obliged to support young children and are often helpless on account of their infirmities!

"I should have thought it more praiseworthy if M. Zola had set forth the honesty, the devotion of servants, the trials they have to go through; for in most of the houses where they go to service, they must possess no individuality, they must efface themselves; if humiliated, they must not show it. We often work very hard, without consolation or encouragement, for we are separated from our relations; these and many other details might have been a better subject for the studies of M. Zola, and would have been more truthful than the disgusting events he tells about, and which he has certainly invented, since he never could have seen what he describes. It does not exist, and I am not alone in thinking a man's thoughts must be evil and unwholesome when his brain creates those loathsome things which, I repeat it, have never existed."

I was terribly excited; M. de Maupassant smiled, occasionally shaking his head, and striking the ground with his cane.

"Pray, François," he said at last, "do believe that Zola did not wish to attack those honest girls you talk about. He only wished to show the bad side of that class of society. His work is good, but, as he always does, he goes in for a striking effect so as to ensure a good sale. If he had written in the sense you advocate, he would not have sold a single volume, whereas owing to what he did do, all the depraved people will rush after his books, like dogs on their quarry; and money, all that he cares for, will simply pour down on him. That is, I think, a mistake, for when an artist does his best, he ought to think only of his work, and be absolutely disinterested.

"Now, look at Flaubert, whom we were speaking of, he is the one who knew the best how to make the French language yield all its grace and harmony. What patience he had, how disinterested he was! Like so many others, he might have published novels and earned an income thereby; he preferred following his artistic vocation and shutting himself up for fifteen years, so as to write *Salammbô*!

"Later on, in a hundred years, after two centuries, perhaps, when Society will have undergone frightful convulsions, when the true Republic shall have found its path, when first-class artists and authors shall have sprung from the new and wiser generations, be sure that most of the writers of this century will be forgotten, while the beauteous work of Flaubert will shine all the more. All intelligent people will want to read it, because they will understand all they can gather from such a noble, such a powerful masterpiece!"

My master pronounced these last words in a most emphatic tone; by his gesture, he seemed to launch them forth into space....

We had walked through the wood, a village and a large part of the plain; my master consulted his watch.

"It is 4-25 o'clock," said he, "we have still thirty minutes for our walk to the station, which is about two miles and a half distant. It can be done — François, let us be off."

And, holding his cane in his right hand, he started at his best pace.

When we reached the station, we walked about, so as not to take cold, for, of course, we were rather heated. My master showed me a house entirely covered by wisteria and ivy.

"That," said he, "is where the great painter, M. Meissonnier, lives all the summer...."

Rue Montchanin, April 25th 1889, *nine in the morning.* — M. de Maupassant is standing by the mantel-piece in his room. He is building up piles of gold coins.

"You see, I won all this last night. It is a pretty sum, but I do not intend to keep a penny of it. This afternoon, I shall go to the Charitable Board. I do not know why those society people oblige me to play.

Yesterday, we all met at my friend X— 's, you know, the barrister who lunched here with me last year. The ladies were in a majority that evening. As they begged me to play, I had to consent; however, I told them they were wrong, since most of their savings would go to the poor....

"I do not understand the aversion I feel for gambling, since I love witty games and all that has to do with any physical exercise...

In the first days of May 1889, my master invited to the rue Montchanin an Arabian company, fresh from Algiers, and about to perform at the Exhibition. He seized this opportunity of offering some chosen friends the first fruits of the skill of these very original African artists.

One of the women, when she came in, threw herself into my arms, saying most amiable things.

"Oh! I recollect you well," she said. "You came to Algiers, I know you, oh, yes, yes!"

And she went on kissing me, which embarrassed me extremely, while my master laughed most heartily.

“Very likely madame did see you at Algiers,” he said, “since you have been there.”

Encouraged by these words, the young lady would not let me go. I must say she was very pretty with her dark, rounded face, her velvety eyes. But certainly when she pressed me to her hot bosom, decorated with a sequin necklace making a metallic noise at her every movement, I thought her anything but attractive. There were twelve women and four men, besides their impresario.

They seemed quite embarrassed in the drawingroom, wheeling about, tripping themselves up in the carpets and in their dresses, which are very long in front as well as behind, and so ample one might have supposed they wore crinolines. When the presentations were finished, their guide made them sit down in a circle, and they began their musical boom-booming, chaunting and screaming. When the first piece was over, they were sent into the dining-room to partake of champagne and cakes.

This good French wine was offered them as being a special beverage made up for them, since Mahomet forbade their tasting wine, and they would not disobey him. After each dance or piece of music, they were always refreshed by a glass or two of champagne.

Now, they all, even the old ones, wished to execute the *danse du ventre*. It became a species of demoniacal revel, each vied with the other in producing the most extraordinary contortions. It really was not interesting, we were too close; the actors were having much more fun than the spectators. My master, accompanied by one of his guests, would leave the drawing-room, and walk through his room to the conservatory, his hands in his pockets, just as he does when he walks alone about the apartment, struggling to put into shape a sentence he is not satisfied with.

The leader did all he could to re-establish order among his people. Some of the ladies are on the divans and the settees, leaning on the cushions; others are on the ground, seated on the white bearskin or on the carpets. The musicians try to tune their instruments, indeed they succeed in playing a last piece. But, oh, what jarring sounds! Everyone played as he pleased, I can’t describe the curious effect of all those people in different costumes, tossing about in a most unruly way; it was like a meeting of animated dolls. The last time they had refreshments, I only gave them orangeade. At last, they had to take leave. The guide, when it came to organising the departure, was obliged to show great resolution. It was a long affair, there was always someone who was not ready, for all had lost some important part of their costume. Of course, my little dancing-girl made a point of saying good-bye to me, for she persisted in taking me for a guest, because I wore a tail-coat and a white cravat!

There were four carriages at the door; the Arabs soon clambered in. I do not know if the guide made a mistake, or whether I misunderstood the directions given me, but the eight persons who ought to have gone to No. 52 boulevard La Tour-Maubourg, were taken to 72 boulevard Voltaire, while those who ought to have slept in this last house were stranded at La Tour-Maubourg.

They only found out the next morning that there had been a mistake.

At the end of May, M. de Maupassant took me one day to Triel, in order to choose a villa for the summer. My master wished to leave Paris, without going too far away, in case he might wish to see the Exhibition.

My master found what he wanted at the farther end of Triel, near Vaux. The villa, buried among trees, faces the Seine; one of the sides of the house skirts the towing path.

On our way back we followed the river up to the bridge joining Triel to Vemouillet, where the station is. My master did not want to return immediately to Paris, he was fascinated by the view of the river-side, already clothed with flowers. He chose one of those arbours of the restaurant whence you can see the perspective of the river, and they brought us our lunch there....

M. de Maupassant was seated, looking towards the bridge; he could follow with his eye the course of the Seine, as far as the Isles of Meulan. On the opposite side, fine trees were grouped, casting their high reflections over the running water, on which they threw large dark shadows.

My master looked at all these details with the deepest attention; he seemed to scent them from afar, for I could see his nostrils quivering, and his frown showed how deeply he concentrated his powers of observation. He was entirely absorbed by his contemplation of the landscape. There was a slight smile on his lips.... He thought of nothing but the beautiful scenery; he was evidently trying to stamp on his brain the unalterable impression of the delightful sensations he now felt. His face, so placid, so serene, gave me the idea of absolute contentment....

Yet, in the full light of day, that face showed traces of fatigue; but its intelligent expression made one forget everything else....

M. de Maupassant, when ordering lunch, told the servant she must give him good fare.

“I shall drink St Galmier mineral water; and you, François, must choose what you prefer.”

The girl departed.

“I have always,” said he, “a better trust in these popular restaurants, when women see to the service.” Then he told me a few anecdotes about the period when he took to boating as a regular pastime.

“One day,” said he, “I had started from Croissy to Paris, with the intention of rowing part of the night. But when I reached a place called La Folie, beyond Carrières — St Denis, where the railway from Paris to Maison Lafitte crosses the Seine, I broke one of my oars. Then, I moored the yawl to the shore, and started to walk to Paris. I reached Bezons, always following the Seine, when suddenly an enormous dog, on guard before a warehouse, rushed out at me. I hadn’t a single weapon about me, not even a cane. I was wearing ducks and a jersey! I thought the fight would be quite unequal, and threw myself into the river, so as to swim across it. The dog followed me, but he did not catch me because I dodged him, as I am a good swimmer. I obliged him to go up stream, which was too much for him, and that saved me. Next morning, as I went to fetch my boat, I called on the dog’s master to tell him that if the same thing occurred again, I should shoot the animal with my revolver. He cut up rough, saying that I should then have to fight *him*; I left him, telling him that if obliged, I should certainly shoot the dog, and that if *he* appeared, I would stand up against him with the greatest satisfaction. I confess I should have been pleased if the worst had happened, I would have thrashed that brute in a way he would have recollected. I am afraid of no man. I can beat the strongest, nine times out of ten, by my great agility.”

My master was brimful of recollections.

“I have never told you,” added he, “what happened to me one evening at Étretat? I don’t recollect the hour, but the sky was clouded, and you know that in the valley, between the two hills, night is always more opaque. I was coming to the garden hedge without perceiving anything unusual, when, close to the hazel trees, a powerful dog suddenly rushed at my throat. He attacked me so violently that I nearly fell backwards. I had hardly recovered my balance when he sprang on me a second time. Then, I seized his throat with my left hand and put my right arm round his neck, so as to hold him down, and strangle him if I were strong enough. He was in a bad plight and he knew it, for he made a tremendous effort to cast me off, and, locked together, we both rolled into the ditch which skirts the high road. I was uppermost, he was almost on his back and in a towering rage: his body quivered, and he snarled most frightfully. I was quite cool, and was about to put my knee on his throat, when, as chance would have it, I found, under my right hand, a large jagged stone. Without stopping to think, I seized it and plunged it between his jaws, forcing it as far down his throat as I knew how. I understood in an instant I had overpowered the creature, his body hardly moved. I took my hand out of his mouth, leaving the stone, and got up, with a thousand precautions. I ran to fetch my stick I had let fall on the path so as to knock the animal on the head and finish him. But the struggle was over, I heard the dog flying away amid the corn in the next field, and there was no more growling. I was astounded.

"My clothes were done for; my hands bleeding. I bathed them well in coal-tar soap, wetted some linen with the composition, and kept them wrapped up all night. The next morning I saw the bites were not deep. But you may imagine my surprise, when, on opening my door, I beheld the dog lying on the mat! He saw me, got up, and came crouching towards me as if asking my forgiveness. I showed him my wounded hands; he licked them most tenderly; then I gave him some milk to drink, so as to heal his wounded throat. He drank — I coaxed him, and then he ran away. And during two or three seasons, without excepting a single day, I found that dog at my door, no matter at what hour I came down.

"One day, Cramoyson wanted to drive him away; I begged him not to do so. The poor animal could not tell me the reason for which he had attacked me, but I was really touched by his daily visit, and since it pleased him to come to me, I would not allow him to be driven away. We had become the best friends in the world, our first encounter had been stormy, indeed frightful, but it was forgotten. We were both of opinion it had been a mistake; we were meant to be friends, not enemies. I learnt afterwards that the animal belonged to the manager of 'Old England,' who occupied a villa at Étretat."

Lunch was nearly over. The sweets were on the table, and a rice cake.

"Do you know, François," said my master, "water brings out the flavour of sweets?"

Then he made the servant bring me a clean glass, and poured me out some of his mineral water. I must say, it gave the cake a better taste.

While eating, my master let his smoked glasses fall, the better, no doubt, to see the Seine, which he was never tired of contemplating.

“Ah!” said he, “I know the river, as well beneath the water as above it. How often I have plunged into the Seine! A few years ago, I left Sartrouville to live at Croissy, so as I might no longer have to pass the Port-Marly lock, where, when I had to wait too long a time, I used to put my yawl on my shoulder and carry it to the other side. That is why my right shoulder is slightly hollow. I rented a little house at Croissy. There, I had a few neighbours, among them a very distinguished engineer, who, to please his wife, had come to spend some time in this suburb.

“One night, I heard someone calling me from outside. I opened my window, it was my friend coming to tell me he feared his wife had thrown herself into the Seine. He asked me if I could help him to search for her. His agitated voice told me how heavy his heart was. I shall never forget the impression made on me by that man’s voice asking me to accompany him. He was in despair. I did not hesitate, put my bathing kit on, and in five minutes, I was plunging into the river, where my friend thought his wife had disappeared. For a whole hour, I examined the bottom of the river round the spot he had shown me, but I discovered nothing. I then told him his wife was not in the Seine; he seemed to doubt me, he was so convinced she was there.

“Perhaps she had threatened to drown herself?

I would not question him, but I tried to cheer him by saying the bird had simply flown away from the cage, and would soon return, regretting her flight. ‘Near the river-side, during this lovely, most poetical night,’ added I, ‘her excited brain will have cooled down. While looking at this beautiful spot, she will remember the happy hours you have spent together, she cannot forget them. Don’t fear, she will not remain long away; do not let us be alarmed, let us wait patiently.’

“A few days later, I heard someone opening the door of my little house, and my friend came in. He was beaming with happiness and stretched his two hands out to me.

“‘My wife has come back!’ he cried, ‘I love her even more than before, if it is possible. During her absence, she has given up all those exaggerated scents which I cannot stand. Now, my dear friend, her clothes have the sweet scent of the fresh summer air which I breathed that evening, while you were so boldly plunging into the water.' I am told they now are quite happy; I do not often see them; I am so occupied... always and everywhere."

We left the restaurant. My master walks briskly on the bridge. After paying the toll, I joined him.

"That suspension bridge, always quivering," said he, " makes me think of an old man with St Vitus's dance. And how well I know the Seine! She has given me such good times, but she also has given me rheumatism which I cannot get rid of. I bear her malice, on that account, however, perhaps the more so, as hitherto she has given me no opportunity of getting the Humane Society's medal. And yet, I have rescued thirteen from the water, eleven dead people, two living. The dead don't count, and the two living people, belonging to Societies, are of no use either. There must be a new opportunity for me to earn my medal, that I do so wish for. For me, it would be worth more than any ' Legion of Honour.'"

We were alone in the railway carriage, and both took seats back to the engine. Passing by Médan, my master looked out of the window.

Zola is perhaps at Médan," said he, "the windows of his study are open."

June the 1*8th*. — We are settled at Triel. My master has been to fetch his yawl at Poissy, and sends me there to bring back the boat *Tonneau.* This little craft, thus named because the shipwright had made it perfectly round underneath, was intended to be the *Bel Ami's* small boat, but it never could go to sea. I went to fetch it one afternoon; my master was there. He came on board with me, and we went slowly down the river, under the big trees, Villennes on one side, the islands on the other.

My master kept silence, his dreamy eyes gazed through his glasses on all the greenery, and on the flowers blooming by the smiling river-side. After we had passed Villennes, he showed me a house.

"Do you recognise that place?" asked he.

"Yes, sir, 'tis M. Zola's house."

"He gives himself the devil's own trouble!" said my master. " He has taken into his head to write a novel about every sort of workman. He has given himself an awful task, and really a talented novelist ought not to attempt such things. I have often thought on the subject; according to me, a writer must only describe what he has felt; to express a thing well it must have been seen and understood. I think also, one must not only understand it, one must either love or hate it, in fact, be imbued with every detail of one's subject, see them distinctly, and have studied them thoroughly. I shan't follow Zola on that road. I shall only write what pleases me, on a subject that interests me. I intend to keep the style of composition I have adopted, and bear my individual stamp. Zola and Hector Pessard, who lives at Triel part of the year with his mother, will come to lunch here the day after to-morrow...."

We reached Triel harbour, and my master took the oars out of my hands, as I did not pull hard enough to please him. We were passing before M. Pessard's with him the small branches he had cut off the trees bordering a path leading on to the lawn.

"See, François," said he, "it looks much better so."

"Yes, sir," I answered, " but the narrow path leading to the well also requires the same operation." He came, and cut off a good many shoots, even branches. He worked very hard, getting very hot, and how happy he looked! He was certainly much more pleased, notwithstanding the damp (for it had been raining quite recently), than he would have been at a party given by a Prince.

"Really," said he, when he had finished; "I should have made an excellent gardener; anyhow, the work is most delightful!"

July 13*th*. — M. de Maupassant tried taking baths in the Seine, instead of continuing his shower-bath, but with no good results.

To-day, a young couple, friends from Paris, came to surprise him. They stopped to dinner, which pleased him much. During the meal, he told them of his visit to Dr Grubby (of the rue St Lazare, in Paris), and mentioned the complicated diet he orders him: no bread; potatoes cooked English fashion three times a day; as many eggs as possible, prepared in different ways, fish from the sea at every meal, a great deal of poultry and butcher's meat, very few green vegetables no game; no wine, but at least two pints of milk a day "I don't mention medicine," said he, "the list would be too long, but I don't know how my digestion can stand so much food."

On the 17th the oculist came to lunch with my master, whose eyes are no better. On the 20th he went back to his Dr Grubby, and told me in the evening he had obliged him to speak out.

"When," added my master, "he had finished his litany, I stared at him most intently. Then he got angry, and exclaimed: —

"'To you, M. de Maupassant, who are an intelligent man, I prefer telling the truth. I treat people entirely by persuasion; still, allow me to say I obtain good results, you can see for yourself that in all the things I prescribe for you, some may be of use to you and do you a great deal of good.'

"Then," concluded my master, "I knew what to think."

I afterwards tried to make my master follow this system without any exaggeration; for assuredly it was strengthening.

Doctor Grubby died about 1899, he was ninety-three years old, and by a curious chance, in the last months of his life, he took nothing but a rich sort of broth which he made his servant always fetch from the Café kept by François, the ex-valet of M. Guy de Maupassant!

Though not in very good health, my master gave a few dinner-parties and lunches at that time; one remained celebrated on account of an eel-stew called *Matelote à la Mère Didier,* still remembered by some of the guests. And they cannot have forgotten setting off, in a frightful storm of rain, on board the yacht *St George,* moored opposite the house, for a sail that afternoon.

They were apparently all anxious to get on board; they reached the beach, but the rain came down in torrents, which did not prevent their laughing heartily. Instead of protecting themselves with their parasols, the ladies threw them into the small boat that conveyed them to the yacht; of course they were wet through. What did it signifiy! They laughed all the same. When every one was aboard: *Poum*! *poum*! went the *St George*, for she was a steam yacht. Our *Bel Ami* starts without any noise, she glides on the water, graceful as a swan; no trepidation, no nasty smell of coal. However, here there is the steam, we shall see...

The rain has left off, it was only a sharp shower; the sky is dear towards Mantes, there are only a few white heavy clouds flying along. The sun shines straight on to the deck where the ladies are now settled, hoping the bright rays will dry their clothes.

The *St George* turns round; we pass under the bridge of Triel. I looked back and could no longer see our villa; we passed Villennes, Médan; no one even mentions M. Zola, before whose house we fly. We rush by Poissy. The yacht goes well, which pleases me, because it is on this boat we are to travel on the Meuse, from Namur to Rotterdam. We reach Herblay; the country is ugly; the owner of the yacht lands so as to buy some chickens and improve the dinner, which seems to him very inferior to the lunch offered by

Maupassant. He is told that on board ship you can't get what you have at home. But he only listens to his vanity, and brings back two consumptive chickens, bony and full of gristle, the dinner being already very good and very complete.

The weather is quite settled, the warm sun makes all forget the storm, every one is seated on deck. A few notes of some opera seem to follow in the wake of the *St George* and lose themselves among the bushes lining the riverside. They start games, but with no success, these amusements evidently not being open-air pastimes.

In reality, games are quite unnecessary, the owner of the yacht knows how to amuse his guests; he is both gentlemanly and entertaining. He also knows how to please, being a very handsome fellow, with splendid black hair, a perfectly defined dark moustache, a mouth red as a girl's, a slightly pointed chin, well and freshly shaven. He has great success with the ladies.

One of them is constantly looking at him, her eyes never leave him. Sometimes she opens those large eyes wide, then the lids meet slowly with an endearing expression, for a long minute they keep the shape of a half-open almond. Ah! what play these eyes have! At the same time her nostrils palpitate, her pink lips turn mauve-coloured and almost white; her bosom heaves a deep sigh. Ah! fair lady, your love is calling, every trait in you is saying to him whom you gaze at: "Is it I whom you prefer?" He understood, and was full of attention to her; when he pronounced her name, all his being seemed to vibrate, He was completely fascinated by her, he spoke to her with the greatest tenderness, his heart was beating delightfully....

My master, of course, had some success with the ladies, but the handsome dark fellow put all the others into the shade. My master was not jealous; on the contrary, he tried to facilitate his friend's success. On board there were also a painter (sometimes courteous, but often absorbed by the thought of his picture, a portrait still on the easel in his studio), the head-clerk of a State department, and two men of the best society, who most kindly helped me to lay the table.

Dinner was served early on account of the daylight and because the excursion had made every one very hungry. At table they were very merry; all kinds of pranks were played, and the dishes were emptied as if by magic. Champagne is the wine they prefer, and the splendid Aurora borealis then lighting up the sky gives the wine in the crystal glasses a lovely coloured hue. And the guests' faces are flushed. I have nothing more to do, and go forward to dine with the engineers. Night falls, we are in the dark, the lights of the yacht throw their rays before us but leave the deck quite obscure, Venetian lanterns are lighted, and all are merry again. The stars seem quite small, one of them shoots down.

"'Tis Heaven sending a kiss to earth!" exclaims a young countess.

The painter, who now is contemplating a fairy-like picture with these ladies grouped astern on the yacht lighted up by variegated lanterns, is suddenly roused out of his semi-lethargic condition.

"Yes, madame," cries he, "'tis really a fiery kiss." Then he explains the phenomenon in scientific terms, which do not in the least satisfy the Countess.

"M. de Maupassant," says she, "I am sure you know something about the embrace of these powerful elements...."

"Very little, madame," answers the author of *Une Vie,* "and I deeply regret it since the fact interests you. But as to the art of kissing or the art of love, if you prefer it, read what Michelet tells us about the dwellers in the sea and also of certain vegetables, which know how to enjoy happiness far surpassing..."

The lady did not allow him to continue his speech, she suddenly took, his arm and they went to the other extremity of the yacht to finish their conversation, to the great disappointment of the other guests who also wished to hear the end of the explanation.

There were reproaches; they were obliged to come back, they were both laughing so heartily they almost had to be carried, but it was impossible to obtain any more particulars about Love and Kisses.

There was a pause, then another good-looking lady began to expatiate on the delight of this charming excursion, in exquisite weather, with such merry, such witty companions....

"I should like to remain here all night," said she, "indeed I wish the trip could be prolonged for ever."

"It is a pleasure," said my master, "I have often enjoyed. Many a time have I seen daylight appear on this beautiful river, on the Chatou side."

"Not alone, I trust?" quickly said the lady.

As my master would not answer, a chorus of feminine voices ordered him to reply. But the author of that wonderfully powerful sketch *Sur l'Eau* got out of it without saying yes or no, which much provoked the lovely passengers, who all exclaimed: "Ah! that clever Norman!"...

The horizon widened, one could only perceive scattered lights.

“We have been steaming about for a long while,” thought I, “ no doubt we are going to Elbeuf or to Mantes. It is one of M. de Maupassant’s practical jokes.... All will have to sleep at an hotel.”

But I was wrong; we reached the bridge of St Germains at one in the morning. Landaus are waiting there to take the ladies and a few of the gentlemen back to Paris. My master, some of the most intrepid of his friends, and I, take the train at St Germains and reach the rue Montchanin at three in the morning.

On July 21st my master resolves to return to Paris. He is not satisfied with his doctors; last week Dr Grubby confessed persuasion was his only mode of treatment; to-day his oculist tells him the bad condition of his eyesight is only the sequence of his general health, which must be cared for to obtain any improvement. My master fancies the neighbourhood of the Seine may be bad for the nervous condition he now suffers from, so he gives order that the boats may be moored off Poissy, and on the 25th he starts for Paris, which I reach that evening with the furniture waggon.

On the 27th we took the train for Étretat, where my master was very pleased to find his powerful shower-bath and the very cold water of the well. A few days elapsed, he was much better and began to work again. *Notre Cœur* was on the stocks, but he abandoned the novel for a whole week so as to write an article for the *Gaulois*, and a tale he had suddenly thought of.

“I have it in my mind completely finished,” says he to me.

And he wrote it in four days, filling up seventy-two pages of foolscap without a single erasure. When finished, my master, intending to keep this manuscript, caused it to be copied.

Little Pussy had settled down on my master’s bureau while he was writing, and he drew a silhouette of her, with a few strokes of his pencil.

“I shall have great trouble,” said he, “ in getting Pussy to remain as quiet as her mother did on my writing-table. Her temperament is infinitely more sensitive; cat-like, she is agitated by the noise of my pen running over the paper, she keeps the attitude you see and is always ready with her paw to hit my pen which squeaks a little. If the shopkeeper has smoother paper you had better get some....”

Many of my master’s intimate friends are here. There are tennis-parties in the afternoon. From six to seven my master fences in the garden, he prefers the open air to his fencing-room.

There are dinner-parties almost every evening at La Guillette, followed by entertainments with a magic lantern, or amateur theatricals. It is easy to organise these amusements in the new drawing-room which opens into the old dining-room.

One morning as I was returning from the garden, my apron full of French beans, I found my master in the kitchen contemplating his map of the Heavens; and this time he seemed very cross.

“François,” said he abruptly, “pray shut all the windows before nightfall. I hardly closed an eye during the night. I tried the beds in all the rooms, there were spiders in every one. These insects inspire me with the greatest repulsion, I do not know why, but they horrify me. The abominable creatures climb up the balconies and thus get to the windows. Mind you close them all before night, I do beg of you.”

During the afternoon following this bad night, master told me to come up to the first floor with two lighted lamps. He had closed both windows and shutters; all was dark. We hunted after the spiders; first we examined three bedrooms, where we only found some small insects with long thin legs and a tiny body, absolutely harmless, but they were killed all the same. Then we reached the blue room reserved for friends. My master first placed a lamp in each corner near the window; then he shook the curtains, two enormous spiders escaped, hiding behind the mirror on the mantelpiece.

I proposed removing this mirror which was not very large.

“No, no,” said my master, “I should fear an accident to the top of the frame which, my mother tells me, is the work of a mystic, and represents the arms of the Le Poitevins, if they had assumed their title of nobility.”

The carving was both delicate and fragile. Two lances supported several vases containing no flowers and looking rather unsteady. They were surmounted by two Cupids walking with difficulty on the edges of the weapons; they were apparently trying to reach the heads of two leopards; and their own doll-like faces seemed as if about to kiss each other. A coat of white paint covered the whole design without improving it.

Then M. de Maupassant dragged the bed into the middle of the room, and made me abandon my station near the lamps to help him hang a large band of black stuff in the recess. He made me put a lamp against the wall so as to light up the back of the mirror, and hiding behind the black cloth, he began to hum in imitation of soft music. We had not to wait long, the two creatures came out of their hiding-place, rushed to the edge of the cornice, and took refuge in the dark between the black cloth and the recess, where they were captured. Their dead bodies were put on a plate with those of the small spiders killed previously, and escorted by Pussy and Pel, we carried these disgusting remains to the fish-pond. The small bodies were immediately absorbed, there was some delay about the larger ones.

“Perhaps I was wrong,” said my master, “to give those large spiders to the fish, for their suckers are very venomous. You see how the fish hesitate to swallow them. Is it possible that they scent the venom? It may be so. These insects are as dangerous on account of their strong claws as for the poison they launch by their suckers.”

Pussy watched all this with deep attention. As to Pel, he galloped about, jumping now and then up to his master. Poor Pel has neither the “dignity” nor the intelligence of his father, the solemn Paff.

CHAPTER XIII. AUGUST 18TH, 1889

The anniversary of St Helena — The large yacht Bull-dog brings the smart people — The Norman Nausicaas — The humane doctor — Sphinx Cottage — An old-fashioned country dance in the meadow — The Montmartre murder, and Marius Michel the painter — An inextinguishable fire and headlong flight — Escape of the supposed murderer — An amusing raffle— "It is the cock"... — A rahhit for Madame Arnould Plessy — A most lucid somnambulist — Fifteen hundred sightseers round the Guillette.

ÉTRETAT, August 17th 1889. — Painters working in the small path near the kitchen are finishing a picture representing the Montmartre murder. Master admires the masterpiece and laughs heartily.

"François, is everything ready for to-morrow?" he asks. "Have you all you require? Barrels, planks, smock-frocks, hats, hens, rabbits, a hut for the somnambulist, cans full of petroleum, and the prison, the water-pipes, nozzles, and both the pumps in good condition? To-morrow you will tell Eugenie to fetch some blood at Vimont's, it must be as hot as possible. The firemen's dresses are here, and I have seen the somnambulist; she is very well got up. And you have ordered the cakes at Madame Lecœur's?"

August 18th. — It is St Helena's day. The Étretat sailors and the visitors taking their daily walk on the beach stared when they beheld a splendid steam yacht, the *Bull-dog,* carrying the French flag on the main-mast and the colours of the Club de France at its stem.

Small boats brought to shore the fine ladies who were on board the yacht. The sea was like a mirror, the breeze soft; it was pretty to see the white barks gliding slowly and gracefully, to the measured rhythm of the oars on the transparent green sea with an emerald bottom, which is only to be seen at Étretat. Laden with women in light dresses, wearing hats trimmed with flowers, and holding prettily hued parasols, these boats looked like so many floating gardens as they neared the shore.

The fishermen and professional bathers, all kindly people, went forward to help the ladies to land. Once on the pebbles, the new-comers shake their dresses into shape, and settle their hats. Suddenly they perceived, quite close to them, a row of white caps swaying continually to and fro. They went nearer, and saw with some surprise women occupied in washing linen in a spring flowing between large pebbles down to the sea. A small donkey harnessed to a cart stands surrounded by heaps of damp linen. One of the ladies rubs his head with her parasol, she would like to stroke the sturdy little beast, alone of his species in that country. But she cannot get near him on account of the heaps of linen which surround him, and she goes away with regret. That small donkey was given to the washerwomen by a kind doctor, who pitied the poor things obliged to carry on their backs their heavy loads of wet clothes all up the cliffs where they spread them out to dry.

"How I should like," said one lady, "to dabble about with those good women in that beautiful clean water!"

"Ah! I dare say," said her neighbour, "for five minutes!... Surely M. de Maupassant told me a river passed under his house.... No doubt it comes spouting out here."

Very true, the river, now a subterranean one, which passes under the Guillette, was formerly *la Riviere du Grand Val.*

All the Étretat hotels were full. Guests had not only come by sea, but also from Dieppe, Fecamp, and the surrounding country houses.

Towards two o'clock, groups of people took the *rue Alphonse Karr,* and reached the Pass, at the entrance of which many observed an inscription on the door of a chalet half hid in greenery and a profusion of flowers: *Sphinx Cottage.* This name must have recalled many recollections to those who belonged to Parisian society, for she who resided there for many years made such gaps in that society that she could never be forgotten.

The sheltered Pass is now left behind, the gay parasols are opened to protect the pretty faces against the burning sun; long trains sweep the dusty road; they stop opposite a chapel where the English who reside in Étretat can be heard singing like angels.

A few steps more and the first visitors reach the open door of La Guillette, They see in the field on the right musicians with enormous hats, they are clad in blue smock frocks, so long that one cannot see their feet, so that they look as if they formed part of the barrels they are standing on. They welcome the guests by blowing as hard as they can in their instruments, performing a "Ça ira" which my master had found among his grandfather's music.

“That piece,” said he, “and the musicians’ costumes, are quite accurate, according to the period.”

The last notes had died away among the echoes of the cliffs, but still people were swarming on. The garden and the *carré normand,* now formed a delightful picture, crowded with all these pretty ladies clad in fresh toilettes of different hues. Best of all was the light-hearted gaiety of the whole party.

When all had been introduced to each other, my master and some of his most intimate allies, organised a huge country-dance in the field. Every one joined in. I can still see my master — he had taken two ladies by the hand and danced with all his heart, dragging his partners on with him. They were laughing so much that if he had not held them up they certainly would have fallen. Occasionally some lady lost a shoe; she screamed, and peals of laughter drowned the sound of the instruments.

There was a see-saw managed by amateur firemen on the pond, into which one of them fell and was thoroughly drenched.

Then came “ the Montmartre murder,” a startling scene before which every one had to pass. The murder was represented at the back of a passage, in most suitable semi-darkness. The picture was painted with awful realism by Marius Michel.

A policeman has hung his wife up by the feet and, *wanting to see things he does not understand,* has cut an opening in her out of which real blood is flowing. My master’s dagger does duty for the knife, and remains stuck in the wound. The effect of the whole is most striking, terribly realistic; many of the ladies are frightened, and hide their eyes so as not to see.

Suddenly the murderer is detected in a group. All, aided by the firemen, rush after him. He is arrested and taken immediately to prison. In a few moments the cunning criminal sets fire to his prison, and taking advantage of the general surprise, disappears. The firemen do their duty, take up their hose and try to extinguish the fire. But the more they throw water on it the better it burns, because the prison is made of wood and straw, and has been soaked in petroleum. The guests, standing in the avenue round the prison, are much entertained by the sight of these brilliant flames. This is perceived by the firemen who suddenly direct their spray towards the groups of ladies, and leave the prison to burn as it pleases. There are screams in every direction, and all fly for their lives. My master is obliged to send us to stop the fun. A few napkins suffice to put an end to the whole affair. This was a first attempt at the style of play afterwards performed with such success at the Grand Guignol.

People went to be restored at the refreshment tables, of which Madame Leconte du Nouy did the honours with her usual grace. Her artistic head, as master said, looked beautiful, standing out from a background of flowers arranged with that intention.

After the drama there was a raffle; a table covered with shelves had been placed at the bottom of the garden; there were vases and pottery of all sorts; I was much surprised to see two small China vases of old pink porcelain. All the numbers being distributed, they began to draw the lots; each prize was immediately delivered to the winner and all were laughing heartily. The climax came when my master called out: “ Number 16!”

“Here!” answered a clear young voice.

“It is the cock!” said my master.

And I put into the hands of a young lady a live cock, a very fine one, adding a hen, so as he should not be too much bored. The young lady, holding a fowl in each hand, was rather embarrassed, the more so as the birds struggled vehemently to get away. There were roars of laughter.

“Number 29!”

The celebrated actress, Madame Plessy Arnould, held up the ticket.

“That number,” said my master most seriously, “ wins a live rabbit with all his fur on!”

I gave the lady her prize, advising her to hold the rabbit by his ears, which she did, saying almost with despair:

“I shall never be able to carry that animal!”

“Yes you will, madame,” said I, “you will put him in the boot of your carriage.”

Then, walking sideways so as to hold the rabbit as f*ar* from her as she could, the lady went towards the garden door. Many of the guests followed her, delighted to see her distress. The rabbit kicked continually, and at each kick the lady, giving a slight scream, took a step backwards. But she did not lose her hold.

A fortune-teller’s booth had been provided...

Madame R — who knew how to read the lines of the hand, distributed her predictions during the whole day to the ladies.

“My poor François,” said she after the sitting, *“*it was time we finished, I was gradually growing rooted to my seat, I was so tired. However, one can get nothing without trouble, and I had a great deal of fun at the expense of those smart ladies. The best of it is, most of them believe what I said; ’tis extraordinary!”

It was dinner-time. My master’s intimate friends were there, and also some amateurs who had most kindly contributed to the entertainment. All were in excellent spirits, and there was a coruscation of wit, sallies being launched and repartees following with the rapidity of balls at a game of tennis, skilfully played. Somehow, my master was not so gay as usual. Everything had gone off well, but it was easy to see he was not perfectly satisfied.

Next day he came into the kitchen and looked at his map of the Heavens, now somewhat forgotten by him.

“It was rather successful,” said he, “but what a nuisance it is when there is an entertainment of this kind, that one can’t have complete privacy! Did you see all those people close to the hedges and seated on the hill? I am sure there were fifteen hundred prying lookers-on.... If I possessed a very large house and grounds well shut in, I could manage something much more amusing....”

And he described his plan, which I thought could very well be realised.

“In that case,” said he in conclusion, “one would have to harbour, not only twelve or fifteen people under the same roof, but at least eighty or a hundred.”

There was a laugh under his moustache, and he went off to take a walk round the pond and the *carré normand.*

That same day I met, on the road of the Great Valley, pretty Helène of the rue St Lazare. She was leading by the hand two lovely boys of five or six years of age, one dark, the other fair. She asked me to request my master to receive her; he had seen her and came forward to shake hands with her; but that was all... for he no longer cared to receive the visits of these seductive ladies....

CHAPTER XIV. END OF AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1889

An excursion by sea to Italy — Paradise on the blue sea — Tales on deck — An allusion to the beautiful Allouma, heroine of La Main Gauche — Raymond's travels across the high seas — Off the Japanese coast — A flower boat — Distant music in the evening — The Genoese smells — In the fog — We put in at Porto-Fino and Santa Margherita — Music at break of day for the Bel A mi — Florence — In the museums — Hunting for curiosities — The church of San Paolo — Thoughts about war aiter the manner of Tolstoi — Pisa — Madame de Maupassant awaits at Cannes her son who is recovering from a short illness.

AT the end of August, we started for Italy on the yacht.

We left Cannes harbour at break of day, so as to take advantage of the breeze; we passed the bar between the point of the Croisette and the island of Sainte Marguerite, leaving the Golfe Juan on the left.

Shortly after, the sun appeared like a ball of fire ascending in the sky above the Cap d'Antibes, which promised us a hot day.

Soon we were on the open sea, having nearly doubled the cape. But that was all. The wind had given us what it generally gives during the very hot season. However, in the afternoon, a breeze came from the east and carried us beyond Villefranche. There, master made us observe the beauty of the coast, *us* "Below," said he, "there is Beaulieu, a nest of green. Above is the Comiche road, a most exquisite drive."

Some time afterwards we passed before Capo della Mortola, and Bernard told us we were leaving French waters. In the evening he put the lights up and settled everything for the night.

It was decided that I and Raymond should take the watch till two in the morning, and that we should then be succeeded by Bernard and the pilot.

The heat was not so great on the second day of navigation, the breeze still keeping up. After lunch my master took the tiller, and we thus were able to have our meal forward, in the shadow of the sail.

Lunch over, the sails being sufficiently inflated by the wind, our taut little yacht glided along prettily on the blue sea. We felt well, my chest was dilated, and my lungs sucked in with delight the pure air. It was truly Paradise on the water.

We all wanted to talk, and praise this charming life on board ship, which had already turned us into members of one family. Assuredly, friendship, good-fellowship, family life as one leads it on board a boat, link people together. It is as if man, knowing himself to be isolated in the midst of the waters, felt the want of friendship and did, by instinct, all in his power to retain it.

We were together on deck; and we began to tell yams, so as to pass the time. The pilot, who was the oldest of us, spoke first; he related in his picturesque language, half Italian, half French, the curious tale of a shipwreck on the coast of Sicily. Then it came to the turn of Bernard. He detailed some amusing passages of his youth.

He said to my master when he had concluded:

"At that time, sir, I was not married."

"Pray understand, my good Bernard," replied M. de Maupassant, "that this circumstance leaves me perfectly indifferent."

Then I recounted an adventure which befel me at Algiers two years before, as I was seeking an apartment. I had reached the end of my story, and the others were still laughing; I asked myself if I had not been rather too far.

"Very good, François," said my master, "that is quite Arabian."

Then he described to us the life of the Kabylia women. Though very complicated, and extraordinarily wild, it certainly bore a great analogy to the tale of *Allouma,* published in the volume *La Main Gauche.*

Allouma, an Arabian woman who has become the mistress of a wealthy Frenchman settled near Théniet-el-Haad, was occasionally struck by a sudden desire to recross the desert and return to the tents. And when she had satisfied her wishes, she would take again the long and fatiguing track over the sandy plains, return dead-tired, and crouch at the feet of the Roumi, her master.

It then was Raymond's turn to tell his story. He asked my master's leave, which, of course, was granted. " At that time," said Raymond, "I took long journeys to China; I was young, hardy, and plucky. We left Marseilles on the *Agrippa,* a first-class sailing-ship, considering its type; we were a crew of thirty-six men, all fine fellows. As in our preceding trips we passed by many seas and oceans. Now and then there was a gale, and some damage done to the ship, but that did not signify. What really matters with a sailing vessel is being becalmed, on a long journey; it is enough to make sailors go mad! One day, after seven months at sea, the captain told us we had reached our port. We stared, for none of us could see land. We went on for a mile or two, and received orders to anchor. At some distance we could see a low coast forming a sort of point that lost itself in the sea.

“Immediately communication with land was established, and two days later some barges came along to fetch our goods. We were off the Japanese coast, and the harbour did not allow of the entry of our ship. We were stationed there for seven weeks, the period necessary for unloading our goods, and taking in those we were to carry back to France. The crew was not at all pleased at having to remain thus out at sea. At least, we all said, when we were in China, we got into harbour and landed. This time, we were to stand seventeen or eighteen months’ tossing, without an interruption of even a quarter of an hour!

“These were the thoughts we communicated to each other, but we did not complain, for our captain, who was extremely energetic, was also a very kind man, and he was quite beloved on board. Some days after, a large whaler’s boat, filled with people, came alongside. You may imagine our curiosity, everyone was wondering what this could mean. The strangest part of it was, that we could not guess the sex of all these new-comers, for in that country male and female costumes are almost alike. As soon as they were all on board, the boatswain told us with a smile, thirty-six Japanese women had come to entertain us during our stay near that coast. You may imagine our delight.

“I don’t intend to describe to you what went on. I will only tell you the Japanese were most amiable, and taught us the dances of their country. I never knew one from the other, all those lemon-coloured faces seeming to me exactly alike!

“You may fancy how short the six weeks seemed in such pleasant society, and the leaving-taking was quite pathetic— “

Here Bernard interrupted the yam.

“Ah! you may talk!” said he, with a roguish smile.

“My boy, you are jealous,” replied Raymond, “you would much have liked to have been there.”

M. de Maupassant asked for his tea, and ordered cooling drinks for the crew. Then he asked the sailors to tell him about the Far East.

We were all on deck in the evening, our boat was going slowly, Bernard at the helm, my master sitting beside him: —

“Why, one can hear music!” exclaimed he; suddenly, with some surprise.

True enough, harmonious sounds came from the Italian coast. Their sweetness was indescribable. It seemed as if, in a dream, we were thus gliding between the sea and the sky, such was the charm of this quiet night; the sea was smooth as a sheet of oil, of a dark blue colour.

“It would not surprise me,” said my master, delighted with this distant music, “if a whale came this way, music attracts them, ’tis strange that such an enormous animal should be so much influenced by harmony.”

And some blowing cachalots passed close to our boat some hours later, making a noise like a tempest on the surface of the water.

Next day we anchored at Port Maurice. My master landed for a stroll.

“François,” said he on his return, “this little town is neither interesting nor wealthy. I tried to change a hundred-franc note, and I could find nothing but silver. There is no gold, and as we shall pass the day here to-morrow, I will ask you to go to Monte Carlo for some gold, it will be handier for our journey.” *September* 12*th*. — We are now in sight of Genoa. We passed the outer port, and had to show our bill of health before we were allowed to pass into the commercial harbour.

“See, François,” said my master, “what a splendid harbour!”

“Well, I prefer that of Marseilles, sir!”

“Ah! but this one is wonderful!”

To avoid the contact of the trading-vessels, we of *grey,* compact foam, and nothing else. An hour, perhaps, passed away thus. Then there were successive changes, the foam whitened, forming a kind of curtain, limiting somewhat one’s vision. Then spray, revolving and disappearing in the light mass, produced wonderfully varied hues, violet mingling with light yellow, blue turning into pale rose-colour. I was much puzzled by the play of all these exquisite tints. Now, I was beginning to see. The large white bank, where all the colours of the rainbow mingled together, disappeared in the waters under the powerful influence of the sun, shining red in the distance; the rays dispersed the fog, and the sun rose majestically and warmed us thoroughly the whole day.

“Now,” said Bernard, “you can see.”

“Oh, yes, and I should wish that extraordinary phenomenon could be reproduced some other morning!”

We had been sailing slowly on a smooth sea for several days, when towards two in the afternoon the pilot told me he saw Porto-Fino.

“Yes,” said he, “ I know it by the clock tower.” We all looked in the direction he indicated. Not distinguishing any interruption in the line of the coast, I confessed my doubts to my master. He then consulted his maps and the compass.

The map placed Porto-Fino behind a small cape.

“François,” said my master, “you are near-sighted in the same style as my mother, who was always the first to recognise the coasts when I sailed with her.” By five o’clock we were anchored in the little harbour of Porto-Fino, but we had weathered some gusts of wind coming from the hills on each side of the channel.

“I am going to land,” said M. de Maupassant, “and take a bedroom for the night.”

What a strange notion! Why spend money in a town, when one is so comfortable on board! Sleep is so sweet in the cabin-berth, rocked by the waves!

Porto-Fino looks charming on the edge of its small natural harbour, backed by hills covered with dark, green firs. Their rounded forms make you think of what the sculptor Falguière has intentionally omitted in the figure of his Diana, otherwise so perfect.

My master now goes every day to explore the coast in his small boat, and always returns full of wonder at the unknown things he has discovered. The *Bel-Ami,* if I may say so, was as if in an aquarium, for I never saw so many little fishes of variegated hues, as were constantly swimming around us. My master used to feed them, no doubt in remembrance of his Étretat goldfish which he was always regretting.

On the fifth day Bernard was ordered to prepare for a sail out to sea, after which we were to anchor at Santa Margherita.

On the first day my master found an apartment two hundred yards from the harbour, and on the southern side. He hired it for a month.

“Shan’t I be able to work, François?” said he, “with that beautiful view of the sea!”

Two days later he told Bernard that as soon as a favourable breeze sprang up, he would take advantage of it to sail on the Bel-Ami to Sistri-Lavente, and would then spend two or three days in the mountains.

So, one morning, after crossing that pretty bay, we reached Sistri-Lavente, in very fine weather. My master took a carriage, and started, with his dressing-bag. We took advantage of his absence and of our stay in this place to buy some provisions. The weather was so splendid that we spent the night in the harbour of Sistri and only returned the next morning to Santa Margherita.

M. de Maupassant came back on the morning of the third day. The little town was full of animation, people came and went, flags were flying on all the houses. We were asking ourselves what this could mean, when a citizen of the place begged the captain of the Bel-Ami to land. Then he solicited the favour of being allowed to play the Marseillaise before this yacht carrying the French flag, because it was the anniversary of the Unity of Italy.

My master gave the permission, but recommended Bernard to allow no one to come on board.

Towards three the concert began by the Marseillaise and finished with the same hymn, welcomed all the more by the inhabitants on account of the fact that they were thorough Republicans.

In the evening M. de Maupassant gave Bernard some napoleons, ordering him to offer the musicians a glass of punch. I was of the party, and there was a most charming entertainment. The generosity of my master thus brought us into contact with nice people of very good position.

I am sorry my master did not see more of the inhabitants of Santa Margherita, he could have obtained from them more inspiration than was given him by the sight of a countrywoman's profile when coming up a path.

Our stay came to an end, the Bel-Ami was sent on to await us at Genoa. M. de Maupassant visited some of the towns further inland, among them Florence.

We went by rail. But we had hardly been in this last-mentioned town three days, when my master felt tired and therefore did not go out. He asked me if I had been to see the galleries.

"No, sir— "

"You can easily visit them this morning, when going to the post to fetch my letters, as I shall not go out before lunch."

On my return I could not help expressing to M. de Maupassant my astonishment at seeing in these galleries so many works belonging to the French and Flemish schools, among others the Virgin with the goldfinch, by

Raphael, and various pictures I had read the names of in the Paris Louvre, as well as at Bruges, when I was younger. In the Chapel of the Bruges hospital you find many works by the most celebrated painters of the Flemish school. When once you have seen those masterpieces, you never can forget them; they produce such a wonderful impression.

My master then asked me if I had seen Titian's Lady.

"No, sir."

"Well, I will show her to you"; adding, "I have long promised myself the pleasure of visiting all those Dutch and Belgian galleries; when I go there, I promise to take you with me."

Next day we went to the Gallery at ten and admired the Titian he had mentioned; then we went to some curiosity shops, hunting for pretty things. My master bought a few. There were some beautiful articles, but to his mind they were not so artistically finished as he could have wished. They were not equal to any of the admirable pictures in those celebrated galleries; but he could not buy those, notwithstanding his ardent desire of possessing them.

In the course of our walk we reached the Piazza della Signoria; opposite us was the Loggia dei Lanzi. My master made me see and admire The Rape of the Sabines, then Hercules vanquishing Nessus the Centaur, by John of Bologna.

We came back to lunch, laden with our curiosities; my master seemed satisfied with the morning's work.

"One's head is turned by the sight of the masterpieces in this town!" cried he. "This wilderness of artistic things runs away with all my thoughts. My delight makes me think I can penetrate the souls of those great men, who have put all their inspiration into their perfect works."

To-day, October 22nd, my master is much better. He was ailing, and had to remain at home; it is over. His drawing-room window is open, and he watches a regiment of cavalry passing on the opposite quay of the Amo. These horsemen, dad in embroidered uniforms, are playing very sweet, soft music.

"The instruments of that regiment," says my master, " make me think of one that used to be played at my grandfather's, to set the birds singing."

Then he read me a passage of one of his mother's letters, telling him to go and see the old church of San Paolo, which was so interesting.

Immediately after lunch we went to find this church. We soon discovered it. It is there they keep the flags and trophies taken from the enemy on the field of battle. Those glorious relics, hanging there in tatters, and quite faded, are very numerous.

A sexton accompanied us, explaining whence came all the flags.

“That is all very fine,” said my master, “but what is less pretty is the number of lives all those rags have cost, lives of men who might have been more useful to their country than by sacrificing themselves in those wars which only do harm — I,” said he, in a very loud tone, “am the enemy of war!”

And I thought my master was quite right.

When we came out of this Pantheon, my master spoke at great length about the valour of the nations which existed formerly in this fertile and pleasant land.

On our return from Florence we spent a few days at Pisa, a pretty and clean little town, celebrated for its leaning tower, and its exquisite cathedral. We admired the Baptistery doors with their bronze Cupids of the size of two year-old boys, which do duty. as handles. Near it is the Campo Santo, in a very bad state, the beautiful frescoes which adorn the walls not being protected in the slightest degree against the inclemency of the elements.

We were back at Cannes on the 31st of October at six in the evening.

Madame de Maupassant was at the door of the apartment, awaiting her son. She was extremely moved when she saw him, her voice was trembling, she could scarcely speak.

“My dear child!” said she.

As soon as he came in, my master informed her he had suffered at Florence from an attack of enteric, which had obliged him to keep his room, but that he felt much better and hoped it was over.

In the evening he continued giving his mother details about his health and his cruise. Before leaving the house to go home, Madame came into the kitchen, took my two hands in hers and thanked me for the care I had taken of her son since our departure from Cannes. Large tears fell from her poor sore eyes, and her maid, crying still more than she did, led her away. After resting for ten days, M. de Maupassant got much better, his ruddy complexion had returned.

CHAPTER XV. NOVEMBER 1889-JULY 1890

We return to Paris — We settle in the Avenue Victor-Hugo — Disagreeable vicinity of a baker — A lawsuit — The expert's dinner — The atmosphere of Influenza — Conversation about death — M. de Maupassant wishes his end to be in accordance with the religious notions of his family — Mr Taine and Le Champ d'Oliviers — Hating Crispi, M. de Maupassant destroys his manuscript about Italy — The mysterious visits of the Russian lady — A letter from Cannes — The tragic end of Pussy remains unknown to her master — Persecuted by the baker, Maupassant moves to the rue Boccador, and goes to stay with Lord R — in England — A Flemish profile — Notre Cœur is finished — Victor Koning and my master — Super-nourishment — Return of Maupassant's illness — At Aix-les-Bains — The Russian Princess and her bodyguard — The dramatis personæ and scenario of L'Ame Étrangère — The rope.

PARIS, November. — We are moving again. We leave the rue Montchanin for the Avenue Victor-Hugo, though I have tried all I can to prevent my master from taking this uncomfortable flat, an entresol just above a baker's oven.

November 25. — We have been five days in the new flat.

"François," says my master this morning, "if I had listened to you, I should not have taken this apartment, which pleases me, and I don't in the least hear the noise of the kneading trough at night...."

Unluckily, as often happens in this life, what is agreeable soon comes to an end, and this restful quiet did not last long. A frightful noise, sufficient to wake a deaf man, ascended every night from the subterranean regions. Then, all sorts of arguments were tried with the architect who had let this apartment to my master, but he could obtain no redress. He was obliged to go to law. On December 18th, the Court named an expert who was to spend part of the night in the flat so as to make an official report.

So that the expert might enter the apartment without raising the suspicions of the porter and the baker, my master gave a dinner party to which he was invited. Thus he only had to remain somewhat later than the other guests, in order to hear the noise that shook the house up to the sixth story every night.

He was an architect of the town of Paris, and I thought him most gentlemanlike and a man of great tact. During dinner, conversation was agitating and even disturbing, especially for such as I, who was present, but of course took no part in what went on. Many causes contributed to this excitement. First, the speakers all belonged to different classes; next, there was a strange atmosphere arising from the dangerous epidemic of influenza which killed so many invalids at that time — one's nervous system was unbalanced.

Several medical men were present, their knowledge about this epidemic was discussed, and even disputed. The doctors argued with great persistence, but they did not have the last word. One of the ladies, whose mind was full of logic and undeniable facts, clinched the matter. Silence reigned in the dining-room; the heat made the lights flicker, all seemed ill at ease.

However, conversation was soon resumed. This time death and the immortality of the soul were spoken of. One could see none of the guests cared much about this world; but they feared " the other side," and there was a long dissertation on the nature of the soul!

Many arguments were brought forward to prove its existence; but doubt seemed to predominate. One of the doctors took advantage of this opportunity and tried to make out with great eloquence that the soul was simply an invention, that it did not exist....

This denial was followed by complete silence, my master had not spoken for some time. Then he began, with great firmness: —

"If I were dangerously ill," said he, "and the people about me brought a priest to me, I would receive him, so as to please them!"

These words created so much surprise that the guests seemed astounded; I might say, they looked as if asking themselves if they had quite understood. Some of the ladies tried to oppose my master. Exclamations were bandied about, those who protested could hardly be heard through the tumult. Some wanted my master to take back what he had said.

"I am sure," exclaimed one person, " you would only receive the priest so as to console and comfort those around you, who are always to be considered under such circumstances."

This obstinate persistence annoyed my master, he did not answer in words. He took a rose from the middle of the table, and slowly pulled the petals out, letting them fall on his plate, as if he did not wish to pluck the last petal. His uneasy smile made me understand he wished his guests had shown more self-restraint, and had not tried to inquire into his opinions. At some other moment those pretty perfumed rose-leaves he touched so delicately would have given *him* poetic inspiration.... His thoughts were far away....

The next morning my master found on his drawingroom table these words signed by the expert: —

"The evidence of noise is more than sufficient"; and the lease was cancelled. Notwithstanding this success, I saw he remained gloomy. I brought him his tea.

"How unmannerly," said he, "clever people can be in society! After all, if, when I am on my deathbed, I choose to see a priest, I suppose I am free to do so! And," added he, "on that subject my way of thinking will never alter, and I will not accept these arguments; tending to oblige me to think like others...."

That evening he came in looking quite gay, his usual good humour had returned. I helped him to dress, and he told me he had been to see M. Taine.

"I went," said he, "to read him my tale Le Champ d'Oliviers. He was delighted, and told me it resembled Eschylus."

He saw I did not understand, and then explained to me Eschylus was an admirable writer, a poetic genius, the real creator of Greek tragedy.

A pale-looking lady has already came to our door.

Avenue Victor-Hugo, at nine in the morning. She asks for M. de Maupassant.... I t*hink* I have already seen her. She is a Russian, somewhat occupied with literature; but, above all, she goes in for politics.

After lunch my master went out. I entered the study to put it in order and make up the fire. I see that the little cupids surmounting the Henri II. andirons are covered with black things that even spot the carpet. It is burnt paper; on the marble slabs are some fragments of a manuscript which have escaped from the flames. I recognised the remnants of the manuscript on Italy lying among the ashes!

I could hardly believe my eyes. I was going towards that corner of the study where the manuscript was yesterday, when I saw on my master's table a few leaves on which he had written with his blue pencil the words: "To revise... There was no longer any doubt, the manuscript two hundred and twenty pages long, and of inestimable value, now no longer existed!... It contained the recollections of my master's travels in Italy.

He recounted therein, even in more expressive terms than in his article on War, his feelings so full of compassion on this grand subject. He mentioned the Vicenza ladies shut up in a cavern; the struggle at Pisa, Florence, and Milan. It was all so beautifully told, the reader followed the events as if they happened in his presence. We were deeply moved by them, we scented from afar off the smell of the warm blood flowing on the fields of battle he described; it was as impressive as the reality would have been.

Then my master told about art and the great men born in that country. At page 17 he began the biography of a tourist who fell ill on his travels and was taken care of by his servant in his room at an hotel. The author of Notre Cœur had surpassed himself when telling of this simple fact. The feelings of the sufferer spoke for themselves, that passage struck me as so intensely vivid, that to my mind, M. de Maupassant never wrote anything more beautiful.

Later on, a few pages escaped from, the fire were published in La Vie Errante. I tried to learn the motive of the auto-da-fé. My master remained inscrutable on this point; only, when speaking of Crispi, he would often say:—

“That base individual has done nothing but harm to his country! And to such a pitch that I refuse to read even what that man makes his newspapers say about France and her people. But, if one day, I find myself in his presence, I don’t think I shall be able to restrain myself! I think I shall tell him things he will be pained to hear....”

After hearing my master speak several times so bitterly about Italy, I concluded he preferred sacrificing his work to eulogising a country the governing powers of which persecuted France with such treacherous animosity.

Still, why did he destroy that splendid Manuscript? Destroy? Could that be of use to Russian designs, which that lady from Tourguenieff’s country came and advocated by her early visits?

In the first days of January, 1890, I fell a victim to a strong attack of influenza. My master resolved he would no longer put up with the baker’s noise, and decided on going to Cannes.

“The move,” says he, “will only take place in April.”

Strange to say, he seems to leave me behind with a certain satisfaction I don’t understand.

“You are not well enough,” says he, “to come with me. You will probably have some more attacks of that nasty malady. Have a good rest, take care of yourself, I will write and give you some news of Madame.”

Between January 12th and March 15th, when my master returned to Paris, I received several letters couched nearly in the same terms.

“My Good François, — Thanks for having done all my errands, and succeeded with the publisher; I am glad you are feeling better. Look out for a flat for me for the month of April, see it is comfortable, with a bathroom.... I leave it all to you, all you do will be right.

“Madame, for the time being, is pretty well satisfied about her health. Besides, her eyes are always better in the winter.

“I remain, my good François, etc...”

I noticed my master did not mention his own health.

When he returned to Paris, I thought him not so well as when we came back from Italy.

He no longer petted Pussy. True, the little creature seemed to get wilder and wilder, she rushed away from everybody. My master said she required air and freedom. I put her under the care of a porter attached to a big house in our avenue, where there were stables and a garden.

I thought she would be better there; ten days after, the good man came to tell me that the Veterinary had advised that poor little Pussy should be put to death.

I was very sorry, and those who had known the little animal, so playful, so intelligent, could scarcely believe this. I did not mention it to my master, it was useless to sadden him by the news of the death of the favourite he used to love....

We are at the end of March, my master has taken a flat in the rue Boccador, but the move will only be on the 30th of April. He is better, but says he is not well enough to work at the last chapters of Notre Cœur. The noise of the bakery still prevents his sleeping at night, which is very bad for him. As there still remain a few days he cannot make any use of in Paris, he decides on going to stay in England with his friend, Lord R — , who is constantly asking him to return the visit he paid him at Étretat.

When he came back from England, my master had hardly entered the flat when he asked if his bath was ready.

“I shall take it ‘immediately,” he said, “for you cannot think how knocked up I feel; as if bruised all over from head to foot! Those devils of

Englishmen, and that so-called smart society have put me into this state; they are so boring, so conceited, so nonsensical I can't stand them. That is why I shortened my stay. block of white marble, it is a clock of authentic Louis the Sixteenth time, with its two very low candlesticks. The curtains are in excellent taste; the gilding of the doors and looking-glasses has disappeared underneath the silk. The whole has a most refined effect, and my master's drawing-room is perfect.

There is also antique furniture in the dining-room; a few pictures and old Rouen dishes hang on the walls. This room is lit up by a large bow-window, looking on the avenue, from which you can see the pont de l'Alma and opposite the Eiffel Tower, pointing to the sky, and which my master does not much admire, excepting during a storm. He is interested by the sight of the serpentine flash of electricity rushing along the iron ladders. Sometimes he remains a long time at this large window, watching this phenomenon and all that passes in the enormous space stretching out before him. My master's apartment is perfect; a bath-room with shower-bath, a fencing-room, and five other rooms to the South with sunlight, and independent of each other. Leaving open all the doors, which are opposite each other, he can take a walk of twenty-five yards in a straight line. It is a dream for him, as he is so fond of walking while he is at work.

May 18th. — A lady comes every day! How odd, I hardly know her; when she comes in, she just pronounces the name of M. de Maupassant, and, without looking at me, she walks like an automaton into the drawing-room. My master never speaks to me of the visits of this almost unknown lady.

One morning, as my master was walking the whole length of the apartment, he came to speak to me in the dining-room.

"I have pains in all my joints," said he. "Tomorrow, I shall begin taking a series of vapour-baths. Pray have everything ready."

But after taking three or four vapour-baths, and though we shortened the operation so as each only lasted ten minutes, he had to give up taking them. Hardly had he been five minutes in his arm-chair, when in a second his blood flew to the head. He knew it, so, to avoid congestion, he returned to his simple shower-bath, always following it up with rubbing his whole body with a horsehair glove and eau-de-Cologne.

Notre Cœur is finished, my master has given it to the Revue des Deux Mondes, which will first publish it as a serial. He tells me that M. Koning, the manager of the Gymnase theatre, will come to see him in a day or two....

After this visit, during which I heard the loud and imperious voice of this gentleman, my master told me the reason of his coming to the house.

“He has asked me to recast entirely to my taste, and also a little according to his, the manuscript of a short play M. X — has taken from one of my tales.

It seems easy enough; he would allow me a month for this work, but I said to him: ‘ Come here in a fortnight and it will be ready.’”

On the day fixed, the manager came to fetch the Manuscript and read it aloud before he carried it away. What a voice! Never had I heard so strong a one! When he came to paragraphs which pleased him, he literally shouted and showed the manager’s, perhaps the artist’s, delight.... But he saw my master had omitted several playwright’s touches he had told him about, he mentioned the fact, without making any reproaches, and went off enchanted. I can still see him in the anteroom, a short, stout man, with a red face, and jet-black hair. His large, fat red hand thrust the Manuscript of my master deep into the inner pocket of his jacket; then he shook hands warmly with M. de Maupassant.

“I hope,” said he to my master, “that when I am Manager of that theatre” — I think it was the Vaudeville— “you will not refuse to give me some good play of yours, which will be an excellent thing for the theatre, and a triumph for you.”

My master let him depart without replying, but he laughed under his moustache, which meant that he almost consented.

June. — The doctors my master has just now advocate abundant food, without taking into account the difficulties of his digestion. They want him to eat a great deal, at least four times a day. In the morning, an egg beaten up in milk; at noon, underdone meat, mashed potatoes, cheese; at four, custard; in the evening, the usual dinner. He remains in the same condition, taking all this food which is easy to assimilate, but does not get better as I should wish. He gives several dinner-parties and receives many compliments about his pretty and very comfortable establishment. His magnificent old Rouen dishes are much admired, indeed they are coveted by one of his guests, a great collector; but he will not sell them at any price. They are beautiful, exquisitely painted, and with detached handles, which add a great deal to their value.... Next day, my master examined his dishes and saw to their fastenings — one cannot take too many precautions!

At two o'clock on June the 7th, my master went to see his publishers in order to settle about advertising his new book. Notre Cœur appears on the 20th and there is work enough to fill up several afternoons. But I cannot quite understand what is the matter with my master. He talks to me, but I see none of that enthusiasm which generally accompanies the publication of one of his works. At last: —

"You can conceive," says he, "how unpleasant the commercial part is to me!"

End of June. — The papers are favourable to Notre Cœur, the editions are swallowed up. So far, M. de Maupassant certainly is satisfied. It is not the same with his health. Still, for the last month, he has not gone into society; in the evening, he has no longer a little cat to fondle and to touch. Therefore he amuses himself by causing the electric sparks to fly out of his own hair in the dark, and they crackle loudly enough under the comb, particularly about his ears. He walks out after dinner, comes home, rests before he goes to bed; notwithstanding all his care, he sleeps badly. Between eleven at night and two in the morning, he calls me up three or four times for a cup of camomile tea, or else he asks me to cup him. This seems efficacious, for almost every time we succeed in getting rid of his pain, or at least in soothing it.

The unknown lady has returned several times. Her demeanour is always the same, she comes in and departs silently; she is not of the demi-monde, though too much perfumed; nor does she belong to that smart distinguished set, where they like to laugh and by which master is so much invited. She is a bourgeoise of good taste and resembles the great ladies who have been well educated whether at the Oiseaux, or at the Convent of the Sacré-Cœur. She has preserved the well-bred or even severe manners of those places.

I cannot be mistaken, I know the stamp of those religious houses; during many years I have been able to appreciate it by studying ladies of very high rank in houses where I served before coming to my master. I have hardly exchanged two words with this lady, but I know by whom that rare intelligence has been moulded.

She is remarkably beautiful and wears with supreme chic her tailor costumes, either pearl grey or dark grey, with a waistband of real gold tissue. Her hats are very simple, matching her dress, and if the weather is gloomy or rainy, she carries a small cape on her arm....

We reach Aix-les-Bains on July 3rd. My master settles down in a pavilion belonging to the Hotel de l'Europe. This pretty nest is on a narrow path near the hill on the side of the Revard. There is a fine view, one sees the Dent-du Chat, just opposite, rising above the chain of mountains, surrounding the south-eastern side of the lac du Bourget. M. de Maupassant takes his meals at the hotel. Since he has not come here to write, but to take notes for his work L'Ame Étrangère, every day he goes several times to the Villa des Fleurs, observing as much as he can a Russian Princess who is staying at the pavilion the Empress Eugenie occupied in other times....

One day he told me to meet him in the evening in this "nursery garden of human flowers" as he called it, and he showed me the Princess.... After losing fifty francs at the racing game, I left and went on the shore of the lake, where the water gave innumerable reflections of the image of the moon.

Long did I follow the serpentine border of the turf that runs along the irregular contour of the lake; the night was so calm, I could hear the murmur of the streams which fed it. What a charming recollection that evening left me! The beautiful light, the restful quiet, the rustle of the water, the mildness of the air, and the sweet scent of the grass heated all day by the sun! How I should have liked to sleep in the open air, if only I had possessed a boat which would have rocked me on that clear running water! But I could not go on dreaming; my master no doubt had come home, and I hastened to return to our pavilion.

Next day, lunching with the couriers and knowing a little Russian, I managed to make the acquaintance of the Princess's man-servant. The day before, we had made the balls roll about the billiard table of the café, and next day at four in the afternoon, I was drinking exquisite Russian tea with cream in it in the drawing-room belonging to Her Serene Highness's lady companion. Two days after that, we went together to the Club theatre.

From that moment I was able to give my master all the details he wished so ardently to learn about this eccentric lady; and he knew well how to turn them to account.

Our Princess was a leading personality in L'Ame Étrangère. I never quite understood how my master intended to present in his novel, the lady's position. What I can say is that besides a thousand small but interesting details of the life of this Princess, there was one fact that impressed me; she had two admirers who never left her, and travelled everywhere with her. It appears the Prince, her husband, was a very great dignitary who rarely came to France, and that only when his duties obliged him to do so.

One afternoon, the heat was such that I gave up taking a walk, I returned to the châlet, carrying a boxful of grapes, for here, besides his series of shower-baths, M. de Maupassant took his cure of white grapes. He heard me come in and called me to him. I showed him the box of grapes, which pleased him, and which he put on a table near his bed.

"On account of this intolerable heat," said he, " I thought it would be imprudent to walk out. Therefore I lay down on my bed, and for once in your life that you have not too much to do, pray try and rest. Here, we have not enough air...."

While eating his grapes, he began to tell me about his L'Ame Étrangère, but in that room I was so overcome by the heat, that I could not recollect what he said. Seeing I was suffocated by the temperature, he told me to open the door of the drawing-room and also the window looking towards the North. I breathed a little. My master laughed while playing with his grapes.

"If this continues," said he, "I will send word to Bernard and Raymond, and we will go to sea as soon as possible. We shall be better off sailing about. I will let you know in time. But, if by chance, you see an accident, or a murder, anything where there is the death of a man, a violent death, mind you, come and tell me directly, because I should like to take some notes on that subject."

Two or three days after this conversation, I was returning from a walk on the Marlioz road, when I saw, behind a bank, the body of a man hanging to the branch of a tree.

"Why," said I, "that's just what my master wants!"

But two gendarmes arrived, immediately followed by a woman; they cut the rope, the body was still warm, but the man was dead....

All the same, I went post-haste to tell my master. But it was of no use, he told me it must be a violent death caused by a knife or a revolver, or else the crushing of a body, with bloodshed!...

We have been several times up the Revard. My master contemplates for a long time, and with great attention, all those mountains, and the scenery around Aix-les-Bains. One day, we remained up there till night. My master wants to study all the hues that appear in the vast panorama before us, by a beautiful sunset. The picture is perfect; the sun has disappeared into a valley on the right, it still lights up the lake in its whole length, giving its waters the colour of a blazing fire; the high summits of the mountains are now in the shade. Night is falling.

"Did you see that?" asked my master, as we came down. " Well, you will find the description in my novel. Aix and its surroundings will give me a splendid frame for my people. I am satisfied. It was a beautiful sight and I feel it is all imprinted here."

And he touched his forehead.

July 22nd. — My master is quite merry to-day, and between two peals of laughter, he tells me we are starting for Cannes the day after to-morrow by the evening train, so as to avoid the heat of the day.

"We are going via Valence, I did think of the railway of the Alps by Grenoble, but we should be obliged to take slow trains all the time, which would be more tiring. I have now all my documents; my people are in their proper places; there is no more to do. I see everything quite clearly."

I informed my friend, the Princess's man-servant, that we should soon be off. He appeared quite put out; so as to cheer him up, I took him in the evening to the Villa des Fleurs, and showed him how to play the game of petits chevaux, to which I had returned with the firm intention of getting back the two napoleons I had left there a few days before. When my friend understood the system, I began to play myself; he followed my play. During an hour chance favoured us, after which she became capricious; at eleven o'clock, I said I had had enough of it. But he *insis*ts on continuing; a strange pallor had replaced the ruddiness of his complexion, his eyes shone like lamplight. I saw he was caught, but I succeeded in getting him away, he wanted to pay for anything I chose, as long as it was extraordinary and of great price.

"My friend," I said to him, "chance is an inconstant jade. When you have spent a pleasant quarter of an hour, the best thing to do is to take a modest glass of beer and go and dream in bed, thinking you are still winning..."

Next day, when I went in for lunch, I remarked that for the first time, there were champagne glasses on our table. My Russian friend told me it was he who was offering that good French wine to all on account of my departure, adding that he had never been able to reckon up the napoleons he had won last evening at the horse racing game.

All the servants belonging to the guests at the hotel partook joyfully of these extraordinary libations, and the end of the meal was marked by much mirth. But there was a secret no one knew; the champagne was the result of the good luck brought by the rope which hung the man whose body I had discovered a week before on the Marlioz road.

CHAPTER XVI. END OF JULY-NOVEMBER 1890

At Cannes — We are delighted to get on board the Bel Ami — The Ironclads and the Richelieu — A favourable breeze — Master's niece — The two lovers in the book Sur l'Eau — To M. de Maupassant's great joy, good Bernard begins to tell yarns — Impressions of Brittany — François goes on a pilgrimage — Arthur's Grotto — M. de Maupassant tells about his schooldays at the Yvetot college — Saint-Tropez — The strange meeting at sea of M. de Maupassant and his father — Bernard's presence of mind saves the Bel Ami from striking on the reefs — Departure of Mireille's compatriots — At St Raphael — Frèjus, the Crusaders; Gounod; Alphonse Karr, etc.... — At Nice — The lesson given by the ants — At Lyons — Anniversary of Hervé de Maupassant's death — Here lies... — Communications about his end — Who knows?

ON July the 28th, the Cannes station-master was walking up and down the platform, awaiting the Marseilles Rapide. The presence of Bernard and Raymond had announced the arrival of M. de Maupassant, whom the station-master welcomed with a deep bow as he got out of the train; my master was pleased and spoke most kindly to him.

Then came the two good sailors — Bernard, with his dry tones; Raymond, with his sonorous voice — also welcomed my master. Their faces said more than their words; it was easy to see these two men loved him, not because he was their captain, but because he was so kind to them. Bernard would often say, "Master is not only our captain, but also a comrade."

The Splendide Hotel is open. My master prefers staying there a short time before settling on board the Bel-Ami.

Next morning, he was at his window by seven o'clock, watching the sky and sea.

"François," said he, " it is fine, I think the weather is settled, I am going to dress, take my shower-bath at the Baths, and I shall be on board by half-past nine. Buy provisions for the day. We shall lunch on the Bel-Ami, do what you can to reach the harbour by nine o'clock, as we may weigh anchor as soon as I get on board."

The breeze was favourable, and we got easily out of harbour. We sailed about the bays of Napoule and Théoule, we passed before Doctor Magitot's dwelling, half-concealed by a recess in the mountain; we could just perceive it behind a thick curtain of dark pine trees.

My master lunched; then came our turn. It blew hard from the east, we had reached the point of the Estérel, and bore towards the open sea. Raymond stood forward, close to the outrigger, in the shade of the standing-jib; Bernard was seated in the stem, against the mizzen-mast. I remained near him, so as to be out of the way.

My master is sheltered by his white parasol, which is fixed to the boat. His two hands are on the tiller, he steers; all goes well, the breeze is steady.

"I think," says he, "we are running eight or nine knots an hour."

"I think so too," answers Bernard.

My master was satisfied and happy; in those moments of pleasurable emotion, his face showed firmness and strength of will. He moved about on his bench, and occasionally gave a slight impetus to the helm, so as to obtain all the speed he could get from his yacht, and thus increase the rapidity of his great white bird, as he sometimes liked to call it.

Bernard began to talk, and I was searching the horizon with the telescope. Suddenly I saw two large vessels which I took for coal barges. But my master and Bernard soon saw I was wrong, Bernard saying they were two cruisers of a new species, with a pointed and, plunging prow. They all talked of these new vessels, of their great use, their speed, hitherto unknown, and what people could hope from them. My master approved of this new model, ascribing great strength to it, both for attack and defence. Then t*alkin*g of the old ironclads, he called them obstructive monsters.

Bernard was somewhat provoked, he tried to defend the men-of-war of his time when he belonged to the fleet; but he was obliged to allow for the march of progress. My master saw Bernard was put out, and drew me into the conversation.

"And you, François, you have seen the old ironclads?"

"Yes, sir, fifteen years ago. I went on board the Richelieu in Brest harbour."

And I repeated what I had heard during my visit on this vessel.

"Yes," said my master, "the cardinal whose name was given to your ironclad was a man of many tricks, he played some on the King, and also, by rebound, on us...."

He paused, and suddenly changed the conversation.

“Why, Bernard, it seems to me the wind is dropping.”

“Sir, on these hot days, it is quite unusual it should be so steady as it is now.”

“In that case, we won’t go to Agay, and when you think proper, we will sail towards the islands, so as to return to Cannes towards five, in order that I may take a walk and stretch my legs before dinner.”

At three, I went down into the kitchen to make tea. When I got back on deck, I saw the yacht was going faster. Bernard had to take the helm while his master drank his tea.

“I could not drink and steer at the same time,” said he, “it is such a handful. See how fast we are going! The breeze is as strong as it was a quarter of an hour ago, and all the same, our sails are spread. I do believe we are running more than ten knots an hour. It is splendid for a boat of this size. It is a fine boat! You see, going so fast, and with every sail spread, it scarcely leans at all....”

My master steered towards the open sea. He was delighted with this good wind. Then Raymond took his turn at the helm, and my master began to walk up and down the deck.

“François,” said he, “I have given up my walk till after dinner. Now we are too far, and really it is worth our while to go on. See how fast she goes! Splendid! That’s what I call navigation!”

And he walked up and down his yacht. He was clenching his fists, which meant with him either boredom or delight.... This time he was certainly pleased.

“One would think we were crossing to Algiers!” said he, steering again.

This was all very well, but the yacht, really going like a bird, was leaning more and more to one side, and water already covered half the lower part of the deck. I felt no fear as yet; but all the same, I looked towards land, where I could only distinguish a large circle of mountains, and the Pointe d’Estérel, till it lost itself in the sea. Nearer, I could descry the Lerins islands, now forming but a dark spot in the midst of the immense mirror, so brightened by the sun’s rays that one was quite dazzled by it.

At eight in the evening we got into Cannes harbour with just enough breeze not to be obliged to row. Captain Pierruque was awaiting my master on the quay, to congratulate him on his cutter’s excellent trim. He also had been in the direction of the island, and he had seen us. My master listened with a smile; he was delighted with his excursion.

"I did enjoy my day," said he, coming into the drawing-room; "the yacht went so well."

Next day, July 29th. — I accompanied my master to Nice, where he went to see his mother, Madame de Maupassant, who now lives at the Villa des Ravenelles, rue de France. The house has only one story, but it is built on a height and towers above the open sea. It is a most peaceful spot, with a magnificent view. As we came in we saw in the garden a little girl of four years old, with curly fair hair, tied up by a riband; her eyes are of a soft, bright blue, her pretty white complexion is slightly roseate; she is lovely, and is the niece and god-daughter of my master. She is pla*ying* at pushing a small wooden cart before her. Her uncle calls her, she comes and says prettily "good-morning," then returns to her cart, puts herself between the two poles, and runs along a narrow path which borders part of the garden. Madame de Maupassant cal*ls* Simone to come to lunch, she answers, but she does not come. Her grandmother goes to fetch her, and the child is quite vexed at leaving her game.

At three we left the Villa des Ravenelles for the station. The heat is terrible; my master confesses he feels it, but says he is satisfied his mother has chosen this dwelling, for the air, between land and sea, is excellent, and that he also will stay at Nice next autumn.

Next day we again set out on the Bel-Ami. We are at sea, the weather is delicious. My master regrets his mother's constant refusal, every time he invites her to come and take a short cruise on board his boat. He would be so happy to have her there.... We lunch at sea, and at six in the evening we anchor in the harbour of Agay.

After dinner my master takes his walk on land.

Next morning, very early, he goes off into the mountain to chat with the hermit he likes to visit in his poetical solitude. But he is disappointed, the man has disappeared, and has not been seen for the last two months.

On August the 2nd my master goes in the morning to St Raphael. In the afternoon he starts in the small-boat to go up the little river that loses itself in the mountain.

"It is all very pretty," says he, when he returns, "and most poetical; the sides of the river are shaded by trees; and there are splendid meadows. It is charming, but I shall not go there again, the branches of the trees, spreading down to the water, make it awkward for boating."

It is a magnificent evening, stars are beginning to shine in the blue vault, which is misty towards the east. We are seated on the deck of the Bel-Ami, now moored exactly on the same spot where, three years ago, the little black Bel-Ami lay at anchor. My master is seated on a folding chair, in the stem, and, as he did three years ago, he looks at the mountain and the zig-zag path where he then saw a couple of lovers walking, to him they had seemed the very picture of happiness. He looks towards the bridge and the shore, where these two lovers walked after dinner; then he contemplates the inn, the window of their room, where shone a light which soon was put out.

"Bernard," said he, coming out of his meditation, "did I describe faithfully in my book, Sur l'Eau, the lovers I saw here one evening? I am sure they had no idea they were so closely watched— "

"Yes, yes!" answers Bernard with an approving gesture and great energy.

And he starts on his favourite hobby — Bernard cannot hear the words "love" or " lovers" without wanting immediately to tell some adventure of his youthful days.

M. de Maupassant is aware of this foible and amused by it. This time Bernard relates to us his flirtation with a Morlaix cook, explaining to us the signals they employed. There was a flower-pot that was either placed at the window, or taken away according to circumstances. My master laughed, but Bernard continued his story with the utmost gravity.

"Ah, sir," said he, "the Bretonnes are really wonderful women! And that river, where I remained for four months on a paid-off boat, really it is the most picturesque I have ever seen in all my journeys round the world, it flows between two high hills covered with trees many hundred years old; and this ribbon of salt water, which comes like an ordinary river to bury itself in the ground, would make you suppose yourself in a forest, if the quiver of your boat did not recall the fact that you are moving. There was also the large viaduct that spans the river, but I did not look at it often, as the window of my beloved cook was on the other side...."

Here the story-teller stopped.

Raymond was stretched out forward. He sleeps and snores slightly, Bernard wants to wake him, my master will not allow it. To change the subject, he addresses me: —

“François, you who know Brittany so well, you ought to tell us something about that part of the country.”

“I said I had stayed once at Huelgoat, a beautiful spot near the Arrée mountains. There I saw picturesque rocks, one group of which is called the Virgin’s house. On a fête day, I was walking in a wood near Huelgoat, following a pretty spring that meanders through the underwood; the large roots of the trees entangled on its borders formed natural dams, multiplying myriads of little foaming cascades which fell into the valley. As if to make the aspect of the place still more romantic, numerous painters, hiding in the grass, stood motionless before their easels, as if they were playing a game of hide-and-seek. I came across them unexpectedly in comers along that pretty rivulet, which was shaded by branches of light foliage of the tenderest hues.

“I was still walking on, not knowing exactly where I was, when I beheld on a path at the right, white coifs all coming the same way. I immediately supposed there must be something attracting them in that direction. I followed the same path, without being observed, and walked behind a group of young women. After taking a broad zig-zag lane, I reached a splendid group of gigantic pine trees. Immediately on the left, after having climbed on a mound covered with moss, I reached the goal of the pilgrimage, for it was really a pilgrimage that attracted these young girls. There was neither chapel nor saint, but it was the Grotto of Artus (Arthur), a famous Breton chieftain who fought in the sixth century against the Anglo-Saxons, defending his country’s independence. Later on, he became the hero of the chivalric tales of the Round Table and the Holy Grail.

“I hid behind a bush, to see what these young girls would do in the grotto. They went in, or rather slipped in, bending their heads very low under huge stones; then they passed through a species of high chimney, coming out on the roof of the grotto, a platform made apparently of large flag-stones. When they were up there, they began to dance, to laugh, to sing as loud as they could. They vied with each other as to which should sing the loudest.

“It was now time to come down; I suppose they did not care to come out by the same opening they had taken to reach the roof of Great Arthur’s grotto, for each of them slid down backwards between two stones that formed a sort of funnel. Then they screamed, and they laughed, till the birds themselves ceased singing.... When this extraordinary descent was over, the birds began to chirp again, probably telling each other all they had seen.”

“You always manage to be on the spot at the right moment,” said my master, laughing.

We roared and woke Raymond; and my master began also to tell his yam.

“I was only fourteen, and studied at the Yvetot college. They gave us that abominable beverage they call ‘abondance.’ So as to be revenged for this treatment, one of us got hold of the storekeeper’s keys. When the headmaster and the others were asleep, we boys took from the larder and the cellar the best wines and liqueurs we could find, then we hoisted the whole, with infinite care, on to the roof, where we made a tremendous feast.... The alarm was given at four in the morning. As I was one of the leaders, and always took all responsibility on my shoulders, I was sent away. I was not sorry, because I was better off at the Rouen college, where I was sent afterwards....”

My master then passed to another subject.

“How beautiful is the blue sea, to-night! And how strangely the crescent moon illuminates that point of land which almost separates us from the sea! And those thinly planted pines, they look like the silhouettes of warriors, of advanced sentinels of some army corps!... Now, my boys, if you like, we will all go to sleep...

Next morning the weather was extremely fine.

“I love the sea,” said he, with a radiant face; “on it I enjoy such thorough independence. When I am on my boat, no one can hunt me out. Nothing is so delightful as our mornings, our evenings here. Nevertheless I often think of the sea at Étretat, of my excursions with the sailors, with friends, often in awful weather. Nothing stopped us, we enjoyed climbing up monstrous waves on our fishing-smack, so as to go out to fetch turbots, or herrings, according to the season....”

On the 4th of August, at seven in the morning, I served my master’s breakfast in the drawing-room, of which the window looked on the harbour of St Tropez and the bay, just now all wrinkled by the east wind. My master tells me he has slept better in his room on land than on the yacht.

“Really, Raymond is too noisy a sleeper, his snores are so powerful that they seem to follow the ribs of the boat and reach my ears with their vibrations, as if they were brought along by some electric wire; and that is anything but agreeable....”

He walks while he talks, and eats a roll; he goes from one end to the other of the room, which is long, then looks out of the window, and wipes his eyes. They are very red, those poor eyes!...

On August the 5th the Bel-Ami leaves at two o'clock the harbour of St Tropez. There is a good east wind, we glide along easily. My master tells Bernard to go as near as possible to Sainte-Maxime, as he intends to land in the small-boat and see his father.... Bernard of course would not refuse, but he did not like nearing the north-eastern coast of the bay of St Tropez, knowing the difficulties that may arise in those parts when manoeuvring by an east wind. He managed to sail towards the sea on the right, then steered towards the coast.

We were then opposite the Sainte Maxime semaphore, which rises above the sea, whereas the coast recedes on the side of the bay of St Tropez. The keeper is a relation of Raymond's. I hoisted all the flags and my master conversed with this State official, who lives in a hut perched on a high point of the coast. Among other things he told my master he expected that afternoon a visit from M. de Maupassant's father.

The conversation was over, and my master was exploring the coast with the telescope, when he saw someone waving a white handkerchief in the air — He recognised his father.

"How oddly," he exclaimed, "he is waving that handkerchief about! It is not meant as a greeting, for he waves it from left to right, very fast, just like a signal of distress."

I was forward on the yacht, Bernard joined me, he gave one look at the sea, and bounded into the middle of the boat, ordering a manœuvre. My master jumped on to the helm Raymond was holding and, in an instant, the slim Bel-Ami had turned on its left, like a bark revolving on itself. Then we saw on our right how dark the water looked; rocks which it hardly covered gave it this tint. And that was why my master's father was waving his handkerchief so desperately! He knew them well, those treacherous reefs....

Here, the seaman's eye Bernard was always boasting about, saved us from a very bad pass, and the supple Bel-Ami avoided breaking its beautiful ribs on those rocks, which were so near the surface of the water. The disaster might have happened under the flag, under the very eyes of the keeper of the semaphore, who was talking to us but a minute ago!

Then we sailed towards the open sea. My master, while drinking his tea, assured us that at the worst, we could have reached land in the small boat....

He spoke very calmly, almost with indifference. Then he begged Bernard to return early enough for him to take his walk.

The day after this excursion he told me to order a victoria with two horses for three o'clock.... During, the drive, he said, without any preface, that he had begun to write L'Ame Étrangère, and thought it would be a good novel, perhaps rather sensational.

We skirted the gulf at a trot till we reached Piu-Bertrand. A few people are seated under the pine, others contemplate its gigantic size.... We turned about for more than an hour, following devious narrow paths leading now and then to cultivated fields or vine plantations. There are also a good many bushes and much uncultivated ground. Here we are at the end of our drive, we have reached the valley of Pampelone. There is a change of scene; all is cheerful. Our carriage is put up at an inn, almost entirely hid under a fig-tree. It is the same with every house on this country-side, all nestle behind orange-trees or palm-trees; some are covered with vines hanging about them most gracefully.

We take a path leading up towards the west and pass a wooden bridge under which unseen waters murmur their song. It is a rivulet entirely covered by aquatic plants (a kind of water lily finding its dwelling there), they flourish well and are of a tender green. One longed to pluck them. On the left we follow another path which takes us to the seashore, to the cove which bears the name of this valley.

There my master stops a moment, enjoying the sight of the sea.

“ How beautiful!” he exclaims; “that view is matchless! Here I find the sea has more charm, more poetical beauty than I have ever seen anywhere else! Look at the grace of that undulating motion. And this thin wave, how lightly it dies away on that belt of white sand! It is no longer the fight, the struggle taking place elsewhere between the two elements, but a sort of caress, so soft that one might think they are wonderfully pleased with their meeting....”

On the right is the terrace anchorage, sheltered by Cap Camarat; we have passed it sometimes....

My master was silent, his radiant face showed what he felt in presence of Nature's splendour. He began walking on the fine sand of the beach, in the direction of the centre of the valley, advancing quickly, holding his white parasol tightly in his right hand; now and then, during a short pause, he would take off his blue glasses, and then walk on in silence. He seemed to have forgotten my presence.

I walked occasionally by his side, sometimes behind him, taking great care not to speak, not to disturb him during his moments of inspiration, which I had witnessed so often; I was aware his thoughts were then hard at work. He was storing up impressions, and fixing in that magical memory of his all he saw; not a single detail was forgotten; nothing escaped that scrutinising eye of his! I thought: “In a year, later perhaps, he will express in a few sublime pages the poetry of this scenery, which is now causing such a deep impression on his artistic and literary faculties; and by those pages, he will soothe the heart and the mind of those who love Beauty and Truth...”

When we returned to the carriage, he begged the coachman not to drive too quick. We reached the platform on that height which separates the vale of Pampelone from the bay of St Tropez. My master stood up in the victoria, throwing a long look on the whole of the country-side we had gone through.

“What a delicious sojourn one could make in that valley!” he exclaimed, sitting down again.

He then described to me the discovery of Étretat by Alphonse Karr, author of La Pénélope Normande and by Offenbach, creator of the operetta and composer of Orphée aux enfers, who was one of the first to cause a villa to be built half-way on the road to Fécamp.

We reached the northern side; before us spread the bay of St Tropez in all its beauty, under a red sun tinting it with a faint light of the same hue. On the other side, a forest of cork-trees was visible; down below, on the shore, they looked grey, but the tops, on the horizon, took a green velvety tint delightful to the eye.

In the evening, my master described our drive to his sailors, and Bernard told him the anchorage of La Terrasse is anything but secure; that it is exposed to the east wind, and that seamen have baptised the cove of Pampelone by the name of the Bay of Death, on account of the vast number of boats lost on its sands.

“It is beautiful but treacherous, then,” says my master.

Next morning we were already on board the Bel-Ami by nine o’clock, my master wishing to get out to sea “as far as possible,” said he to Bernard. Suddenly a trumpet, some distance off, sounded in the fields.... My master, seated aft, was reading his paper.

“Is St Tropez going to fight?” said he, laughing. “There does not exist a single forage-cap about the place, even the rural constable goes his rounds, with a squash hat on his head!”

Omnibuses drove up, and remained in rows on the quays — then a number of women came along, they were dressed in light colours, and wore white sun-bonnets, which looked as if the slightest breeze would blow them away. They carried large parcels that were placed on the tops of the omnibuses. The trumpet sounded again and they all rushed to the vehicles, outside, inside, they were everywhere, even next the drivers. Then they all began to sing in the tongue of Mireille. The song was sweet though high, and was like a Chant du Départ, but not in the least war-like. Raymond explained to us these were workwomen going off to pick orange-blossoms at Cogolin, where the traffic in those flowers is very important. This unexpected and pretty sight amused my master, who began to tell us about the exodus of Normans, who go harvesting from one land to another.

St Raphael, August 11th, 1890. — It is easier to reach this harbour, which is deeper in the sea than that of St Tropez. The heat is tremendous; so the slightest breeze is welcome, and one can the better enjoy it.

In the early morning my master walks into the woods of Boulouris, hoping to find a little coolness there. He passes and repasses by the shady avenue connecting St Raphael with Frèjus. According to him there is always some air there, whatever the weather may be. He has baptised this road by the name of The Zephyr of Frèjus.

He continues taking his meals on board, but we pass the nights at an hotel surrounded with pine-trees. The garden follows the towing-path along the seaside; there is no beach here; the garden, the path, and the water are all on the same level. When it blows a little from the south, the roots of the pine-trees bordering the path are bathed by salt water, which does not seem to harm them. From the windows of his room my master has a view of the ocean; at a cable’s length out at sea there are beautiful porphyry rocks of a magnificent red colour; their shape resembles the outline of two lions warning the sea not to encroach on them.

On the 12th the day has been so oppressive that in the evening we are loth to leave the deck, where we have spent part of the day under the tent. Raymond has found time for his siesta; now he is inclined to chat, and he tells us a yarn about the sailor, surnamed Patience, because he never had been impatient for a single minute.

To-day, which is the 15th, we sail while it is cool, taking advantage of the first breeze sent us by the bay of Frèjus; and we spend the whole day on the sea. It is delightful on that blue sea, there is enough wind for sailing; at half past three in the afternoon I bring my master his tea.

"What, already!" says he. "I am so comfortable here I am not aware time passes."

He wants us to take tea with him; he praises this wholesome drink, and is pleased to find we agree with him. Then he explains that we are very nearly on the spot where, in 1800, Admiral Baudin fought against the English, who are known to be great tea-drinkers.

He takes the helm, and Bernard says I have as yet told them nothing to make them laugh. Then I ask my master if I may again speak of the Breton customs.

"Certainly," says he, "there is always something original about Breton habits."

Bernard and Raymond, who wanted me to make them laugh, listened open-mouthed to my story that they call a fable. I insist on the fact being true; then they split with laughter.

"The customs of that country are curious," says my master, " but there is always something worth recollecting."

Raymond goes up the main-mast so as to undo a cord caught in a hook. Bernard sits starboard close to the netting, in the attitude of a frog about to jump into the water. He is listening, and examining part of the woodwork, which makes a disagreeable crackling noise. At last, all is repaired, and the "great white bird" is flying speedily toward its nest. We return to St Raphael; the sun has not yet disappeared entirely behind the chain of the Moorish mountains. My master, looking at the Argens Valley, says: —

"How interesting is the view of that valley just when twilight is falling, and the heat mists are floating over it! Many recollections are connected with it. Those marshes, now kitchen gardens, were in former days a Roman harbour. The Crusaders often started from it; and after the Eastern and Italian wars the Kings of France several times took refuge there with their fleets. One could write something fine with all the reminiscences of the old city of Frèjus; but I can't undertake everything. My head now represents a builder's yard filled with materials for several years' work. It is here, in this pretty frame, that Gounod composed Roméo et Juliette."

On reaching the harbour Bernard gave the order to cast the anchor. Raymond executed this manœuvre with the necessary promptitude and regularity, and the Bel-Ami, with extraordinary suppleness, turned round, placing her stem at seven feet from the quay, neither more nor less, just at the distance of the length of the plank.

On August the 20th my master went to Maison Close to pay a visit to M. Alphonse Karr. He tells me we shall start for Nice the first day there is a favourable wind.

August 22*nd, Nice*. — One cannot breathe in Nice harbour as freely as in that of St Raphael: M. de Maupassant walks about on deck; the sailors say he is taking the watch, and does not seem satisfied. He looks at the mountains.

“I do not want to see what is near me,” says he. “My eyes can seek afar something that pleases me, but my sense of smell cannot do the same. This harbour reeks too much of trade for a man of my temperament.”

He lunches at the Villa des Ravenelles with Madame de Maupassant, and his usual good temper returns when his mother tells him she feels so well in her garden, that her health is much stronger, she can sleep without taking chloral, and sees sufficiently to be able to read.

In the afternoon he stops on the path opposite the kitchen. He is close to the trunk of an old tree, where there is a large ant-hill; suddenly he calls me; armed with his eye-glass and lens, he watches these insects at work, and admires their way of living.

“There are no sovereigns among them,” says he; “work is distributed carefully, and each does its part with pride, there is never any disorder; each keeps to its own business; the workers build the galleries, and have to feed the females about to lay their eggs, and whose wings they have tom off when they return from their short honeymoon. But that is not all, the males are put to death after a single interview, what do you think of that?”

He watched all the evolutions of these laborious insects; he did not seem to approve of these speedy executions, but he would have liked to have witnessed one, and to have beheld the ants carrying the bodies into the mortuary chamber, where they leave them to become mummies.

Little Simone, my master’s godchild, comes up to him, she jumps on to her swing, which she launches quite violently. Her godfather tells her to go more gently, he is afraid of her falling.

On the second day of our stay at Nice, the Bel-Ami weighs anchor after lunch and is moored in the evening behind Cannes jetty. That is best for my master, as the place boasts of excellent water.

Lyons. — The reason of our visiting Lyons in November 1890 is that my master's brother died here prematurely a year ago. He lived in a pretty village beyond the bridges which span the two large rivers flowing through the town. My master had the deepest affection for his brother. He proved it to him, in many circumstances, by the paternal advice he gave him.

It is only eleven, and we have lunched. A carriage comes to fetch us, and conveys us to the house of a man who works at monuments. All is already settled; but my master wishes for more information about the perpetual grant of the ground. We then cross the river and reach the country. Probably, during that drive, I spoke too much of what I saw on the road, for my master is not interested, and hardly replies. He is thoughtful, and his eyes seem to seek afar off what they do not find. Then I remain mute; there is nothing but the deep silence of the country. Thus the carriage rolls on for an hour.

Suddenly M. de Maupassant puts the glass down; a gesture shows me a house on the left surrounded by trees.

"It is in that dwelling," says he in a tone he tries to keep steady, " that my poor brother died."

Ten minutes later we reach a pretty country church; then we enter the cemetery containing M. Hervé's sepulchre. It is a black marble tomb on which golden letters mark the name and the age of he whose remains rest there for ever.... The monument is in very good taste, and imposing by its very simplicity.

Raising my head I saw the beautiful panorama beneath this cemetery. My master remains motionless and silent. I take a few steps, and risk a word or two to make him look at the scenery; but he does not seem to hear me, his face has taken that violet hue which always betrays, with him, a violent emotion. He does not shed tears, but his countenance is convulsed, and my heart is wrung by his suffering without a word, without a sob.

"That tomb is as it should be," says he at last; "its rounded form will allow the rains from heaven to purify it."

The hand holding his stick moves nervously. I try to lead him out of the mournful enclosure; he follows me without speaking, jumps into the carriage, and sinks into the comer. He always seems to be looking out afar, but he sees nothing.

We return the way we came. When he sees his brother’s house, he repeats several times the same word:

“It is there!..

Then, with an impetuous flow of words, he tells me the principal episodes of the life of the one he mourns for, and I find a resemblance between these two beings, yet so different in many points. He praises his brother, regretting that he refused to go in for diplomacy, a career on which his gifts would have been useful. M. Hervé insisted, instead, on cultivating flowers and standing in his gardens, his head uncovered in the summer sun, he twice had sunstroke. Again, my master is silent.... On each side of the carriage II — see two long light lines between high walls. It is the Rhone running towards a milder climate, as if it tried to escape from the fog weighing it down.

My master is still quite absorbed, and we reach the hotel. I give him some very hot tea. He walks up and down his room and begins to talk of his brother.

“I saw him die,” said he. “According to the doctors, his end was to have come a day sooner; but he waited for me, he would not depart without seeing me again, without saying good-bye.... Perhaps: ‘Let us meet again’... Who knows? When I had embraced him he said twice very loud ‘Guy! dear Guy!’ as he used to do in the garden of Verguies when he called me for a game of play.... I wiped with my handkerchief his poor dimmed eyes, of which the beautiful blue colour had disappeared. A sign he made led me to think he wanted me to lower my hand, and then he touched it with his lips.... Ah! poor fellow, how sincere his friendship was... and really he was very young when he was taken from us!”

My master’s sorrow was very deep at that moment.... He did not go out that evening, and next morning after visiting the little hill of Fourvières we returned to Paris.

CHAPTER XVII. FROM NOVEMBER 1890 TILL THE END OF OCTOBER 1891

The lady with the pearl-grey silk dress — Invited to the Italian Court — Severe judgment on the idleness of the higher classes — Plan of work — Flight to the Côte d'Azur — The mysterious villa — The Figaro's last article — The Angelus — Alarming symptoms increase — Disappointment about the stage — The exactions of a star — M. Piot Verdier — No gew-gaws — Journey to Arles in search of Mireille — The counterpart in a convent of Titian's Lady at Florence — Walks in Avignon — No music! — Details on the composition of the Angelus — Nîmes and the Tour Magne — The Bridge on the Gard — Eulogium of Roman hygiene — One cannot sleep at Toulouse — Treatment attempted at Bagnères de Luchon — Sulphurous smells do not agree with my master any more than they did in Sicily — At Divonne — The haunted house — War on the mice! — Unexpected physical improvement — Sunstroke and bicycle accident — The romance of Andrésy and the beautiful Madame X — Trout fishing.

WE are settled again in the rue Boccador. The lady of the pearl-grey dress and golden waist-band is come again. After we had tried everything, my master only got to sleep this morning at three. While the mustard poultices were on, I was seated against the wall close to the window, and there, leaning my head against the large curtain, I counted the quarters, halfhours and hours struck so distinctly by the little travelling clock....

My master has just received a letter from the Court of Italy, it is a most flatteringly worded invitation from Her Majesty the Queen. He is going to accept it; he seems quite happy at the idea of getting such a close view of the two sovereigns' lives. With a hearty laugh he says he hopes "those people" progress with the times, and have thrown to the winds all prejudices against daily baths!

November 25th. — My master went yesterday to Rouen to inaugurate M. Flaubert's monument. This morning he examines the small plaster model after which the work has been sculptured, and which represents the features of his literary godfather. But he does not seem satisfied.

"Did you see the nasty, cold, grey weather I had during my journey? I really do not know why, but it becomes more and more disagreeable to me to talk to people I do not esteem."

We hung the plaster medallion above a door inside the drawing-room.

The Paris temperature is trying when one is accustomed to hot climates; my master feels cold, even in his fur coat, and thus is obliged to take a carriage to pay his visits, which provokes him. He is so fond of walking! He still accepts a few invitations to dinner, but refuses evening parties, where the lights tire his eyes. He goes out as little as possible in the evening, and rests. He does not even read; after dinner he comes occasionally to the door of the kitchen.

"In France," he tells me during one of these visits; "there are about forty or forty-two thousand young fellows of good family; it is extremely rare that one of them tries to leave the ranks of the idlers; and that is from sheer laziness. That old racial aristocracy, which had a certain historical value, was destroyed by the guillotine. Now I can't enter a drawing-room (in good society) without hearing groups advocating idleness for the 'golden youths' and advising them against activity, thus consigning them to ruin and poverty. Everywhere in the world I see a violent current rising and about to swallow up all members of society who don't know how to defend themselves by the wholesome habits resulting from steady work. Work is such a delightful thing as long as health lasts! I do not know, but I really think I could not give up work. The want of it is innate with me. Sometimes I may have said I only worked because I wanted money. It is not quite true, there are things I love to write about. All the same, when I shall have finished the novels and tales I am now busy with, I shall draw out a sort of general analysis of my work, and review the great writers I think I have known how to understand. It will be a restful occupation for me, and of great interest for the young — I think it will not tire me, and that I shall have the great pleasure of re-reading the things that have most contributed to my intellectual satisfaction.

"As an appendix, I intend giving my opinion on the evolution which I think will be produced in France among the different classes during the twentieth century."

End of February. — My master suddenly resolves that we shall start for Nice where the boat is awaiting us, quite equipped for sailing.

It is in a garden all planted with orange-trees that my master takes a flat, half-way between the harbour and Madame de Maupassant's house. His first nights are rather good, which he attributes to the neighbourhood of the orange-trees, best of soothing draughts.

Ten days later we sail away on the Bel Ami. All that is necessary for a long journey is on board; the guns, the American rifles, and a new compass, much more important than the old one. My master has studied it to make the course out. The lights also have been renewed. We go out to sea one morning by a stiff east wind, and in the afternoon the Bel Ami finds his friend the Ville de Marseille again near the Cannes jetty, where my master lands. He follows the shore alongside the pleasure-boats moored near the beach, which resemble a town of little white houses. Their masts spring up like miniature spires; they might be chimneys....

My master still walks along the beach, and just before the baths, his figure disappears in a garden, bordering the Croisette road, of a villa with gilt balconies in a nest of green. I can still see the illustrious author putting his hand on the banister and climbing towards the low story, from which we can see the horizon. He was going to revisit the lady of the pearl-grey dress, always so calm, so silent, so enigmatical....

After two days' rest the Bel Ami hoists its colours; they fly, making a curious noise under the pressure of the wind, as if saying good-bye. Quickly we pass by Cap Roux, Agay, St Raphaël, all those pretty places where, during past years, our yacht rested so pleasantly. Next day we gave a passing salute to Porquerolles, and in the evening we reached the old Marseilles harbour, and I ask myself if the Bel Ami knows again its quarters. Anyhow, the most cunning inhabitant of Marseilles would not now recognise the ex-Zingara.

Every morning for a week I walk with my master to the Prado by the rue de Rome, then to the Comiche which we travel over from end to end, before that beautiful sea which was always of so imposing an aspect. Often we lunch at the Restaurant de la Réserve, after which we walk out to the public park.

M. de Maupassant seems tired; the Bel Ami is ready to start for Seville and Tangiers according to former plans; but the Golfe du Lion is terrible; ever since our arrival its waters are agitated, and in the papers, meteorological authorities announce a lengthy period of bad weather. Notwithstanding all these disagreeable warnings, the Bel Ami one day leaves the harbour of Marseilles; in those treacherous parts, the water forms enormous and threatening waves. My master gives the order to sail towards the coasts of Provence, abandoning, I think, with some vexation, the idea of those of Spain.

Here we are back in Garibaldi's country; in our large apartment surrounded with sweet-smelling shrubs, M. de Maupassant seems bored; the crowds in the Nice streets tire him. We often lunch at Madame de Maupassant's, and then, following the seashore, we reach the harbour where the Bel Ami is ready for a sail. When the weather allows of it, we manœuvre before Villefranche, giving a glance to Beaulieu, which is growing every day more beautiful. For the sake of variety, we sail another day to the Cap d'Antibes; and when my master has again admired the îles de Lerins and in the distance Cannes, — which forms a green circle spotted with white; its old square tower on Mont Chevalier in ruins, bright with red shining tiles, yet with a mournful aspect created by the assaults of past centuries and of the mistral, which dies at its very feet, we turn towards the open sea, so as to anchor before the city of Masséna.

To-day, during the sail, my master allowed me for a long time to keep the helm. That is because he is finishing his article: Un Empereur, for the Figaro. Who would have thought, seeing him so quick at his work, that it was the last article he would write for that paper, for it was without any trouble apparently that he composed this short tale! From that moment he put aside his l'Ame Étrangère, and only worked at one single composition, his Angelus.

One night in April he called me to him. He felt ill, and would not allow me to leave him for a minute; so I made him a cup of camomile tea in his spirit-kettle in his bedroom. When the sun rose I was still near him. But in the morning he felt better; his faintness had disappeared, and we spent the day in the air as usual. That evening he told me the heat was coming on and that I might prepare everything for our return to Paris; a few days later he said goodbye to his mother, and we took the Rapide in the evening.

My master has been quite reasonable during the six weeks we have just spent in Paris, taking all the necessary time to care for his health without infringing for a single day the new regulations. He is therefore better, and is even a little stouter; his face looks healthier. He offers a lunch in honour of the two MM. Coquelin of the Comédie-Française.

"I think," says he, "I have found the subject of a play which will suit them both, and also suit their theatre, and I have invited them expressly to have their opinion. Those two men are sincere, I can submit a sketch to them, trusting in their good sense," In this sentence he alluded to the disappointments often afforded him by actors. Some writers have blamed my master for not following their advice and writing for the stage, they multiplied their efforts against what they called his prejudices; few of them knew that my master had not been very well treated by the world of the footlights. He wrote a play in three acts in 1886. He had begun by settling everything with the lady who was to take the leading part. He was well acquainted with her style, her talent; the play really was made for her. The parts were all copied out and distributed, it was time to begin rehearsing. Then the lady exacted terms the manager could not accept. She asked for each representation a sum which came to more than half the receipts, my master offered to give up the sum total of his author's rights to satisfy the Star; but all was in vain, and the play remained in the drawer of his bureau.

He talked of this incident.

"I only regret," said he, "this disaster, on account of that excellent fellow, Raymond Deslandes. He is such a perfect gentleman, he showed such kindness about the whole business! What a bore it must have been to fail, after all his endeavours. As to me, this disappointment turned me away from the stage, I went back to my novels and tales. They are, after all, what I prefer, it amuses me to compose them. Still," added he, after a pause, "I should have thought that woman had more sense. She seemed so sincere as we talked. I can see her still, seated on my divan, listening to me so gracefully, holding in her hand the corner of a cushion, and pressing it as if to give emphasis to her answers. I must confess she had produced an excellent impression on me; later on, I understood she was as good an actress in private life as on the stage. I was naïf enough to fear that a particular perfume she preferred was too strong, I thought it must do her harm...."

M. Piot Verdier, my master's shirtmaker, came to deliver the dayshirts and nightshirts we had ordered. The first fit well and please him, because they are very simple, it is not so with the nightshirts that M. Piot Verdier, thinking he is right, has trimmed with a coloured frill.

"No, no," says my master, "I won't have those ornaments; take them off and I will accept the nightshirts. If you wish to please me, always give me the simplest of articles, they must be plain, no gew-gaws; you'll put the monogram under the fold, that will do."

On the 22nd October, M. Piot Verdier brings worsted socks and drawers of a drab colour; they are warm English articles which please my master. He gives his card to the shirtmaker bearing his address: Chalet de l'Isère, Cannes; that is where the flannel waistcoats he has ordered are to be sent.

On June the 27th M. de Maupassant takes a journey towards the Cévennes mountains, intending afterwards to follow a course of baths at Luchon.

We reach Arles.

"We are here in Gallic Rome, this town is celebrated for the beauty of its women, I hope to see here some handsome faces!"

We are in an hotel, on a square which is not remarkable in any way. In the morning we go into the street, up to the church-doors — we visit St Trophime, of which my master admires the façade. In the narrow street we see women whose large cloaks and coifs are flapping in the wind.

Neither the celebrated Arles cap, nor its black velvet ribbon, nor the white crown that surmounts it, give these women that queenly aspect master expected.

"It is pretty because of its simplicity," says he. "But there is nothing aristocratic about it... yet it is here Mistral wrote Mireille." Thus the day passed away without our having set eyes on the hoped-for beauty.

At nine next morning a "M. Oscar" is there to guide us. Where to, I do not know. As we leave the hotel, he makes us ascend by a winding street and we reach the Arena in a few minutes; he tells us about it, always coming back to the Romans.

Then we find ourselves on a height on which rises a kind of quaint public square. This part of Arles is in a very sad state, the houses are tumbling down without any attempt apparently being made to repair them. It looks as if one were in a deserted city, not at all like the celebrated town which sometimes has been called the French Pompeii. My master looks morose as he contemplates the sad sight.

About a hundred-and-twenty yards further, M. Oscar knocks at a varnished door studded with large black-headed nails, surmounted by a capital shaped like a pointed arch; modem, I think. A grated peep-hole is opened, our guide says a few words, and we are allowed to go in. We are in a convent. We are led to a circular room which does duty as a parlour. A very old sister, who can hardly walk, comes to us. My master bows very low. She makes a show of taking him by the hand, and pushes open a door before her. Both disappear.

How long did they remain away? I cannot exactly say, the time passed slowly. When my master returned, we went out immediately, and walked quietly down a very steep street, at the bottom of which our guide M. Oscar took leave of us.

Now we follow the delta of the Camargue, and my master cannot restrain himself from expressing his delight.

"What I have seen in that convent is more beautiful, more artistic than anything I have yet beheld! It is perhaps finer than Titian's Lady at Florence. What I have just seen surpasses everything, everything...."

We spent the morning of the 20th at Tarascon. We visited the crypt of the first Romanesque church, which is most interesting, and then King René's castle. In the afternoon we listened to some music on the Cours des Papes at Avignon. There were numerous pretty women, some very young and fresh, who made up a pleasing sight, and suggested to my master some happy remarks; but the music began again, which bored him.

"That music," said he, " is too noisy — I don't like it..."

"His nerves are too sensitive just now," thought I, as we walked towards the Rhone, "for he has written in Fort comme la Mort:

"'Music is a mystery that penetrates the body, maddens the nerves and the soul with a real and poetical fever, by mingling a wave of sound we listen to with the clear air we breathe."

After glancing at the Pope's Palace, we crossed the Rhone and visited the ancient city of Villeneuve d'Avignon. We returned to Avignon, after recrossing the river which flows so majestically, and which, from the bridge, one can see meandering along, far away. We beheld a large chapel: Notre Dame des Doms on a terrace on our left, which rises above the square and the Pope's Palace.

"Let us go in," says my master, "sometimes inside those old monuments there are things worth looking at, such as painted glass windows, etc."

After going round the church, we saw a hall on the left, near the entrance, and there, in a glass shrine, a life-size recumbent female saint.

My master looked at it with that attention he always shows when wanting to understand a thing thoroughly.

"That statue," says he in a loud tone, "was the work of an Italian artist. In France, we do not know how to produce such artistic finish."

Going out, he gives some silver to the woman who looks after the holy water, and she tells him the pretty saint Nevia Félicité he has just admired was offered to this church by Pope Pius the Ninth.

As we returned to the station, my master looked right and left towards the narrow streets in which one can perceive Gothic monuments. In the evening he says we can go back to Nîmes.

"Later on," said he, "when M. Dumas asks me where I found my woman's face, it will be amusing to tell him 'In a shrine at Notre Dame des Doms, of Avignon....' I confess I have not found in that figure all I want for my type of a woman. Still I saw in that expression of face the uncut diamond I have to polish. I perceived some artistic details which will be of use for carving my subject, that I hope to make very striking, as near perfection as possible. In my Angélus I intend to give all the power of expression of which I am capable, every detail will be cared for most minutely without tiring the reader. I feel very well-disposed to write this book, the subject of which I possess completely, and which I have conceived with surprising facility. It will be the crowning-piece of my literary career, I am convinced its qualities will awaken such enthusiasm in the artistic reader that he will ask himself if he is in presence of reality or fiction."

Nîmes, July 1st. — My master photographs the principal Roman monuments, and we ascend the Tour Magne, on the top of Mont Cavalier. The panorama we see from the platform is really marvellous; my master did not know how to leave off admiring it....

At eight next morning our carriage rolls on the broad white road leading to the Pont du Gard. Some battalions of artillery going to Nîmes for a review, advance in such a thick cloud of dust that we can see nothing. My master coughs slightly, but does not complain; all his attention is attracted by the cannon crossing our path. Two hundred paces before we reach the restaurant of the Pont du Gard, we hear on our left the cries of frightened fowls in the bushes. My master jumps out of the carriage and runs towards the spot whence come the screams of the poor birds. I follow him, and on the edge of the path we see a fox flying as hard as he can, carrying a hen away. My master is sorry not to have his gun....

We reach the bridge, we admire the majesty of the works the Romans have bestowed on this part of France. To climb to the top there is a choice of several winding paths. I take one of these, carrying the photographic apparatus, a set of films and a telescope; I reach the platform before my master who probably had chosen a more difficult path. When he saw I was in advance, he made an evident effort to reach the summit, not an easy matter, I confess. He takes a photograph of the bridge on the side of the Louis XIV. footbridge; then we go from one end to the other of the narrow passage on the top of the bridge which connects the two uncultivated banks of this torrent. From there we look over the surrounding woods. What my master told me at that moment was most interesting. He enumerated the episodes which took place on that bridge about the end of the fourth century, as soon as it was built; then he praised the utility of this aqueduct, bringing the waters drawn from the Eure at Nîmes.

"What a lesson!" he exclaimed, " nothing was impossible to the Romans when it was a question of public health. Besides their prodigious works, they constructed baths everywhere which were open gratuitously to all. Ah! they were practical people! It is sad to think that goodly process of regeneration by water they had shown us should be lost; our race would have been much improved by it."

We spent half a day at Cette, then went to Toulouse, where we put up at the Hotel Tivollier rue d'Alsace-Lorraine.

In the early morning my master already is at his bedroom window; he is looking at the sky and asks me if I think the day will be fine. I answer that knowing nothing about this region I can't give him my opinion, but that if I were in a northern country I should tell him that a dry morning without any dew, such as this one, with the rising sun drinking up the mists, means generally a rainy afternoon.

My master then asked if I had seen the Capitol.

"No, sir; I do not know why, but I like neither the people or the things of this country. Perhaps it is because in my youth I had to stand during three years the presence of a man from Toulouse; such a boaster, that my nerves quite gave way!"

My master does not sleep well in this hotel, there are too many mosquito-nets, curtains and hangings. So, notwithstanding the tremendous heat, he travels all day to reach Bagnères de Luchon, where he thinks it is better to take an apartment during the time his treatment lasts. I then ask if he had not better wait a little to see if the climate will suit him.

"I think you are right," replied he; "it will also be wiser to see if the treatment suits me."

We made excursions during three days, visiting the waterfalls of Juzet, Montauban, then the Lys Valley and the cascade du Cœur. My master finds these united names auspicious, and laughs, adding a few pleasant remarks about them. We finish our round by the Cascade de l'Enfer, which falls from a great height. We take the left-hand path and reach the glacier, which my master admires while saying he has seen "more imposing ones."

The guide follows us with some difficulty during the ascent, so when we get back to the inn a drink is offered him; he and the coachman are quite surprised to see us leave without taking anything at the bar.

But we feel very hot, and, well wrapped up in our plaids, we go down the fresh and pretty valley, following a brawling stream, the sweet music of which resembled the dainty song of some mysterious divinities far away down in fairy palaces under the earth.

My master spent the fourth day at Luchon, and in the evening, by the doctor's advice, he resolved not to continue the cure. His nervous system cannot stand the sulphurous smells of the baths; and the good Spanish doctor tells him grievous harm might ensue if he persisted in continuing his treatment. Then Luchon is so monotonous! It is a funnel where you cannot breathe, and where you can only see the sun appear at ten o'clock on the top of the mountains. As we do not ride, there is no opportunity of ascending these forbidding-looking mountains so as to see the sun rising on their tops....

My master says to me after the doctor's decree has been pronounced:

"Here the smell of sulphur is strong everywhere. Inside the Bathing Establishment, it is even worse than down in the sulphur mines I explored in Sicily." Here we are at Divonne-les-Bains. My master wishes to reside rather far from the centre of the town. So we take a lodging in a sort of farm in the country, belonging to a doctor's widow. On the following day, I went to buy provisions in the village, coming back by paths crossing fields planted with oats and golden com. They were occasionally divided by great stretches of green clover; a light scarlet carpet with soft violet groundwork spread over them. On the edge of the path, I found clover with four, six and eight leaves, always in even numbers, which according to country people, brings good luck....

M. de Maupassant goes thrice a day by the road to take his shower-bath. But the way is monotonous, it seems lengthy to him; a few walnut trees stand out on the horizon and look picturesque against the deep blue sky.

Mont Blanc is visible at a distance, but it is far away, and when on the road to Divonne, it disappears on the left.

On the fourth morning my master is ready at seven, he goes off to take his shower-bath, I know that during these four nights, he has slept but little. He tells me he hears strange noises in the night, I can well believe it, since wide awake, and seated on a ricketty chair that hurts me, I also hear noises I cannot explain. My nervous system is just now rather highly strung certainly, but I have my wits about me, and neither my master nor I know what is commonly called fear. We are indifferent about this house being haunted or not, but all the same, we should like to take some rest. So last night as we could not sleep, and whole groups of mice, like reconnoitring patrols, passed continually before us, the light having no effect on them, we organised some ambuscades to catch these impudent creatures.

Armed with the provision net and a few other weapons invented by my master for the circumstance, we captured thirty-two of these little beasts. They were immediately condemned to the fate of the martyred St Lawrence. Only, instead of the gridiron, they had the honour of a bon-fire.

“If Piroli were but here, how she would have enjoyed it!” thought I.

My master was only half-pleased by this result, for not a single rat had been taken, and it appears the rats cause this inexplicable noise.

The afternoon following the “ burnt sacrifices” I went with my master to Divonne by his favourite path. I told him how superstitious I was about four-leaved clover. This made him laugh, and he began walking so fast I could scarcely follow him. But at the end of a few minutes, he slowed down and stretched out his hand towards a large figure of Christ placed above the cemetery.

“Certainly He was the most intelligent, the most perfect Man that ever appeared on this earth, when one reflects on all He did. And He was only thirty-three when they crucified Him! Napoleon the First, whom I admire, but only for his genius, used to say: ‘In all that Man did, — were He God or were He not — there is something mysterious and inexplicable’...”

Here he stopped, we were obliged to stand aside so as to allow for the passage of some splendid red cows going to graze.

We reached Divonne, where my master hired half a chalet with a kitchen. We were settled there that very evening, my master’s bedroom is on the southern side, the dining-room looks west; all is for the best, and he sleeps better, even from the first night.

After a quiet fortnight in this pretty habitation, my master seems to have recovered his usual good-humour, and his former health.

His doctor lunches with him one day; their conversation is merry and animated. I must confess that the doctor added to his professional merit, wit and a tactful philosophy, which much pleased my master. The medical man had over the artist the authority of the scientist, and it was easy to see how beneficial his treatment was. The shower-baths of that icy water, coming down the mountains of France; that isolated retreat in a corner apparently lost in the immense chain of mountains, on the edge of the Lake of Geneva; first-rate food; all combined to restore the health of the celebrated oarsman of Sartrouville, he gets stouter, his complexion is good, he sleeps nearly the whole night; he calls me only once or twice.

Occasionally my master goes off on a tricycle. The day before yesterday, he went to Voltaire's chateau at Ferney; to-day, he will go to Prégny, where Baroness de R — lives, and he gives me a holiday for the afternoon, saying that if the lady invites him, he will remain and dine with her.

I went to take a walk on the road to Gex. But notwithstanding the luck which seemed to smile on us, since my master was so much better, and all the happiness promised by that symbolical clover, I felt nervous and would not go far. I came in at half-past four; my master appeared at the same time, his face was red, there was evidently a flow of blood to the head. The Baroness was away, and he had taken the journey on his tricycle from Divonne to the gates of Geneva under a burning sun, absolutely tropical in that valley. He would return, without stopping, without taking any rest, and while coming back, overwhelmed by the heat he turned giddy, fell from the machine and hurt two of his ribs. After resting a little under a farm shed, he has the courage to get on to his tricycle again, and there he is, quite miserable, not on account of the pain in his side, but because of the shock this fall (which must have been caused by sunstroke) may communicate to his brain, which had been latterly so clear that he had been able to work with the greatest ease at his Angelus.

The doctor is there, he sees the ribs are hurt, and orders that his chest be bandaged up. My master seems quite comforted after this good doctor's visit, but he has a bad night; several times he unlooses his bandages, and I have to put them on again, which is not so easy. About five in the morning he gets to sleep.

The next night was a little calmer. I was dozing on a chair in the dining-room when I heard the little travelling clock strike two in the morning.

"That's the bad hour," I thought.

And he called me, of course. All kinds of mournful ideas then tortured me, my heart beat as if under the impression of some great disaster; hardly awake, I had the presentiment misfortunes never come singly.

On the 15th at nine in the morning, a carriage stops before the garden door. A lady gets out. Alas! my presentiment comes true! She explains it is to her To-day we have had some hard work; I transported my master's bed to the other side of the room — some plaids, blankets and hangings which the landlady kindly gave us are stretched along the partition, separating the two lodgings; and this thick padding forms a very sufficient insulator. The same noise was repeated on the other nights, but it was softened and one could rest.

While I worked, my master told me how he had become acquainted with Madame X — .

"It was," said he, " during the spring of 1883; I was passing in my yawl by Andrésy. After rowing round the island, and throwing a glance on the lock at Fin-d'Oise, I turned round and thought I should like to cool myself and rest a little on that belt of grass surrounded by water. I moor my yawl, and walk into a bush of thorns. That corner was still a species of wilderness at that time; now people go there as often as to La Jatte. I walk towards an elm with low and spreading branches, promising me a little shade. But on nearing it, I perceive the place is already occupied. I hesitate... Is it a man, is it a woman? Passing at a little distance, I see it is a woman wearing a sailor's hat and a tight-fitting bathing costume.

"At that very moment, she puts a cape over her shoulders, probably because she is chilly. The lady is reading a book; she is alone — That seemed funny. Is she really alone? That is the question. Nearer still, I saw she was reading my book, Une Vie, with extraordinary attention. That detail, said I to myself, will facilitate an introduction. I began to walk in the beautiful Andrésy avenue of lime-trees. Towards six in the evening a man comes in a boat to fetch the lady reading on the island. I followed; other couples, friends evidently, sit with them at a table in the restaurant Chantry. I tell the waiter to put me at a table near enough to see the lady.

"The host tells me she is the wife of the dark gentleman. At first, I am rather put out, then the man comes back and tells me he hears they are about to be separated.

“The unknown lady is pretty, lively, like a Paris gamin. Then melancholy thoughts about her come to me. There are two young and handsome people, already tired of each other, who will probably be unhappy for the rest of their days. What a comedy marriage is, such as conventionality has made it! Would it not be simpler and more just to allow two beings to obey Nature and follow their instincts?

“A few weeks later, I was on good terms with all these people who loved the water....”

The first days of September are over, and the sun sinks early behind the mountains. We make amends by climbing, one morning on to the heights; while waiting for the sunrise we follow a pretty river (the Versoix) its cool clear waters flow rapidly towards the valley, carrying off occasionally large stones, and thus showing bright trout with their silvery reflections. Barefoot fishermen are in the water; they seize with their hands the fish, but these sometimes escape, sailing away just under the surface, and hiding under the first pebble they can find. The sport amused my master, who had long wished to see the way these delicate fish were taken.

“This pretty scene,” says he, “lit up by the sun on mountain and plain, gives me ideas I shall treat in an article for the Gaulois.”

We are leaving Divonne, my master tells me he has written the sonnet he wished to compose for M. Gounod.

CHAPTER XVIII. FROM THE END OF SEPTEMBER 1891 TILL JULY 3RD, 1893

The clear-sighted sympathy of Professor G.... — The fatal visit — A very serious consultation — Departure for Cannes — At the "Chalet de l'Isère" — Doctor Daremberg — The fatal illness progresses slowly — Haunted by sad thoughts — Le Moine de Fécamp — Part of a sole in the lung — Symptoms of ataxy — Memory very clear — Increase of brain-fatigue — The mosquitoes — A sad New Year's Day — Last family meeting — The fatal telegram from the East — M. de Maupassant cuts his throat — He is aware of his condition — A terrible watch — The idea of revenge on the Germans haunts the patient — At the house of Dr Blanche at Passy — Momentary hope of a cure — What Dr Blanche feared takes place — Mad terror of persecution — Flashes of good sense — How Fate decides! — It is on account of a sojourn in Switzerland that M. de Maupassant ends his days in a madhouse.

SEPTEMBER 18th, 1891. — We are delighted to return to the comfortable apartment in the rue Boccador. M. de Maupassant expresses his regret at not being able to take with him when he travels, all the familiar things he loves, which he is in the habit of seeing and touching every day, " above all my bed," says he, " for nowhere can I find its equal."

On the 19th he comes back to dinner, apparently in excellent spirits. He has been to see an eminent Professor of the Medical Faculty, who for years, has watched over his health.

"Doctor G— " says he, "has found me in very good condition; I have told him what I think of Divonne; he agrees with me, it is the treatment that suits me the best. Of which this result is a proof."

This professor, a most kind-hearted man, had been my master's friend for years; he treated him with fatherly affection, seeming to look on him as a boy without any experience. A year ago, my master went to Cannes without me, and told me an incident that happened there.

"I was coming home," said he, "with Dr G — one evening to that dull hotel situated in a sort of hollow between the road to Grasse and the boulevard du Cannet. The night was dark, the air of that valley is oppressive, and smells of the marshes, a kind of wretchedness floated in the air. Why were we staying there? I do not know; anyhow, as we were walking conversation turned on my health. I told the good Doctor something of what the author of Bel-Ami had been in his youth, what an intrepid oarsman I was. And I told him all I feel now. Then he, speaking like a father to his son, said the kindest things one could hear coupled with advice, so severe but so clear, that the most indifferent of minds could not fail to be impressed. When we shook hands before separating, I observed that large tears were rolling down the thin cheeks of the man whose kind words had moved me so deeply; I felt the spontaneous desire of wiping with my lips those tears, the noblest my wet eyes had ever beheld....”

He paused.

“That is the only instance,” added he, “in the whole course of my life, that I have felt the wish of throwing myself into a man’s arms....”

On the 20th of September, at two in the afternoon, the electric bell (of which the wires have not been renewed for several months) rings in an uncertain way. I open the door and find myself face to face with the woman who has already done such harm to my master. As usual, she passes, rigid, and enters the drawingroom without her marble countenance showing the slightest change. I go to my room, cross and unhappy. Ought I not to warn this fatal visitor, reproach her with the crime she is committing with such unconcern, put her to the door without any ceremony?... But, since my master consented to receive her, I could only bow down to her.... I may now confess how deeply I regret not having had the courage of sending that vampire away! My master would still be living....

In the evening, he seems tired and does not mention this visit.

On October the 17th, at eleven in the evening, the eminent Professor who is so kind to my master, sends Doctor D — to him, for he is suffering greatly.

After some cordial conversation on both sides, the Doctor leaves, and I continue watching till four in the morning. He sinks into a deep sleep, then I go to rest a little.

He is not so well on the 19th of October; I might say he has lost all he had gained by the Divonne treatment. Doctor D —— has been to see him, also Professor G — who has requested a consultation for the day after to-morrow.

As I go into the bedroom, I look at the masterpiece of Rodin which decorates the chimney, representing a wicked-faced Chimera carrying off an unfortunate victim; on this group is placed the paper covered with the notes for the doctors' perusal; they are to read them, and decide their diagnosis of my master's health....

It is three in the afternoon, the doctors are there. They pass from the drawing-room where I conducted them into the study with my master. A few minutes later they return into the drawing-room; the whole did not last half an hour. I study with anxiety M. de Maupassant's countenance; he does not seem at all frightened by the diagnosis, but he looks bored, his complexion is that of one of his bad days. I venture to ask him what has happened, he is preoccupied and hardly answers. He walks unceasingly up and down the apartment, I leave him to himself.

Half an hour later, I bring him an egg beaten up in tea, which he seems to like; he tells me to carry away a whole series of perfume bottles he has taken from his dressing-room.

"All these scents," says he, " have done me the greatest harm."

During dinner, he says this meeting of the doctors has not given him much hope about his health in the future, besides which Paris is not good for him, and that we are going to start for Cannes. Then he talks of his physical strength, saying he hopes that will suffice to set him up again, adding he wants perfect rest.... and above all to see no more that wicked lady, who is so harmful to him....

And now my poor master opens his heart to me, he makes a species of short confession to me.... For the moment, I feel such pity for him, such sorrow, that I have not the courage to express the slightest reproach. During the last month certainly, I had often gone out of the way of an ordinary servant, by giving him advice whenever there was an opportunity, and according to circumstances; sometimes my hints might go a little too far; but he, who had understood them well, did not reply.

That evening, however, his heart was full, he allowed some words to escape (which were an avowal) in the course of an answer by which he acknowledged I was right in the discreet recommendations I had ventured on giving for so long a time. I tried to remind him that to prolong life, it was necessary to avoid all dangers, and watch over health, the greatest of all possessions....

On the 20th my master wrote to his mother, on the 22nd he settled accounts with his publishers.

I am busy packing. M. de Maupassant gives me the different articles which are to travel slowly, one or two dictionaries of which he possesses two copies (he has already some at Cannes) a few rare works by classical authors, which he wishes to read again before returning them to his mother to whom they belong....

We take with us a special bag containing manuscripts and a few letters. All is ready by the 28th, we go downstairs towards seven on the 29th, the carriage awaits us at the door. The concierge, a good and simple woman, sincerely saddened by our departure, sheds tears....

My master gave her her Christmas box this morning, telling her he would be away on New Year's Day....

November the 2nd. Chalet de l'Isère. — My master from his bedroom window beholds the open sea, the Cap d'Estérel jutting out into the blue water, and also the lighthouse. He is delighted with this view and his apartment, the very resting-place he wished for. He is alone in his little house, there is no piano either above or underneath, no near neighbours, a most extensive view, and his small garden in the centre of which he makes them plant a bed of carnations. This tiny garden looks well from the first story, it looks larger as it is next the one belonging to Madame Littré, widow of the celebrated professor. The autumn is splendid; my master sails about on the sea, he loves his yacht more than ever. Though the climate is warmer, he tells me that at night the temperature of his room changes rapidly and gets very low by the morning. That is because there is only a loft above his room. That very day, I go off to a wood-yard, following the course of the river that comes from Cannet. Next day I made them lay a bed of sawdust about a foot and a half deep, on the ceiling. With a small fire, this precaution caused the temperature to remain regular.

Some friends from Paris are here, but only for a few days, they intend hiring or buying a villa for the winter. My master takes them about for a sail or a drive, he does all he can to be of use to them, for they are old people. As to him, he is busy with his Angelus, working obstinately but slowly at it.

We are at the end of November; my master complains of pains everywhere. It is strange! For he looks well, his countenance is placid; he is even somewhat stouter. Often he takes a bath at home, and every day his douche at the Baths. His appetite is good and regular, two or three times he has told me I have put too much salt; but nevertheless he does not push the dish away. Now he rarely sees his usual doctor at Cannes, Doctor Gimbert; as his friend Doctor Georges Daremberg is already here for the season, it is to him he goes and confides his ailings. Altogether, excepting the nights, his condition seems to me good. My poor master can never get any regular sleep before three in the morning. If he gets to sleep before, I am always sure he will call me at two.

December 6th. — This afternoon he takes a sail with Doctor Daremberg, who came to-day to lunch. They laughed, talking over their young days. I noticed the Doctor tried to recall suddenly certain details to M. de Maupassant, to see if he would answer without hesitation and in a direct manner. And my master never failed in his replies.

December 15th. — Since the beginning of the month, we go at least twice a week to Nice to lunch at Madame de Maupassant's. My master insists on my accompanying him, so as to prepare the meal.

"It is not that my mother's cook does not know her trade, but I am accustomed to your cooking, and you understand what suits me."

December 16th. — In the evening, he walks about his tiny garden, and always keeps to his carnation-bed. Sometimes he leans closer to admire them in detail, many are already out, and there are thousands of buds.... I am in a corner with Bernard, cleaning the tricycle. My master says I need not do so, it is too dangerous a steed for this hilly country....

On Christmas Day, I go sailing with my master, but the wind has dropped; so it is a holiday for the seamen. When I come home, he has already returned, and asks if it is not too late for me to prepare his bath, I make haste, the bath is soon ready and he dines with appetite afterwards.

In the evening, Bernard accompanies Raymond who is to sleep at the Chalet. My master hears them and comes into the kitchen to say good-night to them. M. de Maupassant then tells us the first tale he intends to write will be the Le Moine de Fécamp, and he sketches his subject in a few words. In a loft, at Fécamp, he had seen a monk, who had lived in that retreat for years.

"I heard many curious details about him," added he, "from the woman who brought his provisions. I saw that Monk on two occasions, I am sure he does not suspect how I am going to touch him up. I intend to show him under new colours, and when my tale is told about this celebrated fellow, we shall hear nothing more of the Estérel hermit."

We all laughed with him about these strange beings who leave the customary haunts of men, to live in a desert like the hermits of Egypt.

"Do you recollect," said M. de Maupassant to me, "the nocturnal ceremonies of our Divonne neighbours? they also furnished me with facts which will not be lost."

On the 26th in the afternoon, my master told me he was about to take a walk on the road to Grasse. He was back in ten minutes; I was dressing. He called me loudly, insisting on seeing me at once, so as to tell me what he had seen on the way to the cemetery. A shadow, a phantom! Certainly, he had been the victim of some sort of hallucination. I gathered he had felt frightened, but he would not say so.

When lunching on the 27th, he coughed slightly; and told me with the utmost gravity that assuredly a fragment of the sole he was eating had passed into his lungs, and that he might die of it! My scanty knowledge does not allow me to take this seriously. I simply advise him to drink some very hot tea. The result was satisfactory, an hour later he took the path leading to the harbour, and made a pleasant excursion on board the Bel-Ami. I little thought it would be the last one! He came in at about five, in good spirits, but feeling tired. He was better after being well rubbed down; rested before dinner, and took his meal as usual.

In the evening, Raymond told me my master had had some trouble in getting in and out of the small boat, evidently he had no longer the command of his legs. Now and then he lifted them up too high, or put them down too rapidly. He had already complained to me about this difficulty in moving.

On the 28th we lunched at Nice as usual with Madame; there was nothing to remark, except that from the house to the station my master never spoke, and that in the evening, in his room, he only said the few words necessary for my orders.

December 29th, five in the evening. — My master gets into his bath. At that very instant in comes his friend Dr Daremberg — I inform him that my master is in his bath.

"I don't care," answers he merrily, "I am just as pleased to see Maupassant in the water as in his drawing-room."

And he enters the bath-room.

"Now, old fellow," he exclaims, "don't take your hands out of the water, the heart's in the right place, and we don't want ceremony! How are you?"

Two peals of laughter resound in that unfurnished place.

When the Doctor took leave, I accompanied him to the garden-door.

"Your master," said he, "is of a very strong constitution, but he is attacked by a malady that may not spare the brain. Still he has just related to me his travels in Tunisia with extraordinary ease, mentioning the dates, the names of the people he saw, without hunting for them, with no hesitation. All that came spontaneously, without any trouble; he spoke like a man who has nothing to fear for a very long time. Therefore, patience, and courage, my good François."

On December the 30th there spread over the Estérel mountains and all the west of the sky a magnificent aurora borealis. My master made me take with him the path skirting Madame Littré's garden. There, we beheld the phenomenon in all its grandeur, nothing interfered with the view. M. de Maupassant seemed to enjoy life.

"I never saw," he exclaimed, "so fairy-like an aspect in the Heavens! It is like none of the pink-orange auroras I have seen elsewhere. Look, 'tis blood-red!"

True, the sky was so red it was impossible to fix one's eyes on it even for a few minutes. My master tried to make me understand how these wonderful lights (connected with electricity and the magnetic fluid near the poles) arose.

On the last day of December he told me he had slept better than usual. When he had taken his egg and his tea, he told me his friend, M. Muterse, was coming to lunch, and that he would dress quickly, so as to go and take his shower-bath and return before his guest's arrival. At half past twelve, they sat down to table, but my master had a headache, and soon asked leave to go to his room, as conversation fatigued him.

Towards three, my master is better; we go together towards the Villa Bellevue. We stop where Rose stays (the woman who comes to char for us by day), then at the Villa Continentale. There we make inquiries on a subject which has to do with our rest, we ask how mosquitoes are attracted or got rid of. For instance, at the Villa Continentale, we used to be literally devoured by these noisome insects, and here in this little châlet we inhabit (which is quite close), we never see one.

And, yet exactly as at the villa, we have a ditch with pebbles at the bottom, we have even a wash-house and an uncovered well in the garden; but we have never beheld one of these terrifying insects.

New Year's Day 1892. — My master is up at seven. I bring him his hot water for shaving, for we are to take the nine o'clock train to go and see his mother; but he has some difficulty in shaving himself. He tells me there is a mist before his eyes, and that he does not feel well enough to go to his mother’s. I help him as well as I can. He takes a couple of eggs and his tea, that does him good, he feels better. I throw his window open, the air and the sun flow into the room.

The postman comes, he reads a few letters of good wishes, “always the same,” he says. Then the sailors come, my master goes downstairs to receive them. I hear them pronounce the same set sentence they repeat every year. But here, at least, the voices of these good fellows have an accent of inimitable sincerity, they are addressing a kind patron they love — without any interested motive. I also went to shake hands with my comrades both by sea and land.

It is ten; he asks me if I am ready to start.

“Because,” sighs he, “ if we don’t go, my mother will think I am ill.”

We take the train; during the short journey M. de Maupassant looks out on the sea, it is beautifully blue under the purest of skies, with a good east wind. He observes this bright weather would be perfect for a sail. And absorbed by the view, he tells me to glance over the papers and tell him if I see anything likely to interest him.

At Madame de Maupassant’s I cook and serve the lunch, apparently he eats with a good appetite. There were his mother, his sister-in-law, his niece and his aunt, Madame d’Harnois, whom he is very fond of. Many a time, when his heart has been too full, he has sought this lady out, so as to confide in her. She was naturally gifted in a way that enabled her to pity and console him.

The carriage came to fetch us at four; on our way to the station we bought a large box of white grapes so as to continue the usual grape cure. At the châlet, M. de Maupassant changes his clothes, puts a silk shirt on to be more comfortable, and dines as usual eating the wing of a chicken, endive with cream, and a vanilla soufflé, with a glass and a half of mineral water.

Till ten, he walks from the drawing-room to the end of the dining-room, occasionally coming to the kitchen, the door of which has been left open. Sometimes he throws a word or two to Raymond and to me.

When I took him a cup of camomile tea in his bedroom, he followed me directly, complaining of internal pains.

“I feel them even in my loins,” said he.

I cupped him, and at the end of an hour, the pains left him. At half past eleven, he went to bed. Seated on a low chair in the bedroom, I waited for him to go to sleep. After taking his cup of tisane he ate some grapes and closed his eyes; it was then half past twelve.

I went into my room leaving the door open. A minute later, there was a ring at the garden door, it was a telegram. I looked into my master's room to see if he slept, and if it was possible to give him the telegram the postman said come from some Eastern land. But he was sound asleep, his mouth slightly open; I went to bed.

It was about a quarter to two when I heard a noise. I rushed into the small room next the staircase; I found M. de Maupassant standing with his throat bleeding.

"See, François," said he immediately, " what I have done. I have cut my throat. This is a case of absolute madness (sic)...."

I called Raymond. We put him on the bed in the next room, and I hastily bandaged the wound. Dr de Valcourt, suddenly called in, kindly helped me on this mournful occasion. Notwithstanding all I felt I was able to hold the lamp, while the doctor rapidly sewed up the wound aided by Raymond, who did not flinch and made himself useful. The operation succeeded perfectly.

My poor master was quite calm but did not utter a single word before the doctor. When the latter had left he told me how he regretted having done "such a thing" and causing us so much worry. He gave his hand to Raymond and to me; he wanted to ask our forgiveness for what he had done; he fathomed all the depth of his misfortune; his large eyes were fixed upon us as if he were requesting some words of consolation, if possible, of hope.

In moments like these (so painful that it seems we could not undergo them a second time without losing our reason) whence comes the strength that enables us to struggle against evidence itself? I continued to try and comfort my poor wounded master with all the soothing expressions I could find. I repeated them twenty times, they did him some good, he clung desperately to the most insane of hopes. At last his head drooped, his eyelids closed, he slept....

Raymond leaning on the foot of the bed, was totally exhausted, he had done all he could; he was pale as death. I advised him to take a little rum, which he did, and then terrible sobs burst from him, though his eyes remained quite dry. We both watched over our good master; I never stirred, for he had put a hand on one of my arms; I was so afraid of waking him that we did not even speak. We had turned the lamps down, and in the dark, we reflected on the irreparable misfortune....

How many thoughts passed through my brain during the latter part of that night! Sometimes, I wished all was over, and my life at an end, it was so difficult to live.... Then I tried to hope again, since my master was able to reason, to realise the senselessness of what he had done; his mind was not dead; so I might still hope. By dint of argument, I persuaded myself I should be able to cure him, and that his state would improve in time. I told myself it was impossible he should thus leave us, when, only the day before, he talked to us in such lucid terms about his work, his Moine de Fècamp and his Angelus. Anyhow, I resolved to do all that in me lay to fight against this evil, which, when one thought of M. de Maupassant’s powerful constitution, assuredly might be cured.

When he awoke, at eight, I was convinced he would get better. Bernard came; he was terrified at the sight of our patient, he had become most awfully pale; I touched his hand to see if he was feverish, no, it was cool. I asked him if he wished to take his tea, it was the hour. He hardly replied; I offered him an egg beat up in tea which he accepted. By twelve, he was still in a state of complete prostration, indifferent to everything; his calmness frightened me....

The telegram that came on that fatal night remained open on the table; it was signed by the Christian name of the ill-omened lady. My master’s relative who opened it and read it, did not understand it. But I had shuddered at the sight of that signature. Is one to believe in fatality? In the secret action of hostile forces? Why did the good wishes of the most terrible asylum, arrived, and I was able to go to Cannes. I called at our butcher’s to apprise him of my approaching departure, and to give him the mournful news.... He was cutting up a sheep, took up the bill I was to pay, put it down and remained perfectly dumb-foundered for several minutes. His wife asked what was the matter with him, trying to recall him to reality.

“Nothing, nothing,” he answered, “but I cannot believe what has just been told me. That gentleman I saw going by several times a day, in the direction of the harbour, has.... But his brisk and steady walk was that of a man full of life, and health, it was a delight to see him. I have read some of his tales, and loved him dearly, he was a great writer. Ah! what a misfortune....”

The good fellow’s heart was too full, he put his handkerchief to his eyes, and could not keep his tears back.

“We have been married fifteen years,” said his wife, “and this is the first time I have seen him weep.” I think it is the sixth of January. Rose and the keeper are with my master, who is calm. As to me, I am not quite conscious, I move like an automaton, but the moment I glance at the patient, reality reappears. I am constantly fearing he may return to our discussion about going to the war... it is a strange hallucination.

Now we are in a sleeping car, attached to the Paris Rapide; we are going to Dr Blanche’s house at Passy, where my master is to stay, and perhaps be cured. He is lying there on the central couch, showing no agitation, and quiet as a lamb. The train rushes along, we are going through the Estérel mountains. I am standing, and put my hand on the door, it flies open; I just escape being thrown out into space! I cannot even tell how it was that I did not fall out! When I had closed the door, and was regaining my self-possession, the keeper spoke to me: —

“You have had an escape!” said he, “it was written you were not to die, no doubt because your master, to get well again, requires your care.”

I was struck by these words, and felt my courage revive.

Passy, January the 7th. — During the whole of that first day my master rests; he seems very tired and yet he has slept during the greater part of the journey....

Three days after our arrival at this private asylum, Dr Blanche came at eleven o’clock in the morning. M. de Maupassant was beginning his breakfast. After saying good-morning and shaking hands with him, the celebrated doctor sat down, and remained present during the meal. He spoke on different subjects, putting unexpected questions. My master answered them all, quite to the purpose. I must add that he already knew Dr Blanche, and held him in high esteem.

“Your master,” said the doctor when he left, “ does all that you ask him, which is a good thing. He answered my questions quite correctly, all hope is not lost!... let us wait.”

This hopeful speech comforted me, and I blessed this excellent white-haired man, whose worthy countenance made me trust him at once.

So, till the 20th of April, helped by the male nurse, I took care of M. de Maupassant, with the firm hope of obtaining a good result. His physical health was good, his mental faculties also seemed in better condition. It was only on occasion that a few hallucinations haunted his quiet spirit. Sometimes he would tell us some most amusing jokes with the inimitable wit I was so well acquainted with, and he was happy to see his keeper and me laugh heartily.

One evening in April I was writing to his mother, when suddenly he reproached me with having taken his place at the Figaro and having slandered him in Heaven (sic). “I beg you to leave me,” he added, “I refuse to see you any longer.”

I was astounded, my heart sank, but following the advice of Baron the keeper, who knew better than I that kind of patient must not be opposed, I went away.

The next day my poor master welcomed me the same as usual, and asked me if we should soon return to his home in the rue Boccador.

In the day I recounted to Dr Blanche the distressing scene which had occurred, repeating exactly what my master had said to me. The specialist’s face changed, his features hardened.

“So much the worse!” he exclaimed with a frown, “that’s what I feared.”

He ran quickly downstairs and it seemed to me he clung more tightly to the wooden banister he always leaned on. I remained puzzled. When I could collect my ideas I concluded that the doctor decidedly despaired of his illustrious patient’s recovering his mental balance.

“If he is not so well,” thought I, “if there is no hope of curing him, why leave him here? We should be much better in the country, I and another man would suffice to watch over him, since though he has hallucinations, he never shows any opposition. True, he did tell me the other day to go away; but the next day he no longer thought about it.”

June 17th, 1892. — Madame de Maupassant completely agrees with me. She would like a different sort of arrangement for her son’s well-being....

July 15th. — All has been tried with this intention on the part of my master’s mother and of his aunt, Madame d’Harnois, who has always been full of solicitude about his welfare. But, to our great regret it is impossible, the unfortunate man must remain shut up, buried alive.

On the day I was told of this decision, my master received me with these words:

“François, when shall we return rue Boccador, where I have all I require for dressing? And my manuscripts are there, as well as my books. The food you know so well how to prepare for me would strengthen me, whereas here I shall never be cured!”

I was obliged to listen to this without being able to find a word in reply. Was it not heart-breaking? As usual, I promised that we should soon return to the rue Boccador. I must say the doctors always treated me with the same kindness, one of them one day questioned me as to the length of time I had been in M. de Maupassant’s service.

“Yes,” said he after a short conversation, “I understand you, my poor fellow, but what would you have?...”

September. — Now my master no longer speaks of returning to his home.... One day he asks me for the ivory carving he had so mysteriously given away, and smiles, notwithstanding which he declares he does not know what has become of it. Then he turns to Baron, taking him to witness of the truth of what he said. This keeper, who was both amiable and yielding, understanding his profession perfectly, had become a favourite with the patient.

“Certainly, François,” M. de Maupassant’s memory is good, he recollects that detail perfectly, and many other things as you may have observed.”

October. — We go into the garden every time the weather allows of it. The days grow shorter and darker; there are already fogs on the shores of the Seine. It is not fine to-day, M. de Maupassant spends his time in the drawing-room and plays billiards.

I came home, and being alone in the evening, I took up a volume of my master’s works. I pause as I am reading, I fancy he is near me.... His writings are so like himself, I think he is there and is about to pronounce my name; I see his gestures putting life into his tales, he is present to me with the hearty laugh he had when he spoke to me of his readers.

Yes, alas! I live the old days over again, I hear distinctly my master giving me his usual order.

“François, this afternoon you will carry my article to the Gil Blas. I hope they will be pleased, since they love merry ones!”

Then he would have a burst of hearty laughter, like a child pleased with having accomplished its task.

On Easter Monday (April 3rd, 1893). — I was in the garden with my master and the nurse. He has grown much thinner during that long winter, and his walk is less steady. We sit down on a bench under a chestnut, the rays of the sun glimmer through the young leaves.

Notwithstanding all, my master still enjoys the revival of Nature, he looks at the fresh green lawn stretching out before us; it is such a rest for one's eyes. I make him admire the beauty of a young shrub already crowned with variegated leaves that are almost white.

"Yes," he answers, "that is a pretty tree, but it cannot be compared with my white Étretat poplars, particularly when the east wind blows."

When in this garden, enclosed by severe-looking walls, I think of the numerous walks we have taken together on the mountains, in the pure free air, I seem to see us both on the top of Mount Renard, when he would point out to me with his cane the Swiss mountains, showing me Chamonix, Zermatt and Monte Rosa.

I also recollect that it was on that spot he told me, with a certain embarrassment betraying a regret he did not confess, that his intended marriage had been broken off partly on account of these travels in Switzerland. Ah! had he but married, how different his fate would have been! I know the lady who was to have been his wife, her intelligence is great. No doubt she would have steadied her husband, have prevented his wearing himself out. My poor master would not have become paralysed, destined to end his days in a lunatic asylum, but he would have become the most fertile writer of his time; and his works would have been so near perfection! One day I mentioned this impression of mine to Dr Blanche.

"Guy de Maupassant," answered he, "was too much of an artist to marry!"

For the moment I thought the doctor was perhaps right, but after reflecting a little, when I recollected how kind my master was, how easily influenced by the suggestions of the heart, I came to the conclusion that a woman appealing to the delicacy of his feelings, to his splendid mind, would have done what she chose with him...

Of what use was it to look backwards? No one escapes his destiny. That of M. de Maupassant was altered by a meeting which determined his fate when he was about to take the usual step.

As we returned from our walk, we passed before the aviaries, filled with all kinds of birds. Here, it is Baron who converses with master about all these feathered creatures he is so much interested in. He is well-versed in these matters of the poultry-yard; M. de Maupassant recognises the fact, and listens with pleasure to his explanations.

When I left my master in the evening he gave me his hand, and seemed even sadder than usual. As had happened before, I left the place with a heavy heart; never did I feel more deeply the horrors of that tomb where my dear master was buried alive....

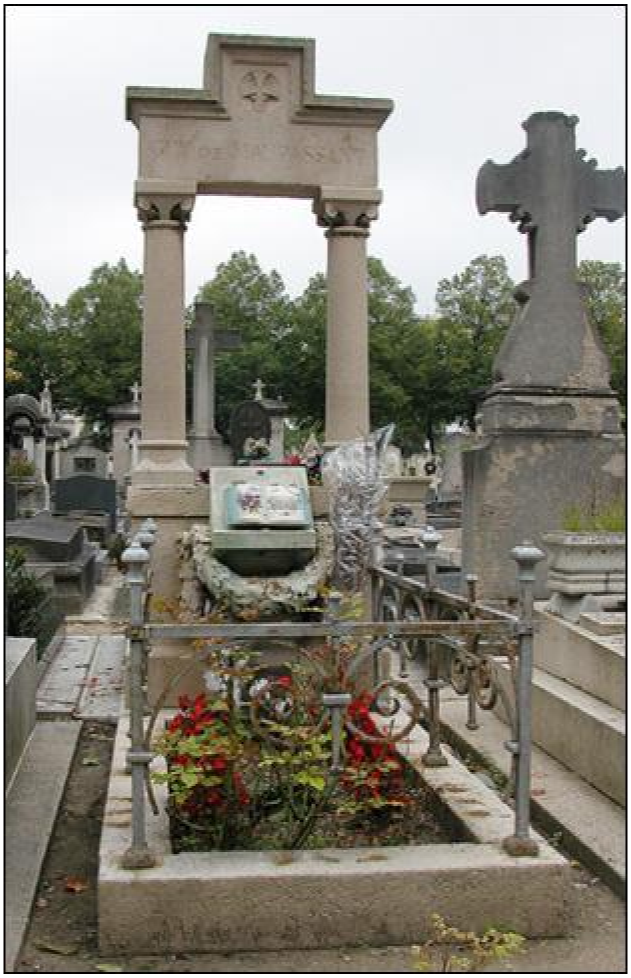
It is the end.

On July 3rd, 1893, M. de Maupassant passed away in that gloomy” retreat, alas! far from me....

My task is ended. I have told the little I know about M. de Maupassant. May this sincere and humble book, the faithful echo of a long intimacy with my departed master, give a few useful details to those who may endeavour to place in full light the works and the personality of that wonderful writer.

THE END

The Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris — Maupassant’s final resting place



Maupassant's grave. The author penned his own epitaph: "I have coveted everything and taken pleasure in nothing."